

2.2.2 Spatial integration revisited – new insights for cross-border and transnational contexts

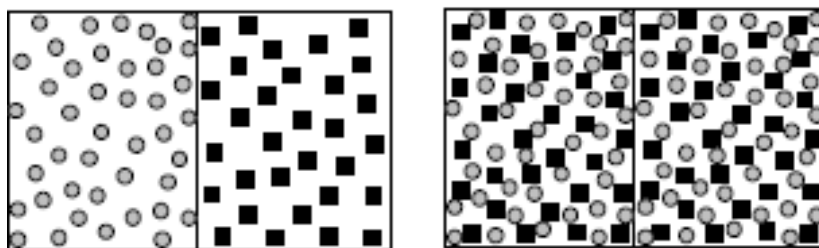
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I. INTRODUCTION

In the early days of the discussion on European Spatial Development, the authors de Boe, Grasland and Healy made a very valuable contribution to the discussion on how ‘spatial integration’ could be understood (de Boe et al. 1999; cp. Grasland 2012). Their paper was part of the Study programme on European Spatial Development, the forerunner of the ESPON programme. During the last 15 years, this paper was an important inspiration for many colleagues and researchers within and beyond the ESPON programme.

Simplifying to a considerable extent, de Boe et al. 1999 reflected spatial integration in cross-border contexts predominantly as the dynamic resulting from the removal of barriers. Intensified processes of exchange and interlinkage lead to a territorial harmonisation and homogenisation (see Figure 2.9). The metaphor of ‘communicating pipes’ might come into mind here.

Figure 2.9 Homogenization as an important consequence from European Integration



Source: De Boe et al. 1999: 29

With regard to cross-border development, specific integration patterns of density and networks were developed as well as integration dynamics of connectivity and influence. Since then, a series of ESPON projects has applied and further developed this perspective (e.g. project 1.4.3 in the 2006 programme, Metroborder, Geospecs, Ulysses and others in the 2013 programme). These projects have many (explicit and implicit) references to this concept. In the following sections we will reflect some strands of this debate by formulating three postulates;

- Integration is not only about growing similarity and connectivity, but also about complementarity as driving force of integration processes (e.g. labour markets)
- Functional integration is selective and scale sensitive: border spaces can be integrated in European metropolitan networks and / or in local cross-border flows.
- In times of multi-level governance, a three dimensional perspective on integration seems necessary as integration on the local, regional and national level does not necessarily take place in parallel

II. THE COMPLEMENTARITIES POSTULATE

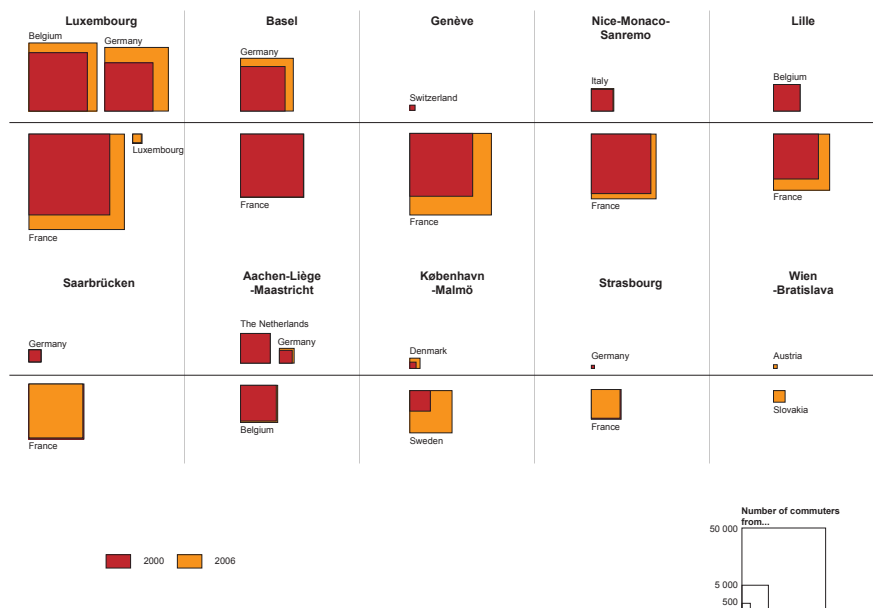
Without any doubt, cross-border integration has accelerated during recent years, as increasing numbers of cross-border institutions and increasing numbers of cross-border commuters show in particular in urbanised border regions.

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Figure 2.10 shows the changes in commuting flows across borders in metropolitan border regions. Two findings are striking here: First, in almost all cases we see an increase in numbers, and this is a clear argument for increasing cross-border integration. Secondly, we see a certain asymmetry between the different poles involved in the process: There is at least one place of origin (places of domicile) and an attracting pole (place of work). In times of high economic dynamic the total number of commuters increases, but the asymmetry does not diminish. This example questions to a certain extent the ‘communicating pipes’ postulate: Even if we observe dynamic integration processes, homogenisation processes or convergence are not necessarily the consequence. Instead we see persisting differentials in GDP, income etc. (Metroborder, cp. Sohn et al. 2009).

Figure 2.10 Cross-border commuting in the case study regions of the Metroborder project



Source: Metroborder, CEPS Instead

In the cases presented, this can in part be explained as agglomeration effect (e.g. Geneva, but not in Strasbourg / Kehl). In other cases we see the consequences of a process of specialisation and concentration which is typical for processes of spatial integration from the economic point of view: economic integration enlarges economies of scale, and this leads to specialisation and concentrations (Aiginger / Pfaffmeyer 2004). Here we have to consider that the European integration process has led to differing degrees of harmonisation and integration in different policy fields (full labour market mobility, limited fiscal harmonisation etc.). These territorial differentials fuel the regional specialisation.

Territorial specialisation – which is also based on historical path dependencies – can be observed in two ways. Firstly, we observe *economic* specialisations (e.g. automotive sector in the Saarland, financial business in Luxembourg). Secondly, we have *functional* specialisations (one place as business core, another as cultural or retail destination or as growing zones of living spaces).

With regard to the policy implication, this finding is sensitive. In general, asymmetries do not necessarily mean that these asymmetries contradict the objective of territorial cohesion. Instead, cross-border integration allows new forms of regional functioning and prospering, offering opportunities for all partners involved. But indeed, questions of balancing prosperity and redistribution procedures are on the agenda and have to be addressed carefully.

III. THE MULTI-SCALE POSTULATE

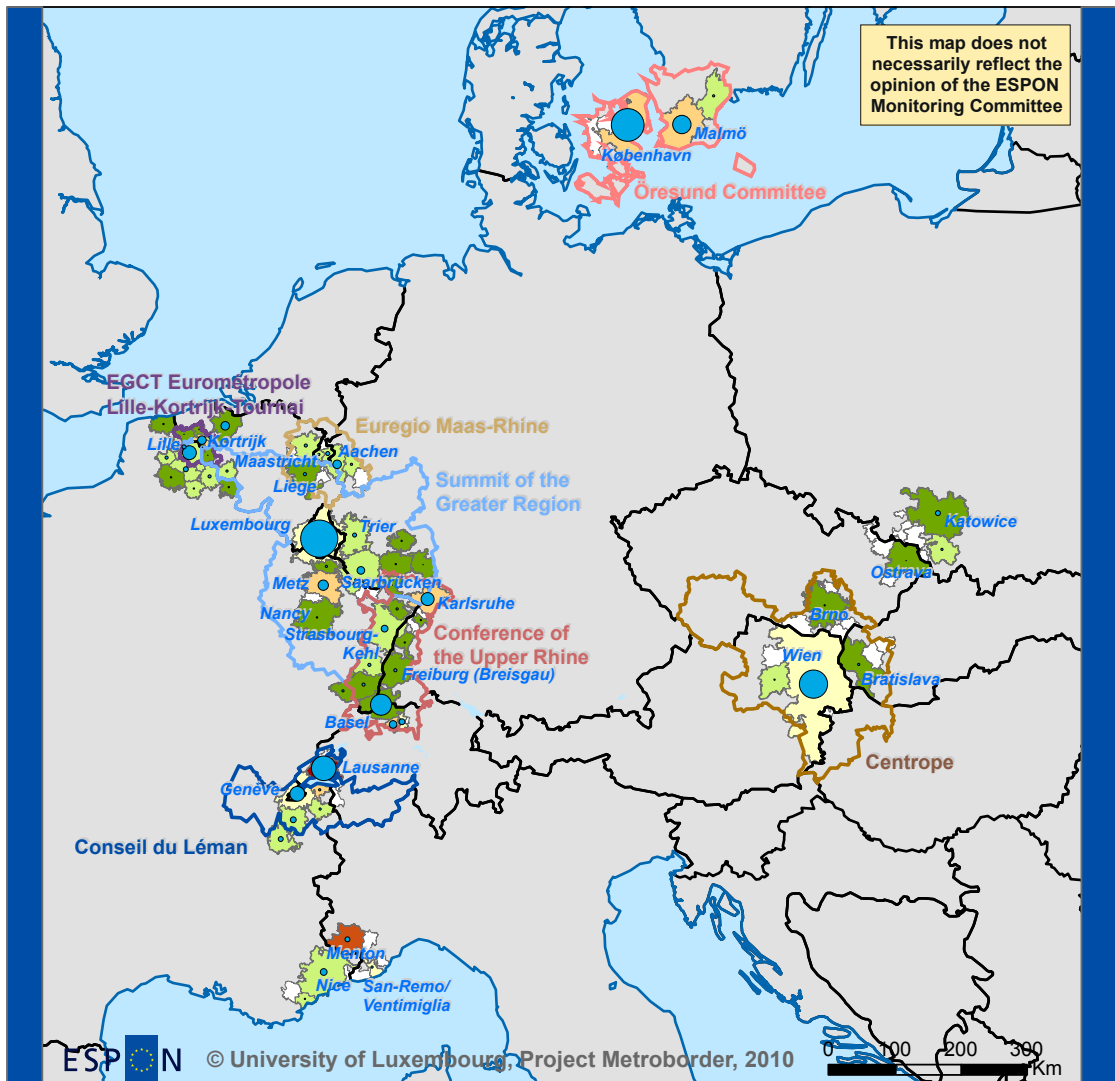
Cross-border integration is a spatial phenomenon that takes place on different scales. At first glance we see two scales of key importance: Firstly, the integration takes place on a regional scale, approx. 30 to 100 km on either side of the border. Within this zone cross-border commuting plays a particular role. ESPON has shown this for the cross-border context applying the concept of the Functional Urban Areas (FUAs, see project 1.4.3, Metroborder). In polycentric regions this extension can add up to larger spaces. These functional areas are mainly defined by commuting activities, and these trigger off a series of further dynamics – the more intense the commuting is, the clearer we see the implications on the real estate market, in the transport sector, in planning conflicts etc.

The second important scale is the global context. In particular in metropolitan border regions, the embeddedness into the global economy is of great importance as also the current crises shows. De Boe et al. (1999: 27) have referred to this constellation by referring to external and internal flows which has proven to be an appropriate framework.

Map 2.4 illustrates this for the Europe's metropolitan border regions: Their FUAs are presented as surfaces, representing the regional ('internal') integration. The circles illustrate the embeddedness within a globalised ('external') economy: the subsidiaries which are mapped here belong to the leading 3.000 companies worldwide and, thus, show a considerable presence in these border regions (cp. FOCI 2010).

However, reducing the spatial dynamic to these two scales would mean to simplify to a large extent. Within the Functional Urban Areas, the spatial complexity is enormous. Neither is commuting a spatially homogenous phenomenon, nor are the consequences equally spread. From the Upper Rhine region we know this with regard to commuting patterns (which remains largely a domestic phenomenon); from the Greater Region around Luxembourg we know that the economic patterns show different characteristics with the FUAs, having a prominent financial sector concentrated on the Luxembourgish side, an automotive sector in all parts etc. – but given the poor data situation, it is not easy to get the full picture.

Map 2.4 Europe's cross-border metropolitan regions and their integration into the global economy



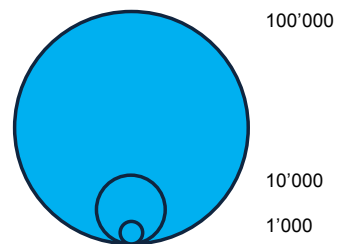
EUROPEAN UNION
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Level: FUA
Source: Team IGUL, FOCI 2010
Origin of Data: Team IGUL, FOCI 2010
© EuroGeographics Association for administrative boundaries

Controlled subsidiaries – subsidiaries from outside
Controlled subsidiaries + subsidiaries from outside

- 0,71 – 1,00
- 0,51 – 0,70
- 0,21 – 0,50
- 0,01 – 0,20
- 0,49 – 0,00
- 1,00 – -0,50

Controlled subsidiaries + subsidiaries from outside by FUA (except local links)



IV. THE MULTI-LEVEL POSTULATE

De Boe et al. (1999) referred to the reflections on multi-level governance that were very young at that time: “Multi-level relationships between territories can be quite complex [...]. Hierarchical relationships clearly exist between different territorial scales which combine with horizontal relationships between similar territorial units” (De Boe et al. 1999: 29).

The ESPON research on cross-border development has clearly proven and illustrated that assumption. Cross-border integration means the intensification and the institutionalisation of cooperation on all levels. This might take place on the local level (e.g. Euregios), on regional or the transnational level (e.g. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, Macroregions); these examples are completed by a series of individual, multilateral solutions (see the institutional mappings of Metroborder, Ulysses).

Different case studies have shown several so called ‘mis-matches’ (cp. Chilla et al. 2011). Firstly, institutional cooperation between institutions on the same level does not automatically mean that all partners have comparable competences. For example, the competences for transport infrastructure are in some countries concentrated on the national level, in others on the regional level. This kind of misfit poses some considerable challenges in the practical and diplomatic sense.

Secondly, the cross-border institutionalisations hardly ever bring together all important institutional partners and the fitting perimeter. For example, the Greater Region brings together very relevant political actors even if the perimeter is far too large for most pressing challenges of territorial development.

The political implication from this insight is that one-size-fits-all institutionalization in cross-border and transnational context is hardly possible. Instead we have to see the importance of soft and flexible instruments, and of horizontal and vertical linkage of hard competences.

V. CONCLUSION

Recent years of the ESPON programme have confirmed, illustrated and further developed important aspects from 1999 study programme with regard to cross-border and transnational integration. The complexity and dynamic in these territories is enormous and needs particular political commitment. For the coming years we have to underline the following points:

Firstly, spatial integration is more than homogenisation by cross-border flows, but instead we see the development of complementary structures and of opposing trends. This offers new development opportunities for all partners involved, but the question of balance is a delicate one: tailor made strategies have to work towards territorial balance that heads towards territorial cohesion.

Secondly, the complex character of overlapping multi-scalar developments has to be further reflected, and the still relatively poor data situation has to be improved. A solid research project on borders (beyond targeted analyses) seems to be necessary.

Thirdly, the institutional response to the multi-level challenge of cross-border cooperation has to consider soft, flexible forms of territorial governance.

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