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# Cross-border vocational training as processes of cross-border learning

INES FUNK, BIRTE NIENABER, H. PETER DÖRRENBÄCHER

## **Abstract**

*In recent years cross-border vocational educational training (VET) in cross-border regions has gained more and more importance. The overall research question is how regional learning processes are shaped by bilateral cross-border formal learning agreements in a border region. Therefore, we build our own model of regional learning in border regions on WELLBROCK et al. (2012) following an integrated conceptual perspective and focusing on the actor's perspective. The development of this transboundary VET by a variety of actors can be considered to form an intra- und interregional learning process. The interpretation of the structures regarding the conceptual findings reveals that the learning processes in the Saarland-Lorraine border region are dynamic and depend on key actors with expert knowledge as well as advantageous regional characteristics.*

Cross-border; VET vocational and educational training; France; Germany; qualitative interviews

## **Zusammenfassung**

### **Grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung als ein Prozess des grenzüberschreitenden Lernens**

*In den letzten Jahren hat die grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung zunehmend an Bedeutung gewonnen. Die übergeordnete Forschungsfrage beschäftigt sich damit, wie regionale Lernprozesse in einer Grenzregion durch bilaterale grenzüberschreitende formale Bildungsabkommen entwickeln. Dafür wurde ein Modell regionalen Lernens in Grenzregionen basierend auf dem Modell von WELLBROCK et al. (2012) entwickelt, das sich auf eine ganzheitliche Begrifflichkeit stützt und die Akteursperspektive in den Fokus stellt. Die Entwicklung der grenzüberschreitenden beruflichen Ausbildung unter Beteiligung verschiedener Akteure kann als intra- und interregionaler Lernprozess verstanden werden, der zu einer „grenzüberschreitenden Lernregion“ führt. Die Analyse der untersuchten Strukturen unter Berücksichtigung der konzeptionellen Annahmen zeigt, dass die Lernprozesse in der saarländisch-lothringischen Grenzregion dynamisch sind und von Schlüsselpersonen mit Expertenwissen abhängen, genauso wie von vorteilhaften regionalen Gegebenheiten.*

Grenzüberschreitend; Berufsausbildung; Frankreich; Deutschland; qualitative Interviews

## Introduction

In June 2018, the four-year experimentation period for integrated cross-border vocational training in the Saarland-Lorraine<sup>1</sup> border region ended. German and French politicians underlined the innovative character of the project and their will to develop it further in the future (RÉGION GRAND EST 2018; STAATSKANZLEI 2018). This example shows that in recent years cross-border vocational educational training (abbreviated below as VET) in the Saarland-Lorraine border region as well as in other cross-border regions has gained more and more importance (cf. DÖRRENBÄCHER 2018). The main reasons for this are on the one hand social (especially demographic) and economic disparities between the subregions of the cross-border cooperation areas, but on the other hand also the increasing significance of education and knowledge in the knowledge and information society. The approaches of cross-border VET developed in the Saarland-Lorraine border region as well as the *Rahmenvereinbarung für die Kooperation in der grenzüberschreitenden beruflichen Aus- und Weiterbildung Saarland-Lothringen* (hereinafter referred to as *Rahmenvereinbarung*) concluded in 2014 (RVSL 2014) – including the agreement based on *Abkommen über grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung Saarland-Lothringen* (hereinafter referred to as *Abkommen über grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung*) (AGBSL 2014) – can be understood as a tool for inter- and intraregional learning processes.

The aim of this paper is to comprehend what kind of learning processes led to the existing forms of cross-border vocational training in the Saarland-Lorraine border region and what role regional conditions and regional actors play. At a conceptual level, the following article analyses which approach of regional learning could be used for reconstructing learning processes in border

regions and how it needs to be adapted to the characteristics of border regions. At an empirical level, this paper explores the strengths and weaknesses of the existing forms of cross-border vocational training and of the cross-border networks which are the results of the learning processes. The overall research question is thus how regional learning processes are shaped by bilateral cross-border formal learning agreements in a border region.

In the first part, concepts of regional learning are discussed regarding the analysis of the development of cross-border vocational training. After a short descriptive overview of the development of cross-border vocational training in the Saarland-Lorraine border region, approaches of cross-border VET as a regional learning process are analysed and reconstructed.

## An integrated perspective of regional learning in cross-border contexts

For this article, the term *regional learning* and the related concepts – unless *learning region* is used in articles quoted – is preferred, as the actor's perspective thus comes more to the fore whereas the notion of *learning region* has been criticized by various scholars (COOKE 2007, HASSINK 2007) because of its fuzziness and normative character. Apart from that, its connotation is essentialist. Although, it has been increasingly used in academia since the 1990s in the context of regional *capacity building* – especially in form of knowledge transfer from science to the industry (e.g. FLORIDA 1995; STORPER 2007).

Studies of this kind mostly focus on industry and sector-oriented approaches in urban, economically prosperous and innovative contexts (e.g. ASHEIM 2007; STORPER 2007). HASSINK (2005) however tries to break down whether structurally weak regions can also use the concept to leave negative traditional path dependencies. HASSINK and KLAERDING (2012) sum up the different research concepts in three categories:

- (1) as a theoretical-structural perspective in which learning regions are the result of global developments (cf. above all; FLORIDA 1995),
- (2) as the relationship between business, innovation and geographical proximity at the heart of the learning region, and
- (3) as a theoretically-led concept of regional development.

Both authors question, however, whether the concept is still tenable. They state that it is not regions but players that learn, and that the concept is normative, vague and cannot be clearly distinguished from others. Moreover, local developments are increasingly overshadowed and controlled by global developments. RUTTEN and BOEKEMA (2013) also doubt whether both regional learning and “learning regions” are learning regional at all. Furthermore, the unit “region” is not uniform, which makes comparisons more difficult. They also underline the normative nature of the approach. The two authors also question how learning can be connected with space at all, and to what extent social contexts, processes and dynamics influence learning (cf. also RUTTEN a. BOEKEMA 2012). Clear delineations cannot be discerned.

A good starting point for research on cross-border vocational training seems to be the linking of the learning concepts of RUTTEN and BOEKEMA (2013) and of ADGER et al. (2005). The former understand learning “as the process that results in innovations such as new products and services.” (RUTTEN a. BOEKEMA 2013, p. 722), while ADGER et al. (2005, p. 1038) emphasise the collective dimension of learning by understanding it as “the diversity of adaptations, and the promotion of strong local social cohesion and mechanisms for collective action.”

In addition to the more economic or economic-geographical studies on regional learning, there are also studies that look into governance structures apart from science and industry/econ-

<sup>1</sup> Since 2016, Lorraine has been part of the newly established Région Grand Est that comprises the former regions Lorraine, Alsace and Champagne-Ardenne.

omy (e.g. ETZKOWITZ a. LEYDESDORFF 2000; WELLBROCK et al. 2012; WELLBROCK et al. 2013b) and that raise the question of to what extent and in what form regional learning can be supported, and how this can be made usable (e.g. WELLBROCK et al. 2013a). Cultural aspects are also taken into account in the concepts of regional learning.

“By stressing the cultural perspective, learning in space is strongly related to the underlying attitudes, norms and values about learning. Moreover, the often territorially bounded, local and regional, understanding of cultural influences [...] should give way to a relational view of learning processes in space [...]” (HASSINK a. KLAERDING 2012, p. 1062). This approach can be essential for the cross-border perspective chosen in this article.

WELLBROCK et al. (2012) have combined two different concepts to respond more strongly to the needs of regional learning in the context of rural areas, and to expand the concept of *regional learning* both theoretically and empirically. Through this extension, they also tried to respond to existing criticism of the concept of learning region/regional learning.

In the sense of a stronger focus on actors and on the consideration of the relationship between institutional, political, social, economic context and regional development initiatives, the consideration of the synthetic concept of regional learning developed by WELLBROCK et al. (2012), using the example of rural areas, seems to be interesting (cf. Fig. 1). The model which was created by integrating the “triple helix thesis” of ETZKOWITZ and LEYDESDORFF (2000) with the concept of the “learning region” of RUTTEN and BOEKEMA (2007)

“... does not focus on what learning and innovation is supported or what type of support is given. Instead it focuses on how support for regional learning and innovation is actually

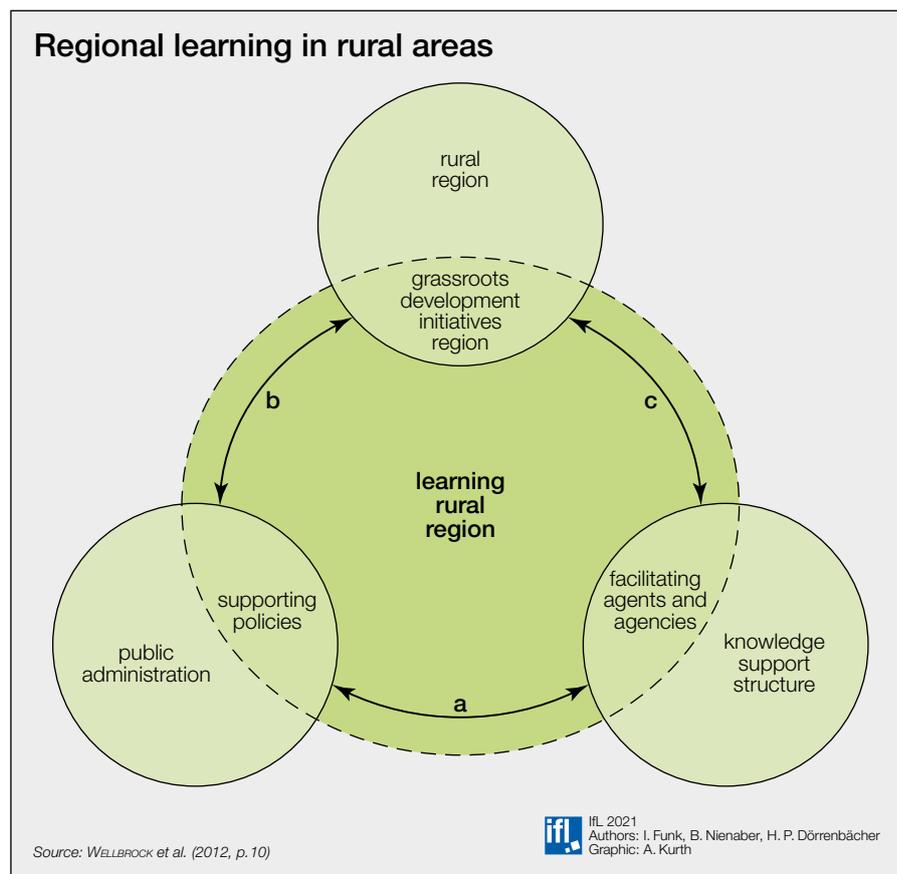


Fig. 1: Regional learning in rural areas

arranged and how and by whom it is mediated, thus how interfaces are operating” (Wellbrock et al. 2012, p. 7).

The integrated model of regional learning should help to identify, analyse, evaluate, redesign and establish new connections between policies, initiatives and structures (cf. WELLBROCK et al. 2012; WELLBROCK et al. 2013a; WELLBROCK a. ROEP 2014). The model assumes that there can be several types of governance for a successful “place-based” implementation of the model, which, however, strongly depend on the respective political, economic and demographic contexts and a “shared sense of place” (WELLBROCK et al. 2013b, p. 428). Based on this integrated model of regional learning, which was developed for rural areas, the question now arises as to what special features cross-border regions have and how this model can be applied to border regions.

To this end, we have developed the model of WELLBROCK et al. (2012) further (cf. Fig. 2): first, there are the na-

tional frameworks in the cross-border region, which differ on either side of the border; these form the (national) arena for regional learning from the respective national “facilitating agents and agencies” (as part of the “knowledge support structure”) and the supporting policies (as part of the “public administration”) in connection with the respective (non-cross-border sub-) region. Here, the national border also initially appears to be an educational border. Only by embedding both national into cross-border settings with cross-border institutions and the supporting policies, it becomes a cross-border arena of regional learning (with “grassroots initiatives”) (ibid.). This will be analysed in more detail below using the Saarland-Lorraine border region as an example.

### Development of the cross-border vocational training in the Saarland-Lorraine border region

Saarland and Lorraine are both characterised by a stagnation or even decrease

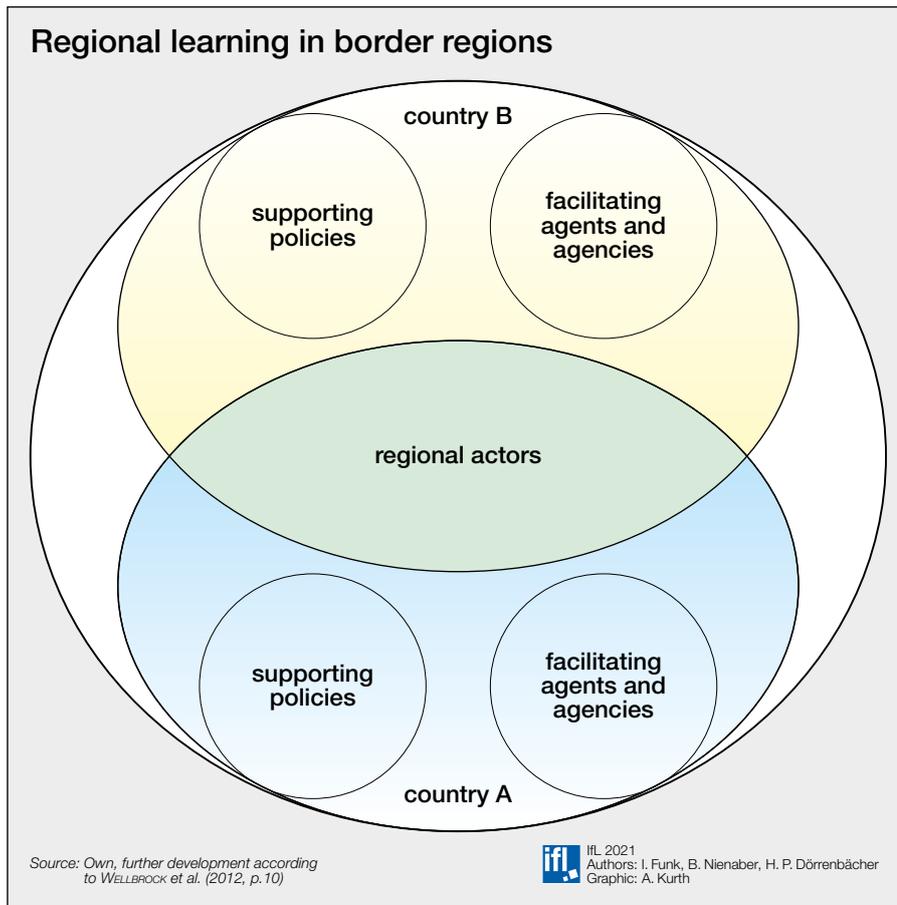


Fig. 2: Regional learning in border regions

in their populations, as well as ageing of their populations. This demographic change has a high impact on companies in their efforts to find and recruit qualified employees. While the unemployment rate for young people aged under 25 was only 10.1 % in Saarland in 2016, it was 25.5 % in Lorraine. Moreover, the employment rate for all people aged between 15 and 64 is higher in Saarland (68.5 % in 2015) than in Lorraine (62.0 %) (STATISTISCHE ÄMTER DER GROSSREGION 2018; cf. BELKACEM et al. 2018).

In view of long-term intensive economic interrelations (cf. DÖRRENBÄCHER 2015; BELKACEM et al. 2018), it is not surprising that there have been a large number of very different types of cross-border cooperations in the field of vocational training in the Saarland-Lorraine border region. Thus, in its Report on the economic and social situation of the Greater Region 2013/2014 to the Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Re-

gion (*Wirtschafts- und Sozialausschuss der Großregion*, WSAGR), the Interregional Labour Market Observatory (*Interregionale Arbeitsmarktbeobachtungsstelle*) (IBA/OIE 2014) lists – without claiming completeness for the Greater Region<sup>2</sup> – over 50 different measures and projects of cross-border collaboration in the field of vocational training, well over half of them concern the Saarland-Lorraine border region.

#### Different VET approaches in Germany and France

Cross-border VET between France and Germany is difficult because of the fact that both countries practice different approaches of VET which are hardly compatible. Whereas VET in France is more academic as it is performed completely at vocational schools (*lycées profession-*

*nels*) with the exception of short company internship periods, Germany applies the so-called dual VET system. Practical training in Germany is performed on the company shop floor whereas the theoretical training is conducted at vocational schools. The French equivalent, *Formation professionnelle en alternance*, consisting of alternating training at a vocational school called *Centre de formation des apprentis* (CFA) and in a company is not very widespread. Most young people prefer the three-year *Baccalauréat professionnel* that can be attained at a *Lycée professionnel*.

#### Short-term internships

This is why most of the hitherto existing cooperations are not regular basic and/or integrated VET programmes which lead to a national, let alone a joint bi-national qualification, but to short-term offers – mostly company internships in the neighbouring country. The most important actor in this field of cross-border work placements is *FagA* (*Fachstelle für grenzüberschreitende Ausbildung* (*Specialised body for cross-border training*)). This institution, which is supported, among others, by the Saarland Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Saarland Metal and Electrical Industry Association, arranges internship work placements of several weeks for Saarland and Lorraine vocational students in companies in the neighbouring country.

With the project *PontSaarLor* (ROBICHON a. SCHWARZ 2011), implemented within the framework of the *JOB-STARTER Programm* of the Federal Ministry of Training and Research (BMBF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) and with the *FagA*, more than 200 French and some German interns have been placed between 2013 and 2017 (VAUS 2012).

#### Agreements on integrated cross-border VET

Important experience was gained with the implementation of two agreements between Saarland and Lorraine; the Framework Agreement on VET (*Rahmenvereinbarung*) (RVSL 2014) and the

<sup>2</sup> The Greater Region is a cross-border region. It comprises the two German federal states of Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate, the French subregion Lorraine, the state of Luxembourg, Wallonia and the German and French-speaking communities of Belgium.

Agreement on VET (*Abkommen über grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung*) (AGBSL 2014). Both contractual documents signed in 2014 were milestones for the development of cross-border VET, not only in the Saarland-Lorraine border region, but also in the entire Greater Region. It is not possible to define one single reason that led to the negotiation of the *Rahmenvereinbarung*; it was a coincidence of several developments. The Saarland-Lorraine cooperation was prompted by the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Elysée Treaty in 2013, the *Year of France* and the so-called *Frankreich-Strategie* (*Strategy France*) initiated by the Saarland government. The objective of this strategy is to strengthen the special relationships between the Saarland and France and bilingualism among the Saarland population within one generation. The chambers were also interested in the institutionalisation of transborder VET, as they were looking for ways to deal with high youth unemployment on the one side of the border and impending shortages of apprentices on the other side (DORKA a. FRISCH 2016). The first school and training under these conditions started in 2014/2015 (RVSL 2014).

The agreement was intended to give young Germans and French people the opportunity to complete the practical part of their training on the basis of a training contract in a company in the neighbouring country (ibid.). A key objective was to make a contribution to dovetailing the different training systems, whereby the principle of dual VET practised in Germany played a special role, by giving trainees the opportunity to complete theoretical training in their home country and practical (in-company) training in the neighbouring country. This was intended to tackle both the previous incompatibility of the German and French training systems and the problem of the language skills of the trainees, which were usually insufficient for completing theoretical training in the neighbouring country.

Particularly important for the creation of the *Rahmenvereinbarung* were

already well advanced negotiations of the Framework Agreement on VET in the Upper Rhine region (*Rahmenvereinbarung über die grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung am Oberrhein*) (RVOR 2013), conducted by the French state, the German federal states of Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate as well as the German and French actors involved in VET in the Upper Rhine region on the initiative of the Upper Rhine Conference. This agreement, based on many years of experience of cross-border collaboration in the field of VET in this region and signed on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013, was the blueprint for the framework agreement negotiated between Saarland and the Lorraine region.

The subtitle "*Strategische Ziele*" (strategic objectives) of the framework agreement makes it clear that this document is a flexible framework offering conditions for creative and varied ways of cooperation. That is what the contracting parties agreed on, that "it will be possible to develop a whole set of creative models. Therefore, the partners agree on the objective to implement a large number of cooperations." (RVSL 2014, p. 4). The *Rahmenvereinbarung* is intended to create an experimental field – one could also call it a learning field – in which different ways of cross-border cooperation in VET and further education are developed.

The *Abkommen über grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung* (AGBSL 2014) which regulates the operational implementation of the framework agreement, allows young people from Lorraine and Saarland to conclude a training contract with a company in the neighbouring country and to complete the practical part of the training there. Theoretical knowledge is acquired at the vocational school in their home country. At the end of the training, the young people then take the final examination and obtain their vocational qualification in their home country in which they have completed vocational school. In addition, they have the opportunity to take the final examination in the respective partner country, provided that the con-

ditions for this are fulfilled. A total of 15 recognised apprenticeship trades can be learned across borders (IBA/OIE 2014).

Both agreements enable an integrated dual cross-border apprenticeship and provide legal certainty. This is particularly important for those companies in Saarland which, due to their high proportion of French customers, have a great interest in recruiting French employees and in retaining them through their VET in the company.

### Examples of integrated cross-border VET

Immediately after the two documents had been signed, two Saarland companies (operators of DIY stores and hypermarkets, together with the school *Lycée professionnel Henri-Nominé* in Sarreguemines (Lorraine), set up an alternating school and company training course ("*formation en alternance*"), which is completed with the French professional certificate BTS-NRC (*Brevet de technicien supérieur – Négociation et relation client*). The trainees have a training contract with the German companies and complete their practical training there. The theoretical training and the final examination take place in a separate *BTS en alternance* project class at the CFA (*Centre de formation d'apprentis (vocational school)*) in Sarreguemines. If they have the appropriate language skills, they can also take the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce qualification as an option after the two-year training.

Since the 2015/2016 school year, the tyre manufacturer *Michelin* has been running a similar programme for its industrial training at the company's production site in Homburg (Saarland). Two trainees attend the vocational school in Sarreguemines (Lorraine) and do the mandatory work placement at *Michelin* in order to obtain a French qualification as an electrician. The Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the corresponding French offices compare the syllabus with the training course for an energy electronics technician. The three-year training in France is followed by a six-month work

placement, with the possibility of taking the practical examination for the German training occupation (NAGEL 2015). In addition, *Michelin* in Homburg has signed an agreement with the CFAI (*Centre de formation d'apprentis de l'industrie (vocational school of the industry)*) in Yutz (Lorraine) for other apprenticeships.

Experience has shown that the long distance between the company's location and the vocational school is a great burden for the trainees. Therefore, when starting a new project class in the field of electrical engineering in 2018, the aim was to find a school near the border (interview with *Arbeitsagentur/Regionaldirektion* 2018).

In contrast to these two models, in which employment is handled according to German law in Germany and (theoretical) training according to French law (in France), the car manufacturer *Smart* in Hambach (Lorraine) trains a trainee under German law.

In the training year 2015, a total of 12 trainees took up a cross-border *formation en alternance* on the basis of both contractual documents (DORKA a. FRISCH 2016). The number of these *formation en alternance* contracts, which combine VET at school and on the shopfloor, fell to six in the year 2016. In 2017, ten trainees in seven professions started a cross-border apprenticeship. For 2018, the numbers are comparable and new companies decided to offer a cross-border *formation en alternance*. The numbers show a strong imbalance: in total, only four Germans made use of the possibility of a cross-border apprenticeship in a company in Lorraine, and all the others were French. In the period 2014–2018, the dropout rate was not higher than for other forms of apprenticeships. Since 2017, the number of professions chosen for cross-border training strongly increased (interview with *Arbeitsagentur/Regionaldirektion* 2018).

As all partners came to a positive conclusion at the end of the experimentation period, the agreements were transformed into permanent contracts in June 2018.

### Other agreements in the Greater Region

It can be assumed that the experiences gained in the Upper Rhine region and the Saarland-Lorraine border region have been incorporated into the framework agreement for the Greater Region signed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014. This is a framework for corresponding agreements between other subregions of the Greater Region.

Following this framework agreement for the Greater Region (RVGR 2014) and the Saarland-Lorraine framework agreement, Lorraine and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg declared their intention to “experiment in learning in the field of vocational training” (authors' translation) in May 2015 (CONSEIL RÉGIONAL LORRAINE 2015, slide 1). An agreement was signed in October 2017 (GROSSREGION 2018). For their part, the Lorraine region and the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate carried out an assessment to formulate common targets for an *Accord-cadre* project between the two regions. An exchange of experience is currently taking place with the Walloon region in connection with negotiations to be prepared on an agreement to be defined (CONSEIL RÉGIONAL LORRAINE 2015; *ibid.*). On 29<sup>th</sup> February 2016, the German Community of Belgium, the Federal State of Rhineland-Palatinate as well as important actors in vocational training in both regions finally concluded an agreement to implement the *Accord-cadre* on cross-border VET in the Greater Region (VDG-BRLP 2016). In 2018, the Federal State of Rhineland-Palatinate and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg replaced their agreement of 2016 and opened it up to more professions (GROSSREGION 2018).

This brief overview of the development of cross-border vocational training should have made clear that this is an inter- and intraregional learning and adaptation process of cross-border cooperation. Apart from the learning process controlled by the public administration during the development of the *Accord-cadre*, individual, collective and cross-border learning processes take and took

place in the development and implementation of tangible cross-border training courses in the Saarland-Lorraine border region. The model adapted to border regions, following WELLBROCK et al. (2012), is suitable for investigating these learning processes.

### Regional Learning using the example of cross-border vocational training in the Saarland-Lorraine border area

#### Methodology

In the following, these processes and their results will be analysed on the basis of 20 interviews (cited below as interviews 1 to 20). They have been conducted in 2015 with trainees and members of the public administration, the chambers and advisory and placement institutions, as well as with business representatives and educational providers. The chosen interview partners have been found by contacting the main actors of cross-border VET and their networks. They represent all forms of cross-border training existing in the region, ranging from short work placements to three-year dual training courses, and discussed the development, documentation and exchange of knowledge in relation to cross-border training. Thereby, an inventory of all existing forms has been taken.

Due to the explorative character of the study and the small number of cases, a qualitative methodology was the most adequate research design. The chosen problem-oriented interviews (WITZEL and REITER 2012) were based on flexible, strictly qualitative interview guidelines including the following topics: individual involvement of the interview partner in cross-border VET and strategies to deal with the regional conditions; positive and negative effects of cross-border VET; evaluation of cross-border VET on an individual and general level.

In 2018, a second research phase was carried out to evaluate in-depth the developments since 2015. It included only the new form of apprenticeships according to the *Accord-cadre* and consisted in analysing the reports on the progress of

cross-border vocational training (cf. DORKA a. FRISCH 2016; GROSSREGION 2018) and the statements of the partners at the end of the experimentation period (cf. RÉGION GRAND-EST 2018; STAATSKANZLEI 2018). Additionally, an in-depth interview with one of the cross-border career officers and a responsible representative of the *Regionaldirektion Saarland/Rheinland-Pfalz* of the German Federal Employment Agency (cited as interview *Arbeitsagentur/Regionaldirektion*) has been conducted. This step focused on how knowledge about cross-border VET has been generated since 2015.

For the analysis and following the steps proposed by WITZEL and REITER (2012), the evaluation of the interviews was prepared by transcribing the interviews, coding them in MaxQDA, and writing individual case analyses. The subsequent comparative horizontal evaluation of the interviews is based on the four-stage approach proposed by WELLBROCK et al. (2012, p. 8): (1) Identification of “supporting policies” of the public administration, regional actors and “knowledge support structures”, (2) identification and analysis of existing connections between the actors, (3) evaluation of existing structures and connections, (4) search for causes of the strengths and weaknesses of existing structures and connections, as well as drawing up suggestions for improvement. For step (1) and (2), it was checked which organisations and actors named in the case analyses correspond to the institutions introduced in figure 2. Step (3) consisted in a SWOT analysis basing on the case studies. In step (4) the reality of cross-border VET has been compared with the aims fixed in the agreements and our model of regional learning introduced in figure 2.

## Results

This section summarises the evaluation steps (1) and (2) and describes the structures and processes of learning about cross-border vocational training in the two regions involved.

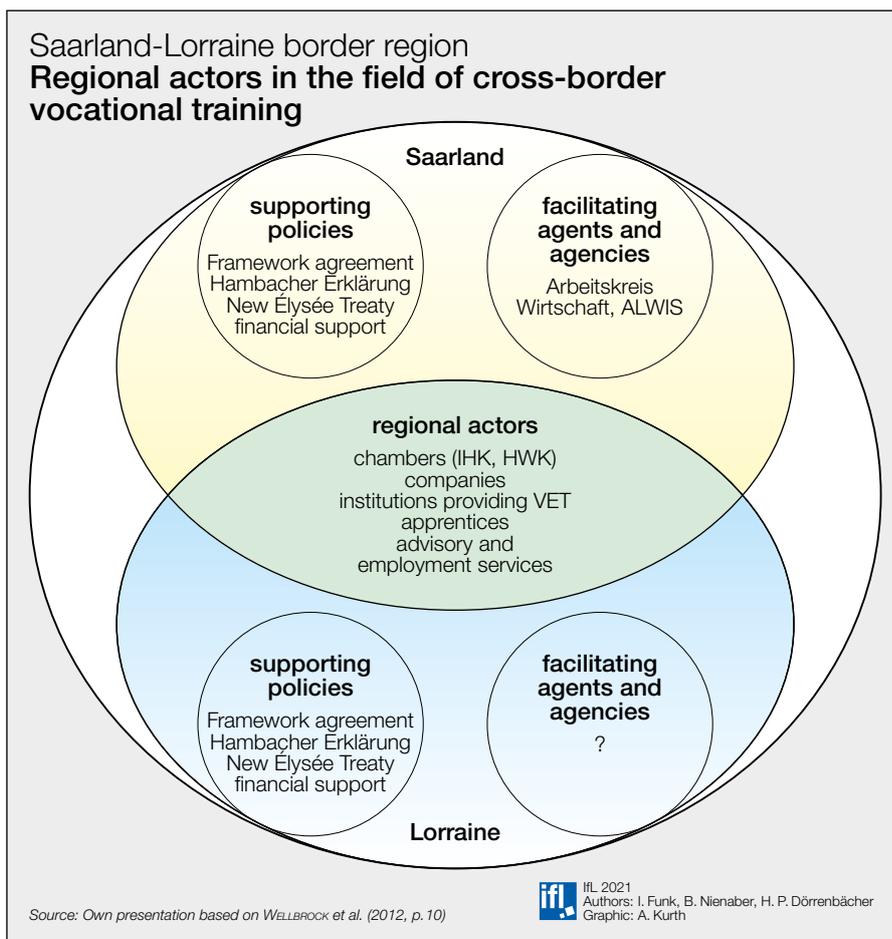


Fig. 3: Regional actors in the field of cross-border vocational training in the Saarland-Lorraine border region

## Regional actors

On both sides of the border, many ‘regional’ actors are involved in cross-border training (cf. Fig. 3). First of all, the chambers have to be mentioned (*Industrie- und Handelskammer (IHK)*, *Handwerks- und Landwirtschaftskammer* on the Saarland side, the *Chambre de Métiers et de l’artisanat*, the *Chambre de Commerce et de l’Industrie*, the *Direction régionale de l’alimentation, de l’agriculture et de la forêt* on the French side), which were largely involved in the elaboration of the *Rahmenvereinbarung* and which are points of contact for questions about the organisation of cross-border training and vocational qualifications. Cross-border training contracts are deposited with the IHK in accordance with the *Rahmenvereinbarung*. The chambers on both sides of the border constantly exchange information on vacancies and applicants, and also with the

advisory and placement institutions (interview 11, 12). Through regular cross-border meetings, the border between nationally-oriented administration and governance structures is overcome and cross-border learning processes are made possible. Since 2017, the IHK has employed a mobility advisor for cross-border apprenticeships to foster this form of training.

Among companies, in 2015 a distinction could be made between pioneers that experiment with new types of cross-border training and are known for it across borders, and companies that first wait to adopt proven concepts. The extent to which companies are involved in cross-border processes of knowledge transfer depends on available human resources, cross-border contacts and language skills. The in-house learning processes are based on experience of different types of cross-border training, e.g.

work placements or normal training of French trainees in the German system. With each trainee or intern, cross-border training becomes less “exotic” because strategies for dealing with problems are already known. Possible solutions are also worked out through exchange with other companies (interview 1, 2, 9). The decision against cross-border training or to discontinue such training can also be understood as a learning process. In return, we were able to observe in 2018 that more and more companies, and even small companies, were offering cross-border apprenticeships. These companies were monitoring the first examples of cross-border apprenticeships on the basis of the existing agreements, and now hope to benefit from this form of training to meet their specific needs, such as the support of French customers (CFACI 2018/Interview Arbeitsagentur/Regionaldirektion).

For vocational schools and other educational providers, cross-border work placements and exchange programmes are particularly suitable. The necessary knowledge and cross-border contacts can usually be built up by highly motivated teachers with appropriate language skills. The permit of French trainees in accordance with the *Rahmenvereinbarung* is not necessarily associated with additional expenditure for Saarland schools, or is not perceived as cross-border training since the trainees do not benefit from any special treatment (interview 4, 6). On the French side, the CFA Henri-Nominé in Sarreguemines, situated less than 500 metres from the German border, has gained a lot of experience by hosting several project classes. At the same time, new CFAs such as in Forbach are involved because of the rising number of professions (LEVILLAIN 2017). The apprentices hope to have better career opportunities if they choose cross-border training. It is remarkable that most of the first apprentices have strong relationships to the neighbouring region and have excellent skills in the language of the neighbouring country. For these pioneers among

the trainees, learning processes regarding the course and conditions of cross-border training as well as cultural differences imply the greatest effort (interview 2, 4, 7). The poor French or German skills of the young people in the border region are therefore an important limiting factor for cross-border dual apprenticeships.

Knowledge about cross-border training is difficult to access for pupils and trainees. Exploring information is often only possible through personal initiative, private contacts with actors in the neighbouring country and very good language skills, with which boundaries between national educational and advisory systems can be overcome. The experiences of other young people and their implicit knowledge are an important factor in deciding on cross-border training. Events like the ceremony for the first apprentices to finish cross-border dual training are a possibility to show interested pupils that this form of apprenticeship succeeds (STAATSKANZLEI DES SAARLANDES 2018).

In both regions there are public institutions for careers advice and training as well as for job placement which also deal with cross-border topics. In Saarland there are the *Regionaldirektion Saarland/Rheinland-Pfalz* of the Federal Employment Agency and the local employment offices. Due to the decreasing number of applicants for apprenticeships in Saarland, the topic of cross-border VET has gained in importance there and found its way into existing structures, e.g. through the employment of a coordinator for international affairs at the management office of the *Regionaldirektion Saarland/Rheinland-Pfalz* of the Federal Employment Agency (interview 10, 12). On the Lorraine side, *Pôle Emploi* and the *Centres d'information et d'orientation* (CIO) provide advice, while schools also play a major role in career orientation. Since 2017, the *développeurs d'apprentissage* have provided support to young people in the region Grand Est who are interested in dual vocational training. The *développeurs* are aware of the possibility of cross-border apprenticeships and co-

operate with the career officers in Saarbrücken.

### Supporting policies

The regional actors benefit from the “supporting policies” of the European Union, the nation states and the regions for cross-border training projects (cf. Fig. 3). Many of the projects have been funded by the European Union, e.g. the *Fachstelle für grenzüberschreitende Ausbildung* (FagA) or language training courses for some apprentices (interview *Arbeitsagentur/Regionaldirektion*). The national foreign and education ministries make the cross-border training possible by shaping the legal framework, such as the German Vocational Training Act, which allows trainees to spend a part of the dual vocational training abroad (BBiG 2005). At the regional level, in the Saarland Ministry for Economic Affairs, Employment, Energy and Transport as well as the Ministry of Finance and Europe and in the *Conseil Régional* in Lorraine, political interest is more strongly linked to tangible problematic situations and objectives and to specific regional framework conditions. Activities involve the completion of the *Rahmenvereinbarung* and support for projects on cross-border VET. The reasons for the activities have been mentioned above. Since 2017, the *Conseil Régional* has borne the full costs of the *taxe d'apprentissage* for cross-border apprenticeships to support companies in Saarland (MFE 2017). This symbolic act shows the political support of the region Grand Est for cross-border VET.<sup>3</sup>

“Facilitating agents and agencies” (cf. Fig. 3) such as the *Arbeitskreis Wirtschaft* and the association *ArbeitsLeben Wirtschaft Schule* could only be identified in Saarland. They are not directly involved in cross-border training, but they disseminate information and contribute

<sup>3</sup> After the finalization of this article, the situation changed due to a reform of vocational training in France. The regions are no longer responsible for cross-border apprenticeships and stopped bearing the costs. As a result, the number of new contracts for cross-border apprenticeships collapsed in 2020.

to intraregional and cross-border networking (interview 1, 9).

To conclude, the activities of the regional actors in the field of cross-border vocational training heavily depend on individual people who are willing and able to overcome administrative, language and cultural borders. These key actors have obtained expert knowledge and are important drivers of the learning processes.

**Cross-border actors and policies**

In the Saarland-Lorraine border region, besides the actors and supporting policies with original regional or national objectives and additionally operating in the field of cross-border vocational training, actors and policies with an explicit cross-border focus can be found. The organisational structure and the field of activity of these actors can be defined as cross-border (cf. Fig. 4). An example is the aforementioned *Fachstelle für grenzüberschreitende Ausbildung (FagA)* and the Lorraine *Formation SaarLor FSL*. Since 2017, the cross-border character of the FagA has been strengthened by transformation into an Interreg V A Greater Region project with several French partners (VAUS 2013; SAARLAND 2013; MWAEV 2017). The expert knowledge acquired in numerous projects is valuable beyond work placements due to common ground with other forms of cross-border training (interview 16). In 2017, two specialised career officers dedicated to the cross-border “*formation en alternance*” have been employed at the local employment office in Saarbrücken. Despite their location in the Saarland, they are jointly funded by the region Grand Est and the *Agentur für Arbeit* in Saarbrücken, and their work is characterised by an explicitly cross-border task: they support young people and companies interested in a cross-border apprenticeship based on the *Rahmenvereinbarung* on both sides of the border (interview *Arbeitsagentur/Regionaldirektion* 2018). The stabilisation of the numbers of contracts and the expansion to new professions in the last two years is the result of their work. The total num-

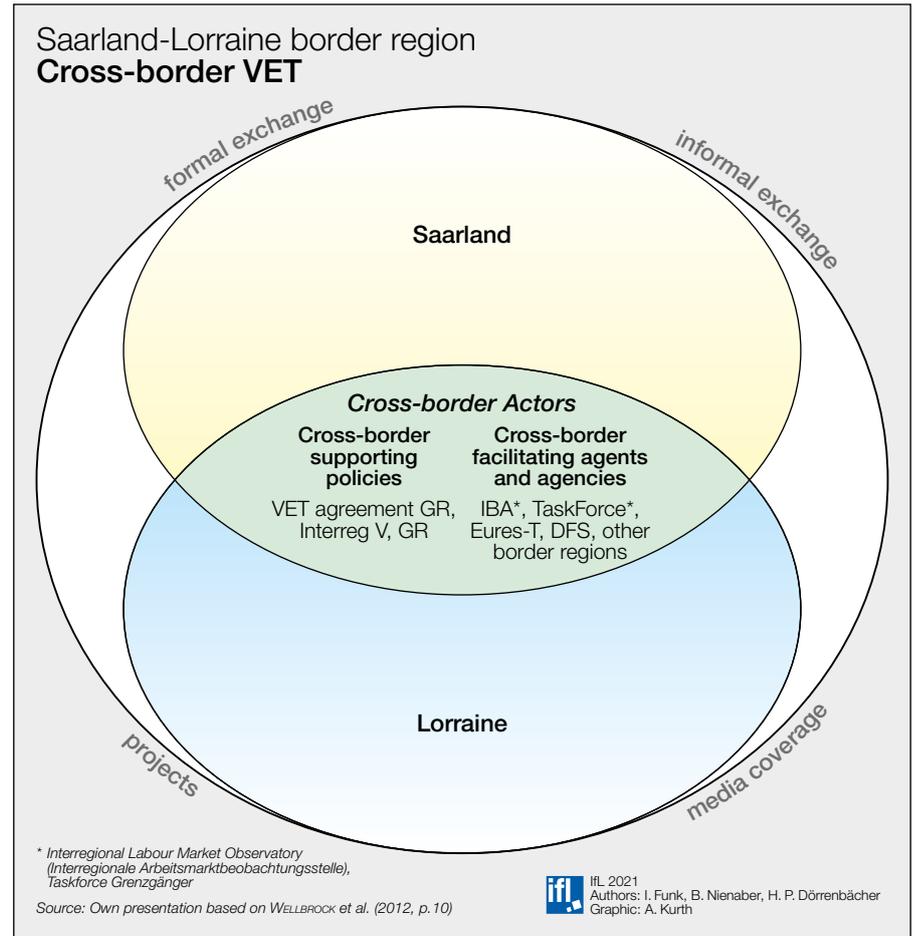


Fig. 4: The cross-border VET in the Saarland-Lorraine region

ber still seems to be very low – but this perception changes when one bears in mind the great effort necessary for establishing a single apprenticeship.

These actors establish important connections between the two regions, through which knowledge can be disseminated.

The main cross-border-oriented “supporting policies” (cf. Fig. 4) are provided by the Greater Region, especially the aforementioned framework agreement for cross-border vocational training for the Greater Region and the INTERREG V A Greater Region programme identified. Although not directly involved in the cross-border vocational training, the following institutions, “facilitating agents and agencies” provide significant knowledge for the implementation of cross-border vocational educational training.

The Interregional Labour Market Observatory (IBA) makes available statisti-

cal data and analyses of the labour markets in the Greater Region. The *Task Force Grenzgänger* supported the development of the *Accord-cadre* with legal expertise (cf. TASK FORCE 2012) (interview 17). The *Eures Greater Region* network advises employers and employees on questions regarding the cross-border labour market. The *Deutsch-Französische Sekretariat für den Austausch in der beruflichen Bildung* (German French Secretariat for VET exchange) (DFS) in Saarbrücken, although not active in the border region, has valuable experience of cross-border exchange during training. Interregional contacts and knowledge transfers from other border regions have a considerable influence on the (inter-)regional learning processes.

The contacts in the Upper Rhine Region come about through the participation of Saarland and Lorraine actors in supra-regional professional events such as the *Deutsch-französischen Dialog* on “Cross-border vocational training and mobility in

the labour market in the German-French border regions” in 2015. There are still connections through institutions that are responsible for the two border regions, such as the *Regionaldirektion Rheinland-Pfalz-Saarland* of the Federal Employment Agency. The advances in knowledge in the Upper Rhine region has accelerated learning processes in the Saarland-Lorraine border region. At the same time, the actors in Saarland and Lorraine are aware of the fact that regional framework conditions and interests of the actors may differ and that their own individual solutions must therefore be developed and that specific learning processes take place in each border region.

The aforementioned actors come together in different formats in the cross-border region (cf. Fig. 4), which contribute to the spreading of knowledge. A distinction can be made between formal non-public bodies bringing together experts, such as the monitoring committee for the *Rahmenvereinbarung*, and public events, such as the *Interregionale Jobmesse (Interregional Job Fair)* which has been organised annually by the employment office in Saarbrücken since 2010. The fair supports cross-border exchange by means of reports of experiences and contributions from acknowledged experts. It is a door-opener for interested young people and employers. Joint projects in the field of VET, such as the *PontSaarLor*, promote cross-border connections and help to build trust. Informal contacts are based on personal acquaintance and are closely linked to concrete problems and individual needs in cross-border education. Although media coverage is not a form of direct contact, in some cases it has an intermediary function, e.g. by pointing out existing opportunities to companies.

These different ways of crossing the border have different, complementary functions. The contacts allow collective regional and cross-border learning processes. The impetus for these arises from chronologically shifted individual learning processes, when e.g. pioneering companies and pioneers among the trainees pass on their experiences to others. The

greatest gain in knowledge for the actors derives from the joint concrete implementation of cross-border training. Since actors from both regions are involved, learning processes are transboundary. These are *learning-by-doing* processes that are constantly given new impetus by special cases that arise.

Experts with comprehensive implicit knowledge are key actors for the cross-border transfer of knowledge. These include employees of the chambers, the *Bundesagentur für Arbeit* and the *Fachstelle*. In order to ensure that tacit knowledge is not lost, it is increasingly codified in internal manuals and databases (interview 10, 12, 16). The documents also simplify cross-border cooperation between the actors by defining standardised procedures.

The cross-border aspect of the learning processes imposes special requirements on the people involved. In addition to dealing with practical problems arising from differences in training and legislation, intercultural learning processes and special competences are necessary as well. These include for example knowledge of the fact that the dual vocational training in France and Germany has a different meaning and therefore does not receive the same appreciation. This also includes the discussion of interests and fears of those involved. It becomes clear that many structures are nationally oriented and that flows of information are held up at the border. The cross-border diffusion of knowledge is more strongly linked to individuals than to public support structures, or structures become cross-border through individuals. However, the newly established explicit cross-border actors improve the situation.

### **Evaluation of existing networks and learning processes**

In steps (3) and (4) of the horizontal evaluation (cf. *Methodology*), strengths and weaknesses of existing structures and processes are analysed to show potentials for improvement. The spatial proximity and the limited number of actors in the border region promote informal contacts which have proven to be im-

portant for joint learning processes, because they transfer results of individual learning processes to other actors. The various existing forms of exchange are often a result of long-standing cross-border contacts and the trust developed through them. It becomes evident that learning about cross-border training is not a completed process but constantly develops through *learning-by-doing*. The pioneers find out what is possible and what works and set an example for other interested companies and apprentices. Solutions for several practical problems have been found. With the *Accord-cadre*, a complex and comprehensive framework was created that will not replace existing forms of cross-border education that meet the needs and resources of the actors. Low-threshold forms such as work placements can make it easier for those actors who, despite their interest, refrain from cross-border training according to the *Accord-cadre* because of legal and practical problems, in order to get started. It is therefore necessary to maintain the diversity of cross-border training.

The existing pool of experience in the border region and the tacit knowledge of the experts are important resources for the learning processes, which are also enriched by cross-border experiences in other areas. Key players, who are anchored in several networks and across borders, are important initiators of learning processes. Further impetus comes from the differences between Saarland and Lorraine and from encounters between actors who did not know each other before. Interregional knowledge transfer from other border regions also supports the processes.

At the same time, the described advantages of the networks in the border region entail risks. Knowledge that is personalised and not documented can only be accessed with difficulty by many actors. The cross-border opening up and spreading of knowledge require knowledge of the neighbouring language and the differences between the educational and administrative systems. Without them, sustainable, systematic and cross-border diffusion

of knowledge does not always succeed. Establishing posts for two specialised career officers was therefore an important decision for improving the programme. Today they are an essential node in the network. The fact that many structures and activities becoming manifest in projects are limited in time exacerbates this problematic situation. Intercultural misunderstandings, prejudice and the pursuit of one's own interests make cooperation more difficult. Therefore, the aim must be to create sustainable structures, to make existing tacit knowledge accessible and to preserve the diversity of the forms of exchange.

All three components – supporting policies, the facilitating agents and agencies, as well as the regional actors which have been mentioned in the model – contribute, in varying degrees, to the development of “cross-border regional learning”. A joint assessment of the cross-border education as a win-win-situation for both subregions of the border area would be an important framework condition for the extension of the cross-border education. This requires further learning processes on both sides of the border in order to reduce fears and to develop common objectives that should be further supported by public support structures and the promotion of exchange.

## Conclusion

The development of the cross-border VET in the Saarland-Lorraine border region is characterised by a slow increase in the number of contracts based on the *Rahmenvereinbarung* and the *Abkommen über grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung*. But the barriers to be overcome and the necessary support to conclude a single apprenticeship contract are still tremendous. Between 2015 and 2018, the cooperation structures have been consolidated and the number of involved actors has increased. Despite still existing practical problems and large-scale challenges such as unsatisfactory language skills, the *Abkommen über grenzüberschreitende Berufsausbildung Saarland-Lothringen* has been transformed into a per-

manent agreement. This means that the cross-border VET in the Saarland-Lorraine border region is still based on two pillars: integrated cross-border apprenticeships and cross-border internships.

The preceding explanations make clear that the approaches to cross-border VET developed recently in the Saarland-Lorraine border area are learning processes themselves. These affect different social, temporal and spatial levels. They are not only *inter-* but also *intra*regional learning processes. Knowledge and experience have been generated in other regions, such as the Upper Rhine region, that then have been adopted *inter*regionally. At the same time they have been adapted *intra*regionally to the specific conditions of the Saarland-Lorraine border area. From the Saarland or Lorraine perspective, however, the learning processes in the Saarland-Lorraine border area are nevertheless *inter*regional themselves. Considering the temporal aspect of these learning processes, one has to distinguish their diachronic and synchronous dimensions. On the one hand, they are embedded in long-term processes such as European integration or the German-French friendship; on the other hand, they are the expression and result of everyday activities of the actors involved in VET. The comparison of the situation in 2015 and 2018 shows this clearly. These learning processes thus take place at different social scale levels and can be considered as the manifestations of structuration processes that combine the spatial, temporal and social macro and micro levels. Finally, they are contingent, i.e. open-ended processes that never achieve a fixed goal. They themselves are the goal.

Therefore there is a need for more research on the future development of cross-border VET. Beyond that, more interviews on the French side would be essential if the cross-border VET also develops further on the French side. The actor-centred model of WELLBROCK et al. was helpful to reveal that the regional learning processes highly depend on individuals. The adapted models allowed to involve the special characteristics border regions

like the coexistence of regional and cross-border actors. Though, some questions like the influence of contacts to other border regions or the development from regional actors to cross-border actors need to be discussed once more. Analysing other learning processes in other border regions would help to still better adapt the model to the complexity and dynamics of cross-border cooperation.

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**Резюме**

Инес Функ, Бирте Ниенабер, Х. Петер Дёрренбэхер

**Международное профессионально-техническое образование как процесс обучения без границ**

В последние годы значимость международного профессионально-технического образования существенно выросла. Предметом исследования является подход к организации региональных образовательных процессов в приграничных областях благодаря официальным международным двухсторонним соглашениям в области образования. С этой целью была разработана модель обучения в приграничных областях, основанная на модели Велльброка (Wellbrock et al. (2012)), опирающаяся на стандартизированные форматы и с фокусом на возможные перспективы участников. Совместные действия вовлеченных инстанций привели к созданию международного профессионально-технического образования, совмещающего в себе внутрирегиональные и межрегиональные образовательные процессы, и соответственно к созданию «международного образовательного региона».

Анализ различных структур с поправкой на концептуальные исключения показал, что образовательные процессы в приграничном регионе Заарланд-Лотарингии протекают динамично и подвержены влиянию как ключевых экспертов, так и благоприятных региональных особенностей.

Международные; профессионально-техническое образование; Франция; Германия; опросы и интервью

**Résumé**

INES FUNK, BIRTE NIENABER, H. PETER DÖRRENBÄCHER

**La formation professionnelle transfrontalière en tant que processus d'apprentissage transfrontalier**

Ces dernières années, la formation professionnelle transfrontalière a pris une importance croissante. La question globale de la recherche porte sur la manière dont les processus d'apprentissage régionaux dans une région frontalière sont façonnés par les accords bilatéraux transfrontaliers en matière d'éducation formelle. À cette fin, un modèle d'apprentissage régional dans les régions frontalières a été élaboré sur la base du modèle de WELLBROCK et al. (2012) en s'appuyant sur une terminologie holistique et en se concentrant sur la perspective des acteurs. Les activités des différents acteurs ont conduit au développement de la formation professionnelle transfrontalière, qui est liée à des processus d'apprentissage intra et interrégionaux conduisant à une «région d'apprentissage transfrontalière». L'analyse des structures étudiées en tenant compte des hypothèses conceptuelles montre que les processus d'apprentissage dans la région frontalière Sarre-Lorraine sont dynamiques et dépendent de personnes clés ayant des connaissances spécialisées ainsi que de conditions régionales avantageuses.

Transfrontalier; formation professionnelle; France; Allemagne; entretiens qualitatifs