

Opportunities for Regional Collaboration on the Border: Sharing the European border experience with the San Diego/Tijuana region

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How to read this white paper?

This white paper highlights best practices and barriers for local cross border cooperation across the European Union and will suggest policy options relevant to the San Diego-Tijuana region.

The research done in Europe has been carried out as part of two large scheme EU wide projects sponsored under the 5th and 6th framework Programme of European Commission. Code named EXLINA and EUDIMENSIONS, the research consisted of a consortium of multiple universities across the European Union and took 8 years between 2002 and 2009. Both project have sought to understand the actual and potential role of cross border co-operation beyond the external borders of the EU and focused on specific local development issues, including economic development, cultural and educational matters, urban development, local democracy and environmental issues. The research was designed to address practical aspects of cross-border co-operation across and beyond the external borders of the European Union. The case studies that covered most part of the external borders of the EU centred on how changes within Europe's political space are being interpreted and used by actors with a stake in bi-national/cross-border cooperation.

This whitepaper compares and contrast the San Diego-Tijuana realities with cross border cooperation in border regions of the European Union. In addition to improving our understanding how local border regions function within a global context, the whitepaper highlight best practices and barriers for local cross border cooperation and will suggest policy options relevant to the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone.

Understanding borders in a broader context

Before looking at the San Diego-Tijuana region it is important to take a closer look what we are actually talking about. What are borders in the first place? Asking people, borders are often viewed as a given line between one place and another. Without going much into scientific detail we can indeed say that for some borders indicate the end of a certain territory. In this view, borders divide the world in clear nation states that are sometimes divided by mountains, deserts, rivers or seas. Whereas for others borders represent a sense of global responsibility, for example, environmental movements, fair-trade and free-trade organizations who think beyond national borders. Either way, not only people's lives are influenced by "the other side" also the economy and the physical environment. What often is overlooked is that even if borders occasionally

appear to follow the natural features of a landscape, they are fundamentally human constructsⁱ. The EU and U.S Mexican borders are no difference.

In our 'borderless' world of communication, borders are associated with difficulties, challenges and problems. In addition, their creation and development frequently have unexpected and unintended consequencesⁱⁱ. What we mean by that is that borders are most and for all *ideological*. Or in other words; borders always mean different things to different people. When it comes to those in power, borders are often explained in two ways: 1) the world is globalized and therefore borders tend to lose their effectiveness (borders are increasingly fluid and porous). 2) In a globalized world, security needs to be increased in order to restore that effectiveness (borders as frontiers of protection). This is increasingly the dominant geopolitical meaning of the EU and U.S Mexican borders: The dominant meaning is security. Both the European Union and the U.S federal government (department of Homeland Security) *invest* significantly in the latter vision (borders as frontiers of security) through the investment of public money in protection, technology and defence.

Already since the mid-1990s there has been a gradual policy shift from a cross-border trade paradigm to a homeland security paradigm in terms of U.S. efforts and public monies spentⁱⁱⁱ. Federal policies such as the 1994 operation Gatekeeper and the Secure Fence Act of 2006 have affected cooperation across borders. One recent example is President Obama, who as an early advocate of border reform, largely followed in the footsteps of President Bush who put a lot of effort in securing the border. In the run-up to the 2010 midterm elections, pledging hundreds of millions of dollars in additional investment in border security^{iv}. A recent study by the associated press revealed that for 2012, the Obama administration's record high budget for border security invests an additional \$242 million to pay for high tech watch towers and movable screeners along the border, \$229 million to raise border agents' pay, and \$184 million to identify and deport criminal aliens in state prisons and local jails. That's on top of about \$14 billion to support the ongoing infrastructure. In contrast: U.S-Canada border security only received \$2.9 billion of federal budget in 2011. According to the research, an estimated total of \$90 billion was spent on public money in 10 years since 2001 in securing the U.S-Mexican border^v.

In case of the European Union the investment in external border relations is very much represented in the EU enlargement geopolitics of the past two decades. Discussions about the limits of the European Union have been resonating across member states long before the last EU enlargement in 2007. Apart from the current candidate countries (including Turkey which has no guarantee of ever joining the EU), the geographical boundaries of the EU appear increasingly 'frozen' not only by means of discursive practices about concerns of future enlargement, but also through various policy incentives from the European Commission in Brussels.

A good example is the European security policy stating that: 'Those countries that are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe. The integration of acceding states increases our security but also brings the EU closer to troubled areas. Our task is to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the

borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations^{vi}



Figure 1: Investment in Security

Through the strong focus on securitization and border management, the EU external borders, like the U.S-Mexican border, have become increasingly secured zones with limited access, fenced structures, increased control and tightened security measures. These more visible modifications along the actual borders have been accompanied by less visible but nonetheless present borders that are expanding away from the territorial boundary. This process of *bordering* is characterized by flexible and mobile monitoring, patrol zones and policy incentives that have more and more jurisdiction like the introduction of *Frontex* which is the EU agency with the task of coordinating EU-wide border security. For example the EU budget for external security is \$ 2,6 billion (2007-2013). As an illustration, Spain receives \$61 million in 2012, Italy \$67 million and Greece \$56 million. In comparison Germany receives only \$18 million as it does not have an external EU border^{vii}.

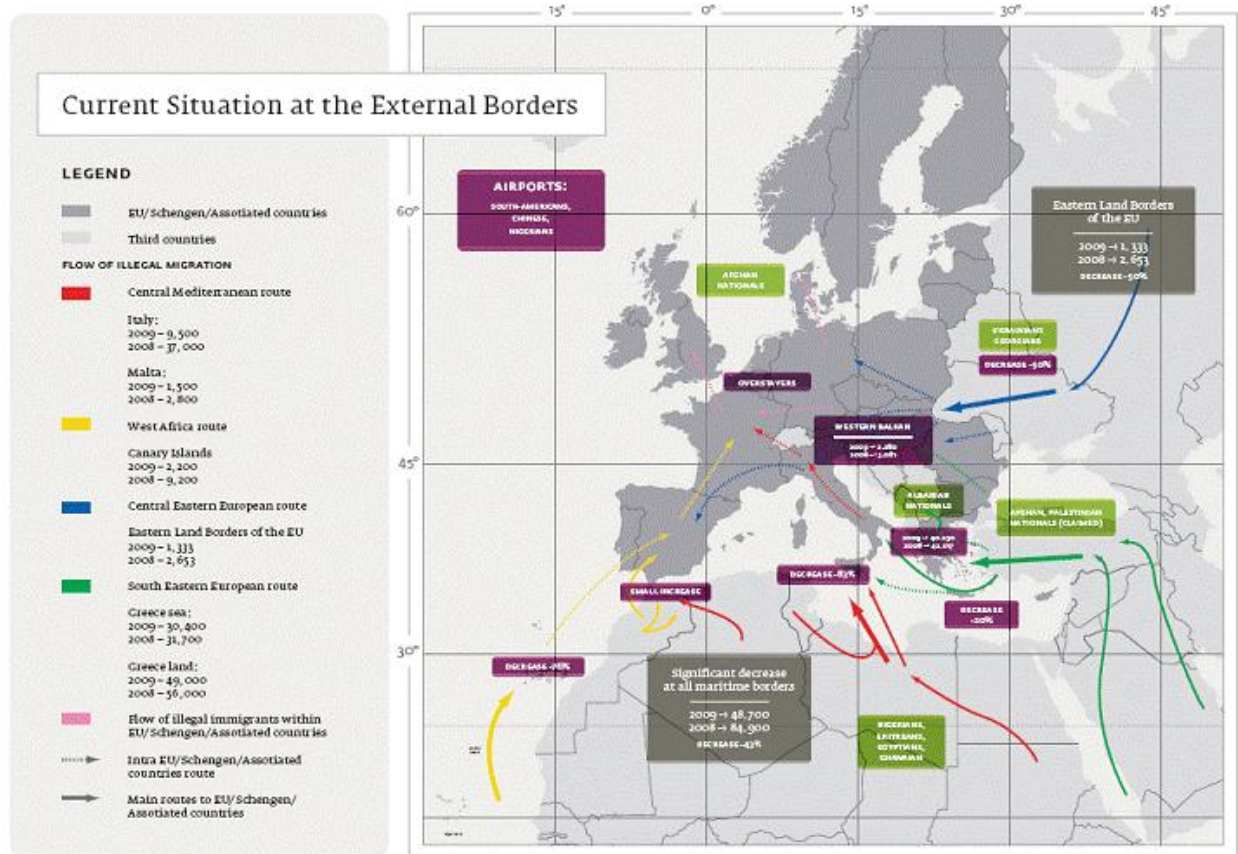


Figure 2: Migrant routes to Europe

At the same time, the increasing investment in security is challenged by different users of the border. It is challenged, practically if not politically, by a social economy and urban ecology that muddles its "us-them" logic and strengthens the ideological value of borders on the reverse side, by migrants who cross the border at night through the desert or in little boats on a long and hazardous journey, but also by drugs and human traffickers who serve the large demand on either side of the border. The effectiveness of borders is further challenged by the neighbouring states who realize that they do not necessarily support the unilateral strategies. An example is the more critical view towards the US border fence by the Mexican federal government: "I do not see a solution in building more fences", said Mexican Senator Hector Osuna Jaime, a former Tijuana mayor. "You have to ask how high, what material will be used, and who will build it. We might even help you, but it's not going to solve the problem^{viii}".

Similar perceptions play a role in the relationship between Russia and the European Union. Russia has always been an exceptional case, as it remains haunted by mysterious ghosts of corruption, authoritarianism, violence, and the Communist past. This is further fuelled by the fact that Russia does not aim to become another EU candidate or partner. The EU was quickly to declare that Russia is much more than just another neighbour, since it is a strategic gas partner (here issues of economic self-interest, political stability and security play a prominent role).

This sense of pride is also present along the U.S Mexican border. Whereas the U.S tends to view the border as a supreme function of maintaining the sovereignty of the nation, Mexican authorities hold even stronger notions of sovereignty, given Mexico's history of loss of territory to the U.S. and the importance of nationalism in Mexican domestic politics^{ix}. Besides these various examples of actors who challenge the security discourse, borders are also scenes of protests by activists (for example the no border network), filmmakers (many documentaries about the securitization of the border), artists (for example the political equator initiative in San Diego) and scholars (various critical debates about moral implications of borders) adding all different layers of meaning to the border.

These examples reveal that borders have not one meaning. They might be penetrable yet never freely accessible. It is the very place where those who invest in it through enforcement and those who question its effectiveness (migrants, traffickers but also activists, scholars and artists) encounter. Borders are "gate-keepers", who decide who will have access and who does not. They also have a lot to teach about how the investment in security has effect on design, spatial planning - and management - of public spaces. The current delays at San Ysidro port of entry are a result of poor planning and coordination of automobile checkpoints and a single pedestrian passageway that causes long lines. Security features increasingly become highly valued revealing the complex process of bordering practices^x. Despite this desire for clear borders that are well regulated but permeable, there is general agreement among people who cross the border that the ritual of border-crossing itself is often experienced in negative terms and associated with long waits and inconvenience^{xi}.

An uneasy balance between securitization and cooperation

When looking at cooperation across the border, what can be said about the *investment* in collaboration given the current circumstances of heavy investment in security by national governments aiming at exclusion of potential hazards? When looking at Europe, the 1985 Schengen convention defines areas of cooperation for the external borders and interior space of the EU: internal borders, police and security. Rules and regulations for each policy area are carefully spelled out - cooperation at the borders and within the interior space - under five headings: general provisions, policies on border checks, asylum and immigration, judicial cooperation in civil matters, judicial cooperation in criminal matters and police cooperation^{xii}. For the internal borders of the EU this largely means the abolishing of border checkpoints and enhanced cooperation in the field of security, police and jurisdiction.



Figure 3: The abolishing of EU internal border check points

For the EU external borders this means the establishing of an EU-wide border management system and more recently the European Neighborhood policy. Created in 2004 the ENP encourages cross-border cooperation at the external borders to assure that existing commercial, financial and security arrangements are maintained and enhanced (basically, northern Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Russia and Eastern Europe). The goal of the ENP is to prevent new dividing lines between the EU and its immediate neighbors, and to ‘bring about economic and political privileged relationships between the Union and each neighboring country^{xiii}’, a policy supported by extensive financial assistance for partner countries of a projected \$16 billion for the 2007–2013 period. Financial assistance aims at reducing trade barriers, the promotion of human rights and assistance in the field of good governance, training of police and education. The ENP is a *partnership* based on Action plans, which have characteristics of EU membership (applying EU regulations, financial assistance in return of market and political reforms) but not the same. It acknowledges the fact that there are share opportunities and common problems with what the EU formulates as ‘creating a ring of friends’ and ‘wellbeing for all’.



Figure 4: The green countries signed the European Neighborhood partnership

The ENP shows parallels with the signing of NAFTA in 1994, maybe the closest example of a bi-national investment in cooperation in the U.S. The initial investment in bilateral agreements with Mexico energized border relations and California's trade with Mexico has exceeded \$20 billion annually since the implementation^{xiv}. The bilateral relationship is fundamentally structured by three characteristics shared with the European Neighborhood Policy: "proximity, interpenetration, and asymmetry." These traits are most pronounced at the U.S. Mexican border, where the two societies meet and intermingle. The relative success of the Maquiladora industry (The United States provides up to 50% of all inputs for Mexico's maquiladora manufacturing and assembly firms, which translates to more than \$41 billion in annual sales^{xv}) represented the cutting edge of the two-way economic penetration between the United States and Mexico, stimulated by NAFTA and accelerated by Mexican privatization initiatives. On the regional level, this two-way trade and investment represented a growing component of the San Diego economy^{xvi}. An example of the optimism surrounding the emergence of the Maquiladora industry was the development of Otay Mesa, based on the location close to Tijuana's industrial areas as well as the border crossing. While economic linkages between San Diego and Tijuana have increased over the long run, Tijuana remains somewhat unnoticed as an area of real economic opportunity by Southern California businesses. Despite the hindrances NAFTA-related trade with Mexico has added 1.7 million jobs to the U.S. economy. In addition, Mexico and the United States trade more than \$1 billion worth of goods each day (\$397 billion in 2010)^{xvii}.

Despite the increase in trade, the establishing of enduring cooperation was challenged by the increasing concerns about national security. NAFTA's implementation in 1994 coincided

with the first ideas of Operation Gatekeeper by the Clinton administration and was introduced to put a hold to illegal migration. The gradual emphasis on security hindered the emergence of a common border with harmonized NAFTA policies. Apart from security and trade, the U.S. federal interest in the border region has been sporadic over the years. A difference in legal systems and political-administrative structures between the EU and its neighbors as well as the U.S and Mexico also make regional cooperation in border regions difficult. The United States has a federal political system with significant autonomy at the local and state levels. Mexico is highly centralized and local and state governments are almost totally dependent upon the federal government for funding and decision making^{xviii}. Under these circumstances, formal cross border cooperation remains a highly selective exercise as disparities in economic strength and political power which have great potential to undermine bilateral attempts at problem solving have changed the least^{xix}.

Borders therefore play an interesting but double role. While some kind of openness (in terms of trade mobility) is generally praised, the protective and stabilizing function of the border is almost always prioritized. The political discourse that supports the increasing security of the borders is given in by protecting Europe but also the U.S from terrorism and other harmful forces. This makes borders to be seen as lines that provide certainty within “chaotic” times of change; they are perceived as an organizing element in the environment that clearly demarcates national spaces and guarantees national sovereignties.



Figure 5: U.S and Mexico Two-Way Trade in Goods, 1985-2007

Border Regions: Challenges beyond Boundaries

Now we have defined the context of borders on the broader level, it is time to look at the regional level of border regions in Europe and in particular the San Diego and Tijuana bi-national region. Border regions both in Europe and the U.S have a long history of dealing with negative stereotypes. Stereotypes that contribute to a certain meaning of the border even reality might have changed. For example, the 1920s saw the San Diego-Tijuana border region as depicted and a haven for gambling, prostitution and drinking. This image continued especially among tourists and visitors while other layers of meaning have been added over the years. In the 1980s and 1990s, the border was frequently decried as a centre of worker exploitation in assembly plants (*maquiladoras*), serious environmental problems, and out of control urban growth. The flow of illicit drugs across the border to consumers in the United States has produced the perception of a region characterized by drug wars and corruption^{xx}. Negative stereotypes about the border serve as fuel for the media. For example, at the U.S.-Mexican border, only a tiny percentage of the people crossing the border on a regular basis do so illegally, yet this percentage frequently constitutes the only border story deemed worth reporting in the mass media of both Mexico and the United States which exacerbated the already prevalent Anglo indifference or hostility to things Mexican^{xxi}. The perception that the U.S Mexican border was porous and a threat to the U.S National security was transformed into a widely held stereotype after 9/11 emphasized by the example of maps of Mexico, that from the U.S sites are white, as if the world ceased to exist beyond the border. This occurred despite the fact that there is no specific evidence to support the theory that the southern border is a security threat^{xxii}.

As a result, cross border activities in Europe as well as along the U.S Mexican border currently take place against the backdrop of considerable structural, financial, political constraints. Extended research in Europe has pointed out that an increased mobility at borders is generally welcomed by frequent users of the border, activists as well as chambers of commerce and other business representatives. However, citizens but also policy makers appear to have difficulties identifying with or even understanding the goals of cooperation across international borders, in fact, no coherent policies of cross border cooperation exist. The *Exlinea* research in Europe indicated that although the respondents represent experts who are specialized in cross-border cooperation and are working to promote it, nonetheless, they were not enthusiastic about abolishing institutional barriers. For instance, visas and the increased level of border control were generally accepted. Interestingly, the people who live at and along the borders tend to ignore borders when that serves their interests and to take advantage of the border when that is more convenient^{xxiii}. The main reason behind regional cross border cooperation has been the discovery by individuals and organizations that understanding the region means extending their scope of activities across international boundary.

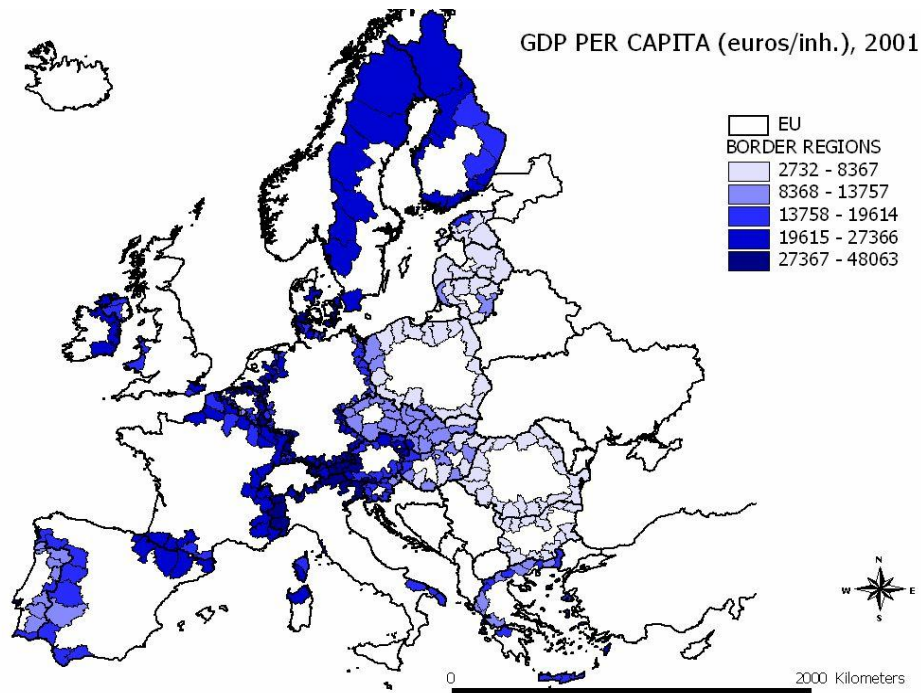


Figure 6: External Border regions are weaker than the internal border regions

Notions of integrated border regions continue to remain “elite” visions at present and region-building processes have more to do with the selective networking of cross border cooperation stakeholders who work largely, but not exclusively, within the public. This also contributes to the absence of the feeling of a common cross-border region^{xxiv}. Because cross border cooperation lacks resources and is perceived to only have limited political significance, there appears to be very little public interest in getting involved in or following cooperation activities^{xxv}. In addition, cross-border co-operation is influenced in every case by the nature of the relationships between the national states involved. For example, in the Russian case (one of the case studies in the *Exlinea* project), little support is given to cooperation on the central level. In periods of heightened political tension (as over the Russian memorial in Estonia, or Russia withholding gas supplies to the EU) the adverse effects on cross border co-operation can be very direct. Therefore, the potential removal of barriers does not necessarily guarantee a flourishing cross-border region and only a change in social practices and political attitudes can make regional projects reality^{xxvi}.

Furthermore, border regions face more obstacles as they are generally economic, geographic and political peripheries, poorly connected with the centres and unyielding borders with neighbouring states. While the U.S border region remains more prosperous than the Mexican border zone, it continued to lag behind the rest of the United States. Even in San Diego, the wealthiest of the U.S border cities, much of the job growth was in the service sector, where employees have a hard time finding affordable housing in the local market. The benefits of NAFTA led growth in the U.S border region, then, were not widely enough across the income groups for most residents to see an improvement in quality of life^{xxvii}.

What these examples reveal is that despite some positive indications of change, the overall picture of cross-border cooperation offers a very complex and fragmented outlook^{xxviii}. Cross-border co-operation policies in particular will not quickly reverse the economic and political marginality of border regions. The weakness of regional levels is compounded by severe financial constraints that often tend to reinforce dependence on central government agencies. As this white paper has revealed, the development of cross-border governance structures is not always welcomed by national governments. On the level of day-to day politics, differences in economic transformation and institutional modernization have tended to inhibit greater co-ordination of policies; while supporting cross-border interaction EU member states and the US part of the border are striving to establish conditions that will be most beneficial to their own constituents^{xxix}.

Policy relevant insights

Therefore, border regions reflect in their own way tensions related ongoing securitization and local needs. The ‘border factor’ still has a lot to do with and reducing spill over problems without valuing the potential of cross border cooperation. Therefore, the idea behind a comparison between Europe and the U.S is that border regions reflect common challenges yet have responded to those challenges in very different ways to address local and regional needs. It may be that successful responses to challenges in one border region may provide best practices cases that are useful in another region. What this research reveals is that despite the ignorance of the border, there are huge opportunities for the San Diego-Tijuana region in terms of economic, environmental and cultural cooperation. Related to this, this research suggests the following practical and policy relevant insights for a more enhanced cross border region:

Regional government and cooperation in the the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone

The slow progression of cross border cooperation and project funding opportunities are very much related to the weakness of local and regional government. This is the case for institutions in general in border regions both along the European Union external border and along the U.S. Mexican border^{xxx}.

In the San Diego-Tijuana region, there have been increasing efforts by the local government and administration to enhance involvement with the Tijuana region since the mid 1980’s. In 1986, the City Council of San Diego established the department of bi national affairs that was created to coordinate issues with trans-border implications. In the following year the County of San Diego established the Department of Trans border Affairs mainly to gain knowledge in key trans- border issues and establishing bi-national projects. On another level SANDAG was established and has over the years been active in establishing enhanced cross border linkages. However, a thorough institutionalization of cross border cooperation on the

regional level was tempered by financial restrictions and political disinterest/unwillingness that often tend to depend on central government agencies which have other priorities in particular in times of budget restraints and elections. Sometimes, but not exclusively, governments have little interest in promoting and supporting cross border cooperation.

The example of the U.S. Mexican border reveals that it is not always the border that hinders cooperation. To a certain extent, it is also due to agencies and actors who lack the understanding of Mexico, the significant difference in systems, expectations, habits and the complexity in establishing sustainable links. Oftentimes it is perceived relatively easy to establish agreements but the challenges set in when the first efforts are made. This is further complicated by the political marginalization of San Diego's Latino community, in terms of political integration. Although there were Latino's in key positions in local politics, the community has lacked a strong political organization that can further strengthen the institutionalization of cross border cooperation^{xxx1}.

Challenges for cooperation in the the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone

To an extent, the process of cross-border cooperation mainly contributes to small-scale projects both in the European and San-Diego-Tijuana examples. Unlike port, rail, and airport development, which are locally controlled by Caltrans and the port/airport authority, border trade corridor projects depend on federal and state approval for funding and other decisions in the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone. Port-of-entry projects are even more complicated, requiring Mexican government approval. Driven by trade growth, trade corridor projects in San Diego have become a major federal and state funding priority. In particular, SANDAG has a good track record of building regional consensus and speaking with a unified voice. In 2008 San Diego's border infrastructure projects garnered \$400 million for the state's \$2 billion intended to improve infrastructure in the trade corridor^{xxxii}. On the Mexican side of the border, there is also a strong interest in improving the region's highway system and border crossing. Congesting is growing, however, Mexico's centralized political structures leave little space for local authority and financing to border related infrastructure projects^{xxxiii}. This relates to similar problems in the EU where the lack of financial resources hinders participation in EU funded programs as local governments have not yet found a way to develop expertise in the development, management and monitoring of cross-border projects.

Obstacles of more structural nature like few border crossing points, etc. and new visa regimes as well as coordination between the two sides have made the development, maintenance and expansion of cross-border networks and projects difficult. In the San Diego-Tijuana cross border region itself, the most immediate transportation bottleneck is the highway system to and from the border like the Interstate 5. Customs controls are very thorough and no border crossing stations that discriminate in favor of local traffic. Border communities must "compete" with interregional traffic flows that congest the existing cross points^{xxxiv}. Growth in cross border trade

since the rise of NAFTA in 1994 has resulted in a dramatic increase in truck-traffic^{xxxv}. Furthermore, there is no cross-border public transportation to speak of despite the need for such alternative transportation. Here cooperation is explained in terms of increased mobility and not so much in terms of an increased and enhanced region building.

The Environment in the the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone

Environmental issues are a latent problem in all of the case study areas, primarily because of pollution, development and a lack of cooperation. The San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone is one of the world's most important areas in terms of biodiversity with important and sometimes endangered plant and animal species that rely on unpredictable and oversubscribed water resources, at the same time; it is also a focal point of rapid urbanization and border security issues^{xxxvi}. Because of intense development, including urbanization and agriculture, many natural systems and species of native flora and fauna are under stress or threat of extinction^{xxxvii}. Currently, a lack of data and control mechanisms exacerbated environmental problems at the border^{xxxviii}.

However, a series of problems led to an increase awareness of common solutions across the border. Water pollution from industrial and urban development plagued the border and led to health issues for border residents. Although Tijuana began to upgrade its sewage treatment in 2002 and developed a twenty year master plan, keeping up with the needs of the rapidly growing urban population was nearly impossible^{xxxix}. Another problem is the poor air quality which emerged as an important health issue as twin cities increased in size. Foul air north and south of the border was generated by automobiles, smelting plants and other businesses, and agriculture. Exhaust of the vehicle fleet everywhere along the border was primarily cause of air pollution, although other factors contributed. Everywhere along the border, the sale of older, polluting vehicles from U.S. border cities to Mexican border cities is a common practice^{xl}.

The U.S and Mexican governments initiated a series of bilateral programs and other measures to provide a comprehensive approach to the worsening of border environmental problems. One of the important focus points in the region is cross-border energy-related infrastructure to cope with the increasing energy use in the region. One innovative effort to protect connected areas of habitat is in San Diego County where the Multiple Species Conservation Program, negotiated among developers, land owners, environmentalists, and government officials, is in effect. There, protected areas and corridors of habitat that link the areas together are protected from development. However, the great challenge of binational programs remains the management of these programs in the future^{xli}. U.S and Mexican authorities have not been able to develop agreements to jointly manage the river basins, or watersheds that lie across the international boundary^{xlii}. After 9/11 the refocus to the border on security matters and not on the quality of life of the region resident's. Ironically, just as the capacity to address binational border environmental issues was increasing, federal resources for

the effort were decreasing^{xliii}. Most recently, one effort consisted of a succession of border environmental plans is the Border 2012 plan. Border 2012 incorporated specific goals for border environmental clean-up and established a series of measures to assess progress. Border 2012 has been particularly effective at engaging participation from both sides of the border and provides simultaneous interpretation and organizing support for meetings of regional task forces on water and air quality. These meetings are a critical forum for citizen participation and networking along and across the border. Border 2012 has also been crucial for the efforts of sister cities such as San Diego and Tijuana to develop joint emergency response plans for contingencies, such as chemical spills that occur in the border region^{xliiv}. The Border 2012 project resonates with many environmental projects along the European external borders. A good example in Europe is the Barcelona Convention for the protection of the Mediterranean. The 22 Contracting Parties to the Convention individually or jointly take all appropriate measures to protect and improve the Mediterranean marine environment in order to contribute to sustainable development.

The main aims of the Convention consist of:

- assessing and controlling pollution;
- carrying out the sustainable management of natural marine and coastal resources;
- integrating the environment into economic and social development;
- protecting the marine environment and coastal regions through action aimed at preventing and reducing pollution and, as far as possible, eliminating it, whether it is due to activities on land or at sea;
- protecting natural and cultural heritage;
- strengthening solidarity between countries bordering the Mediterranean; and
- contributing to improving quality of life

The Convention for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution was adopted in Barcelona on 16 February 1976 and amended on 10 June 1995. Over time, its mandate has been widened to include planning and the integrated management of the coastal region^{xliv}.



Figure 7: Tires in the Tijuana River Estuary

Economic cooperation in the the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone

The Tijuana-San Diego binational metropolitan area is the largest and most dynamic of the Mexican-U.S. border region and especially Tijuana's economy continues to depend to a large extent to its location on the border, while the San Diego economy depends less on its location on the border. Also, San Diego's economy is much bigger. But figures show that the two cities share an increasingly commingled workforce. More than 40 million people, 19 million passenger vehicles and almost 1 million commercial vehicles travel through the San Diego border crossings each year making it the busiest international border crossing in the world^{xlvi}. Some 8% of the workers of Tijuana actually are employed across the border in the San Diego region, and a large segment of the formal jobs in Tijuana directly depend on upon sales of the final products in the United States. San Diego not only depends on labor from Tijuana for parts of its service and construction sectors, but shoppers from Mexico are critical for the retail sector in the region^{xlvi}. In addition, a growing number of U.S. nationals live in the Tijuana region, where the cost of home ownership is significantly lower.

Despite these interdependencies, the city of San Diego has for a long time shown not much interest in deepening its (economic) relations with Tijuana/Mexico. The city continues to focus on its traditional core pillars like the military, the tourist industry and recently the

emerging bio-tech sector in the UCSD La Jolla/Sorrento Valley area. A recent survey conducted by the San Diego Foundation (the San Diego Foundation Regional Focus 2050) did not mention the border in a single question and reveals this limited interest.

One explanation might be the excessive border regulations that affect cross-border interaction in the economic sphere. Border agencies are to a great extent depended on orders from Washington bypassing local border concerns and perceptions^{xlvi}. The long lines and unpredictable waiting times to cross the border are now common, particularly in the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone. Statistics reveal that the individual northbound crossings at the San Ysidro Port of entry declined from 48,727,602 in 2003 to 30,590,858 in 2010, which is 37.2%. The decline of individual crossings at the Otay Mesa and Tecate Ports were both 33% in the same period^{xlix}. Security is also tightened for commercial vehicle crossings into the US. X-ray technology has been installed to scan each entering truck for unauthorized cargo. Large numbers of trailers are unloaded, and paperwork is more closely scrutinized. This raises the cost for shippers as well as adding to local air pollution problems. According to SANDAG, congestion and delays at border crossings between San Diego County and Baja California cost the U.S. and Mexican economies an estimated \$7.2 billion in foregone gross output and more than 62,000 jobs in 2007^l. Despite the delays at the border, there has been a steady growth in trade from \$19,384,772,659 in 2001 to \$26,194,141,520 in 2010 at the Otay Mesa port and \$71,551,437 in 2001 to \$144,367,395 in 2010 at San Ysidro Port of Entry^{li}.

San Ysidro Port of Entry - Northbound Individual Crossings						
Year	Total Individual Crossings	% Annual Change Total Individual Crossings	Total Passengers (Private Vehicles and Buses)	% Annual Change Total Passengers (Private Vehicles and Buses)	Pedestrians	% Annual Change Pedestrians
1998	39,644,307		32,734,925		6,909,382	
1999	42,005,306	6.0%	34,447,132	5.2%	7,558,174	9.4%
2000	39,351,555	-6.3%	31,809,105	-7.7%	7,542,450	-0.2%
2001	45,336,547	15.2%	33,900,601	6.6%	11,435,946	51.6%
2002	45,274,997	-0.1%	37,371,514	10.2%	7,903,483	-30.9%
2003	48,727,602	7.6%	40,425,492	8.2%	8,302,110	5.0%
2004	43,872,934	-10.0%	34,415,334	-14.9%	9,457,600	13.9%
2005	41,417,164	-5.6%	33,260,814	-3.4%	8,156,350	-13.8%
2006	40,740,621	-1.6%	32,929,007	-1.0%	7,811,614	-4.2%
2007	37,022,194	-9.1%	29,265,625	-11.1%	7,756,569	-0.7%
2008	33,310,098	-10.0%	26,020,236	-11.1%	7,289,862	-6.0%
2009	30,576,138	-8.2%	24,388,012	-6.3%	6,188,126	-15.1%
2010	30,590,858	0.0%	24,150,906	-1.0%	6,439,952	4.1%
	1998-2010					
	2003-2010	-37.2%		-40.26%		-22.43%
	2004-2010	-30.31%		-29.14%		34.57%
	2005-2010	-26.14%		-27.39%		-21.04%

Figure 8: Northbound Individual Crossings San Ysidro Port of Entry

In addition, and although statistics are scarcely available, it suggest that the total cost of “security tax” is enormous^{lii}. As a result, the transactions costs of anything beyond small-scale import-export activities are rather high even without customs and visa restrictions which further complicate the import-export activities. For example, one of the biggest limitations for fast mobility of trade is often not the trade itself, but the driver of the truck and all the screenings and paperwork involved. This has limited the degree to which direct investments or other entrepreneurial activities have taken place. In addition, labor restrictions and visa restrictions on the U.S side of the border do not allow for the development of more dynamic cross-border job markets; interestingly these are not always seen as a threat at the local/regional level as welfare policies and the complementarities of labor and investment demand often reduce competition for low paying jobs. On the U.S side this has resulted in large underground economy. The phrase “underground economy” is a term that refers to individuals and businesses that deal in cash and/or use other schemes to conceal their business activities. In doing so, they escape their true tax liability, responsibilities to employees, government licensing, regulatory and taxing agencies. It also is referred to as the shadow economy, tax fraud, cash pay, off-the-books, and payments under-the-table as is the case in the employment of undocumented workers.

As change comes slow, the Greater San Diego Chamber of Commerce is now recognizing the importance of San Diego’s location on the border and the benefits of its location and the potential markets across the border. One excellent example of the growing interest is the Otay Mesa-Mesa de Otay Binational Corridor Strategic Plan initiated by SANDAG, and the Tijuana city council. The plan promotes the creation or expansion of common employment clusters on both sides of the border and address future industrial land use supply and demand. The main issues focus on the implementation of the East Otay Mesa – Otay II Port of Entry and connecting road and on improvements to the existing Otay Mesa-Mesa de Otay Port of Entry. In addition, facilitate improvements to cross-border and regional public transportation services. A big achievement was the approval by the city of San Diego to support the building of a U.S terminal for the Tijuana airport. It also addresses the conservation of sensitive habitat and urban river corridors (e.g. Alamar River and Otay River watershed) and water quality collaboration with the U.S (the Border 2012 program, the binational air quality task force, and the San Diego County APCD in binational clean air efforts)^{liii}. Whereas in Europe strong cross-border city partnerships and similar cooperation vehicles have come into being, the Otay Mesa-Mesa de Otay Binational Corridor Strategic Plan might be the first step in creating a future strong cross-border city partnership.

The research in Europe pointed out that the external border regions are among the weakest and less advanced regions of the European Union. They have developed relatively low levels of cross border economic interaction with neighboring countries. Although East-West trade and investment in Europe have increased dramatically during the last years, border areas at the new EU frontier do not seem to participate as key players in this process. Evidence shows that performance in trade and investment is affected by the degree of institutional and

geographical proximity to the EU structures and markets. External border regions of the ‘old’ EU tend to have a better performance than external border regions of the ‘new’ EU and the non-EU countries where economic relations are often asymmetric. The inability of open borders to change the trade orientation is an indication that barriers at the borders and removing them are not symmetric actions in terms of expected market dynamics^{liv}.

This also explains the difficulties of bi-national city regions in Europe and the San-Diego/Tijuana region to translate cooperation ideas into reality through projects with visible regional impacts that enjoy popular interest. Many of the regional strategies and political projects developed are too ambitious and complex, overloading local capacities for action and lacking sufficient political goodwill and funding (this is both the case for Euroregions and the San Diego/Tijuana region). The difficulties for platforms like SANDAG in coordinating the activities and resources with various stakeholders are likely to continue hampering cross-border commerce in the years to come^{lv}.



Figure 9: Border delays are an obstacle for economic integration in the region

Civil Society in the the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone

Identification with cross-border cooperation projects is tenuous at best. Both in Europe and in the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone there is limited public interest in getting involved in cooperation activities. As a result, region-building/social capital processes and the strengthening of civil society have more to do with the selective networking of stakeholders. Local identities are overwhelmingly national in character and a sense of border identity does not exist. One of the few signs that indicate a sense of communication across the border is the Spanish language that is widely spoken across San Diego County. Furthermore, the private sector has for a long been rather hesitant to participate in co-operation agendas.

The lack of regional building suggests that the border operates too much as a formal instrument. Regional interests are seen to be neglected in favour of national concerns and it is here where policy making has, to date, proved to be inadequate both in Europe and the U.S. There appears to be a lack of communication between the formal and informal arenas. Furthermore, the main common denominator in the dialogue between is seen to be security. Consequently, illegal immigration, human trafficking, terrorism and cross-border organised crime often crowd out other social concerns. More serious, however, were two general contradictions in EU policy which affected region building in all the borderlands and constitute major problems. Firstly, there is a widespread perception that many funding sources are designed to suit the needs of state agencies and do not correspond to the needs and capacities of local civil society organizations^{lvi}. For example Casa Familiar in San Ysidro works with a very limited budget and recently the resources for volunteer work has dried up on both sides on the border, even philanthropy resources have been constantly decreasing over the past years. In consequence only a rather narrow range can be effectively involved in cross border cooperation. For example in Europe only a few strong actors have skills in managing bi national projects. This was confirmed by the cross-sectional analysis in all eight project borderlands of the *Eudimensions* project. In addition, there is a general pattern of many smaller civil society organizations not bothering to apply for funding because of the complicated nature of the programmes and their own lack of appropriate management and language skills or difficulties in finding suitable cross border partners.

Policy considerations resulting from the comparison

Results from the research suggest a strong fragmentation in terms of cross border co-operation along the EU external border and the U.S Mexican border, in particular the San Diego-Tijuana region. Most of cross-border activities are project-based with limited duration and sustainability often defined by international organizations or existing funding opportunities^{lvii}. Whereas dense networks of cooperation based on historical ties operating in the Finnish-Russian, Polish-

Ukrainian and Hungarian-Ukrainian borderlands, more limited and cautious co-operation exists between Turkey and Greece. Cross border co-operation in Europe has developed as a means to communicate and manage issues that affect both sides of the border. Nevertheless, despite some positive indications of change, the overall picture of local and regional cross-border cooperation along the EU's external boundaries offers a very complex picture^{lviii}. Complexities of the various programs are designed to suit the needs of state agencies rather than local actors^{lix}. For example, the EU's Cohesion and Regional Policy 2007-2013 has an operating budget of \$408 Million with a clear focus on distributing aid to poorer areas of the EU-27. By comparison, the total budget of the entire European Neighborhood Policy (the EU's official external policy) for the same period will be about \$19 billion. In addition, and most surprisingly, out of this amount very few funds will be allocated to cross-border and interregional co-operation with neighbouring states. Ironically, over \$2,5 billion will be dedicated to border security and technology studies within European research programmes, more than the entire Cross Border Cooperation budget planned for the European Neighborhood Policy^{lx}.

This is not different in the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone where cooperation from the U.S perspective is increasingly explained in terms of **increased mobility in an otherwise closed and secured border zone**. Here the goals of cross-border cooperation have not much to do with the establishment of conditions for social, economic and institutional co-development, but more with efficient borders to minimize further economic damage to the U.S and regulate and manage the flows of people and trade. The specific challenge facing cross border cooperation in creating a common "political space" might be the eventual outcome in Europe; in the U.S it is more about defending America from hazards.

This message is rather clear in the proposal to "upgrade" the San Ysidro port of entry which includes increased emphasis on managing car traffic^{lxi}. This latest proposal is far away from the old and famous plan put forward by Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard in 1974. This privately sponsored report, entitled *Temporary Paradise*, proposed not only "green" agricultural and recreational uses around a border crossing of multiple access points, but an international airport shared by both Tijuana and San Diego, coordination of water usage and other natural resources, and joint cultural institutions including an "Interamerican University^{lxiii}". However, as this white paper has revealed, the removal of barriers does not in and of itself guarantee the emergence of a flourishing cross-border region. There are signs of optimism, on the informal level there are examples of small changes, for example, the active bicycle community in Tijuana is supported by its counterpart in San Diego and together they organize the critical mass rides both in San Diego and Tijuana. Also, with the rise of internet blogs, there has been a large blogging scene on the food culture in Tijuana influencing the mainstream media and broadening the view on the border region.

So despite significant advances in many policy areas, much remains to be done in terms of regional cross border cooperation in both border regions. Several issues and challenges that can be improved are related to effective planning and a crucial aspect is making more funds

available that allow truly bi-national projects and organizations to utilize their funds. Funding should reflect the reality of the border region; if authentic border projects are to be undertaken in a bi-national manner^{lxiii}. Based on the findings in the San Diego-Tijuana region and experience of the research done for *Exlined*^{lxiv}, the following policy recommendations can be made for the San Diego Tijuana region:

- Increased financial support for setting up administrative mechanisms for active cross border cooperation is needed. Institutions in border regions with limited funds and specialized knowledge in the development of cross-border networks are currently limited in their opportunities. Crucially, local authorities usually lack a strategy for using cross border cooperation funds. Moreover, the cooperation of regional bodies is often too formally structured, which looks good on paper but does not translate into specific projects.
- Promote the co-ownership of projects by a wider range of regionally based organizations and not merely elites. In addition, it would be important to lower the bureaucratic obstacles for smaller projects of a person-to-person nature and that are user-friendly.
- Civilizational discourses that distinguish between the U.S and Mexico in terms of a hierarchy of values and societal development should be avoided (third world vs. third world discourses).
- The reduction of economic barriers, such as the mutual recognition of qualifications and restrictions on the freedom of business activities could greatly facilitate cross-border retailing and services. Under such conditions, competitiveness and economic growth could be achieved the exploitation of niche strategies. This means that an increased mobility is desired in the otherwise secured border. A rethinking is needed and smart border technology could facilitate increasing mobility.
- Abolishing political and legal barriers, such as those inherent in labor market and foreign resident legislation, would allow for greater socio-economic mobility, innovation transfer and flexibility. An open and transparent dialogue on the needs of the California labor market is needed without falling back to political rhetoric and ideal situations. The real needs are only expressed by taking the large underground economy into consideration.
- It is perhaps best to build up open networks before formalizing cooperation. Policies should reflect this. Learn from innovative networks that use social media and other outlets for community building and social awareness.
- Short-term demands for visible results must be reconciled with the necessity of long-term strategies. Cooperation approaches should include both objectives, dedicating resources to a limited number of large projects that attract public attention and interest while promoting more complex initiatives that require longer preparation and programming periods. This should also be reflected in policies, allowing for more flexible, multi-term programming of development projects.

- Exploit where possible the economics of urban networks. In the San Diego-Tijuana region this can include the redeveloping of political and functional relationships between public agencies, universities, firms, etc. Such networks could also participate in infrastructure investments and the promotion of economic development.
- Economic actors especially from the San Diego side need to be more directly involved in cross border cooperation. Business opportunities are seen as essential to more responsive cross-border cooperation.
- Different (and very legitimate) perceptions of the role of cross border cooperation have to be reconciled: for example the view emphasizes the regional development and economic aspect of cooperation not in a “one size fits all” manner.
- The degree of institutionalization must be negotiated and carefully considered. Modernization is an important goal but it should not mean an unnecessary complication of cooperation by overstressing administrative/legal capacities before these can be built up.
- The highly secured border is currently a big barrier for any type of mobility and cooperation. Therefore a change in mindset is required to rethink security in terms of increased mobility and not so much in creating obstacles.
- An increased cooperation between the Department of Homeland Security and local/regional bodies is needed in order to facilitate the increase in mobility. Communication needs to be improved and currently the share of information is lacking. This creates tensions and frustration when it comes to the initiation of cross border cooperation and projects. Ideally, cross border cooperation should have a multi-layer structure, consisting of regional and national (central) representatives. In general, both Homeland Security and local/regional bodies are independently operating with their own decision-making structures. A multilevel structure might enable priorities as well as other relevant information and knowledge to be communicated effectively.
- Potentially, senior governments could have a vital role in providing a supportive framework for co-operation; for example by co-coordinating available resources and promoting a regional idea and bridging cultural difference
- Cross-border conferences and (in)formal networks of planning and economic development agencies are excellent and highly valuable forms of cooperation. For example, SANDAG was in the first place established to facilitate regional planning and serves as a forum for decision making on issues of regional concern and encourages regional leaders to make interregional and bi-national concerns an integral part of regional planning^{lxv}. These informal “networks” focus attention on specific issues and, in particular, on the identification, financing and management of key projects. One of these examples is the creating of COBRO. Over the years COBRO was so successful in demonstrating the importance of looking at bi-national, interregional planning issues that SANDAG decided one of its five policy advisory subcommittees to trans boundary planning^{lxvi}.

- Link regional plans together/Coordinate plans for example the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone and the Otay Mesa/Mesa de Otay regional corridor.
- The Creation of a cross border forum

Conclusion

It is without a doubt that border regions are facing big challenges in today's world. It is an inescapable fact that our global village is characterized by walls that one cannot climb and by streets that one had better not cross^{lxvii}. The strong focus on security with more fences, more control, ever tightening security regulations are here to stay and will not be reversed anytime soon. In a perfect world there would be no need for a triple fence, but the extreme focus on security after 9/11 has proved that completely closed and secured borders are harmful and still porous. Borders rarely make clear and simple divisions between or among peoples. Goods, services, and people flow across borders in spite of the division they imply^{lxviii}. Within the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone the cost of the securitization of the border has had a chilling effect on cross border cooperative morale and goodwill in the region and a broadly shared vision on border region development and cross border cooperation as such is needed^{lxix}. Currently the political willingness is not strong enough and policies are ineffective to create needed solutions that somewhat counter the narrow focus on security.^{lxx} There are signs that the Department of Homeland Security is slowly recognizing that an increased mobility and a change in mindset is necessary. We have to note that the focus on increased mobility is different than sustainable and long-lasting cross border cooperation. Whereas mobility is often inspired by unilateral economic interest, cooperation is inspired by the establishment of enduring bi national networks, partnerships and projects.

What this white paper has made clear is that the border is first and foremost a struggle over meaning with many representations and explanations. The explanation for ever tightening security by the Department of Homeland Security is that it protects America from hazards. The explanation by cross border agencies and actors in the San Diego Region and the Tijuana Tecate and Playas de Rosarito Metropolitan Zone is given in by the need to address common problems and benefit from mutual strengths and opportunities. The question is not whether we accept the border to be ignored, but how to move cooperation forward. For cooperation 2.0 to succeed the implementation of shared projects and visions is an important next step. The challenge for the near future is to meet somewhere in between through increased awareness, enhanced communication and a better coordination. Common struggles, economic challenges, environmental issues and cultures do not stop at borders. In fact, Europe's border regions show many similarities with the San Diego-Tijuana border region as this white paper has revealed. The stronger focus for a more inclusive border in Europe combined with a decent security could set a geopolitical counterexample for the San Diego-Tijuana region. Hence, a final recommendation can be made what works in Europe:

- In Europe there is a political willingness to cooperate beyond the external borders, providing supra-national support for institutionalizing cross border cooperation
- There is a strong political promotion of the border regions and Cross Border Cooperation (this is the key to raise awareness and promote people to people contact)
- Successes in making the border more efficient. Easier crossings, better infrastructure, less of a fortress.
- A better authorization of Visa/Work Regulations to facilitate cross border workers.

SANDAG is already paving the way for what enhanced cooperation in the future could look like.

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