

Cross-Border Cooperation Structures in Europe

Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future

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Introduction

Cross-border studies and their political, economic, social, and cultural relevance have a significant presence in the scientific literature, although not with the same intensity among the different social sciences, nor among countries. In fact, the Mexico-US border has had, for a long time, an iconic status within border studies; EU borders were later integrated in cross-border research and, more recently, borders in other continents. At the same time, an increasing number of collective studies characterised by the interdisciplinarity of their approach have emerged in the last decades. Along this path, the interrelation of several social sciences involved in border studies has enabled the achievement of significant conceptual and methodological contributions. Thus, anthropologists managed to include border citizens as active participants in their studies¹, breaking away from the classical state and institution centred approaches. Geographers introduced the concept of border landscapes in order to define the space located in the milieu of each state's limes, shaped by the constant interaction between the people who live there and by the geographical features of the border area². Along these lines, historians coined the notion of borderland in order to highlight the relevance of these territories and their people in building nation-states and their interrelationships, from the state towards its borders and vice versa³, in a dual relationship in which the political decisions taken by national actors predetermine border life and context, but, at the same time, state decision-making is also determined by the border itself and the actors involved in it. In addition to this, political scientists have refined the notion of borderland as a unique space for developing processes of ethnic, local, class, religious and linguistic identity and their different meanings⁴,

¹ The study of the Italian Tyrol, with its successive historical partitions and the subsequent transformation of local political loyalties, constituted an innovation in this respect, J. Colea, and E. R. Wolf, *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley*, New York, Academic Press, 1974.

² J. R. V. Prescott, *Political Frontiers and Boundaries*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1987. Previously, J. R. V. Prescott, *Boundaries and Frontiers*, London, Croom Helm, 1978.

³ O. J. Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1994; M. Baud, and W. van Schendel, "Toward Comparative History of Borderlands", in *Journal of World History*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1997, pp. 211-242.

⁴ M. Anderson, *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World*, Cambridge, Polity, 1996; M. Perkmann, and N. L. Sum (eds.), *Globalization, Regionalization and Cross-Border Regions*, London, Macmillan, 2002.

and have contributed to the acknowledgement of culture as a key facilitator for cross-border cooperation strategies. For sociologists, focused on the study of social groups and institutions, the main finding might be that of ambivalent identities, which are characteristic of border societies open to influences increased by various formal and informal cooperation processes⁵, this identity ambiguity of border residents undermines the classic concept of sovereignty, based on the identification of state with territory⁶.

In the case of Europe, border studies have been characterized by a special feature from the outset of the post-war integration process, the emergence of a range of formal and informal cooperation structures with different degrees of institutionalisation, either by means of grassroots initiatives (bottom up), or through supranational and intergovernmental initiatives (top down), with uneven results in its management. These structures have emerged in different historical moments and contexts as a response to diverse motivations. Initially, cultural affinities and a common desire for reconciliation allowed for early signs of cross-border cooperation. In the 1960s, the so much in vogue spatial planning enhanced cooperation as the appropriate formula to promote regional development, also on borders. The International Congress of Regional Planners in 1965 was an important milestone; Regio Basiliensis summoned a thousand experts and professionals (political authorities, scholars and spatial and urban planning analysts) with the presence of other ground-breaking structures of cross-border cooperation, for example Euregio, CIMAB and the first associations of what later became the Regio Rhein-Waal⁷. The 1970s are known as a period of decentralization⁸ caused by the double crises of the Keynesian and Fordist models⁹. Although it is true that the regionalisation process in Europe did not lead to the emergence of levels of regional government with elected representatives in most of the countries, it did allow for the emergence of regional power and a considerable increase in the networks of cooperation structures in the following decade; at this point, interest in cooperation had a strong

⁵ R. Strassoldo, "Boundaries in Sociological Theory: a Reassessment", in R. Strassoldo and G. Delli Zotti (eds.), *Cooperation and Conflict in Border Areas*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 1982.

⁶ L. O'Dowd, "From a "Borderless World" to a "World of Borders": "Bringing History back in", in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 28, 2010, pp. 1031-1050.

⁷ It is worth mentioning that in the previous year, the Conference of Local Authorities of the Council of Europe had adopted Resolution 46 (1964), with regard to spatial planning in border regions.

⁸ Y. Meny (dir.), *Dix ans de régionalisation en Europe. Bilan et perspectives*, Paris, Cujas, 1982.

⁹ C. Trigilia, "Il paradosso delle regione? Regolazione economica e rappresentanza degli interessi", in *Meridiana*, Vol. 6, 1989.

functional component, it was about joining efforts towards common objectives, such as economic development and promotion, infrastructure, environment and culture. As a result of the European integration process, peripheral and border territories were given the opportunity to become Euroregions, which acquired centrality in the new European space in the making¹⁰.

A. Paasi¹¹ has pointed out that the 1990s witnessed a remarkable interest in borders with an interdisciplinary approach from different academic fields. Certainly, there are several factors which can explain this interest, including the implosion of the Soviet Empire, the reconfiguration of European borders and the implementation of cohesion policies on the part of the EU, with large allocations of structural funds via initiatives such as INTERREG, and to a lesser extent, PHARE and TACIS, specifically designed for cross-border cooperation. In Europe, the study of regionalism has run in parallel with border studies. In fact, the concept of neo-regionalism, closely linked to the process of economic globalization, was coined in this decade. Neo-regionalism differs from classic regionalism – related to regulatory (federalism) or political (nationalism) actions – in that an emphasis is placed on public policies and their efficiency and, especially, in that it substitutes intergovernmental relations for networks of collective action, which associate private actors and public authorities from different levels within border-based cooperation processes¹². In this context, the concept of paradiplomacy¹³ emerged in order to describe regions' external actions. Cross-border cooperation in the EU has become a major field of research, and it is much more developed than the one in North America, this is due to the fact that the EU and its cooperation programmes offer resources which reduce cooperation costs, provide political support against national governments and facilitate management and assistance in organising initiatives¹⁴. However, the booming of studies, theories and concepts has not always left a lasting trace, one of the best

¹⁰ R. Balme, "Pourquoi le gouvernement change-t-il d'échelle?", in R. Balme (dir.), *Les politiques du néo-régionalisme*, Paris, Economica, 1996, p. 25 [11-39]. This collective work contains important contributions about cooperation structures, which focus on transnational rather than border cooperation.

¹¹ A. Paasi, "Inclusion, Exclusion and Territorial Identities: the Meanings of Boundaries in the Globalizing Geopolitical Landscape", in *Nordisk Samhällsgeografisk Tidskrift*, Vol. 23, 1996, pp. 5, 6 [3-17].

¹² R. Balme, "Pourquoi le gouvernement change-t-il d'échelle?", in R. Balme (dir.), *Les politiques du néo-régionalisme*, Paris, Economica, 1996, p. 35.

¹³ F. Aldecoa and M. Keating, *Paradiplomacy in Action. The Foreign Relations of Subnational Governments*, London, Frank Cass, 1999.

¹⁴ M. Keating, "Regions and International Affairs: Motives, Opportunities and Strategies", in *Regional and Federal Studies*, Vol. 9, 1999, p. 10 [1-16].

examples might be the idea of the de-territorialisation of politics¹⁵, swept aside in favour of re-territorialisation¹⁶.

The first years of this century have been very productive in terms of collective works about regions and border studies; however, less attention has been given to cross-border cooperation, although there are significant contributions¹⁷. In Europe, the study of cross-border cooperation counts on important contributions from a scientific field often absent from other geographical areas, i.e. the legal field, concerned with the complexity of the newly created structures. *Le Réseau d'étude des normes transfrontalières et inter-territoriales* (RENTI), established in Bayonne in 2004, illustrates this effort through its significant contributions¹⁸. Innovation has also occurred from the viewpoint of the European integration process, with considerable impact on cross-border cooperation. The EU enlargement, almost doubling its size, has consolidated cooperation models among the new members and their neighbours; the Open Method of Coordination, subsequent to the Lisbon Strategy, represents a step forward for inter-governmentalism and the re-nationalisation of Community policies. The regulatory package for the period 2007-2013 has coined the term territorial cooperation in order to encompass the different cooperation models that emerged in the previous decade. The European Commission has launched, relatively successfully, macro-regional strategies, which provide a significant stimulus to cooperation.

This monograph aims to contribute to the debate on the future of cross-border cooperation with experiences from its past and its informal

¹⁵ B. Badie, *La fin des territoires. Essai sur le désordre international et sur l'utilité social du respect*, Paris, Fayard, 1995.

¹⁶ G. Popescu, "The Conflicting Logics of Cross-Border Reterritorialization: Geopolitics of Euroregions in Eastern Europe", in *Political Geography*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2008, pp. 418-438.

¹⁷ Examples related to this volume include: M. T. Bitsch (dir.), *Le fait régional et la construction européenne*, Brussels, Bruylant, 2003; O. Kramsch and B. Hooper (eds.), *Cross-Border Governance in the European Union*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004; B. Wassenberg, *Vers une eurorégion? La coopération transfrontalière franco-germano suisse dans l'espace rhénan de 1975 à 2000*, Brussels, PIE Peter Lang, 2007; M. Libera and B. Wassenberg, *L'Europe au cœur. Etudes pour Marie-Thérèse Bitsch*, Brussels, PIE Peter Lang, 2009; D. Wastl-Walter (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, London, Ashgate, 2011; T. M. Wilson and D. Hastings (eds.), *A Companion to Border Studies*, London, Blackwell Publishing, 2012.

¹⁸ Y. Lejeune (dir.), *Le droit des relations transfrontalières entre autorités régionales ou locales relevant d'états distincts*, Brussels, Bruylant, 2005; H. Labayle (dir.), *Vers un droit commun de la coopération transfrontalière?*, Brussels, Bruylant, 2006; C. Fernández de Casadevante Romani (dir.), *L'Etat et la coopération transfrontalière*, Brussels, Bruylant, 2007.

institutionalization. In order to do so, we have had the collaboration of professors from different social sciences, historians, geographers, sociologists and political scientists; this allows us to present a clear and convinced interdisciplinary approach. We also wanted to combine studies carried out by internationally renowned authors from the field of cross-border cooperation with other less known ones. This volume is structured in two parts. The first part, more theoretical, analyses general aspects of cross-border cooperation in the EU, with Euroregions as a recurring theme, including a chapter aimed at analysing the same phenomenon in North America. **L. Domínguez** and **I. Pires** analyse the historical development of cross-border cooperation, taking the symbolic years 1989/1990 as reference. In fact, it was along these two critical years when sustained and generous financial support to cooperation was initiated, especially, on the part of the European Commission with the INTERREG initiative. For some, it was about involving more actors in the multilevel arena which European governance was turning into; for others, it included the application of indicative planning formulas somewhat outdated; there are some who even point to the creation of privileged laboratories of a borderless Europe. The fact is that cooperation may have a different meaning, depending on the interests of each of the actors involved. Local and regional authorities see it as an instrument that can achieve a certain degree of centrality in the Community arena and that can also facilitate the endogenous development of its territories. The European Union understands it as a way of building European unity from the bottom, steadily, removing mutual prejudices and forging a truly European citizenship. States manage cooperation in a Lampedusan style, maintaining the control and deepening in the respective national identities, banishing the spectre of the creation of new territorial identities with relative success, except for the areas with political dominance of regionalist and nationalist forces on both sides. Finally, when cooperation structures are criticised as being mere communication tools for guidelines from Brussels, it is worth remembering that cross-border cooperation is distantly rooted in the European construction process itself and that its actors and motivations have not diverged substantially before and after 1989/1990.

Cross-border cooperation, both in Europe and North America, has a common starting point in the interests in intensifying economic and trade relations. Nevertheless, the institutionalization of these interests was substantially different. In fact, the foundational treaties of the European Communities went beyond trade relationships, creating their own institutional system with clear supranational elements and common policies which, for the particular case of cross-border cooperation, result in important financial support to the creation of cooperation structures which, in many cases, ended up forming Euroregions. Conversely,

NAFTA consciously escaped from any attempt to create similar policies or institutions; in North America, the promotion of continental trade has always been seen as a threat to national sovereignty, as a facilitator of an unwanted political integration. **E. Brunet-Jailly** highlights these differences. In North America, the support of trade relationships and the increase in security are the most important factors which explain the set up of cooperation structures across borders. Cross-border cooperation results from policy parallelism. However, the author also emphasises a second fundamental difference between Europe and America, the existence or not of a recent past of warfare, which stimulated cooperation in the case of Europe in greater deal than in North America. At the same time, each U.S. border has different characteristics. In fact, on the border with Canada, there exists a higher number of cooperation structures and the participation of the private sector is very remarkable. We could even talk about emerging proto-border regions in the West (Cascadia) and the Great Lakes area, with a special mention to PNWER. On the other hand, there are fewer cooperation structures on the border with Mexico, and nearly all of them are linked to the public sector, being this federal, regional or local. Here, the consequences of the 9/11 on security reinforcement result in a greater difficulty for the private sector to participate in these structures. Also, in contrast with the wider areas in which these structures are developed in Canada, structures with more specific aims or interests predominate here. Furthermore, while security issues are the subject of border cooperation with Canada through Integrated Border Enforcement Teams, there is no similar unit on the border with Mexico.

B. Wassenberg introduces us to the recent linkage between cross-border cooperation and international relations, a connection which has not always been evident. In fact, early academic approaches to cross-border cooperation in Europe, carried out by geographers in the 1970s from the standpoint of international geopolitics, regarded this phenomenon as part of the post World War II reconciliation process in Europe. It was not until the 1990s, with the interest in regionalism shown by political scientists, that cross-border cooperation became linked to the process of European integration; a process which promoted cooperation as a key element, much needed by the newly created single market, in order to overcome borders. However, the author argues that it is in this century when a more general connection with international relations is established and the role of cross-border cooperation is recognized as a model of micro-diplomacy.

Undoubtedly, the European integration process is experiencing a critical juncture and territorial cooperation has not only strengthened its institutional importance and become one of the three objectives of cohesion policies, established a new legal entity, namely the EGTCs, or applied their own regulations, but it can also be tackled as a reflection

of this crisis, and may provide useful alternatives. The following three chapters draw attention to these aspects.

J. W. Scott claims that we can clearly observe the main elements of the EU crisis in terms of its political identity, governance, social agendas and economic perspectives through the development of Euroregions, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe. The development of Euroregions, which started at a local level as relatively modest expressions of good “neighbourliness” in Dutch-German border regions to then become laboratories of experimental governance in the 1990s, distinctly shows the process of Europeanisation followed by agendas, discourses and practices of the processes of territorial cooperation. Nevertheless, after two decades of institutional and financial support to cross-border cooperation, borders are still a major impediment to social and political interaction among citizens and institutions on both sides of the border. Moreover, cross-border cooperation results are not immediate in the regional development of the territories involved in it, nor in their economic development. Furthermore, while the Europeanisation process takes place, contradictions within the EU are contributing to a re-nationalisation of the political contexts in which local and regional cross-border cooperation is developed.

M. Perkmann focuses on the oldest Euroregion, the Dutch-German EUREGIO, which has become a symbolic reference of cross-border cooperation in the EU. Particular emphasis is placed on the analysis of both the local and supralocal context conditions under which this cross-border region emerged and the governance structures created as a result of its development, as well as an evaluation of its success and impact. The author points out three relevant aspects in the analysis of the EUREGIO experience; firstly, he sets three criteria in order to assess the success of this type of cooperation structures: organisational development, diversification of resource base, and appropriation of cross-border activities. Secondly, despite evidence of the capacity of EUREGIO and other structures to create new models of governance, their originality is shaped by the EU cohesion policies that provided opportunities for the emergence of these Euroregions. Finally, considering the evident impact of EUREGIO as a model for other EU territories, we must take into account the varied typology of Euroregions, in particular instrumental Euroregions, which are almost totally dependent on Community funds, and permanent Euroregions, which are able to develop policy entrepreneurship and have their own policies to a certain extent. EUREGIO is an example and a model of the latter group, these regions are capable of functioning as representatives of local authority interests and as implementation agencies for this type of EU cohesion policy.

Finally, **M. van der Velde** examines a key aspect which is centred on borders but clearly goes beyond their spatial framework, i.e. labour (im) mobility. This is a matter of concern for the EU and national authorities in these times of crisis due to its corollary of strengthening xenophobic drifts and the growth of extreme political ideas, which are often anti-European. The author starts off with the acknowledgement of the low levels of cross-border mobility of workers, in comparison with the United States, for example. Although he warns of the difficulties of measuring this phenomenon, the result is that it offers an exceptional character which is not relevant to the context of labour mobility in the EU. He focuses on the importance of three thresholds, the individual disposition to migrate, the location of the destination, and the route or trajectory. His analysis allows us to observe the intensification of labour mobility in the first years of the current century, not isolated from the Community policy to promote these flows as an integral part of cohesion. However, this process came to a halt in 2008, the financial and economic crisis being a decisive factor in this development. This chapter mainly analyses the cases of Denmark, Lithuania and Spain. The latter is a country which provides a good example of the changes in tendency, from being a country which hosted migrants before the crisis to being a country of emigrants at present. Nevertheless, even though cross-border mobility is still low, we can clearly detect the migrants' preference to work in neighbour countries. The current context of economic crisis does not allow for a detailed evaluation of the impact of Community policies on labour mobility.

The second part of this volume is devoted to case studies, dealing with core aspects of past and future cross-border cooperation covering most of the EU territory. Our contributors have studied the impact of structural funds aimed at stimulating cooperation in stable and old borders (such as the Iberian border) or more recent and less consolidated ones (such as the borders across the old Austro-Hungarian Empire); these funds include both the long-standing experience of INTERREG and the current cross-border Operational Programmes. The authors also research on citizen mobility, both in its specific strand of labour mobility and in its broadest sense, with all types of exchanges of people in Northern, Central and Eastern EU territories. The increasing importance of cities as cross-border cooperation agents, together with the challenges and problems entailed, constitutes an important field of study; as well as the strongly contested effectiveness of the latest structure of territorial cooperation with legal personality under Community law.

The first case study discusses the critical balance of funding, which characterises and intensifies cross-border cooperation in the EU more than in any other territory, **E. Medeiros** pays special attention to the experience of the four INTERREG, between 1990 and 2013, in "Raia

Ibérica”. Community Initiatives have certainly contributed to the reduction of the barrier effect in border areas, however, this is a medium or long-term process, which requires the participation of local and regional stakeholders in building robust and sustainable cross-border networks; in this regard, the growing role of universities as promoters of cooperation initiatives is very significant as it is a sign of the maturity of cross-border cooperation in the “Raia”. The Iberian example shows how the successive INTERREG programmes transformed one of the most isolated and unaltered EU borderlands into a dynamic space of cooperation intentions, through territorial networks, which include structures as varied as Working Communities, Euroregions, Eurocities, and EGTCs. However, the strategies used, which focus on a small number of objectives with the ultimate goal of reducing the barrier effect and promoting the territorial capital of the border area, are at odds with the lack of compromise of the different regional development strategies, which still prioritise national perspectives over cross-border ones.

A. Torello presents the impact of cross-border operational programmes for the period 2007-2013 between Slovenia and its neighbouring countries Austria and Italy. The author focuses mainly on infrastructure enhancement and transport policies, as key features in the cross-border cooperation process, which is still unable to overcome the traffic congestion problems at specific moments, like holiday seasons; on the environmental policy, in which a threat to sustainable development of the border can be detected as a consequence of the excessive levels of water consumption and the need for monitoring the prevention of potentially frequent natural disasters; on the asymmetrical labour markets, as a consequence of the insufficient flexibility of the Slovenian framework, and of the low competitiveness of its SMEs, and higher salaries in Austria and Italy; lastly, this chapter is devoted to the continued existence of noticeable historical, cultural and linguistic barriers, especially between Italy and Slovenia, which hinder cooperation.

The following two chapters address the issue of both stable and occasional mobility on border spaces. **G. Besier** and **K. Stokłosa** focus on the German border with Poland and Denmark. In the first case, the German-Polish border region has a long history of cross-border commuting, which was even negotiated and agreed during the period under Soviet rule, directed to large factories in the GDR, with a majority of women commuters. Since 2008, mobility has gained importance and has become truly free again, although not in the numbers originally expected by most and feared by some; this issue hints at the persistence of the stereotype of Polish slackers or at how Polish workers are received on the other side of the border. However, it may be necessary to emphasise that mobility does not only occur among Polish, but also

among Germans, to the extent that the number of German workers in Poland has already outnumbered those who are employed in Austria. In the second case, in the Dutch-German border, problems are of a different nature and the number of commuters is much lower. On the one hand, the number of Germans who have crossed the Dutch border is higher, especially under the labour crisis until 2009; on the other hand, there is an ongoing debate about the “unwilling destinations of immigration” from non-Western countries that encourages the right wing populists discourse in favour of establishing restrictions to migration, which seems to be more successful on the Danish side.

In his contribution to the volume, **T. Lundén** pays attention to informal cross-border contacts in the Baltic area, a privileged cooperation space recently praised by Community institutions. This type of contact has a strong influence on identity and spatial behaviour due to the fact that most modern states try to make a nation-of-will out of its population through *inclusion/exclusion* processes, and try to make domestic contacts seem more natural than those of, for example, ethnic groups beyond the border. In most European states, boundaries are porous and feelings of loyalty may be vague or divided. Even in borderlands with an almost total ethnic division, where identity is clearly delimited, a second generation of migrants, settled on the other side of the border, may change or modify their allegiance because, as the author concludes, territorial allegiance and ethnic identity are learning processes.

Although border regions or spaces as a whole captured all the interest in the past, cities have become particularly relevant as cross-border cooperation actors in recent years. Thus, cross-border metropolises start to be the main subject of study. **F. Moullé** and **B. Reitel** draw our attention to the cross-border metropolises formed by the cities of Basel and Geneva with their urban peripheries beyond territorial boundaries. Despite their small size, Basel and Geneva are “poles of excellence” at a regional level and are well connected to global networks. The cross-border dimension in these regions brings some specificities, such as the significant increase in the level of complexity, especially in political terms – it should not be forgotten that cross-border metropolises are both spatial and political constructions. Thus, for example, the analysis of public transport networks and plans shows a high degree of integration, but it also reveals the difficulties found in building a real cross-border metropolis. The main finding is that, while using the border as a source of legitimacy, seeking being more visible to national authorities, public actors are reinforcing the ambiguous and ambivalent character of the border at the local level, without overcoming the current metropolitan asymmetry.

Symbolically, this volume concludes with a case study focused on the newly established European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), a long-standing demand on the part of local and regional actors to manage cooperation, overcoming the barriers derived from the co-existence of different regulatory systems on each side of the border. **E. Soós** tackles this issue from a Hungarian perspective, one of the leading countries in Eastern Europe, and even in the EU as a whole, in the implementation of this new tool. The EU has offered its members the opportunity to establish EGTCs, bodies with legal personality, since 2006. This chapter analyses the reasons why the creation and development of EGTCs, with the participation of third countries' regional and local governments, have not been able to meet their initial expectations. The main problem lies on the concept of sovereignty. Many states, especially Serbia and Romania, still understand cooperation as part of international relations, a matter which is the sole competence of central governments. At the same time, the desire for control on the part of national governments is strengthened by the possible reawakening of regional identities. The author argues that there is a complementary relationship between local and regional democracy and cross-border cooperation; this relationship cannot function fully effectively without strong local governments with efficient local governance. The need for legal national frameworks is also pointed out here; these would allow cross-border cooperation to develop from the ratification of the Madrid Convention and the Council of Europe, and from the signing of bilateral agreements, in this case of Hungary with Serbia and Romania.

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