

# CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES IN THE PRODUCTION OF CROSS-BORDER TERRITORIAL STRATEGIES: THE EXAMPLE OF THE GREATER REGION

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## Abstract

Cross-border strategies have been flourishing over the last few decades in Europe, mostly in a favourable context where European funding is available and legal instruments are well-developed. However, one may wonder which objectives are really targeted within this very broad and imprecise notion of cross-border strategy. The purpose of this paper is, first, to provide a theoretical framework in order to better understand the different meanings of the notion of cross-border integration and to provide a more critical perspective on its effects. Secondly, it analyses the policy content of the cross-border territorial strategy developed within the Greater Region before, in the final section, pointing out the difficulties faced by policy-makers during its elaboration. This final section is based on the insights brought both by the regional stakeholders interviewed and by our expertise as moderators and scientific advisors within the working group in charge of the realisation of the cross-border territorial strategy. The main finding of our analysis is that the consensus that has been reached by all the stakeholders is the “smallest common denominator”; that is to say, the least constraining.

### *Keywords*

*Cross-border territorial strategy, cross-border governance, the Greater Region, obstacles, cross-border cooperation.*

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# 1. Introduction

Several decades of European integration policy have helped to reduce the fragmentation of the European territory (Dominguez and Pires, 2014). The challenge related to the project of creating a multicultural supra-state space of freedom, security, and justice is indeed to reduce the impact of internal borders on movements and to allow cross-border exchanges (Nugent, 2012). Territorially speaking, the European Union objective has always been to diminish the gap in socio-economic development between the European regions, as already pointed out in the Treaty of Rome (1957). Ten years later, in 1967, the Directorate General XVI, the ancestor of European regional policy, was created to implement this goal. The formulations have changed, the strategies as well, but the contemporary territorial cohesion paradigm, as first mentioned in the Treaty of Lisbon (2007), refers back to this objective of reducing regional disparities. The structural funds (called European structural and investment funds since the European funding programme 2014-2020) constitute the financial leverage to implement concrete actions for reducing the differences between the territories, from the local scale to much broader ones.

In this quest for a more unified Europe, which is nowadays threatened by a tendency towards a re-closure of borders in a context of multiple crises (terrorist risks, the refugee crisis), border regions are hotspots that condense most of the challenges that the European construct faces. Borders are the sovereign 'interface' between countries (Henrikson, 2010), and operate as filters to the exchanges taking place between border regions. Their degree of openness, which can evolve over time, allows stock to be taken of the situation with regard to the process of Europeanisation.

In order to improve the articulation of border regions, numerous regional stakeholders have taken the initiative to start a dialogue on cross-border spatial development and to share their views and objectives on a cross-border scale by elaborating territorial strategies in a collective manner. Through the quite ambiguous terminology of "territorial strategy", we mean a document, developed at the cross-border level, which summarises the priorities shared by all the parties concerning territorial development and which should help to formulate policies in the field of spatial planning. However, cross-border territorial strategies cannot be perceived as spatial planning documents *stricto sensu* since there is no cross-border jurisdiction in this field. Spatial planning remains totally embedded in national and regional contexts. Paasi and Zimmerbauer (2015, p.1) summarise very well this contradiction between the need for more "cross-border thinking" and the limits imposed by the regulatory frameworks:

In strategic planning, planners need to think increasingly in terms of open, porous borders despite the fact that in concrete planning activities, politics, and governance, the region continues to exist largely in the form of bounded and territorial political units.

Moreover, the prevailing official discourse, which systematically associates cooperation beyond borders with something positive, tends to hide the fact that a lot of obstacles hamper the development of efficient cross-border territorial strategies.

The aim of this article is therefore to question the ability of cross-border territorial strategies to concretely improve cross-border integration and to bring more cohesion at the cross-border level, as advocated by the European Union authorities, despite the numerous obstacles which remain. Such an ambition requires a clear understanding of the concept of cross-border integration, which appears to be complex and multidimensional. In the spatial planning literature, there is a lack of theoretical references that describe, properly and in a comprehensive manner, how cross-border integration and its regulation impact on actual spaces. This inadequacy of the conceptual tools hinders the production of cross-border territorial strategies that can efficiently articulate border territories and create synergies between them in a way which includes institutional aspects, functional realities, ideational representations, and elements linked to differences in territorial contexts. In order to contribute to answering this need, the first part of this paper will briefly introduce how spatial planning has been addressed so far on a cross-border scale, as well as the limits of the implementation of cross-border strategies. It will also formulate an analytical framework, to better apprehend and investigate cross-border territorial strategies through the prism of cross-border integration. In the second part, we will focus our analysis on the case study of the Greater Region, where a cross-border territorial strategy

is being elaborated. This article relies on the experience that we gained by being involved as moderators and scientific advisors in the elaboration of the economic part of the Territorial Development Scheme of the Greater Region. The analytical framework developed in Part One will be applied to the examination of the documents comprising the cross-border territorial strategy of the Greater Region. After having presented the case study and the approach followed by policy-makers in elaborating their cross-border strategy, the contribution of this cross-border strategy with regards to the cross-border integration process will be addressed. Finally, based on the findings revealed by a series of interviews conducted with regional stakeholders of the Greater Region, the third part will highlight the most important limits and obstacles which hamper the success of this cross-border strategy.

## **2. An Analytical Framework Derived from the Articulation Between the Fields of Border Studies and Strategic Spatial Planning**

Though border studies have come increasingly under the spotlight over the last 20 years, and though numerous papers have been published on cross-border cooperation and its challenges, cross-border spatial planning as such still constitutes quite a restricted section of the literature, probably because its existence in legal terms does not exist (Durand, 2014). Researchers interested in the field of planning in transnational spaces have focused so far mostly on comparisons between national planning policies, thus highlighting the differences in planning cultures and their influence on the organisation and functioning of planning systems (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009; Newman and Thornley, 1996); on the emergence of a European spatial planning vision and how it influences national planning systems (Dühr et al., 2010; Faludi, 2010); or on the different forms that Europeanisation of planning can take (Korthals Altes, 2014; Faludi, 2014).

With respect to the elaboration of cross-border strategies for spatial development, academic papers have been written on the phases of strategic elaborations (Durand, 2014), and on their limits (Jacobs, 2014), but, to our knowledge, few have been designed around the concrete impacts of cross-border cooperation projects on the dynamics of urban development. For Bufon (2011), cross-border territorial strategies can be summarised as non-constraining documents that are limited to a high degree of generalisation, due, for de Vries (2008), to the fact that there is no clear and recognised hierarchy within cross-border governance. Spatial planning is not a supra-national competence and the action of the European Union is limited to the definition of non-binding strategies, such as the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (1999), the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (2008), and the Territorial Agenda 2020 (2011). For Terlouw (2012), the logic of strengthening territorial cohesion in the European Union by stimulating territorial development in the border regions, directs the focus of cross-border governance away from the border itself, and in so doing, does not take into account the interests of the local population with regard to the possibilities offered by differences in regulations and prices between national territories. For Jacobs (2014, p.86), who shares the reservations with regards to the potential efficiency of such strategies,

The more strategic the approach will be, attempting to look at cross-border space in a more integrated way, the less will it be possible to embed this in the right contexts, consequently allowing a gap between the strategic plan and whatever will be actually developed. Often, developments will occur despite of any strategic planning, for example because of economic opportunities observed by business organizations. Nonetheless, strategic spatial plans may continue to play a role as monuments of cross-border cooperation, and it will still be possible to refer to them when discussing the potential of a more integrated cross-border region.

Since cross-border areas associate different territorial systems with their own regulatory systems, tools and methods for planning, a common planning vision requires a certain degree of coordination between the different institutional levels of each country involved in cross-border cooperation (Peña, 2007).

However, the lack of theoretical references about what cross-border spatial integration means in terms of spatial planning hampers the elaboration of cross-border territorial strategies that address the diversity of problems related to the articulation and synergy of border territories. In the scientific literature about border studies, cross-border integration has been widely studied and covers different aspects: economic interactions

between border territories (Anderson and Wever, 2003); institutionalisation between local and regional actors across borders (Scott, 1999); or sometimes both (Sohn et al., 2009, Dörny and Walther, 2015). Other works have tried to see whether interactions between two border areas 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 territorial disparities instead of reducing them. This finding seems to disprove the paradigm that greater cross-border interaction always leads to more convergence (Topaloglou et al., 2005; Decoville et al., 2013). Therefore, cross-border integration is not a process which has a single causal effect. It 'results as much from the symmetries and similarities between territories that make up a cross-border region as from the asymmetries and existing differentials on either side of a border' (Durand, 2015, p.314). We propose, in order to overcome the misunderstandings linked to the equivocal meanings of this concept, to approach it through four different entries, or dimensions:

First, the **functional dimension** of cross-border integration is linked to the flows of people on both sides of a border for reasons that can be linked to work, shopping, the use of public amenities and other services. This dimension of the integration process has been largely investigated in the field of border studies and has been defined by Van Houtum as the *flow approach* (2000).

The **institutional dimension** of cross-border integration relates to cross-border cooperation and the building of multi-level governance networks (Perkmann, 1999), that is to say, to the structuring of the decision-making process with respect to cross-border issues. Cross-border institutionalisation can be more or less formalised, and more or less opened to non-public actors.

The **structural dimension** of cross-border integration refers to the evolution and the convergence (or not) of the border territories with respect to socio-economic and spatial characteristics.

Lastly, the **ideational dimension** of cross-border integration consists in the more subjective elements linked to collective representations. Indeed, a process of integration is supposed to lead to more dialogue, exchanges beyond borders, and consequently more shared social values, or more common references. Focusing on the ideational dimension of borders helps to go beyond the top-down perspective on borders and takes into account the individual border narratives and experiences, which reflect 'the ways in which borders impact upon the daily life practices of people living in and around the borderland and transboundary transition zones' (Newman, 2006, p.43). However, this ideal vision of cross-border integration can also be seriously hampered by some of the contradictory effects associated with an increase in cross-border flows, such as anti-cross-border commuters' movements, as in the Canton of Geneva.

These different dimensions of cross-border integration underline the polysemy of the concept, and it should be kept in mind that these dimensions are largely intertwined. The increase in the level of integration in one dimension naturally has effects on other dimensions of cross-border integration, whether in a positive or a negative way. However, the observation of the links between these different dimensions allows questioning of the concept of cross-border integration in a more critical way, such as: does an increase in functional interactions bring more convergence or more divergence between border regions? Does it lead to more social cohesion between the border populations or more tension and rejection? Do the institutional actors that are involved in formal cooperation really play the game of a win-win collaboration, or do they use the arena of cross-border governance to better design their own development strategies, which they consider as being in competition with those of their neighbours? In our perspective, these four dimensions help to go beyond the normative approach of cross-border integration as advocated by the European Union, and to adopt a more critical perspective on the potential impacts of cross-border integration in a context characterised by Euroscepticism and re-bordering.

Based on this multidimensional perspective of cross-border integration as well as on a spatial planning approach, our analytical framework will investigate how these different dimensions of the process are taken into account in the territorial development strategy of the Greater Region.

### 3. The Attempt to Establish a Territorial Strategy for the Greater Region

In this part, we will see how the territorial strategy of the Greater Region, which is still under construction, is addressing the elements raised in the previously described theoretical framework, but first, it is necessary to describe the spatial features of the Greater Region as well as the approach pursued by institutional policy-makers.

#### 3.1. What is the Greater Region?

This cross-border region has a long history of cooperation. Indeed, one has to remember that it is located at the heart of what became the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, which was the foundation of the subsequent European Economic Community in 1957. Luxembourg, the Lorraine region in France, the Walloon region in Belgium and Saarland in Germany shared the same industrial profile, characterised by the importance of the steel industry. Within this context, favourable to European economic cooperation, regional authorities developed cooperation at a much more local scale, which resulted in the setting-up of a cross-border organisation, Saar-Lor-Lux, in 1980. The idea was to create synergies between these border areas which then faced similar economic challenges with regard to the steel crisis. Today, this Euroregion is a very large cooperation space of 65,000 km<sup>2</sup>, covering the Lorraine Region in France, the Walloon Region in Belgium, the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, and the federated States of Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland in Germany. It encompasses more than 11 million inhabitants.

The Greater Region is characterised by strong socio-economic inequalities between the neighbouring territories, as well as by numerous cross-border flows which are mostly oriented towards the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. More than 160,000 people cross the border every day to work in Luxembourg (STATEC, 2015). This situation stems from the structural differences which exist between the border regions. Whereas Luxembourg is an attractive working place which offers high wages and good working conditions, the neighbouring regions in Lorraine, Belgium and Germany have developed larger residential areas at much lower prices than in Luxembourg. The combination of these specific advantages favours cross-border commuting, but also huge planning problems, such as traffic congestion and uncontrolled urban development. This process tends to create asymmetries and leads to more unbalanced paths of economic and spatial development, thus contradicting the proclaimed objective of the European Union to foster territorial cohesion. In spite of these problems, which considerably erode the living conditions of the population in Luxembourg as well as in the border regions, it appears obvious that a strategic coordination of spatial development on the cross-border scale is necessary, and this is why policy-makers decided to embark on a strategic and cooperative approach.

#### 3.2. The Approach of the Territorial Development Scheme in the Greater Region

Cross-border interactions which link the different territories and populations within the Greater Region have encouraged regional governments to launch a strategic reflection, called the Territorial Development Scheme of the Greater Region (TDS GR), which aims at better organisation of spatial development in the broad sense of the term. In addition, a second objective can be seen: to foster the development of a cross-border metropolitan polycentric region, as proposed in the frame of the METROBORDER project (European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion [ESPON], 2010), which highlighted the lack of urban critical mass in the Greater Region. The basic idea can be summarised as follows: in the absence of any "big city", demographically speaking, the Greater Region has difficulties in being perceived as an important and attractive region with a notable metropolitan dimension on the European scene. Through a better integration of the different urban centres, the three main objectives are to ensure an integrative and coherent development of the whole Greater Region, to contribute to reinforcing its metropolitan dimension, and to generate economies of scale and to share certain public facilities. The cross-border territorial strategy might tend to constitute a socio-spatial process, driven by the public sector, through which a vision, actions, and means to shape and organise spatial development of the cross-border area are developed. However, this strategy remains very theoretical and the orientations formulated in the METROBORDER report are, of course, not constraining.

The elaboration of the strategy has been entrusted to the Coordination Committee for Territorial Development (CCTD), a working group which gathers different representatives of the spatial planning authorities from the different territories which compose the Greater Region. This process, which was begun in 2011 and is still in progress, has led so far to the production of several documents which are supposed to frame and guide the future actions of public stakeholders from the perspective of building a cross-border polycentric metropolis. These documents consist of different thematic approaches, which have all been computed into different documents. The first one studies the urban framework of the Greater Region in a descriptive manner, with the different levels of the urban centres. The second document focuses on transportation issues and highlights priority projects. The third document provides policy-makers with statistical and qualitative information about the potential synergies that could be created on a cross-border scale. Two other issues (demography, and culture and tourism) are planned and will be addressed in the TDS GR, but have not been realised yet.

This strategy therefore relies on different sectorial issues. In order to see whether this strategy answers or not to the objective of improving cross-border integration in the broad sense of the term, the following section will pay attention to the different constitutive documents of the strategy that have been written so far.

### **3.3. The Contribution of the Territorial Development Scheme of the Greater Region to the Different Dimensions of Cross-Border Integration**

The first document, which is rather compact and analytic, focuses on the metropolitan dimension of the Greater Region. It defines 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, all possessing their own logics (Figure 1), but no factual element is provided to underpin scientifically the existence of these three different cross-border metropolitan spaces. 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 is located along the Rhine axis and incorporates three different German metropolitan regions: Rhine-Ruhr, Rhine-Main and Rhine-Neckar. The last is located on the northern part of the Walloon region, and is composed of cities which are mainly influenced by their proximity to Brussels, as well as by other cross-border metropolitan areas, such as Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai or Aachen-Liège-Maastricht. This document outlines the scope of the cross-border strategy, which aims at creating polycentric urban networks in order to strengthen the position of the Greater Region at the heart of European economic flows. It sheds light on the metropolitan dimension of the urban areas without specifying the analytical method used to draw the different perimeters. Such a document aims to distinguish different metropolitan areas within the Greater Region which could be the subject of specific policy attention. It also emphasises that the priority action space for the Greater Region is the one centred on Luxembourg, since it is the only one that is common to the four countries. However, it does not provide solutions for increasing or regulating the cross-border integration process and remains very general.

The second document, which concerns priority transport networks (Figure 2), highlights the challenge of cross-border mobility in a context which is characterised by a growing number of cross-border workers and, more generally speaking, by an increase of flows across borders. Different spatial scales are addressed in this document. First, the spatial scale of the whole Greater Region and of its insertion within Europe is clearly brought to the fore, through the development of road transport infrastructure as well as the railway network (improvement of the motorway network, construction of a high-speed railway line, and implementation of the Eurocap-Rail project, which aims at better inter-linking of the three different European capitals of Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg). The second scale is more local and linked to daily mobility. The main objective of this document is the enhancement of services which accompany the provision of public transport, such as a single information platform or the pricing strategy. As regards the delicate issue of airports, no strategic discussion has taken place so far, probably because of the importance of the competition between the different territories. Waterway transport has also not been considered a priority. This document puts forward the necessity of improving cross-border mobility within the Greater Region, as well as the connections between the Greater Region and the neighbouring regions. Its ambition is to better serve or accompany the development of flows across the borders in order to enhance the functional dimension of cross-border integration for cross-border workers, as well as for freight. However, this document does not constitute a purely new strategy for the Greater Region, since it also introduces, in a unique document, the most important projects that have already previously been selected bilaterally in order to better coordinate the actions related to transportation planning. For instance, the improvement of road accessibility between France and Luxembourg was developed in 2009 with the SMOT (Scheme for Cross-border Mobility).

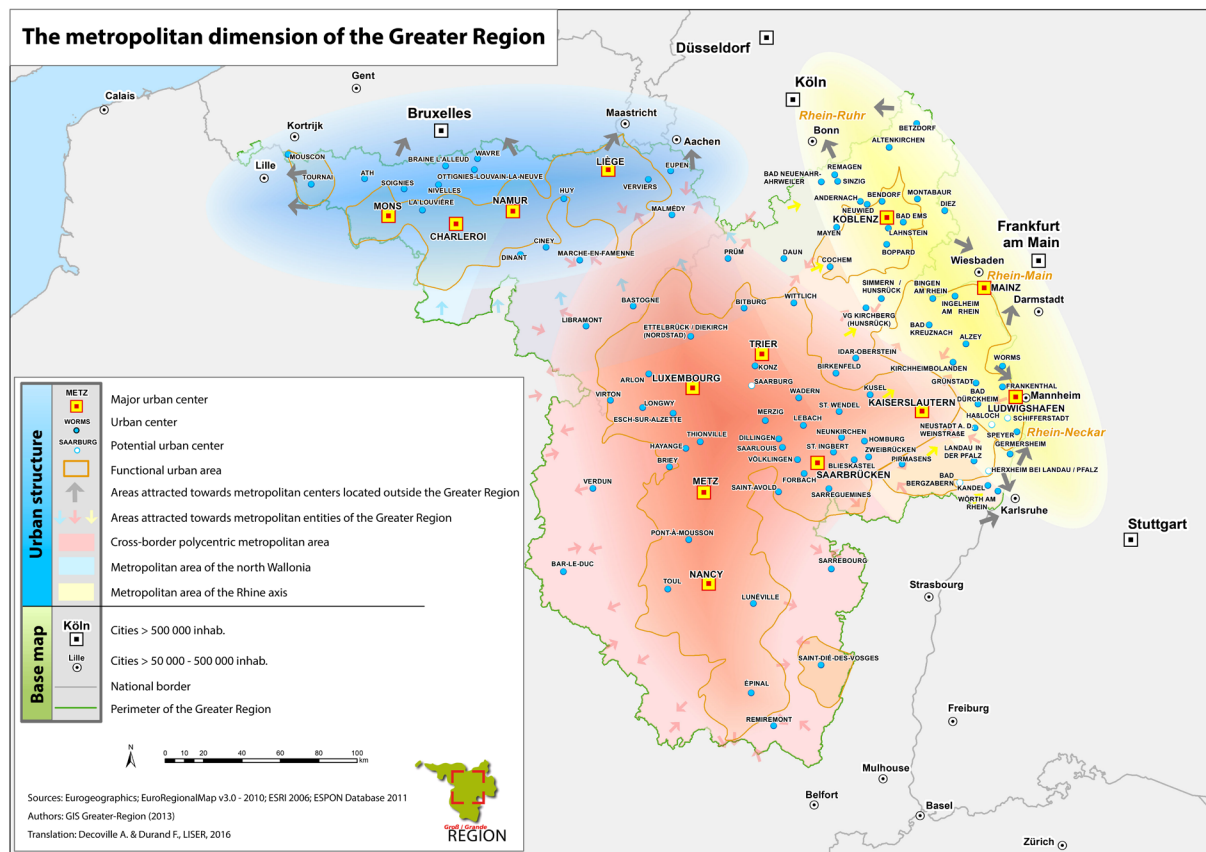


Figure 1. The three metropolitan spaces of the Greater Region  
 Source: CCTD 2012 (Schéma de développement territorial de la Grande Région – volet 1: la dimension métropolitaine de la Grande Région)

The last document produced deals with the territorial impact of economic development on a cross-border scale. The choice made by policy-makers is to focus on metropolitan economic activities, that is to say, medium-high-tech manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services, in line with the strategy of fostering a cross-border polycentric metropolitan region. This study consists of a summary of the state of play of the economic situation, which has underscored the strong heterogeneity of the Greater Region in terms of economic specialisation. It has also brought to the fore divergences with respect to economic policy priorities identified in the different territories. As far as Luxembourg is concerned, the strong specialisation of the Grand Duchy in the financial sector has pushed policy-makers to reduce their dependency on this sector and to search for a diversification of its economy, by supporting other kinds of high added-value sectors, such as research and development, information technologies, or highly specialised services. Saarland, which is facing a serious problem of population shrinkage, is trying to foster its attractiveness to French skilled workers in order to keep its industrial sector going, which is dominated by the automotive industry and machine-tool production. The economic development strategies of Rhineland-Palatinate are more directed towards the Rhine Valley on the western side of the region. Trier, which is the only important city in the western part of the *Land*, is a commercial centre for the Greater Region and especially for the Luxembourgers, and this role should be reinforced. For the eastern part of the Walloon region (the “Province du Luxembourg”), which is more rural, the priorities are research and development, especially in the field of the aerospace industry (the European positioning system, Galileo, is intended to be operated from this region). The French Lorraine region, which faces important unemployment problems, has banked on research into new materials. The state of play has also highlighted four spatial patterns associated with the spatial organisation of economic activities (a polycentric spatial pattern dominated by an attractive employment centre; a polycentric spatial pattern dominated by several employment centres; a balanced polycentric spatial pattern; and an “oligocentric” spatial pattern characterised by a limited number of centres which hold the majority of jobs). These four types of spatial patterns directly affect cross-border cooperation potentialities. Dealing with such a differentiated situation and improving cross-border cooperation implies a strong commitment on the part of institutional actors, as well as a concentration of public effort and financial means on specific priorities. In the light of this, a consensus has been reached concerning the elaboration of a joint smart specialisation strategy, and a political

resolution has been taken by the decision-makers of the Greater Region, focusing on two domains of activity: the development of new materials; and the “silver” economy (the economy linked to ageing). Furthermore, the key message of this document is that any economic development across the border has to be driven and framed by institutional actors in order to promote and boost economic cooperation within the Greater Region. Therefore, it has emphasised the significance of the institutional dimension of cross-border integration, since cross-border partnerships and support for initiatives and synergies in the economic field need efficient cross-border governance.

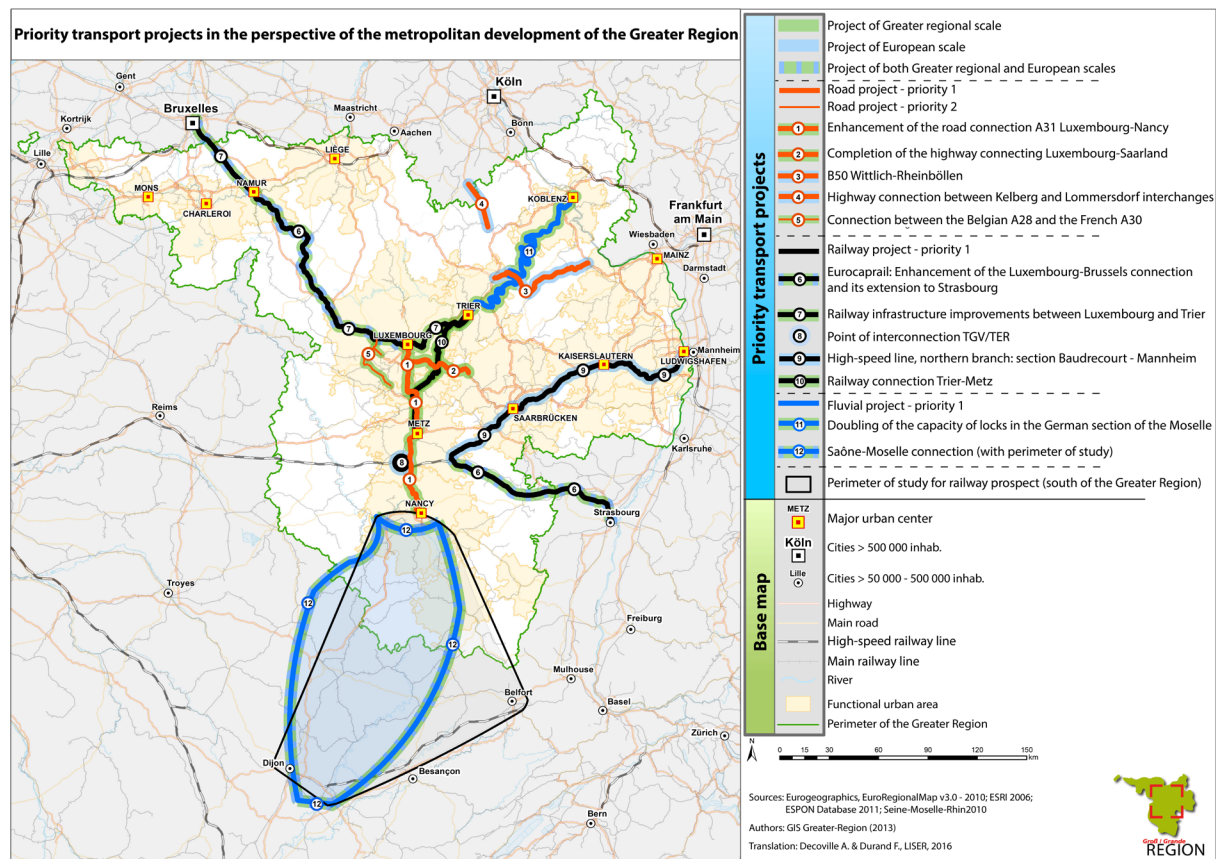


Figure 2. Priority transport projects within the Greater Region

Source: CCTD 2013 (Schéma de développement territorial de la Grande Région – volet 2:

les projets de transport prioritaires dans la perspective du développement métropolitain de la Grande Région)

As we can see, at its actual stage of development, the TDS GR consists more of a descriptive document, to which some quite general objectives have been added or synthesised from previous works. Its focus seems to be to address the growing importance of cross-border interactions (that is to say, to oversee the functional dimension of cross-border integration), rather than developing a proactive approach aimed at bringing greater economic and social convergence (the structural dimension of integration), supporting the emergence of a trans-border identity (the ideational dimension), or strongly reinforcing regulation modes on a cross-border scale (the institutional dimension). This strategy does not appear to have an all-encompassing approach to the cross-border integration process. It pursues more of a utilitarian goal (based on improving cross-border traffic, developing territorial marketing, and attempting to develop partnerships for two identified economic sectors). Most of the work done so far consisted of setting up a general overview of the situation, whereas concrete decisions have been limited in both their scope and ambition. To understand the lack of more concrete results for some of the dimensions of cross-border integration, it is necessary to shed light on the different obstacles that the stakeholders of the Greater Region have to face before adopting concrete resolutions.

#### 4. A Cross-Border Territorial Strategy Constrained by Numerous Obstacles

The elements provided in this fourth section come directly from our involvement as external advisors and debate moderators during the formulation of the report on strategic cooperation with regard to the territorial

impact of economic development within the Greater Region. To do so, we attended numerous meetings of the CCTD throughout 2014, which allowed us to observe the evolution of the decision-making process, with its challenges and obstacles. We also conducted 31 face-to-face interviews with experts from the different territories. These experts were chosen by the CCTD for their knowledge of the economic synergies potentially to be fostered between the different territorial entities of the Greater Region. They represented various types of organisations such as chambers of commerce, agencies for economic development, or public authorities in charge of spatial planning and economic development issues. It has to be said that the list of people interviewed was imposed on us, thus certainly introducing a bias in the collection of points of view. Moreover, there is an imbalance between the number of people interviewed in each region (five in Luxembourg, eight in France, seven in each *Land* in Germany, and three in Belgium) which is due to the fact that some targeted individuals declined our request for an interview. However, the interviews have allowed us to define a typology of obstacles encountered by the actors in the development of the cross-border territorial strategy.

#### 4.1. Institutional Obstacles

Institutional obstacles are usually the ones which are the most often cited by actors in the field of cross-border cooperation, especially because of the absence of supra-national competencies with regard to spatial planning (Knippschild, 2011). In the case of the Greater Region, the situation with respect to this type of problem is very complicated due to the number of countries involved (four countries and five regions), which makes the decision-making process more complex. Indeed, these different territorial systems have their own regulatory systems and their own priorities for spatial development. Institutional structures and state organisations (centralism vs federalism) vary on each side of the border. In addition, the different institutional levels are not systematically represented within cross-border governance (Nelles and Durand, 2014), even if they would theoretically be needed. Luxembourg, of course, has the full competencies of a sovereign country. The *Länder* in Germany benefit from a strong autonomy, as does the Walloon region. The Lorraine region has some competencies with regard to spatial planning, but is forced to work closely with the *Prefecture de la Région Lorraine*, which represents the interests of the central state at the regional level and which has jurisdiction over international affairs. These differences in the prerogatives of the different institutions bring mismatches with respect to the operational capacities of the different stakeholders involved in cross-border governance. In addition, the different institutional levels are not systematically represented in the CCTD (more especially the local level, which elaborates the local development plans, which concretely impact on land use). Figure 3 shows how unbalanced the representation of the different countries is within the CCTD due to differences in territorial organisation. It also shows the different levels of the “institutional pyramid” that are represented in governance. The French actors outnumber the Belgian ones by a factor of seven within the CCTD. The individuals are included in the CCTD because the regional organisations to which they belong are territorially incorporated in the very large cooperation zone of the Greater Region. Some of these territories, however, do not really share a strong interest in cooperating with foreign partners, because they have no territorial contiguity with them, for example. As some scholars have already shown, state actors and national interests still dominate the cross-border governance sphere and largely influence policy choices and the outputs of the debates in the Greater Region, thus confirming previous studies (Dörry and Decoville, 2013; Durand and Lamour, 2014). Of course, such an unequal representation of the different institutional stakeholders largely affects the balance of power in the decision-making sphere, and this is in several ways. Even though the meetings of the CCTD benefit from translations, the common language is French, since the German actors are the only actors who do not have French as an official language in their territory.

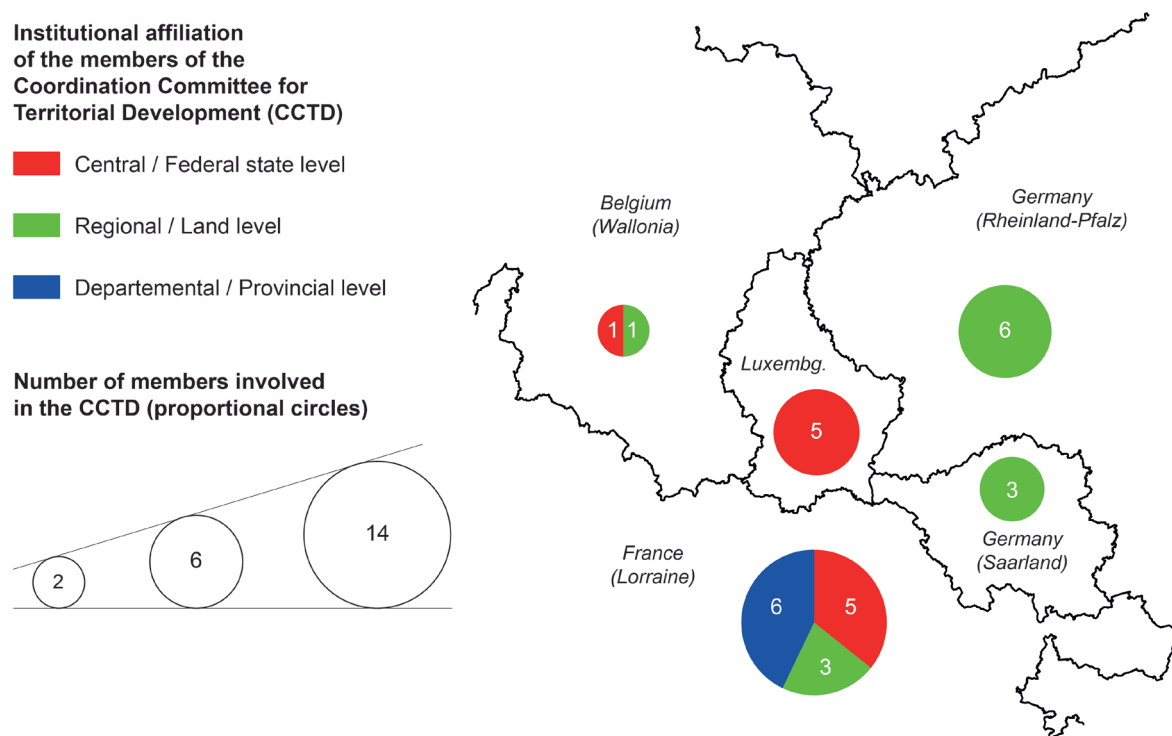


Figure 3: Representation of the different countries within the Coordination Committee for Territorial Development  
Source: Official list of the members of the CCTD (June 2014)

## 4.2. Cultural Obstacles

Beyond these institutional mismatches and the differentiated distribution of competencies according to administrative levels, cultural obstacles emerge. First of all, linguistic differences create communication problems and constitute significant brakes to a better mutual understanding between the institutional actors involved in cross-border cooperation (Cankar et al., 2014). The use of different languages to communicate and debate can generate misunderstandings, conflicts and preconceived ideas (La Cecla, 1997) even if translators are present to ease the communication and dialogue between the stakeholders involved. Within the working group of the CCTD, the presence of four nationalities and the use of two languages (French and German) complicate the discussion and the working sessions between the policy-makers when creating a common strategy (Evrard and Schultz, 2015). Secondly, discrepancies between planning cultures can affect the way the strategy is discussed and elaborated. Newman and Thornley (1996) distinguished 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*. If the confrontation between these different planning conceptions does not constitute, at first sight, a strong impediment to cooperation for the elaboration of the TDS GR, which is a flexible and non-constraining process, it clearly appears that the conceptual tools that are used are not always understood in the same manner. The most important one, which is the concept of “polycentrism”, demonstrably reflects this problem of mutual understanding between the different actors. The stakeholders have quite different views on what polycentrism should entail in terms of concrete priorities. French and Belgian stakeholders conceive the polycentric strategy as a way of developing a whole territory, including rural regions, through the reinforcement of a regular network of urban centres which are supposed to steer economic development throughout their respective hinterlands as well. For the Luxembourgish and German actors, polycentrism is considered as a set of actions that should benefit first of all the most important centres. These differences are not just cultural and have far-reaching consequences with regard to the potential outcomes of the strategy.

### 4.3. Obstacles Linked to the Divergences of Strategic Visions and Priorities

Our position as insiders during one year within the working group of the CCTD gave us the opportunity to point out discrepancies with respect to the strategic visions and political priorities that are supported by the stakeholders within cross-border governance. These divergences have their roots in the structural differences which exist between the border territories (e.g. in terms of average wages, total tax rates on business, total labour cost, or unemployment rates). Indeed, the inequalities in terms of economic development and tax regimes between the different territorial members of the Greater Region are very high and create an uneven situation which does not facilitate territorial cooperation. De facto, these disparities tend to generate a feeling of dependency on “wealthy Luxembourg”. When the skilled workforce 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 develop their own economic activities. This uneven situation can potentially affect cross-border cooperation dynamics. Some stakeholders can have defensive postures that are not in favour of a more peaceful and fruitful dialogue, generating other types of obstacles. An example of such a position can be highlighted by one of the representatives of business interests in France, who said that some entrepreneurs in Lorraine are against upgrading the cross-border railway and road networks to Luxembourg because they do not want to encourage the most highly qualified workers in Lorraine to commute and work in the Grand Duchy, which offers advantages in terms of wages. Traffic congestion is perceived as helping to limit the loss of this labour force in favour of Luxembourg.

The strategic visions and priorities that are targeted by the different representatives of the planning authorities within the CCTD are mostly in conformity with the national strategies of their home territory. Whereas the promotion of endogenous economic development is prioritised by French and Belgian actors – who focus their efforts on job creation – stakeholders in Luxembourg concentrate their policy priorities on the issue of cross-border mobility for workers. These divergences concerning the conceptual tools and priorities that are foreseen with regard to economic development strongly reduce the scope of the potential agreements that can be found between all parts, and, as such, the content of the cross-border territorial strategy. Another example is the theme of tax regimes, which generates important disparities between the attractiveness of the different territories for some specific types of activities, goods, and services, and the logic of competition appears quite strongly there. Indeed, the differences in the total amount of taxes that employers have to pay for an employee differ sharply,<sup>1</sup> thus making it complicated for a French or a Belgian entrepreneur to offer competitive wages for an employee who is ready to work in Luxembourg. During the face-to-face interviews, numerous experts clearly mentioned the importance of this issue in their explanation of the strong differences in spatial development dynamics on a cross-border scale, and they suggested it would be useful to conduct a study to highlight the challenges linked to tax differentials in respect of territorial strategies at the cross-border level. This suggestion was widely rejected by the members of the CCTD. Indeed, tax regimes seem to remain a taboo issue, and the stakeholders are not ready to share strategic information in this field.

### 4.4. Relational Obstacles

Finally, another type of obstacle should be considered, which lies in the formal or informal relations between individuals and which can be called a “relational obstacle”. These obstacles should be differentiated from the others because they are not linked to differences in terms of ideologies, cultures, or policy priorities, but depend on the quality of interpersonal relations within cross-border governance. This type of obstacle is rarely studied *per se*, and it is very difficult to obtain reliable information on such a sensitive issue.

Cross-border governance is an arena in which dialogue emerges between individuals who do not have the same degree of legitimacy, the same experience, or the same leadership. The balance of powers between these individuals is de facto not equal. Observation of the communication and exchanges that occur between the different members of the CCTD allowed us to identify the main causes of relational obstacles. Some actors show an important degree of commitment, leadership quality, or legitimacy, whereas others are less involved since they have been asked by their superiors to participate in CCTD in addition to other priority tasks. Of

1 Some information about the different levels of tax burden in OECD member countries is available at: <http://www.oecd.org/ctp/tax-policy/taxing-wages-tax-burden-trends-latest-year.htm>.

course, the gap in interest and involvement between the different partners of cross-border cooperation brings disillusion and seriously hampers the motivation of the ones who significantly drive cooperation. Trust is another crucial issue. Building a consensual vision of the future spatial development of a cross-border region requires a strong level of trust between the actors, who sometimes have to share precious or strategic information with respect to national or regional strategies. When this level of trust is not realised, and when the different members of cross-border governance withhold information, the outcomes cannot go far. Lastly, legitimacy is necessary to upgrade the level of cooperation, and legitimacy is provided, amongst other things, by the position of the different stakeholders within their own institutional hierarchies. When a territory is not represented by more senior people, it tends to show (or at least, is perceived by the representatives of the other territories) as a sign of disinterest.

Cross-border cooperation thus appears as a fragile network mostly driven by policy-makers 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: political and cultural problems can be solved, whereas it is much more complicated to recreate trust where it no longer exists.

## 5. Conclusion

In the light of the analysis made, it appears that the cross-border territorial strategy of the Greater Region does not take into consideration the diversity of the challenges engendered by the cross-border integration process. Its first objective is to facilitate the cross-border commuter flows towards Luxembourg, which needs this workforce for its economy. Therefore, the cross-border strategy developed so far focuses on the functional dimension of cross-border integration (by improving cross-border accessibility and facilitating interactions in targeted economic activities), and not on the other dimensions, in particular the causes and negative externalities of these cross-border flows. To summarise, this cross-border strategy aims so far at coping with the increasing number of flows, but does not reflect a willingness to reduce the structural differences in the framing conditions of economic development, and especially the tax issue. The discussions emerging from the CCTD on the elaboration and implementation of a cross-border territorial strategy stress the need to frame and stimulate cross-border cooperation by means of an efficient cross-border governance and from a perspective of easing the implementation of initiatives and actions across the border. Thus, it emphasises the will to reinforce the institutional dimension of cross-border integration. As regards the ideational dimension, there is no agreement on the fact that the identity of the Greater Region should be taken into account and more recognisably branded. Some other topics will be addressed in the near future to complete the cross-border strategy. However, it seems that this current strategy cannot serve the ambition of promoting a more comprehensive cross-border cooperation covering the different dimensions of integration. As a consequence, this strategy can be qualified as a “smallest common denominator”, that is to say, a joint strategy in which the content and the strategic orientations are the least constraining for all the actors involved. Of course, such a stance is far from being enough to arrive at a more coherent and integrated cross-border area. The policy recommendations formulated in the different parts of the strategy are not precise enough or supported by concrete tools to permit a vision that spatial development will actually be more coordinated in the near future. In addition, some problematic issues are evaded and both human and financial resources remain low given the cross-border challenges.

Some insights from this case study should be cross-checked in other case study areas to draw more general conclusions. However, it seems that institutional obstacles, which are often invoked to interpret the lack of outputs in cross-border strategies, are far from being the most important ones. When we try to look beyond the stage of cross-border governance, by looking at the individuals who drive it, and not at the institutions which are represented, it appears that solving the institutional, cultural and political problems is not a purely technical issue, but more a question of willingness. Studying the importance of notions of trust, leadership, and involvement can be crucial to better understand the “cooperation fatigue” often associated with cross-border governance (Knippschild, 2011), and to be more nuanced with respect to the European Union paradigm, according to which more interactions should lead to more integration. Considering the different dimensions that are covered by the umbrella expression of cross-border integration can help to point out the challenges associated with the opening of borders and a better articulation of different territorial systems and societies,

each having their own cultural heritage, legal framework, and collective identity. A cross-border territorial strategy can hardly address all these different challenges, but it is at least important to consider that actions directed towards a certain target at the cross-border level can have positive or negative feedback loops on other important elements related to cross-border exchanges.

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