

'Rien que tel qu'un échec pour progresser.'

'Is the EU flexible enough, able and ready to admit past blunders and learn from experience? Or, is it just in the process of running without learning?'

(Gilbert Fayl & Ulric Fayl von Hentaler, Running without learning)

INTERREG or the myth of territorial integration –

The ex-post evaluation of INTERREG III re-evaluated

Paul Drewe

In 2010 Panteia and partners have presented an ex-post evaluation of the INTERREG III Community Initiative (2000-2006) [1]. Let us recall – this Initiative consists mainly of five different operational elements:

- 1. Strand A on cross-border co-operation which was expected to promote an integral regional development between neighbouring border regions including external and maritime borders.*
- 2. Strand B on transnational co-operation which was expected to contribute to the harmonious territorial development and integration of the Community territory.*
- 3. Strand C on inter-regional co-operation was expected to improve the effectiveness of policies and instruments for regional development and cohesion by structured and large-scale information exchanges and a sharing of experience.*
- 4. The programme ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observation regional development trends in Europe and spatial planning research of relevance to the EU territory.*
- 5. The programme INTERACT (INTERreg – Animation, Co-ordination, Transfer) was established as a co-operative tool for providing assistance to EU-funded territorial co-operation.*

Not all of these elements have a direct bearing on territorial integration. This mainly holds for cross-border cooperation (Strand A) and, to a lesser

extent, for transnational cooperation (Strand B). Strand A and B are also financially the most important elements with respectively € 6.472 and € 2.368 billion (both 2007).

The definition of territorial integration is far from clear. Panteia refers to *vague territorial development objectives in the INTERREG III Guidelines* and *the lack of a politically agreed definition of territorial cohesion*. The dominant definition of cohesion is based upon disparities of per capita GDP covering all EU regions, not only those with a common border or with propinquity (Drewe, 2011a). Strand A is a clear case at hand of the latter. It is also clear that inter-regional cooperation (Strand C) does not qualify. ESPON and INTERACT are only support acts. Propinquity can play a role in the case of Strand B though one may doubt the relevance of the formation of large groups of European regions such as North West Europe. They are the result of geographic imagery that was started by Drevet (1988) who brought it to Brussels.

Attempting to evaluate and discuss cross-border cooperation in Europe, one can put forward six theses (Drewe 1996; 2006a,b):

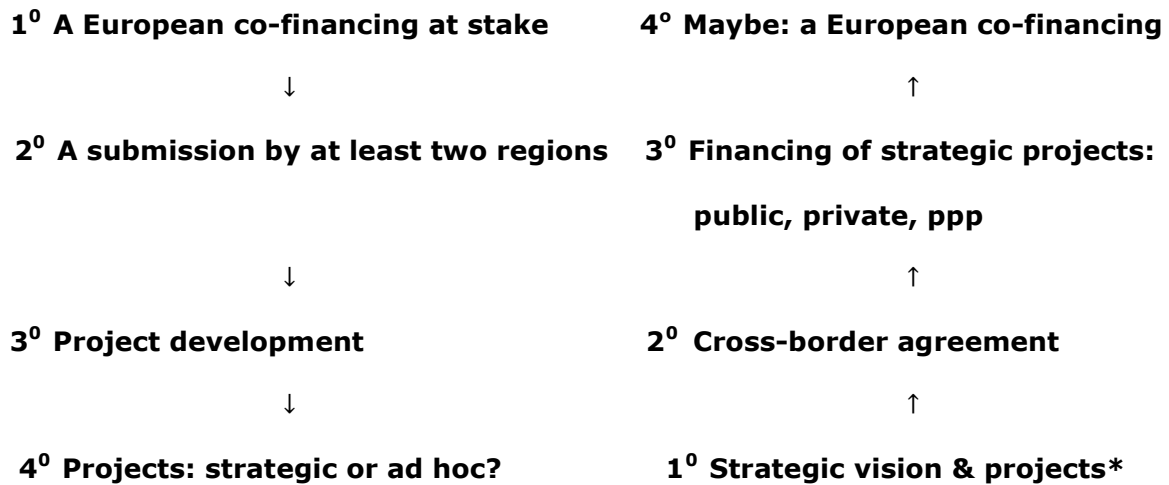
1. Cross-border cooperation is essentially a voluntary action
2. Socio-economic complementarity is a key factor in cross-border cooperation
3. Without a strategic vision and strategic projects there is no real cross-border cooperation
4. Given the spatial proximity of the regions involved, cross-border cooperation requires a common spatial planning perspective
5. The creation or reinforcement of an innovative milieu is a vital to a successful cross-border cooperation
6. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can be a strength or an opportunity in a cross-border cooperation

1. Cross-border cooperation, an act of voluntarism

Voluntary – according to Webster’s – means ‘proceeding from the will: produced in or by an act of choice (action)’? Cross-border cooperation can also be durable in the sense that it can, in principle, proceed without EU funding or is continued once the funding stops. No sanctions of bad practice have been recorded which would put voluntarism to the test. While INTERREG is basically a top-down approach – in order to be successful – cross-border cooperation must (also) be a bottom-up operation (similar to innovation policy ; see Drewe, 2011b). European co-financing simply is no guarantee for success. It is neither

necessary nor sufficient. For the sake of clarity and argument see the following scheme:

Cross-border cooperation: top down versus bottom up



- See thesis 3

2. Socio-economic complementarity

Cooperation is the opposite of competition. But in order to be durable, each of the partners - whether strong, medium or weak - must profit from the cooperation. Focusing on the extremes of strong and weak, three combinations can be distinguished: strong-strong, weak-weak, and strong-weak. None of these is exactly stable. The first two are prone to competition. How are, for example, two weak frontier regions dealing with candidates for foreign direct investment? The combination of strong and weak regions tends to breed dependence of the latter, suffering from a 'big-brother syndrome'.

SWOT analysis can help to identify complementarities in terms of (internal) strengths and weaknesses as well as (external) opportunities and threats, partly linked to globalization. If strengths and weaknesses and, to a lesser extent, opportunities and threats are not equally distributed among frontier regions, then trade-offs become possible – which is just another word for complementarities.

3. Strategic vision and strategic projects

Unlike a cross-border cooperation `inspired by the availability of co-financing at the European level, it is preferable to start from a strategic vision and strategic projects in each region. This requires a strategic planning approach, for example, a mixed scanning. The essence of mixed scanning is the matching of visions and projects. Without a strategic vision there are no strategic projects, but only ad hoc projects. And without strategic projects a vision remains an abstract planning exercise.

Mixed scanning involves four interacting steps: analysis of existing situation; design brief of development problems a region is facing; design/redesign that is defining and matching of visions and projects; implementation & monitoring (for details see Drewe, 2011c).

4. A common spatial development perspective

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) lists policy aims and options that can serve as guidelines for common spatial development perspectives in border regions: polycentric spatial development and a new urban-rural relationship; parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge; wise management of the natural and cultural heritage.

Thesis 4 can be illustrated by cross-border agglomerations, in particular by a French initiative (MOT, 2003). Five outstanding cases are quoted: the French – Belgian 'Métropole Lilloise', the European Development Pole (PED) of Longwy, the French-Swiss agglomeration around Geneva, the Bask Eurocity and, finally, the Eurodistrict Strasbourg- Ortenau. An early example of a common planning perspective is given by the Métropole Lilloise (COPIT, 1994).

A key concept is that of intercity networks comprising four interacting elements (Drewe, 1994):

- the complimentary qualities of the constituent cities
- the actual flows of goods, persons, and information between them
- the physical links of material infrastructure
- the immaterial infrastructure, that is various forms of organizational links allowing for consultation and the exchange of information.

5. Innovative milieu

An innovative milieu has the following characteristics (Maillat, 2006):

- a group of actors
- material, immaterial and institutional elements
- cooperation
- learning or 'apprenticeship'

A wide array of actors is involved such as business firms, research and educational institutions, and local public authorities: all of them possessing decision-making power and all of them able to make strategic choices.

Material elements are plants and infrastructures whereas immaterial ones pertaining to know-how. The institutional elements refer to local public authorities and other organizations with decision power.

The actors are interacting in a cooperative fashion. They are networking (also, or even mostly, informally) to make best use of existing resources, thus creating value added or synergy.

Permanent learning enables actors to modify their behavior in order to develop new solutions, adapting to a changing environment.

Both learning and cooperation relate, among others, to the relation between the milieu's actors and the external environment as the milieu is - thanks to *transterritorial networks* - part of a technological and market context which is both international and dynamic (more about innovative milieux in Drewe, 2010).

Transterritorial networks are relevant to cross-border and transnational co-operation. The emphasis on innovation in 'Europe 2030' makes the creation of (transterritorial) innovative milieu even more urgent, in particular if the top-down approach of innovation policy is combined with a bottom-up approach (Drewe, 2011b).

6.The role of ICT

The position of a given node or city on the European (Inter) net depends, first of all, on the number of direct connections to other cities. Of course, the importance of links varies. Direct connections need to be weighted for their capacity as well as for multiple paths. The latter depend on a node's proximity to an Internet exchange point. The more (peering or cooperating) Internet service providers are associated with an exchange point, the more weight it pulls (Drewe, 2002).

The endowment with Internet infrastructure favors city regions or hubs. But there are ways in which non-hub, border regions can strengthen their position. Take for example Internet exchange points in France or in the Netherlands. International data flows from or to border regions usually travel via the dominant exchange points of Paris or Amsterdam. To lessen their dependence on these national hubs, some border regions in both countries have created their own exchange points, specialized in cross-border flows of information in particular with Germany.

It should be noted, however, that the Internet infrastructure represents only the supply side and that this not the most logical point of departure in cross-border cooperation. When it comes to invest, for example, in broadband communication, the right starting point should be the demand side, that is the private and public needs for this kind of communication. Only after having considered the impact on access to the infrastructure, technological possibilities and, not to forget, the cost of producing and operating the required infrastructure can one draw up a solid investment plan (Nguyen, 2002).

Conclusion

Only the first of the six theses bear on the process aspects of cross-border and transnational cooperation. Confronted with INTERREG III, the is thatthis Community Initiative clearly fall short of content or short of as Panteia has put it *content-related policy issues of strategic relevance for territorial cooperation*. Hence our re-evaluation does not exactly contradict *the established view in the scientific literature that the outcome of INTERREG III interventions and territorial was mostly limited to individual and organizational learning* (Panteia). Around € 5.69 billion of ERDF-funding has helped to directly or indirectly creating or safeguarding 115 000 jobs/employment opportunities. This is certainly an expensive way of creating jobs.

Programme strategies need to address and effectively tackle issues of real cross-border or transnational relevance (Panteia). This perhaps the most amazing policy implication for European territorial cooperation after 2013. Maybe the six theses, presented in this essay, can provide some guidance in tackling the **real** problems.

One cannot accuse Panteia and partners to have been uncritical. One does not even have to read between the lines. But there is something entirely wrong with the approach to evaluation which is the responsibility of the European Commission.

If one reads the recommendations for Objective 3 (2007-2013) one cannot help asking 'What took you so long?' We are dealing with INTERREG III here. What about INTERREG I and II? One would have expected an evaluation of INTERREG I before engaging in the second edition and of the latter before adopting INTERREG III. But an evaluation of INTERREG I has only become available in 2003, half way through INTERREG III. Moreover, the same holds for the transition from INTERREG to cross-border cooperation as part of Objective 3 from 2006 onward. Each time the budget has increased...

Instead of being obliged to stress *Community value added* [2], the evaluators should also have been encouraged to report bad practice cases, the earlier, the better. *Rien que te qu'un échec pour progresser* - as the French say.

The way INTERREG has been handled is just another example of the EU 'running without learning' (for 18 years) rather turning territorial integration into a myth.

Notes

[1] Panteia and Partners:

- EureConsult S.A. (Luxemburg) – Policy Research and Consultancy (Frankfurt) – GÉPHYRES (Roubaix) – The Radboud University (Nijmegen)

[2] *INTERREG III generated considerable Community value added... Strand A further strengthened and deepened the cross-border governance dimension for promoting socio-economic and sustainable development along most borders between the "old" EU Member States. Along the other borders, this process either stagnated (old external borders) or started to develop at an initial stage (new internal and external borders)* (Panteia).

References

COPIT (Conférence Permanente Intercommunale Transfrontalière) (1994) *Rapport d'activités – axes stratégiques*, Menen.

Drevet, J.-F. (1988) *1992-2000 Les régions françaises entre l'Europe et le déclin*, Souffles, Paris.

Drewe, P. (1994) The towns of Benelux faced with the challenge of transborder cooperation, *Regions of Europe*, 9: 29-33.

Drewe, P. (1996) *La coopération transfrontalière en Europe, un bilan critique*, Paper IVth Meeting of APDR, Universidade de Beira Interior, November 21-23, Covilhã.

Drewe, P. (2002) Understanding the virtual space of the Internet, a network approach, in M. Carmona & M. Schoonraad (eds) *Globalization, urban form & governance*, Delft University Press: 135-142.

Drewe, P. (2005) Border regions as laboratories of European integration? in A. Kuklinski & K. Pawlowski (eds) *Europe – the strategic choices*, Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu – National-Louis University, Nowy Sacz: 233-243.

Drewe, P. (2006) *Border regions as laboratories of European integration?* : <http://www.drewe.nl/Essays> (PDF 2a).

Drewe, P. (2010) *Innovation: theory and practice*: <http://www.drewe.nl/Essays> (PDF 6).

Drewe, P. (2011a) *Cohesion or the solidarity that unites'*: <http://www.octobre-lookingfromtheinsideout.blogspot.com> (January)

Drewe, P. (2011b) *Europe: innovate or perish!* Paper prepared for the Second Lower Silesian Conference on 'Renaissance of European Strategic Thinking, June 16-19, Wrocław.

Drewe, P. (2011c) *Mixed Scanning new style: a useful planning tool for Poland?* (publication forthcoming).

Maillat, D. (2006) Comportements spatiaux et milieu innovateurs, in R. Camagni & D. Maillat (eds) *Milieus innovateurs, théorie et politiques*, Economica Anthropos, Paris: 65-73.

MOT (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière) (2003) *Les agglomérations transfrontalières, Les Cahiers de la MOT 3*.

Nguyen, G, D. (2002) *Entreprises et hauts debits, le rôle des collectivités territoriales*, Observatoire des telecommunications dans la ville, Paris.

Panteia (2010) *INTERREG III Community Initiative (2000-2006) Ex-Post Evaluation*, Zoetermeer.

