

CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION AS
POLICY ENTREPRENEURSHIP:
EXPLAINING THE VARIABLE SUCCESS
OF EUROPEAN CROSS-BORDER REGIONS

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Abstract

The article addresses the recent proliferation of Cross-Border Regions, or Euroregions, across the EU. It aims to explain why they have been more successfully institutionalised in some areas while they have had less success in others. It conceptualises Euroregions as the outcome of policy entrepreneurship strategies through which support is mobilised on the local level and the Euroregions are institutionalised into durable organisations. Based on a systematic comparison of three cases, the EUREGIO, Viadrina and Tyrol, it is shown how different administrative and institutional environments throughout the EU affect the ability of Euroregions to engage in policy entrepreneurship. At the same time, it is shown that it is premature to perceive Euroregions as new types of regional territorial entities; rather, they constitute an institutional form through which existing authorities engage in collective action across nation-state borders within the context of EU multi-level governance.

Keywords: cross-border region – cross-border co-operation – trans-border co-operation – EU – policy entrepreneurship

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1. Introduction: Euroregions as instances of region-building?

Virtually all European border areas are involved in some type of cross-border region (CBR). Today, there are more than seventy such arrangements in Europe, usually operating under names such as 'Euroregions' or 'Working Communities' (Perkmann 2003). Although CBRs have a long tradition in post-war Western Europe (O'Dowd 2003), the 1990s saw a large increase all over Europe.

Among the various models, the 'Euroregions' – also known as 'Euregios' or 'European Regions' – have certainly received most recent attention in policy practice, mostly because they fit the organisational and spatial requirements of the EU support programme for CBRs.¹ As opposed to the larger, multi-regional Working Communities that often spread over several countries, Euroregions are small-scale groupings of contiguous public authorities across one or more nation-state borders and can be referred to as 'micro-CBRs' (Perkmann 2003).

There are few European border areas today that are not involved in any of these CBR initiatives. Does this mean we are witnessing the emergence of a new type of region spanning national borders and creating cross-border territories?² Observers have pointed to the sometimes patchy track record of European CBRs, both in terms of institution-building as well as their actual impact on local cross-border environments (Beck 1997; Church and Reid 1999; Liberda 1996; Scott 1998). Even in the eyes of the European Commission – the main sponsor of many of these collaboration initiatives – it has generally been difficult to induce genuine cross-border collaborative projects (O'Dowd 2003: 22). Against this background, the apparently even proliferation of Euroregions across the EU warrants some further investigation.

The paper pursues two aims, related to the internal and external conditions for successful Euroregions, respectively. The first aim is to investigate what the Euroregions effectively do and assess when they qualify as effectively functioning 'cross-border regions'. It is assumed that if these CBRs were regions in some sense, they would need to develop cross-border governance structures,

¹ Cf. Jessop (2002) for a more general discussion of cross-border regions within broader re-scaling tendencies. He identifies various different ways in which CBRs have emerged and investigates their scalar implications in terms of institutional orders and strategic capacity-building.

² A region can be defined as a subnational territorial unit with a collective governance arrangement.

combined with the building up of a degree of a *capacity to act*. In turn, to develop a capacity to act requires the establishment of an organisational basis, complemented by the capability to mobilise a resource stream to fuel the enactment of cross-border strategies and related interventions. Judged against this criterion – derived from the concept of policy entrepreneurship – I intend to show through a comparative case study analysis that Euroregions differ in fact greatly in terms of their set-up and degree of success. A set of success criteria is developed and used as unifying framework for the analysis of the cases. Such a systematic comparison of Euroregion cases has been largely missing from the existing literature on European CBRs although some contributions have addressed the differences between Europe and North America (Blatter 2001). The comparative case study approach can be seen as complementary to other, quantitative work on the proliferation and forms of European CBRs (Perkmann 2003).

To address the second aim, the paper then proceeds to explore the reasons for this uneven development of local cross-border relationships across the European Union. In this respect, particular emphasis is placed on the political-administrative context in which Euroregions developed and propositions are developed as to what context conditions are conducive to successful cross-border regions.

In terms of methodology, the empirical evidence in this article is based on information obtained from two types of sources: interviews and policy documentation. A total of 42 interviews were carried out between 1997 and 2000 with individuals involved in the EUREGIO, Viadrina and Tyrol Euroregions as well as the European Commission. Interviews lasted 1-2 hours, were semi-structured and were taped and transcribed. The evidence was complemented by printed and electronic documentation, in particular strategy, policy and public communication materials produced by the Euroregions, their member authorities, the European Commission and other organisations.

The paper is organised as follows: First, I provide an overview on the specificities of European CBRs. Second, I introduce a conceptual framework, based on the idea of policy entrepreneurship and resource mobilization from which success criteria for CBRs are derived. Using this framework, I then discuss three case studies across Europe – the EUREGIO, the Viadrina and the Tyrol. The conclusion synthesises the results and identifies the facilitating factors behind successful cases of CBC.

2. Overview: Cross-border co-operation, the European

experience

In general, European CBRs represent policy-driven rather than market-driven cases of local cross-border integration. This distinction can be made against the background of the main drivers of the cross-border integration processes. In this respect, two main integration scenarios can be distinguished:

- *Market-driven integration*: based on the proliferation and/or reactivation of social or economic relationships. Such processes of cross-borderisation can often be found to predominate in case of *persisting borders* where highly accentuated cross-border differentials, for instance in terms of factor costs such as labour, stimulate strong cross-border activity. Examples are provided by 'Greater China' (Sum 2002, (Breitung 2002) or the US-Mexican border (Scott 1999); in each of these cases, market-driven integration processes were induced by the declaration of Special Economic Zones.
- *Policy-driven integration*: based on the building of co-operative relationships between public and other bodies that share certain interests, such as coping with environmental interdependencies or creating cross-border economic spaces. These networks often emerge in response to the failures of central state authorities, with local and regional actors exploiting the new opportunity structures created by regionalisation and globalisation. Examples are provided by most European CBRs but also 'compensatory' meso-level networks that emerge as a reaction to the interdependencies or negative externalities created by market-driven cross-border integration, such as on the US-Mexican border (Scott 1999).

European CBRs can be largely characterized as policy-driven model focused on the building of meso-level cross-border policy institutions that have some similarities with conventional regions. This applies in particular to micro-CBRs – or Euroregions in common parlance – which are the institutionally most developed type of CBR in Europe; they are also the subject of the following considerations.

In practice, such CBRs are defined by three characteristics (Perkmann 2003). First, they are *public agency* institutions, given their main protagonists are usually public authorities either on the local, district or regional level. CBRs tend to emerge as a result of a stabilisation of cross-border contacts over time, involving a de-facto institutionalisation of governance structures, decision-making mechanisms and distribution rules. Second, CBRs tend to be collaboration arrangements between subnational authorities in different countries whereby these actors are normally not legal subjects

according to international law. They are therefore not allowed to conclude international treaties with foreign authorities which is why CBRs are often based on *informal or 'quasi-juridical'* arrangements among the participating authorities. Third, in substantive terms, CBRs are foremost concerned with *practical problem-solving* in a broad range of fields of every-day administrative life; these tend to be local policy areas with a perceived need for policy co-ordination or the management of cross-border interdependencies.

In organisational terms, many Euroregions have a council, a presidency, subject-matter oriented working groups and a common secretariat. Thus, the term 'CBR' refers to both a territorial unit, made of the aggregate territories of the participating authorities, and an organisational entity, usually the secretariat or management unit. In most cases, the participating bodies are local authorities, although sometimes regional or district authorities are involved. Occasionally, third organisations, such as regional development agencies, interest associations and chambers of commerce also participate in the governance of the CBR. The spatial extension of micro-CBRs will usually range between 50 and 100km in width; and they tend to be inhabited by a few million inhabitants.

European CBC: a brief history

The first formal CBR, the EUREGIO, was established in 1958 on the Dutch-German border, shortly followed by a number of initiatives along the Rhine basin, notably the Regio Basiliensis (Speiser 1993). Today in more than seventy cases municipalities, districts and regional authorities co-operate with their counterparts according to various organisational arrangements.

Crucially, this process was facilitated by supranational institutions, such as the Council of Europe³ and the European Union. Partly resulting from strategies of transnational collective representation pursued by border authorities, they helped create the conditions under which border authorities could collaborate within a context characterised by legal uncertainty and 'soft' institutions. The classical form of the Euroregion is the 'twin association': on each side of the border, municipalities and districts form an association according to a legal form suitable within their own national legal system. In a second step, the associations then join each other on the basis of a cross-border

³ The Council of Europe (CoE) is a European intergovernmental organisation headquartered in Strassbourg, founded in 1949. It was the first supranational organisation to provide an arena for local and regional authorities.

agreement – traditionally according to private law – to establish the CBR.

In 1980, an international treaty, the so-called *Madrid Convention*, was concluded to provide as a first step towards CBR structures based on public law. But many Euroregions do not (yet) make use of this legal-institutional opportunity but prefer to collaborate on the basis of alternative types of agreements. The Madrid Convention therefore failed to live up to the hopes of the proponents of CBRs which were to provide a strong alternative to centrally controlled ‘border commissions’ for governing trans-border interdependencies.

By contrast, a supranational policy of great impact was created when the European Commission launched the Interreg programme, designed to financially support CBRs, in 1990. Interreg III, for the period 2000-06, has a budget of €4.875b (1999 prices), corresponding to approximately 2.3% of the total regional policy budget of the EU. Effectively, this amounts to approximately €700m per year, complemented by a similar amount by the member states.

Local and regional authorities and other organisations located on external⁴ and internal land borders, as well as some maritime areas, are eligible to apply for cross-border project support. The European Commission’s objective is to develop cross-border social and economic centres through common development strategies, with eligible projects being required to demonstrate a structural economic benefit to the border area. The allocation of funds is governed by Steering Committees involving local actors as well as higher-level authorities such as central states and/or states from the participating countries.

3. A framework for comparing Euroregion cases

Interreg is by far the most important source of funding for most micro-CBRs, raising the question whether these initiatives only exist *because* this type of resource is available to them. In that case, they would qualify as hardly more than ‘grant coalitions’ (Cochrane, Peck and Tickell 1996) that disintegrate once the funding stream runs out. Judging from the evidence this might be the case for some but certainly not for all CBRs in Europe. On the other hand, observers have pointed out that a certain degree of ‘entrepreneurial’ behaviour can actually indicate an effective empowerment of the regions against their central-state authorities within the context of EU integration (Smyrl 1997). So, in this sense, their ability to mobilise funding could be interpreted as success.

⁴ Borders with non-EU members.

There is presumably a continuum between what can be called intensive co-operation, on the one hand, and instrumental co-operation, on the other. Empirically speaking, this distinction will be difficult to operationalise. It appears therefore more appropriate to focus on the outcomes rather than on the more intangible imputed motives for establishing CBRs.

This paper hence proposes a set of conceptually grounded criteria for distinguishing between successful and less successful Euroregions, based on their ability to establish a cross-border capacity to act. The argument put forward is that building of such capacity is predicated upon a Euroregion being a successful policy entrepreneur.

I use concepts taken from two streams of the literature: firstly, the work on policy innovation, and secondly, the work on resource mobilisation within the context of organisations and social movements.

Within the literature on policy innovation, policy entrepreneurs are characterised as actors who position themselves as protagonists within specific policy areas by taking advantage of windows of opportunity opened up by conjunctures within their policy environment. Reflecting the ‘garbage can model’ of organisational choice (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972), they are in constant search for possible problems for which they can offer a solution (Kingdon 1984; Majone and Tame 1996; Mintrom and Vergari 1996). They do this not necessarily for financial profit but to increase the influence of their organisation or organisational unit which is often correlated to their resource basis. Recent research on EU policy formation has applied the concept of policy entrepreneurship to the European Commission (Pollack 1997, Cram 1997, Laffan 1997, Moravcsik 1999). The Commission is described as a policy agent capable of entrepreneurially exploiting the resources at its disposal in order to generate new policies that are acceptable to various coalitions of member states. By way of analogy, the concept can be applied, with some modifications, to Euroregions. Brouard, for instance, analyses the construction of the Atlantic Arc – a Working Community at the Western fringes of the European Union from the UK to Portugal – as a ‘political enterprise’ (Brouard 1996). Although not using the notion of policy entrepreneurship, Carmin et al. show that the emergence of the White Carpathian Euroregion was shaped by environmentally oriented NGOs seizing an opportunity structure which in turn had been created by changes within their national political systems and the availability of European Union support (Carmin, Hicks and Beckmann 2003).

For current purposes, I propose to amend these notions of political entrepreneurship in two respects. Firstly, while the notion is often applied to theorise *individual* agency, i.e. the strategies of

entrepreneurial individuals (Kingdon 1984), I apply the notion to activities and strategies of Euroregions as *organisations*. In recent work, political scientists have suggested that it is not always possible to trace policy innovation back to individuals but needs to be attributed to collectives (Roberts and King 1996).

Secondly, and following from the last point, this means that strategies to exploit windows of opportunities will be accompanied by a process of organisation-building. As with any other organisation, once a Euroregion is established as such, it will operate to secure organisational survival (McCarthy and Zald 1977). This will occur within the constraints and opportunities afforded by the organisation's ability to mobilise resource and the specialist competencies it will be able to build up over time. Though mostly applied to social movements, resource mobilisation theory can hence be used to inform an operational framework to assess the success of Euroregions. In particular, this refers the ability of these organisations to create and maintain a support base on a local level; in most cases, this will involve maintaining networks of local authorities as paying members.

In light of the above considerations, why would Euroregions qualify as policy entrepreneurs? First, unlike most public-sector organisations, Euroregions do not exist on the basis of constitutional or public-law enactments. Their organisational set-up and operating procedures are policy innovations that were developed over time within a context of legal uncertainty and novelty. Second, their resource base is not guaranteed by statutory income streams but is secured only in the short-term and often derived from multiple resources. Third, their areas of responsibility are not defined a priori but were developed over time during a complex search process guided by the overall theme, or organisational mission, of CBRs.

It can be argued that under these fluid circumstances successful Euroregions can develop only through active policy entrepreneurship, capable of exploiting windows of opportunity, and resulting in a growing organisational base. Therefore, the following success criteria are postulated:

1. Organizational development: In order to acquire a relative degree of strategic and operational autonomy vis-à-vis the 'ordinary' border authorities, successful Euroregions will need to develop as independent organisations with a clear specialisation in CBR matters.
2. Diversification of resource base: Euroregions that depend on Interreg funding risk being reduced to mere implementation agencies for this specific type of EU regional policy. Successful Euroregions can be expected to have more diversified and stable income streams, for instance via

membership fees paid by participating authorities or the appropriation of other policy activities relevant for the border space. However, assuming that the availability of EU funding provides selective incentives (Olson 1965) for municipalities to shoulder the cost of participation in return for Interreg project funding – which could be indicative for purely ‘instrumental’ participation – it can be postulated that successful Euroregions will attempt to broaden their resource base to consider other, more diversified sources.

3. Appropriation of Cross-border co-operation (CBC) activities: Successful Euroregions will establish themselves as important players within the overall context of CBC activities in a given border area which might be pursued by actors different from public authorities, such as civil society organisations. They will consequently play an important role in CBC strategising in their area of influence and be recognised as legitimate and competent by other public authorities.

In the next section, these criteria are applied to the case studies to capture the variance of CBR initiatives and derive conclusions on the main determinants of successful cases.

Table 1: Case studies: Schematic comparison

EUREGIO (DE/NL)		Viadrina (DE/PL)	Tyrol Euroregion (AT/IT)
General characteristics			
Specific border regime	Open border scenario (ex D-Mark block)	Former external EU border (persisting border)	Recently open (Austria's EU accession)
Historical background	Post-war reconciliation	Alienation in socialist period	Common ethnicity
Inter-State relationships	Early bi-national treaty on cross-border co-operation, 'CBC-friendly',	Neighbourhood agreement, rapprochement between Germany and Poland	Politically sensitive minority issue, 1995 treaty on cross-border co-operation
Dominant level of co-operation	Municipalities	Municipalities, strong role of higher level authorities	Regional authorities
Policy problem	Manage inter-dependencies and promote cross-border functional integration	Attract investment, stimulate economic growth, cultural relationships	Symbolic territorial politics
Strategic context of cross-border agency	Long established inter-municipal co-operation with clear CBR focus	Only recent development of intermunicipal co-operation (partly externally imposed)	Weak sense of cross-border agency
Policy entrepreneurship			
CBR organisation	EUREGIO secretariat (high degree of autonomy)	Euroregion secretariat (lower degree of autonomy)	Range of agencies associated with regional authorities (fragmented)
Resource base	Diversified	Dependent on Interreg	Not developed
CBC appropriation	High	Low	Low

4. Case studies

Having defined the criteria for successful Euroregions in this section primary empirical evidence is provided on three cases, with a specific focus on the dimensions identified above. The cases were chosen to ensure variation across several dimensions, as illustrated by Table 1. The cases comprise: The EUREGIO, a Dutch-German CBR and one of the oldest in Europe; the 'Pro Europa Viadrina' (forthwith: Viadrina), a German-Polish CBR that until recently reached across the external border of the EU; the 'Euroregion Tyrol' (forthwith: Tyrol Euroregion) between Austria and Italy that brings together an ethnically homogenous population.

The rationale for the selection of the case studies was to create variation particularly with respect to two dimensions:

- (a) The type of participating authorities: local authorities in the case of EUREGIO and Viadrina, and regional authorities in the case of the Tyrol Euroregion,
- (b) Territorial organisation of involved countries: federalist and high municipal autonomy for the EUREGIO, federalist/centralist and low municipal autonomy for the Tyrol Euroregion, with an intermediate position for the Viadrina.

The EUREGIO: the 'model case'

Among the four Dutch-German CBRs, the EUREGIO is situated in between the 'Ems Dollart Region' in the north, and the 'Euregio Rhein-Waal' and the 'euregio rhein-maas-nord' in the south. Stretched over 8,000 km², the EUREGIO area has a population of approx. 3m, consisting of Dutch and German citizens on a balanced basis. It has approx. 140 municipal members; the largest urban centres are Enschede (NL) and Münster and Osnabrück on the German side, following its recent 'Eastern Enlargement'.⁵

The EUREGIO dates back to 1958 when municipal associations on both sides of the Dutch-German border in the Enschede area decided to engage in collective action. The aim was to alleviate the relative marginalisation of the local border economies relative to central agglomerations of economic activity in both countries, the Amsterdam agglomeration and the Ruhr, respectively.

The history of the EUREGIO is one of successive institutionalisation. In 1966, a 'Work Group' was founded to operate as the informal board of the cross-border region. At the same time, a secretariat was established, funded via membership fees, which at the time was distributed across two locations on each side of the border. In the mid-seventies, the Work Group was given a formal statute, and an action programme was developed. This formalisation process ended with the establishment of the Council in 1978, the first cross-border regional parliamentary assembly in Europe, constituted by the political delegates of the member authorities. The EUREGIO pioneered the idea of regional cross-border development strategies, for instance through the 'regional cross-border action programme', presented in 1987, which outlined the general strategy for the EUREGIO for a twenty year period. This action programme constituted the main input for a first Operational Programme under EU Cohesion Policy for the period 1989-1992, funded as pilot project. When the European Commission launched Interreg I in 1990, the EUREGIO reacted with the speedy elaboration of a

⁵ www.euregio.de

second Operational Programme and has since been instrumental in deploying Interreg policy measures in this area.

Organisational development

Over the last 40 years, the secretariat of the EUREGIO has developed into a cross-border regional development agency with considerable standing in the local environment. Essentially, it developed the EUREGIO from a loose network with strong ceremonial elements into an operational policy-making organisation.

Although it acts on behalf of more than 140 local authorities, for most of the time the EUREGIO has not been a public authority, at least not as a cross-border unit. This means, *inter alia*, that the secretariat has no formal competencies nor any guaranteed income streams. Thus the range of tasks assumed by the EUREGIO, and in particular its secretariat, is relatively undefined. This enables the secretariat to act in an entrepreneurial fashion as long as it has the backing of the member authorities. This relative discretion in defining and expanding its tasks has been widely used by the EUREGIO secretariat, with particular impact exerted by its longstanding secretary, Jens Gabbe.

Based on its expertise and local connectedness, the secretariat exerts considerable informal influence upon EU programme implementation. First, by acting as a project animator, it ensures that all available funds are effectively allocated.⁶ As senior NRW official observed: ‘... you can’t pull projects like a rabbit out of a hat’, implying that the higher-level authorities rely on the EUREGIO in this respect (iE11). Secondly, it has made itself indispensable as a network broker. For genuine cross-border projects, project applicants need partners on the other side of the border; the relevant contacts are usually established by the secretariat.⁷ Thirdly, the secretariat is vital in turning initial ideas into project applications ready for submission to the Steering Committee.

Including the contacts in the context of various other European projects the EUREGIO has attracted, the secretariat is contacted by approx. 20,000 citizens a year (Goinga 1995: 38). It also runs secretariats for a range of third parties and associations, for instance, the Interreg Steering and Monitoring Committees, the ‘Mozer Commission’, a socio-economic advisory council⁸, the

⁶ Interview, EUREGIO official.

⁷ Interview, Regio Achterhoek official.

⁸ ‘sozial-wirtschaftlicher Beirat’

‘Arnhem-Overleg’⁹ as well as the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). In the late nineties, the EUREGIO had grown into an organisation directly and indirectly co-ordinating an annual expenditure of approx. EUR 4.5 per inhabitant.

Diversification of resource base

The EUREGIO’s standing is reflected in its ability to generate a stable resource flow to maintain its operations. The EUREGIO has considerable income from sources not related to Interreg, notably from a membership fee charged to the member authorities, EUR .29 per inhabitant at the time of writing.

The proceeds from the membership fee enable the EUREGIO to pay its overheads out of its own budget. The secretariat proved rather successful in raising project-related funding long before Interreg was launched. In most cases, local funds were complemented by contributions from NRW and the European Commission. For instance, in the cultural field, a special body, the ‘Mozer Commission’, is separately funded from various regional and national sources from both countries. More recently, the secretariat successfully bid for pilot-projects from several DGs of the European Commission. Among others, the EUREGIO is currently in charge of a ‘EURES-T’ unit concerned with labour market issues (funded by DG5), a consumer advice centre (funded by DG23) and a ‘Euro-Info-Center’ for SMEs as part of a network of more than 200 centres throughout the EU. As a result, today the secretariat operates a range of activities that strengthen its profile as cross-border regional advice and citizen’s service centre. The most important sources of income of the EUREGIO secretariat are the proceeds from the membership fee, approx. EUR 500,000, and Interreg project management (‘technical assistance’), approx. EUR 400,000.

Unlike other Euroregions, the secretariat always sought to avoid overdependence on the mostly temporary resources provided by non-local authorities. Although Interreg constituted a major boost in terms of financial revenues and organisational growth, the secretariat has managed to diversify its revenues and secure stable funding from local sources.

Appropriation of CBC activities

One of the EUREGIO’s key achievements is to have established itself as a highly regarded regional

⁹ A forum of Belgian-Dutch-German Euroregions.

development agency in the Dutch-German border area, carrying out important tasks on behalf of the Commission.

With hindsight, the development of a strong organisational basis – involving a steadily increasing resource flow – was crucial for providing the local actors with access to Interreg implementation. In the eighties, the member municipalities agreed to increase their financial contribution in the expectation that this would help to secure a substantial local impact on the allocation of future European funding. The EUREGIO hence grasped a strategic opportunity when it was still undecided whether a large-scale CBC support programme would be launched by the European Commission.

The result was that when Interreg was finally launched, with 15 staff members the EUREGIO secretariat was the natural candidate for the management of the programme in its area.¹⁰ It is an indicator for the institutionalisation of the EUREGIO is that it even tends to be identified with ‘Interreg’, at least on the local level. It has become a natural part of the day-to-day activities within the local public administrations.¹¹ The EUREGIO’s strong local position is in part translated into the Steering Committee whose non-local members give the EUREGIO considerable discretionary power over project selection.

Beyond being an implementation unit acting on behalf of the European Commission and the involved member states, the EUREGIO has become the undisputed instance for all ‘cross-border issues’ in the local environment. It has positioned itself as the strategy unit responsible for a range of tasks no other organisation could deal with, thereby becoming the undisputed agency for ‘mobilising the region’.¹² The objective is the transformation of the cross-border area into a ‘central location in North-western Europe’ with 20m consumers within 150km (Gabbe 1985: 95). Policy frameworks inspired by the idea of a homogenous region have existed since the early stages of the EUREGIO. Its perception as a ‘functional unit in all spheres of life’ between the Dutch Randstad and the German Ruhr originated in the late sixties, if not earlier (CoE 1972: 111). The development of such visions can be seen as important for constituting a strategic envelope for the organisation-building strategies of the EUREGIO.

¹⁰ ‘... the EUREGIO was already there, it was obvious that they were going to do the programme management.’ (Interview, Provincie Overijssel official).

¹¹ Interview, Landkreis Steinfurt official and Kreis Borken official.

¹² Interviews, EUREGIO officials.

Euroregion Viadrina: a EU policy implementation vehicle

The 'Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina'¹³ is one of eight Euroregions that have been established across the border between Germany and Poland and/or the Czech Republic since 1992. It covers the eastern part of the East German State (Land) Brandenburg and parts of the Lubuskie and Zachodnio-Pomorskie voivodships (districts) in western Poland and has a population of approx. 1m. The Viadrina is relatively typical for the Euroregions on the eastern external EU border and the results therefore permit some careful generalisation.

The Viadrina was founded in 1993 in the wake of the breakdown of the Socialist bloc and German re-unification. Its socio-economic environment is characterised by relatively strong border differentials between the East German and Polish economies that were induced by the radical structural and institutional changes on the German side in the early 1990s. Until very recently – i.e. Poland's EU accession – the Viadrina cut through the external EU-border as the German parts were EU territory while the Polish areas were not. Hence only German border areas were eligible for EU Interreg support while the Polish part depended on funding that was centrally administered by the Polish government.

The motives for establishing a Euroregion were twofold. The initial desire to establish neighbourly relationships originated in civil society circles on the German side. A foundation was established – called the *Bridge*¹⁴ whose main objective was to make a local contribution to German-Polish 'reconciliation' after the border had been re-opened. Almost simultaneously, the local authorities particularly on the German side, were made aware of the prospective availability of EU Interreg funding for CBC which constituted a strong driver for establishing a local co-operation initiative. This process was supported by the Land Brandenburg which under German legislation is responsible for the implementation of EU regional policy programmes and hence had a strong interest in establishing administrative structures suitable for deploying Interreg funding in its border areas. Ultimately, this meant that the organisational form to be chosen for establishing a CBR was going to be a 'Euroregion' – adopting the successful model of the EUREGIO and other mature CBRs – and not a foundation as originally proposed by the civil society actors.

Organisational development

¹³ www.euroregion-viadrina.de

¹⁴ 'Frankfurter Brücke'.

The Viadrina is a cross-border body, established on the basis of an agreement between two associations, one on either side of the border, that involve local authorities as well as functional and representational bodies, such as the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, or the World Trade Centre Frankfurt (Oder). In terms of organisational set-up, the Viadrina was modelled after the EUREGIO involving the effective transfer of an institutional form with the active participation of EUREGIO and AEBR officials.¹⁵ Hence, the Viadrina bodies comprise the Council, the Presidency, a secretariat and sector-specific working groups.

Decisions on project selection and funding are made within one of the three working groups, the so-called 'Project Management Group'. It involves the city of Frankfurt, two German districts, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK), the Viadrina University and two regional spatial planning bodies.

The development of the Viadrina as an organisation has been rather limited to date. Although the Viadrina's HQ is formally based in Poland, the secretariat has separate German and Polish sections, the larger one being located in Frankfurt/Oder on the German side with approx. eight staff. In terms of its role, most of the secretariat's activities are concerned with administering the deployment of Interreg funds.

Two factors are responsible for the relatively limited role of the Euroregion secretariat. First, for most of its history, the influence of the secretariat – and indeed the Euroregion as a whole – was handicapped by the fact that Interreg funding was only available to the German side. Although some EU support from another programme (Phare) was available for the Polish Areas, the administrative separation proved a barrier to effective cross-border projects and decision-making mechanisms are complex and unwieldy (Grix and Knowles 2003). As a result, most projects are merely border projects rather than *cross*-border activities. Most importantly, it prevented the secretariat from developing a profile as a genuine cross-border agency by creating the required network contacts as well as 'cross-border competence' as seen with the example of the EUREGIO.

Second, compared to the EUREGIO, in the case of the Viadrina, the Land administration operates more hierarchically in terms of the Euroregion's overall direction, effectively limiting its strategic and

¹⁵ 'As a matter of fact, the Euroregion model was imposed on the Viadrina, as they had no experience [with CBC activities]', Interview with expert from IRS, Erkner.

operational autonomy. ¹⁶ For instance, in one case, the Land intended to employ Interreg funding to contribute to a massive flood protection programme along the river Oder, after the flooding in summer 1997. The Euroregions argued that Interreg funds should not be employed for such measures as they are among the general obligation of the Land. However, the Land was backed by the European Commission and the parties settled for a compromise.

Diversification of resource base

The budget of the Viadrina secretariat has three sources: Interreg ‘technical assistance’ – which is by far the most important source of funding – a job creation scheme of the *Land* and a membership fee paid by the members on the German side. The membership fee contributes approx. 20% of the total budget which is considerably lower than in the case of the EUREGIO. Compared to the EUREGIO, the Viadrina has hence not reached a similar level of resource diversification.

Beyond its budget per se, funds allocated through the Euroregion are rather modest compared to other regional policy measures in the area. Interreg funding channelled through the Euroregion amounts to approx. EUR 19 per inhabitant on an annual basis and EUR 25 if one adds the national match-funds. By contrast, all through the 1990s, infrastructural investments and economic policy measures for this area enacted by federal and *Land* authorities amounted to approx. EUR 233 per inhabitant on an annual basis.

Appropriation of CBC activities

What is the Euroregion’s role within the policy strategies targeted at the East Brandenburg-West Poland cross-border space? Basically, the Euroregion has not yet managed to go beyond its role as an Interreg implementation agency. It has played a rather marginal role in the economic development strategies in the German-Polish border area discussed above. Even locally, its involvement in strategic economic policy issues has been negligible. Various commentators have noted that the Euroregion failed to deliver on the exaggerated expectations it nourished in the initial period (Grix and Knowles 2003; Ribhegge 1996; Schwab 1997; Scott 1998).¹⁷

For instance, the Euroregion was not actively involved in recent contacts between the operators of

¹⁶ ‘...the *Land* [Brandenburg] has a massive say in the selection of projects although its financial contribution is only marginal’, Interview with Euroregion secretariat official

¹⁷ Interviews, officials from Euroregion, Frankfurt/Oder City and Investors’ Centre.

the 'Technologiepark', a high-tech trading estate operator in Frankfurt (Oder), and the Special Economic Zone set up by the Polish government in Kostrzyn-Slubice. The operators of both industrial estates are considering jointly developing 'cross-border packages' for investors. This would permit investors to run operations at both sides of the border in order to selectively exploit the respective advantages, i.e. 'cheap' qualified labour and market access in Poland and considerable investment subsidies and EU location in Germany. In this way, both areas could benefit from the proximity pooling of locational advantages in different countries.

It is too early to judge whether such strategies will succeed but the Euroregion is hardly involved in such initiatives. This holds even though many of the new operators in the field of local economic policy, such as the Euro Transport and Trade Centre (ETTC) or a 'EURO-Investor' agency have been established with Interreg support.

Within a broader policy context, the German-Polish border area – including the Viadrina – was at several points the focal point of more fundamental attempts to establish a cross-border economic space based on the idea of exploiting factor differentials and other border-related assets. This included an early development plan (1991) that proposed the establishment of a publicly owned development bank targeted at the border areas reaching 100km into Poland and 50km into Germany and covering a population of approx. 5m (Eckert 1992). As this plan failed for political reasons, attention turned to the idea of establishing cross-border industrial estates, i.e. limited bi-national areas with a special territorial status (Scott 1998). All these attempts to establish a Maquiladora scenario failed but the important point here is that the Euroregion did not figure as a participant in these discussions.¹⁸ The Euroregion also has limited contact with TWG (German-Polish Development Agency) that was established in the late nineties and is based in the Polish border area. Partly, this has to do with the fact that the geographic extension of the Euroregion is smaller than the border area as defined from the viewpoint of the Land Brandenburg authorities and the federal authorities.

Krätke has shown in various analyses of the German-Polish cross-border space that strictly local strategies have often had only very limited relevance as they fail to shape cross-border economic

¹⁸ The term 'maquiladoras' is used for referring to the 'in-bond assembly' plant areas in the North Mexican border area which allow manufacturers to import materials and components from the United States free of duty provided the end-products were exported (Dicken 1998).

strategies that are far more large-scale (Krätke 2002). In light of the perspective developed here, one could add that the limited success of the Euroregion as a policy entrepreneur is one of the reasons for its marginal involvement in the broader strategies within the German-Polish border space.

Euroregion Tyrol: an ethno-regional experiment

The motivation for creating a Euroregion between Austria and Italy encompassing a cross-border area known as the Tyrol differs entirely from the two cases described above. The Euroregion Tyrol⁹ is an example of a CBR embedded in an historical and political context dominated by ethnic minority situation (Luverà 1996). The German-speaking southern part of the ancient Tyrol was ceded to Italy in the aftermath of WWI while the equally German-speaking Northern part remained with the newly constituted Austrian Republic. It is no surprise that the building of a CBR will in this case invoke the common cultural and ethnic heritage of the German-speaking populations in both countries as a common overarching territorial identity, a component largely missing from the previously described cases.

Central to the emergence of this Euroregion is the history of the ‘South Tyrol’, the German-speaking territory that before 1919 belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire but has been Italian since then. Politically, the post-war history of South Tyrol is characterised by the fight for ‘self-determination’ pursued by the main German-speaking forces. This struggle was successful insofar as a powerful ‘autonomous’ constitutional status was obtained in 1991 after decade-long negotiations with the Italian central government.

Although cross-border co-ordination and collaboration had been pursued for most of the post-war period, the establishment of a Euroregion as a formal platform was initiated only in the 1990s. It involves three regional governments, South Tyrol and Trentino (two Italian provinces) and Tirol (Austrian Land, also known as ‘North Tyrol’). As opposed to the EUREGIO and Viadrina, the Tyrol Euroregion does not involve any municipalities or other lower-tier authorities as the arrangement is limited to a top-level agreement among the governments of the participating regional authorities. While in the two former cases the establishment of CBRs resulted from a process of regional mobilisation – spurred by collective action among municipalities and other actors – in case

⁹ Officially: the ‘European Region of Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino’ (www.euoparegion.info)

of the Tyrol the arrangement resembles more an inter-state agreement between established authorities.

Organisational development

In an early attempt in the 1990s, the three authorities involved sought to institute the Euroregion as a formal authority recognised by public law in both countries (Toniatti 1997: 32). However, facing local and national opposition fuelled by nationalist, legal and sovereignty-related concerns, they retreated from the initially ambitious plans. The Euroregion *qua* public body project was silently abandoned and a less sensitive alternative was selected instead: In 1998, the parliaments of the three participating regional authorities approved an ‘Agreement on Cross-border Co-operation in the Context of a *Europaregion*’. The rather general agreement stated the obligation of the parties to develop common initiatives and co-ordinate their policies in a series of fields.

In this situation, the Euroregion remains a largely symbolic envelope rather than an operational organisation with a coherent strategy. The secretariat that was established in the Italian city of Bolzano in the early 2000s is more an administrative and public relations outlet rather than an active driver of cross-border activities. The Euroregion Tyrol also lacks the representational and decision-making bodies as seen in the other cases. In the language of International Relations, it can be compared to a confederal arrangement characterised by a minimum of emerging supranational organisational capacity – as opposed to a federation.

Given this very thin layer of cross-border agency and low degree of institutionalisation, decisions on cross-border projects are taken at yearly ‘conferences’ that bring together representatives from the three member authorities, with a strong influence being exerted by their executive branches. Activities are then carried out by their respective administrative apparatuses.

Due to its young age, but also its organisational set-up, the track record of activities initiated and supported by the Euroregion remains unproven. A mixture of EU-funded projects, policy co-ordination frameworks, PR and external representation initiatives has been presented so far within the Euroregional envelope.

Diversification of resource base

Given that the Euroregion did not really develop as an organisation, the question of resource base diversification does not apply in this case. It is significant, however, that this Euroregion is not involved in the implementation of Interreg and is hence not funded by Interreg technical assistance.

One reason for this is that the area designated for Interreg support by the European Commission does not exactly correspond to the territories of the co-operating regional authorities. In addition, the participating authorities do not depend on Interreg for running a Euroregion. For instance, compared with the total budget of the two Italian provinces, the material contribution of Interreg funding is almost negligible; in the case of South Tyrol, total matched Interreg funding amounts to approx. 0.05% of its annual budget.

Appropriation of CBC activities

This Euroregion envelope plays only a marginal role in the complex CBC landscape in this area of the Central Alps. Historically, co-operation has long been pursued among the authorities involved. The relationships in the cultural-educational field are particularly well developed – for instance concerning University education. Equally, in the field of health, complementarities between the hospitals in South Tyrol and the University clinic in Innsbruck have been exploited in the past. Other fields of loose co-ordination have been the area of large transport infrastructures, a sensitive issue in the ecologically fragile Alpine area, and other aspects of the environment. In the wider context of the Eastern Alps, the three regional authorities have also been actively engaged in the Working Communities Arge Alp and the Alpe-Adria (Kicker 1995).

The initiation of these activities did not depend on the existence of a Euroregion, which today raises the question what it effectively adds to CBC activities. In particular, it is striking to note that Interreg is implemented by administrative units that are different from the Euroregion. Interreg-funded activities are carried out rather quietly and in rather routine fashion within the responsible units of the administrative apparatuses of these authorities although the lack of a true cross-border character of the projects is criticised even by the policy implementers themselves.²⁰ Some of the Interreg-related activities are devolved to deconcentrated branches of the regional administrations located in the immediate border areas. These units have historically been involved in other EU-funded programmes, such as LEADER, and have hence developed the required expertise to solicit and facilitate these programmes.

It can hence be concluded that the impact of the Euroregion qua organisation on the CBC landscape in Tyrol is almost negligible. The *Euroregion Tyrol* is a project proposed by the political *leaders* of three regions. The project is driven by strong political motivations whereas the pragmatic aspects

²⁰ Interview, South Tyrol Province official.

appear marginal. Hence, here CBC does not involve a process of bottom-up cross-border regional mobilisation as occurred in the Northern European cases.

Conclusions

Two main results can be derived from the analysis of these cases. First, a considerable variance can be observed in terms of organisational set-up of these Euroregions and the degree to which they have established themselves as organisations and actors in their own right. A framework building on the concepts of policy entrepreneurship and resource mobilisation was used to assess the single cases.

The EUREGIO illustrates the case of the ‘model’ European CBR. It emerged as a result of the successful bottom-up mobilisation of municipalities on the Dutch-German border, led by a strongly entrepreneurial secretariat, and has inserted itself as the undisputed cross-border development agency in the local context of its stretch of the Dutch-German border.

By contrast, the Viadrina is a ‘late-comer’ and – in an act of mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) – adopted a readily available organisational model schema for CBC. For the involved German local authorities and the Land Brandenburg administration to which jurisdiction they belong, the immediate purpose of the Euroregion was to have a vehicle for deploying EU Interreg funds in the border area. The effective regional mobilisation in terms of establishing collective action capacity among local actors was less pronounced than in the EUREGIO, and higher-level authorities, such as the central state and regional authorities, retained stronger control. The Viadrina was also handicapped by the fact that Interreg was for a long time available only for the German side.

The Euroregion Tyrol is an example for a CBR induced by a politically driven ethno-regional project that has largely failed to develop independent organisational capacity. It differs from the EUREGIO and the Viadrina in that it does not involve municipal actors but is pursued largely on the basis of a top-level agreement among already established regional authorities. It has remained a confederal envelope rather operating independently as a cross-border agency.

Second, the analysis allows for some careful generalisation relating to the structural conditions of successful Euroregional policy entrepreneurship, particularly if one considers that Euroregions in similar administrative environments (such as those in the Western German/BENELUX areas as opposed to Eastern German/New Accession Countries) operate in similar ways.

The case studies suggest that the ability of Euroregions to engage in active policy entrepreneurship is

shaped by the politico-administrative environments in which they operate. In this respect, two cases were located more or less in the European North whereas one case (Tyrol) is Central-European and importantly involves a Southern-European country, Italy. Synthesising the evidence, it appears that the ability of *municipalities* to engage in collective action – both intra-nationally and then cross-nationally – is important in constituting a strategic opportunity space for Euroregions.²¹ In this respect, there are major differences between Northern Europe (Germany, Scandinavia) and countries such as Italy and France. As Page and Goldsmith (1997) have argued, Northern European local government has higher margins of discretion and a broader set of responsibilities, backed up by locally raised resources, compared to Southern Europe.

Put simply, CBRs are more likely to be effective in countries with a strong tradition of municipal autonomy. In the German system, the two-level structure of local authorities – consisting of the municipalities on the one hand and district-type aggregations of municipalities (*Kreise*) on the other – facilitates collective action among municipalities. Historically, in particular the (West) German *Laender* have developed a benevolent attitude towards inter-municipal co-operation in general and CBRs in particular, as this is seen as a way of decentralising the implementation of local regional policies (Voelzkow 1995: 9).

In such a context, the autonomy gained by the Euroregions qua organisations has allowed them to engage in policy entrepreneurship, exploit windows of opportunities related to the cross-border theme and build up organisational competence in cross-border policies and initiatives – as seen in the case of the EUREGIO. Their ability to insert themselves into the implementation of Interreg as small, specialised implementation units – with major implications for their resource base – is one of the foremost examples in this respect.

Although both are involved in Interreg, differences remain between the EUREGIO, which emerged as a grass-roots movement long before Interreg funds were available, and the Viadrina where the availability of Interreg was a major rationale for adopting the form of a Euroregion for creating a CBR. The EUREGIO's more diversified resource base, more developed organisational capacity and legitimacy within the local environment are in stark contrast to the Viadrina whose role is mostly limited to administering Interreg and which has failed to insert itself as a strategic actor in cross-border matters.

²¹ Confirming the hypotheses suggested by quantitative accounts such as in Perkmann (2003).

The evidence from this specific case study comparison hence confirms the results yielded by broader analyses of 'multi-level governance' policy structures in the European Union that argue that European regional policies are implemented within complex vertical integration networks that vary strongly across member states (Benz and Eberlein 1999; Heinelt and Smith 1996; Hooghe 1996). What the analysis in this article has added is a micro-perspective on the modalities of agency and strategy-formation at the grass-roots level; it postulates that policy entrepreneurship and organisation-building are among the facilitating conditions for soliciting durable local action in the multi-level governance framework.

What can we conclude with respect to the more general question as to whether there is a widespread emergence of a new type of regional territory, i.e. the 'cross-border region'? The answer is two-fold: First, the degree to which genuine cross-border agency is established across local cross-border spaces varies strongly, primarily dependent on the territorial-administrative context and specific local conditions for the emergence of such policy entrepreneurship. This comparative case study analysis has shown that in some cases Euroregions represent hardly more than paper tigers while in others one can see the embryonic emergence of cross-border regional governance structures linked to a cross-border agency.

Second, even in those cases where cross-border agency has been successfully institutionalised, however it appears premature to attribute a 'region' character to these entities. Although they assume pseudo-territorial features, and engage in strategies of cross-border identity building invoking territorial imaginaries, their relative dimensions in terms of organisational size and resource control are still small compared to the established public authorities on either side of the borders. Rather, they constitute an institutional form through which existing authorities engage in collective action across nation-state borders. Hence we need to regard Euroregions more as part of the dynamic policy innovation scenario induced by EU integration rather than new territorial entities strictly speaking.

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