

RESSENYES

BECK, Joachim and WASSENBERG, Birte (dir.) (2014)
Vivre et penser la coopération transfrontalière (Volume 6): Vers une cohésion territoriale?
 Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 377 p.
 ISBN 978-3-515-10964-2

For about ten years, Birte Wassenberg and Joachim Beck have worked as a scientific duo exploring cross-border cooperation in the European Union (EU). By means of a series of books entitled *Living and Researching Cross-Border Cooperation*, the two professors embody a conference cycle on European cross-border integration conducted jointly by the University of Strasbourg and the Kehl Euro-Institut. The historian from the French university and the political scientist from the German University of Applied Sciences Kehl have invited experts in their twin cities to discuss contemporary issues of European cross-border regions, assuming that they are a laboratory of the EU project itself: “At the latest when the single European market was set up – that is to say with the official abolition of Europe’s internal borders – it became clear that the European border regions had a very specific and central role to play in the European integration process” (Beck and Wassenberg, 2014: 25). A regional logic inspired the first two books with a focus on French and then German border regions, followed by three thematic books on the

European dimension, sensible borders, and finally identity and citizen participation. The book presented here gathers contributions from the concluding conference held in Strasbourg in 2010 and is therefore an insight into recent research and practice in cross-border cooperation, but also a look into the future of the Cohesion Policy.

The distribution of the contributions itself is a metaphor of the diversity of cross-border cooperation in Europe. It reflects intercultural exchanges at stake on European internal borders: the publication is trilingual and includes translations or summaries of every contribution in English, German and French; the seventeen academic authors come from universities and research institutes from nine European countries; in addition, seven practitioners give their analysis about their work in a border region, and various disciplines from the humanities are represented such as history, political sciences, social sciences, regional science, geography, spatial planning and management. According to their background and region of reference, the authors address

the question of the link between cross-border cooperation and Cohesion Policy from very different angles. They give the reader a variable and even contradictory analysis of the manner in which cross-border regions could contribute to territorial cohesion in Europe.

In the first part, the concept of multi-level governance serves as an analytic framework to discuss modes of governance and initiatives for the territorial networking of cross-border regions. The debate is open about the degree of institutionalisation needed. At external borders, but also within the EU, cross-border regions experience a persisting dependency on international and national systems and even the return of strong nation-states, making horizontal and bottom-up dimensions of cross-border governance unlikely. According to Estelle Evrard and Tobias Chilla, harmonisations, intergovernmental agreements and sectoral regulations are not sufficient to cope with the institutional and functional asymmetries at borders. In this perspective, the legal tool of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) does not bring consensus: it is still unclear if it offers an efficient solution to decision-making processes or if it rather hides an institutional trap. Indeed, several authors point out the hazardous development of cross-border cooperation towards a growing bureaucracy in INTERREG programmes and the counterproductive multiplication of platforms and governance bodies. Beyond institutions, cross-border actors still rely on informal cooperation relations and networking in the invention of cross-border multilevel governance.

The second part focuses on the experiences in the Upper Rhine region between Switzerland, Germany and France, presuming that this established case study might have a model character for territorial cohesion applicable to other European cross-border regions. Jean

Peyrony recalls the creation of the Cohesion Policy and especially the objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion which was meant to counterbalance the impact of the internal market. While he regrets the lack of symbolic narratives and policies, Martin Weber strongly signifies his wish for rationalised decision-making processes, for instance for the implementation of strategic planning in the metropolitan region of Basel. Antoine Decoville, Frédéric Durand, Christophe Sohn and Olivier Walther present a very interesting systematic quantitative analysis of cross-border metropolitan regions in the EU and distinguish three models of cross-border integration which do not necessarily improve territorial cohesion. Bernard Reitel and Raymond Woessner, in their geographic observation of, respectively, cities and bridges in the Upper Rhine, come to the same results of a heterogeneous space structure, so that a long history of cross-border cooperation does not imply territorial cohesion.

The future of training, education and research on cross-border cooperation is then briefly drawn in the third part. Martine Camiade and Marco Trienes describe attempts to build cross-border knowledge systems at the Franco-Spanish border and the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, sticking to the trendy terminology of innovation. But other authors underline that the obstacles to be overcome are still numerous. On the side of the practitioners, cross-border project partners could benefit from quality training founded on the concept of capacity building, suggests Joachim Beck. On the side of the academics, Michel Casteigts stresses the epistemological challenges of scientific work in cross-border issues and calls for a promising interdisciplinary, intercultural and reflexive research agenda.

Although Joachim Beck and Birte Wassenberg successfully develop central themes and questions in the introduction and conclusion, the heterogeneity

of the publication must be pointed out. According to the advocated dialogue between academics and practitioners, the publication collects texts of various natures, but the variable density and depth of the different contributions not only depends on their length (from 5 to 38 pages) or the status of the author. From regional and thematic case studies mainly on EU-internal borders, to conceptual attempts on the role of cross-border cooperation in the European objective of territorial cohesion, it also includes empirical experiences from the field written by cross-border stakeholders. The latter case offers both enthusiastic descriptions of ongoing projects and disillusioned testimonies on the obstacles in everyday work. Such contributions seem to be a great raw material for further analysis. Is it the necessary work of gathering knowledge before building methodological and theoretical framework of border studies, as would Michel Casteigts argue? The importance of the series of books actually lies in this dialectic relationship between local views and opinions (*Living*) and analytic scientific distance (*Researching*). Therefore, a comparative approach comes from the readers themselves who are invited to deepen their understanding of cross-border cooperation and territorial cohesion. The publication is a written illustration of the research process in action and of the consolidating field of border studies. In that sense, the sixth band of the series belongs to one of the significant attempts of structured and coordinated research on European cross-border cooperation.

While the first part shows evidence of progress, but also the need for improvement in territorial governance, the second part principally deals with the title's question of the role of cross-border regions in territorial cohesion. Quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal rather negative findings. Despite a com-

mon strategy of territorial development and the realisation of cross-border infrastructures, cross-border regions present different patterns in connectivity and urban structure. In the case of a metropolitan cross-border region, the core agglomeration can even lead to a process of specialisation or polarisation which maintains or increases territorial disparities. These persisting territorial discontinuities would qualify the hypothesis that cross-border cooperation contributes to territorial cohesion. Indeed, behind the label of territorial cohesion, the book questions the very concept of integration. The EU defines territorial cohesion with three principles: "concentration (eliminating differences in density), connection (linking territories and controlling distances) and cooperation (overcoming divisions)" (Beck and Wassenberg, 2014: 366-367). However, further aspects like the participation of citizens, the promotion of European public goods, the creation of a European civil society or a common European vision should be considered. Yet the goals of cross-border cooperation do not necessarily fulfil these definitions. The book thus raises the question of the integration process at play which can be defined oppositely either as convergence or as interactions. In her concluding remarks, Birte Wassenberg finally challenges the European Council in the backdrop of the negotiations for the next financial period, asking in a vibrant call if territorial cohesion is a true objective or just a facade. "In the end, the cross-border areas – these micro-places for integration, are only a reflection of Europe as a whole: a Europe where, at present, solidarity has no influence at Council level in response to the economic crisis [...]. Cross-border regions can therefore only contribute to European territorial cohesion if the EU gives itself the means – political and financial – to achieve it, and if Euro-

pean citizens, especially border citizens believe in it” (Beck and Wassenberg, 2014: 371).

Because of the diversity of his contributions, this publication significantly contributes to the maturation process of an interdisciplinary comprehension of cross-border cooperation in Europe. Besides, some contributions may be useful for the dissemination of good – and bad – practices in cross-border cooperation. It can be recommended for its multifaceted and critical approach to students and scholars, project managers and pro-

gramme authorities, territorial and political actors or even citizens interested in the European integration process at internal borders.

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<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/dag.524>

