



**CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**  
*ON COMPLEMENTARITY AND RECIPROCITY*

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**CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**  
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*Eric Beerkens<sup>1</sup>*

## **1. Introduction to the paper**

Internationalisation of higher education receives more and more attention from the Dutch Government, higher education institutions and students. The attention for internationalisation of higher education is first and foremost a reflection of the global character of learning and research. Scholars and students have travelled from early ages and research has never been completely bounded by national borders. The last two decades however, have shown a growing interest in internationalisation and international exchange. This growing interest is apparent with national and supra-national governments as well as with institutions and students and is underpinned by the following developments. First, international activity of individual students has become something that is open for the majority, independent of financial position or social status. It is changing into an activity that is no longer limited to an elite group. Furthermore, the concept of internationalisation has shifted from its initial and almost exclusive focus on student exchange to a concept including curriculum reform, quality improvement and institution-wide strategic development. Third, (supra-)national decision making is affecting higher education increasingly. Schemes, conventions and directives regarding credit transfer and the recognition of qualifications are influencing curriculum structures and content. This emerging interest has led to many (supra-)national exchange and cooperation programmes, the establishment of a variety of international inter-institutional networks and to a growing number of students studying in foreign countries.

In addition to the inherent international nature of higher education and research, the growing interest in internationalisation over the last decades can be explained by more general changes in society. The growth in internationalisation activities can be considered a reaction to the processes of globalisation and regionalisation. The term 'globalisation' can be defined as "a concept that refers to the compression of the World and the intensification of consciousness of the World as a whole"(Robertson, 1992: 8). The process reflects the growing interdependence at the world-level of national economies and trade, as well as the necessity of a global approach and action to cope with problems like ecology and disparity. This process is enforced by the continuing developments in transportation and communication technologies. The other process is the process of regionalisation. Regions can be understood as geographically limited areas, not restricted by constitutional boundaries but tied by characteristics, either natural or of a human origin, which make it different from the areas that surround it. The areas are homogenous in terms of certain physical,

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social, cultural, historical or economic features. These regions can consist of a set of nation states (e.g. EU; NAFTA) as well as a set of sub-national areas (e.g. Euregions or Lapland). The process of regionalisation is triggered by the homogeneity (whether ethnic, cultural, political etc.) of the area and is often aimed at facilitating integration as a means of reinforcing competitiveness or as a reaction to a growing regional awareness. Internationalisation activities can thus be considered reactions to the processes of globalisation or regionalisation. These might be reactions from governments or institutions, as well as from students. In this paper, I will focus on cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries as a governmental reaction to regionalisation processes. The question addressed in the paper is:

*What problems are encountered in cross-border cooperation and to what extent can they be overcome by the CBC Programme?*

The cooperation between institutions in border regions has gained special attention from the Dutch government, which has led to the implementation of the CBC Programme for 1997-2000. This programme, as an instrument of the Dutch Border Countries Policy, will first be introduced. The Dutch rationales for this policy as well as the former and current programmes will also be addressed. To provide a framework in which the results can be analysed, some particular characteristics of cross-border cooperation will be mentioned and some characteristics that are specific of the CBC Programme. Subsequently, the paper will focus on a study that CHEPS conducted for the Dutch Ministry in the period October 1998 until May 1999. After a description of the methodology, the results of the study will be discussed. In this study the focus was on the content and design of the various projects that were developed in the framework of the CBC Programme and the problems that are encountered in these projects. In section four, these results - in relation to the specific features of cross-border cooperation and the CBC Programme- will be reflected upon. Finally, some provisional conclusions about cross-border cooperation and some recommendations will be presented.

## **2. Introduction to the CBC-Programme**

### *The Border Countries Policy: overview*

In 1991, former Minister Ritzen of Education, Culture & Science initiated the Border Countries Policy. The Paper "Unbounded Talent" (Onbegrensd Talent) states that: "the border countries policy is linked with both the regular cross-border movement between adjacent states and the common interests and problems that are connected with these movements. The policy intends to bring young people into contact with one another and with each other's education. This enables them to learn about each other's culture and backgrounds. Understanding for each other will stimulate cultural cross fertilisation and it contributes to a solid economical foundation" (MECS, 1997). Furthermore cooperation within border regions is believed to be more efficient and effective because one can benefit from the relatively small differences in language and culture, from the vicinity of partner institutions and from existing relations between institutions in these

regions (albeit these are mostly on sub-institutional levels). These factors make cooperation with neighbouring countries preferable over more remote countries.

The Border Countries Policy started as a form of bilateral cooperation with Flanders and is later on expanded with three German Länder. Now it has developed into multilateral cooperation that should eventually lead to an open educational space. This implies the absence of obstacles concerning educational choices for the whole area. In other words: complete and unrestricted mobility should be made possible. To accomplish this, structural institutional cooperation should be established between higher education institutions on either side of the border. Development of joint curricula or adaptation of curricula, so students can obtain credits at either side of the border, provides a good option to accomplish complete and unrestricted mobility.

A first instrument to meet the objectives was the GROS-HO Programme for Cross-border cooperation in higher education, which covers the period 1992-1996. This programme was meant to supplement existing programmes in primary and secondary education and the European INTERREG Programme. The total budget for the programme was Dfl. 300.000 a year, divided over 15 projects within 12 universities and hogescholen<sup>2</sup>. This programme led to the incorporation of cross-border cooperation in several policy areas of the participating institutions, and sometimes even a prioritisation of this form of international cooperation. However, the means that were allocated were proved insufficient to satisfy the ambitious objectives of the programme (Bosma, 1995).

### ***The current programme***

Building on the experiences in cross-border cooperation gained through the GROS-HO Programme, in 1996, the Ministry introduced the "Regulation on the Stimulation of Cross-border Cooperation in Higher Education 1997-2000". Activities eligible under this governmental Programme had to be aimed at:

- Strategic inter-institutional cooperation on a structural basis (e.g. adjusting policies concerning the supply of programmes, the use of staff, the use of facilities etc.).
- Broad educational cooperation (e.g. development of joint double-degree programmes, the organisation of exchange of staff and students).
- Embedding the cooperation activities in the regional socio-economic environment.

Activities solely aimed at student mobility were not eligible for funding under this programme. For this programme the Dutch Ministry made available 28 million guilders. The grants received had to be matched by the Dutch institution and also by the partner institutions.

The projects proposed in the framework of the CBC-Programme had to meet certain additional requirements, which are derived from the main aims. The cooperation should be complementary to former

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<sup>2</sup> The Dutch higher education system is binary and consists of universities and hogescholen

cooperation activities and should preferably build upon existing contacts. Furthermore, the new relations should be sustainable and function as a stimulus for further cooperation between the institutions. Subsidies serve as investments to create structural cooperation. This means that cooperative agreements have to be established on the central institutional level. Cooperation on faculty or department levels, without knowledge and involvement of the central level, is not eligible for funding.

### ***Cross-border cooperation and the CBC Programme***

The CBC Programme has some specific characteristics of which some are inherent to cross-border cooperation and others relate to the architecture of the CBC Programme. The most important, and most mentioned characteristic of cross border cooperation is that it concerns cooperation between institutions in different countries and therefore are subjected to different educational systems, policies and regulations. Furthermore, constitutional borders often imply the presence of linguistic differences and differences in cultures between countries. Another characteristic is the fact that institutions are involved in cooperation, not only in mobility of students and teachers. This implies a confrontation between different organisational, managerial and educational cultures. These differences are not always related to the fact that institutions are located in different countries but these confrontations might also exist in cooperation within countries. Cooperation will provide an advantage for the involved institutions when these problems do not prevail over the benefits of joint action.

Other aspects are not directly related to the concept of cross-border cooperation but are linked with the specific architecture of the CBC Programme. The first aspect relates to the criterion of the Dutch government that both institutions should be located in the same border region, often demarcated according to the Euregions. This regional dimension is applied because of certain presuppositions relating to similarities in culture, language and educational system, and the assumption that the short distance between institutions will favour cooperation. Other characteristics are the amount of funding and the emphasis on structural and strategic cooperation on the central level. The intention was that with substantial funding, comprehensive projects could be developed and multiple projects could be carried out simultaneously within one institution. This together with the emphasis on strategic inter-institutional agreements, was believed to benefit commitment at the central level and integration of the cooperation into the institution-wide strategical development, which in turn would promote sustainable engagements.

CHEPS conducts a study of this programme in the period 1998-2000. This study consists of two scans: a first scan has been carried out in 1998/1999, with the objective to make an inventory of the projects and of the obstacles and problems institutions encountered while initiating, designing and implementing the projects (Beerkens & Van der Wende, 1999). The second scan will take place in the year 2000. In between the scans, the various projects and the policy as a whole will be monitored through a regularly updated website ('Cross-border policy Monitor'). The next part will address the approach of the first scan, the type of

cooperative agreements and the obstacles and problems, as they were perceived by the persons directly involved in the cooperation.

## 4. Analysis of the projects

### *Approach & methodology*

The first scan focused on a number of questions. The ones relevant for this paper are the following:

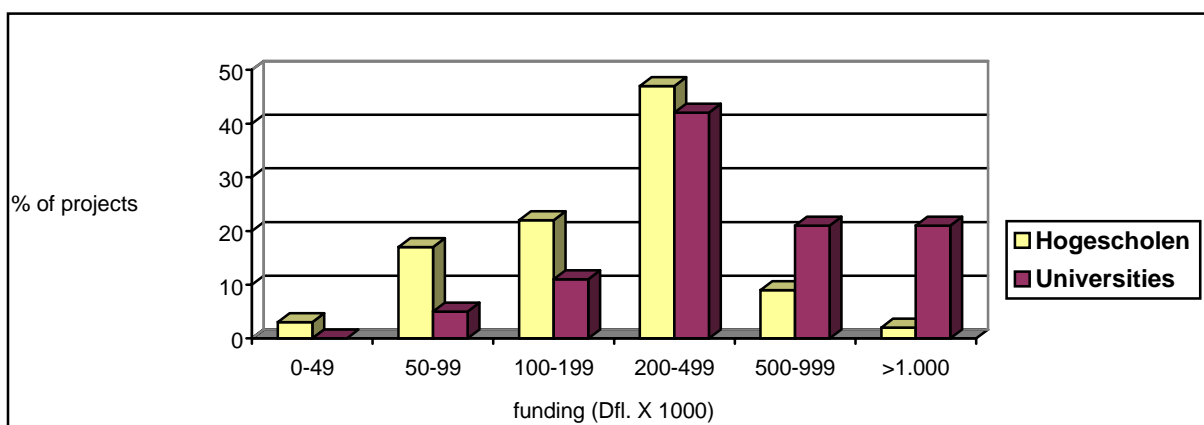
- What kinds of activities are undertaken in the framework of the CBC Programme?
- What obstacles and problems do institutions encounter?
- How do institutions perceive the cross border policy concept, including its presuppositions?

To answer these questions, data has been collected through document analysis, surveys and interviews. The data have been supplemented by conducting five in-depth case studies based on desk research and interviews. By means of questionnaires, data on the project level have been collected in all three countries. The questions related to the type of cooperation and the problems encountered. In total, 83 projects were identified in the Dutch institutions of which 77 returned the questionnaire (93%). In the interviews that were conducted from December 1998 until February 1999, further questions were asked about the problems and obstacles and about the solutions that were found or under consideration. Furthermore the internal and external organisation of the cooperation was addressed. Fourteen involved policy makers at the central level were interviewed at Dutch institutions and in addition, interviews were taken at three German and three Flemish institutions. To supplement these findings, five best practice case studies were identified. These projects were further analysed on the basis of desk research and interviews at the decentral/project level.

### *Configuration of the cooperation projects*

There is great diversity in the projects that are developed in the framework of the CBC Programme. This applies to the magnitude of the projects, the form of cooperation and the content of the projects. When looking at the amount of funding received and the type of institution (University or Hogeschool), it becomes apparent that most projects are in the range between Dfl. 200.000 and Dfl. 500.000 (figure 2). Projects carried out in universities are generally more substantial than those carried out in the Hogescholen.

**Figure 2: Division of projects according to the amount of funding**



*Beerkens & Van der Wende, 1999*

Most of the projects consist of cooperation with only one partner institution. Both in the cooperation with German and Flemish institutions, these bilateral agreements are dominant and account for almost two thirds of all agreements. A proportion of 12% of all projects consists of cooperation with German and Flemish partners simultaneously. The kind of activities developed in the CBC framework varies considerably in content and character. On the basis of a qualitative analysis of the project-objectives, six different types of cooperation activities were identified. Although the projects vary in their content, all projects are supported by some form of institutional administrative cooperation as imposed by the CBC Programme. The concrete activities that are supported can be categorised according to the types in table 1.

*Table 1: types of cooperation activities*

Activities aimed at:	Proportion of projects
Educational cooperation:	
- Joint curriculum development	70%
- Mutual recognition and mobility	27%
- Exchange of educational/didactical knowledge	42%
Joint use of infrastructure and facilities	14%
Regional socio-economical cooperation	24%
Administrative/organisational measures facilitating cooperation	13%

*Beerkens & Van der Wende, 1999*

The majority of the projects are involved in joint curriculum development. This covers a broad range of activities reaching from a jointly developed course that should be accredited in both institutions to the joint development of a complete new programme. Cooperation on the curriculum level in the projects focuses mainly on situations where the courses or programmes are offered at both sides of the border. This is remarkable if we consider the findings of earlier research that stated that there were several border regions with so-called white spots in the educational supply (Huisman et al, 1997<sup>3</sup>). Table 2 shows that the focus on duplications comes to the fore even more in the implemented projects than in the originally proposed projects.

*Table 2: Focus of educational cooperation (based on the provision of programmes in border regions 1995/1996)*

	Duplications	White spots	Non-filled clusters
Proposed projects	50%	38%	12%
Implemented projects	67%	19%	14%

<sup>3</sup> On the basis of an inventory of programmes offered in the border regions in 1995/1996, Huisman et al. make a distinction between 'duplications' (offered on both side of the border), 'white spots' (offered on one side of the border) and non-filled clusters (offered at neither side of the border).

***Beerkens & Van der Wende, 1999***

For efficiency reasons one would expect cooperation in these regions to focus on these white spots or the non-filled clusters to complement the provision of programmes in the region. This efficiency argument was also one of the presuppositions of the Dutch Ministry. These macro-considerations however, do not seem to be very important in practice and mutual interests and backgrounds appear to provide more practical starting-points for cooperation than differences do. It is however observed that, in the case of the white spots, spontaneous student mobility does exist.

Mutual recognition of courses or programmes accounts for another type of cooperation. This type also refers to existing programmes or courses that have certain similarities and therefore should be interchangeable for students of both institutions. The mutual recognition of programmes and courses (whether jointly developed or not) is stimulated to enable mobility of both students and teachers. Projects included in this category, explicitly state recognition to enable mobility as one of their objectives. Another educational cooperation activity focuses on differences instead of similarities. An analysis and comparison of the differences in educational and didactical practices or education systems is carried out in some projects to learn from each others weak and strong features.

The other three types of cooperation activities do not directly relate to educational issues. The joint use of facilities, for example, takes place mostly out of efficiency reasons. Through cooperation, certain resources can be exploited more efficiently. Sharing of lab facilities or computer networks are examples of this type of cooperation. Several projects are explicitly related to specific (socio-economic) features of the region or aimed at cooperation with other actors (in addition to higher education institutions) in the region. These are often in the business sector, but in a few cases also relate to local or regional governments or institutions for secondary education. Finally, a category of projects can be distinguished that are explicitly established to facilitate the cooperation on the institutional level. This type is for instance related to the establishment of administrative bodies, the organisation of seminars or conferences, the exchange of policy makers et cetera.

***Problems & obstacles***

Partly due to the variation in the content of the projects, the encountered problems and obstacles are too very diverse. The problems and obstacles that were encountered most frequently at the project level are given in table 3.



**Table 3: problems from the Dutch, Flemish and German perspective (in %)**

	Netherlands	Flanders	Germany
Differences in curriculum structure	56	71	53
Differences in academic calendars	48	71	32
Cultural differences	46	21	16
Contribution of partner institution lower than anticipated	44	0	16
Differences in commitment within the institution	43	7	21
Differences in commitment between institutions	34	21	26
Differences in assessment systems	31	36	37
Differences in curriculum content	29	43	37
Linguistic difficulties	23	0	32
Governmental funding lower than anticipated	5	64	16

*Berkens & Van der Wende, 1999*

Many observed problems relate to structural differences. Differences in curriculum structure and academic calendars are of a very practical nature but are considered a problem in all participating countries. Furthermore, differences in the content of curricula and in assessment systems cause problems in the cooperation activities. Cultural and Linguistic differences still remain relevant problems in cross border cooperation. Cultural differences in the cooperation are highly connected with diverging opinions about education and didactics but also with notions about management and governance.

The presence of problems that relate to commitment and contribution are different for the three countries. Many Dutch institutions are disappointed by the financial contributions of the partner institutions and therewith, by the level of commitment of the partner institutions. The Flemish respondents for instance experience no lack of financial contributions of Dutch institutions. On the other hand, they consider their governmental funding as being too low. A lack of commitment within the own institution, is a phenomenon observed mostly by Dutch institutions.

The interviews at the central level, revealed several other problems. Regulations and policy in the participating countries are inadequately tuned to each other. This causes cooperation and mobility to develop in an uneasy and inflexible way. National governments often use additional requirements for certain professions or apply diverging procedures and regulations. Other problems relate to the student level. The modest level of mobility is believed to be related to the low level of enthusiasm with students to study in Flanders and Germany. This can partly be subscribed to the use of additional requirements, but also to ignorance of and a lack of interest in the culture and language of these countries. Therefore several institutions try to accustom the students with the other language and culture by organising project weeks, which creates a first confrontation with the other language and culture and the foreign students, language courses or courses relating to cultural or socio-economic aspects of the other country.

### ***Cross border cooperation in the perception of involved institutions***

In general there is an optimistic view towards the policy objectives, as stated in the CBC Programme. The same goes for the objectives of the individual projects. In many cases however, it is difficult to establish on which considerations this optimism is based. In particular in the case of more complex projects, which are often still in the stage of inquiry or development, positive results in the preparation of the projects do not guarantee success in the implementation and institutionalisation stage (Van der Wende et al., 1999).

The vicinity of the partner institutions is seen as the main advantage of cross-border cooperation as opposed to other forms of internationalisation. For mobility as well as for cooperation between administrators, managers and policy makers, the advantages of vicinity are recognised. For some institutions however, the assigned area in which cooperation agreements could be established, were considered too rigid. Sometimes, more ideal partners, in terms of content or strategic considerations, were found outside these areas. It is questionable if such occasional engagements will sustain after the funding is stopped and if the choice of the partner should be based more on concrete considerations. Given the improvements in public transport, physical infrastructure and the emergence of new information and communication technologies, a larger area could be taken into consideration for the choice of partner institutions. Other presupposed advantages of regional cross border cooperation were less well endorsed (table 4). Similarities in language and culture were identified as promoters of cross-border cooperation in less than one third of the projects. Linguistic similarities were naturally more considered as an advantage in the cooperation with Flemish institutions. In only 15% of the projects did the respondents agree with the assumption that similarities in educational systems did exist and did have a positive influence on the inter-institutional cooperation. These observations do coincide with the results of earlier programmes (Bosma, 1995).

***Table 4: cross border regional cooperation versus broader international cooperation***

<i>Advantages of cross border regional cooperation</i>	<i>Percentage agreeing</i>
Geographical vicinity	97%
Cultural similarities	29%
Similarities in educational systems	15%
Similarities in languages	29%

***Beerkens & Van der Wende, 1999***

The specific architecture of the CBC Programme for 1997-2000 is also perceived positive by the institutions. This perception is based on the specific form of cooperation and the amount of funding received. The specific form of cooperation, strategic cooperation at the institutional level, has made it possible to use an integrated approach in the management of the projects. In addition, the substantial amount of funding, compared with earlier cross-border cooperation programmes, makes it possible to carry out multiple programmes simultaneously and to focus on more comprehensive forms of cooperation. This way, institutions can apply an integrated approach of comprehensive activities. With the CBC Programme 1997-

2000, a shift can be recognised from an isolated approach of marginal projects, like earlier European and CBC programmes, to an integrated approach of comprehensive projects. Since more projects are carried out at the same time, institutions take advantage of the possibilities for economies of scale and utilising the learning effects between projects. Furthermore, carrying out several substantial projects simultaneously offers possibilities to reach a better commitment on the central institutional level and to incorporate the activities in the institutional strategy.

#### **4. Cross border cooperation and the CBC Programme: a reflection**

##### *Crossing borders and cooperation*

The fact that borders have to be crossed causes for many problems in the cooperation between institutions. The boundaries still constitute a major obstacle for the inter-institutional cooperation as well as for mobility of students and teachers. For inter-institutional cooperation, many problems are connected to the differences in educational systems and qualification demands. As I mentioned before, structural differences, for instance in curriculum structures or academic calendars, are often a result of institutional policies, but national regulations can affect these structures as well. Furthermore, in spite of the bilateral and multilateral agreements, institutions are subjected to different policies, which are implemented at a different pace. This makes it difficult for the institutions to obtain a clear picture of the future contributions of the governments of other countries. Cultural and linguistic aspects play a major role, in spite of the assumed similarities. Although many border regions do have a common culture and history to a certain extent, the emergence of national boundaries has led to a differentiation in culture and history and to a national awareness. The cultural, linguistic and historical differences are reinforced by the fact that many of the staff or students do not originally stem from the region, and that graduates do not always stay in the region. In addition, further cooperation between institutions or even mergers between institutions constitute several legal obstacles. Legal obstacles relating to financial support, residence permits, working permits, employment conditions, health care facilities et cetera, pose further obstacles for free mobility of students and teachers and therewith for an open educational space.

Another aspect is the emphasis on cooperation instead of exchange. This relates to the reasons for cooperation between the institutions and the problems that these cooperative agreements entail. First, cooperation between institutions can promote efficiency for the educational system as a whole as well as for the individual institutions. By taking into account the programmes that are offered at the other side of the border, duplication can be avoided and resources can be exploited more efficiently. Many countries have already implemented policies that were aimed at a more efficient provision of programmes at the national level. For certain programmes, the provision in the adjacent countries could be taken into account. Nevertheless, this would make adjustment of educational systems and legal aspects necessary. Furthermore, linguistic and cultural obstacles will remain a problem in this respect.

Cooperation can also promote efficiency through the emergence of economies of scale. The joint use of infrastructure and facilities could enable a more efficient use of scarce resources. This goes in particular for the capital intensive educational sectors or for expensive technologies for education, information or communication purposes. In addition, cooperation can have a positive influence on the quality of education. As staff and students are brought into contact with different perspectives on education and didactics, they can seize the opportunity to learn from one another's weak and strong features. The same argument can be made for the quality of management.

Besides efficiency and quality, cooperation is also a means to enable mobility between institutions. Some form of coordination of curricula or joint development of curricula is often a requirement for mobility to occur. Programmes or courses attended at the host institution should be accredited at the home institution and be transferable to encourage mobility. Furthermore certain structural characteristics that relate to curriculum structure and calendars should be mutually adjusted.

Although cooperation between institutions does provide advantages in terms of efficiency, quality and mobility, it often does affect the level of autonomy of the institution as a whole or of the staff. Institutions usually have their own view on education and management. Some use the concept of problem-based learning or project-based learning; others use lectures for large groups of students. Some institutions are very decentralised and award a high level of autonomy to professors where other institutions are far more centralised. These differences in educational and management concepts often exist between institutions in different countries but there are also substantial differences within countries. In other words: it is not always a confrontation between national cultures and perceptions that complicates the cooperation, but complications also stem from differences in organisational cultures and perceptions.

### ***The focus and architecture of the Dutch CBC-Programme***

The CBC Programme not only focuses on international cooperation but also incorporates a regional dimension. This geographically limits the cooperation to the border regions. In other words this regional factor distinguishes the programme from transnational cooperation. In the case of transnational cooperation, institutions or organisations are not necessarily in the vicinity of a national border. Regional (cross-border) cooperation however, takes place within an area, which is (or once was) tied by one or more common features such as culture or dialect, but has now grown apart by the rise of the nation states and its national boundaries (Reichenbach et al., 1999). The regional factor therefore is incorporated due to the assumption that the common features within the area would foster cooperation. Findings from the study however, do not exactly point at cultural and linguistic ties between institutions within the region. Although these ties may exist between people within the region, many of the students and staff are not from the region and do therefore lack any cultural, linguistic or historical bond with the region. In some projects however, advantage is taken from the common economic features in the region. A common economical base, for instance in a harbour area or an area dominated by a certain industry, might provide a starting point for cooperation between institutions. Furthermore, the regional dimension also entails that the institutions involved are relatively near

to each other. This seems to have a positive impact on the progress of the cooperation. For mobility, the vicinity does have a positive impact, if commuting on a day to day basis is possible. If students have to move anyway and have to find a temporary place to live, the vicinity seems to be less important or even disadvantageous.

The demarcation of the regions by the Dutch Ministry constituted a problem for the institutions. For most institutions, possible partner institutions had to be pursued in a certain region, which often coincided with the Euregions. These regions were established in the second part of this century to facilitate cooperation between administrative bodies. These areas do not always provide enough starting-points for educational cooperation in terms of content. A more homogenous region in terms of educational features would possibly provide more starting-points. With current developments in public transport, physical infrastructure and communication technologies however, larger areas should be taken into consideration in choosing the partner institutions. This argument is even stronger for universities than for the hogescholen since they are, in general, less focused on the region and more nationally (or even European or globally) oriented. This goes for student markets and graduate markets as well as for the pursuit of future alliance partners.

The specific form of cooperation and the magnitude of funding constitute another characteristic that is typical for the CBC Programme. The Ministry explicitly advocated an institutional approach, assuming that commitment at the central level would create more sustainable ties between institutions. As was described above, the focus on inter-institutional cooperation, together with the execution of multiple projects, has led to a more integrated approach in the management of cooperation activities. The integrated approach refers to integration between levels as well as integration between various departments or projects. The former stimulates central level commitment and incorporation of the activities in the institutional strategy. This could lead to more sustainable relations, which can also persist after governmental funding is stopped. A more integrated approach between projects promotes economies of scale and learning opportunities between projects. An example of the first argument is that contacts have to be made only once, certain decisions do not have to be taken over and over again for each individual project et cetera. An integrated approach can also lead to learning effects. These effects can emerge when for instance ways to overcome obstacles are communicated through to other project coordinators: solutions only have to be discovered once. The comprehensiveness of several projects, combined with the integrated approach, however, makes management more complex and calls for an accurate coordination of activities.

## **6. Conclusions**

### *Conclusions*

Only after the CBC projects have evolved into concrete activities, when students can benefit from the cooperation, it will become clear whether the programme is successful or not. During this evolution, many projects did suffer problems relating to differences in culture, management, organisation et cetera. In many

cases however, a mutual and substantial interest in and commitment to that particular activity, enables partners to overcome these obstacles.

The fact that cooperation takes place in border regions and institutions are located in each other's *vicinity accounts for benefits as well as problems*. The spatial limitation accounts for one of the benefits of cross border cooperation: the short physical distance between cooperating institutions. This vicinity can positively influence the cooperation between staff and the mobility of staff and students. On the one hand, it can enable students to attend courses in another country without having to change their place of residence. On the other hand, the vicinity has a negative impact on the students' motivation to attend courses at the other institution because more remote or exotic places are often perceived as more exciting than neighbouring countries. It seems however that spontaneous mobility in these regions does exist. Some institutions anticipate on this and start more European oriented courses or some have even started German language courses at the Dutch side of the border.

The preliminary results of the CBC Programme shows a broad range of cooperation projects, each bearing its own problems and obstacles. The typical features of this Programme compared to earlier programmes, are its magnitude and its emphasis on institutional level strategic cooperation. The first findings imply that these have had a positive effect on the *management of the projects*. Although most projects are still in their early stages, many have established ties with partner institutions that go beyond simple exchange relations. Several joint programmes are being developed, intermediary bodies are being established, relations with other regional actors are tightened et cetera.

The problems that are encountered in the CBC-Projects are often related to the fact that both institutions are situated in different countries and are subjected to different policies and regulations. Although the international aspect does pose several problems, many encountered problems are *inherent to inter-institutional cooperation*. Cooperation means working together and this always implies a confrontation of different organisational, managerial and educational cultures.

The question addressed in the beginning of the paper was: "What problems are encountered in cross-border cooperation and to what extent can they be overcome by the CBC Programme?" The conclusions make clear that the merits of the Programme are in the emphasis on the form of cooperation: structural and strategic cooperation on the central-level and a broad interpretation of educational cooperation in the projects. The benefits that a regional focus was believed to bring about, were slightly overestimated. The regional focus did benefit the cooperation because of the vicinity of institutions. Cultural, linguistic and educational similarities however, were hardly beneficial. The architecture of the Programme has potential to overcome several observed problems in cross -border cooperation, although this will require considerable effort of governments as well as institutions.

### ***Recommendations***

The Dutch Border Countries Policy aims to bring young people in contact with one another to learn from each other's culture and education. Considering the lack of enthusiasm with students, it is questionable if this focus on cultural aspects is effective. Institutions should engage in cooperation for efficiency or quality reasons. They should therefore seek partners that can complement their own services. In other words: cooperation with the foreign partner should have a certain *complementary value* for the institution. This can be value in terms of a more efficient provision of programmes, in terms of quality or in terms of financial means.

Restrictions according to distance should be reviewed. Developments in transportation and in communication make the *distance-factor less decisive*. The emphasis in the choice of partners should be in the complementary value of cooperation. When both institutions gain by cross-border cooperation, stable and sustainable ties can be created that will also last after governmental funding has stopped. If no complementary institutions can be found in the immediate surroundings, cooperation with more remote partners should be taken under consideration. This problem is already recognised by the Dutch government and the distance-criterion was since then applied in a more flexible way.

To create an open educational space, there still are many *political decisions* that have to be taken. First, a more joint coordination of the cross-border cooperation policies should be realised. Disproportionate support of a government or institution on either side, compared to the partner country or institution, will endanger the stability and sustainability of the inter-institutional or international relation. Furthermore, several obstacles should be taken away by a joint efforts of governments, either bilateral or within the European context. Many educational regulations, financial restrictions, differences in employment regulations and conditions still raise barriers to mobility. There are also several obstacles that do not directly relate to education but also constitute obstacles for other types of cooperation. Legal issues concerning right of residence, employment, health care et cetera can be mentioned in this respect, but also imperfections in infrastructure and public transport links in border regions.

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