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## Labour-market in a border-area; searching for jobs and the influence of borders

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## **LABOUR MARKET IN A BORDER-AREA**

*Searching for jobs and the influence of borders*

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### **ABSTRACT**

At the moment borders, border-related problems, and the process of tearing down borders are very much in the centre of interest. Especially in Europe a lot of scientific work is done with regard to borders of countries, in particular to determine their role in the ongoing integration process. In this respect border-regions are considered to be able to play a catalytic role. The borderland economies on both sides of a national border in this view have to be changed into one trans-border economy. Initiatives to encourage cross-border integration however are not always successful. To our opinion, one of the main reasons lies in the fact that the border has many faces. The effect of a border differs, depending on the type of interaction (e.g. economic, social-cultural or institutional) and the nature of the region it defines.

This paper tries to formulate a conceptual framework, within which the different faces of borders and border-regions are taken into account. Next this model is applied to the regional labour market in the Nijmegen-Arnhem border-area in the eastern part of the Netherlands especially concerning the role of the border when searching for a job. The most important questions to be answered are:

- Which effects stem from the fact the regional labour market in the Arnhem-Nijmegen is part of a (peripheral) borderland economy?
- What are the effects of the border with regard to the interaction between the region Arnhem-Nijmegen and the neighbouring region in Germany?
- Does the national border cut off a part of the "natural" labour market of the Arnhem-Nijmegen area, or put in other words, what would happen if the Dutch-German border would disappear completely?

Keywords: Borders, Regional labour markets, Transition

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In this paper some results are presented of the project “Search behaviour on the labour market”. This project is part of the larger research program “Borders and Interaction” (Van Houtum, Van der Velde & Boekema, 1998). The main objective of this program is to formulate a theoretical framework explaining the influence of borders on the process of starting up and maintaining cross-border relationships and the level or intensity of these relations.

Cross-border relationships are defined as actions of individuals or organisations with a spatial component and crossing a border. These actions are categorised in three broad groups, political-institutional, economical and social-cultural. Obviously these three types of actions are interrelated and influence one another. A second distinction can be made with regard to the level of scale. Economic cross-border relations on a European level differ greatly from the ones concerning the regional level (Van der Velde 1997a; 1997b; Van der Velde & Boekema 1997).

The border itself influences whether cross-border relationships come into existence. On the one hand strong almost impermeable borders of course prohibit relationships. The neighbouring regions in this case can be characterised as alienated (Martinez, 1994). Integrated borderlands on the other hand are functioning as if no border exists at all. The effects of the border however are not stemming from the border itself, but from the region it encloses. In order to study border-effects, we have to look at the regions alongside the borders. To be more precise we have to look at (groups of) individuals and organisations in the regions and their perception of the border.

Despite the ongoing integration in Europe, relationships are still very much affected by borders. The causes of these influences can be divided in two broad categories, exogenous and endogenous causes. In the first group the influence of a country border is caused by factors outside the individuals or organisations wanting to start up or maintain cross-border relationships. In this case one could point at for instance legislative differences. Differences of an “exogenous” nature are often considered to be one of the main reasons for the relatively low level of interaction between labour markets in different countries.

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<sup>1</sup> ) The author wishes to thank Dick Vergoossen en Henk van Houtum for their creativity and constructive criticism, both when preparing the questionnaire and when adapting the text of this contribution.

In this paper emphasis lies on the second group of causes, the ones with an endogenous nature. The origin of these causes can be traced back to the individual (organisation) itself. The individual is building its own regions or spaces marked by “mental” borders. In this respect Van Houtum discerns three types of regions or spaces, action-regions, cognition regions and affection regions (1998). Real action takes place in the action-regions. The presupposition is that the action-region, cognition-region and affection-region of the individual affect the extent of regions mutually (fig. 1). The composition of these regions determines, whether or not specific cross-border interaction comes into existence.

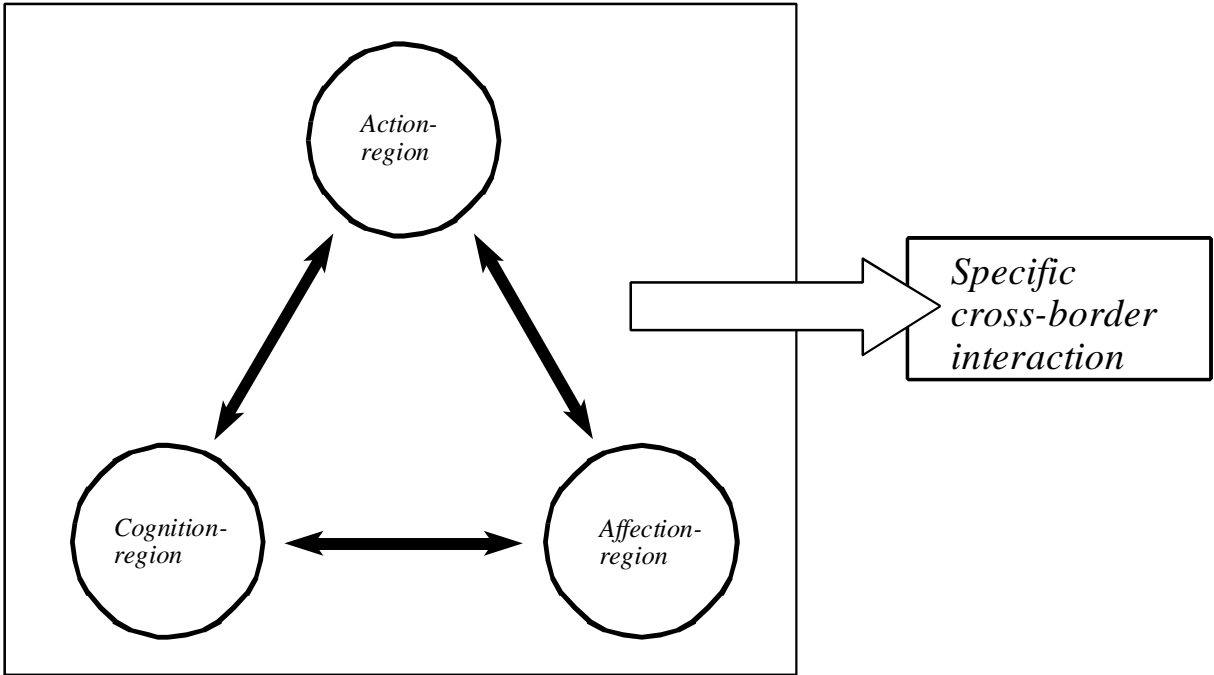


Figure 1: Regions and relationships  
 Source: Van Houtum, Van der Velde & Boekema (1998)

The project underlying this paper tries to determine the influence of action, cognition and affection on the process of starting up and maintaining cross-border relationships on the labour market. Of course cross-border relationships on the labour market have been studied before, but the majority of these studies are considering the success-stories (e.g. Schack & Hansen, 1997). The motives and experiences of cross-border commuters or employees who moved from one country to another for professional reasons, provide only a partial insight into these kind of relationships. These individuals did decide to cross a national border. In general the outcome of these kinds of studies therefor show a very positive situation. The same goes for studies into businesses making use of foreign employees.

These kinds of studies are particularly useful to investigate the practical problems, which can be expected when working abroad or engaging foreign employees. They hardly explain why the level of interaction is as low as the figures show.

This project is turning its attention towards an earlier phase in the process of starting up cross-border relationships. Before an actual relationship in the form of a labour contract can be established the employee-to-be has to look for a job on the other side of the border. Just as it holds for companies searching for a new location, job seekers not having cross-border areas on their shortlist will never start up a cross-border relationship on the labour market. The research project therefore aims at search behaviour on the labour market

#### **OBJECTIVE AND CENTRAL QUESTIONS**

The main objective of the project is to determine the influence of action, cognition and affection (next to exogenous factors) on the spatial dimension of behaviour of individuals when searching for a new job.

This being a very broad objective for this paper the region to be investigated is confined to the Dutch municipalities along the national border in the Euregio Rijn-Waal. The central question to be answered in this paper is:

*Are the inhabitants of the Dutch municipalities of the Euregio Rijn-Waal searching for new jobs on the other side of the national border and which influence do action, cognition and affection have in this respect.*

The most important questions to be answered are:

- Which effects stem from the fact the regional labour market in the Arnhem-Nijmegen is part of a (peripheral) borderland economy?
- What are the effects of the border with regard to the interaction between the region Arnhem-Nijmegen and the neighbouring region in Germany?

- Does the national border cut off a part of the “natural” labour market of the Arnhem-Nijmegen area, or put in other words, what would happen if the Dutch-German border would disappear completely?

## QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to find the answer to the central question, a questionnaire was sent to a sample of the inhabitants of the Dutch border municipalities, the borderlanders. This questionnaire consists of two parts. First of all the actual search pattern is determined. This pattern is applicable to employees and jobless people between the age of 18 and 65.

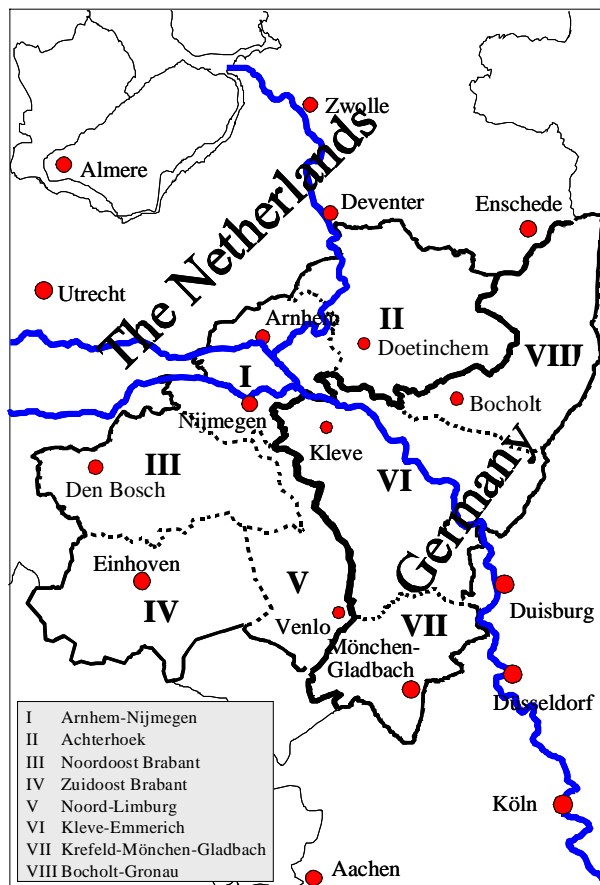


Figure 2: Research area

Because the role of the national border is to be investigated, the search pattern is determined on a rather low regional level (fig. 2). The respondents were asked to indicate which regions are considered when searching for a job. Those respondents actually searching actively were asked to indicate the regions they *are* looking for a new job. The remainder had to indicate the regions where they *would* search for a job.

The respondent were given the options of their own region (COROP-region), the other border-regions in the Dutch part of the Euregio Rijn-Waal, the border-regions in the German part of the Euregio Rijn-Waal, elsewhere in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Germany.

The second part of the questionnaire is aiming at measuring the level of action, cognition and affection of Dutch borderlanders with regard to Germany and the German border region. Im-

portant parts of the methods for measuring these levels are adapted from the work of Van Houtum (1997 & 1998).

The level of action and cognition can be determined (partly) by the frequency of contacts with the neighbours. Therefore questions were asked about the number of personal visits to Germany, reading German newspapers and watching German TV-channels. These contacts are supposed to rise the level of knowledge of Germany and Germans. The knowledge is also measured by analysing the estimated distance of important cities. Finally the knowledge of the German language is determined.

Factors concerning affection are more difficult to determine. In this case spatial identity is supposed to be important (Van Houtum, 1998). To determine the spatial identity the respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they consider themselves for instance as people from Gelderland, as Germans, as Europeans or as people living in a border region. Next to the regional identity, it is supposed that the expectations about the new labour circumstances are important. When one expects to encounter problems the enthusiasm to look abroad could be less. Therefore the respondents were asked to react on some theses about working conditions in Germany. A final major influence on the process of starting up cross-border relationships is of course the border itself. Nine adjectives concerning borders were presented, like natural, dividing and hindering. The presupposition is that especially those who consider the border as outdated and of no use are searching more frequently in the neighbouring country (Van Houtum, 1998).

The questionnaire has been sent to 3000 households in the Dutch border area. The results in this paper are based on 440 questionnaires that have been sent back so far. The relevant part of the questionnaire is included as an annex (in Dutch)

## **SPATIAL PATTERN OF THE SEARCH BEHAVIOUR**

Generally spoken the distance component is very important when considering the spatial pattern of search behaviour (tab. 1). The three regions Achterhoek, Arnhem-Nijmegen and Noord-Limburg, which are in the topmost row of the table, consist of the municipalities of the corresponding regions in figure 2.

Table 1: Areas to search for a new job

	Achterhoek	Arnhem-Nijmegen	Noord-Limburg
Region Arnhem-Nijmegen	48,4%	92,7%	53,2%
Region Achterhoek	93,5%	29,3%	5,6%
Region NO-Brabant	3,2%	27,3%	53,2%
Region ZO-Brabant	3,2%	6,7%	17,7%
Region N-Limburg	3,2%	28,0%	84,7%
Region Kleve-Emmerich	19,4%	24,0%	17,7%
Region Krefeld-MG		3,3%	8,1%
Region Bocholt-Gronau		4,0%	2,4%
Region remaining the Netherlands	9,7%	12,7%	10,5%
Region remaining Germany		3,3%	2,4%
Region elsewhere	3,2%	3,3%	4,0%
<i>Number of regions mentioned</i>	1,8	2,3	2,5
<i>Total (n)</i>	31	150	122

Source: Questionnaire

The vast majority of the respondents regard their home region when looking for a new job. The more distant the regions the less people indicate the specific region as a search area. At first glance it does not seem important whether that region is located in the Netherlands or Germany. A provisional conclusion could be that spatial mobility is rather low not only across borders but also within the Netherlands.

When aggregating these data to compare the Dutch and German border regions the picture changes somewhat (fig. 3.)

When comparing the Dutch border region (apart from the home region)

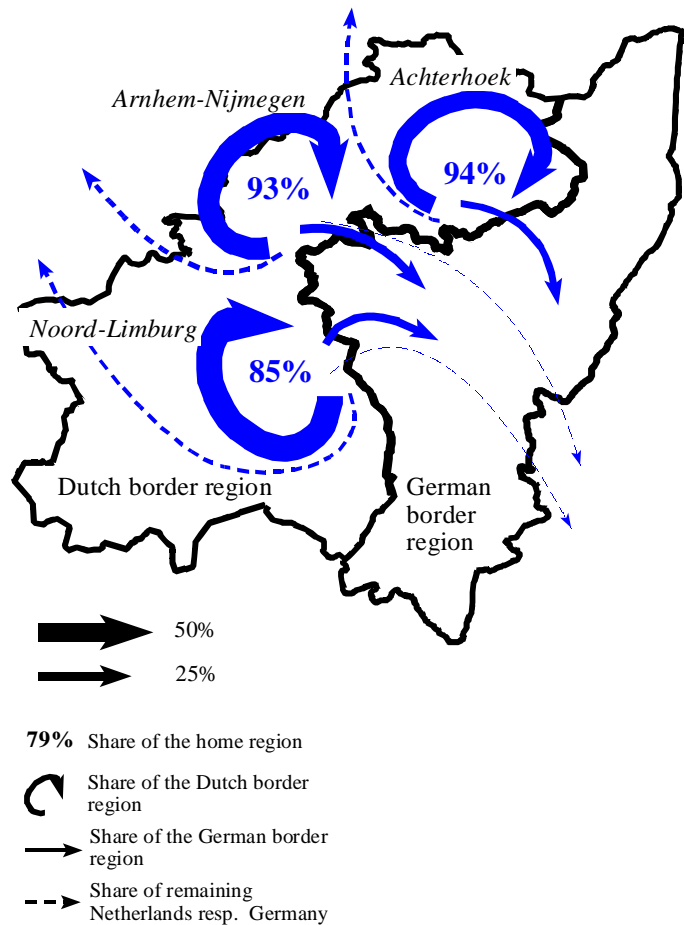


Figure 3: Areas to search for a new job  
Source: Questionnaire



with the German border region, it turns out, the level of interaction with the German regions is about a third to half of the one of the Dutch regions. The shares of the respondents from the three areas Achterhoek, Arnhem-Nijmegen and Noord-Limburg searching in the Dutch border regions are 44%, 38% and 54%. The German regions have shares of 19%, 25% and 21%.

## **SEARCHING IN THE GERMAN BORDER REGION**

In the remaining part of this paper we will turn our attention to searching for jobs in the German border region. Altogether 23% of the respondent have indicated at least one of the German border regions as a region to search for a job. This group is compared with the one consisting of respondents who did not indicate any German regions. As was posted in the objective of this paper, the main question to be answered is which of the action, cognition and affection factors influence the horizon when searching for a job. Before going into this some “objective” factors are briefly related to these two groups.

### *Objective factors*

Three objective factors were used, age, education and employment sector. Statistically it turns out that age and employment sector are influencing the level of cross-border searching. The older the respondent the more they are or would be searching for jobs in Germany. The share rises from 9% of inhabitants below the age of 30 to 27% of the inhabitants of 50 years and older. Employees in the transport and communication sector are looking more often in Germany, while employees in the retail sector hardly consider the German regions as an option. The fact that the employment sector also influences the horizon can be explained, by the differences of the composition of the regional labour markets. Surprisingly the educational level is not connected with the share of respondents searching in Germany. This contradicts with the general thought that the higher the education, the more mobile the employee (e.g. Janssen, 1998). Probably this can be explained by regional differences at the labour markets also. The possibilities for the higher educated Dutch employees to find a suitable job in the German border region is relatively small. This has to be investigated further however.

### *Action and cognition factors*

Factors associated with action and cognition are supposed to influence the interaction across borders. The thresholds for crossing borders are expected to be lower when an individual is

more familiar with the region opposite the border. To determine if personal contacts or contacts through media stimulate cross-border searching, the sample is divided into two groups. The first one consists of the respondents with frequencies above the median the second one of respondents with lower frequencies (tab. 2).

*Table 2: Contacts with Germany and searching for jobs*

		searching in the German border region	
		yes	No
Visiting Germany	20 times per year or more	30%	70%
	less than 20 times per year	15%	85%
Watching German TV	2 time per week of more	35%	65%
	less than 2 times per week	14%	86%
Reading German papers	once in a while	63%	37%
	never	16%	84%

*Source: Questionnaire*

As can be seen, a clear connection exists between these variables and searching for a job in the German border region. Reading German papers seems to have the strongest relation.

A second important variable is the knowledge of the German language. When asked why a job offer in Germany would not be accepted, lack of knowledge of the German language is often brought up. The results of the questionnaire show that inferior knowledge prevents to a certain extent looking for a job in Germany. The linguistic competence is expressed in a factor based on grades for speaking, reading and writing skills. A t-test shows a significant difference of this factor between the respondents searching in the German border area and those only searching in the Netherlands ( $t = 4.32$ ;  $d.f. = 312$ ). Respondents with higher skills include the German regions more often in their search area.

The last variable brought up in this paper is the knowledge of the geographical distances. In this paper only the deviations are considered. When a job seeker overestimates the distance, it could prohibit placing the region or city on the shortlist. Of course this variable can be used in other situations also, but for now only this aspect is taken into account. Generally speaking it turns out that distances are estimated more accurate by those who are or would be searching in Germany (tab. 3). Especially the estimated distances to Duisburg and Mönchen-Gladbach, cities at greater distances, differ strongly between the two groups.

*Table 3: Deviations from the actual distances (in km) and searching for jobs*

	searching in the German border region	
	yes	No
Bocholt	+6 km	+6 km
Duisburg <sup>*)</sup>	+2 km	+16 km
Kleve	+5 km	+3 km
Mönchen-Gladbach <sup>*)</sup>	+8 km	+28 km

<sup>\*)</sup> Significant at the 99% confidence-level

Source: Questionnaire

From this short analysis the conclusion can be drawn that the distinguished action and cognition variables are related with the cross-border “interaction” of searching for jobs in the German border regions. As usual we have to be careful to pinpoint causal relationships. Whether a high level of cognition leads to searching for jobs or the other way around remains to be determined in future research.

#### *Affection factors*

The first variable in this group can be read as regional identity. To what extent do inhabitants have a bond with the indicated regions? To determine the level of affection of the respondents, they were asked give notes to several regional identities on a seven-point Likert-scale (cf. Van Houtum 1998). As a rule the regional bond with the home region and the Netherlands is strong. With the other Dutch regions and Germany no bond is felt. Borderlander, European and citizen of the world are more favourite identities (tab. 4).

*Table 4: Regional identity*

	Achterhoek	Arnhem-Nijmegen	Noord-Limburg
Gelderlander	5,0	5,2	3,2
Achterhoeker	5,8	2,6	1,7
Limburger	1,3	2,1	5,3
Dutch	6,5	6,5	6,7
German	1,7	1,8	2,0
Borderlander	4,4	4,7	4,6
European	5,0	5,2	5,3
Citizen of the world	4,1	4,5	5,0

Source: Questionnaire

A comparison between the respondents searching in German regions and those not searching in Germany shows a significant difference in the regional bond with Germany, with being inhabitant of a border region and with Europe. Those searching in Germany identify themselves stronger with these identities. The differences within the first two identities are significant at a 99% confidence level, the European identity at the 95% level.

The same procedure was followed to investigate to what extent the ideas about the differences between the Netherlands and Germany when searching or accepting a job are influencing the search pattern of employees. Higher notes indicate greater expected differences. Once again a scale of 1 to 7 was used (tab. 5).

The table clearly shows only small differences exist between the two groups. The results of a t-test display, only the differences in the judgement of the last thesis are significant at the 95% level. It appears that the expected differences in the labour market conditions do not influence the search pattern.

*Table 5: Expected differences and searching for a job in German border areas*

	searching in the German border region	
	yes	no
Time needed for finding a job	4,5	4,5
Time needed to get used to an new job	4,7	4,7
Changes for finding a better job	3,4	3,5
Changes for miscommunication with the employer	4,8	4,9
Hierarchy between the “workers on the floor” and the “executives”	5,5	5,5
The facility to fire an employee	4,4	4,5
Changes for feeling at ease with the new colleagues quickly	3,7	3,5

*Source: Questionnaire*

The last variable in this group of factors is the opinion about the national border between Germany and the Netherlands. To determine this opinion the respondents were confronted with nine adjectives in a positive and negative version (cf. Van Houtum, 1998). These pairs are:

Useless vs. Useful	Unimportant vs. Important	Restrictive vs. Not restrictive
Artificial vs. Natural	Irritating vs. Not irritating	Noticeable vs. Unnoticeable
Abnormal vs. Normal	Hindering vs. Not hindering	Dividing vs. Uniting

Once again a seven-point Likert-scale was used. A factor analysis reduces these nine adjectives into two factors. The first dimension can be indicated as the “irrelevant border” and is composed of the adjectives useless, artificial, abnormal and unimportant. The second dimension indicates the “border as barrier” and consists of the adjectives irritating, hindering, restrictive, noticeable and dividing. This concurs with the findings of van Houtum in his research among entrepreneurs in the Dutch-Belgian border-area (1998).

When these two factors are included in a t-test between the group of respondents searching in Germany and the group not searching, it shows a significant difference for the first factor at a 95% level. Whether or not the border is regarded as a barrier does not influence the search pattern. Employees regarding the border as an irrelevant factor are more often searching in the German border region.

Once again a relationship can be observed between the affection factors and the search pattern. A higher level of affection correlates with more intensive searching in the German border area. More research however is needed to determine the causal direction of this relationship.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

When studying the influence of the border on the search behaviour of employees looking for a new job, the national border still seems to act as a barrier. An important nuance however is the strong distance effect noticeable not only in Germany but also in the Netherlands. Employees from Noord-Limburg for instance are hardly looking for jobs in the Achterhoek and the other way round. When aggregating the results to compare the German border region with the Dutch, it shows Dutch employees include Dutch regions more often on their shortlist compared with the German regions.

The shares of respondents searching for new jobs in Germany are correlating first of all with some “objective” factors like age and employment sector. The central question of this paper, whether action, cognition and affection factors also influence search behaviour, can be answered affirmatively. Reading German papers, watching German TV and visiting Germany correlates positively. Linguistic competence and geographical knowledge also show positive

relationships with the shares of people searching for jobs in German border regions. Affection factors are more difficult to visualise. The relationships between regional identity, expected differences in working conditions and judgement of the border with the search behaviour are less clear. Propinquity with Germany, the border region and Europe is higher within the group of respondents looking for jobs in the German border region. Supposed differences in working conditions hardly differ between the groups. Finally employees looking for jobs abroad regard the border more often as irrelevant.

The questions raised at the start of this paper need of course more research to be answered conclusively. Some provisional answers can be given however. The Arnhem-Nijmegen region is part of a borderland economy and insofar “suffers” from the position alongside a border. As long as cultural differences and mental distances across national borders exist, borders will effect the level of interaction negatively. It seems however that part of the “border”-effects at least where it concerns cross-border interaction on the labour market, have to be attributed to distance effects. The share of people searching for jobs declines rapidly with the distance. The answer to the third question, what would happen if the border would disappear completely, is probably “not very much”. Lifting the border does not automatically means a change in the action-, cognition- and affection regions of the borderlanders.

A final remark has to be made concerning the causality of these relationships. Causal relationships can never be proven through statistical analyses. Therefor this paper does not answer this question. The results presented in this paper make very clear however a lot of factors influence the search behaviour on the labour market and because of that also the mobility on the labour market. It is therefor worthwhile to continue the research efforts into the influence of action, cognition and affection factors on search behaviour on the labour market and cross-border interaction and relationships in general.

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11	Wilt u met een rapportcijfer aangeven hoe goed u de Duitse taal beheerst?										
	Zeer slecht					Vloeiend					
	Luistervaardigheid	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Spreekvaardigheid	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Schrijfvaardigheid	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12	Wilt u aangeven in welke mate u zich verbonden voelt met de volgende gebieden? (één cijfer per gebied aankruisen)										
	Ik voel me:			Geheel niet				Volledig			
	Gelderlander	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	Achterhoecker	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	Limburger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	Nederlander	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	Duitser	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	Grensbewoner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	Europeaan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
Wereldburger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
13	Wilt u voor de volgende onderwerpen aangeven of er naar uw mening een verschil bestaat tussen Nederland en Duitsland? Wilt u bij de beantwoording uitgaan van de Nederlandse situatie? Wanneer u zelf geen ervaring hebt, wilt u dan proberen om een inschatting maken? (één cijfer per gebied aankruisen)										
	In Duitsland is			Veel geringer			Gelijk		Veel groter		
	het tijdsbestek dat nodig is voor het vinden van een baan:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	het tijdsbestek dat nodig is om ingewerkt te raken in een nieuwe baan:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	de kans op het krijgen van betere baan:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	de kans op een communicatiestoornis met de werkgever:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	de afstand tussen de mensen aan de "top" en op de "werkvloer":	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
	het gemak waarmee u door een werkgever kunt worden ontslagen:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
de kans dat u zich snel thuis voelt tussen uw collega's:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
14	Wilt u over de volgende stellingen uw oordeel geven? (Kruis bij elke stelling slechts één cijfer aan)										
	De landsgrens tussen Nederland en Duitsland is:										
	Nutteloos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Nuttig		
	Kunstmatig	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Natuurlijk		
	Abnormaal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Normaal		
	Onbelangrijk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Belangrijk		
	Irriterend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Niet irriterend		
	Belemmerend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Niet belemmerend		
	Beperkend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Niet beperkend		
	Merkbaar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Onmerkbaar		
Afscheidend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Verbindend			
16	Wat is de hoogste door u afgeronde opleiding?										
	1	O	Geen afgeronde opleiding	4	O	Mavo, ulo of mulo	7	O	Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs		
	2	O	Basisschool	5	O	Havo of mms	8	O	Hoger beroepsonderwijs		
	3	O	Vbo of lbo	6	O	Vwo, hbs of gymnasium	9	O	Wetenschappelijk onderwijs		