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Thomas Perrin

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## ➔ From euroregions to macroregions: a reasonable step?

An appraisal from Western Mediterranean

TEXT:  
THOMAS PERRIN

### Introduction

› Macro-regional strategies of the European Union are conceived as new instruments for territorial cooperation. They must integrate all the available and existing resources and schemes within the same transnational geographical area: EU structural funds and territorial cooperation programmes; other national, local and transnational planning schemes; public and private initiatives, etc. These strategies are expected to articulate functional and political complexity and to improve policy efficiency through cooperative and flexible approaches, without creating new institution or funding<sup>(1)</sup>.

This territorial approach evokes the concept of “mega-region”, i.e. a “meso-scale” transnational territorial unit, located inside a supranational “region”, such as for instance the European Union, North America, Mercosur, East Asia<sup>(2)</sup>. Moreover, macro-regional scale was already at stake in the transnational areas designed from the mid-1990’s in the strand B of EU territorial cooperation programmes, or in cooperative organisations like the Benelux, the Visegrad Group, the Nordic Councils or the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

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

<sup>(1)</sup> Stefanie Dühr, *Mer Baltique, Danube et stratégies macro régionales: un modèle de coopération transnationale dans l'UE ?*, „Notre Europe Études & Recherches”, N°86, 2011.

<sup>(2)</sup> Richard Florida, Tim Gulden, Charlotta Mellander, *The rise of the mega-region*, „Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society”, Volume 1 Issue 3, November 2008, p. 459-476

<sup>(3)</sup> Francesc Morata, *Euroregions i integració europea*, Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica, Vol. 56, N°1, 2010, p. 41-56

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



bordered by around 15 euroregions and in this context an association of Polish euroregions was founded.

In the framework of the Western Mediterranean macro-region, we can wonder for instance whether two existing euroregions in this area – Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée and Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée – can be milestones in the constitution of a macro-regional strategy for this area. The case of cultural cooperation is an interesting example to address this question. Indeed, among the various policies that are developed within euroregions, culture appears to be a frequent domain of cooperation. A recent study shows that culture and tourism are the favoured themes of cross-border cooperation<sup>(4)</sup>.

### Cultural cooperation: a vector for macro-regionalisation?

› Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée was constituted in 2004 between the French regions of Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées and the Spanish autonomous communities of Aragon, Catalonia and Balearic Islands. Culture has been a mainstream domain of cooperation, through a specific agenda that includes a culture portal online, specific calls for projects, annual cultural forums. Culture was also one of the first attributions of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) that was launched in 2010 to reinforce the structure and governance of the euroregion<sup>(5)</sup>. Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée was launched in 2007 and gathers the

<sup>(4)</sup> (EPSON) European Observation Network for Territorial Development & Cohesion, EPSON Evidence Brief. Territorial Cooperation, May 2013

➔ [www.epson.eu](http://www.epson.eu)

<sup>(5)</sup> This legal status was created in 2006 within EU law to facilitate the management and implementation of cross border cooperation. Cf. Regulation (EC) N° 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC).



IMAGE 1. Euroregions in Poland / SOURCE: [www.euroregion-silesia.pl](http://www.euroregion-silesia.pl)

(6) Thomas Perrin, *Culture et Eurorégions. La coopération culturelle entre régions européennes*, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2013

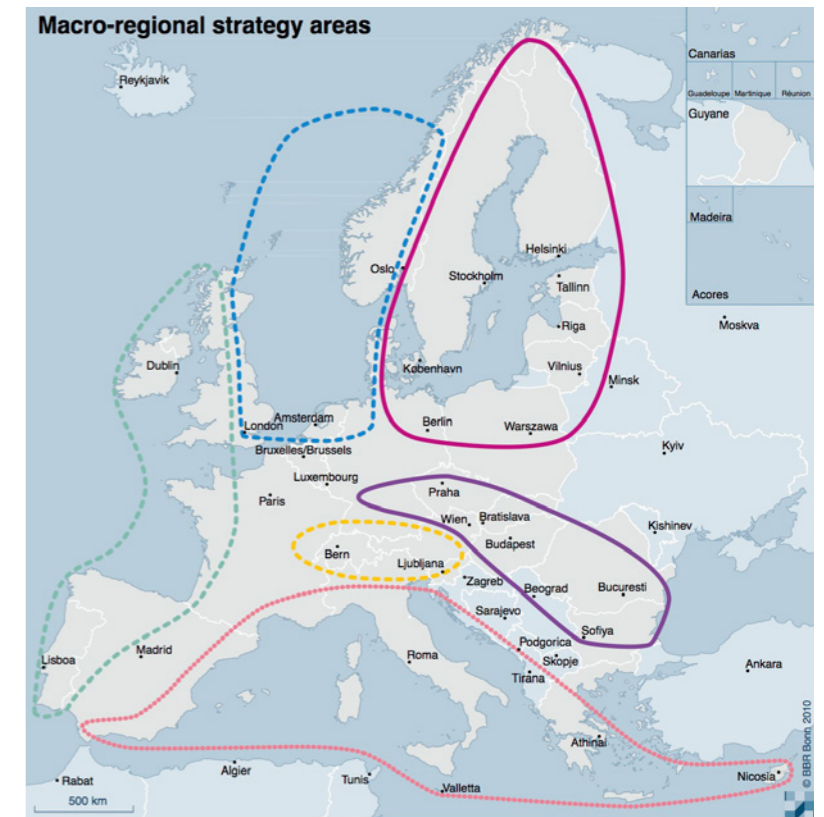
(7) Hugues de Jovenel, Maria-Àngels Roque (dir.), *Catalogne à l'horizon 2010*, Barcelone/Paris: Institut catala d'estudis mediterranis/Economica, 1994, p. VI.

(8) Guy Baudelle, Jean Ollivro Catherine Guy, *Les scénarios de l'espace européen*, in Baudelle & Castagnède (dir.), *Le Polycentrisme en Europe. Une vision de l'aménagement du territoire européen*, Éditions de l'Aube/DATAR, 2002, p. 130.

French regions Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur with the Italian regions Piemonte, Liguria and Val d'Aoste. The partners established a cultural agenda based on networking in the field of visual arts and on organising cultural events to promote the euroregion.

In this context, different elements suggest that the interaction between both euroregions can help to implement a macro-regional strategy in this area, specifically starting with cultural cooperation(6):

- ◆ they encompass focal key areas of the Western Mediterranean, with the Barcelona-Marseilles-Genoa Arc and the metropolitan regions of Toulouse, Lyon, Torino; thus constituting a potentially homogenous territorial entity like "North of Southern Europe(7)" or "Golden Mediterranean Belt(8)".
- ◆ There already exist cooperation schemes that can be integrated within a macro-regional strategy: EU cooperation programme MED,



Core areas of macroregional strategies of the European Union

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <b>Existing or adopted</b>             | <b>Under discussion</b>        |
| European Danube Strategy               | European North Sea Strategy    |
| EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region  | Atlantic Strategy              |
|  | Alpine Strategy                |
| <b>Existing of different character</b> | Regionen NUTS 2                |
| Mediterranean Strategy                 | Geometrische Basis: GFK MACON  |
|  | Quelle: Europäische Kommission |

IMAGE 2. Actual and potential macro-regional strategy areas  
SOURCE: BBSR Research News 2/2010, p. 3. [www.bbsr.bund.de](http://www.bbsr.bund.de)

cooperation Rhône-Alpes/Catalonia in the framework of the association "Four Motors for Europe", Union for the Mediterranean.

- ◆ These two euroregions show potential geo-cultural interactions: transnational historical and identity links, common fields of "creative excellence" that are already mobilised in the euroregional cultural policies, like for instance audiovisual and image industries.
- ◆ The two euroregions showed first step of cooperation with a joint participation to the Open Days in Brussels within the grouping "Euroregions for territorial integration" in 2009, 2010 and 2011.



IMAGE 3. Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée / SOURCE: Marie-Laure Malaval, Université de Toulouse-Jean-Jaurès

The realpolitik limits

Even though the macro-regional interaction between euroregions Pyrénées-Méditerranée and Alpes-Méditerranée can prove to be an option for the constitution of a Western Mediterranean macro-regional strategy, several points(9) show a certain gap between the theoretical-ideal level and the practical one.

First, some observers question the very relevance of a macro-regional strategy for this area: can this help reinforcing cooperation, does it have a real added value and does it respond to the specificities of the Mediterranean territorial cooperation context(10)? Secondly, the evolution of both euroregional partnerships shows that they remain uncertain schemes in several aspects. In Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée the whole cooperation project slowed down following the change of political majority in the Italian regions. The president of Piedmont, who was elected in 2010 with the support of the extreme-right party Lega Nord, declared that the euroregional cooperation was not a priority anymore and most of the projects are in stand by. In Pyrénées-Méditerranée, recent financial cuts and changes in the

(9) François Alfonsi, *The evolution of EU macroregional strategies: present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean*, European Parliament, Committee of Regional Development, 2012, p. 25.

(10) Luiza Bialasiewicz, et al., "Re-scaling 'EU'rope: EU macro-regional fantasies in the Mediterranean", *European Urban and Regional Studies* January, vol. 20, n° 1, 2013, p. 59-76.



IMAGE 4. Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée / SOURCE: www.medalp.eu

The interaction between both euroregions can help to implement a macro-regional strategy in this area, specifically starting with cultural cooperation



political majorities could start to impact the initial ambition and objectives of the euroregion.

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



THOMAS PERRIN

Thomas Perrin is a lecturer in Planning and European Studies at Université Lille 1, research centre TVES. Previously, he worked for the French Ministry of Culture and cultural institutes abroad (Morocco, Chad) and was a research assistant at Toulouse University. Thomas holds a PhD in Political Science from Institut d'Études Politiques, University of Grenoble, with a thesis that deals with cultural policy and cooperation within euroregions. In 2011, he was a post-doctoral fellow at the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona. He is expert for the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe and member of ECURES: European Association of Cultural Researchers.

His research and teaching deal with cultural policy and cultural relations on the one hand, and with the issues and dynamics of regionalism and territorial cooperation on the other hand. His works have been published in several books and journals. In 2011, he was awarded the Mark Schuster Prize on comparative cultural policy and a Merit Prize in the Committee of the Regions' Doctoral Thesis Competition. In 2012, Toulouse City Council gave him the award of "chercheur novélisé" during the Novela, Toulouse festival of science and knowledge.