

# Language as facilitator

The role of barrier effects in cross-border cooperation along the Dutch border

Thijs Fikken

Master's thesis for the Erasmus Mundus Planet Europe programme

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## Abstract

In this thesis, the role of barrier effects on cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border region has been examined. Specific emphasis has been placed on the role of language within cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian Interreg cross-border regions. Through a literature review, in-depth interviews with participants in cross-border cooperation and participant observation sessions with Interreg V-A projects, a sketch of the effect the Dutch border has on cross-border cooperation has been made. Three main groups of border effects have been identified: administrative barriers, cultural barriers and language barriers. Administrative barriers are considered the strongest barriers for cooperation, whilst language barriers are considered the least relevant for cooperation.

Language differences do act as catalysts for other barrier effects. Along the Dutch-German border, Dutch and German are used primarily in socio-cultural projects. English plays an important role in high-tech and research oriented projects. Along the Dutch-Belgian border, the primary language used is Dutch. Still, in high-tech and research oriented projects, English is common. If there are differences in language, other barrier effects are reinforced and harder to circumnavigate. Moreover, lagging language proficiency triggers exclusion of certain groups of people in cross-border cooperation. The other way around, a good command of the language used enables more efficient cooperation processes.

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### List of abbreviations

CF	Cohesion Fund
CBR	Cross-border region
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ERAC	European and Regional Affairs Consultancy
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
ITEM	Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border cooperation and Mobility
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MS	Member State
NAFTA	North-American Free Trade Agreement
SEM	Single European Market
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

# 1 Introduction

The free movement of goods, services, capital, labour and people has been a central issue on the European agenda since the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Citizens of Member States (MS) were generally able to cross borders into other Member States by just showing a valid passport or ID. However, most MS still enforced border controls at the internal EU borders. The first official agreement to abolish these border controls was the Schengen Agreement (1985). The Schengen Agreement was signed independently of the European Union, due to a lack of consensus among the MS over whether or not the EU had the competence to abolish border controls. The Schengen Agreement was signed by five of the then ten MS (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany). The Schengen Agreement was supplemented by the Schengen Convention in 1990. Herein, the complete abolishment of internal border controls and a common visa policy were proposed. The Schengen Agreement and the complementary Convention were implemented for some signatories in 1995. Only during the negotiations leading to the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), the Schengen philosophy was integrated in the main body of EU law. The establishment of the Schengen Area, which currently encompasses 22 MS and 4 non-EU members, has led to the image of Europe without borders, and can be seen as one of the main accomplishments of the European integration process.

For a period of roughly 15 years, the Schengen Area has grown in size and member count. For those growing up in Schengen countries in the '90s and '00s, crossing borders without border controls is common practice. Open borders were assumed an irreversible result of EU integration (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010). The expansion of the European Union and the Schengen Area into the former Eastern Bloc marked a significant geopolitical transformation, where Western and Eastern Europe were reunited after the fall of the Iron Curtain. In terms of internal EU mobility, Schengen has simplified travel to such an extent where borders are perceived as non-existent.

While borders seem non-existent for the casual European tourist, their existence is still highly relevant for people who interact with the border in different ways. Those who work or live on the other side of a border encounter a wide range of border-effects (ITEM, 2016; Weterings & Van Gessel-Dabekaussen, 2015). Examples worth mentioning are differences in language and culture, but also taxation and administrative practices (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). While the EU's internal borders seem open, there is still a wide range of barriers in effect (Newman, 2006; Perkmann, 2007; Tripl, 2010; ITEM, 2016). These border-effects have been a focal point for academic discourse on EU-integration (Perkmann, 2003; Evers, 2008; Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010), economic development (Feenstra, 2002; Tripl, 2010), and studies on geographical proximity and interaction (Tobler, 1970; Anderson, 1979; McCallum, 1995). In the light of recent events, such as the immigration crisis, during which the Schengen Convention was disregarded by some countries through the temporary reintroduction of border controls; or the increase of nationalistic political tendencies, best illustrated by BREXIT and the rise of anti-EU political discourse; the openness of the EU's internal borders is under stress. It is also clear that the openness of borders is taken more serious by some countries and less by others. Even if we assume that the Single European Market has been fully institutionalised, one might wonder how open the different internal EU borders actually are. There is a constant struggle between the Member States and the European Union.

Attempts to integrate borderlands and stimulate cross-border cooperation have been at the core of EU rhetoric for decades (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010). The first 'official' cross-border region (CBR) has been set up on the Dutch-German border in 1958. This area, aptly called Euregio, was located roughly in the area of Enschede (NL) and Gronau (DE). It can be seen as the starting point of a new

institutionalised form of EU cross-border regions (Perkmann, 2003). Currently, CBRs are funded by the EU under the Interreg V-A programme. Through the Interreg V-A programme, projects that involve actors from different sides of the border are subsidised, with the goal to integrate European borderlands. With signs that lead us to believe that border effects are still relevant in cooperation processes today (discussed in f.e. (Weterings & Van Gessel-Dabekaussen, 2015; ITEM, 2016)), Interreg V-A programmes can function as test cases to examine how these border effects come into play at the EU's internal borders.

Following the discussion above, this research outline aims to set a range of research questions concerning the topic of border-effects at the EU's internal borders. The majority of research on CBC has focused on administrative barriers (see section 2.2). There is wide mention of the existence of language barriers, but its actual workings have not been assessed in detail. The focus in this thesis will thus be placed on the role of language in cooperation in Interreg cross-border regions. The Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border regions have been selected as case studies (see section 2.4). Specifically, the following main research question has been formulated:

**How do language differences affect cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian Interreg cross-border regions?**

In order to answer this question, a range of sub-questions has been formulated.

1. What border-effects are commonly identified as influencers of cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border regions?
2. What is the role of language in cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border regions?
3. How do the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border-effects compare in terms of identity and perceived severity?

A phronetic approach will be used to find answers to our main questions. This implies that a large amount of context dependent data has to be gathered in order to sketch the phenomenon that we are examining. Questions 1 will provide us with a broad image of the border-effects that play a role in cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border regions. With the use of knowledge that is already available in academic literature, basic understanding will be shaped. Then, this understanding will be tested through empirical research in the form of in-depth interviews with participants in cross-border cooperation. Interviewees are both professionals and voluntary workers active in one of the two Interreg V-A cross-border regions<sup>1</sup> that will be examined (see Chapter 3 for a more extensive methodological background). Question 2 will apply focus to the effects of the little researched theme of language and communication on cross-border cooperation. With this question, we delve deeper into the issue of language and the role it plays in our case studies. An essential part of the data gathering process in this section will revolve around participant observations of two meetings of partners of currently active cross-border projects.

The knowledge that has been gained through the literature review, in-depth interviews and observation sessions will be combined with the overarching analytical question 3. Herein, a broad sketch of the workings of the border-effects will be made. By using this broad base for the final sub-question, we can put the role of language and communication in perspective to the other border-effects. Thus, from this broader discussion, we can distil the answer to our main question: How do language and

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<sup>1</sup> For the Dutch-German border, the studied region is: Interreg V-A – Germany - the Netherlands (Deutschland - Nederland).  
For the Dutch-Belgian border, the studied region is: Interreg V-A – Flanders – the Netherlands (Vlaanderen - Nederland).

communication differences affect cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian Interreg cross-border regions?

In the second chapter of the thesis, the conceptual framework will be provided. Herein, a thorough literature review on the theme of borders, cross-border cooperation and barriers for cross-border cooperation will be provided. The chapter is concluded with a description of our two case study regions: the Interreg V-A Deutschland – Nederland programme area and the Interreg V-A Vlaanderen – Nederland programme area. The third chapter of the thesis explores the methods that are being used to gather primary data, as well as the methodology that supports the scientific structure of the research. The fourth chapter outlines the major outcomes of the in-depth interviews and participant observation sessions for each of the cases. Emphasis is placed on three types of barrier effects that have been identified in both the literature review in chapter 2 and the in-depth interviews and participant observation sessions. In the fifth chapter of the thesis, a reflection on the outcomes of the thesis is provided. The reflection will focus on what has been discovered in the results section, and builds on the phronetic methodology to create perspective. The thesis will be finalised with a conclusion, in which the main findings will be summarised.

## 2 Conceptual framework

In order to make the most of the empirical research section of this thesis, it is essential to gather a solid theoretical base of knowledge. The conceptual framework will provide us with this theoretical foundation. The information that is compiled herein will be used to add focus to the empirical section of the thesis. The first two sections of the conceptual framework encompasses a discussion on borders, border-effects and cross-border cooperation based on academic literature. It is however important to remember the context of the locale which we are studying. Border development will be examined in a European context unless stated otherwise. Therefore, the third section of the conceptual framework focusses on a discussion on EU processes and institutions relevant for borders, border-effects and cross-border cooperation. To conclude the chapter, a description of the two case regions will be provided.

### 2.1 Borders, border-effects and cross-border cooperation: an academic perspective

The academic field of border studies and the associated number of geographical studies on borders and border regions has grown significantly over the last decades (Van Houtum, 2000). This growth can be contributed to the increasing dynamism of borders and border regions from the 1980s onwards (Van Houtum, 2000). After the Second World War, the European borders were stable for a period of roughly 40 years. The borders that were there were clear examples of the geopolitical academic rationale in the 1960s (Van Houtum, 2005). Borders were perceived as boundaries, lines, demarcations of national sovereign territory. They were thus solid (and fairly undisputed) entities which kept two geographical locales separate in terms of political and socio-economic structure (Newman, 2006).

The 1980s were the start of a period of drastic change in European borderlands (Newman & Paasi, 1998; O'Dowd, 2002; Perkmann, 2003; Van Houtum, 2005; Newman, 2006). In Western Europe, the EU's increasing pursuit for integration through the call for a Single European Market and a European Monetary Union, triggered a period in which the role of borders as boundaries became less prominent. In Eastern Europe, the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc had a twofold effect. On the one hand, the impenetrable Iron Curtain disappeared. On the other hand, a group of newly independent national states with their own national borders appeared.

During the 1990s and 2000s, European integration was at its peak (Perkmann, 2003; Newman, 2006). The opening of internal borders through the Schengen Convention, the establishment of the Internal Market, and the rapid eastern expansion of the European Union have formed the European landscape today. The EU grew to 28 Member States in 2013 when Croatia entered the Union. The growth of the Union coincided with growing scepticism from European citizens and Member States. Recently, the EU has undergone crisis after crisis. The collapse of the financial sector in 2008 led to speculations about a possible GREXIT, a scenario where Greece would leave the EU (or at least the European Monetary Union). Unrest in the Middle-East and several African countries triggered large refugee flows. Growing nationalist tendencies in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary and Poland shaped an anti-EU political agenda. And most disturbingly, the British vote to leave the EU. All these events illustrate the core issue in the European Union. How much influence should the EU have? Where does the sovereignty of the Member State end, and the power of the EU begin? The European dilemma between EU integration and Member State sovereignty lays at the core of the recent EU crises (Van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007). The EU's internal borders are a pivotal

point for this dilemma: how permeable should borders be? How do borders affect integration or protect sovereignty? How do CBRs function as a whole? These are some of the questions that will be discussed below.

### 2.1.1 Border typologies

Borders and boundaries, and their role in our contemporary world have been the subject of an interdisciplinary academic debate over the last two decades (Newman, 2006; Paasi, 2012). Geography has traditionally been related to border studies. In particular, land boundaries, and the borderscapes of states have been a central point of geographical research. Territory, territoriality and sovereignty are central themes in this research, and boundaries are perceived as expressions of this territoriality of states (Newman & Paasi, 1998). They are '*physical and highly visible lines of separation between political, social and economical spaces*' (Newman, 2006). From this reasoning, one can easily derive that borders can function as barriers and limit interaction. The extent to which this occurs can be described on a continuous scale from 'hard' borders that are impermeable to 'soft' borders through which people, goods, services, capital and labour pass freely.

Globalisation fanatics have supported statements that hint at a borderless world (Newman, 2006). Perhaps this is most accurately illustrated by the notion that '*the world is flat*' (Friedman, 2005). This reasoning is supported by the softening of borders in the EU and NAFTA<sup>2</sup> in the early 2000s. The image of a borderless world was contested by border researchers right from its initial phrasing. As Anssi Paasi states, '*the disappearance of boundaries has been more celebrated in the catchy logos of transnational corporations than realised in practice*' (Paasi, 2003). After the events of 9/11 and the relevance of the securitisation discourse in which the protection of borders is central grew significantly (Newman, 2006; Paasi, 2012). The increasing tensions within Europe due to the refugee crisis and the (ridiculous) promise of the US president Donald Trump to build a wall between the US and Mexico have shattered the borderless world paradigm. In the geographical reality of today, borders matter.

Borders are an intricate part of sociological and anthropological academic discourse. Herein, the idea of a border refers more and more to socio-cultural constructions between different groups of people rather than state boundaries (Newman & Paasi, 1998). The process of drawing a line creates a significant distinction between the internal and external, and thus automatically triggers inclusion and exclusion. It results in a notion of 'us' versus 'them' or the 'other'. This has been famously phrased in Edward Said's work 'Orientalism', in which he describes the attitude of the 'Occident' (the West) towards the 'Orient' (the East, or more broadly, the unknown) (Said, 1978). The influence of socio-cultural thinking is strongly reflected in current cultural geography. At this crossing-point between disciplines, the abstract and non-abstract notions of the border collide (Newman, 2006). Terms like identity, place attachment and related processes like 'Othering' and '(B)ordering' reoccur regularly (Newman & Paasi, 1998; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002; Paasi, 2003; Paasi, 2012).

The rising interdisciplinary approach towards border studies has countered the old geopolitical assumption that places are fixed in space and time. It has led to an alternate perception of the border, not as a solid demarcation, but as an active process. Bordering herein is '*an ongoing strategic effort to make a difference in space among the movements of people, money or products*' (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). Phrased differently: it is still very common to see borders as barriers. As a result, the other side of the border could be avoided because it represents a different attitude or entity. In this case, there is little cross-border traffic. However,

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<sup>2</sup> The North American Free Trade Agreement was established in 1994 and signed by Canada, the United States and Mexico.

the international differences reflected by the border can also be perceived as opportunities. The difference in prices on the other side of the border is usually a major stimulant of cross-border traffic. In this manner, borders function as bridges rather than barriers, where cross-border traffic is stimulated by differences in local factors (Spierings & van der Velde, 2013).

To finalise our basic understanding of borders, one must take the different spatial scales of borders into account. While this thesis will focus on national borders, there are other spatial contexts in which borders exist. At a simplified level, borders range from international and national, to the local level of provinces, municipalities or metropolises (Newman & Paasi, 1998). Apart from these administrative borders, local boundaries of everyday spheres of life play a much more important role on the level of the individual. As David Newman and Anssi Paasi (1998) aptly phrase it: '*Beyond national identity, most of life's functions take place within the context of local boundaries, both real and perceived*'. This implies that, while national boundaries and administrative divisions are really there, local boundaries can also be perceived as such, while not formally being there. Examples are boundaries between neighbourhoods with different socio-economic status, or boundaries between different ethnical groups of people, where it is assumed there are differences, while there might not be any differences (Newman & Paasi, 1998). These boundaries are shaped by historical processes and heritage, and are embedded in the collective memory of those people that experience them (Zhurzhenko, 2011).

### 2.1.2 *Border-effects*

As can be seen from the literature provided above, borders affect their surroundings in a wide range of manners. These border-effects have been widely studied by economists interested in international trade patterns. A recurring pattern can be seen in the examination of the role of the border on what is known as the gravity equation. The gravity equation determines the amount of economic interaction between two points based on their economic mass and their proximity. Big centres interact more than small centres. Centres that are geographically close to each other interact more than centres that are far away (Anderson, 1979; Bergstrand, 1985). When you assume that all other factors are irrelevant, this basic equation holds its ground. When barriers like national borders are incorporated, the outcomes are stunted. McCallum (1995) used the gravity equation to compare the trade relations between cities within Canada, and between Canadian and US cities. He found that the Canadian-US border reduced trade relations by a factor of 22 (McCallum, 1995). The effect of the border is thus similar to the effect of an increase in distance between the two centres by a factor of 22 (McCallum, 1995).

Since the gravity equation is a model built by and for scholars of international trade, border effects are usually attributed to economic factors like price differences, tariff barriers or taxing systems (Feenstra, 2002; Gorodnichenko & Tesar, 2009). Its basic assumption: the decrease of effective geographical proximity due to the existence of border effects, can be applied within a socio-cultural context as well. CBC scholars have referred to the existence of administrative barriers, where differing laws and legalities have affected CBC in business and on the labour market (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011; ITEM, 2016). Others have discussed the role of cultural differences, where the term '*unfamiliarity*' has been applied to identify the lack of knowledge of and willingness to interact with the other side (Spierings & van der Velde, 2013). Communication and language issues are a recurring theme which is granted varying weight. These and other barriers will be further discussed in the analysis of previous case-studies on barriers in CBC in 2.2.

### 2.1.3 *Cross-border regional typologies*

When we talk about borders and borderlands, there is a tendency to look at the two sides of the border as separate entities rather than a whole. In the EU, experimentation with integration

processes has focussed on the borderland as transition zone rather than frontier (Newman, 2006). This is reflected in the creation of cross-border regions, where cross-border cooperation is stimulated, all over Europe (Perkmann, 2003). In this thesis, whenever we refer to CBC, we apply the definition provided by Perkmann (2003) and commonly associated with the workings of the European Interreg programmes: *'a more or less institutionalized collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders'*. Since this is still fairly loose, Perkmann further specifies his definition with four criteria. 1. *'CBC must be located in the realm of public agency'* 2. *'CBC refers to a collaboration between subnational authorities in different countries'* 3. *'CBC is foremost concerned with practical problem-solving in a broad range of fields'* 4. *'CBC involves a certain stabilization of cross-border contacts over time'* (Perkmann, 2003). This definition provides us with a clear research demarcation: only interaction between authorities and/or actors within an institutionalised context will be examined. Interaction between single citizens, that cross the border for motives like shopping, recreation, or visiting friends are thus not the subject of this thesis<sup>3</sup>.

Now that a clear definition of CBC has been provided, we can focus on the locale in which CBC takes place. CBRs have been a central point of discussion in the academic world over the last two decades. If we again follow Perkmann's (2003) reasoning of CBC: *'a CBR is not only understood as a functional space, but as a socio-territorial unit equipped with a certain degree of strategic capacity on the basis of certain organizational arrangements'*. CBRs are thus institutionalised to a degree. This is the line of reasoning that is being followed in this thesis. There is, however, a range of other approaches towards CBRs that are worth discussing further.

The majority of research on CBRs is centred on the degree of integration that is found across a national border. Herein, CBRs are thus perceived as functional spaces primarily. Institutionalisation is merely seen as an aspect of the CBR when the degree of integration is high. This is highlighted particularly in the work of Martinez (1994). Martinez categorises borderlands in four paradigms: alienated borderlands, co-existent borderlands, interdependent borderlands, and integrated borderlands. Herein, borderlands are seen as more integrated when the degree of interaction and socio-cultural integration is higher (Martinez, 1994). This line of thought is adapted in the work of Sohn, Reitel & Walther to incorporate a component for the degree of institutionalisation of the CBR (Sohn, Reitel, & Walther, 2009).

A set of scholars have attempted to make typologies of the European borderlands (Topaloglou, Kallioras, Manetos, & Petrakos, 2005; Perkmann, 2007; Decoville, Durand, Sohn, & Walther, 2013). Usually, these studies differentiate between levels of integration based on a set of different factors like language difference, amount of cross-border traffic, similarity of regional policies and administrative systems, and economic interdependence. Topaloglou et al. (2005) stress the fact that integration cannot solely be judged with economic parameters like those that are the main focus in the gravity equation mentioned earlier. Therefore, they incorporate non-economic factors, like language and nationality, which refer to the dominant socio-cultural conditions that influence border interaction in the border regions (Topaloglou, Kallioras, Manetos, & Petrakos, 2005).

In recent years, the study of cross-border metropolitan regions has been a trend (Häkli, 2009; Sohn, Reitel, & Walther, 2009; Nelles & Durand, 2014; Sohn, 2014; Dörry & Decoville, 2016). Christophe Sohn (2014) has even attempted to cross-compare a set of 9 different CBMRs in Europe, ranging from Lille-Kortrijk to Luxembourg, Basel and the Öresund-region (Copenhagen - Malmö). These studies attempt to examine how integrated urban borderlands are. It is

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<sup>3</sup> This topic has recently been examined in depth for the Dutch-German border in a study by ERAC and Radboud University (ERAC & Radboud University Nijmegen, 2015)

intriguing to see that the majority of these studies highlight the importance of historical developments, wherein the two urban areas were not separated by state boundaries before. In the case of the twin cities of Haparanda-Tornio, the Tornio River has turned into an international boundary in 1809 when the Russian empire annexed a major piece of the eastern territory of the Kingdom of Sweden. Before that, the city of Tornio had developed on the eastern shore of the river, leaving the western shore largely unpopulated. To compensate for their loss, the Swedes settled a new town on the western shore: Haparanda. While the two towns developed separately for more than a century, after the Second World War, the two towns joined forces. With the relaxed border formalities between Finland and Sweden, the twin-cities have pursued development based on local history, social and cultural resources (Häkli, 2009).

Another recent development in CBR research is closely associated with the regional innovation systems discourse. In the late 90s and early 2000s, a group of scholars has described the importance of cooperation and geographical proximity for the development of innovative regional systems (Edquist & Lundvall, 1993; Asheim & Gertler, 2005; Boschma, 2005; Doloreux & Parto, 2005). Where this concept has initially been applied to national or regional systems within state borders, authors like Michaela Tripl (2010) have applied this way of thinking to CBRs. Tripl (2010) stresses the fact that knowledge about an integrated CBR in terms of socio-institutional convergence is very limited. It would thus make more sense to study the effects of institutionalisation of CBRs in more detail.

## 2.2 Evidence for barriers in cross-border cooperation

The workings of CBC have been discussed from many differing perspectives in case-studies of CBRs in the EU, on the EU's borders or even in different continents. In many of these studies, the way in which the border functions as a barrier for cooperation has been discussed. This section will function as a cross-section of those studies, specifically examining the barrier effects that have been identified in previous cases. With this gained knowledge we can then identify a single barrier as focus for the empirical section of this thesis.

### 2.2.1 Administrative barriers

Martin Klatt and Hayo Herrmann (2011) have conducted a thorough analysis of four CBRs across the Dutch-German and Danish-German border. In their study they have focused on '*evaluating barriers against and incentives for cross-border activities in connection with cross-border regional governance*' (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011), thus making their work highly relevant for the issues that are being examined in this thesis. A clear distinction between administrative and cultural barriers has been made. Administrative barriers are seen in different legal systems that are especially relevant for the labour market and in business. They create a barrier to be crossed only when there are significant gains to be reached. The main reason administrative differences are barriers is not because of their mere existence, but because of a lack of information on how to bypass them. Most participants in institutionalised CBC are only involved in CBC part-time and thus do not have the time needed to familiarise themselves with the necessary knowledge. This effect is enhanced by frequent changes in local administrative structures and practices (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011).

An example of extensive research into administrative barriers can be found in the work by the Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border cooperation and Mobility (ITEM, 2016). In their first annual report they have published the outcomes of research on a range of administrative barriers along the Dutch border. An interesting example which highlights administrative barriers is found in the acceptance of diplomas across different countries. The recognition procedures that are started when someone applies for a job in a different country

can be very costly, and the language in which the documents need to be provided can vary from field to field (ITEM, 2016). An interesting notion is that the law seems to enable cross-border labour, but in practice there seem to be issues with implementing this legislation (ITEM, 2016).

The perception of border-effects by companies and citizens has been analysed in depth by the European and Regional Affairs Consultancy in cooperation with Radboud University (2015). They differentiate between physical, economic, socio-cultural and administrative barriers. In general, citizens perceive the border as less of a barrier than organisations<sup>4</sup>. The administrative barrier is perceived as the most limiting by both citizens and organisations. Another interesting result is that in all cases, the German respondents perceived the border as less of a barrier than the Dutch respondents (ERAC & Radboud University Nijmegen, 2015).

### 2.2.2 Cultural barriers

Cultural barriers have been identified in the analysis of the Dutch-German and Danish-German border region as well, even though the interviewees had difficulties with defining them (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). One cultural aspect that does resonate widely within European border regions is the effect of historical conflicts on the perception of the 'other' (Zhurzhenko, 2011; Häkli, 2009; Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). Moreover, there seems to be a 'mental border', highlighted by a lack of interest in what is happening on the other side of the border. The 'mental border' partly relies on the existence of stereotyped narratives and images about the neighbouring region. In the case of the Dutch-German border, Dutch attitudes towards Germans date back as far as the Nazi-German occupation of the Netherlands, where Dutch representations (jokingly) hint at xenophobia and harshness (Strüver, 2005). In German representations, Dutch people are often depicted as tolerant tulip lovers. While these representations have a high degree of satire and the validity is hard to measure, studies on peoples' perceptions of the border do reflect these satirical representations (ERAC & Radboud University Nijmegen, 2015).

Where the Dutch-German border is demarked by differences in language that already give a hint at cultural differences, the Dutch-Belgian border shares a common native language. At first sight, this suggests that differences between the regions on both sides of the border are not that big. However, there is evidence that cultural differences between Flanders and the Netherlands are significant. Jochem de Vries (2008) analysed the execution of three cross-border spatial planning projects on the Flemish-Dutch border. Differences in political-administrative culture and lack of awareness about cultural differences were among the identified phenomena that influenced the efficient execution of the projects (de Vries, 2008). This cultural difference recurs in the works of Geert Hofstede (2001). Based on four factors; power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and individualism, Hofstede compiled a culture index. For the Dutch-Belgian border, he states that '*no two countries [...] with a common border and a common language were so far apart culturally, [...], as Belgium and the Netherlands*' (Hofstede, 2001).

### 2.2.3 Language barriers

The effect of language differences in CBC has been touched upon in the work of Klatt and Herrmann (2011) too. For CBC to take place in an effective manner, clear communication is essential. On the German borders, a 'lack of language symmetry' has been identified. What is meant by this is that the inhabitants of both the Netherlands and Denmark have a better average command of the German language than the German inhabitants do of the Dutch or Danish language. The use of the German language in cross-border cooperation has not solved the issue however: most participants do not have language skills to negotiate at a high level, and thus, communication is unbalanced. The use of English as a third language for cooperation

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<sup>4</sup> Organisations are defined as one of the following: governmental organisations, companies, knowledge and education centres, and other organisations (ERAC & Radboud University Nijmegen, 2015).

does not solve this problem, since it limits the accessibility of CBC processes to those that have learned English as a second language, thus increasing the degree of 'elitism' within CBC (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). Other studies mention problems in communication or language differences as well, although no clear analysis of what this effect entails has been found in the literature review made (Strüver, 2005; Topaloglou, Kallioras, Manetos, & Petrakos, 2005; Sohn, Reitel, & Walther, 2009; Häkli, 2009; ERAC & Radboud University Nijmegen, 2015). The in depth study of the effect of language differences on CBC is thus highly valid in an academic setting.

For a deeper understanding of the effect of language differences in communication, we can borrow from the academic fields of international communication and international business studies. Herein, language differences are a more central part of academic discourse. They are seen as a major barrier to effective communication (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999). When we take the example of a multi-national corporation, often multiple languages are used within the company. English is then commonly used as a lingua franca. Still, communication issues persist because of different levels of language command among workers. For the top-level management, this issue is less pronounced than for those at more 'hands on' positions (Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006). Moreover, the assumption that English is understood by every English speaker in the same way should be critically examined (Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006). We can translate this to the situation on the Dutch-German border. Can we expect Dutch natives that speak German with German natives to have the exact same understanding of the language? Or do misunderstandings take place? Even in the case of the Dutch-Belgian border, where the main language is Dutch, different dialects are spoken. Could these dialects be cause for misunderstanding?

## 2.3 European Regional Development and Cross-border Cooperation

The empirical part of this thesis will be based on the processes occurring within projects under Interreg V-A programmes on the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border. To adequately analyse what is happening in the programmes, one needs to understand the institutional context. That is why this section of the conceptual framework is aimed at gaining understanding of the political structures that support the Interreg V-A programmes. Moreover, the goals and objectives of the Interreg V-A programmes themselves will be clarified.

### 2.3.1 European Regional Development

Over the past few decades, the influence of the EU on the spatial development of its member states (MS) has been steadily increasing (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010). This happens not directly with spatial development policies, but indirectly through spatial outcomes of for example policies on environment, agriculture and transport (Ravesteijn, Evers, & Middleton, 2004). The creation of Natura2000 areas is a direct result of EU policy that is reflected in national spatial planning. The development of the Trans-European Networks have changed national transport landscapes and affected business location strategies (Evers, 2008). There is thus significant spatial impact of EU policies within the EU's regions. However, there is no central spatial planning policy at the EU level (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010).

The EU is home to significant wealth disparities between its regions. In 2014, the wealthiest region in terms of GDP per capita at NUTS 2 level was Inner London – West (539% of the EU-28 average). In contrast, GDP per capita was 18 times smaller in Severozapaden, Bulgaria (30% of the EU-28 average) (Eurostat, 2017). The scope of disparities is not limited to the economic sphere. There are big social and political differences between the different European regions. The former Eastern Bloc countries carry their centralised political heritage. The MS each have their own language and culture. These disparities are at the heart of most of the EU's

struggles. They threaten the political consensus around the European project of political and economic integration (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010). If there is no commitment from the EU to decrease the disparities, the lagging regions will feel left behind. On the other hand, if there is support for lagging regions, the wealthy regions expect beneficial effects for themselves too. Since every MS still has its own identity and national system, there is a strong tendency for ‘us’ versus ‘them’ debates. As we can see in the current political debate, highlighted with the UK vote to leave, progress for the MS carries more weight than progress for the Union.

With the existence of the regional disparities, the SEM and the Schengen area, there are ample economic, social and political arguments in favour of regional policies at the EU level (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010). The EU is aware of these arguments and attempts to exert influence on regional policy directly through its Cohesion Policy<sup>5</sup>. Cohesion policy is delivered through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) (see figure 1). The ESIF consists of five main funds which support economic development across the EU: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the Cohesion Fund (CF), and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Not all of these funds are relevant for this thesis and therefore they will not be discussed in detail. In the next section, we will take a closer look at the ERDF, which is the main component in the Interreg programmes that are the focus of this thesis.

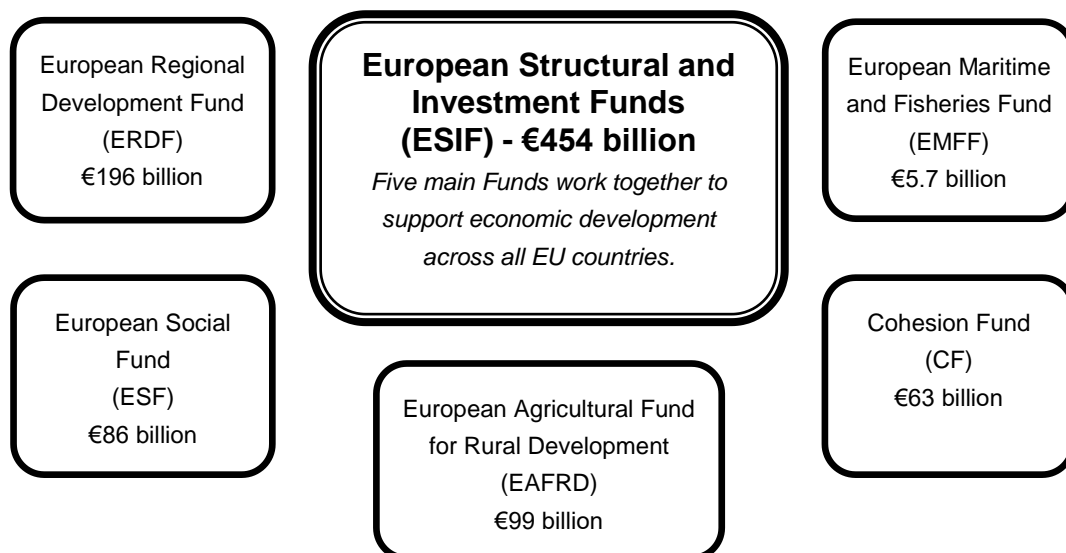


Figure 1. Schematic overview of the European Structural and Investment Funds and their allocated funding for the 2014-2020 funding period. Source: author's own

### 2.3.2 European Regional Development Fund and Interreg

The ERDF was established in 1975 in response to the accession of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Its main objective, while rephrased often, has always been to ‘correct regional imbalances within the Community’ (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010). The ERDF is the main source of funding for one of the two main goals<sup>6</sup> of cohesion policy: European Territorial Cooperation (ETC). ETC is better known as Interreg, a programme with a budget of roughly €10.1 billion.

Interreg attempts to promote a ‘harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Union as a whole’, by providing ‘a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States’

<sup>5</sup> On various EC websites, the terms Cohesion Policy and Regional Policy are used jointly to describe the same thing.

<sup>6</sup> The other goal being investments for Growth and Jobs

(Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, 2017). This framework is developed around three types of cooperation: cross-border (Interreg A), transnational (Interreg B) and interregional (Interreg C). In total, the Interreg programmes encompass 103 regional programmes, 60 of which are Interreg A programmes. The Interreg programmes are funded in specific time periods. Currently, we are in the middle of the fifth funding period, which runs from 2014 to 2020. The projects that will be examined in this thesis are projects that take place in Interreg V-A regions: Interreg cross-border regions within the fifth funding period, 2014-2020. During the 2014-2020 funding period, ERDF funding has been limited to 11 investment priorities or thematic objectives (Council of the European Union, 2013)<sup>7</sup>. Each cooperation programme is obliged to concentrate 80 % of its budget on four of the thematic objectives.

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<sup>7</sup> The 11 thematic objectives are: 1. Research and Innovation, 2. Information and Communication technologies, 3. Competitiveness of SMEs, 4. Low-carbon economy, 5. Combating climate change, 6. Environment and resource efficiency, 7. Sustainable transport, 8. Employment and Mobility, 9. Social inclusion, 10. Better education, training, 11. Better public administration.

## 2.4 Dutch borderlands compared

To examine to what extent language differences play a role in cross-border cooperation, the Dutch border region has been used as a case study. To be more precise, two Interreg V-A programme regions have been selected: Interreg V-A Deutschland – Nederland, and Interreg V-A Vlaanderen – Nederland. Each programme region has its own characteristics in terms of culture, language use, shared history and current programme focus. In the section below, a general description of the characteristics of the border regions will be provided.

### 2.4.1 *The Dutch-German border region*

The border between Germany and the Netherlands is one of the most static borders in Europe. The northern part of the border, from the Ems Delta down to the river Waal, has been located in roughly the same area for hundreds of years. With the exception of the Province of Limburg, the current border has not changed much since the existence of the Dutch Republic in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Interreg V-A Deutschland - Nederland programme area on the Dutch side of the border roughly consists of the Dutch provinces of Groningen, Friesland, Flevoland, Overijssel, Gelderland, the eastern part of Noord-Brabant, and the northern part of Limburg. The German part of the programme area consists of the western parts of Niedersachsen and Nordrhein-Westfalen, roughly between Oldenburg, Dortmund and Düsseldorf. The southern part of Limburg is not officially part of the Interreg Deutschland-Nederland programme area. It is instead the focal point of a third Interreg V-A programme area on the Dutch border, called the Euregio Maas-Rijn. This programme is not incorporated in this thesis as research area.

The Dutch-German border is not defined by physical features like rivers or mountains. It is rather an old cultural and linguistic border that has demarked separate states, countries, kingdoms or other forms of groups of people for hundreds of years. There is thus a clear difference in language used, where the Dutch speak Dutch, (Nederlands) and the Germans speak German (Deutsch). People that live in the border region often speak a local dialect which has a stronger resemblance to the language of the neighbouring country. However, when one travels inland, this dialect becomes less common. According to the borderland typology made by Topaloglou et al. (2005), the Dutch-German border region is highly integrated in terms of economic structures and level of development. However, the border region is classified rather negatively in some parameters, where cultural and linguistic differences are perceived as problems for cross-border interaction (Topaloglou, Kallioras, Manetos, & Petrakos, 2005). The northern part of the region is very rural, with relatively few inhabitants and larger cities. About one hundred kilometres south of the Wadden Sea, the region is more urbanised, with centres close to the border like Enschede, Arnhem and Nijmegen. The German side of the border is still less densely populated. In the southern stretches, between Venlo and the Ruhr Area, population density on the German side of the border is the highest, with one of the most urbanised regions in Europe.

Every Interreg V-A programme has its own specific objectives, based on the ERDF regulations (Council of the European Union, 2013) that were shortly discussed in section 2.3. The Interreg Deutschland-Nederland programme is subsidised with roughly 222 million Euros from the ERDF, and revolves around two priorities. Priority 1 is 'Strengthening Innovation Across Borders'. This is translated to two different objectives: to support innovation in SMEs and to support the transition to a low carbon economy with a more sustainable use of natural resources. The second priority is 'To bring people and companies closer to one another', and aims to lower the barrier represented by the border. This is done through investments in social, cultural and territorial cohesion in the area. The funding is not split equally between the two priorities. For priority 1, 65% of the budget is reserved. The remaining 35% of the budget is meant for projects in priority 2. (Secretariat I. D.-N., 2017).



Figure 2. Map of the Interreg V-A Deutschland-Nederland programming area. Source: INTERREG Deutschland-Nederland

#### 2.4.2 The Dutch-Belgian border region

Flanders, the Northern part of Belgium, and the Netherlands share a long common history. For a short period of time, Belgium was actually part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. After its independence in 1830, the current border between Belgium and the Netherlands was established. This border has not changed much, apart from some minor border corrections. The only region where the demarcation of the border was notably complex is in the twin-village of Baarle-Nassau – Baarle-Hertog, where multiple enclaves and exclaves still exist. The Interreg V-A Vlaanderen-Nederland programme area consists of the Belgian provinces of Antwerpen, Limburg, Oost-Vlaanderen, (parts of) Vlaams-Brabant, and (parts of) West Vlaanderen. On the Dutch side of the border, the provinces Zeeland, Noord-Brabant, and Limburg cooperate.

The main language spoken on both sides of the Dutch-Belgian border is Dutch, since the border runs along the northern part of the Dutch speaking Flanders region. The southernmost part of the Dutch province of Limburg borders with the Belgian Walloon region, where French is the main language. This area will not be taken into account in this thesis. The border Dutch-Flemish border region has been more integrated historically, which is reflected in the shared language, but also in the higher degree of urbanisation with bigger cities on both sides of the border. In the west, the southernmost part of the Dutch province of Zeeland only has an overland link with Belgium. The rest of the Netherlands can be reached through a tunnel nowadays, but before its completion in 2003, people had to use a ferry or drive through Antwerp to get to the rest of the Netherlands. This region is thus historically dependent on Flanders. More to the east, the Dutch cities of Breda, Tilburg and Eindhoven make use of Belgian employees. Towards the south, near Maastricht, large groups of Dutch people have settled just across the border in places like Lanaken, and commute to work in Maastricht. The region is thus fairly integrated, as is also highlighted in the typology by Topaloglou et al. (2005). In fact, it is very similar to the Dutch-German border region, without the linguistic and cultural barriers (Topaloglou, Kallioras, Manetos, & Petrakos, 2005).

The Interreg V-A Vlaanderen-Nederland programme has selected four themes for investment. The programme will receive 152 million Euros from the ERDF to spend on cross-border projects. The first theme, for which 40% of the budget is reserved, is the reinforcement of research, technological development and innovation. Then, two priorities are to support the transition to a low carbon economy in all sectors, and to protect the environment and support the efficient use of natural resources. Each of these priorities receives 22% of the budget. The final priority is to promote employment and labour mobility. This theme receives 10% of the budget. The remaining 6% of the budget is reserved for technical support (Secretariat I. V.-N., 2017).



Figure 3. Map of the Interreg Vlaanderen-Nederland programme area. Source: Interreg Vlaanderen-Nederland

## 3 Methodology

Now that the conceptual tools have been discussed in detail, we can focus on our choice of methods for the gathering and processing of empirical data. The data needed for our empirical analysis will be collected through two methods: in-depth interviews and participant observation. The sections below will explain the process of collecting and processing data for both methods. First, a framework that will clarify the workings of the thesis as a whole will be presented. Second, the in-depth interview methodology will be discussed. Third, the participant observation methodology will be discussed. Fourth, ethical issues associated with the research methods that are being used will be highlighted.

### 3.1 An overarching methodological framework

With an epistemic approach, taken from natural sciences, the best way to test the role of language differences in CBC is to phrase a hypothesis. One could for example phrase the hypothesis: Language differences between partners that cooperate across the border reduce the effectiveness of cross border cooperation. The reduction of effectiveness would then be similar to the effect of the border in international trade described by McCallum in his gravity model (1994, see section 2.1.2.). This method provides us with a simple answer: we can either validate or discard the hypothesis. We can then use this answer to generalise for other cases of cross-border cooperation. There is a danger in using this method. By using a hypothesis to guide your research, one has to apply a high level of abstractness. This level of abstractness is borrowed from a natural science epistemology. As a result, conclusions in the natural sciences often have a high degree of conditionality: the hypothesis that has been tested is valid when all other factors are considered equal. By simplifying the context, a supposedly neutral perspective is created.

One can argue that in social science, context should not be disregarded. The phenomena that we are examining are intrinsically social and thus bound to practices, perceptions and values that are personal for each individual and each case. When a hypothesis has been tested for one individual or one case, this does not mean that the same will be true for other individuals and other cases. The description of the phenomenon that we study is thus value based, and is constructed around perception, interpretation and deliberation by those that observe or experience the phenomenon. Therefore, it is worthwhile to reflect and add value and interpretation to the phenomenon that is being examined. We would thus need a broad base of knowledge about the specific case before we are able to make a statement about one specific aspect of this case. And the other way around, this one specific aspect cannot be examined without taking the context of the case into account.

The description that has been provided above is reflected in the structure of the research questions and methods of data collection of this thesis. Sub-question 1<sup>8</sup> provides us with a general knowledge base on the two cases by gathering broad information on the phenomenon of border-effects in cross-border cooperation in the Interreg V-A Deutschland-Nederland and Interreg V-A Vlaanderen-Nederland regions. They will be tested through a review of the academic literature (see chapter 2) and in-depth interviews with relevant actors (see section

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<sup>8</sup> Sub-question 1: What border-effects are commonly identified as influencers of cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border regions?

3.2.) Sub-question 2<sup>9</sup> will delve deeply into the role of language and communication in cross-border cooperation. This will be examined through both the in-depth interviews and the participant observation sessions (see section 3.3.). To finalise the methodological workflow, we need to apply our knowledge of the context to the specific theme of language and communication. Thus, we reflect on the bigger picture with sub-question 3<sup>10</sup>, where the position of language and communication barriers is placed in perspective to other border-effects that play a role. Finally, from the result of the three sub-questions, we can formulate an adequate answer for our main question<sup>11</sup>.

There is a clear choice for a 'phronetic' approach in this thesis. The procedure that is being followed in this thesis is grounded in research philosophy in the works of Bent Flyvbjerg (2001; 2004; 2006). Flyvbjerg applies the classical Greek concept of 'phronesis' to social scientific research. Phronesis is commonly translated as practical wisdom, common sense, or prudence (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Along with episteme (science) and techne (art or craftsmanship), it is one of the three forms of intellectual virtues that was formulated by Aristotle. Phronesis is then explained as pragmatic, with '*deliberation about values with reference to praxis*' (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Phronetic research is based on value-rationality and centres on reflective procedures that observe what is happening in practice rather than what is happening in theory. It is not about making absolute statements that are valid in certain circumstances, like in epistemic research. Rather, it is about being descriptive and reflective, and providing a value based analysis of a certain case. A key part of phronetic research lies in the researcher's interpretation of common practices of the phenomenon studied. Context is thus regarded as highly important, rather than disregarded as irrelevant.

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<sup>9</sup> Sub-question 2: What is the role of language in cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border regions?

<sup>10</sup> Sub-question 3: How do the Dutch-German and the Dutch-Belgian border-effects compare in terms of identity and perceived severity?

<sup>11</sup> Main question: How do language differences affect cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian Interreg cross-border regions?

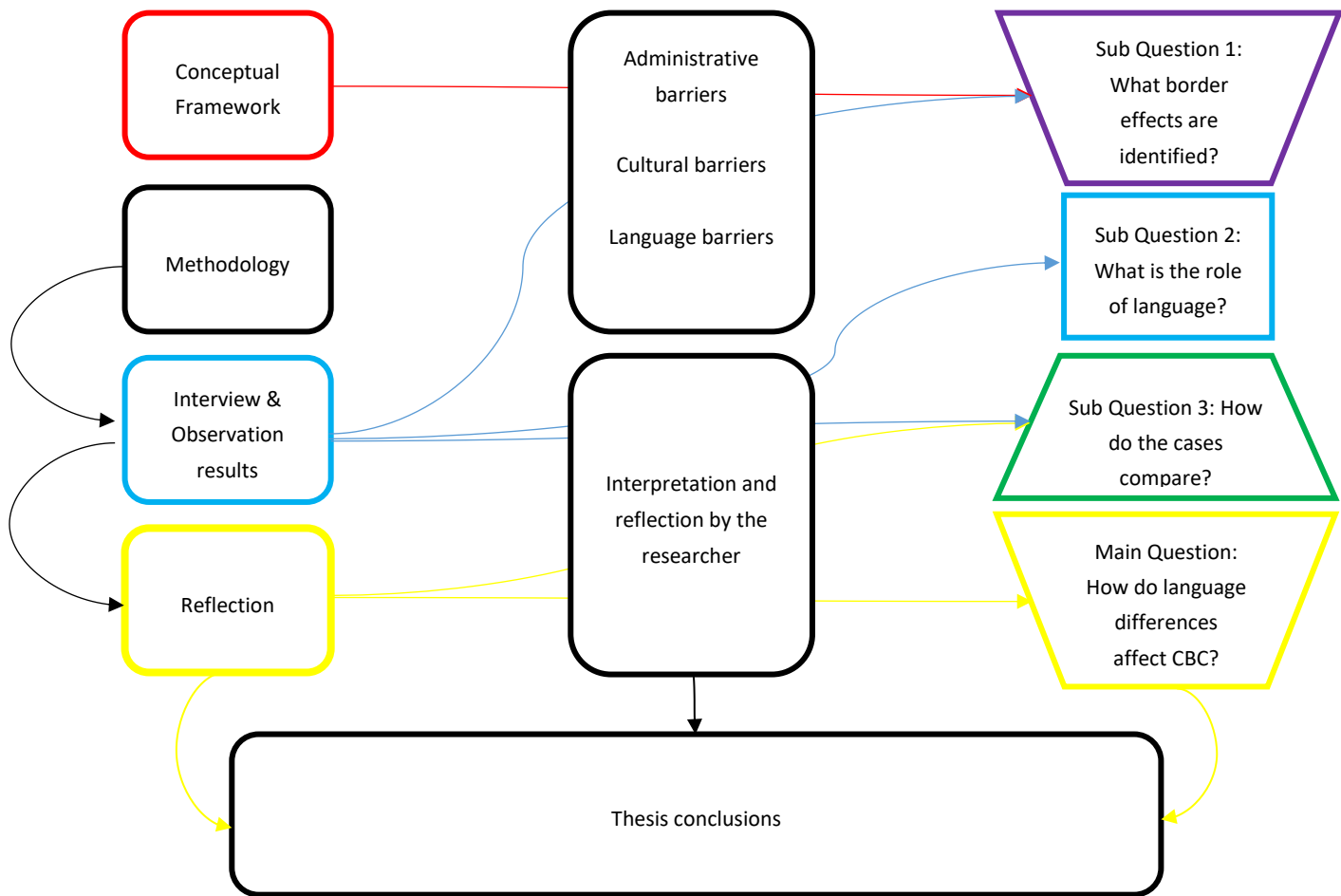


Figure 4. Methodological thesis structure

## 3.2 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are commonly used qualitative research methods in social sciences. They are used to gather descriptions of occurrences, events or processes that take place in the real world (Opdenakker, 2006). The data gathered through in-depth interviews has a high degree of interpretability. It contains more extensive information than data collected by surveys or quantitative methods. In the following section, the methods that are used to conduct interviews and process interview data in this thesis are discussed.

### 3.2.1 *In-depth interview approach*

There are a variety of interview styles and setups that can be adapted for qualitative empirical research. Three main strands that are used frequently are: 1. the informal conversational interview, 2. the standardised open-ended interview, and 3. the general interview guide approach (Turner III, 2010). Each format has its advantages and disadvantages:

1. The informal conversational interview relies on the spontaneous generation of questions and responses in an informal conversation. The interview process is not guided by a predefined structure, but is flexible in nature. An advantage of this style is that it can lead to unexpected results, where the interviewee introduces the researcher to topics that the researcher had not encountered before. However, the informal conversational interview style can also result in large amounts of thick data that are inconsistent through different interviews. This can make the data more difficult to process (Turner III, 2010). Moreover, by being too flexible in the interview questions, the researcher could end up with data that is unsuitable for comparative analyses.
2. The standardised open-ended interview is structured in such a way that the questions posed to respondents are always phrased in the exact same manner. In this manner, the researcher ensures that the research questions are answered by each individual participant. In addition, it gives the participant the chance to formulate a full answer without being guided by the question formulation. One of the disadvantages is that, once the data collection process has started, it is difficult for the researcher to change the questions based on new insights (Turner III, 2010).
3. The general interview guide approach is more flexible than the standardised open-ended interview and more structured than the informal conversational interview. The phrasing of the questions is up to the researcher. The flexibility of the question phrasing process has both an inherent weakness and strength. Questions might not be answered in a similar manner due to the variety in phrasing. However, the flexibility gives the researcher the opportunity to ensure that the necessary information is gathered. Moreover, if the researcher encounters striking new information that has not been thought of during the preparation of the methodology, this data does not have to be disregarded (Turner III, 2010).

For the data collection for this thesis, the general interview guide approach has been used. The choice for this approach revolves around two theoretical arguments. First of all, in order to be able to adequately test and process data that has been gathered through interviews, a structured approach is necessary. Since interviews are the primary source of data for this thesis, it is essential for the validity of the thesis that topics are consistently discussed with all participants. Therefore, an appropriate interview structure is needed. Second, while the interviews are being conducted with persons related to one of the two cross-border regions under examination, there is a high degree of variability in the type of projects that are being developed by the respondents (see section 3.2.3.). A degree of flexibility in interview structure is thus needed. The choice for a general interview guide approach is thus a midway between a flexible (and less valid), and a rigid (and more valid) structure. In order to compensate for the

degree of uncertainty and incoherence that is caused by the flexible nature of the general interview guide approach, a second method of data collection is used to verify what has been derived from the interviews (see section 3.3.).

There are two arguments of a practical nature that support the use of the general interview guide approach. The general interview guide approach gives the researcher the flexibility to focus the questions in such a way that he can get the answers he desires from the different respondents without having to constantly change and adapt the formal structure. This means that it takes less time to collect the data that is necessary for the analysis, then when one uses one of the other two approaches. Since there is a limited amount of time available to conduct research for this thesis, it is helpful to make use of a method that is not as time consuming as the other methods. Furthermore, the general interview guide approach allows for some degree of informality. This gives the researcher and the respondent the opportunity to get acquainted with each other and develop a sense of trust. Following the phronetic research methodology (see section 3.1.), it is important to get an in-depth image of the context and praxis surrounding the subject. This can best be done when the respondent has developed a certain sense of trust or goodwill towards the researcher. The informal structure allows the researcher to first decrease power imbalances, increase trust, and then get to the core of the content.

### 3.2.2 Interview Guidelines

In order to conduct the interviews, interview guidelines with indicative questions have been made. Since the context surrounding the two border regions that are being examined in the thesis is different, two different guidelines have been produced. In specific, the guideline for the Dutch-German border region has an additional section that revolves around barrier effects caused by language differences. It has been written in English (Appendix 3) and Dutch (Appendix 4), since not all respondents share the same language proficiencies. The respondents were allowed to answer questions in German if this is easier for them. The guideline for the Dutch-Belgian border region (Appendix 5) does not specifically mention language differences, but puts a stronger emphasis on communication issues. The content of the interview guideline has been based on what has been found during the literature review. In the following paragraphs, the interview guideline structure and its relation to the literature will be explained. We will use the English interview guideline as an example, since this was the first guideline that was written (Appendix 3). The other guidelines are translations and adaptations of the English guideline.

The first section of the guideline, '*Introducing ourselves. Current and previous experiences with cross-border cooperation*', does not have a direct content related purpose. Rather, the main purpose of this section is to get acquainted with the respondent and to make the respondent feel comfortable. The questions posed are easy to answer, phrased in a simple manner, and provide the respondent with some time to get comfortable in the situation without having to directly address complex issues. The second section, '*Border-effects and cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German<sup>12</sup> border region*', delves deeper into the thematic content of sub-question 1 of the thesis. In the conceptual framework, we have identified a set of commonly recognised border-effects (see section 2.2). The main goal of the in-depth interviews was to identify whether border effects are experienced by the participants of the Interreg V-A projects. Therefore, questions have been phrased in such a way that the respondents first had to think of border-effects themselves (e.g.: '*Which border-effects do you see as influential on the process of cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German border region?*'). If necessary, the respondents would have received a few suggestions on which to elaborate. The final question, '*Can you place the different effects that you have mentioned in order from most negative to*

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, this was changed to 'Dutch-Belgian' in the interview guideline for Interreg V-A Vlaanderen-Nederland projects.

*most positive?*' was phrased in this manner to evaluate the relative importance of the different border-effects. The exact phrasing of the questions during the interview was much looser than the phrasing in the interview guideline. As explained earlier, the interview guideline really is a guidance for conversation, not a strict turn-based questionnaire.

The third section, '*The role of language in cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German<sup>13</sup> border regions*' revolves around sub-question 2 of the thesis. In the interview guideline for Vlaanderen-Nederland, this section has been adapted to focus on communication issues rather than language differences. Based on the literature review (see section 2.2.3.), a range of issues concerning communication and language differences within cross-border cooperation were raised. As an example, the question '*When people communicate, does it ever occur that there is confusion about the meaning of a word or a phrase?*' is based on the finding that language is often not interpreted in a similar way (Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006). The fourth section of the interview guideline has been formulated to make sure important information is not left out or forgotten.

The guidelines, accompanied by an introduction letter (Appendix 1 & 2), have been sent to each participant before the interview. The introduction letter was added to make sure the respondents were already acquainted with the content and context of the research. Also, a decent introduction serves as a first step towards mutual trust, which is essential for the outcomes of in-depth interviews. To do this, details on the PLANET Europe programme and the researcher's obligations were shared. Moreover, all but one<sup>14</sup> of the in-depth interviews have been conducted face-to-face.

### 3.2.3 Choice and number of respondents

The phronetic research approach supports gathering as much in-depth, context heavy data as possible. Because of this, extra efforts have been made to select respondents with different backgrounds. Ideally, interviews should take place with *all* participants in Interreg V-A projects. However, since this thesis has a clear deadline and interviews are time consuming, this is not realistic. In total 11 in-depth interviews have been conducted with 15 respondents. The respondents have been selected based on nationality, thematic focus and location. Attempts have been made to interview respondents along the entire Dutch border, from Antwerp (Belgium) to Maastricht (the Netherlands) and Leer (Germany) (see figure 5). Also, both participants in hi-tech projects with relatively large amounts of funding and participants in social projects with small amounts of funding have been tackled. By talking with a broad range of respondents, we can get a complete image of the phenomena we are studying. For a list of contact persons please see Appendix 6.

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, this was changed to 'Dutch-Belgian' in the interview guideline for Interreg V-A Vlaanderen-Nederland projects.

<sup>14</sup> Due to the location of Ostfriesland Tourismus being simply too far away from the researcher's home town, a Skype interview has been conducted in this single case.

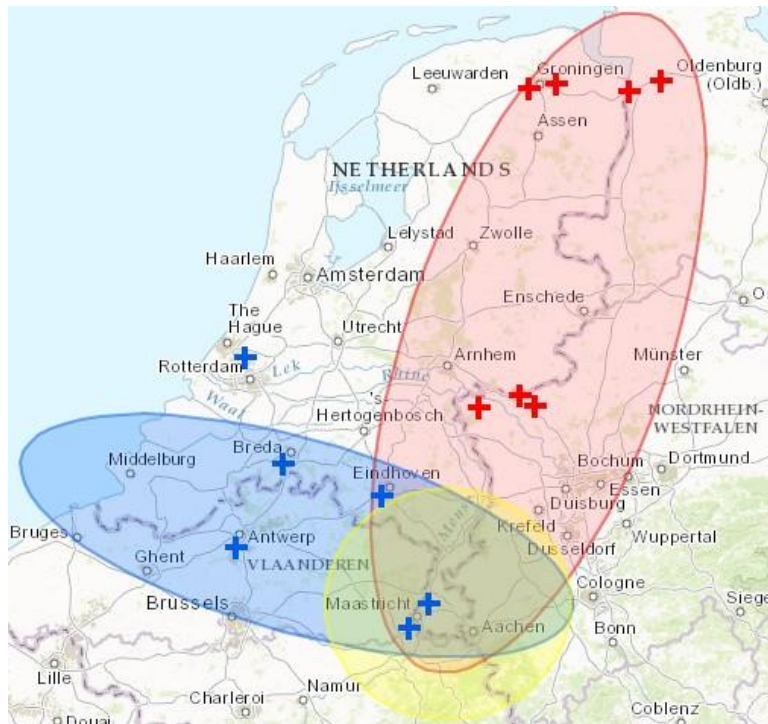


Figure 5. Location of interview partners and indicative Interreg V-A cross-border regions along the Dutch border. Blue = Interreg Vlaanderen-Nederland, Red = Interreg Deutschland - Nederland, Yellow = Euregio Meuse Rhine. (Source: Author's own)

### 3.2.4 Data processing

All the interviews have been recorded using a voice recorder. To process the data that was gathered in the interviews, a step-wise process has been applied. First, audio material that is relevant for the thesis has been transcribed. Those sections that were not considered relevant by the researcher were not transcribed due to limitations in time. Second, the transcription has been summarised. This summary was then sent to the specific respondents, to give them the opportunity to reflect and correct statement when necessary. The final summary has then been colour coded according to the coding scheme below. Colour coding helps to identify common patterns and themes in the pile of qualitative data that has been gathered. Moreover, it makes it easier, more efficient, and more precise to distil the necessary data from the transcripts and summaries (Basit, 2003). Coding can be done with the help of software like Atlas.Ti. However, for this thesis the choice has been made to do the coding of the summaries manually. This has two reasons. First of all, by coding every summary manually, the researcher has to immerse himself in the content that was discussed during the interview once again. This increases the understanding of what has been said. Since interpretation of data is a valuable and essential aspect of qualitative research, it makes sense to immerse oneself once more in the interview content. Moreover, the phronetic approach advocates a reflective and interpretive effort towards data processing. The second reason to use a manual coding approach is more practical: access to coding software is expensive, and since the amount of data that has been gathered is not staggering, it simply is not worth the price to purchase software for this thesis only.

**Thematic colour coding scheme**

Light Green	Culture (general)	Yellow	Language (general)
Dark Green	Culture (professional)	Orange	Language (communication issues)
Medium Green	Culture (willingness to participate CBC)	Red	Language (imbalanced proficiency)
Light Blue	Administration (general)	Light Brown	Language (Difference due to different type of projects)
Dark Blue	Administration (legislation)	Dark Red	Exclusion (Language)
Very Dark Blue	Administration (organisational structures)	Pink	Exclusion (General comprehensibility)
Grey	Physical (infrastructure)	Purple	Comprehensibility (Interreg)
Black	General barriers		

Figure 6. Thematic colour coding scheme

### 3.3 Participant Observation

Following the phronetic research philosophy, we can only truly understand the phenomenon we are studying by immersing ourselves in the practice that we are studying. Since it is not possible for me to actively participate in Interreg V-A projects, the closest we can get to gaining insight in the practices is to look through the eyes of others. In-depth interviews provide us with the perspective of the respondent on the phenomena that we study. By relying solely on in-depth interviews, we thus risk overlooking issues that might not be apparent to the respondents, but could be interpreted as relevant by the researcher. Therefore, a second (and ideally a third, fourth, etc.) method of data gathering adds to the completeness of the research.

The respondents of the interviews have clearly stated their respective opinions on barriers for cross-border cooperation within their respective projects. To check the validity of these statements, two meetings of Interreg V-A projects have been observed by the researcher. This has been done to include the perspective of the outsider on the practices within the project. It can thus help us to validate or amend certain statements that were made in the in-depth interviews. The observations are not meant to undermine the statements of the respondents: the statements are based on their perception of the phenomena we discussed. It does provide us with room to add new perspective, and will thus increase our contextual knowledge: the knowledge we need for our phronetic analysis. The observations have been summarised and colour coded using the system in figure 6.

Participant observations, where one is physically observing a phenomenon while it is taking place, are useful to observe actions, behaviours, situations, and non-verbal messages in groups of people (Kawulich, 2005). During the observation, the researcher is not interacting with the subjects he is studying. However, since the other participants in the observed events are aware of the researcher's presence, one has to take into account that behaviour could be different from normal situations. The respondents could act in a way they deem acceptable towards the researcher. Moreover, one has to take careful attention not to let bias influence the interpretation and perception of what is being observed.

### 3.4 Ethical questions in research

When conducting research of any kind, and qualitative research in particular, one needs to take ethics into account. A starting premise that should be followed in all cases is that one is honest in the presentation of both primary and secondary data. This means that one should report data, methods and products as they have been used. Data should not be falsified or copied with the purpose of deceiving others. Closely linked to the issue of honesty, is the issue of bias. In qualitative research and especially in phronetic research, a certain degree of interpretation is asked of the researcher. By adding personal interpretation, results that are derived from datasets become richer and easier to understand for outsiders. However, there is an intrinsic danger in adding personal interpretation: one could rig the outcomes in such a way as is favourable for the researcher. Personal preconceptions and bias can influence what the researcher perceives as outcomes, and could influence the perception of the researcher. This should be avoided at all costs, by remaining as objective as possible and disclosing any personal interests that might affect the outcomes of the research. In close relation with the issue of bias is the danger of affecting the outcomes of your data gathering sessions by asking guiding questions or exerting power imbalances. It is essential to allow respondents to freely answer the questions asked, and not guide them in a specific direction. This goes hand in hand with the protection of privacy of those subjects that were involved. In the case respondents ask to remain anonymous, this should be respected and protected fully.

## 4 Results

Based on the findings in the literature review, the participant observation session, and the discussed content in the in-depth interview, three types of barriers became apparent. Administrative barriers are related to differences in legislation or organisational structures. They represent differences between countries that are independent from the participants of the projects themselves. Because of this, they are usually perceived as barriers 'one simply needs to deal with' in cross-border cooperation. Cultural barriers are harder to define. For this thesis they are usually represented in differences in working methods, differing degrees of formality, and different manners to approach other people. Communication barriers are reflected in differences in language proficiency, contrasting connotations, and power imbalances due to these differences. In line with the phronetic approach taken in this thesis, we cannot rightly assess one of these barriers without examining its relationship with the other barriers. Therefore, in the following section, we will discuss the outcomes of the in-depth interviews and the participant observation session in full. The participant observations will be used to critically examine what has been said in the in-depth interviews. In this section, sub-questions 1 and 2 will be answered.

### 4.1 Case 1: Interreg V-A – Deutschland-Nederland

Data for case 1 has been gathered through six in-depth interviews and a participant observation session. Two of the interviews have taken place with actors from the Interreg secretariats. The first interview took place in the border town of Bad Nieuweschans, in eastern Groningen. Here, the head of programme management at the local Interreg Eems Dollard Region (EDR) secretariat has been interviewed. The respondent, a German native, has been working at the EDR since 1991 and has been involved with Interreg from the start. He was thus able to discuss both current and previous programming periods, which provided an interesting perspective on the development of the programmes. The second interview took place at the Joint Interreg Secretariat Deutschland-Nederland in Kleve. Here, two Dutch respondents were interviewed. One is a senior policy maker at the Euregio Rijn-Waal, the other a coordinator at the Joint Secretariat. The respondents provided in depth descriptions of their experiences with cross-border projects within the Interreg framework and were able to give accurate descriptions since they are both actively involved in various projects.

Four interviews were planned with actors in Interreg V-A projects. The lead partner of the project 'EurHealth-1Health', a German native, working at a Dutch academic hospital, has been interviewed primarily about his experiences in Interreg projects as a lead partner. The respondent has been involved in multiple Interreg projects in health care related fields, and was thus able to provide perspective on both scientific projects surrounding new developments in medicine, and socially oriented projects around the acceptance of diplomas across the border or developments in the labour market. A project with a strong focus on innovation is the '*Groene Kaskade*' project, in which innovative technologies and production methods for biogas value chains are being developed. A Dutch project partner of this project was interviewed. This provided valuable insight in how the border is seen as a barrier in more research oriented projects. The German lead partner of the '*Wadden-Agenda*' project was interviewed. This project is aimed at developing sustainable tourism in the Wadden Sea area, and thus has a more social focus than the projects previously discussed. Since the respondents were new to Interreg projects, this interview provided us with valuable insight into what one might encounter

when starting with cross-border cooperation. A final interview was conducted with both Dutch and German partners from the '*Buren stellen zich voor*' project. This is a small socio-cultural project in which the small communities in the border region are jointly organising exhibitions to promote interaction between the two sides of the border. Since the project is run entirely by volunteers, this interview provided insights in the complexity of Interreg project administration as a non-professional, and gave perspective on cooperation processes in a setting without professionals. The '*Buren stellen zich voor*' project was also the object of the participant observation. During a project meeting, where the different project partners discussed the progress made and exhibitions to come, the researcher was able to sit in and observe what was going on. This helped specifically to add perspective on what had been said in the interviews before. In the section below, the outcomes of the interviews and the participant observation session will be discussed.

#### 4.1.1 Administrative barriers

Out of all border effects, administrative barriers are the easiest to identify. They are an intrinsic part of what national borders are about: differences in legislation, law, governmental structures and organisational identities. In all but one of the interviews with participants in Interreg V-A Deutschland-Nederland projects, administrative barriers were seen as having the strongest effect on cross-border cooperation by limiting the possibilities for cooperation. These barriers were interpreted differently by the different respondents in relation to the theme of their project. A recurring statement was that administrative barriers are simply there. They cannot be changed easily. Therefore, when one is involved in cross-border cooperation, one needs to learn the differences in the two national systems, and invent ways to bypass the system when necessary. According to one of the respondents, who is active in the health care sector, one '*needs to create a legislation free zone [...]. The system does not help you [in cross-border cases], people need to solve issues by themselves*' (A. Friedrich, personal interview, April 19). In the majority of cases, there is legislation that deals with cross-border cases. However, '*the information is very complicated. For normal people the legislation in their native country is already difficult to understand. If you are looking to understand this information across the border, everything gets at least twice as hard*' (H. de Ruiter & M. Spaargaren, personal interview, April 11). For the activities within cross-border projects themselves, the main barriers that are identified due to differences in legislation revolve around taxing procedures, tendering procedures and the acquisition of permits for activities.

Differences in organisational structures are considered to be highly influential on the efficiency of the cross-border cooperation process. In general, the Netherlands and Germany seem like fairly similar countries. However, if you take a closer look at the different organisations (both governments, research and education institutions, and companies), it is hard to find an appropriate counterpart for a Dutch organisation in Germany and vice versa. Moreover, the role of the different actors within organisations can be vague (H. Wessels, personal interview, April 11). During an interview with the lead partner in one of the Interreg V-A projects, this general statement was matched with a practical example, where there is uncertainty about the different responsibilities of the actors in Dutch organisations: '*[...] we have the administration [organisational structure (red.)] problem sometimes. Because we speak with one partner from Province Friesland for example, [...]. But we don't know the structure within the Province. Because she needs to talk to 20 other people we think. And, we don't know exactly which part or department she is talking to*' (O. Knagge & C. Pupelis, personal interview, April 25).

While the majority of respondents perceive differences in legislation as barriers for cross-border cooperation, in some cases, the differences are experienced in a positive way. The fact that legislation surrounding the organisation of events is less strict in the Netherlands contributed to

a large extent to the speed with which events could be organised (O. Knagge & C. Pupelis, personal interview, April 25). In other situations, the lack of proper cross-border legislation leads to a unique situation where the system has to be reinvented. This provides opportunities to completely change the way in which certain issues are handled. In the healthcare sector, for example, this implies renewed focus on the patients' needs: *'All of a sudden you are free of the rigid system. What if patient care had the highest priority? How would you then reinvent [the system]? At once, a range of new possibilities open up that are not possible within your national healthcare system'* (A. Friedrich, personal interview, April 19). Clearly, differences between administrative systems do not only hamper cross-border cooperation. They might just as well trigger new cross-border developments and be beneficial to the progress within cross-border projects. This leads to questions about the direct cause of the barriers for cross-border cooperation: is it the differences in systems that makes it hard to cooperate? Or are the systems themselves limiting cooperation? Either way, the border is highlighting these issues.

#### 4.1.2 Cultural barriers

Cultural differences between the partners that participate in Interreg V-A projects are mentioned by all respondents. However, cultural differences are not necessarily seen as a barrier for cooperation. In some cases, the cultural differences seem to cause clashes. In general, the German culture is seen as stern, formal and precise. The Dutch culture is seen as more informal, creative and chaotic. In one of the interviews it has been stated that in most cases, the combination of these qualities leads to satisfactory results (H. Laan, personal interview, April 19). By combining Dutch pragmatism and German thoroughness, innovative and trustworthy products can be created (H. Laan, personal interview, April 19). An intriguing statement which recurred throughout the interviews revolved around these culture clichés. There is a high degree of doubt with the respondents whether these cultural differences are actually there. In the experience of the respondents, the differences in culture are not that big. The barrier effect occurs due to the perception or believe that there are cultural difference, rather than because there are significant cultural differences. Put clearly by one of the respondents, *'when you are German and you travel to the Netherlands, you believe the people there will interact in an informal manner. [...] And the other way around, Dutch people coming to German feel people will interact in a very formal manner. [...] For me, these differences are not visible anymore. I think they are not there anymore, but people still think there is a big difference'* (H. Wessels, personal interview, April 11). It is thus distorted or negative perceptions of the cultural difference, rather than the cultural difference per se, which creates a barrier effect. When participants are aware of the minor differences, there are no problems in dealing with them.

Cultural differences are often reflected in the structure and objectives of non-governmental organisations. For example, in the project *'Buren stellen zich voor'* (freely translated to 'neighbours introduced'), a share of different local non-governmental organisations take part. In the Netherlands, the majority of partners are *'leefbaarheidsverenigingen'*, which focus on improving living conditions in the villages in the area. Most of the German organisations are *'Heimatvereine'*, which attempt to conserve the history and culture of the area. Both types of organisations do not have a direct counterpart on the other side of the border (C. Van Dee, G. Krause & J. Küster, personal interview, May 3). They all work together based on their own individual goals.

The distorted perception of cultural differences is intrinsically linked with one of the core characteristics of borders: they are seen as the outer boundaries of a designated space. In the case of national borders, this means that all systems within the designated space are aimed inwards, and not across the border. One of the goals of the Interreg programme is to broaden the perspective across the border. In one of the interviews, it became clear that the Interreg

framework enabled a relatively small company to broaden its horizon across the border (H. Laan, personal interview, April 19). This change of perspective recurs across all sectors. *'It is still not common thought for the organisations on both sides of the border to include the other side of the border in their scope. The Euregion has existed since the 70s. All that time there were investments to establish contacts across the border. [...] But the fact remains that when a new employee enters an organisation, his primary focus is the Netherlands, and not Germany'* (H. de Ruiter & M. Spaargaren, personal interview, April 11). There is thus a tendency for most people to limit their scope to their respective national spheres. However, a select group of people seems to thrive in cross-border activities. *'You encounter people, enthusiasts, who want to change something. People that move left and right of the border and weave a network that rises above the current (healthcare) systems. [...] Then, the barrier effect of the border disappears'* (A. Friedrich, personal interview, April 19). There is a marked contrast between cross-border enthusiasts that manage to make things work despite the barriers, and those who are not willing to broaden their scope across the border. It seems like one of the main reasons the border is functioning as a barrier, is because people are not interested or do not feel the need to rise above these barriers. Within Interreg V-A projects, this does not seem to be a problem. Most if not all of the participants chose to participate in cross-border activities and can handle the differences that exist.

A final, more specific cultural barrier can be seen in the contrasting working cultures of the two countries. One of the respondents found the differences in working culture the most relevant barrier in their project. This is specifically connected to differing communication styles, where German partners reply faster and more accurately to emails and phone calls than Dutch partners (O. Knagge & C. Pupelis, personal interview, April 25).

#### 4.1.3 Language barriers

Based on the responses from the interviews, there is a clear pattern when one discusses the role of language in cross-border cooperation on the Dutch-German border. We can formulate the following general reasoning:

*The Dutch and German language are different. Therefore, it must be hard for people on both sides of the border to cooperate efficiently. However, in our current international society, most people speak English anyways, so it should not be a problem to communicate. But what about the elderly, or lower educated people? They do not speak English that well? Thank god all Dutch people know German. But. Do they?*

This admittedly exuberant example highlights the main issues one encounters when researching the effect of language differences on cross-border cooperation on the Dutch-German border. The main line of thought is reasonable. The Dutch and German language are different, which makes it harder for people across the border to communicate. A large share of society speaks or understands English, which makes communication easier. However, this is not the case for all socio-economic and demographic groups. The same accounts for the general proficiency of German for Dutch natives. And then there are differing levels of proficiency: do those that claim to understand the language also understand minor differences in connotation? And what happens if there is perceived understanding, while actually something completely different is meant? These questions came up in section 2.2.3. and have been tested through the in-depth interviews and the participant observation session on the Dutch-German border.

Language differences are seen as relevant influencers of the efficiency of cross-border cooperation by all of the respondents. When two partners are not able to speak the same

language, cooperation is difficult. On the other hand, when partners have good command of the language, they are usually able to positively influence the cooperation process and gain better results (for the project as a whole, or the partner itself) (H. Wessels, personal interview, April 11). It is common Interreg policy that both Dutch and German are used as main language within the projects. Progress and administration reports have to be delivered both in Dutch and German to the Interreg secretariat. Since most Dutch participants have a basic understanding of the German language, communication often happens in German. It is also commonplace for people to talk in their native language. In this case it is up to the listener to interpret what is said correctly. To make this easier, simple tricks are used: *'if you would have to present, you could send your slides to a translator. So your Dutch slides would be translated in German. [...] So then you can present your story in Dutch, with the German slides on the screen. And then they were supposed to ask questions if they did not understand what I said'* (H. Laan, personal interview, April 19). When this does not work because one of the partners is not able to understand what is being said, English is often used as a surrogate language. While this used to be discouraged by the Interreg secretariats, in recent years, the use of English is widely accepted. The official reports still have to be written in Dutch and German.

Exactly which language is used depends strongly on the type of project and the project partners that are participating. In projects with a strong socio-cultural focus, like *'Buren stellen zich voor'*, English is never used. The partners in this project are all small scale community driven organisations with a high base of volunteers. Communication happens in German or even in the local dialect, which is still commonly understood among older generations (C. Van Dee, G. Krause & J. Küster, personal interview, May 3). During the interview, the respondents were convinced there is no language barrier in the project. In the participant observation session, however, there were clear signs language barriers do exist within the project. During the meeting, it became clear that there are many occurrences during which misunderstandings related to language proficiency occur. While these are usually solved without leading to a lot of trouble, an extra amount of effort is needed from the group to prevent misunderstandings (*'Buren stellen zich voor'*, participant observation, May 3).

In projects that are geared towards hi-tech development and innovation, English is more common. It is considered more practical to use English since it is the main language used in the academic world. As a consequence, large amounts of technical jargon are only available in English, so it does not make much sense to translate everything to Dutch or German. In general, a division can be made between projects with groups of universities and hi-tech companies where English is the main language, and projects which involve local governments, voluntary organisations and non-technical SMEs, where German and Dutch are the main languages. Moreover, younger generations prefer English over German or Dutch, while older generations are more comfortable with the use of German or Dutch over English (H. de Ruiter & M. Spaargaren, personal interview, April 11).

Usually, the use of different languages is not seen as a problem for cooperation. However, there are some dangers that, if not taken into account, could lead to distorted outcomes of projects. One of these dangers is related to the specific connotation that technical jargon carries. When one tries to translate specific phrases, often a part of the context is lost. This is best illustrated with the help of an extensive example where four parties attempted to write a common covenant: *'In the Kreis Kleve four safety regions attempted to write a covenant to assure an increase in cross-border practice opportunities and support when something happens. It was written down very well in German, and then translated to Dutch by a translator. The German side was satisfied with the translation, because they could recognise every word. [...] The Dutch side replied by saying that this is not the terminology that is commonly used. [...] [The covenant] may be literally*

*translated, but the content has disappeared completely. So they rewrote the translation. Consequently, the German side replied saying, this paragraph is two lines longer, that paragraph is two lines shorter, [and] a completely different word is used there. Does this still mean the same?* (H. de Ruiter & M. Spaargaren, personal interview, April 11).

Another danger that is inherently bound to the use of different languages in communication is that different people have different levels of proficiency. A learner of a second language will almost never achieve the same level of command as a native speaker. A proper level of understanding is important not just to communicate, but also to add nuances and interpret cultural differences correctly. Moreover, during important meetings, those who can express themselves the clearest, often have an advantage in the negotiations. This could lead to power imbalances between the partners. In the participant observation session of the 'Buren stellen zich voor' project, this was clearly the case. During the meeting, there were two moments where issues that were important to the participants were discussed. In these issues, some of the participants disagreed on the desired outcome. It is in these discussions, that a clear effect of the differing levels of proficiency in German was visible. While one German participant was able to formulate her viewpoint very clearly in German, the Dutch participant that disagreed with her had difficulties in formulating a proper reply in German. As a result, the Dutch participants was limited in his verbal reaction to the arguments posed by the German participant. It was clear that, because of difficulties in language proficiency, the Dutch participant was not able to defend his arguments as effectively as when he would have been speaking Dutch. The German participant, however, was able to defend her arguments effectively. This points us to the effect that language proficiency has on power relations when participants are engaged in discussions. The native speaker of a language always has a strong advantage compared to a speaker with lower language proficiency. As a result, the outcome of the discussion was decided in favour of the German participant. Possibly, this was because of imbalances in language proficiency ('Buren stellen zich voor', participant observation, May 3). Interestingly, this imbalance is not recognised by the respondents in the interview (C. Van Dee, G. Krause & J. Küster, personal interview, May 3). To prevent situations like the one described above, oftentimes translators are used during essential meetings (H. de Ruiter & M. Spaargaren, personal interview, April 11). In extreme cases, a lack of proficiency can lead to partners not wanting to participate in certain activities or events, simply because they cannot understand what is being discussed. According to the respondents, this happens rarely, if ever.

Then, in rare cases, partners do not share a common language at all. It is no surprise that this leads to frustrating situations. *'[...] sometimes we have to talk with local institutions. But we can't do it. So we have a common project, but we need our Dutch partners to speak with their Dutch locals because we can't. Because of the language'* (O. Knagge & C. Pupilis, personal interview, April 25). While the sole effect for the project in this case is a slight delay in communication, in other cases, language imbalances carry more significant consequences: *'[...] we are also responsible for the finances to the [Interreg secretariat]. Then we need to speak with the finance team from the Dutch partners [...] [it] would be better if we speak the same language. Contacting the finance team in the Netherlands is a bit different because we then need to talk [...] in Dutch. And then of course [...] there are errors in the bills or something like that'* (O. Knagge & C. Pupilis, personal interview, April 25). Usually, these errors are corrected before any significant problems occur.

## 4.2 Case 2: Interreg V-A – Vlaanderen-Nederland

Data for case 2 has been gathered through five in-depth interviews and one participant observation session. One of the interviews took place with the programme director of the Joint Interreg Secretariat Vlaanderen-Nederland in Antwerp. Like the respondents in the Interreg secretariats on the Dutch-German border, the respondent in Antwerp has years of experience in the programme, and was able to provide a broad perspective on the challenges the Dutch-Flemish border still poses today. Once again, this interview was the starting point for a series of interviews with respondents active in Interreg V-A projects. The other interviews took place with a set of lead partners from different Interreg V-A Vlaanderen-Nederland projects. The majority of projects within the Vlaanderen-Nederland programme are aimed towards research and innovation in one way or another. There is one project that is not: ‘*Grensinfovoorzieningen*’. In this project, local information points are set up that provide the inhabitants of the region with guidance regarding cross-border issues related to employability. In the interview with the lead partner of this project, it became clear that the border is not necessarily an issue for those involved in the project management. It is however still an issue for inhabitants of the border region.

The other three lead partners that were interviewed all participated in projects related to research and innovation. The BIO-HArT project focuses on upscaling technology for the production of aromatics from biomass. Two other projects whose lead partners have been interviewed are closely linked to academic medicine. In the PRosPERos project, regenerative healthcare is sponsored through the development of 3D printed implants that stimulate bone tissue to grow back. The Trans Tech Diagnostics project is aimed at creating innovative options for better cardiovascular diagnostics. In both interviews, insight in the role of the border within these hi-tech cross-border projects was discussed. To add to this mix of interviews, a participant observation session was held with a project that is currently in the last stages of approval. While the content of this project cannot be discussed in this thesis, the observation session provided useful insights in the communicative differences between Flemish and Dutch participants. The outcomes of the interviews and participant observation session will be outlined in the sections below.

### 4.2.1 Administrative barriers

In the first responses to questions asked in the in-depth interviews, the majority of the respondents do not see administrative barriers as a problem for cross-border cooperation in the Flemish-Dutch border region. Specifically with regards to differences in organisational structures or networking processes, there seems to be clarity about which partners are needed and what these partners are capable of. As said in one interview, a large group of the partners in the partnership had already worked together in previous projects (N. Wennersbusch, personal interview, May 10). In other cases, the project management has made arrangements to make sure people with enough mandate are in the right positions. As stated in the interview: *‘[I] do not notice any issues to contact the people at the appropriate levels’* (K. Martens, personal interview, May 16). What is striking, is that the Joint Interreg Secretariat portrayed another image, for example by stating that often people believe the provincial government on the other side of the border is a suitable counterpart for the provincial government on the other side of the border, while this is not always the case. *‘In your own country you have a clear image of who you need to talk with, and who you should inform about what. Across the border, that is a lot harder’* (B. de Kort, personal interview, April 28). This issue is reflected during the participant observation session, where a new proposal for an Interreg project is being discussed. During the meeting, there is some ambiguity about the different organisational structures of the different parties at the table. For example, the term *‘stichting’* is used in both Flanders and the

Netherlands, but it implies a different legal status. Moreover, the attempt is made to match every Dutch partner with a Flemish counterpart, but this is a difficult process that is hampered by organisational differences ('Project X, participant observation, May 12). These conflicting outcomes indicate there might be ambiguities between the partner's perception of the administrative barriers and the actual situation.

The respondents are uniformly clear about the hampering role of different types of legislation in the two countries. Primarily, issues are encountered in the financial department, where different taxing systems lead to confusion between the partners (D. Molin, personal interview, May 8). While these differences do not trigger significant problems, there is a common need to clarify the regulations to the partners on the other side of the border. As phrased in one interview: '*You have to explain things that you would consider commonplace. You can notice you are thinking from different perspectives, so you have to clarify what is happening*' (N. Wennersbusch, personal interview, May 10). Another issue regarding legislation comes up surrounding employment policies in the different countries. Where regulations regarding temporary employees are fairly flexible in Belgium, this is not the case in the Netherlands. This leads to problems in relation to the extension of project programming periods (D. Molin, personal interview, May 8). While these differences in legislation and regulation cause confusion, there is no significant impact on the progress within projects.

#### 4.2.2 Cultural barriers

If we follow Geert Hofstede's study (2001) on cultural differences in border areas, we can expect major cultural differences between the Flemish and Dutch partners in the Interreg projects. Interestingly, this is not regarded as such by the respondents. All respondents mention minor differences in culture between Flanders and the Netherlands. Dutch people are more direct in communicating whilst Flemish people phrase their opinions more carefully (B. de Kort, personal interview, April 28). This difference is not seen as significant for cooperation in any respect by the respondents. Two of the respondents attempt to explain this by differentiating between the southern and northern part of the Netherlands, where the provinces in the south are closer to Flanders culturally than the rest of the Netherlands (R. Bevers, personal interview, May 8; K. Martens, personal interview, May 16). As phrased by one of the respondents: '*Perhaps it is a cliché, but cultural differences between Brabant, Zeeland and Limburg, [the southern Dutch provinces], and Flanders are smaller than when one looks at Noord- or Zuid-Holland or Drenthe*' (K. Martens, personal interview, May 16). As long as the project manager is aware of minor differences in culture, there should be no problem to manoeuvre through these differences without offending anyone (R. Bevers, personal interview, May 8).

What might be more important than the actual existence of cultural differences, is the perception that people have of what is happening on the other side of the border. On the one hand, this refers to the perceived image of cultural differences described above. On the other hand, this refers to a degree of unawareness about players and possibilities on the other side of the border. As explained in one of the interviews, the national perspective is still guiding people's vision, which results in a lack of knowledge of what is happening on the other side of the border (B. de Kort, personal interview, April 28). This lack of knowledge reduces the effectiveness of regional organisations. An example outline by one respondent indicated that oftentimes, companies in Eindhoven have a perfect image of what can be delivered by producers in Amsterdam or Groningen, but are not aware that in Turnhout, just across the border, a producer can deliver the same thing with a better price or higher level of quality. Already at the start of people's education, and in events and networking sessions, emphasis is put on the local or national scale, and the regions across the border are disregarded (B. de Kort, personal interview, April

28). *'The lack of knowledge about opportunities across the border. That seems to be the most important barrier for cross-border cooperation to me'* (B. de Kort, personal interview, April 28).

While cultural differences do not seem to limit cooperation to a great extent, a recurring theme in the interviews was related to working cultures of Flemish and Dutch people. In general, as said earlier, Dutch people are considered more direct in their communication than Flemish people. According to one respondent, this recurs in the manner in which discussions are being held in meetings. Dutch participants prefer to address all issues in common meetings, while Flemish participants are more comfortable with discussing issues in smaller groups or solely with the project manager (R. Bevers, personal interview, May 8). It became clear during the participant observation session that this could lead to tense situations during a meeting. On multiple occasions, when things were not considered clear by the Dutch partners, a firm request was made to clarify things. The Dutch would not accept uncertainty, and would continue to ask for clarity until they were certain they understood the issue. The Flemish partners were more reluctant with voicing their questions and concerns. One of the Flemish partners suggested it might be better to discuss the issue with a select group outside the meeting. This process repeated itself multiple times, with Flemish partners asking to discuss things after the meeting, and Dutch partners requesting clarity during the meeting ('Project X', participant observation, May 12). The differing working culture thus has clear implications for the manner in which meetings in cross-border projects are conducted.

#### 4.2.3 Language barriers

In the interviews, a recurrent pattern was visible when the respondents were asked about the role of language differences in cross-border cooperation in the Interreg V-A Vlaanderen-Nederland programme. A representative formulation could be similar to the following:

*Language differences on the Dutch-Belgian border? Well, the same language is spoken, so there is no issue whatsoever. However, there are some minor differences in connotation. And in some cases, even different languages are used!*

Clearly, at first sight, language does not play a role in cross-border cooperation on the Dutch-Belgian border, simply because the native language is the same in both countries: Dutch. This is also reflected in the response of one of the interviewees, who stated that *'language is a non-issue. We use Dutch as main language in the project'* (N. Wennersbusch, personal interview, May 10). In the participant observation session, the similarity of the language also showed. However, while the same language is used, there are minor differences in word choice and phrasing between Dutch and Flemish. This becomes apparent in the meeting. There is some confusion about terms like KMO (*kleine- of middelgrote onderneming*) and MKB (*midden of klein bedrijf*), which both are equivalents of the English acronym SME. Moreover, there is confusion about the Flemish equivalent of the Dutch MBO education. These communication issues are solved quickly and without further influence on the process as a whole ('Project X', participant observation, May 12). Minor differences in connotation has been confirmed in one of the interviews: *'Language is not a barrier on the Flemish-Dutch border at first sight. There are some issues, words that have a different connotation for example, but usually this just results in funny situations and the partners can laugh about it. Sometimes, there are misunderstandings, but this is rarely a problem'* (B. de Kort, personal interview, April 28). Rather than triggering problems, these minor differences function as lubricant for conversation among partners.

The use of Dutch in projects along the Flemish-Dutch border is not as exclusive as one would expect. All but one of the respondents mentioned the use of English in internal communication within their respective projects. A range of documents of the Joint Interreg Secretariat have

even been translated into English (B. de Kort, personal interview, April 28). This is due to the fact that it is common for high-tech companies and institutions to use English in their work because they hire international employees, and simply because a lot of scientific or high-tech materials are only available in English. As stated in a range of interviews, English is the main scientific language (R. Bevers, personal interview, May 8). This recurs through the observation session, where the partners seem convinced that English should be used as a surrogate language because some of the employees that will be involved in the project do not have command of the Dutch language ('Project X', participant observation, May 12). The use of English has implications for reporting procedures towards the Joint Interreg Secretariat. Reports and administration should be delivered in Dutch. However, the main difficulties in translating the language used in the project to language that is understandable for those outside the project is not in the move from English to Dutch, but in the change from technical jargon to understandable phrasing (R. Bevers, personal interview, May 8). If the reader does not possess technical knowledge of the content discussed, it makes no difference in which language the report is written (D. Molin, personal interview, May 8).

A final language related issue that could play a role on the Dutch-Belgian border is the use of different local dialects. According to one respondent, it is impossible to understand some of the local dialects that are being used. *'[...] you have to deal with dialects on the Flemish and Dutch sides of the border, which are not commonly understood everywhere. To put it mildly. [...] I can follow most of what is said, but if people start speaking Brugs (the local dialect in Bruges) or Maastrichts (the local dialect in Maastricht), there simply are language barriers. But usually, when people try to speak clearly, everyone is able to do that'* (K. Martens, personal interview, May 16). Dialects do not function as barriers for cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-Belgian border region.

### 4.3 Analytical conclusions

The primary outcome of the thesis is that, while borders still function as barriers due to differences in administrative systems, culture and language use, all of these barriers can be overcome if the participants are willing to invest some time and effort in the cross-border process. Over the years, efforts of the EU, the Joint Interreg Secretariats and the border regions themselves have thus lowered barrier effects for cross-border cooperation to an extent where cross-border cooperation is possible when one is investing some time and energy. Having said that, this still suggests that more time and energy is needed for cross-border cooperation than for internal cooperation. Like suggested in the works of McCallum (1994), the border increases the effective distance that has to be crossed for partners to cooperate. While there are marked differences in administrative and cultural barriers, the main thematic focus of this thesis is the role of language in cross-border cooperation. In this section, the analytical conclusions that can be derived from the case study will be summarised. The outcomes of the two case studies will be thoroughly reflected on in chapter 5, in line with the phonetic methodology that is followed throughout this thesis.

Overall, we can say that administrative barriers are the easiest barriers to identify, since they mainly constitute differences in taxing procedures, tendering procedures and legislation. This is very similar to the findings in section 2.2.1. (ERAC & Radboud University Nijmegen, 2015; Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). These issues have a similar degree of importance in both the Dutch-German and the Dutch-Belgian border region. There seems to be a stronger barrier effect surrounding differences in organisational structures on the Dutch-German border, where partners have a more difficult time to find counterparts with similar functions and the right mandate. It is worth mentioning that for the Dutch-German border region, administrative barriers

were almost uniformly perceived as the biggest barriers for cross-border cooperation. In the Dutch-Belgian border region, this seems to be less of a problem.

Cultural barriers between Germany and the Netherlands also seem more pronounced than those between Flanders and the Netherlands. The German culture is seen as stern, while the Dutch culture is more informal. According to some respondents, this perceived difference is old-fashioned. However, the general image that there are cultural barriers between Germany and the Netherlands functions as a barrier on its own. For the Flemish-Dutch borderland, differences in working cultures play a noticeable role. Herein, the Dutch are more direct and could be considered rude, while the Flemish are more prone to backroom politics. Overall, what is seen as a major limitation for cross-border cooperation in the entire border region is the limited knowledge of what is happening across the border. As stated in the conceptual framework, it is not the barriers themselves that hamper cross-border cooperation. It is rather the lack of knowledge about how to surpass those barriers that hampers cross-border cooperation (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). The formation of networks and knowledge is usually focused on the national instead of the international, and thus, opportunities across the border are not fully exploited.

Language can be seen as a facilitator in the cross-border cooperation process. If there are no issues in understanding one another, cross-border cooperation is only complicated by administrative and cultural barriers. However, if there are issues regarding use of language, this is not just a barrier in itself, but other barriers are reinforced as well. Language differences are seen as mildly relevant barriers for cross-border cooperation on the Dutch-German border, while they are seen as irrelevant on the Dutch-Belgian border. Since most Dutch participants in cross-border projects on the Dutch-German border have a basic understanding of the German language, communication often happens in German. In Dutch-Belgian cross-border projects, the main language used is Dutch. The use of English in both regions is becoming more and more common, especially in high-tech and academic projects. The exact language used thus differs per type of project, both on the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border. Since reports for the Interreg secretariats still have to be written in Dutch (and German), one of the main language related issues for partners that participate in cross-border projects is that their work has to be translated. Herein, difficulties are not found specifically in language differences, but more in the translation of technical jargon, which is often hard due to the inherent danger of losing specific connotations. An added issue related to differing levels of language proficiency occurs when partners choose to use a language which is not spoken well by some of the partners. In this case, the lagging (often non-native) speaker has a disadvantage in discussions and negotiations. The results from the interviews show a high degree of similarity with what has been discussed in section 2.2.3. Specifically, the degree of 'elitism' which is reflected through the use of English as a surrogate (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011) and the unbalanced level of language proficiency (Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006) recurred in the interviews as problematic. While this rarely results in major problems, it certainly influences the cross-border cooperation process. All the issues discussed in this paragraph are more pronounced on the Dutch-German border. However, to a certain extent they occur in the Dutch-Belgian border region as well, especially due to differences in phrasing in Flemish and Dutch, and due to difficulties in translating technical jargon.

## 5 Reflection

In Chapter 4, we have seen the different ways in which border effects still play a role in cross-border cooperation. As part of the phronetic approach of this thesis, it is essential to reflect on these outcomes extensively. The outcomes of the in-depth interviews are a starting point for reflection. The participant observations provide us with an external perspective of the communicative processes that take place in Interreg V-A projects along the Dutch border. Moreover, a considerable share of this chapter will consist of the author's interpretation of the data that has been gathered for this thesis. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to provide a sketch of the role of language differences within Interreg V-A projects along the Dutch border as a whole. Thus, it will attempt to answer sub-question 3 of this thesis. The chapter will be concluded with a section on issues encountered while writing this thesis and suggestions for further research.

### 5.1 Language as a facilitator

So far it has become clear that in our two cases, the Dutch border is still functioning as a barrier for cross-border cooperation, specifically because it represents administrative and cultural differences. For both the Dutch-German and the Dutch-Belgian case, language differences play a minor role. This role is stronger on the Dutch-German border because the native language of the two countries is different. However, not just the language in itself has an effect. The use of technical jargon can also pose a barrier, mainly when it has to be translated to another language. Keeping this in mind, it is worthwhile to look back and reflect on the primary outcomes of the interviews and observation sessions. In what way does the border still function as a barrier exactly?

In the interviews with participants in both border regions, it seemed like the Dutch-German border was always seen as having stronger barrier effects than the Dutch-Belgian border. Even though the administrative barriers, like differences in legislation, taxing and tendering procedures, are highly comparable, the participants in Dutch-German cross-border cooperation were more outspoken about the existence of the barriers. In the Dutch-Belgian cross-border region, most of the respondents would quickly state that the differences do not really matter. This suggests that, while the actual barrier effects are similar, the severity of those effects is perceived differently by the participants. It has been adequately stated by one respondent that for him, the barriers are not there anymore, but he believes other people still *think* the barriers are there (H. Wessels, personal interview, April 10). So why do participants in one region perceive the same barriers as more severe than the participants in the other region?

Due to the Schengen Convention, the SEM and the introduction of the Euro in the majority of EU countries, real border effects are relatively small on the EUs internal borders. It is quite likely that the major component in determining the effect of the border on cross-border cooperation within this region is not found in real differences, but in perceived differences. Repeatedly, we have heard statements that people believe there are still barriers, while objectively there should not be any. This image, of the border functioning as a barrier, poses a barrier on its own. And it is very likely this effect is reinforced by differences in language. A difference in language use makes it harder to interpret, understand and circumnavigate the other border effects. It is harder to understand legislation if it is written in a foreign language, and it is harder to understand each

other when one speaks a different language. Language differences function as catalysts for barrier effects: if there is a barrier, this will be strengthened by differences in language.

In this thesis, the effect of language differences as a catalyst can be identified specifically in differences in working cultures. In both border regions, the differences in working cultures were noticed by participants. While they were of a similar nature, with the Dutch being direct and the Germans and Belgians being more formal, it was mainly perceived as a problem in the Dutch-German case. Both Dutch and German respondents have stated they had difficulties in understanding the differences in working culture (e.g. H. Laan, personal interview, April 19; O. Knagge & C. Pupelis, personal interview, April 25). On the Dutch-Belgian border, differences in working culture were merely identified (e.g. R. Bevers, personal interview, May 8). If one looks at the kind of working culture differences, one could say the differences on the Dutch-Belgian border are bigger than those on the Dutch-German border. Still, they are perceived as more severe on the Dutch-German border. It is very likely, that language strengthens the barrier effect in this case.

We can also argue the other way around, by saying that language facilitates cross-border cooperation. When cooperating parties are able to understand each other well, it is easier to circumnavigate barrier effects. Here, the use of English as a surrogate language comes into play. For a large group of partners, it is easier to communicate in English than in German or Dutch. By using English, they are able to communicate clearly and are thus able to find solutions to negative barrier effects. This is however only possible for those groups that do speak English.

In the first periods of the Interreg programme, the use of English was strongly discouraged. The argument of the Joint Interreg Secretariat was that, to stimulate cohesion along the border, it is essential that people on both sides of the border are able to communicate. The programme had a local focus on socio-cultural exchange (H. Wessels, personal interview, April 10). Nowadays, the programming area is larger and the thematic focus has shifted towards research, innovation and competitiveness. This shift has diminished the need for local language use: the majority of participants is highly educated and able to speak English. In the academic sphere, the lingua franca is often English anyways. The use of English has thus become more acceptable in Interreg projects. However, there is an intrinsic danger connected to this change. By switching to English, those who cannot speak the language are excluded from participation. Cross-border cooperation then turns into a somewhat elitist execution, where only highly educated people participate. From my point of view, this is the exact opposite of what the Interreg programmes should aim to achieve. Interreg should aim to increase cohesion by connecting local people rather than stimulate research and development by sponsoring large institutions.

The Interreg programmes are thus in a challenging position. By advocating the use of local language, more people can participate. The risk however, is that the process is less efficient on the short term because barrier effects are stronger when the language is not commonly understood. If English is used, some projects might be able to implement their ideas more efficiently. But there is a danger of elitism and exclusion of large groups of people that do not speak English. In the end, it depends on the programme focus. Do we want to strengthen local socio-cultural cohesion? Use the local language. Do we want to stimulate research and development? Use English. In the end, language is a means to an end, a way to facilitate cross-border cooperation. It depends on the goals of the cooperation process, which language should be used.

## 5.2 Issues encountered while writing this thesis

In any kind of academic research, proper scoping of the themes and issues that are examined is essential. Especially for someone with broad interest in the field of European spatial planning, like me, it is hard to define an accurate research topic. This process has started in the early stages of the Master programme, and has been a continuous struggle until the finalisation of the thesis. After selecting the overall theme of borders and barrier effects, it was hard for me to decide on the location of the cases. It might be more interesting to examine borders with a bigger difference in language, like the German-Polish border. However, due to issues of practicality, the choice to stay in the Netherlands was made. In retrospect, this was a good choice, since the interviewing process in the Netherlands was already very time consuming. One can imagine this would take way more time in other countries.

The solid deadline that has been installed for the Planet Europe programme poses a challenge. There are many things I could have done to make the research for the thesis more complete if there would be more time to finish the thesis. Time management was of the essence, and especially challenging during the data collection phase. After the data was collected, it became clearer how much work was to be done, and planning became easier as well. If I could start again, I would start with the interviews sooner and plan them in a shorter period of time to increase efficiency. However, planning turned out fine in the end. In light of the time that was reserved for this thesis, I am satisfied with the results.

## 5.3 Suggestions for further research

Obviously, it is always possible to delve deeper into the phenomenon you are examining in social research. With more time and funding available, it would be worthwhile to not just partake in a onetime interview, but track progress within the Interreg projects from start to end. In that way, one could find out how border effects and ways to surpass border effects change as the project evolves. Outcomes of research of this type could indicate to what extent Interreg programmes help to increase awareness of what is happening on the other side of the border. They could thus provide an answer to the question whether Interreg programmes actually help decrease barrier effects.

Another approach one could take is to look at barriers on a higher scale. By incorporating multiple border regions with different qualities, the identities of the different barrier effects can be outlined more specifically. One could for example look at the German border as a case study, and still focus on language, because Germany borders with countries with languages that are the same (German in Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland), fairly similar (Dutch in the Netherlands and Belgium; Danish in Denmark; and to a lesser extent French in Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Switzerland), or very different (Polish in Poland, and Czech in the Czech Republic). It would then be possible to rank the barrier the different languages pose from non-existent to severe. Clearly, the role of language in cross-border cooperation can be researched in different locales and varying contexts.

## 6 Conclusion

In this thesis, we have taken a close look at the role barrier effects play within cross-border cooperation in Interreg V-A projects on the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border. Through a thorough review of current academic literature on cross-border cooperation and border studies, three groups of barrier effects have been identified: administrative barriers, cultural barriers and language barriers. The occurrence, identity and severity of these barrier effects have been examined in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian border region through in-depth interviews with participants in Interreg V-A projects. The outcomes of these interviews have then been tested with the help of participant observation sessions, where the researcher was able to critically examine the communicative process within meetings of partners in Interreg V-A projects. As a result of these methods, a set of conclusions can be drawn up.

First and foremost, there are clear barriers for cooperation along the Dutch border. However, if the participants are willing to invest some time and effort into the process, these barriers can be circumvented easily. In this case, they do not pose any direct problems for the process of cross-border cooperation. By most interviewees, administrative barriers like differences in taxing, legislation, and tendering procedures were considered the strongest barriers for cooperation across the border. In the case of the Dutch-German border, differences in the structures of organisations and institutions were also considered as a strong barrier for cooperation. Cultural and language differences usually followed as second and third, with a large group of respondents stating that culture and language differences are not considered relevant as barriers for cross-border cooperation. In the Dutch-German border region the effect of language differences was considered to be larger than in the Dutch-Belgian border region. This can be easily explained by the fact that the same language is being spoken on the Dutch-Belgian border.

To answer the main research question of this thesis: *'How do language differences affect cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German and Dutch-Belgian Interreg cross-border regions?'* a stronger focus has been placed on the role language plays within cooperation. The initial response for the respondents on the Dutch-Belgian border was that language does not play a role at all, since the same language is spoken by participants on both sides of the border. However, at later stages of the interviews, it became clear that there are minor differences in language use which can lead to confusion. This usually does not have any consequences for the cooperation process. The use of English as a surrogate language is also very common on the Dutch-Belgian border, specifically in projects which are high-tech or research oriented. On the Dutch-German border, the situation is different, since often the partners do not have complete command of the language spoken on the other side of the border. Hence, language barriers pose a bigger problem. As is the case on the Dutch-Belgian border, in high-tech and research oriented projects, English is often used as a surrogate language. Since the participants in these projects are highly educated, and English is the lingua franca in the academic world, this does not pose any problems. In socio-cultural projects, a mix of German and Dutch is often used. Language plays a stronger role here, as could be seen in the participant observation session, where differing language proficiency resulted in imbalanced power relations between the participants. Still, the role of language in cross-border cooperation on the Dutch border is not very relevant on its own.

Where the role of language barriers in cross-border cooperation is highlighted is when it coincides with other barrier effects. Language barriers make other barriers more severe. When there are differences in legislation, and the legislation is also written in a different language, it is significantly harder to

understand this legislation. Moreover, differences in language lead to the perception that there are differences in administrative and cultural issues, while there might not be any. There is thus an assumption that, when people speak different languages, other barriers are reinforced. If we turn this reasoning around, we can also conclude that when people are able to speak the same language, the minor differences in administration and culture are easily circumvented. Language thus plays an important role as facilitator in cross-border cooperation. On the one hand, it enables participants to manoeuvre through the field of barrier effects. On the other hand, if participants do not possess the necessary language skills, it strengthens the barrier effects that are already in place. To conclude, difference in language proficiency is a cause for exclusion of certain groups of people. If one is not able to speak two or more languages, it seems very difficult to fully participate in cross-border cooperation processes.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – English introduction letter

Dear interviewee,

This interview has been arranged as part of the development of a Master Thesis in European Spatial Planning and Regional Economic Development at the Radboud University (Nijmegen, the Netherlands) and the Blekinge Institute of Technology (Karlskrona, Sweden). The interview will be conducted in either Dutch or English. If you are more comfortable with answering in German, this is accepted as well. The outcomes of the interview will be used for academic purposes only. Upon request, you will not be mentioned by name in the actual Master Thesis.

The topic of the master thesis is the role of the border in cross-border cooperation. While the European Union has simplified cross-border travel and trade through the Single European Market and the Schengen Agreement has made travelling within the EU very easy, there is still a lot of evidence for the existence of so called border-effects. Usually, these effects are seen as barriers for cross-border cooperation, like when differing administrative systems make working in another country more difficult, or when communication is more difficult because of differences in language.

The goal of this thesis is to examine how these border-effects affect the process of cross-border cooperation in Interreg V-A projects. This will be tested through research done in both the Dutch-German and the Dutch-Belgian Interreg V-A regions. One of the point of focus in the study is of how important language and communication difficulties are as barriers. It is easy to imagine why this might be relevant in the case of the Dutch-German border, since the region has two different native languages. The Dutch-Belgian border shares a common language, although there are differences between the Dutch and Flemish dialects. This case is included to identify whether language actually plays a limiting role in cross-border cooperation, or if other border-effects are more significant.

The interview is structured loosely and it would be very much appreciated if you mention what is on your mind regarding the cross-border cooperation process you are involved in. The structure below has a thematic focus. Not all questions that are there have to be answered, and there might be additional questions that come up during the interview. Feel free to raise issues that are not mentioned in the guideline, as long as they are in line with the general research topic.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Warmest regards,

Thijs Fikken

## Appendix 2 – Dutch introduction letter

Beste geïnterviewde,

Dit interview is georganiseerd als onderdeel van de ontwikkeling van een Master Thesis in Europees Ruimtelijk Beleid en Regionaal Economische Ontwikkeling aan de Radboud Universiteit (Nijmegen, Nederland) en Blekinge Institute of Technology (Karlskrona, Zweden). Het interview zal afgenomen worden in het Nederlands of in het Engels. Als u gemakkelijker kunt antwoorden in het Duits dan kan dat ook. De informatie die gedeeld wordt in dit interview zal enkel gebruikt worden voor wetenschappelijke doeleinden. Indien gewenst kan uw naam geheim gehouden worden in de Master Thesis.

Het onderwerp van de Master Thesis is de rol die de grens speelt bij grensoverschrijdende samenwerking. De Europese Unie heeft grensoverschrijdende verkeers- en handelstromen vergemakkelijkt door de inwerkstelling van de Europese Interne Markt en het Schengen Verdrag. Toch is er nog veel bewijs voor het bestaan van grenseffecten. Deze effecten worden meestal gezien als barrières voor grensoverschrijdende samenwerking, bijvoorbeeld als verschillende administratieve systemen werken in het buitenland moeilijker maken, of als communicatie stroef verloopt door taalverschillen.

Het doel van deze scripte is om te onderzoeken hoe deze grenseffecten de grensoverschrijdende samenwerking binnen Interreg V-A projecten beïnvloeden. Dit wordt getest in de Nederlands-Duitse en Nederlands-Belgische Interreg V-A gebieden. Een van de centrale punten in deze studie is het belang van taal- en communicatiebarrières. Het is makkelijk voor te stellen waarom dit relevant kan zijn aan de Nederlands-Duitse grens, omdat hier twee verschillende talen worden gesproken. De Nederlands-Belgische grens deelt een gezamenlijke taal. Toch zijn er veel verschillen in de regionale dialecten. Deze grens is meegenomen om na te gaan of taalverschillen daadwerkelijk een probleem vormen.

Het interview heeft een losse structuur. Het is de bedoeling dat uzelf kunt zeggen wat u wilt over het grensoverschrijdend project waarbij u betrokken bent. De structuur is hieronder gegeven. Het is ingedeeld in thematische blokken. Niet elke vraag hoeft beantwoord te worden en er is ruimte voor het toevoegen van thema's die u relevant vindt.

Hartelijk bedankt voor uw medewerking

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Thijs Fikken

### Appendix 3 – English interview guideline

<b>Introducing ourselves. Current and previous experiences with cross-border cooperation.</b>	
How are you associated with Interreg V-A?	
In how many cross border projects/programmes have you been involved?	
Which experiences do you have from these projects/programmes?	
Have you had any experience with other EU funding programmes? (e.g. Horizon 2020, LIFE, URBACT, etc.)	
<b>Border-effects and cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German border region.</b>	
What do you consider to be the largest barriers in cross-border cooperation?	
Which border-effects do you see as influential on the process of cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German border region?	
Are there effects that are positive? Are there effects that are negative?	
How do these effects influence the process of cross-border cooperation?	
Can you place the different effects that you have mentioned in order from most negative to most positive?	

<b>The role of language in cross-border cooperation in the Dutch-German border regions.</b>	
Which language(s) is/are used in your project? Is there an official first language?	
How are these languages used? What is the most prominent language?	
Do you encounter any issues in communication in your project? How are they caused?	
Are the issues more pronounced in some groups than others?	
When people communicate, does it ever occur that there is confusion about the meaning of a word or phrase?	
Do misunderstandings occur due to communication issues? What is the effect of these misunderstandings?	
Are things left unsaid due to communication issues? Are people less willing to cooperate? Are people more eager to cooperate due to language differences?	
<b>Concluding questions, do border-effects matter?</b>	
Do border-effects matter? Does language matter?	
Is there anything we haven't touched upon yet that you think is relevant?	
Are there any issues that you would like to emphasise as highly relevant?	

**Appendix 4 – Dutch interview guideline – Germany-Netherlands**

<b>Introductie. Huidige en vorige ervaringen met grensoverschrijdende samenwerking.</b>	
Wat is uw huidige relatie met Interreg V-A?	
In hoeveel grensoverschrijdende projecten/programma's bent u betrokken (geweest)?	
Wat zijn uw ervaringen bij deze projecten/programma's?	
Heeft u ervaring met andere EU programma's? (e.g. Horizon 2020, LIFE, URBACT, etc.)	
<b>Grenseffecten en grensoverschrijdende samenwerking in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied.</b>	
Wat ziet u als de grootste barrières bij grensoverschrijdende samenwerking?	
Welke grenseffecten zijn volgens u van invloed op het grensoverschrijdend samenwerkingsproces in het Nederlands-Duitse grensgebied?	
Zijn er positieve effecten? Zijn er negatieve effecten?	
Hoe beïnvloeden deze effecten het grensoverschrijdend proces?	
Kunt u de verschillende effecten die u benoemd heeft in volgorde van meest negatief naar meest positief plaatsen?	

<b>De rol van taal in grensoverschrijdende samenwerking langs de Nederlands-Duitse grens.</b>	
Welke talen worden gebruikt bij uw project? Is er een officiële eerste taal?	
Hoe worden deze talen gebruikt? Wat is de meest belangrijke taal?	
Komen er communicatieproblemen voor in uw project? Hoe komt dit volgens u?	
Zijn de problemen nadrukkelijker aanwezig in verschillende delen van het project?	
Komt het wel eens voor dat er verwarring is over de exacte betekenis van een woord of zin?	
Worden gesprekken wel eens verkeerd begrepen door communicatieproblemen? Wat is hiervan het effect?	
Zijn er dingen die moeilijk bespreekbaar zijn door communicatieproblemen?	
<b>Afronding</b>	
Maken grenseffecten een verschil?	
Is er iets nog niet besproken waarvan u denkt dat dat relevant is?	
Zijn er zaken die u wilt benadrukken?	

Appendix 5 – Dutch interview guideline – Belgium-Netherlands

<b>Introductie. Huidige en vorige ervaringen met grensoverschrijdende samenwerking.</b>	
Wat is uw huidige relatie met Interreg V-A?	
In hoeveel grensoverschrijdende projecten/programma's bent u betrokken (geweest)?	
Wat zijn uw ervaringen bij deze projecten/programma's?	
Heeft u ervaring met andere EU programma's? (e.g. Horizon 2020, LIFE, URBACT, etc.)	
<b>Grenseffecten en grensoverschrijdende samenwerking in het Nederlands-Belgische grensgebied.</b>	
Wat ziet u als de grootste barrières bij grensoverschrijdende samenwerking?	
Welke grenseffecten zijn volgens u van invloed op het grensoverschrijdend samenwerkingsproces in het Nederlands-Belgische grensgebied?	
Zijn er positieve effecten? Zijn er negatieve effecten?	
Hoe beïnvloeden deze effecten het grensoverschrijdend proces?	
Kunt u de verschillende effecten die u benoemd heeft in volgorde van meest negatief naar meest positief plaatsen?	

<b>De rol van communicatie in grensoverschrijdende samenwerking langs de Nederlands-Belgische grens.</b>	
Komen er communicatieproblemen voor in uw project? Hoe komt dit volgens u?	
Zijn de problemen nadrukkelijker aanwezig in verschillende delen van het project?	
Komt het wel eens voor dat er verwarring is over de exacte betekenis van een woord of zin?	
Worden gesprekken wel eens verkeerd begrepen door communicatieproblemen? Wat is hiervan het effect?	
Zijn er dingen die moeilijk bespreekbaar zijn door communicatieproblemen?	
<b>Afronding</b>	
Maken grenseffecten een verschil?	
Is er iets nog niet besproken waarvan u denkt dat dat relevant is?	
Zijn er zaken die u wilt benadrukken?	

## Appendix 6 – Interview partners and projects

Name	Position within project	Organisation	Interreg V-A project
Hermann Wessels	Programme Director	Ems Dollart Region	-
Heidi de Ruiter	Policy Advisor / Representative	Euregio Rijn-Waal	-
Martijn Spaargaren	Coordinator	General Secretariat Interreg Deutschland - Nederland	-
Alex Friedrich	Project Manager	University Medical Centre Groningen	Among others: EURhealth1health
Harry Laan	Project Partner	IMEZ	Groene Kaskade
Caroline Pupelis	Project Manager	Ostfriesland Tourismus	Wadden-agenda
Oliver Knagge	Project Manager	Ostfriesland Tourismus	Wadden-agenda
Gerhard Krause	Project Manager	Heimatverein Anholt	Buren stellen zich voor
Christa van Dee	Project Partner	Vereniging Leefbaarheid Netterden	Buren stellen zich voor
Johan Küster	Project Manager	Vereniging Leefbaarheid Netterden	Buren stellen zich voor
Bram de Kort	Programme Director	General Secretariat Interreg Vlaanderen - Nederland	-
Raymond Bevers	Project Manager	University of Maastricht	Prosperos
Kees Martens	Project Manager	Sociale Verzekeringsbank / Bureau voor Belgische Zaken	Among others: Grensinfovoorzieningen
Nadine Wennersbusch	Project Manager	TNO	BIO-HArT
Daniel Molin	Project Manager	University of Maastricht	Among others: Trans Tech Diagnostics