UniGR: University of the Greater Region
UniGR a.s.b.l.

Lucienne Blessing, interim Director

Bringing Europe closer to citizens
2 December 2015

UniGR - Starting point

„We are in the year 2020. The Greater Region is an integrated area of higher education, research and innovation.

Teaching staff, researchers and students from all over the world understand themselves as part of this area and are proud of this.

Accordingly, mobility between the different education and research locations are part of everyday life.

Language barriers no longer exist: multilingualism (German, French, English) is a matter of course for all participants.“

**UniGR –**
An Integrated Area of Higher Education and Research becoming reality

October 2008 – April 2013:
- project co-financed by the Interreg IV A Greater Region EU programme and the partner universities (and regions)

April 2013 – end 2015:
- University consortium (MoU)
- financed by the universities (and regions)
- Central Secretariat with Director and Coordinator in Saarbrücken

24 November 2015:
- UniGR a.s.b.l, non-profit association

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**UniGR Some facts**

4/5 countries, 3 languages, 6 universities, 123,000 students

- Saarland University: 18,000 students
- University of Liège: 21,000 students
- University of Luxembourg: 6,200 students
- University of Lorraine: 52,000 students
- Technical University of Kaiserslautern: 13,000 students
- University of Trier: 15,000 students
Vision

UniGR as innovative and unique university federation
UniGR as actor and engine of the Greater Region
UniGR-culture within the federation

Overall Mission

To actively contribute to
- building a Greater Region Higher Education and Research Area
- developing sustainable solutions for facilitating cross-border cooperation in research, education and administration, in all fields
- stimulating regional development
- increasing international visibility of: the Greater Region, its integrated higher education and research area, and the UniGR members.
Main activities and tasks (MoU)

• Developing cross-border degrees, courses and other forms of educational cooperation,
• Connecting researchers, doctoral candidates and students and supporting shared use of infrastructure,
• Developing cross-border offers for early-stage researchers and doctoral candidates (incl. joint or double PhD degrees)
• Supporting language learning and acquisition of intercultural competences
• Further lowering of administrative barriers for cross-border cooperation
• Lobbying, communication, fundraising, acquisition of seed funding

Flagship areas:
• Material Science and Resource Efficiency, Biomedicine, Border Studies

Studying in the Greater Region made easy

• UniGR- Student status: Inscription at partner universities for free
• UniGR Study Offer Database, comparative academic calendar
• Cross-border degrees (18), cross-border seminars and other events
• UniGR Mobility Funds: reimbursement of travel costs
• UniGR Mobility Guide
• Library Agreement and joint portal: lending books at all libraries
• Staff Mobility Solutions: (under development)
• Blended/Hybrid learning: workshops, (guideline under development)
• Best practice: exchange, model cooperation agreements, templates, examples of joint transcript of records and certificates, (guideline under development)
Research in the Greater Region made easy

- **Workshops** – to prepare research networks, joint projects
- **UniGR Centres of Excellence** – e.g. UniGR Centre of Border Studies
- **Large conferences** – joint organisation
- **Internationalisation of doctoral education**, e.g: European UniGR-Doctorate Label, Joint PhD Degree Template, Comparision guide on doctoral systems
- **Workshops and seminars for doctoral candidates**
- **UniGR guest researchers**: joint guest researchers
- **IPR-Guide** – joint guide on protecting results
- **Inventory of research equipment** – shared use of infrastructure
- **Funding information days**

Governance and communication

- **Web-site**: http://www.uni-gr.eu
- Collaborative **internet platform**
- Participation in **Greater Region Working Groups** Higher Education and Transport
- Organising and initiating networking and expert meetings
- **UniGR Charter « Education, Research and Mobility for all »**
- Newsletter, Activity report
- Presence at fairs, open days
Success factors

• Involvement of all levels and actors

• Networks – bottom-up initiatives in research and education

• Expert working groups – finding common solutions (e.g. languages centres, blended learning experts, IPR experts, joint degrees, …)

• Communication concept and Internet portal – establishing common identity

Impact

• Greater Region Website: UniGR Mobility Guide

• InterRegV-GR: “The UniGR is an important pillar of the cross-border academic collaboration and research”

• German Wissenschaftsrat in her report on Saarland considers UniGR as support in contributing to a restructuring of the Saarland.

• European University Association: “UniGR as think tank and engine of growth for the Greater Region” “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”.

Contributions:
1. Human capital (education);
2. Business innovation (research and technology transfer)
3. Social and cultural development (services to society)
Obstacles and difficulties

Judicial and/or political obstacles

- Diverging academic calendars (Germany)
- Recognition of joint degree diplomas (France)
- Different national requirements and systems for student enrolment
- Different insurance requirements for students
- Recognition/registration of previous diplomas
- Joint Diploma Supplements: no descriptions of higher education systems (France and Luxembourg)
- Different mobility constraints depending on visa status
- Legal entity: Different national laws concerning the same legal form, specifics of University laws
Administrative obstacles

• Cooperation agreement: long and complex procedures
• Enrolment: procedures differ (and are in different languages)
• Harmonizing different academic calendars
• Different module structures and “regimes” (credits, exams, grades)
• Administration and exchange of credits & grades: different, complex IT systems
• Joint Degree diplomas: signatures (and acceptance in France)
• Legal entity: University laws and procedure, Liability issues

Logistical and financial obstacles

• Transport infrastructure and price system (no cross-border “Semesterticket”)
• Financial aid (DFH/UFA & Erasmus) does not cover all (additional) costs of students (local UniGR mobility funds)
• Little financial support for cooperation in teaching not consisting of cross-border degrees
Other obstacles

Cultural & Linguistic:
• Different university systems and cultures
• Language skills of students
• Communication between administrative staff (language barrier and knowledge of other systems)
• Different grading cultures

Communication:
• Difficulty to raise awareness of available support and possibilities

Concluding

Particular attention:
• University laws, rules, regulations, organisational structures, and “habits”
• Political support

Difficult to resolve:
• Differences in legal university frameworks, educational and research systems, including employment/status/allowances/etc.
• Differences in national laws

Easiest to handle
• Bringing together people
Synergies are the goal,
UniGR the means,
Mindset the prerequisite.

Thank you for your attention

http://www.uni-gr.eu