The EGTC as a tool for Cross-border Integration?

Frédéric Durand & Antoine Decoville

research scientists (Urban Development & Mobility)
Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER)

Abstract

With the creation of the EGTC tool in 2006, the European Union wanted to provide the means to overcome the frequently mentioned limits to the deepening of cross-border cooperation initiatives, by allowing the creation of supranational institutional structures endowed with legal personality and their own financial and human resources. In doing so, this tool should theoretically serve the political paradigm of cross-border integration and make it more tangible for the societies living in border regions. This chapter proposes to draw up an initial assessment of the use of this tool by systematically analysing, across the various EU border regions, (i) the characteristics and spatial distribution of EGTCs in Europe, (ii) the types of actors involved, (iii) the geographical coverage of these cooperation structures, and last but not least (iv) the variety of existing EGTCs, between those aiming at reinforcing the governance networks and those more oriented towards the implementation of operational projects. The results show that if EGTCs have the potential to better integrate border regions by contributing to respond directly to the needs of border populations and actors, they are most often used as governance tools to better formalise, institutionalise and facilitate cross-border cooperation. In conclusion, it seems that EGTCs are still very rarely used to their full potential in terms of cross-border integration.

Keywords: EGTC, Cross-border cooperation, Cross-border integration, Governance, Europe

I. Introduction

Since its creation, the European Union has always aimed through its regional policy to promote cohesion between its Member States. This involves, among other things, to foster a greater territorial integration between its border regions. In order to achieve this objective, the EU has taken several measures such as (i) the opening of internal borders to allow the free movement of people and goods within the signatory

countries (Schengen agreements), (ii) the introduction of Interreg programmes to finance cross-border projects and increase interaction across borders, but also (iii) the development of regulations and legal instruments, including the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), which has considerably extended the possibilities for carrying out cross-border projects.[1] All of these arrangements thus offer opportunities for actors in border territories to bring populations closer together and forge partnerships on both sides of the border. However, these mechanisms have not always proved to be guarantees of a successful integration. The decision taken by the European Commission in 2006 to set up EGTCs was to enable cross-border cooperation approaches to reach a new level, by creating supranational institutional structures with legal personality and their own financial and human resources. This new tool was intended to make it possible *"to address acute social and economic problems in border and marginal regions of countries, to attract investment, to run common large-scale infrastructural projects and welfare equipments, to promote cultural and educational exchanges"* (De Sousa, 2013). In so doing, these structures are supposed to enable cross-border cooperation initiatives to gain autonomy in decision-making and action, and even eventually to foster the emergence of new forms of cross-border territoriality. But what is the situation in reality? EGTCs present such a diversity of forms, objectives and means that a single answer to the question posed in the title of this paper would not make sense. Moreover, we have a lack of temporal hindsight in relation to a tool which remains recent and whose full potential has not yet been exploited. In addition, the academic literature has shown little interest in EGTCs other than for their legal and institutional aspects.

Therefore, just as there is no general theory on borders (Paasi, 2011), there can be no categorical answer to the role of EGTCs in the dynamics of cross-border integration, since cross-border regions are multiple and shaped by specific historical and geographical contexts. Pretending to draw up a comprehensive assessment of the contribution of EGTCs to the objective of cross-border integration would not be scientifically honest due to the lack of data and the diversity of case studies. On the other hand, it is relevant to look at the current configurations of the EGTCs set up and to see in which areas, with which actors and which objectives they are trying to serve the policy objective of cross-border integration in its institutional dimension. To this end, we propose to conduct a two-stage reflection: Firstly, we will

---

1   Legal basis:
     Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC).
     Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings.

review the definition of the concepts of cross-border integration and cooperation. The aim here is to specify and circumscribe these two notions by highlighting their differences. Secondly, an analysis will be carried out on the characteristics and spatial distribution of EGTCs in Europe, and more particularly on the forms that EGTCs can take in space (continuous and discontinuous territory), the types of actors involved and who participate in EGTCs, the geographical coverage of these cooperation structures, as well as the variety of existing EGTCs (governance/operational project). To that end, this article is based on descriptive data coming from the dedicated platform of the European Committee of the Regions,[2] supplemented by information from the "EGTC monitoring report 2018-2019" (CoR, 2020). We propose a systematic and comparative approach of all EGTCs active in Europe in order to better understand their functioning, their goal and their contribution to the objective of cross-border institutional integration in Europe. This analytical grid will reveal at the level of border dyads how EGTCs are used in the various cooperation areas and which actors are involved.

II.   Cross-border cooperation and integration, two distinct but interrelated notions

While the literature has largely investigated the notions of cross-border cooperation and integration, the two notions are often used in almost identical ways, both in academic and grey literature. Yet, we believe that they refer to different concepts and that this lack of distinction is detrimental, as it introduces shortcuts, simplifications, and ultimately undermines both the soundness of the scientific analysis and the production of effective policy recommendations.

Cross-border cooperation as an opportunity for border territories

The Madrid Framework Convention (Council of Europe, 1980) defines cross-border cooperation in Article 2.1 as *"any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of two or more Contracting Parties and the conclusion of any agreement and arrangement necessary for this purpose".* Cross-border cooperation therefore consists of the establishment of links and exchanges between actors located on either side of a border with a view to ensuring that each party can benefit from such collaboration. Cross-border cooperation can also aim to find win-win partnerships between regions, in particular to transform a border into a possibility of development (Stubb, 2011). The purpose of cross-border cooperation is therefore to overcome the situations of weakness

---

2   https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/Platform/Pages/welcome.aspx

that the border position of the regions creates and to initiate the transition from marginal territories to interfaces (Decoville et al., 2015).

Cross-border cooperation approaches vary greatly from one case to another. Perkmann thus distinguishes between two categories of cross-border cooperation initiatives: the "market-driven" approach, which is more common in North America, and the "policy-driven" approach, which is more likely to be found in Europe (Perkmann, 2007). The first approach is "*based on the proliferation and/or reactivation of social or economic relationships. Such processes of `cross-borderisation' often predominate in cases of persisting borders, where highly accentuated cross-border differentials stimulate strong cross-border activity: for instance, in terms of factor costs such as labour*", while the second is on the contrary "*based on the building of cooperative relationships between public and other bodies that share certain interests, such as coping with environmental interdependencies or creating cross-border economic spaces*" (Perkmann, 2007: 862). Pursuing this "policy-driven" approach, the European Union provides financial support with the Interreg funds to promote cross-border cooperation, thus encouraging political, economic or academic actors to become involved in these cross-border initiatives.

The EGTC clearly reflects the European way of cooperating beyond borders, very much inclined to formalise cross-border cooperation approaches and to endow them with the legitimacy conferred by institutional recognition. But even within the European territory, the dynamics of cross-border cooperation are not similar from one cross-border region to another. For De Sousa (2013), various factors influence the modalities and vitality of cross-border cooperation, such as political leadership, cultural or identity proximity, geographical conditions or the different "state formations". Knippschild counts about ten factors influencing these cross-border cooperation approaches, from the size of a cooperation area, the need for cooperation, the structure of the cooperating public administrations, to the language barriers, cultural differences and prejudices, or even the transaction costs of cross-border cooperation (Knippschild, 2011). Acknowledging these difficulties the European authorities have decided to set up EGTCs to answer to the needs expressed by actors on the ground, and in particular local or regional authorities, which are the main stakeholders in such approaches. All these elements reveal that cross-border cooperation pursues often concrete objectives with potential benefits that are well identified. How does cross-border integration differ from this notion of cooperation?

The multidimensionality of cross-border integration

The approach most often used to depict cross-border integration focuses on the exchanges and relationships that connect and bind border areas. From this perspective, cross-border integration is seen as a consequence of the opening up of

state borders and the opportunities brought about by the free movement of goods, services, capital and people. It has been conceptualized according to an evolutionary process based on increasing cross-border interactions (Martinez, 1994). Cross-border integration is thus "*a process of increasing and intensifying relations among entities that leads to the emergence and expansion of an inclusive integral whole*" (Svenson & Nordlund, 2014: 3). In doing so, other authors consider that cross-border integration is not limited to interactions only, but is also the result of them, characterized by smaller differences between regions separated by a border (Decoville et al., 2013). In this sense, the notion of cross-border integration is similar to the notion of territorial convergence between the two sides of a border. The dynamics of convergence between border regions has been studied through numerous studies, including pioneering work on spatial integration, which shows that this process can be considered as leading to a reduction in the structural differentials between territories (De Boe et al., 1999). In this perspective, two interconnected and separate spatial entities are said to be in a process of integration if a reduction in their differences is observed. Convergence can be assessed either from a structural point of view based on objective measures of territorial disparities (e.g. socio-economic development, spatial distribution of nationalities), or from an ideational point of view, linked to collective perceptions and a shared sense of belonging. But it is important to note that the growth of cross-border interactions between two territories does not always lead to real convergence in terms of development levels (Topaloglou et al., 2005; Durand et al., 2020; Decoville & Durand, 2018).

Because of its multifaceted nature, the process of cross-border integration must be addressed through an approach that takes into account different aspects. Four main dimensions characterise it: the functional, the institutional, the ideational and the structural ones (Durand, 2015). The functional dimension encompasses all the cross-border flows and interactions initiated by individuals, companies, and other collective actors. It is the most often observed and measured dimension, notably through statistics on cross-border worker flows. This dimension has the advantage of being quantifiable, measurable, and therefore comparable, even if comparative approaches in border studies should always be taken with caution, given the importance of specific contexts (Németh et al., 2013). The institutional dimension encompasses the more or less formalised and flexible exchanges that occur beyond borders between different types of actors, such as public institutions, civil society, entrepreneurs, etc. The institutional dimension covers the more or less formalised and flexible exchanges that take place between different types of actors. It can therefore be considered as a synonym of cross-border cooperation. The ideational dimension refers to the perceptions and representations that border societies have of the neighbouring foreign societies, between openness and rejection, trust and mistrust, attraction and repulsion. This dimension is more complex to systematically

analyse than the other ones. It is nonetheless fundamental since it helps to explain the behaviours of individuals that work in favour of or against more interactions and cooperation. A fourth dimension can be associated with the integration process: the structural dimension, often referring to the idea of territorial convergence. This dimension is concerned with the contextual characteristics of the cross-border area (in terms of urbanisation, economic activity and social composition) and highlights the complementarities, the differences as well as the dynamics of convergence or divergence between territories. However, the structural dimension is not directly linked to the process of cross-border integration. Indeed, the economic and social development paths of border regions are more dependent on the national contexts in which they are embedded than on the interactions that exist with the neighbouring border area.

This way of interpreting cross-border integration as a multidimensional concept should not lead to a fragmented appreciation of the process as a whole. On the contrary, this approach should be used to question the interdependent relationships that may exist between the different dimensions. Thus, functional integration and institutional integration do not necessarily go hand in hand (Decoville et al., 2013), as well as a greater homogeneity of territories in terms of level of economic development does not necessarily translate into less functional integration (Balogh & Pete, 2018). Finally, strong functional integration is not necessarily accompanied by greater ideal integration (Durand & Decoville, 2019).

Cooperation as an approach, integration as a process

Some authors, like De Sousa, have tried to differentiate the two concepts of cross-border cooperation and integration according to the legal anchorage they require, with cooperation based on a simple voluntary basis, while integration would involve a delegation of sovereignty to a supranational authority: "*European integration is a system of interregional cooperation and interdependence in which states parties to a founding treaty abdicate part of their sovereignty to a supranational body, thus departing from a unanimous decision-making process and reducing the likelihood of gridlock in policy areas where member states expect to be better served by pooling sovereignty than by dealing with them alone or via traditional bilateral diplomacy and multilateral arrangements*" (2013: 673). Through this definition, De Sousa proposes a purely institutional differentiation of the concepts of cross-border cooperation and integration, the latter representing a more advanced level of working together across borders characterised by the establishment of supranational authorities. But other distinctions are possible. While cross-border cooperation involves people with common interests working together to solve specific problems or to respond collectively to needs, cross-border integration "*is a dynamic and multi-dimensional process of bringing territories closer together and strengthening social bonds by lowering*

the barriers associated with border and by the development of cooperation between territorial systems" (Durand, 2015: 316). It is therefore a broader objective than that of seeking positive externalities through a cross-border partnership.

In conclusion, while cross-border cooperation refers to a voluntary action and approach, cross-border integration refers more to a process, which may result (or not) from a cooperative approach. Indeed, two border territories may tend towards greater cross-border integration without any formal partnership, whereas conversely two border territories may tend to differ or even oppose each other despite the existence of cooperation initiatives. Even if it can be a political objective, cross-border integration cannot be decreed; it is the result of a long and non-linear process. However, integration – in particular its institutional dimension – can be promoted by tools, and this is what the European Union has achieved by creating EGTCs, since it is trying with this tool of institutional formalisation to give means to its broader objective of social and territorial cohesion across borders, as defined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2012). EGTCs offer the possibility of providing cross-border cooperation with very successful forms of institutional integration, with legal personality, specific budgets and the capacity to employ staff without interfering with the division of competences between the state and regional levels (Evrard, 2016). But how are these possibilities really used in border regions through the EGTC tool?

III.   A multiperspectival approach of the EGTCs in Europe

In order to analyse the role of EGTCs in the process of cross-border institutional integration, this article proposes a multiperspectival approach, which crosses and combines several pieces of information: the distribution and spatial characteristics of EGTCs, the forms of institutional governance they generate and finally their missions.

Spatial distribution of EGTCs

The first lesson that emerges when we look at the distribution of EGTCs in the European area is its very great inequality, visible in particular through the map of EGTCs.[3] 25 countries – some of which are not members of the European Union – have actors involved in the 72 EGTCs created.[4] Hungary appears in first position

---

3   https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/Register/Documents/EGTC-Map-2019.pdf

4   This analysis is based on the list of EGTCs as notified to the Committee of the Regions in accordance with Regulation (EC) 1082/2006. In April 2020, the number of officially created EGTCs was 72.
   https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRActivities/Pages/egtc-list.aspx

(with involvement in 24 different EGTCs), followed by France (23) and Spain (19); Slovakia is also well represented (17). Together, these four countries are involved in 70% of the total number of EGTCs. On the other hand, other countries such as Denmark, Finland, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Ireland and the United Kingdom, have never used this type of tool.

Table 1: EGTCs per border

Number of EGTC	Dyad
14	HU-SK
9	PT-SP, interregional networks
8	FR-SP
5	FR-DE
4	BE-FR, HU-RO
3	BE-DE, FR-LU, HU-SI
2	AT-IT, BE-DE, BE-NL, CZ-PL, CZ-SK, FR-IT, HU-HR, PL-SK
1	AT-SI, BE-LU, BL-EL, CH-DE, CZ-DE, DE-LU, DE-NL, FR-CH, HR-SI, HU-SB , HU-UA, IT-SI, RO-SB

* In the case of the Bánát-Triplex Confinium EGTC, Serbian authorities have an observer status.

Source: Own elaboration

Table 1 shows that 30 European border dyads are concerned by the presence of one or more EGTCs, but the vast majority of these have one or maximum two EGTCs (22 dyads). In addition, three dyads stand out: the Hungarian-Slovak border is the most dynamic dyad in terms of EGTCs, with 11 creations of this type of cooperation structure, followed by the dyad between Portugal and Spain (9) and the dyad between France and Spain (9). It should be noted that other EGTCs, entitled "interregional networks" in Table 1, do not strictly speaking cover cross-border areas but are tools for networking European actors located in several countries, not necessarily close to borders.

This first picture raises questions. Indeed, how can such a diversity of situations be explained? And why do the Nordic countries, which are often presented as model countries for cross-border cooperation, not make more frequent use of EGTCs? Answering such a question would require a comparative analysis with selected interviews of the persons in charge of cross-border cooperation approaches, but in the absence of such research material we can again refer to the work of Perkmann (2003), which showed that there is a line in Europe dividing the Nordic countries

and Germany from France and Italy in terms of institutional organisation, in relation to the autonomy and resources that the municipalities have and which are much greater in the northern countries. This may indeed help to understand why EGTCs are more frequent in some border regions than in others. It could simply be better adapted to the needs expressed by local actors wishing to become involved in cross-border cooperation initiatives in some spatial contexts than in others. In the countries with the most EGTCs, limited resources in terms of staff combined with a lack of autonomy, may explain a greater need for EGTCs structures, which work as facilitators for cross-border cooperation initiatives. On the other hand, such structures are not necessary in border areas where municipalities have greater autonomy, relatively long experience of cross-border cooperation and significant human and financial resources as is the case in the Nordic countries. In these border areas, it can be hypothesised that the possibilities offered by the EGTC tool have simply not been considered sufficiently useful for the continuation of the cooperation approaches already undertaken.

Spatial characteristics of EGTC

In addition to the spatial distribution of EGTCs in Europe, the comparative study of the areas they cover also provides interesting lessons on how these institutional cooperation structures are established in space. These areas are extremely heterogeneous, ranging from 120 km² for the smallest to 110,000 km² for the largest. In terms of spatial scope, EGTCs cover areas that can be small cross-border agglomerations (e.g. Alzette-Belval), cross-border regions (e.g. Tritia), Euroregions which are administrative structures for cooperation between two or more territories of different states (e.g. Euroregio Senza Confini), or even networks of actors that are totally discontinuous in space (e.g. European Urban Knowledge Network). In terms of spatial location, the EGTCs on the Slovak-Hungarian border are the smallest with an average spatial extent of 8,200 km², whereas the borders hosting the largest EGTCs are those around Luxembourg (yet one of the smallest EU member states) and between France and Spain. It is clear that the larger the areas covered, the greater the challenges to further cross-border institutional integration of the territories, since more institutional actors are involved. The areas covered by EGTCs refer very largely to the fields of competence of the actors involved in the cooperation approaches.

The question of the extent of the territory covered by an EGTC is not the only relevant information with regard to the spatiality of these cooperation structures. Out of the 72 cases studied, 51 are areas with a continuous cooperation area on either side of the border, while 21 involve discontinuous territories, which therefore bring together physically distant actors.

Table 2: Spatial forms of EGTCs

Dyad	Continuous area	Discontinuous area	Total
Total	**51**	**21**	**72**
HU-SK	11	3	14
PT-SP	6	3	9
Interregional network	1	8	9
FR-SP	7	1	8
FR-DE	5	1	6
HU-RO	2	2	4
BE-FR	4	0	4
HU-SI	2	1	3
BE-DE, FR-LU	3	0	3
AT-IT, BE-DE, BE-NL, CZ-PL, FR-IT, HU-HR, PL-SK	2	0	2
CZ-SK	1	1	2
AT-SI, BE-LU, CZ-DE, DE-LU, DE-NL, HR-SI, HU-SB, HU-UA, IT-SI, RO-SB	1	0	1
BL-EL, CH-DE, FR-CH	0	1	1

Source: Own elaboration

Certain specificities can be observed according to the border dyads: the majority of them welcome both continuous and discontinuous forms of EGTCS. However, the Belgium-France dyad has only spatially continuous EGTCs (4), such as the France-Germany (3) and the France-Luxembourg (3) ones, whereas along the Greek, Bulgarian, Cypriot and Swiss borders only EGTCs with discontinuous spatial forms exist. Whether or not an area of institutional cooperation is continuous plays a role in the possible emergence, in the long run, of a new type of cross-border territorial actor benefiting from a delegation of competence. It is therefore easier to imagine that an area that is continuous across borders lends itself more easily to the construction of a new cross-border territoriality resembling an integrated space than the mere networking, for limited purposes, of actors physically distant in space, even if the latter type of cooperation can of course be the prelude to more advanced forms of cooperation in the long run.

Institutional scales of EGTC

When we look at the actors who participate – as members – in the various EGTCs, we see that the majority of them come from local structures. Out of the 72 EGTCs studied, there are 966 organisations involved in these cross-border cooperation bodies, including 731 representing the local level (municipalities, inter-municipal structures), 129 the regional level (departments, regions, provinces, etc.), 73 the national level (states, ministries, national agencies, prefectures, etc.) and 33 other organisations such as associations, universities and companies, for which it is difficult to define an institutional scale. Consequently, more than 89% of EGTCs concern local and/or regional actors. This predominance can be broken down as follows: almost 45% of EGTCs involve only local actors, more than 30% of EGTCs are made up solely of regional actors, and more than 16% of EGTCs include both local and regional actors. Only 10 EGTCs involve national actors: 5 in the form of "Local-Regional-National" governance structures, all located along French borders, and 5 in the form of interregional networks. The EGTCs are therefore cross-border cooperation structures that are mainly favoured by local actors located in the immediate or almost immediate vicinity of the border.

## Typology of EGTCs at the European scale

In order to better interpret the relationship between the spatiality of EGTCs and their institutional governance structure, it is possible to produce graphs that depict the surface area and the type of actors involved. This offers first of all a better visualisation of the configurations of each EGTC. Second, it highlights in a European comparison approach, the differences existing from one border dyad to another. The EGTCs can thus be studied along two axes: the geographical scale in the horizontal axis, which distinguishes the three different spatial areas (the "small" scale, less than 5,000 km²; the "medium" scale, corresponding to areas of 5,000 to 25,000 km²; and the "large" scale, with an area greater than 25,000 km²) and the institutional level in the vertical axis, which highlights three levels (local, regional and national).

Figure 1 provides a schematic representation of all active EGTCs in Europe according to the different spatial and institutional configurations they adopt. Looking at this figure, there is no single standard model between the spatial form and governance of the EGTC, nor is there a dominant model, even if three models are in the majority: the "small-local" type of EGTC brings together local actors in small territories and comprises 12 cases. It is therefore the configuration which is the most often adopted in Europe. The "medium-regional" type of EGTC includes 8 examples. In this type of configuration, the EGTC offers a cooperation tool that makes it possible to overcome the significant differences in competences attributed

to regional entities in Europe, particularly between central and federal countries. The same applies to the "large-regional" type EGTCs (7 cases), which bring together the same type of actors but over larger territories. As regards EGTCs of discontinuous spatial forms, there are 12 of them on a large scale; and 10 of these specific types of EGTCs are composed of local actors.

Figure 1: Governance structure types of EGTCs at the European level

Institutional levels
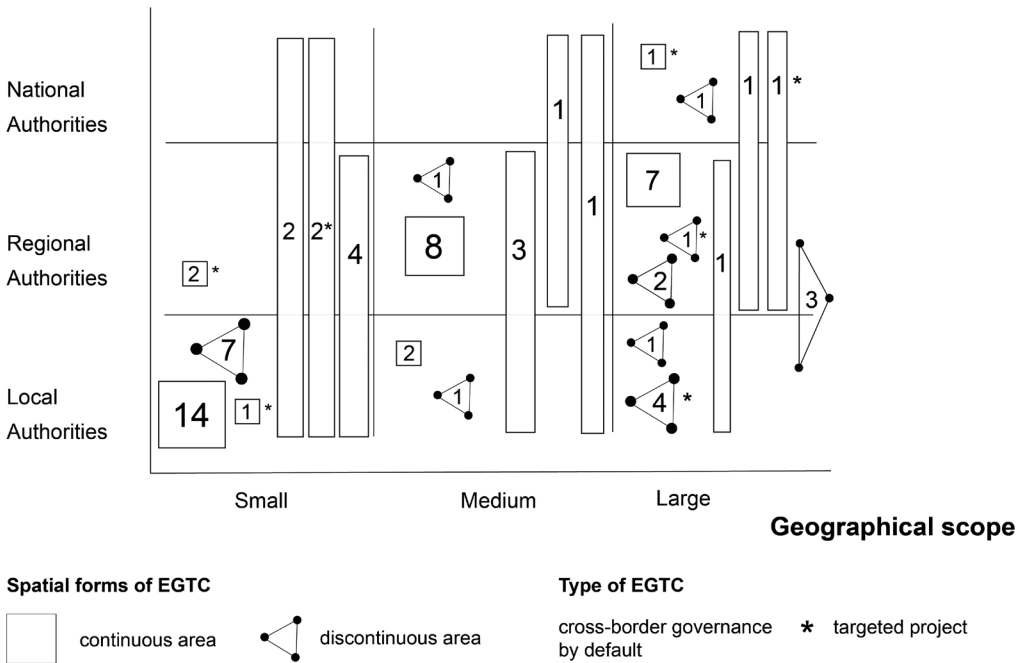
Source: Durand F., Decoville A., 2020

This graph also shows that only 16 EGTCs associate institutions are positioned at different levels of the institutional hierarchy, whereas in theory this tool has the advantage of being able to improve the dialogue between institutions with different levels of responsibility and territorial scopes from one spatial context to another. The overwhelming majority of EGTCs (52) bring together actors located at the same spatial and institutional levels of the countries to which they belong. This means that EGTCs are still very little used as tools to facilitate multi-scale cross-border governance.

At a finer level of analysis, Figure 2 highlights the various spatial and institutional organisations of EGTCs at the dyad level. It reveals very different uses of the EGTC tool from one border to another. For example, the national authorities are involved in all EGTCs on the French-Belgian border or the French-Luxembourg

border, whereas this is never the case in other cross-border areas, such as the border between Hungary and Romania, or the border between Hungary and Slovakia. In these last two dyads, the forms of EGTCs are almost exclusively spatially continuous and only group together actors from the same institutional levels: local-small, regional-medium, regional-large. In contrast, the France-Spain dyad offers a great diversity of forms, types, spatial scale and stakeholder involvement. Furthermore, the dyads in which France and Germany are involved have a significant number of multi-level EGTC structures, where several institutional levels participate jointly in cross-border cooperation initiatives: Belgium-France (100% of all EGTCs), France-Luxembourg (100%), France-Germany (50%), Belgium-Germany (66%). Another peculiarity is that the Portugal-Spain dyad does not include any actors representing the national level. Finally, all the EGTCs described as "interregional networks" expand on large spatial scale.

Figure 2: Governance structure types of EGTCs among the most dynamic dyads
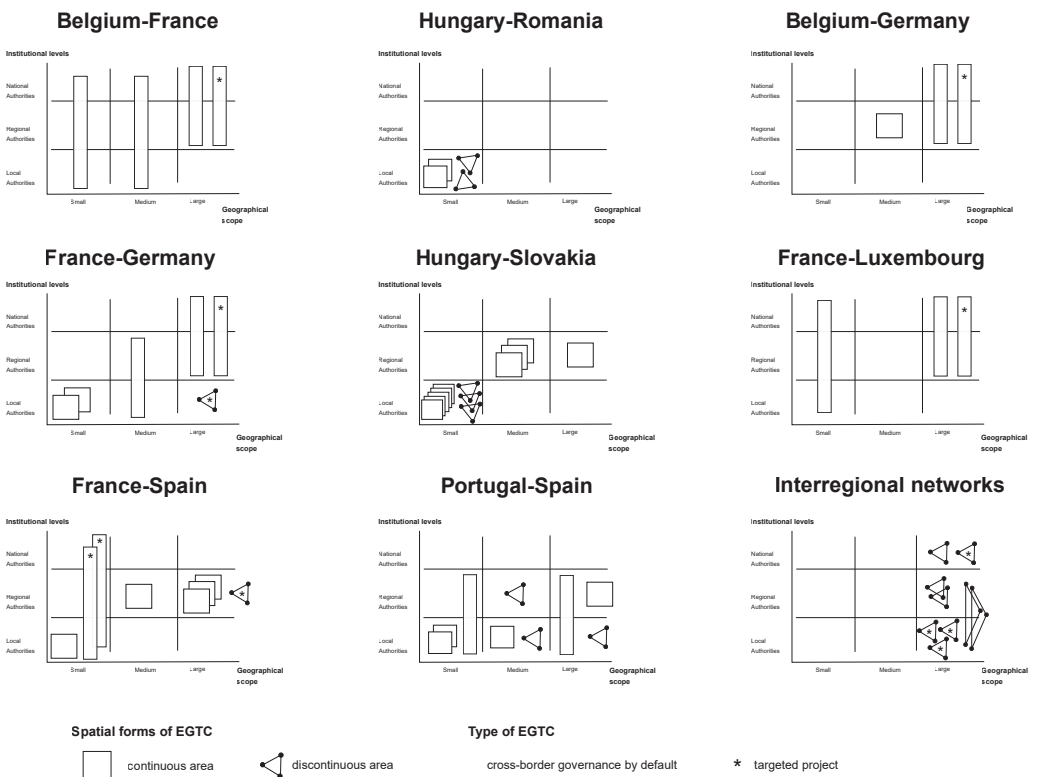
Source: Durand F., Decoville A., 2020

These observations tend to validate the hypothesis that in some countries EGTCs are widely used to improve the quality of dialogue between local actors who are sometimes insufficiently equipped to initiate cross-border cooperation approaches. In these examples, EGTCs can be considered as facilitators of cooperation more than new institutional actors. For Engl (2016: 24), most of the EGTCs "*do not really witness an empowerment of new political actors and that the impacts of the EGTC on cross-border institutional integration is rather limited*". But even if the impacts of this type of EGTC remain moderate, they can help to lay the groundwork for more successful cooperation in the future. In other border regions, EGTCs are really used to promote dialogue between different institutional levels and thus to set up forms of multi-level institutional governance which, without this type of tool, would probably be more difficult to structure. In these specific cases, the function of EGTCs is to bring together actors and territories with different competences and decision-making powers. In other words, they play the role of broker of cross-border exchanges in order to ensure a dialogue and the participation of key partners and to engage organisations with policy responsibilities in this area (Durand & Nelles, 2014). The contribution of EGTCs to cross-border institutional integration is therefore addressed differently, reflecting the diversity of challenges that arise from one context to another in organising effective cross-border governance. It should also be noted that the possible contribution of an EGTC to the transformation of governance can take a long time and require that local political actors get involved and use the EGTC tool to the maximum of its capacities.

The EGTCs' missions in Europe

The objective of EGTCs as mentioned in the European Regulation N°1082/2006 is extremely broad and allows room for interpretation: "*The objective of an EGTC shall be to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and/or interregional cooperation, [...] between its members [...] with the exclusive aim of strengthening economic and social cohesion*" (European Council and European Parliament, 2006). Some EGTCs seem to have been created for a very precise and specific mission, such as the management of a cross-border hospital (Cerdanya), a natural park (International Marine Park of the Mouths of Bonifacio PMIBB, EGTC Geopark Karawanken/Karavanke) or the safeguarding of cultural heritage or know-how (Ciudades de la Cerámica, Pays d'Art et d'Histoire Transfrontalier Les Vallées Catalanes du Tech et du Ter). These latter EGTCs can be described as "operational projects", as they aim to implement concrete targeted actions and do not have other more general missions. Other EGTCs, by far the majority, are structures with the declared objective of contributing to improving cross-border governance. Behind this very vague objective, the goal is often to better frame the networks of actors. Out of the 72 cases studied, the vast majority

of EGTCs (59) are structures that aim to promote cross-border governance, and 13 concern operational projects.

These two main types of missions may suggest a distinction between EGTCs that were created to offer a clear response to a precisely identified need, and which would be categorized as resulting from a "need-based approach", and those created in an "institutionally driven" approach, i.e. which aim at providing an institutional framework favouring future cooperation initiatives between actors. An additional distinction can be made between thematic or disciplinary EGTCs (environmental preservation, cooperation in the field of rescue services, economic development), while others have a function attached to them, such as facilitating cooperation between institutional actors or helping to apply for European Interreg funds. This distinction is to be compared with the one proposed by Beck (2017) who differentiates EGTCs "type A" which consists of cooperation within the framework of monothematic projects, "type B" which relates to cooperation within entire policy-fields, and "type C" which relates to cross-topic cooperation like programming / implementation / management of Interreg programme.

These missions' differences are also revealed by the huge differences in the budgets made available for EGTCs. While the median of the budgets allocated to EGTCs is €160,000 per year, they vary from €20,000,000 yearly for the operation of the Cerdanya hospital (2017 figures) to the absence of any budget in numerous other cases. For EGTCs that have no dedicated budget, the staff are attached to other institutions engaged in cross-border cooperation. Similarly, the number of staff employed fluctuates widely, with a median value of around 3 full-time employees in a dedicated team. Nevertheless, many EGTCs have no staff at all and others have a larger staff of up to 200 for the Cerdanya hospital. Obviously, such differences in resources and tasks make it almost impossible to generalise about the potential effects of EGTCs on cross-border integration. Beyond the emergence of a dynamic of cooperation between actors, in certain cross-border areas, which do not necessarily have much experience in mobilising European funds, EGTCs can function as resource structures that were put in place to help local actors, whether institutional, private, or representatives of civil society, to apply for Interreg funds. Indeed, in certain contexts, having the dedicated administrative staff to help to improve the quality and conformity of Interreg projects proposals is crucial. One of the functions of EGTCs is thus clearly that it makes "*more accountable and more efficient in the use of EU funds by granting legal personality to the new cross-border entity*". (De Sousa, 2013: 679).

This overview of cross-border cooperation and integration issues – from an institutional point of view – clearly shows that the EGTC instrument has so far been primarily created to promote cross-border cooperation approaches, which can

be seen as a means to the wider objective of cross-border integration. However, in some territories, cross-border cooperation, which is encouraged by the allocation of special funds provided by the EU, sometimes becomes an end in itself, a means of financing and thus of sustaining jobs (Scott, 1999), without necessarily benefiting the objective of cross-border integration, in all its dimensions (Leibenath et al., 2008).

IV.   Discussion

EGTCs are legal instruments, which have great potential for strengthening cross-border integration in practice because they can – in theory – be set up to reach tangible outputs, supported by dedicated staff, own financial resources and a large management autonomy. They therefore offer a real capacity to foster cross-border integration in its many dimensions, through initiatives that they have set up or helped to emerge. EGTCs can thus make it possible to develop cross-border exchanges and flows (i.e. the functional dimension of the integration process) via projects aimed at improving transport infrastructures, the interconnection of communication networks or cross-border mobility in general. They may also make it possible to bring about a positive change in the collective perceptions of foreign neighbours, through cultural, educational or artistic projects, which bring together or involve in the same dynamic the populations separated by a border (ideal dimension). Finally, they can help to support the dynamics of convergence and complementarity between border territories and populations (structural dimension), by working towards the harmonious and more egalitarian development of a cross-border area. Consequently, EGTCs have the potential to contribute indirectly and effectively to these three dimensions of cross-border integration.

However, it is in its institutional dimension that this instrument has obvious and immediate consequences on the process of cross-border integration. Through the activities of animation, networking of actors or resource persons, dissemination of information, the EGTCs participate actively in the dynamics of cross-border cooperation. They draw a relational and legal framework that allow exchanges between actors and partnerships to emerge and develop within the cross-border area. Also, because of the legal basis and legal personality that EGTCs have, they provide more guarantees to facilitate as much as to frame cross-border cooperation, even if a certain number of obstacles must be overcome when creating an EGTC. Indeed, the setting up of an EGTC introduces new difficulties, in particular about the status of the staff employed, the place of its establishment, or the lack of clarity between the Convention and the statutes of the declared EGTC (Briot, 2013). In addition, the establishment of an EGTC takes a relatively long time and requires a certain number of points of agreement. Nevertheless, the flexibility of this tool allows adaptation to a large spectrum of border contexts.

As we noted in the analysis, EGTCs are sometimes created for opportunistic reasons such as improving the catchment of Interreg funding or to secure jobs. In many cases, they are simply a body for discussion and can become key actors of cross-border networks. However, behind the official communication and display that often highlights the cooperation approach, some projects linked to economic development remain largely constrained by a logic of "coopetition", i.e. ad hoc agreements on certain areas in a context that remains dominated by competition where everyone has something to gain or preserve. Nonetheless, in the end jobs and wealth creation essentially benefit the regions where the business is really located. Border territories therefore often remain in competition, despite official discourse promoting complementarities and solidarity.

When we compare the institutional arrangements of EGTCs, the territories they cover and their missions, we can see that they are still very rarely used to their full potential. They often stem from the desire to formalise, institutionalise and facilitate cross-border cooperation, but EGTCs could definitely contribute more directly and tangibly to territorial cohesion at a cross-border scale; by being used not as mere instruments of governance, but to concretely set up cross-border infrastructures, equipments and services and to respond directly to the needs and requirements of border populations and actors. Despite the obstacles to cross-border cooperation, whether linguistic, cultural, legal, institutional or economic and social (MOT, 2015; see also the table 12.1 highlighting the types of obstacles in the production of cross-border spatial planning in the book chapter of Durand and Decoville, 2018), border regions seem to be too often reluctant or even frightened to accelerate the process of cross-border integration accordingly to the possibilities offered by the EGTC instrument. Does this under-use of EGTCs not reveal that behind the cooperation difficulties often stated by the actors of border territories, the most important remains the lack of political will?

References

Balogh, P. &Pete, M. (2018) Bridging the Gap: Cross-border Integration in the Slovak-Hungarian Borderland around Štúrovo-Esztergom, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 33:4, 605-622, doi: 10.1080/08865655.2017.1294495.

Beck, J. (2017) Cross-border cooperation and the challenge of transnational institution-building – the example of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). *RECERC (Revue électronique du Consortium d'Études Catalanes)*. Cross-border Cooperation in Europe: Beyond the Scars of History [Special Issue], 1-13.

Biot, V. (2013) Les systèmes de gouvernance des territoires transfrontaliers : la mise en œuvre du règlement européen sur les GECT, *Belgeo*, 2013:1, URL : http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/10565, doi: 10.4000/belgeo.10565

CoR (2020) *EGTC monitoring report 2018-2019,* European Committee of the Regions, Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget, Brussels, doi:10.2863/430409.

Council of Europe (1980) Convention-cadre européenne sur la coopération transfrontalière des collectivités ou autorités territoriales. https://www.coe.int/fr/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/106.

De Boe, P., Grasland, C. & Healy, A. (1999) *Spatial integration. Study Programme on European Spatial Planning 14*, final report. Stockholm, Sweden: Nordregio.

Decoville, A., & Durand, F. (2018) Exploring cross-border integration in Europe: How do populations cross borders and perceive their neighbours? *European Urban and Regional Studies,* 26:2, 134-157 doi:10.1177/0969776418756934

Decoville, A., Durand, F. &Feltgen, V. (2015) *Opportunities of cross-border cooperation between small and medium cities in Europe*, Report written in the frame of the Spatial Development Observatory, on behalf of the Department of Spatial Planning and Development – Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure in Luxembourg. https://amenagement-territoire.public.lu/dam-assets/fr/strategies_territoriales/monitoring_ivl/Opportunities-of-cross-border-cooperation-between-small-and-medium-cities-in-Europe.pdf.

Decoville, A., Durand, F., Sohn, C. &Walther, O. (2013) Comparing Cross-border Metropolitan Integration in Europe: Towards a Functional Typology, *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 28:2, 221–237, doi:10.1080/08865655.2013.854654.

De Sousa, L. (2013) Understanding European Cross-border Cooperation: A Framework for Analysis, *Journal of European Integration*, 35:6, 669–687, doi:10.1080/07036337.2012.711827.

Durand, F. & Decoville, A. (2019) A multidimensional measurement of the integration between European border regions, *Journal of European Integration,* 42:2, 163-178, doi: 10.1080/07036337.2019.1657857.

Durand, F., Decoville, A. &Knippschild, R. (2020) Everything all right at the internal EU borders? The ambivalent effects of cross-border integration and the rise of Euroscepticism, *Geopolitics*, 25:3, 587-608, doi: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1382475.

Durand, F. &Decoville, A. (2018) Establishing Cross-Border Spatial Planning.
E. Medeiros (ed.) *European Territorial Cooperation*, Springer International
Publishing, Cham, 229-244.

Durand, F. (2015) Theoretical Framework of the Cross-border Space Production
– The Case of the Eurometropolis Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, *Journal of Borderlands
Studies*, 30:3, 309-328. doi:10.1080/08865655.2015.1066701.

Durand, F. &Nelles J. (2014) Binding cross-border regions: an analysis of cross-
border governance in Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis, *Tijdschrift voor
economische en sociale geografie / Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 105:5, 573-590;
doi: 10.1111/tesg.12063.

Engl, A. (2016) Bridging borders through institution-building: the EGTC as a
facilitator of institutional integration in cross-border regions, *Regional & Federal
Studies*, 26:2, 143-169, doi:10.1080/13597566.2016.1158164.

European Union (2012) *Consolidated version of the treaty of the functioning
of the European Union*. Official journal of the European Union.
Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/
PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=FR.

European Council and European Parliament (2006) *Regulation No. 1082/2006 -
Article 1*, Available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?ur
i=CELEX:32006R1082&qid=1590650916247&from=FR.

Evrard, E. (2016) The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC):
Towards a Supraregional Scale of Governance in the Greater Region SaarLorLux?,
Geopolitics, 21:3, 513-537, doi: 10.1080/14650045.2015.1104667.

Knippschild, R. (2011) Cross-Border Spatial Planning: Understanding, Designing
and Managing Cooperation Processes in the German-Polish-Czech Borderland,
European Planning Studies, 19:4, 629-645, doi: 10.1080/09654313.2011.548464.

Leibenath, M., Korcelli-Olejniczak, E., & Knippschild, R. (2008) *Cross-border
Governance and Sustainable Spatial Development – Mind the Gaps!*, Springer-Verlag,
Berlin-Heidelberg.

Martinez, O. (1994) The Dynamics of Border Interaction. New Approaches
to Border Analysis. C.H. Schofield (ed.) *Global Boundaries. World Boundaries*,
Routledge, London, 1-15.

Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (2015) *Cross-border Cooperation: Obstacles to
Overcome*, in the frame of the Preparation of the Luxembourgish Presidency of the
EU Council, Paris, France.

Németh, S., Németh A. & Kaisto, V. (2013) Research design for studying development in border areas: case studies towards the big picture?, *Belgeo*, 2013:1, URL : http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/10582; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.10582

Paasi, A. (2011) A Border Theory: an Unattainable Dream or A Realistic Aim for Border Scholars? D. Wastl-Walter (ed.) *The Ashgate Companion to Border Studies*, Ashgate, Surrey, 11-33.

Perkmann, M. (2007) Policy Entrepreneurship and Multilevel Governance: a Comparative Study of European Cross-border Regions, *Environment and Planning C*, 25:6, 861-879, doi:10.1068/c60m.

Scott, J. W. (1999) European and North American Contexts for Cross-border Regionalism, *Regional Studies*, 33:7, 605-617, doi: 10.1080/00343409950078657.

Stubb, A. (2011) *Cross-border cooperation – benefiting from borders*, Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Trade of Finland, Helsinki.

Svensson, S. & Nordlund, C. (2015) The Building Blocks of a Euroregion: Novel Metrics to Measure Cross-border Integration, *Journal of European Integration*, 37:3, 371-389, doi:10.1080/07036337.2014.968568.

Topaloglou, L., Kalliora, D., Manetos, P. & Petrakos, G. (2005) A Border Regions Typology in the Enlarged European Union, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 20:2, 67-89, doi:10.1080/08865655.2005.9695644.