From euroregions to macroregions: a reasonable step?  
An appraisal from Western Mediterranean  
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From euroregions to macroregions: a reasonable step?

An appraisal from Western Mediterranean

Introduction

- Macro-regional strategies of the European Union are conceived as new instruments for territorial cooperation. They must integrate all the available and existing resources and schemes within the same transnational geographical area: EU structural funds and territorial cooperation programmes; other national, local and transnational planning schemes; public and private initiatives, etc. These strategies are expected to articulate functional and political complexity and to improve policy efficiency through cooperative and flexible approaches, without creating new institution or funding.[2]

- This territorial approach evokes the concept of "mega-region", i.e., a "meso-scale" transnational territorial unit, located inside a supranational "region", such as for instance the European Union, North America, Mercosur, East Asia.[3] Moreover, macro-regional scale was already at stake in the transnational areas designed from the mid-1990’s in the strand B of EU territorial cooperation programmes, or in cooperative organisations like the Benelux, the Visegrad Group, the Nordic Councils or the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

- While these macro-regional strategies are expected to foster European territorial cooperation, they raise the question of how they can efficiently interact with the organisations that are considered to be the most successful schemes of territorial cooperation so far: the cross-border cooperative organisations commonly known as ‘euroregions’.[3] Whereas around thirty euroregions existed at the beginning of the 1990s, there are currently about a hundred organisations of this type. Poland for instance is a country (cross)

They raise the question of how they can efficiently interact with the organisations?

Cultural cooperation: a vector for macro-regionalisation?

- Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée was constituted in 2004 between the French regions of Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées and the Spanish autonomous communities of Aragon, Catalonia and Balearic Islands. Culture has been a mainstream domain of cooperation, through a specific agenda that includes a culture portal online, specific calls for projects, annual cultural forums. Culture was also one of the first attributions of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) that was launched in 2010 to reinforce the structure and governance of the euroregion.[5] Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée was launched in 2007 and gathers the bordered by around 15 euroregions and in this context an association of Polish euroregions was founded. In the framework of the Western Mediterranean macro-region, we can wonder for instance whether two existing euroregions in this area – Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée and Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée – can be milestones in the constitution of a macro-regional strategy for this area. The case of cultural cooperation is an interesting example to address this question. Indeed, among the various policies that are developed within euroregions, culture appears to be a frequent domain of cooperation. A recent study shows that culture and tourism are the favoured themes of cross-border cooperation).[4]
French regions Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur with the Italian regions Piemonte, Liguria and Val d’Aoste. The partners established a cultural agenda based on networking in the field of visual arts and on organising cultural events to promote the euroregion.

In this context, different elements suggest that the interaction between both euroregions can help to implement a macro-regional strategy in this area, specifically starting with cultural cooperation:

- they encompass focal key areas of the Western Mediterranean, with the Barcelona-Marseille-Genoa Arc and the metropolitan regions of Toulouse, Lyon, Torino; thus constituting a potentially homogenous territorial entity like “North of Southern Europe” or “Golden Mediterranean Belt”;
- There already exist cooperation schemes that can be integrated within a macro-regional strategy: EU cooperation programme MED, cooperation Rhône-Alpes/Catalonia in the framework of the association “Four Motors for Europe”, Union for the Mediterranean.
- These two euroregions show potential geo-cultural interactions: transnational historical and identity links, common fields of “creative excellence” that are already mobilised in the euroregional cultural policies, like for instance audiovisual and image industries.
- The two euroregions showed first step of cooperation with a joint participation to the Open Days in Brussels within the grouping “Euroregions for territorial integration” in 2009, 2010 and 2011.
The realpolitik limits

Even though the macro-regional interaction between euroregions Pyrénées-Méditerranée and Alpes-Méditerranée can prove to be an option for the constitution of a Western Mediterranean macro-regional strategy, several points show a certain gap between the theoretical-ideal level and the practical one.

First, some observers question the very relevance of a macro-regional strategy for this area: can this really help reinforcing cooperation, does it have a real added value and does it respond to the specificities of the Mediterranean territorial cooperation context? Second, the evolution of both euroregional partnerships shows that they remain uncertain schemes in several aspects. In Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée the whole cooperation project slowed down following the change of political majority in the Italian regions. The president of Piedmont, who was elected in 2010 with the support of the extreme-right party Lega Nord, declared that the euroregional cooperation was not a priority anymore and most of the projects are in stand by. In Pyrénées-Méditerranée, recent financial cuts and changes in the political majorities could start to impact the initial ambition and objectives of the euroregion.

Developing new territorial cooperation instruments at transnational scale can allow a step further in the territorial construction of the European Union. This achievement can be based on the previously developed cooperation schemes, especially at cross-border scale and in the cultural sector. Nevertheless, real political will and commitment are crucial guarantees of efficiency for these instruments. In this way, planning experts and political leaders could work together to find the balance between giving a response to citizens’ expectations, while giving an impulse to meta-geographical projections.

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