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With ‘Regional Territorial Agendas’ towards territorial cohesion? The emergence of supra-regional coalitions in Europe and their future role in Cohesion Policy

This paper focuses on current trends of regionalisation with supra-regional coalitions emerging in Europe. In the context of further European integration and institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation, functional integration in cross-border areas is developing. By exploiting cross-border territorial capital these coalitions might contribute to the concept of territorial cohesion as stated and upgraded in the European Union’s Treaty of Lisbon. The paper considers the right scale for these emerging supra-regional coalitions and their implications for the European Spatial Development Policy. When elaborating on the right delineation of supra- or transnational regional coalitions and about policy options, ‘territorial knowledge’ on territorial specificities, territorial capital and development potential is urgently needed. In border regions this includes cross-border functional linkages and interdependencies. The paper highlights an enhanced framework condition for cross-border functional integration and gives examples of supra-regional coalitions emerging in Europe, especially along Germany’s borders. It shows the difficulties with cross-border data availability for delineation of supra-regional coalitions in Europe and discusses the implications for European Cohesion Policy.

Keywords: Territorial cohesion, border regions, urban-rural partnerships, cross-border regionalisation, regional territorial agendas

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Introduction – territorial cohesion ‘upgraded’

With the Treaty of Lisbon coming into force in December 2009, territorial cohesion became one of the policy objectives of the European Union (EU) alongside economic and social cohesion. Territorial cohesion is now a matter of shared competences between the European Commission (EC) and the Member States (MS) (EU, 2007). The term ‘territorial cohesion’ is still to be defined, even after the consultation process following the publication of the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (EC, 2008). The Green Paper identified territorial cohesion as a place-based policy with a stronger role for functional regions such as urban-rural territories. The consensus from the following consultation process was that territorial cohesion is about allowing regions to mobilise their development potential and to utilise their specificities. Cooperation between regions plays an important role here (EC, 2008).

The EU Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion (EC, 2010a) concludes that territorial cohesion has to be more strongly addressed in the new programmes after 2013. The focus should be also on functional geographies, areas facing specific geographical or demographic problems and macro-regional strategies. There should be greater flexibility in the architecture of future Cohesion Policy in order to better reflect the nature and geography of development processes. The Cohesion Report states that territorial cohesion also means addressing urban-rural linkages in terms of access to affordable and quality infrastructures and services – and also states that, for example, border regions need targeted provisions to reflect the regions’ specificities (EC, 2010a; Ahner, 2010).

The shape of Structural Funds for the period 2014–2020 is currently being designed. The discussion on territorial

cohesion also has a strong impact on the discussion on Cohesion Policy beyond 2013. All of the above-mentioned documents will have an impact in terms of more ‘territorial programming’ (Ahner, 2010). But what do these functional geographies look like – not only from a national perspective but in the light of further integration in Europe?

Better conditions for cross-border and transnational cooperation

Political and legal framework conditions for cross-border and transnational cooperation have been enhanced dramatically in recent years, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. With the EU enlargements in 2004 and 2007, the Schengen Agreement coming into force in many Central and Eastern European countries in 2007 and the free movement of workers from May 2011, physical barriers along national borders are being practically removed. This rapid process of integration allows the emergence of new regional coalitions across national borders in Europe.

Furthermore, a new legal framework now allows easier cross-border cooperation. The instrument of European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) aims at the establishment of cross-border legal bodies. For the first time authoritative competences can be delegated and decentralised to cross-border regional bodies. So far sixteen EGTC have been established. Most of the EGTC cover Eurodistricts or Euroregions on a local and regional scale although much bigger coalitions can be observed as well, such as the EGTC - INTERREG - Programme Grande Région, whose purpose is to jointly administrate an Objective 3/INTERREG IV A programme for cross-border cooperation. The New Member States (NMS) are involved in only four setups, all of them located along the Hungarian-Slovakian border (Committee

of the Regions, 2011).

Therefore cross-border approaches are necessary for abolishing not only physical borders but also borders in spatial development policy. Furthermore the new geopolitical situation in Europe – characterised by processes of ‘macro-regionalisation’ allows regions and communities to more strongly express their interests (Scott, 2004). With reference to Allmendinger and Haughton (2009), Faludi (2010) argues that vanishing internal borders in Europe and the ideal of a federal Europe are bringing about ‘soft spaces’ with shifting configurations and new governance arrangements that are separated from, yet inextricably linked to, established administrative entities. These ‘soft spaces’ require soft planning instruments – like development strategies for macro-regions such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (Faludi, 2010). Such ‘soft spaces’ are actually emerging across European borders.

At least since the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) was approved in 1999, urban-rural partnerships beyond administrative territories have been recognised as a key for sustainable and polycentric development in Europe. This notion was underlined in the Territorial Agenda of the European Union in May 2007. Here, the EU MS emphasise that coordination at local and city-regional level should be strengthened and equal partnerships between cities and rural areas should be developed. The principle of territorial cohesion values territorial specificities and territorial capital. Future Cohesion Policy will more strongly consider functional approaches and variable territories (Piskorz, 2010). Unlike in the past, when the Community initiatives LEADER and URBAN focused either on rural or on urban spaces, the future regional policy of the EU will aim at fostering integrated area-based approaches in larger functional areas with interdependencies.

The following sections of this paper will present examples of recent processes of regionalisation in Europe on different territorial levels.

New processes of regionalisation in Europe

Examples for supra-regional coalitions across national borders are the so called ‘macro-regions’. In the fore here are policy making and strategy development (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, EU Strategy for the Danube Region). These strategies are elaborated by the EC in collaboration with the respective regions. The Danube Region covers parts of eight MS (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania) and six non-EU countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine and Moldova) (EC, 2011). The Danube Region Strategy focuses on eleven priority areas related to transport connections, energy connections, the environment, socio-economic development and security (EC, 2010b). Although the macro-regional strategies provide no new EU funds, the Danube Region for instance demands ‘a sustainable framework for cooperation’ from future Cohesion Policy and it calls for additional international, national,

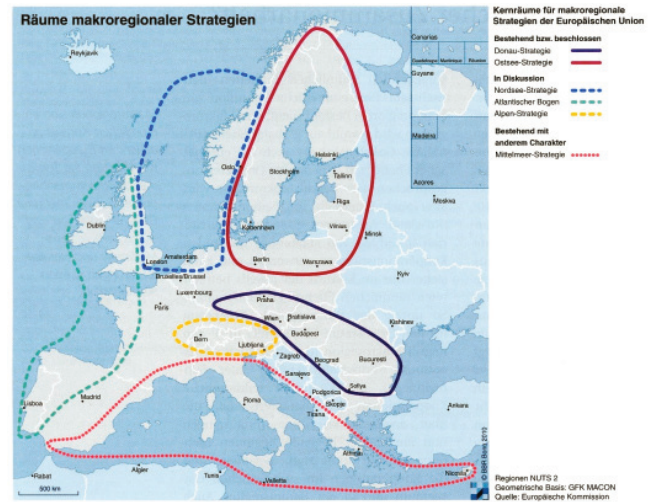


Figure 1: Areas of macro-regional strategies.

Source: Görmar (2010)

regional or private funds and better use of existing funds (EC, 2010b). Although the macro-regional strategies have been elaborated by the EC in collaboration with the respective MS and regions, supra-regional bottom-up processes of problem solving and strategy development have been preceded, often in the framework of transnational cooperation projects (Görmar, 2010). Besides the existing macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region, further cooperation spaces for potential macro-regional strategies are under discussion e.g. in the North sea Region or the Alpine Region (Figure 1).

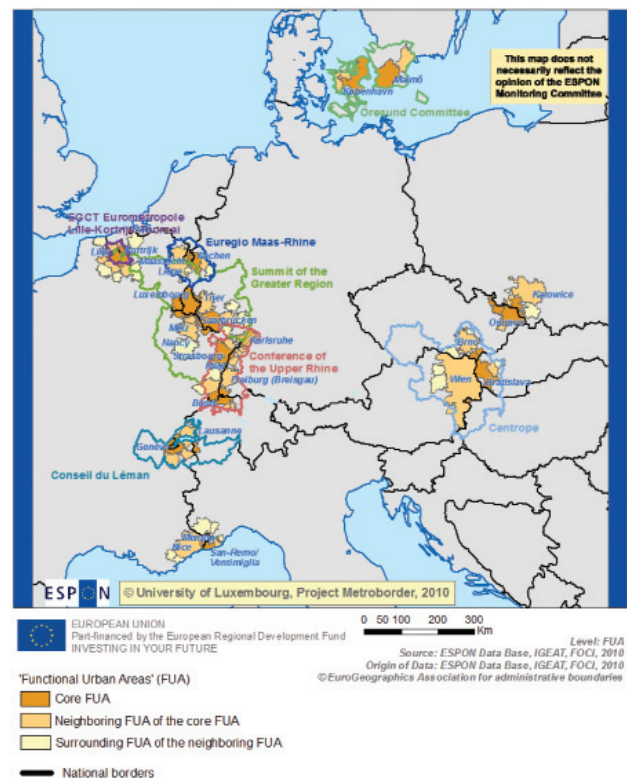


Figure 2: The functional urban areas (FUAs) of the cross-border polycentric metropolitan regions and the cross-border cooperation perimeters.

Source: ESPON and University of Luxembourg (2010)

At a more local level an interesting type of coalition has been investigated by the ESPON 2013 project *METROBORDER – Cross-border Polycentric Metropolitan Regions* coordinated by the University of Luxembourg. In the focus here are cross-border polycentric metropolitan regions characterised by strong functional linkages and interdependencies (cross-border commuting, cross-border labour markets, cross-border health-care etc.) and their development potential. The research team identified and investigated Cross-border Polycentric Metropolitan Regions in Europe with an in-depth investigation of the Greater Region (DE, LU, BE, FR) and the Upper Rhine (DE; CH, FR) (Figure 2).

Interestingly METROBORDER is a project in *Priority 2 – Targeted Analyses* of the ESPON 2013 programme with regional stakeholders from different MS making proposals for research projects with a thematic and/or regional focus. This shows the strong bottom-up approach at least in the two case study regions of this project and their will to be recognised no longer as peripheral border regions but as cross-border metropolitan regions with specific development potential. The project has highlighted dynamic in functional cross-border integration, in particular in sub-spaces of the investigated regions. Also, in terms of governance, space matters within the cross-border polycentric metropolitan regions. The 'multi-level-mismatch' – administrative and institutional asymmetries – are tackled differently in the investigated regions – and in different spatial contexts. Another crucial conclusion of the METROBORDER project is that these asymmetries require a clear cross-border strategy shared by all partners (ESPON & University of Luxembourg, 2010).

In Germany the national spatial development policy reflects these European trends with its 'Perspectives of Spatial Development in Germany' from 2006 (BBR/BMVBs, 2006). The concept of 'Growth and Innovation' stresses the role of urban-rural partnerships and promotes the cooperation of urban and rural, central and peripheral as well as economically strong and weak regions. The strategic approach aims at solving the antagonism between town and countryside and it is in some ways intended as a 'magic formula to overcome spatial disparities' (Kawka, 2009a, p.61).

In order to gain experiences in this regard and to share best practices, in 2008 the federal government in Germany launched a demonstration project where seven metropolitan regions in Germany tried to implement the idea of urban-rural cooperation in supra-regional partnerships that go far beyond the traditional regional planning areas. A second demonstration project that started in the same year recognised that urban-rural partnerships are also an important topic in regions along and beyond national borders. The four regions Euregio Maas-Rhine, Greater Region SaarLorLux, again Trinational Metropolitan Region Upper Rhine, and Region Bodensee – became the German model regions for Supra-regional Partnerships in Cross-Border Areas (Figure 3).

In autumn 2008 stakeholders from German planning authorities in these four regions joined together in order to take the initiative for a project *Supra-regional partnerships in large cross-border regions*. This initiative became a demonstration project for spatial planning supported by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs

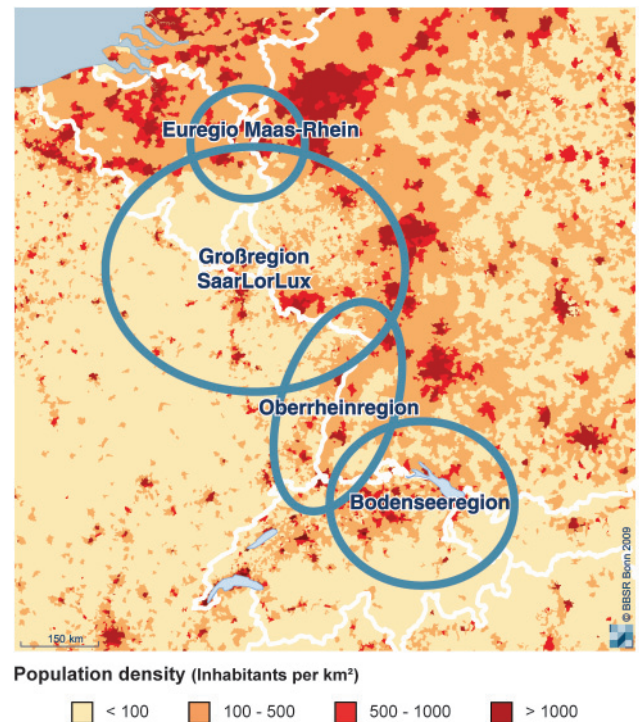


Figure 3: Supra-regional partnership in large cross-border regions.
Source: Kawkla (2009b)

(BMVBs) and the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR) in the period 2008-2010. One intention of the four partner regions was to gather evidence on delineation and specifications of large cross-border areas in comparison with European metropolitan regions. With this evidence the regions wanted to strengthen the concept of large cross-border regions in order to gain greater internal and external perception in Germany and Europe and to achieve higher competitiveness by promoting specific social, cultural, economic and ecological potential. Finally the project intended to give recommendations for spatial development policy in Germany and Europe and to establish a network which is also open to other large cross-border regions to institutionalise the partnership and foster lobbying at national and European levels (Kawka, 2009b).

Conclusion

In conclusion, four key issues relating to the development of supra-regional coalitions can be identified on the basis of the evidence presented above. These conclusions have an explorative character and require further investigation and underpinning. They are addressed to stakeholders concerned with future Cohesion Policy and those involved in regional development policies in border regions.

The 'practice gap' between INTERREG A and INTERREG B

In the light of the above-mentioned supra-regional coalitions across national borders in Europe there seems to be a gap in the current (2007-2013) Structural Fund period between INTERREG A and INTERREG B programme areas

– i.e. between cross-border regions on a local level and transnational programme areas – which does not allow cooperation between large cross-border regions beyond INTERREG A programme areas but on a smaller scale than transnational cooperation areas. Also trilateral cooperation is often not possible within the actual period of Structural Funds. This in particular affects the border triangles in Europe. Future instruments of Cohesion Policy should close this gap and focus also on cooperation at a mezzo level between cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes.

The challenge of delineation

When discussing supra-regional coalitions in Europe a major issue is the question of delineating the respective cooperation areas. Although most of the above-mentioned coalitions are characterised by variable geometries the question of delineation – even though a number of different thematic layers and delineations are imaginable – is clear. Of course, each functional interrelation refers to a different sphere of action. The labour market refers to a different area than retail and services, economic clusters or leisure. At the latest when establishing political and institutional settings a preliminary delineation has to be agreed on. In cross-border settings the delineation is even more difficult due to different administrative constellations and responsibilities.

The challenge of regional knowledge and data availability on cross-border interdependencies

When discussing appropriate delineations of supra-regional coalitions knowledge about these territories is urgently needed. The same is true when deriving policy options. Territorial knowledge means knowledge on territorial specificities, territorial capital and development potential. In cross-border and transnational coalitions often complementary functions bare specific development potential. Therefore knowledge is needed on cross-border functional linkages and interdependencies. But there is a lack of available comparable data. While data to describe the situation on one or the other side of the border are available (e.g. via EUROSTAT), this in particular concerns data on cross-border flows and interweaving as well as specific regional competences (cross-border economic clusters, cross-border commuting, cross-border demands in retail and services, cross-border leisure behaviour, cross-border governance, language skills etc.). This problem has also been highlighted by the METROBORDER project – in particular in the field of economy and polycentricity (ESPON & University of Luxembourg, 2010) – and also for the four regions of the German demonstration project on Supra-regional partnerships in large cross-border regions. Further research is needed, for example within the ESPON 2013 and future programmes.

Towards regional territorial agendas?

Currently the Territorial Agenda of the European Union (TAEU) is being revised in order to implement new trends in spatial development in Europe and to gain indications on the forthcoming Structural Funds period. The revised TAEU

will again formulate a common sense of the frame of spatial development in the EU. It will be interesting to see what the common view is among the 27 MS on the subject of urban-rural and transnational partnerships. Another interesting question is if one single Territorial Agenda for the EU can meet the requirements of the manifold diverse regions in Europe at all. Regions in Europe should be encouraged to establish their own 'Regional Territorial Agendas' (Kunzmann, 2008) in order to identify regional potential and foster regional strategy development. Again the generation of territorial knowledge would then be in the hands of such regions. Future Cohesion Policy could react on this and support the emerging supra-regional coalitions on this path.

The above-mentioned processes are anything but self-evident. This paper has highlighted that strategic coalition building across national borders can be observed more often in Western than in Central and Eastern Europe. Many regions among the NMS still face severe problems when making an effort towards coalition building and strategy development: lacking experience in cross-border cooperation, language barriers, lacking political continuity, legal uncertainties, lacking trust between stakeholders as well as lacking capacities and know-how.

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