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THE PERFORMATIVITY OF COMMONS IN META-ORGANIZATIONS : THE CASE OF GATEWAY CORRIDORS

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1 Gateway corridors : a growing trend in port governance

1.1 Increasing competition between ports

Due to globalization, major seaports are facing an increasingly competitive environment (De Monie, 2012). Ports located on the same range are likely to compete severely since the distance that separates them is actually very small compared to the long distance that ships may do on an intercontinental scale (for instance, it's the case of ports located on the Le Havre-Hamburg range). Besides, the tremendous rise in vessel size which has been observed over the last decade (especially concerning container carriers) causes shipping companies to adopt a strategy of optimal ship rotation, which consists in minimizing the number of port calls. This implies the necessity for shipping companies to select ports on a comparative basis, which generates port competition. The 2008 crisis caused port competition to become even stronger due to a decrease in global transport demand : ports struggled to avoid traffic losses.

European integration also plays a major role in the recent rise in port competition. Indeed, since cross-border flows and their associated administrative tasks are easier than before, companies located in the european hinterland are given a wider choice of ports for their shipments. The "natural" hinterland of ports is not administratively protected from the competition of foreign ports anymore. Moreover, European integration goes along with a generalization of the subsidiarity principle (Duranthon, 2015, Delmas-Marty, 2013), that is to say the decentralization of power up to the smallest able entity for a more rational territory management at the EU scale : this favours competition between territorial entities, including port regions.

As a matter of fact, becoming more competitive has become a major concern for major seaports. Of course, port-specific characteristics such as nautical access, terminal handling operational efficiency or port dues act as competitiveness factors (Fourneyron & Revet, 2016). However, it appears that port

competitiveness improvement tends to expand outside from ports. Indeed, hinterland accessibility becomes a key port performance factor (De Langen & al., 2004, Fourneyron & Revet, 2016), as supply chain managers now look for integrated high quality transport and logistics services. Developing multimodal and multi-destination connections and services has now become a major issue for port competitiveness. Therefore, hinterland connection and structuration have become major sources of concern for major seaports. More specifically, these issues are addressed thanks to major modifications of port governance that make ports cooperate with inland partners. For instance, ports are increasingly implicated in the development of railway freight networks, inland waterway services, intermodal handling terminals or even warehousing.

1.2 Gateway corridors : a new port governance

The scope of increased competition between ports and the growing importance of hinterland issues means that it's not only ports that compete : there are also their associated territories and connections, that is to say, their corridors, which link them to their hinterlands (Daudet & Alix, 2014).

The corridor concept first appeared in geographic literature (Whebell, 1969, Luiz & Paulo, 1975), referring to a road or a transport infrastructure, characterized by an intense circulation of goods or people. This basic definition then evolved, including more and more physical and non-physical components to the notion. Comtois (2012) refers to the notion of commerce corridor, which considers flows of goods, people and information as well as regulation laws in addition to the infrastructure. Notteboom (2012) considers corridors as composites made from four different layers : a territory, a set of infrastructures, transport and logistics activities (which represent the use of the corridor) and a governance that structures the other layers. These definitions make corridors interesting subjects of study for social sciences. Finally, Daudet & Alix (2014) consider the corridor notion from a social network point of view :

gateway corridors are seen as organized networks grouping a large variety of organizations involved in the port and logistics business. This is the point of view that we consider for our use of the corridor notion.

More specifically, we will focus on the gateway corridor seen as a meta-organization, that is to say an organization that has organizations as members. Indeed, seaports and inland ports tend to cooperate by building up networks in their hinterlands, thus moving port governance from port-centered governance to network-oriented governance. This causes gateway corridors to appear. Gateway corridors are meta-organizations which structure and organize cooperation between sea and inland port authorities from a same infrastructural axis. These structures also involve cooperation between port authorities and private companies in a network perspective. Table 1 lists the different stakeholders involved in gateway corridors (Daudet & Alix, 2014, Notteboom, 2012).

Public stakeholders	Private stakeholders
Port authorities	Inland transport companies (Road, rail, inland waterway shipping)
States, Regions, Municipalities	Sea shipping companies
Chambers of Commerce and Industry	Port service operators (tug, bunkering...)
Infrastructure management authorities	Terminal operation companies
Customs	Commissioners, intermodal transport integrators
European Union	Warehousing companies and logistics service providers
	Importers, exporters, retailing companies
	Industries
	Company unions

Table 1: Stakeholders involved in gateway corridors

As an example, we could mention HAROPA, which is an interest grouping that was created in France in 2012 by the seaports of Le Havre and Rouen and the inland port of Paris in order to develop cooperative behaviours between the ports of the river Seine. This structure enabled the three ports to develop a common commercial, institutional and public communication, which thus gives them more visibility and provides them a more integrated service offer. Besides, this structure made it possible to create innovation projects such as the SAFE SECA project, which is intended to develop the distribution of natural gas as a fuel for sea and inland ships. Innovation is

also favoured by "club" structures, which are intended to make it possible to share good practices between companies and authorities, focusing on a variety of themes. Inland transport infrastructure development is also a major innovation project area for HAROPA, as well as the improvement of modal shift from road transport to rail and barge transport. The development of information sharing is also concerned. Besides, a unification work has been done concerning the offer for port land sites: it is provided thanks to a single window and a common call for projects has recently been issued for the rehabilitation of old industrial and logistic port land sites.

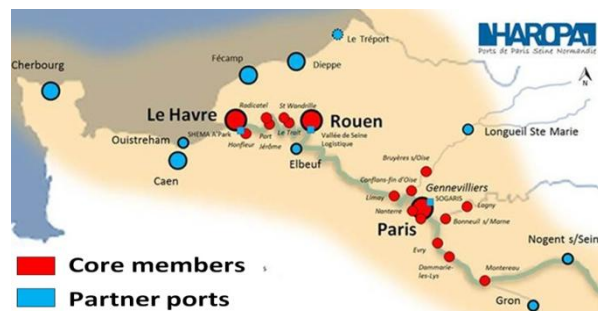


Figure 1: Map of HAROPA's gateway corridor.

Another interesting example is Medlink Ports, located on the Rhône-Saône axis, which gathers the seaports of Marseille and Sète with the inland ports of Arles, Avignon, Valence, Vienne Sud-Salaise, Lyon, Villefranche-sur-Saône, Mâcon, Châlons-sur-Saône and Pagny. Medlink ports also acts in offer unification, information sharing (a common tool, called Medlink+, is developed) and company labelling.

2 Meta-organizations : sets of performative commons ?

Meta-organizations are organizations whose members are organizations while organizations are usually composed by individuals (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Examples as various as the NATO, the European Union, the International Egg Commission, the Federation of Swedish Industries or BirdLife International can be provided. Meta-organizations can exist at an international scale, but they can also exist at national, regional or local scale. Member organizations can be public, private or both public and private. The fact that members are organizations is a difference that has significant governance implications, the most important of them being the fact that meta-organizations have much less resources than their members, while members remain largely independent (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). In opposition, organizations own most of the resources necessary to their activities and have a huge hierarchical authority on their members through the relation of employment. This means that the authority of meta-organizations is quite

limited, which causes governance to be carried out through "soft" law (law that only orientates and advises, without hierarchical punishing or controlling) because meta-organizations rely enormously on their members (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, 2010, Gadille & al., 2013) : their autonomy and identity should not be threatened too much.

This soft law governance still needs to be examined, especially concerning the factors influencing the nature of governance mechanisms, as well as the division of tasks (Gulati & al., 2012). This is particularly challenging in gateway corridors, where different levels of membership can be observed, alongside with a huge member diversity. Indeed, the stakeholders of gateway corridors are not only extremely diverse in nature (see table 1), but they also differ a lot in terms of membership types, which is very different from many meta-organizations, where one only member status exists in an equality perspective.

In gateway corridors, the core members are generally port authorities. Sometimes, transport infrastructure management administrations and railway platforms may also be included as core members. A second level of membership is the consultative member, which provides advice without interfering in the actual governance of the gateway corridor's meta-organization. It's the case of some major private sector logistics companies that operate on the corridor's territory or infrastructure management authorities. Another member category could be called "partner members" : these are organizations that signed a partnership with the corridor meta-organization without being core members because they work with the meta-organization only within the scope of some specific subjects. Of course, users of the corridor (logistics companies, transport commissioners, shippers, handling companies...) may interact a lot with it and become more than simple users as they work on common projects with the corridor. In cases such as Medlink Ports, a labelling even exists for companies that are strongly tied to the corridor. Dealing with this variety of membership and the resulting unclarity of meta-organization boundaries is a huge challenge for gateway corridor meta-organizations.

Nevertheless, it appears that meta-organizational governance is often based on the management of commons, should they be natural, infrastructural or institutional. Indeed, commercial interfaces, information management, institutional communication, infrastructure and natural resources are issues based on commons that are highly linked to the reason why meta-organizations exist (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). This is especially true in the case of gateway corridors.

Based on Latour's actor-network theory (Latour, 2006), we propose to examine how common artefacts and common institutional structures influence the strategic, tactical and operational behaviour of organizations in meta-organizations through the case of gateway corridors. Latour's actor-network theory is based on the principle that, in addition to humans, non-humans such as objects and speeches are performative : they are also actors of the functioning of networks. Considering their role in meta-organizations would bring a new vision to meta-organization theory, which mainly focused on member management.

Within that frame, our research questions are organized as follows :

– Main question :

How is the common destiny of stakeholders organized in gateway corridors?

– Sub-questions :

1) How are power structures modified by federative corridor policies ?

2) Which kinds of federative commons are developed and used ? (material, institutional, processual...)

3) What are the results of the corridor structuration process for stakeholders ? (perceptions, evolution of practices, performance)

3 Methodological frame

We propose to carry out a qualitative analysis of textual corpuses based on the scope set up by Gioia & al. (2013), which focuses on concept identification and refining, combined with a computerized lexical analysis. This qualitative analysis would be carried out thanks to two different kinds of data : interviews and official documents released by gateway corridors and port authorities (strategy presentation documents and activity reports). We are currently focusing on a typical case of gateway corridor : HAROPA, which gathers the French Ports of Le Havre, Rouen and Paris. This gateway corridor, created in 2012, appears to be the most advanced case in France regarding institutionalization and communication.

The "Gioia" conceptual analysis supposes that both the researcher and the interviewee (or document author) are knowledgeable agents : they know what they do and are able to explain their thoughts and actions. The method is divided into seven steps. The first step consists in identifying notions that are located in the text and to classify them according to the speaker/author's own vocabulary. The next steps

is theorization : the notions that were found have to be coded into concepts that are relevant to the researcher. Then comes aggregation : concepts are grouped according to their resemblance to form families, main dimensions. After this stage, the data structure is created : concepts are schematically represented and linked. Then a comparison with existing literature can be made. After this stage, the relations between concepts are analysed in order to characterize the nature of the links between concepts that were identified earlier. Finally, the discussion of results can take place.

The lexical analysis could be a helpful assistant to carry out the first step of the Gioia conceptual analysis (notion identification and classification). Indeed, this analysis, which requires the use of the ALCESTE software, is based on the division of the textual corpus into short text sections and the identification of their resemblance. These sections are classified into a few categories based on their differences of shape and their frequency of occurrence. The software also does statistics on the presence of different kinds of words (types of nouns, verbs, adverbs etc.), which can be instructive regarding the way the interviewee or author speaks or writes.

The interviews that are conducted are semi-directive. They are conducted among people from the top management of various organizations that are stakeholders in the HAROPA corridor (port authorities, transport companies, shippers, transport infrastructures management administrations, freight forwarders, etc.). If possible, a second corridor case could potentially come in consideration.

Our will to combine the analysis of interviews with the analysis of official documents is due to the fact that we want to compare the network image that the corridor and its member ports seek to diffuse in the documents that they publish with the experience that stakeholders actually have of the corridor structuration process in order to see if differences of vision appear. In addition, official documents (especially HAROPA's main strategic document, which provides a long-term vision of the corridor's development ambitions) are issued collectively by a lot of persons from different organizations, while interviews reveal the single view of a given person from a given organization.

Currently, the collection and first analyses of official documents emerging from the case of HAROPA have been done, while the semi-directive interviews are currently being done.

4 First results

The first results that we obtained concern the analysis of official documents published by the corridor and its member ports. These documents are consisting of two different kinds of documents: strategic documents, which look forward, and activity reports, which look backwards.

Strategic documents aim at presenting the collective strategy of the corridor with a long-term view and the strategies of each member port with a short and intermediate-term perspective. The corridor strategic document, named HAROPA 2030, concerns a vision that expands to 2030, while port strategic documents are based on the 2015-2020 time interval. Port and corridor strategic documents are designed to present and describe the port-based and corridor-based strategies.

Activity reports constitute the other category of official documents. These documents are edited every year both at the scale of each port and at the scale of the corridor. These documents are designed to present an analysis of corridor and port activities concerning the last year. It's a self-evaluation of port and corridor organizations.

As a first analysis step for our doctoral work, we carried out a lexical analysis on these two types of documents separately. This analysis has been carried out using a piece of software called ALCESTE (Analyse des Lexèmes Co-occurents des Enoncés Simples d'un Texte), which acts by cutting the text into simple parts and analysing resemblance between these elementary parts. According to resemblance statistic tests, a limited number of vocabulary classes is issued. Then, the classes are interpreted.

Strategic documents have been analysed both at the scale of ports and at the scale of corridors. The lexical classes provided represent different aspects that constitute port and corridor strategies.

Concerning the corridor meta-organization, the following result has been obtained after interpretation (see fig. 2). It shows that strategic communication is based on two different aspects : a rather non-human one, based on vocabulary related to traffic statistics and hinterland transport services and infrastructures, and a more human one, based both on the development of public relationships (both regarding the port city interface and regarding port-related tourists, such as clients of cruise activities) and the development of inter-organizational relations, that is to say, actions as a developer of contacts between organizations.

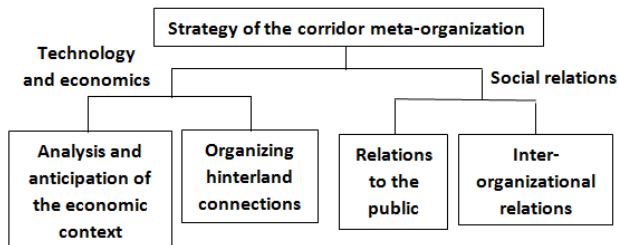


Figure 2 : Structure of vocabulary used in HAROPA's strategic document.

Port strategy is structured differently : four categories of vocabulary appear, grouped in two main categories. These main categories are linked to two different aspects of port management : portfolio management and external relations management.

The portfolio management part is subdivided into an aspect concerning the port activity portfolio, which concerns the commercial and technical offer of each port, as well as the expected offer evolution, and a second aspect, concerning the hinterland transport and logistics service portfolio.

The external relations management part is linked to the way ports manage their external environment. This vocabularial category has a subdivision related to the port's natural environment, which should not suffer too much from port activity. The other aspect of external environment that strategic document vocabulary deals with is the management of the port's social environment. This is highly linked with human resource management issues, but some vocabulary concerning inter-organizational relationships is also used.

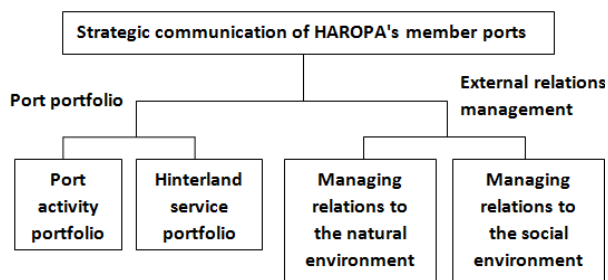


Figure 3 : Structure of vocabulary used in the ports' strategic documents.

This comparison of strategic documents shows that responsibilities are quite well distributed between the corridor's member organization and its member ports. However, we should observe that two themes appear in the strategic communication of both. Indeed, references to hinterland transport connections appear significantly in the meta-organization's strategic communication and member port strategic communication. Inter-organizational relations also appear in both cases. This

underlines the need for corridors and member ports to have a clear definition of tasks concerning these two aspects. However, after analysing the most significant words related to these two categories, we see that the ports' speech concerning intermodal connection strategy is more centered on port intermodal terminal issues, while the corridor organization has a more global view. Regarding inter-organizational relationships, commercial relationship-related vocabulary appears in the ports' speech as well as in the corridor's speech, which is surprising since gateway corridors are meta-organizations that are supposed to become single customer windows.

Regarding activity reports, we analysed the activity reports of the corridor's meta-organization from 2012 on. Activity reports of ports still need to be examined. This brought us to define how the efficiency criteria of corridor meta-organizations are structured (see below).

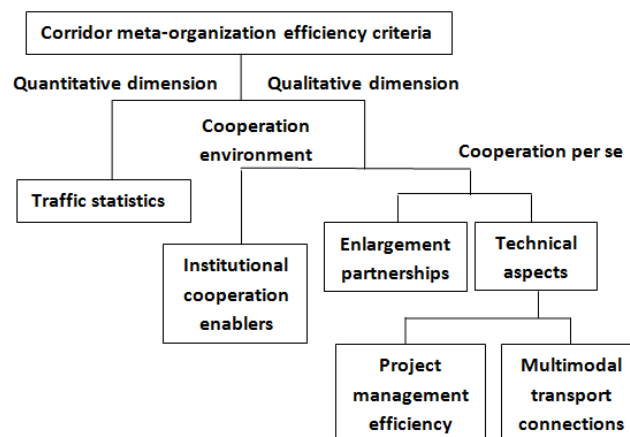


Figure 4 : Structure of vocabulary used in the corridor's activity reports.

It appears that the corridor meta-organization sees its efficiency as organized in two main categories: a quantitative one, based on traffic volumes, and a qualitative one, which is linked both to the creation of a cooperation-fostering environment for member organizations (using institutional cooperation structures that spark up cooperation) and to the technical aspects of cooperation, mainly regarding intermodal transport organization and project management. Vocabulary related to the enlargement of the meta-organization (introduction of new partner ports) also appears.

Globally speaking, these first lexical analyses that were carried out within the scope of our doctoral work tend to underline the accuracy of basing our theoretical frame on the actor-network theory. Indeed, these analyses of speeches reveal that both corridor strategy and performance evaluation practices are highly influenced both by human and non-human elements. Corridor strategy appears as being highly influenced by both non-human factors like economic statistics or transport infrastructure on

the one hand and human aspects related to relations on the other hand. The analysis of corridor activity reports completes this observation by underlining the fact that cooperation, which may initially appear as something human, needs non-human institutional enablers which frame behaviours in order to be efficient. At the port scale, our analysis also shows that non-human and human forces shape the strategic practice, with the environment appearing as a new category of non-human actor that contributes to the shaping of strategy. Finally, we should underline that this set of lexical analyses is only a first step in our research that will be completed by other document analyses and interview analyses. We hope that this work will open the way to many new contributions in the future.

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