

Added Value and Opportunities of Austrian-Hungarian Cross-Border Cooperation

Why working across the border benefits everyone – and what the European dimension means in practice

The Austrian-Hungarian border region is a shared space for living, working and culture, with centuries of interwoven history. People commute, families live on both sides of the border, and associations, parishes, municipalities and social organisations face the same questions about the future. Yet the potential of this shared space often remains untapped: structures, languages and administrative systems differ, and many organisations work side by side rather than together.

Cross-border cooperation – as practised in the Com(p)AGE project – starts exactly here: it connects knowledge, people and institutions across the border and turns two neighbouring regions into one integrated space for action. This infosheet shows where the concrete added value lies, which success factors matter, and which opportunities open up for organisations.

Shared challenges – shared answers

The major societal tasks of our time do not stop at the border. In the AT-HU border region this applies in particular to:

- Demographic change: the population is ageing on both sides of the border; rural municipalities are losing young people while the share of the very old is rising.
- Loneliness and social isolation: loneliness in old age is a growing health and societal issue – in cities as much as in villages.
- Care and family carers: staff shortages, informal care at home and relief for family carers challenge both countries alike.
- Services of general interest in rural areas: mobility, local supply, social meeting places and volunteering structures need to be rethought.
- Digitalisation: digital services can connect – but only if they are low-threshold and supported by personal guidance.

Six dimensions of added value

The benefits of cross-border cooperation can be named concretely in six dimensions:

1. Know-how transfer: the "komp/ferry" as a principle

Good practice travels across the border instead of being developed twice. What works in Vas or Zala can inspire Styria – and vice versa. The name Com(p)AGE carries this principle within it: "komp" is the Hungarian word for ferry. Knowledge, methods and experience shuttle between the two banks and arrive on both sides.

2. Greater impact and critical mass

Shared target groups, shared visibility, shared standards: results take effect in two countries at once. A bilingual platform, a joint curriculum or a coordinated campaign reach more people than either region could alone – and create the critical mass that makes sustainable structures viable.

3. Access to new resources

Cross-border consortia unlock EU funding (Interreg, Erasmus+, CERV and more), partner networks and expertise not available at national level. Cooperation is thus also a location factor: it brings investment, skills and visibility into the region.

4. People at the centre: trust and encounter

Personal encounters reduce prejudice and build trust – the base currency of any cooperation, especially in the sensitive field of elderly care. Digital networking only unfolds its effect in combination with real meetings, joint events and cultural exchange.

5. Institutional learning and innovation

Administrations, NGOs, municipalities and church-based providers learn from each other: different organisational models, different funding logics, different solutions. Looking beyond one's own system boundary is an engine of innovation and modernises services on both sides.

6. Resilience and long-term structures

Cross-border networks are more crisis-proof: they distribute knowledge and responsibility across many shoulders, outlast individual project periods and create a culture of cooperation that makes future challenges – from the care crisis to climate change – manageable together.

The European dimension

Border regions are the seams of Europe: around 30 % of the EU population lives in border regions. What succeeds or fails here helps decide whether European integration arrives in everyday life. Cross-border projects implement EU cohesion policy on the ground: they strengthen territorial cohesion, dismantle border obstacles and make the added value of the Union directly tangible – precisely for older people, family carers and rural communities for whom Brussels often seems far away.

Those who work across borders also become part of a Europe-wide network of regions, cities and initiatives working on the same questions for the future – and contribute measurably to the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- SDG 3 – Good health and well-being: preventing loneliness, active and healthy ageing.
- SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities: participation regardless of age, origin and place of residence.
- SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities: vibrant neighbourhoods and village centres.
- SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals: institutionalised cross-border cooperation.

Com(p)AGE in practice: figures and results

The Interreg project Com(p)AGE ("An Integrated Border Region") shows how concrete cross-border added value is created:

- Digital platform in three languages – publicly available; it connects organisations active in elderly care in Austria and Hungary, bundling support services, volunteering opportunities and educational content.
- Co-creation from the start – three major co-creation events; needs and platform functions were defined together with future users.
- Eight regional stakeholder workshops – including Admont, Szombathely/Zala, Vienna and Graz.
- Five competence modules with around 40 participants – completed with a certificate corresponding to 4.5 ECTS credits.
- 87 testers – accompanied the field-test phase across three evaluation waves; their feedback fed directly into the platform's language, navigation and functions.
- Sustainability strategy – a core group of committed organisations, regular networking meetings, job shadowing, cultural exchange and a cooperation agreement secure operation beyond the end of the project.

Next milestone: the international stakeholder event on 2 October 2026 in Graz as part of the international campaign against loneliness and social isolation.

Success factors for cross-border cooperation

From Com(p)AGE project practice, central conditions for success can be derived:

Trust before technology

Genuine cooperation does not arise from digital tools alone, but from personal trust, language support and face-to-face encounters. Digital networking and real meetings must complement each other.

Making both sides visible

Balance is a must: content, events and organisational profiles of both countries must be equally present – with clear responsibilities, measurable contributions per partner and transparent documentation.

Language as a bridge

Multilingualism (German, Hungarian, English) is not an extra but a prerequisite – from the platform to materials to the facilitation of meetings. Professional language editing ensures quality and parity.

Making impact measurable

Registrations, uploads, article views, documented collaborations: measurable indicators make cross-border effects demonstrable – towards funders as well as within one's own organisation.

Planning sustainability from day one

The operating model, cooperation agreement and core group belong at the start of the project, not at its end. Long-term monitoring – including five years after project completion – keeps impact in view.

What organisations concretely gain

For associations, municipalities, church-based providers, social organisations and educational institutions, participating in cross-border cooperation opens tangible opportunities:

- Visibility on a shared, trilingual platform and within an international network.

- Access to EU funding programmes and support with applications and partner search.
- Qualification of staff and volunteers through certified competence modules.
- Job shadowing and study visits: learning from each other in real working life.
- New volunteers and cooperation partners – including from across the border.
- Helping shape policy recommendations that feed practice into the programmes of the next funding period.

Further links

- Interreg Österreich-Ungarn / Ausztria-Magyarország: <https://www.interreg-athu.eu>
- Com(p)AGE Plattform / platform: <https://www.compage.eu>
- Interreg Europe – Policy Learning Platform: <https://www.interregeurope.eu>
- EU-Kohäsionspolitik / EU Cohesion Policy: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy
- Europäischer Ausschuss der Regionen / European Committee of the Regions: <https://cor.europa.eu>
- b-solutions – Lösungen für Grenzhindernisse / border obstacles: <https://www.b-solutionsproject.com>
- UN Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

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