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**Building a cross-border spatial planning strategy between four
countries: a wishful thinking?**

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Abstract:

Since 2010 and the launch of the METROBORDER project, funded by ESPON, Luxembourg and the neighbouring regions in Belgium, France and Germany pursue the objective of creating a cross-border polycentric metropolitan region. This strategy should bring more coherence and cohesion within this region which is strongly functionally integrated, due to the very high number of cross-border commuters but which is still poorly institutionally integrated. We have been involved in the building of the economic part of this strategy as moderators and scientific advisors. As such, we were able to identify obstacles to cross-border cooperation. The objective of this presentation is to depict the gap between the initial ambitions and the strategy issued with the required critical distance. We propose to describe and analyse the policy content of this strategic territorial vision but, most of all, the difficulties faced by the policymakers in its elaboration. These problems are due mainly to institutional mismatches, diverging policy priorities and differences in planning cultures. We will also highlight the importance of trust between individuals, which remains understudied in the field of cross-border spatial planning but which is, according to our experience, a crucial parameter. In this difficult context, the consensus that has been reached by all the stakeholders is the “smallest common denominator”, that is to say the less constraining. Of course, such a posture is far from being enough to tend to a more coherent and integrated cross-border area.

Building a cross-border spatial planning strategy between four countries: a wishful thinking?

1) Introduction

Europe, with its numerous internal borders, appears as a very fragmented space. The challenge linked to the European project of a multicultural supra-state space of freedom, security and justice is to remove the barriers to exchanges (Balibar, 2005). One of the issues of the European Regional Policy is to strengthen the integration between the border regions in order to better (re)shape ties between the populations. In the 2007-2013 program of the Regional Policy, the EU has set in a more precise way the strategic orientations for the use of the structural funds, especially concerning territorial cooperation. The ambition is to promote a more even, harmonious and sustainable development of the European space and to contribute to a better cohesion between its territories regarding its economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. Through the structural funds, the objective is to finance the networking of regional actors as well as the concrete actions in favour of a more territorially integrated development. In this context, numerous regional stakeholders have taken the initiative to structure and organize spatial development within their cross-border spaces, by elaborating a territorial strategy in a collective manner.

The idea of this article is to question the ability of these initiatives of cross-border strategic spatial planning to contribute to better integrate the territories, answering to the different dimensions of the cross-border integration process, as defined in the academic field of border studies. Indeed, this concept appears as a complex and multidimensional one, but in the European planning discourse, theoretical references are lacking to describe it properly and in a comprehensive form. This hinders the production of cross-border spatial strategies which can efficiently articulate border territories and create synergies between them.

The first part of this paper will consist in formulating a conceptual framework aiming at cross-fertilizing the academic works from the border studies with the discourses and policy concepts coming from the more applied field of spatial planning. The goal is to build a suitable tool-grid to analyse how cross-border spatial planning strategies serve the different dimensions of the concept of integration. Such an approach should allow to question the non-scientifically demonstrated postulate of the EU according to which more integration leads to more cohesion. In a second step, this conceptual framework will be applied to the case-study of the Greater Region where a cross-border spatial planning strategy is being elaborated. In this space of cooperation, which includes one State and parts of three other ones, most of the very numerous flows which cross the borders are oriented towards Luxembourg. At last, the third part will highlight the most important limits and obstacles which hamper the success of this strategy.

2) A conceptual framework derived from the articulation between the fields of border studies and strategic spatial planning

If the literature on comparative spatial planning territories (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009; Newman & Thornley, 1996) has flourished during the last decades, as well as works on the emergence of a European spatial planning policy and discourse (Dühr *et al.*, 2010 ; Faludi, 2010), cross-border spatial planning has still been little studied. The notion of cross-border spatial planning refers to the search for a collective cross-border decision making (Herzog, 2000), which goes through a process of reinforcement of the institutions for pursuing beneficial outcomes for all the involved parts (Peña, 2007). Its primary purpose is to make the spatial planning objectives of all the border regions converge. From a conceptual point of view, the aim of cross-border strategic spatial planning is to develop a common project with a variety of actors on both sides of the border in order to discuss a joint development strategy (Durand, 2014: 117). Most of the time, the approach consists, for the spatial planners, in producing strategic documents which are not constraining, which are limited to a high degree of generalization, and which have very small effects on cross-border

integration. For Bufon (2011), “*regional cross-border policies thus remain mostly administrative and bureaucratic in character, addressing real life and real needs of the borderland population only to a small extent*”. In a way, cross-border spatial planning is restricted to the definition of vague and simple orientations, which have no legal impacts on practices. Indeed, spatial planning priorities and strategies are still defined at the national or regional scale and embedded within these territorial logics.

The EU doesn't address directly the issue of cross-border spatial planning, but it has defined a spatial planning vision for the whole European area through diverse documents (ESDP, 1999; Green Paper on territorial cohesion, 2008; Territorial Agenda 2020, 2011). It has introduced a European dimension in spatial planning, by influencing territorial policies through the elaboration of guiding principles and concepts (polycentrism, territorial cohesion...) (Dühr et al., 2010, Jean & Baudelle, 2010). In order to implement this conception, the EU has established a regional policy which aims, first, at reducing the inequalities between the different European regions –the convergence policy- and which mobilizes an important part of the available structural funds (Objective 1). The EU also promotes the intensification of cross-border interactions, with the help of specific financial tools (INTERREG programs) and legal ones (Objective 3). Concerning the cross-border context, the intention of the EU Policy is to better interconnect the territories beyond the administrative borders which underline the ruptures between states and generate obstacles with regards to flows of people, goods and capital. The EU policy in favour of cross-border integration appears to be deeply impregnated by this cross-border flows approach. However, even if a lot of works have studied the notion of cross-border integration, including studies funded by the EU (Study Programme on European Spatial Planning 1998-2000, Metroborder 2009-2011), the understanding of this process remains tricky. This is why we propose, in the next step, to examine in depth the concept of cross-border integration before seeing how its different dimensions can be transferred in a planning approach. In a second step, we will see how a cross-border territorial strategy can potentially contribute to serve the dimensions of cross-border integration.

2.1 The different meanings of the concept of cross-border integration

In the scientific literature, the study of cross-border integration is often limited to economic interactions between border territories (Anderson & Wever, 2003). Other works have tried to see if the existing interactions between two border regions lead to a greater convergence of the development trajectories (in social, economic and urbanistic terms), and therefore to a diminution of their structural differentials (De Boe et al., 1999). The results show that when cross-border interactions are very asymmetrical, they can tend to increase the territorial disparities instead of reducing them. This observation seems to contradict the hypothesis that more cross-border interactions always lead to more convergence (Topaloglou *et al.*, 2005; Decoville *et al.*, 2013). The concept of integration can therefore not be summarized to a process which would have a single causal effect. Indeed, the cross-border integration process between border regions results from symmetries and similarities as well as from asymmetries and differentials (Durand, 2015). Consequently, in order to overcome the misunderstandings linked to the equivocal meanings of this concept, it has been deconstructed and reveal four different dimensions:

First, the **functional dimension** of integration relates to the interactions on both sides of a border for motives such as work, shopping, leisure or services. They are the results of everyone's actions. The functional dimension of integration can be compared to *the flow approach*, as defined by Van Houtum (2000). The quality of the inter-linkage between two border territories by the network of public transport contributes also to improve the functional dimension of integration.

The **institutional dimension** of integration is linked to the organizational side of cross-border cooperation and to the networking of actors in order to generate, to support or to regulate the functional dimension of cross-border integration. This governance can be either very formalized or more informal from an institutional point of view.

The **structural dimension** of cross-border integration refers to the characteristics of a geographic cross-border space (in terms of urban development, economic activities, social patterns) and to the differences and differentials on both sides of the border. A structural integration process relates to a diminution of these differences and differentials. Most of the times, socioeconomic indicators are used to express the structural integration process.

The **ideational dimension** of integration gathers a variety of distinct subjective elements linked to individual and collective representations, such as the sharing of common social and politic references and symbols, or the feeling of identification to a common cross-border living area (Donnan & Wilson, 2001). Indeed, individuals can cross the border to benefit from opportunities without sharing this feeling of belonging to an integrated space, or without developing cultural affinities.

The concept of cross-border integration appears therefore to be polysemous. The different meanings of the concept of integration show how difficult it is to foster a comprehensive cross-border integration process. Nevertheless, a cross-border spatial planning strategy can contribute, due to its trans-sectorial approach, to support the integration process by opening the debate on the most important directions which should be pursued at the cross-border scale, by institutional actors, civil society, or the business representatives.

2.2 How can a cross-border spatial planning strategy contribute to the different dimensions of cross-border integration?

As previously mentioned, there is no real cross-border spatial planning policy, since there is no real legal framework for it, nor common financial means that are provided at the cross-border scale. Cross-border contexts are characterized by a juxtaposition of different territorial systems with their own functioning, that is to say with their own regulation systems, tools and methods to plan urban development that are inspired by different planning cultures. As a consequence, cross-border spatial planning consists in a cooperation between actors located on each side of a border, without a clear and recognized hierarchy between them (De Vries, 2008). In addition, concrete actions remain very limited since there is no legal instruments, at the cross-border scale, which can directly impact on land use policy, and since financial means remain very restricted. Most often, cross-border initiatives are confined to sectorial approaches, put in place to regulate certain issues, such as mobility questions. It should be added that different factors influence cross-border spatial planning, such as the size of the area of cooperation, the need for cooperation, the structure of the cross-border cooperation, language barriers or cultural differences (Knippschild, 2011). For these reasons, it requires a strong coordination between the different administrative and governmental stakeholders from the different countries (Peña, 2007). Furthermore, the conceptualisation of a relevant cross-border spatial planning policy appears impossible without considering the societal issue, with its different planning cultures and priorities (Jacobs, 2014). However, a cross-border spatial planning strategy can potentially offer relevant tools to foster the process of cross-border integration. Indeed, numerous policy concepts or actions associated with the EU spatial planning policy contain references, more or less explicit, to the different dimensions previously described.

Concerning the structural dimension of integration, its translation into the European spatial planning objectives can be associated to the concept of convergence, that is to say to the reduction of the gap of development on both side of a border. From a strategic point of view, the idea is to include elements from the European territorial cohesion policy to tend towards a more homogenous development on both side of a border. This is reflected on the one hand by a convergence of the socioeconomic characteristics (reduction of the differences) and, on the other hand, by a convergence of the policies, the strategies (in terms of economic, social, educational and spatial priorities), and the legal and tax settings.

The functional dimension of integration is more clearly addressed by the planning policies, especially by the concrete inter-linkage of border territories, which is promoted in order to increase cross-border flows. At the

European level, the transport infrastructures policy is the most important tool (Trans-European Transport Network), even if the competence remains a state sovereignty.

In terms of institutional integration, the setting up of a cross-border spatial planning policy requires the implementation and the structuring of a dedicated cross-border governance between the stakeholders. In order to organize the exchanges and the debate in a constructive way, and to allow the decision-making process to take place, a multi-level governance is usually put in place, which gathers all the institutional actors which have the required legal competence to realize concrete actions and to elaborate projects. In this sense, cross-border spatial planning strategies contribute to structure the institutional integration process.

The ideational dimension of cross-border integration refers to issues relating to the perceived and lived space. A cross-border spatial planning strategy can contribute to build a common identity by creating favourable conditions for an appropriation of space by individuals. In more concrete terms, this can be fostered by taking into account the wishes of the population, or by involving it in the elaboration of the strategic documents. It can also be promoted by implementing diverse initiatives which allow to strengthen social and cultural ties between the populations (organization of events, festivals, meetings). Territorial marketing actions also contribute to improve the image of a cross-border space.

The different elements described above do not constitute a “best practice” guide, but just an attempt to conceive a new conceptual framework, built from the cross-fertilization of the works previously done in the fields of border studies and strategic spatial planning. It is with the help of this conceptual grid that we will analyse the way a cross-border spatial planning strategy has been put in place in the Greater Region.

3) The territorial development scheme of the Greater Region

In this part, the territorial development scheme of the Greater Region, which is still under construction, is going to be analysed with the previously described theoretical framework. Its impact on the different dimensions of cross-border integration will be underlined. But before entering the topic, it is necessary to present the context of the Greater Region as well as the approach that has been followed by the institutional actors.

3.1. Elements of context

The Greater Region is a 65 400 km² cross-border cooperation space which gathers more than 11 million of inhabitants. Its juridical setting, as well as its names and territorial boundaries have evolved since the first initiatives of cooperation, at the beginning of the sixties. Today, this vast cross-border space contains a sovereign State (Luxembourg), the Walloon region of Belgium, the French Lorraine region, and two German *Länder*: Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate. Most of the challenges are concentrated around the borders of Luxembourg (see Figure 1). Indeed, concerning the functional dynamics, most of the cross-border flows are directed towards the Grand-Duchy. With more than 160 000 cross-border workers (STATEC, 2014), which represent 44% of the total employment in Luxembourg, the borders of this country are among the most permeable to cross-border work flows in Europe. Structural differences, in terms of employment opportunities, wages and working conditions explain this attractiveness of Luxembourg with regards to the surrounding areas. These flows strongly impact on spatial development within the cross-border functional region, especially concerning housing development (Sohn et al., 2014). There is another active cross-border space of cooperation around the capital city of Saarland, Saarbrücken, and the northern part of the French department of Moselle: the Eurodistrict Saarmoselle. Cross-border flows are lower there (approximately 20 000) and mostly directed to Germany. The Greater Region appears to be a very large space of cooperation in comparison to the border regions which are concretely impacted by the cross-border dynamics. Taking into account these particular settings, and the administrative complexity of the entire region, the Greater Region

institution has set itself the objective of fostering the complementarities between the territories which compose it, by establishing a common territorial strategy.

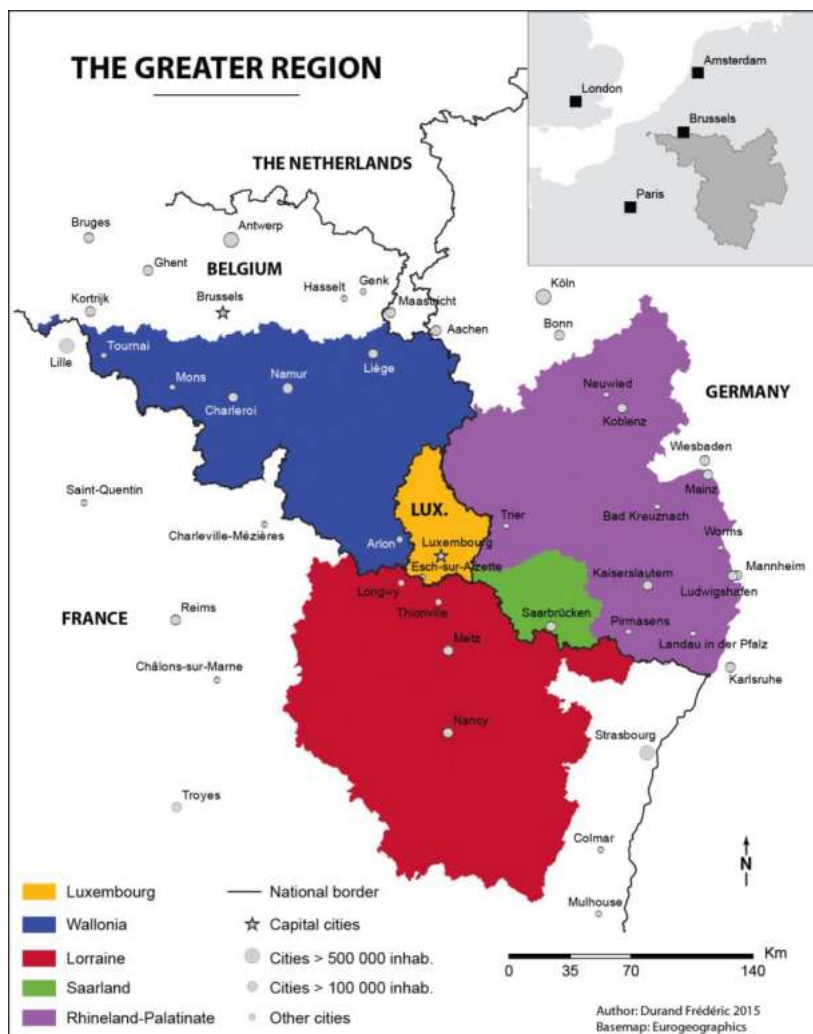


Figure 1. Location map of the Greater Region

3.2. The approach of the territorial development scheme of the Greater Region

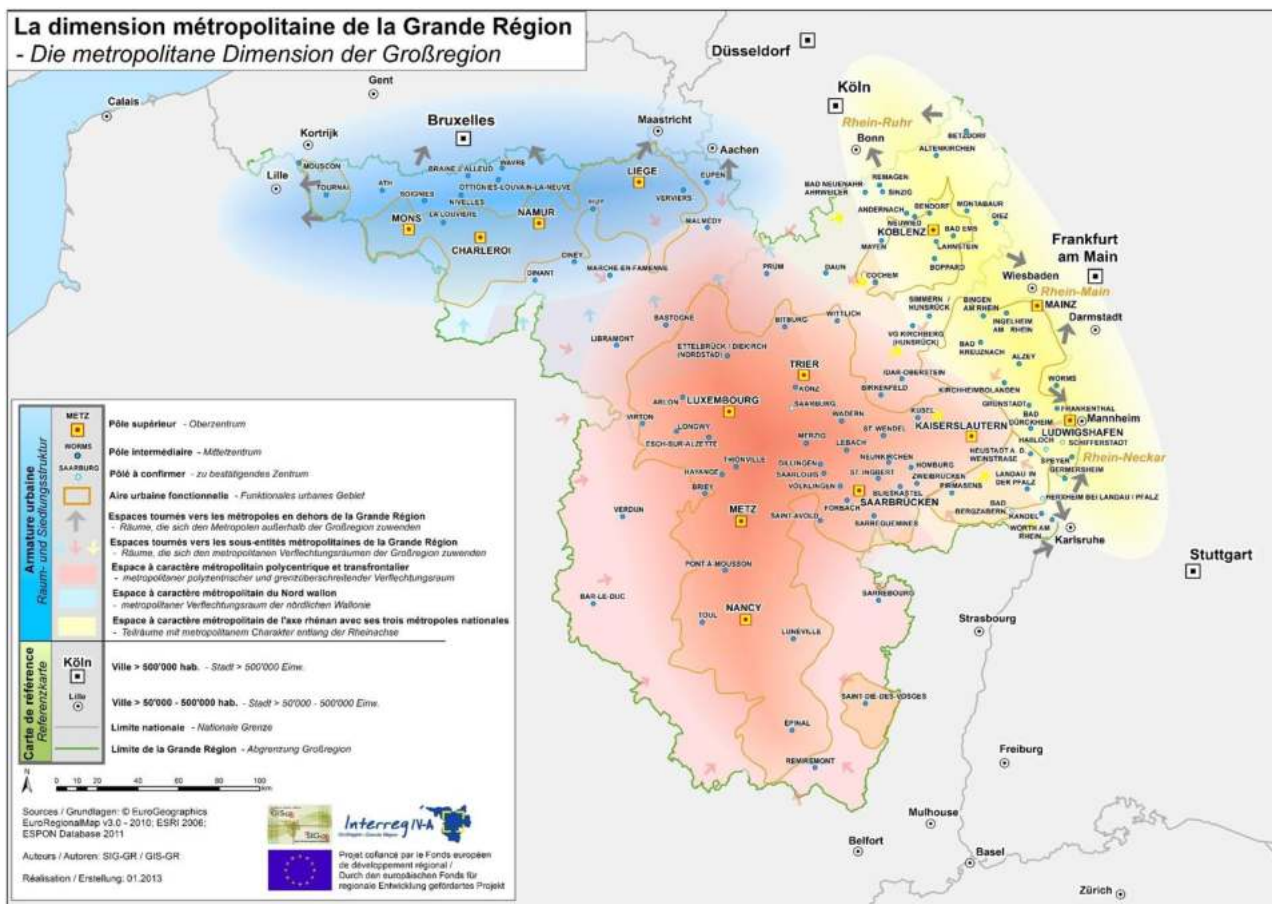
The links which bring together the different territories within the Greater Region have encouraged the authorities to initiate a strategic reflection, called the “territorial development scheme of the Greater Region”, which aims at fostering the development of a cross-border metropolitan polycentric region. The observation which underpins this strategy stands on the results of the study realized in the frame of the ESPON program called METROBORDER (2010), which shown that the Greater Region, characterized by a network of small-and medium sized cities, doesn’t possess the critical mass to position itself on the European scene. The cross-border polycentric metropolitan region strategy suggests a better inter-linkage of the different urban centres, in order to provide a larger offer of metropolitan functions. Through a better integration of the different urban centres, the objectives are also to generate scale economies and to share certain public facilities. The cross-border strategy might tend to constitute a socio-spatial process, driven by the public sector, through which a vision, actions and means to shape and organize spatial development of the cross-border area are developed. However, it remains limited by the fact that it is not constraining and has not the requested means to achieve its objectives.

The elaboration of this strategy has been given to the Committee for the coordination of territorial development (CCTD), a working group which gathers different representatives of the institutional partners of the Greater Region for the issues related to spatial planning. The elaboration of this strategy is a multiple steps process: First, the Executives of the Greater Region have defined the guidelines of the strategy. In the second step, which is still under process, the CCTD coordinates and leads the development of the preliminary works done in the frame of the strategy building. At last, the different parts of the strategy will be validated by the Summit of the Executives, which is the supreme authority of the decision-making process in the Greater Region.

This approach has led to the production of different documents which treat different themes. The first document, produced in 2012, deals with the metropolitan dimension of the Greater Region and consists in an overview of the urban structure of the Greater Region. It has been followed by a second one which defines the existing transport networks, and identifies, on the basis of a common agreement, the future networks which should be given priorities on the policy agendas. The third one focuses on the economic side of the spatial planning strategy, and aims at providing the representatives of the Greater Region with the required statistical and qualitative information to identify the economic domains which should be prioritized and supported by the policy-makers. Two other documents should be produced soon, on the touristic valorisation of the Greater Region and on its demographic challenges.

3.3. The contribution of the territorial development scheme of the Greater Region to the different dimensions of cross-border integration

The document which focuses on the metropolitan dimension has allowed to define the levels of centrality of the most important cities within the Greater Region, as well as their functional profiles. Three different metropolitan spaces have been identified which possess their own logics (Figure 2). The first so called “cross-border polycentric functional space with a metropolitan dimension” is located in the central part of the Greater Region and includes the functional space around Luxembourg, Metz, Nancy, Saarbrücken, Sarreguemines, Trier and Kaiserslautern. The second one is located along the Rhine axis and incorporates three different German metropolitan regions: Rhine-Ruhr, Rhine-Main and Rhine-Neckar. The last one is located on the northern part of the Walloon region, and is composed of cities which are under the gravity of Brussels, as well as cross-border metropolitan areas such as Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai or Aachen-Liège-Maastricht. This first document doesn’t provide concrete solutions to increase the cross-border integration process, but it highlights the potential importance of a better articulation and of more complementarities within these three different spaces. It also gives precisions concerning the cross-border territorial strategy which should be envisaged within the Greater Region. Indeed, since spatial planning is carried out under the responsibility of each territory the actions should be defined and realized in accordance with the competences and tools which already exist in each territory.



Sources: CCTD 2012 (*Schéma de développement territorial de la Grande Région – volet 1 : la dimension métropolitaine de la Grande Région*)

Figure 2. The three metropolitan spaces of the Greater Region

The document which refers to the priority transport networks highlights the challenge of cross-border mobility in a context which is characterized by a growing number of cross-border workers and, more generally speaking, by an increase of flows. The first priority concerns the development of road transport infrastructures as well as the railway network (improvement of the motorway network, construction of high-speed railway line, implementation of the Eurocap-Rail project, which aims at better linking the three different European capitals of Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg). The second priority targets a rise in the offer of public transport lines and an improvement of passenger’s services (single information platform, pricing strategy). In this context, institutional stakeholders have already conducted bilateral initiatives, such as the “Scheme for cross-border mobility” between France and Luxembourg (another one is scheduled between Belgium and Luxembourg). Concerning the delicate issue of airports, no strategic discussion have taken place so far, due to the importance of the competition between the different territories. Waterway transport has not been considered as a priority.

The document which focuses on the issue of a spatial strategic reflection on the promotion of economic development has underlined the strong heterogeneity of the Greater Region as well as the divergences concerning the economic priorities identified in the different territories. The strong specialization of Luxembourg in the financial sector pushes the policymakers to search for a diversification of its economy, by fostering other kinds of high added value sectors, such as research, highly specialized services, IT. Saarland, which is facing a serious problem of population shrinking, tries to foster its attractiveness in order to offset its loss of qualified working force to maintain its industrial sector, mostly dealing with automotive industry and machine-tool production. Rhineland-Palatinate has also a strong specialization, in the sector of

the chemical industry and in the machine-tool production. Most of the economic actors in Rhineland-Palatinate are not really turned toward the “heart” of the Greater Region (except for the city of Trier). The economic activity of the Walloon region is also not really deeply tied to the Greater Regional context, excepted for its most eastern part, which is sparsely populated. For these reasons, Rhineland-Palatinate and the Walloon region do not seem to consider the Greater Region as the most relevant territorial scale to elaborate an economic development scheme. At the opposite, the Lorraine Region, which is encountering difficulties since the closing of numerous steel industries in its northern part, largely considers the importance of Luxembourg in its strategic reflections. Around 80 000 workers cross the French-Luxembourgish border every day to work in the Grand-Duchy. Of course, this also doesn't go without creating problems, including a feeling of strong dependency towards Luxembourg. These differences between the territories which compose the Greater Region have made it very difficult to pinpoint clear priorities at the cross-border scale. Nevertheless, two domains have been identified: the development of new materials and the silver economy (the economy linked to ageing).

→ How do these different reflections serve the four dimensions of cross-border integration?

It seems that, generally speaking, the scheme for the territorial development of the Greater Region consists more in a modest attempt to answer to the growing importance of cross-border interactions, than to a proactive approach aiming at reinforcing the cross-border integration of the different territories. Indeed, the structural dimension of integration is not considered in the targeted objectives, that is to say that the reduction of the inequalities of development is not mentioned. At the opposite, and concerning the functional dimension of integration, the agreements and consensus are much easier to find. The need for a better fluidity of people and goods is clearly recognized by all the stakeholders. This consensus also goes beyond the mere spatial planning policy, since initiatives have been taken to improve the access to the cross-border labour market, to allow the recognition of foreign diplomas, and so on.

The scheme for the territorial development of the Greater Region doesn't address directly the issue of the institutional integration, but suggests changes to improve the cross-border governance. Indeed, a strong original impediment remains: how to define a relevant inter-territorial political coordination in a context characterized by a strong institutional imbalance between the nature of the territories (State, *Länder* and Regions), by a splitting of the decision centres, and diverging priorities? So far, no concrete decision has been taken, but the Walloon presidency intends to deepen the reflection on this specific issue and to rationalize the governance to improve its functioning. At last, the ideational dimension of integration has not been addressed in the frame of the strategy so far.

To understand the lack of more concrete results concerning some of the dimensions of cross-border integration, it is necessary to shed light on the different obstacles that the stakeholders have to face before adopting concrete resolutions.

4) A cross-border strategy constrained by numerous obstacles

The cross-border strategy conceived by the institutional actors aims first at fostering the economic development and at reinforcing the metropolitan potential of the Greater Region. However, this strategy is confronted to numerous difficulties which restrain its capacity to make the cross-border area more coherent. Three types of obstacles can be identified: the technical obstacles, the political obstacles, and the relational obstacles.

4.1. The technical obstacles

These obstacles are linked to institutional mismatches, differences in planning cultures and tools, and legal problems. These obstacles are usually the one which are the most often cited by actors in the field of cross-border cooperation. Indeed, they constitute huge hindrances to the concrete implementation of a strategy. In the case of the Greater Region, the situation with respect to this type of problems is very complex due to the number of countries which are concerned. Institutional structures and state organizations (centralism vs federalism) vary on each side of the borders. The institutional levels have not the same competences, and are not systematically represented in the cross-border governance (Nelles & Durand, 2014), even if they would theoretically be needed. This doesn't help to serve the dialogue between actors and to reach a consensus. Luxembourg, of course, has the full competencies of a sovereign country. The *Länder* in Germany benefit a strong autonomy, as well as the Walloon region. The Lorraine region reflects a more centralized structure of the French territorial organization. Indeed, the central State authority is involved in the cross-border governance through the "Prefecture" of Lorraine. These institutional mismatches impact the efficiency of the cross-border governance.

Beyond these institutional mismatches, planning cultures largely diverge between the different territories of the Greater Region. A distinction can be done between the *regional economic planning approach*, which dominates in Lorraine and in Luxembourg, the *land use management approach*, in the Walloon region, and the *comprehensive integrated approach* in the German *Länder* (Newman & Thornley, 1996). The confrontation between these different planning conceptions doesn't constitute, at first sight, a strong impediment to cooperation, since the setting up of a cross-border territorial strategy constitutes a flexible and non-constraining process. Nevertheless, the conceptual tools that are used are not always understood in the same manner, as "polycentrism", "centrality" and "metropolitan". This impacts on the mutual understanding of the strategies that are followed by the neighbours. Moreover, the priorities that are targeted by the different representatives of the planning authorities diverge. Whereas the promotion of economic development is prioritized by the French and the Belgium actors, the issue of mobility seems to monopolize the attention of the Luxembourgish stakeholders. Our analyses did not allow us to see if the German actors were really following a *comprehensive integrated approach*, in line with the description given by Newman and Thornley.

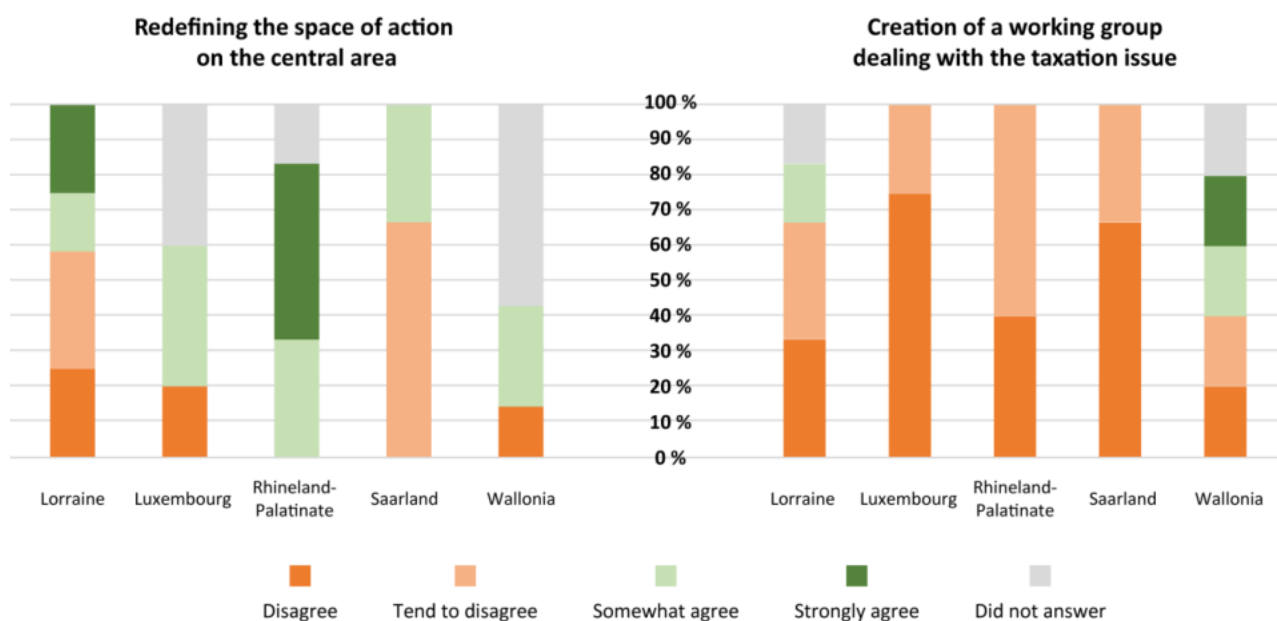
In addition to these obstacles, the inequalities in terms of economic development and tax regimes between the different territorial members of the Greater Region make the situation even more complex. The tendencies concerning the evolution of the average wages, the variation of the total tax rates on business, the total labour cost and the unemployment rates show that the inequalities, which are very high, will probably not decrease in the coming years. These disparities tend to generate, for some territorial actors, a feeling of dependency on the "wealthy Luxembourg" which provides work opportunities. When the qualified work force from France, Germany, and Belgium crosses the border every day to work in Luxembourg, it is sometimes seen as being at the expense of the capacity of these territories to rebound and to develop their economies. These feelings lead to defensive postures that are not in favour of a more peaceful and fruitful dialogue.

4.2. The political obstacles

The development of a cross-border strategic reflection raises political problems linked to the representativeness of the stakeholders that are involved. For instance, the local actors are not members of the decision-making process within the Greater Region, even if they are strongly impacted by the border effects and by the challenges of cross-border integration. On the contrary, state actors still dominate the cross-border governance sphere and largely influence the outputs of the debates (De Vries, 2008; Dörry & Decoville, 2013; Durand & Lamour, 2014). The case of the Greater Region is no exception to this rule, and the content of the exchanges expresses the differences concerning each national strategy. The cross-border cooperation is thus, in a way, the place where national strategies are confronted, where everyone supports his position. State actors import in the debate their "institutional culture", and defend most of all the interests of their institutions.

Beyond the confrontation of the different national priorities, the stakeholders have also diverging opinions concerning the desired future of the cross-border space. During the realization of the preliminary study related to the economic part of the strategy, a workshop took place, which highlighted these contrasting positions. Two issues discussed on that occasion show divisions between territories (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Stakeholders positions (according to their territorial belonging) concerning cross-border related questions



Sources: Data from the workshop conducted in the frame of the study on the development of the economic component of the Territorial Development Scheme of the Greater Region (2014)

Concerning the first question, which suggested a redefinition of the space of action on a restricted area centred on the space where most of the interactions take place, strong differences appeared between the positions defended by the different actors. The stakeholders from Lorraine and the Saarland are not in favour of such a redefinition, and they suggest to stick to the boundaries of the Greater Region as a whole, whereas the other actors were more favourable to the suggestion. The lack of consensus on such a crucial issue makes it impossible to converge towards a more efficient implementation, in concrete actions, of the general orientations of the strategy.

Concerning the thematic of tax regimes, which generates important disparities between the attractiveness of the different territories on some specific types of activities, goods and services, a quite unexpected consensus appeared. All the stakeholders agreed to answer that this topic should not be addressed by a dedicated working group. Such a rejection clearly shows that beyond the appearing desire of more cross-border cooperation, competition and national interests remain stronger. Tax regimes is a very sensitive and strategic tool, and sharing information related to these strategies is not conceivable. This taboo is nevertheless a real political obstacle, which restrains discussions within the cross-border governance.

Furthermore, there are other division lines between the actors on the issue of cross-border governance. Should the local actors be more involved? Should an integrated team, dedicated to cross-border issues and funded by the different territorial members be created? The answers to these questions are far from converging, and these oppositions constitute serious impediments to the success of the cross-border territorial strategy.

4.3. The relational obstacles

At last, another type of obstacles should be considered, which lies in the formal or informal relations which tie individuals and that can be called “relational obstacles”. These obstacles should be differentiated from the political obstacles because they are not linked to differences in terms of ideologies or policy priorities, but because they depend on the quality of the human relations between members of the cross-border governance. This type of obstacle is rarely studied *per se*, and it is very complex to obtain reliable information on such a sensitive issue. Cross-border cooperation has a lot to do with the image that it should reflect from the policymakers, and for this reason the communication on cross-border governance is usually quite controlled. However, a good understanding of the functioning of a policy network, through the perceptions that each stakeholder has from the other members of the decision-making process is a necessity in order to better grasp the limitations or successes of the different initiatives. Indeed, cross-border governance is most of all a space of dialogue and exchange between individuals who do not have the same social capital, the same legitimacy, or the same leadership. In order to understand the power relations which structure the decision-making system, 41 experts belonging to 34 different organizations have been interviewed in a dedicated research project¹ (Dörry & Decoville, 2013). These experts were selected for their involvement in the cross-border governance related to the issue of public transportation. In a first step, we have asked the actors to relate their subjective feeling concerning the importance of the other actors in the decision-making process. By summing the scores obtained by all the individuals who belonged to the same organisations, we could provide an estimation² of the perceived importance of the different institutions, considering that the social capital of people “*aggregates into the social capital of organisations*” (Burt, 1992: 9). This “perceived” importance is not the same as the “institutional” one, which is given by the official legal competences. Table 1 presents the five organisations considered as being the most important.

Table 1. Main organizations perceived as important within the cross-border governance network on the public transportation issue

Organisations	Perceived importance in the decision-making process
Ministry of Sustainable Development (Luxembourg)	55
Lorraine Region (France)	38
National Transport Agency (Luxembourg)	20
Ministry of Economy, Transport, Agriculture and Wine (Rhineland-Palatinate)	17
Ministry of Environment, Energy and Transport (Saarland)	17

The first finding is that two institutions appear as being much more important than all the other ones in the subjective representations of the interviewed people, even if the Greater Region includes four countries and five regions which should have, theoretically speaking, similar weights in the decision-making process. These two institutions are the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure of Luxembourg (MDDI) and the Lorraine Region. The MDDI is both an initiator of projects and a key decision-maker. The Lorraine Region has been given the competences of managing railways transportation in 2002. The three following institutions are the National Transport Agency (Luxembourg), the Ministry of Economy, Transport, Agriculture and Wine (Rhineland-Palatinate) and the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Transport (Saarland). No Belgian stakeholder appears in the top most important ones. These differences in the level of perceived importance in the decision-making process appears to be more due to the level of involvement of the individuals who represent an institution than to the legal and official competences of the

¹ Metronet Project, funded by the National Fund of research, Luxembourg.

² The score corresponds to the number of times one or more actor(s) belonging to a single institution has (have) been mentioned as “important in the decision-making process”.

latters. It should be noticed that most of the time, the actors who participate in the cross-border governance have this task in addition to other attributions that they have to fulfil for the institutions they belong to. In the hierarchy of their tasks, the cross-border files are seldom the first priorities.

In the frame of these interviews, the experts have been asked to express their perception concerning the involvement, the leadership and the trust capital of the other actors involved. For that, the interviewees were asked to give a value ranging from 1 (weak) to 3 (strong). The figures presented in table 2 correspond to the average values obtained by each individual, according to the perceptions the others had from him. Of course, the results were anonymized, and they translate subjective representations of the situation, and not absolute ones. Table 2 shows the five most important actors of the previously mentioned institutions.

Table 2. Perceptions of the involvement, the trust capita and the leadership qualities of a few important stakeholders in the cross-border governance

	Involvement	Trust	Leadership	Type of actor
Actor 1	3,0	2,9	2,9	driver of the CB cooperation
Actor 2	2,7	2,5	2,1	driver of the CB cooperation
Actor 3	1,9	1,7	2,4	hindrance to CB cooperation
Actor 4	3,0	2,7	2,5	driver of the CB cooperation
Actor 5	1,5	2,5	2,0	not involved

The actors obtained scores which greatly vary from one to another concerning their capital of confidence (trust), their quality of leader or their level of involvement. Table 2 just gives a short overview of the different profiles that can be identified. The stakeholders who obtained good values in the three above mentioned fields can be view as drivers of the cross-border cooperation. They are involved, they are recognized, and they can stimulate the debate. On the contrary, some actors can be characterized as constituting a hindrance to the cooperation. Indeed, they are important in the decision-making process, but they do not inspire “trust” to the other members. The reasons of this lack of trust can vary. Either they are seen as actors who are not really in favour of strengthening the cross-border cooperation, or they are seen as lacking the required diplomatic skills. At last, a third type of actors can be distinguished, the ones who are considered as being not engaged and committed in the cross-border issues.

This very brief summary of the survey has no ambition to present the results more in details, but to remind that the elaboration of a cross-border strategy is not only impeded by the well-known obstacles of the institutional mismatches or diverging policy priorities. It is also, sometimes, limited by the bad quality of the inter-individual relationships. Cross-border governance is not a compulsory demarche, it relies on the desire and the willingness of some actors to create, strengthen or maintain ties with the neighbours. It consists in a fragile network mostly driven by policymakers and civil servants who show very different levels of involvement. It is not easy to evaluate the impact of these relational obstacles in comparison to the technical or the political obstacles, but one thing is sure: technical problems can be solved, whereas it is much more complicated to recreate trust when it is not existing anymore.

Conclusion

At its actual stage of development, the scheme for a territorial development of the Greater Region appears to be seriously hampered by the extreme complexity of the geographical configuration, with distinct territorial identities, but also by technical (multiplicity of actors, institutional mismatches, variety of competencies), political (divergence of priorities) and relational (lack of trust, of legitimacy) obstacles. It should be reminded that this strategy is still an ongoing process, and that no definitive conclusion can be given. However, it seems that it cannot serve the ambitions of promoting a more comprehensive cross-border

cooperation, in the different dimensions of the meaning. This strategy can be qualified as the one of the “smallest common denominator”, even if it would be unfair and false to say that cross-border cooperation in the Greater Region has led to no result. In the field of cross-border public transportation, for instance, numerous cross-border lines and services were created to accompany the economic dimension of cross-border integration. Facilitating the workers flows is necessary for Luxembourg, which needs work force for its economy, but also for the border regions, which are facing high unemployment rates and which see the proximity of Luxembourg as an opportunity to develop their residential economy, based on the incomes of the cross-border workers. Allowing a better fluidity of these flows constitutes a win-win challenge. But the other dimensions of cross-border integration are very poorly addressed so far. The complexity of the context is often evoked, but when we try to look beyond the scene of the cross-border governance, by looking at the individuals who drive it, and not at the institutions which are represented, it appears that solving the technical problems is not a purely technical issue, but more a question of willingness. Studying the importance of these notions of trust, leadership and commitment is crucial to better understand the “disillusions” often associated with cross-border governance (Knippschild, 2011), and to be more nuanced with respect to the EU paradigm, according to which more interactions should lead to more integration.

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