

**UNIVERSITÉ DE LA GRANDE REGION/UNIVERSITÄT DER GROßREGION**

***EVALUATION REPORT***

*30 April 2012*

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## **1. Introduction**

This report is the result of the evaluation of the Université de la Grande Région / Universität der Großregion (UniGR), a cross-border network of universities located in the French Community of Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg. The European University Association (EUA) conducted this evaluation at the request of the network partners and as part of EUA's consultancy activities.

### **1.1 The scope of the evaluation exercise**

As agreed in the terms of reference, the aim of this evaluation was three-fold:

- 1) To contribute to UniGR's strategic and sustainable developments
- 2) To identify ways in which cooperation among the universities could be sustained and increased
- 3) To improve international visibility through a communication strategy

Thus, this report assesses progress in relation to the set objectives and provides a range of recommendations to strengthen future cooperation.

### **1.2 The methodological steps**

This evaluation included the following steps:

- EUA appointed a group of experts. The evaluation team included:
  - Luc Weber, former rector, Université de Genève, Switzerland, chair
  - Patricia Pol, former vice-president, Université Paris-Est, France, co-chair
  - Lluís Ferrer, former rector, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain
  - Sijbolt Noorda, president, Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), Netherlands
  - Andrée Sursock, senior adviser, European University Association (EUA), Belgium, coordinator
  - Lewis Purser, director of academic affairs, Irish Universities Association (IUA), Ireland, co-coordinator
- A Self-Evaluation Report was produced by UniGR, according to a template provided by EUA. It was delivered on 15 December 2011, four weeks before the first set of visits.
- Programmes for the first and second site visits were developed in consultation with UniGR staff (cf. Annex).
- The first site visits were conducted as follows:

- A first team of three experts visited the Université du Luxembourg and the Universität des Saarlandes. Technische Universität Kaiserslautern and Universität Trier joined together for their own separate meetings at Universität des Saarlandes. These visits took place between 16 and 19 January 2012.
- A second team of three experts visited the Universities of Liège and Lorraine. These visits took place between 24 and 27 January 2012.
- Following the first visits, the teams exchanged their extensive meetings notes. In addition, the evaluation team asked UniGR for additional documentation such as: breakdown of major expenditures; minutes of meetings; quantitative data on UniGR main activities, including mobility. The Terms of Reference specified that UniGR would send a newly drafted strategic plan between the two visits. These documents were received by 15 February 2012 as agreed. Furthermore, some documents were collected during the visits (e.g., a strategic note written by one of the presidents and discussed by the UniGR Council<sup>1</sup>, the list of cooperation agreements between the Université de Metz and German institutions, etc.) and information was gathered from the UniGR website.
- A second visit by the whole evaluation team was conducted at the Université du Luxembourg, with representatives from all network partners in attendance. The visit took place between 29 February and 2 March 2012, and concluded with an oral presentation of key findings and recommendations to an audience of about 20 participants.
- This report is based on information gathered during all these steps.

### **1.3 General observations on the self-evaluation phase and the site visits**

The UniGR Steering Committee led the self-evaluation process. Two project officers were responsible for coordinating the complex process of involving partners who are spatially distributed. Module leaders and co-leaders were responsible for determining the scope of data required for each module. A draft was then assembled and discussed with a range of actors within UniGR who contributed to the analysis of strengths, weaknesses and recommendations.

The self-evaluation process was reported as having brought to the surface constructive criticism and contributed to strengthening trust among partners, some of whom had been shy to voice their reservations about specific aspects of the project.

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the term president as a generic to refer to the top leadership position in a university.

The Self-Evaluation Report (p.8) mentions several positive aspects of the self-evaluation process such as the opportunity to discuss UniGR's future and the quick consensus achieved on main issues and diagnostics. The main difficulties faced were: time pressure, particularly with a spatially distributed group, and struggle in responding to the EUA guidelines fully because UniGR is a project rather than an institution.

The Self-Evaluation Report – particularly its annexes and the supplementary documentation – was helpful to the evaluation team although it was very concise and lacked quantitative data. It was descriptive rather than analytical, perhaps because the evaluation exercise came relatively early in the life of the project and the responsibility for writing the self-evaluation report was in the hands of junior project officers. Similarly, the document outlining the future strategic orientations was very sketchy.

The site visits allowed the evaluation team to meet a broad range of actors: the institutional leadership teams, administrative and academic staff, students and political actors. The discussions were frank, honest and productive.

The organisation of the two visits proved fruitful: the first set of site visits was useful in collecting factual information on how each institution views the network and its achievements. The second visit was focused on UniGR's future and revealed the extent to which the partners – at different hierarchical levels – had been variously engaged in the project.

## **2. UniGR: an overview**

### **2.1 UniGR: A cross-border network of universities**

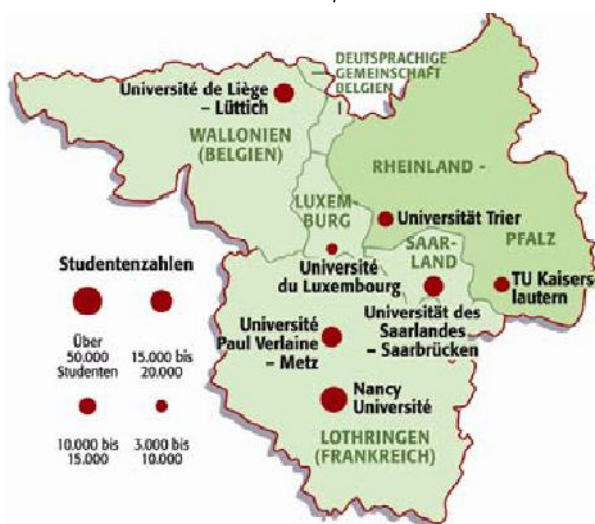
In 2008, seven universities of the Greater Region (Großregion or Grande Région) created UniGR, based on a history of cooperation that started in 1984 through the *Charta of University Cooperation in the Greater Region*. The network was given impetus at the 2007 Summit of the Greater Region. Funding was provided in 2008, by *Interreg Programme IVA Großregion/GrandeRégion* and the Greater Region (6.5 million EUR) to develop several strands of activities, involving all seven partners (cf. Section 2.2), over a three and a half year period<sup>2</sup>. The universities initially included in this network were:

- Université de Liège, Belgium
- Université Paul Verlaine, Metz, France

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<sup>2</sup> Funding was recently extended for an additional year.

- Nancy Université, an umbrella organisation for the following three universities: Université Henri Poincaré-Nancy 1, Université Nancy 2 and the Institut polytechnique de Lorraine (INPL), Nancy, France
- Université du Luxembourg, Luxembourg
- Universität des Saarlandes, Saarland, Germany
- Universität Trier, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany
- Technische Universität Kaiserslautern, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany



Thus, the network includes universities that are located in four countries and five administrative entities: Wallonia, Lorraine, two German Länder and Luxembourg. UniGR represents 115 000 students and 6 000 academic staff. The goal of the network is to create a cross-border higher education region that would facilitate mobility, create research critical mass, develop cross-cultural understanding and linguistic skills and deliver cross-border degree awards. It is important to note that UniGR is a project rather than an institution and has no legal status.

Two important changes occurred during the life of the *Interreg* grant:

- Technische Universität Kaiserslautern and Universität Trier were associate members at the beginning of the project and became full members in July 2010.
- On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012, the four French universities merged to create the Université de Lorraine.

When evaluating UniGR's activities, this report focuses on the pre-merger composition of the network. The recommendations for the next phase, however, take into account the newly created Université de Lorraine.

## 2.2 UniGR in its political context

There are several features of the political context that are worth mentioning briefly:

- The Greater Region is a political construction that was encouraged by the European Union (EU). Depending on the interlocutor, the boundaries of the region correspond to the heart of the ancient Carolingian Empire, the heart of the EU or a miniature EU that allows small-scale experimentation from which the EU could learn. Whatever rationales are used these are generally strictly political and seem relatively remote to the general public in the area. As a result, political identification with the Greater Region has yet to be forged or widely shared.
- Politically, the Greater Region include partners with different levels of powers and competencies: a State (Luxembourg); two German Länder; two regions – Wallonia and Lorraine – the latter enjoying much less powers given the centralised political and administrative structures for higher education in France. These different levels of competences complicate and slow down the political construction and above all its operational powers.
- Coal mining and the steel industry bind the region in a shared economic and industrial history; it has been in a terminal state of decline for decades, with serious economic, social and environmental consequences. Although there are a few regional economic projects, there does not seem to be yet an overall regional vision (although the evaluation team was told that one is about to be launched). Despite the existence of a Social and Economic Council, a systematic integration of the regional business and industry partners in the political construction of the Greater Region seems to be weak. The website of the Greater Region emphasises the size of the region and the diversity within:

La Grande Région constitue à bien des égards un espace composite. Les problèmes économiques qu'affrontent les régions industrielles et minières en reconversion, présentes dans quatre états, y ont créé une certaine communauté d'intérêt et fait naître des projets communs, comme le Pôle Européen de Développement du secteur Longwy (France), Rodange (Luxembourg), Athus (Belgique). Mais la localisation de la Région et ses dimensions, plus de 400 km d'ouest en est, de 350 km du nord au sud, en font surtout un espace de contact, associant des logiques différentes<sup>3</sup>.

Die Großregion mit ihren über elf Millionen Einwohnern stellt in vielerlei Hinsicht einen uneinheitlichen Raum dar. Die wirtschaftlichen Probleme, mit denen in allen vier Staaten die im Umbruch befindlichen Industrie- und Bergbauregionen konfrontiert sind, haben eine gewisse "Interessengemeinschaft" geschaffen sowie zur Erarbeitung gemeinsamer Projekte geführt, wie beispielsweise den "Europäischen Entwicklungspol

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<sup>3</sup> Home page: <http://www.granderegion.net/fr/grande-region/index.html>

des Sektors Longwy (Frankreich), Rodange (Luxemburg), Athus (Belgien)". Aber die Lage der Region sowie ihre Grösse - mehr als 400 km von Osten nach Westen und mehr als 350 km von Norden nach Süden - machen sie zu einem Raum der Kontakte, in dem unterschiedliche Denkweisen zusammenfließen.

Today, the Luxembourg financial platform provides a unique example of economic vitality following a painful post-industrialisation period. None of the other Greater Region partners have yet fully recovered from their economic scars. The changing economic and social reality in these peripheral regions has led to important flows of cross-border workers, with about 120 000 workers commuting across a border within the Greater Region on a daily basis, 90 000 to Luxembourg alone<sup>4</sup>.

However, the various geographical components of the Greater Region share a common destiny, which should justify academic, political and economic cooperation. Thus, effective university coordination could be a driver for the redevelopment of the region.

### **2.3 UniGR in its higher education context**

With respect to the higher education institutions in the Greater Region, several aspects are worth highlighting:

- UniGR groups universities of different sizes (5 000 students in Luxembourg vs. 52 000 in Lorraine) and organisational structures, with different histories, languages and cultures, and a variety of relationships to their political authorities. With the exception of the Université du Luxembourg, all other institutions are located at the periphery of their respective national boundaries.
- The inclusion of these seven universities into UniGR bypasses other existing higher education institutions in the region (about 90) as well as other research organisations. However, all the major disciplinary fields are represented within UniGR.
- The long and deep history of bilateral relations between French and German universities predates UniGR, and some of these have been folded into it.
- The network is evolving within a rapidly changing environment. To list a few recent or foreseen changes: the merger of the universities in Lorraine (which may distract from UniGR for at least a year); the political wish in Wallonia to

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. However, UniGR reports that the number of cross-border workers to Luxembourg alone has increased to 150 000 since the Greater Region website was last updated.



restructure the higher education landscape by regrouping the *hautes écoles* (higher education colleges) around the universities – a construct that is unfamiliar to German universities; the forthcoming move of the Université du Luxembourg to the Belval campus, on the French border; and perhaps most importantly, the requirement for each institution to be more strategic and to develop a strong profile, thus requiring the skilful management of cooperation and competition.

### 3. Analysis of the first phase

The following sections examine the mission, activities, governance and achievements of UniGR. A concluding section identifies aspects requiring further attention. The evaluation approach is grounded in the philosophy of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), an independent service of the European University Association (EUA). IEP is a formative programme, focused on improvement. Its evaluation is guided by four, deceptively simple questions, which ensure that the exercise is mission-driven and tailored to the institution at hand:

- What is the institution trying to do and why?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

Section 3 of this report outlines UniGR's answers to these questions, as observed and synthesised by the evaluation team. It is followed by the evaluation team's analysis in Section 4 and recommendations in Section 5.

#### 3.1 Mission

The Self-Evaluation Report states that UniGR's overall mission is "to initiate a cross-border Higher Education and Research Area in the Greater Region and to develop sustainable solutions to facilitate cross-border cooperation in all fields." (p. 5)

#### 3.2 Activities

As mentioned earlier (cf. 1.1), UniGR developed a set of activities, grouped under five modules. Each module has been coordinated by a university, in association with a second one, and supported by all partner universities. These modules and their objectives, are presented in the self-evaluation report (pp. 5-6) as follows:

- *Governance and marketing*, coordinated by Universität des Saarlandes, in association with the Université de Liège: "To manage the project towards a sustainable university confederation" and "To develop a corporate identity by communicating the diversity, attractiveness and excellence of its partner universities."

- *Mobility*, coordinated by the Université du Luxembourg in association with the Université Paul Verlaine-Metz: "To improve the conditions of and promote simplified student, staff and researcher mobility and to reduce administrative and financial mobility barriers."
- *Education*, coordinated by the Université Paul Verlaine-Metz in association with the Universität des Saarlandes: "To promote the educational offer of all partner universities; to facilitate cross-border studies; to develop new joint programmes; to inform high school target groups about the study opportunities in the Greater Region."
- *Research*, coordinated by Nancy Université in association with the Université du Luxembourg: "To develop cross-border cooperation in research" and "To give an international dimension to doctoral education and share infrastructures."
- *Opening*, coordinated by the Université de Liège in association with Nancy Université: "To anchor the network of the Greater Region and to create partnerships within and beyond the Greater Region" and "To improve and advance cross-border knowledge and cooperation in Intellectual Property Rights Issues and entrepreneurship."

### 3.3 Governance

The governance of the network consists of the following organisational structures:

The UniGR Council includes: the presidents or rectors of the seven universities, a political representative of each of the five administrative entities, and two students representing the Student Advisory Board. The council meets four times a year, twice without the political representatives. To facilitate mutual understanding, the discussions are assisted with simultaneous interpretation. The Council is responsible for setting the strategic objectives and monitoring their implementation. The presidency of the Council has been rotating every six months. Starting in April 2012, the rotation will be longer: one to two years.

The responsibility for executing the Council's decisions lies with the steering committee, which is composed of two members of each institution's senior leadership team and the project managers located in each institution.

Expert Committees gather administrative specialists from each institution to feed into the various modules described above.

The Student Advisory Board includes up to three representatives from each institution. Its role is advisory to the UniGR Council. It is also involved in promoting UniGR among students and participates in the UniGR Expert Committees.

Twenty project officers, distributed across the seven institutions, implement the activities and are coordinated by a project manager located at the Universität des Saarlandes.

### 3.4 UniGR's achievements

So far, the main achievement of UniGR is the good expertise that has been gained in dealing with the administrative challenges posed by cross-border cooperation notably in respect of student mobility. These challenges include the relative paucity of multilingual speakers, differences in academic calendars, difficulties in the recognition of periods of study abroad, and suitable cross-border transportation solutions for students and staff. Despite these challenges, which were – by far – not all overcome, some degree of additional mobility was achieved although this had been flagged as UniGR's top priority<sup>5</sup>. It is important to note, however, that many interlocutors noted that students were not very interested in mobility and if they were, they preferred to go to destinations others than within the Greater Region.

Trust has been developing at different levels. The presidents have been meeting on a regular basis to discuss current and future forms of cooperation. Trust has also developed among the project officers and other staff (such as the heads of communication, international offices, libraries) who have learnt to work together and have come to understand one another better. Intercultural skills have been developed among UniGR's active participants, which will prove essential for further cooperation.

The students who sit on the Student Advisory Board were generally positive about the project, although ordinary students did not always know about UniGR or the Greater Region.

Successful events have been organised and were appreciated by those who took part. These include the *European doctoriales 2011*, the UniGR Autumn School, a *Cross-border Student Day* (organised by the Student Advisory Board), UGR/UNISALL Young Researchers' Day, Sciconomy Conference, five scientific workshops (in biotechnology, building material, mathematics, soft matters, virology) that attracted a total of 250 researchers, and two cultural events.

UniGR has established two important inventories. The educational offer across all member universities has now been posted on the web in an interactive database. Further plans are afoot to add information and tools that would complete the database and allow some additional interactivity with the users, thus ensuring that it responds to the students' needs. Much energy has been spent establishing the list of expensive scientific equipment available within UniGR and the conditions under

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<sup>5</sup> *Université de la Grande Région, Rapport d'activités 2009-2010* (p. 15) refers to mobility as the "keystone" of the project (*clé de voute*)

which the UniGR research community could share them. The reciprocal use of libraries is now possible. Fifteen joint, double or triple degree programmes are available (all existed prior to UniGR), involving about 550 students.

Following a call for proposals, seventeen pilot activities have been selected, of which sixteen aim at developing joint educational offers or transborder research projects: combined, these involve the participation of nearly 240 academic staff, 170 doctoral students and 40 students. One administrative pilot involves 10 administrative staff.

Joint communication tools have been created, with a coherent and effective graphic line. These include: a logo, a website, stationary and various products (mugs, bags, posters, etc.).

Finally, UniGR is starting to leverage the existence of the network in order to gain international visibility. It is now participating in educational fairs in the Grande Region and beyond. In 2011, a UniGR delegation visited Sofia and Bucharest for a meeting with Bulgarian and Romanian university representatives (117) to discuss how cooperation can be developed.

### **3.5 UniGR: a learning process...**

Thus, there has been progress in setting up the foundation for cooperation and many of the pilot activities hold effective academic potential. The sections below present a set of observations, which highlight aspects of the project that require further development or attention.

#### **3.5.1 Objectives**

When examining how the UniGR objectives are expressed – whether in the strategic documents and the Self-Evaluation Report, or on the UniGR website and in the ways the various actors express them – the inconsistency in the wordings of objectives cannot be overlooked. It is presented variously as a project to increase mobility, to promote research cooperation, or a miniature of the Bologna Process.

Furthermore, it is important to note four aspects of the objectives as follows:

- They are rather broad and do not include any milestones or indicators.
- They are not sufficiently persuasive to convince students and academic staff to give priority to UniGR partners. When researchers seek partners, proximity is not a decisive selection criterion; rather, they look for the most suitable ones. Mobile students prefer to go further away than the Greater Region, with the exception of the Luxembourg students who actually favour neighbouring institutions in order to minimise disruption to their lives during their obligatory semester “abroad”.

- They are defined too narrowly in academic terms: particularly, the development of the Greater Region does not appear as a central objective of UniGR even although a vast majority (perhaps up to 90%) of graduates will work or seek to work in the Greater Region. What reference there is to the Greater Region is idealistic – at times, romantic – due perhaps to the frailty of the Greater Region’s political identity and its lack of economic project, neither of which provides a firm anchor for UniGR.
- They are not yet central to each institution’s strategy. Thus, in examining the place of UniGR in each university, it is clear that the project is an add-on rather than a priority strategic aim of the institutions involved.

### **3.5.2 Governance**

There are two aspects of the UniGR governance worth noting:

- In its current first phase, UniGR sought to identify the main administrative obstacles to mobility and cooperation; its specific governance structure was set up to remove these obstacles. This led to an overemphasis on administrative aspects and – to an extent – to handing over the leadership of UniGR to the project officers.
- In addition, UniGR’s collegial culture at each hierarchical level (Council, Steering Committee, project officers), conflict avoidance and a rotating presidency (every 6 months) have not been conducive to making difficult choices and strong commitments.

### **3.5.3 The module structure**

It was probably a good idea to launch the project through the five-module structure but it is time to move away from this because – despite the existence of the Steering Committee – it has led to a fragmentation of responsibilities and five silos.

In addition, there is lack of clarity concerning the functions of different committees, and the role of different categories of staff in the leadership and management of the modules: the Council is a mixed body, with political actors in attendance at half the meetings; the Steering Committee includes some vice presidents but the remaining ones are not involved equally and did not meet regularly, if at all.

Finally, the lack of hands-on management and clear reporting lines reinforced the administrative rather than the academic aspects of the project. Committed junior project officers, carrying an enormous responsibility and with a great deal of autonomy, ran the project. Their lack of experience led them sometimes to ignore resources at hand. Thus, the Expert Committees were not always consulted when needed.

### **3.5.4 Academic activities**

It is very difficult to judge the added value of UniGR because of the history of prior bilateral or multilateral cooperation in the region. UniGR can certainly be seen as a natural extension of prior cooperation. The most challenging to extend, however, seem to be the French-German partnerships probably because they are the most mature. UniGR introduced a new configuration for cooperation in the Greater Region but it has at times been problematic to include new members into existing partnerships, and the French-German partnerships focus the attention and energy of those involved directly.

Although, as mentioned above, there was a call for proposals, the involvement of academic staff and students has been low (with some exceptions). This again, is **certainly** partly due to the recent nature of the UniGR project.

## **4. Recommendations for the next phase**

In the evaluation team's view, UniGR is at a crossroads and should decide among three options:

- Return to bilateral or trilateral partnerships and, in effect, forget about UniGR as a collective project involving all partners at similar levels of participation.
- Continue as is, with the associated risk of losing momentum, particularly, if – as has been decided – the project will continue with only one dedicated staff member in each institution at a modest level of self-funding (80 thousand EUR per institution). This is considered modest in view of the current funding level.
- Be more ambitious regarding the academic project and its value for the development of the region. All things considered, this is the evaluation team's choice and recommendation.

The section below details the main recommendations resulting from the third option.

### **4.1 Objectives**

Is the Greater Region a reality? If not, can it become one? Either way, UniGR should be rooted explicitly in an economic and political project and take – as its starting point – the significant role that research and education can play in regional development. Furthermore, universities can take a leadership role by defining a regional vision to which they will contribute by their research and their educational activities. This is in line with EU policy on "smart specialisation" stating that:

... higher education institutions become key partners for the regional authorities in formulating and implementing their smart specialisation strategies. They can contribute to a rigorous assessment of the region's knowledge assets, capabilities and competencies, including those embedded in the institutions' own departments, as well as local businesses, with a view to identifying the most promising areas of specialisation for a region, but also the weaknesses that hamper innovation.<sup>6</sup>

In order to reset UniGR's objectives, three key principles must be considered:

*Proximity is an opportunity but not an obligation.* This is particularly true for researchers who should not be forced to work with neighbours if this does not bring clear benefits. In order to persuade the academic community to engage in UniGR, it is essential to:

- Develop additional convincing arguments: UniGR could be presented as an opportunity to enhance the academic strengths in each partner's profile. This will require managing effectively the tension between competition and collaboration, and viewing UniGR as an opportunity to improve the academic position of each institution.
- See the UniGR project as an integral part of each institution's preparation of its students for active employment and citizenship. For the graduates of UniGR member universities who plan to stay in their home region(s), their reality will be a cross-border economy and labour market. They need to be helped to understand this, and the UniGR project can be part of this understanding.
- Give higher priority, in each institution, to this collective project as a route to enhance academic performance in the region and its positive relevance to the region.

*Numbers are important.* The scale of the project must be increased in relation to the number of students and staff involved in order to justify the expenditure. This will require focusing on a small number of activities, carefully selected, that would produce more results that are relevant to the partners, their academic staff and students, and the Greater Region. Numbers are also important in terms of visibility. In turn, only visible successes will contribute to greater involvement in the future.

*Sustainability of financial and human resources must be considered.* Is 80 thousand EUR per institution sufficient? The evaluation team realises that this is a difficult issue in a time of financial cutbacks but the partners must show a stronger "willingness to pay" for the success of UniGR. Without external funding, however,

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<sup>6</sup> *Supporting Growth and Jobs – An Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe's Higher Education System*, SEC (2011) 1063, p.43.

the project will probably not survive. Therefore, UniGR must identify, as a matter of urgency, possible sources of funding at EU and regional level and ensure that its organisational structure would make it eligible. For instance, It is expected that approximately 67 Billion EUR would be made available as part of the "Cohesion fund" for the "Smart specialization" programme of DG Research's "Horizon 2020". It would be important for UniGR to monitor the current discussions regarding this funding source and decide how to involve the political actors from the Greater Region in these European level discussions.

## 4.2 Education, research and service to society

As mentioned above, it is important to emphasise an academic project and to channel energy and resources into a small number of carefully selected activities. In other words, the administrative goals should be supporting an academic and scientific project rather than be the focus of attention.

This will require the following steps:

- Identifying the main strengths of each partner in order to leverage the visible academic potential of the network. For this to happen, it is necessary to be selective and join forces to add to the collective strength of the network. By contrast, linking weaknesses only result in a weak network.
- Identifying the ways in which UniGR can support the Greater Region. The contributions that universities can make to regional development fall into four distinct areas: business innovation (linked to research), human capital (linked to teaching and learning), community development (linked to service to society) and social and cultural development (linked to all three university missions)<sup>7</sup>. It would be crucial for UniGR to decide upon the priority area(s) for mid-term action, with an eye to the long-term goal of developing a coherent approach in all four areas.
- Refining the strategy through the selection of specific actions that would justify UniGR's existence and demonstrate its value-added. In other words, identify which actions individual partners can only undertake within the UniGR cooperation framework. Examples could include: e.g., the creation of regional interdisciplinary research networks that would work on key regional developmental issues (cultural, economic, linguistic, political, shared labour market, etc.) or contribute to the future strengths of the region (e.g. in domains like automotive technology, finance, logistics, etc.);

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<sup>7</sup> Based on OECD (2007) *Higher Education in Regions: Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged*. In *Connecting Universities to Regional Growth: A Practical Guide*, Smart Specialisation Platform, September 2011, p.1. EUA is currently conducting the EUIMA-Collaborative Research project; the results will be presented in May 2012 and would be useful for UniGR. <http://www.eua.be/eua-projects/current-projects/euima.aspx>



the creation of joint masters to enhance the quality of the graduate work force; the strengthening of doctoral education through events, co-tutelle and other forms of cooperation; etc.

- In short, UniGR could become the think tank and the engine of growth for the Greater Region.

The evaluation team is not convinced of the value of promoting large scale UniGR mobility during the bachelor. This seems difficult to organise and is not very attractive to mobile students who appear to prefer more distant destinations (except those from Luxembourg) anyway. Mobility after the bachelor might be more attractive. On the other hand there might be a potential for attracting undergraduate students from beyond the Greater Region with the lure of a unique multilingual, multicultural and multi-institutional European environment.

In addition, the evaluation team wishes to stress that language education (English, French and German) and lifelong learning courses would be crucial in developing the Greater Region's human capital and the employability of its graduates.

- Identifying UniGR's regional stakeholders and partners:
  - ✓ At the moment UniGR's main external partners are high-level political actors. It would be important to enlarge the circle and for UniGR to take the initiative in establishing a Regional Knowledge Platform that would also involve the key economic actors ready to assist UniGR in implementing its strategy.
  - ✓ In addition, as already mentioned, there are about 90 other higher education institutions in the Greater Region as well as a number of research organisations. Some of these are already involved in bilateral partnerships with UniGR members. Associating them, when appropriate, to specific UniGR activities would be a useful step.
- Creating interest among academic staff by developing financial and non-financial incentives and opportunities as has been done already. As mentioned earlier, UniGR published a call for proposals that attracted forty responses, of which only 16 could be retained at this stage. This shows that there is an untapped potential for cooperative and innovative academic projects, provided seed funding is available.
- Developing milestones, key performance indicators and quality monitoring mechanisms (e.g. through peer reviews).

### 4.3 Governance

The recommendations in respect of governance are meant to establish *clear and lean structures* that would be effective in making decisions and executing them, thus providing the necessary leadership. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to:

- Distinguish clearly between decision-making and executive functions:
  - ✓ Decision-making processes must be lodged with the Presidents' Council.
  - ✓ The executive function should be led by a UniGR-dedicated president (e.g. a former university president, with the requisite linguistic skills). The UniGR president would be appointed for four or five years, and would be made responsible for the development and implementation of a four- or five-year strategy. Filling the president's post in this way would facilitate clear-cut decisions and enhance operational strength.

The UniGR president would have a small staff, directly reporting to him/her. This would avoid the current difficulties faced by Universität des Saarlandes as both a partner and a coordinator<sup>8</sup>.

- The overall governance structure should be lean, with as few hierarchical levels as possible. The evaluation team recommends:
  - ✓ Eliminating the Steering Committee, in contrast to the governance structure proposed in the UniGR 2012 strategic plan, which is too complex.
  - ✓ Reviewing the role and place of the Expert Committees and of the Student Advisory Board in the context of UniGR's future strategic orientations: Are these bodies the most effective and operational way to provide input into the decision-making process?
- If these committees are eliminated, however, each university needs to ensure that the vice-presidents, the heads of the key departments (e.g., international relations, communication, etc.) and the students are consulted regularly.
- Each university president would be responsible for the interface between UniGR and his/her institution's political authorities. This would ensure good coherence between the political and economic project of the sub-regions with that of the Greater Region.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Self-Evaluation Report, p. 17.

In addition, there is a current discussion in UniGR aimed at creating a confederation through the legal structure of the *European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation*. In the opinion of the evaluation team, this should not be the main focus over the next phase, because a new legal structure will not by itself affect the dynamic of the project, which is the key priority. More generally, it is important to note that “structure follows strategy” and that the creation of such a legal structure requires first thinking through the project in its next phase, particularly its strategy and governance.

In the view of the evaluation team, it is more urgent to devise a strategy geared at regional development, promote the meaningful involvement of academic staff and ensure the support of the key political and economic actors.

#### **4.4 Communication and internationalisation**

The Self-Evaluation Report mentions that internal communication has been a challenge. It varies according to modules and institutions. This was confirmed in the site visit meetings. Communication would improve organically if the steps outlined above (cf. 4.1 to 4.3) are followed. In addition, it would be important to strengthen the involvement of key institutional actors (e.g., vice presidents) and the grassroots – the latter through calls for proposals, targeted events and a set of incentives to participate in the development of UniGR.

External communication – as mentioned in the Self-Evaluation Report (p.15) – will be able to develop once achievements and results are realised. For the same reasons, internationalisation (i.e., more than intra-UniGR activities) cannot be a priority for now. It is too soon in the life of the project. The communication and international officers are experienced professionals who are poised to move as soon as it is realistically possible, i.e. once concrete results are available and focused and targeted messages can be communicated.

When internationalisation does become a priority, at some stage in the future, the relevant vice presidents should be involved closely in the development of this particular strand of activity.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the evaluation team wishes to emphasize that, UniGR should be viewed as an opportunity to enhance the strengths of each partner. Rather than defining UniGR as an umbrella organisation, it should be conceived as part of a “knowledge platform” to strengthen the region. Each university's profile can be strengthened by UniGR. Their individuality is not in tension with collaboration: it enriches it. Similarly, the regional stakeholders must see this network as a place where expertise can be sought and regional educational, research and innovation goals attained. Given the current political discussion in Europe about “smart

specialization”, it is essential that UniGR seek to understand immediately if it is eligible and to act accordingly.

In the final analysis, it is high quality research and education projects that will ensure the UniGR’s success, provided there is good governance that allow crucial decisions to be taken and agreement on the main criteria for selecting activities. These criteria include relevance to research and educational development (including graduate education) and the broader social and economic development of the Greater Region.

## **6. Thanks**

The evaluation team wishes to thank the presidents and rectors, their colleagues, the students and all those who participated in the site visit meetings, most particularly those who travelled some distance in order to do so. Their confidence in the evaluation team, their openness and sincerity were particularly appreciated and a key factor for the success of this complex evaluation.

The project officers have been particularly effective in organising the five site visits and ensuring the appropriate conditions for fruitful discussions and successful meetings. We would like to extend particular thanks to the local projects officers in Liège and Nancy; to Virginie Laye who organised the two visits in Luxembourg with care to every detail; and to Sonja Karb who provided excellent guidance and coordination from the beginning to the end of the evaluation process.

The evaluation team salutes the initiative to undertake an evaluation at this juncture of the project, which allowed consideration of how to improve UniGR at an early stage of development. It is hoped that the recommendations contained in this report will provide useful leads for the future development of UniGR and its successful contribution to the Greater Region.

## 7. Annex: Site visit programmes

First visit in Université du Luxembourg and to Saarbrücken

16 January – Université du Luxembourg	
Mid-morning	Arrival of the EUA team and internal preparatory meeting
14.00 – 16.00	Meeting with the president/rector and vice presidents/rectors
16.00 – 17.15	Meeting with the vice presidents/rectors who are in charge of specific strands of activities in UniGR
17.15 – 18.15	Meeting with political members of the UniGR Council
20.00	Dinner with the university president/rector and guests
17 January – Université du Luxembourg	
9.00 – 10.00	Meeting with academic staff involved in UniGR's activities
10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with academic staff who are NOT involved in UniGR
11.15 – 12.15	Meeting with administrative staff involved in the project activities
12.15 – 13.30	Lunch of EUA team with UniGR staff (project officers)
13.30 – 14.30	Meeting with doctoral students (mix of students who have been involved or not in UniGR's activities)
14.45 – 15.45	Meeting with undergraduate students (mix of students who have been involved or not in UniGR's activities)
16.00	Departure of EUA team to Saarbrücken
	Dinner EUA team alone
18 January – Universität der Saarlandes	
9.00 – 10.00	Meeting with the president/rector and vice presidents/rectors

10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with the vice presidents/rectors who are in charge of specific strands of activities in UniGR
11.15 – 12.15	Meeting with academic staff involved in UniGR's activities
12.15 – 13.00	Meeting with academic staff who are NOT involved in UniGR
13.00 – 14.15	Lunch of EUA team and UniGR staff (project officers)
14.15 – 15.15	Meeting with administrative staff involved in the project activities
15.30 – 16.30	Meeting with doctoral students (mix of students who have been involved or not in UniGR's activities)
16.30 – 17.30	Meeting with undergraduate students (mix of students who have been involved or not in UniGR's activities)
17.30 – 18.30	Meeting with political members of the UniGR Council
20.00	Dinner with the three presidents/rectors of Universität des Saarlandes, Universität Trier and Technische Universität Kaiserslautern and their guests
19 January – Universität Trier and Technische Universität Kaiserslautern (Meeting at the Universität der Saarlandes)	
9.00 – 10.00	Meeting with the presidents
10.15 – 11.15	Meeting with administrative staff involved in UniGR
11.30 – 12.30	Meeting with university administrative staff involved in UniGR's activities (libraries, etc.)
12:45 – 13:30	Lunch of EUA team with administrative staff involved in UniGR (project officers)
13.30 – 14.30	Meeting with academic staff involved in UniGR's activities
14.30 – 15.15	Meeting with undergraduate and doctorate students
15.15	Return of EUA team to Luxembourg

First visit to Université de Liège and to Nancy

24 January – Université de Liège	
Mid-afternoon	Arrival of the EUA team and internal preparatory meeting
20.00	Dinner with the university president/rector and guests
25 January – Université de Liège	
9.00 – 10.00	Meeting with the president/rector and vice presidents/rectors
10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with the vice presidents/rectors who are in charge of specific strands of activities in UniGR
11.15 – 12.15	Meeting with academic staff involved in UniGR's activities
12.15 – 13.30	Lunch of EUA team with UniGR staff (project officers)
13.30 – 14.30	Meeting with academic staff who are NOT involved in UniGR
14.45 – 15.45	Meeting with administrative staff involved in the project activities
16.00 – 17.00	Meeting with doctoral students (mix of students who have been involved or not in UniGR's activities)
17.00 – 18.00	Meeting with undergraduate students (mix of students who have been involved or not in UniGR's activities)
18.15 – 19.15	Meeting with political members of the UniGR Council
20.00 -	Dinner EUA team alone
26 January – Nancy	
9.00 – 11.00	EUA team travels to second site
11.30 – 12.30	Meeting with the presidents and vice presidents
12.30 – 13.45	Lunch with the university presidents and guests
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting with the vice presidents who are in charge of specific strands of

	activities in UniGR
15.15 – 16.15	Meeting with academic staff involved in UniGR's activities
16.15 – 17.15	Meeting with academic staff who are NOT involved in UniGR
17.30 – 18.30	Meeting with political members of the UniGR Council
20.00	Dinner of EUA team with UniGR staff (Project officers)
27 January – Nancy	
9.00 – 10.00	Meeting with administrative staff involved in the project activities
10.15 – 11.15	Meeting with doctoral students (mix of students who have been involved or not in UniGR's activities)
11.30 – 12.30	Meeting with undergraduate students (mix of students who have been involved or not in UniGR's activities)
12.30	Departure



Second visit at the Université du Luxembourg

29 February 2012	
Mid-morning	Arrival of the EUA team
11.30 am	Internal preparatory meeting
13.00 – 14.00	Working lunch of EUA team alone
14.30 – 17.30	Internal preparatory meeting
19.00	Dinner with the university presidents/rectors and their guests
1 March 2012	
8.30 – 9.00	Welcome - EUA team
9.00 – 11.00	Meeting with the university presidents/rectors
11.15 – 12.15	Meeting with the UniGR steering group (comité de pilotage)  The EUA team will split in two: one group with vice rectors and the other with project managers
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch with Grande Région specialists: Mrs. Estelle Evrard, Mr. Rachid Belkacem, Mrs Sonja Kmec
13.30 – 14.30	Meeting with the vice rectors for research
14.45 – 15.45	Meeting with the vice rectors for education
16.00 – 17.00	Meeting with the vice rectors for internationalisation
17.15 – 18.15	The EUA team will split into three to conduct three parallel sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library directors</li> <li>• Directors of the international offices</li> <li>• Directors of communication</li> </ul>
18.15 –	Return to the hotel
18.30 – 20.00	Debriefing of EUA team

20.00	Working dinner of the EUA team
2 March 2012	
8.30	Departure from hotel
9.00 – 12.00	Working meeting to prepare the main conclusions and recommendations
12.00 – 13.00	Working lunch of EUA team alone
13.30 – 15.30	Presentation of the main recommendations