

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDEBOOK

ARTICULATE COHESION POLICY, GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES
AND CROSS-BORDER TERRITORIAL APPROACHES

SUMMARY

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The current context of French cross-border cooperation has been marked by an intense period of reform at the national and European level. The implementation of cooperation depends largely on the administrative organisation of States and the manner in which public policies are led. Moreover, the current context of structural reform amidst the backdrop and the economic crisis is having a large impact on cross-border cooperation.

In France, in recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in awareness of the need to redefine cross-border policies¹ and to initiate a new stage in the decentralisation process.

At European level, 2011 – 2013 was a pivotal period for the cohesion policy and its programmes funded by structural funds. The current period, 2007 – 2013, is coming to a close and the next cycle, 2014 – 2020, is currently being prepared from a regulatory and strategic perspective, at the level of European institutions, Member States and local authorities.

In this dynamic context, the Transfrontier Operational Mission (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière - MOT) has drafted a methodological guidebook aimed at improving the articulation between cohesion policy, governance mechanisms and cross-border logic. This initiative stems from two overall observations. On the one hand, coherence between cross-border governance structures (binding the various institutional partners on both sides of the border), cooperation strategies and sources of funding (notably INTERREG programmes) is currently insufficient. On the other hand, there are a large number of good practices concerning local cross-border cooperation which deserve to be promoted as a source of inspiration for other areas.

This methodological guide is the result of a year and a half of investigations undertaken by the MOT as part of a study carried out between June 2011 and October 2012 and cofunded by the Europ'Act national technical assistance programme in France. The MOT undertook a vast fieldwork, based on about 75 meetings with key stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation. Moreover, it organised a meeting between national and regional French and Italian authorities, on the issue of coherence between cross-border cooperation policies. Finally, the MOT organised a conference called "Cross-border territories, regional and national policies: What coordination for 2014-2020?", aimed at all stakeholders involved in cooperation and allowing the presentation and discussion of the findings included in the methodological guidebook.

This guidebook gives an in-depth diagnosis of cooperation initiatives across all French borders, underlining local particularities, in addition to similarities of all borders. This analysis then fuels the proposal of twenty recommendations to improve the overall framework for cross-border cooperation.

The results of this work are aimed at local authorities, State bodies, European institutions, INTERREG programme bodies, and more widely, stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation.

¹ On this issue, an important milestone was reached with the publication of the Blanc-Keller-Sanchez Schmid Parliamentary mission report in June 2010, which outlined a diagnosis of cooperation and proposed 19 improvements for the current mechanisms in place.

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CROSS-CUTTING DIAGNOSIS

INTRODUCTION

A large range of public stakeholders are active in a cross-border context, involved in governance structures and acting according to various strategies. This diversity results, in part, from the lack of any precise definition of cross-border issues. These issues are neither objectively attached to any specific competence and, therefore, any clearly identifiable institutional stakeholders, nor localised in any explicit and standardised manner – the scales of cross-border phenomena are variable. Local issues internal to States are, admittedly, complex; however, they are the object of standards, technical processes, and even scientific or political debate, in a framework of relatively stable knowledge and questioning, which is lacking at cross-border level. The integration of these local cross-border issues in national, or even regional frameworks, which are different across borders, increases the complexity thereof even more.

A diagnosis comparing the various scenarios observed at local level, regional level and at the level of each border, should allow for the identification of major typologies or trends and overall conclusion, as well as the transfer of experiences and good practices from one border to the other. This may additionally be used as a basis for reflection on how to improve national policies having an impact on cross-border areas and national monitoring of these issues.

The general diagnosis is articulated around three major sections which provide analyses concerning the governance of cross-border cooperation (institutional stakeholders and cooperation structures), the cross-border strategies (priorities for development and action plans) and the funding mechanisms (INTERREG programmes, national or local funding).

GOVERNANCE

The analysis of governance takes on a different form in a cross-border context, where the very notion of cross-border government is « prohibited ». The concept of governance, as a mechanism allowing for cross-border cooperation between various public and private bodies, takes on its full meaning here.

The diagnosis of the governance of cross-border cooperation has led to three major observations. Firstly, the position of institutional stakeholders involved in cooperation reveals a large-scale dynamism, with on the one hand local authorities taking on an increasingly influential role in cooperation; and on the other, a State, at least for the case of France, repositioning itself towards supporting more local mechanisms. Secondly, cross-border cooperation structures are extremely diverse, taking into consideration their territorial scale, their functioning and legal status. Finally, much division remains in handling cross-border issues; both within institutions between various departments, and also between cooperation partners.

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STRATEGIES

Strategies of cross-border cooperation and development represent cross-border policies and initiatives taken by stakeholders involved in cooperation, defined in line with geographical and thematic diagnoses to achieve certain objectives. These strategies are necessary as they promote the desire of stakeholders to take action, beyond mere ad hoc initiatives, and to be involved for the future of cross-border territories.

More widely, the level of cross-border strategic reflection, subject to many restrictions concerning the development and implementation, is rather weak. Whilst the cross-border perspective appears to be a cross-cutting issue, touching on many political sectors and additionally having a territorial dimension, it generally remains a marginal strategic concern for institutional stakeholders. Moreover, sectorial strategic initiatives are predominant in the cross-border perspective faced with integrated development plans. Finally, there are several strategic scales (local, regional, border, macro-regional/trans-national) for which multi-level articulation is difficult and which are primarily developed over the short-term, although there are many examples of mid-/long-term strategies.

FUNDING

The INTERREG cooperation programmes are generally the key funding mechanism for cross-border projects, well beyond the credits allocated by local authorities in the frame of their own policies. Given the amounts at stake, these programmes generally exclude heavy investments in infrastructure.

First the analysis of ten cross-border cooperation programmes at the French borders² revealed the existence of a great potential for improvement in the development of these programmes. Subsequently, although the composition of the programme steering partnership is extremely diverse and the issue of perimeters and sub-assemblies is extremely complex, the financing priorities are rather standardised. Finally, it can be noted that there is a lack of articulation between INTERREG programmes and other European programmes and a reduced place for funding mechanisms outside of the INTERREG programme. Common funds implemented by partner institutions exist in the framework of bilateral or multilateral agreements, but these are relatively limited in terms of financial amounts, aside for large development projects and major investment projects. In this regard, the involvement of local authorities notably takes place through contribution to INTERREG projects, in comparison to other sources of funding.

² France (Channel)-UK (FR-UK), Two Seas (FR-UK-BE-NL), France-Wallonia-Vlaanderen (FR-BE), Greater Region (FR-BE-LUX-DE), Upper Rhine (FR-DE-CH), France-Switzerland, ALCOTRA (FR-IT), Italy-France Maritime, POCTEFA (FR-ES-AN), Amazonia (FR-BR-SU).

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CONCLUSIONS

The articulation between governance mechanisms, strategies and instruments for funding cross-border cooperation is rather limited. First of all, some institutional stakeholders and governance structures do not have precise cross-border strategies. They have a short-term vision of their cross-border initiatives, in line with individual projects and joint competences. Subsequently, the articulation of cooperation strategies and INTERREG programmes is insufficient. Generally speaking, these programmes have a largely reduced strategic dimension which does not go beyond funding axes with a wide scope for intervention. Finally, the cross-border cooperation governance is largely structured by the framework of INTERREG programmes, in terms of the schedule, funding, issues for cooperation and partners involved.

However, the trend towards articulation of the three dimensions studied (governance, strategies and funding) is positive and bringing them together in this manner may only be encouraged by the guidelines of the cohesion policy for 2014-2020, which is aimed at bolstering the strategic dimension of territorial cohesion and local development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The diagnosis has allowed for twenty recommendations to be drafted, developed in three sections, aiming successively at general principles, the French organisational framework and the 2014-2020 cohesion policy.

- 1. Consolidate the articulation between strategy, governance and funding**
- 2. Integrate the cross-border perspective into the mainstream public policies**
- 3. Bolster multi-level cross-border governance**
- 4. At local level, consolidate the role of local authorities and groupings in the construction of cross-border regions**
- 5. At regional level, consolidate the strategic role of regions, in association with other local authorities and cross-border groupings**
- 6. At national level, ensure the supervision and monitoring of issues related to borders**
- 7. Identify cross-border referents in each ministry**
- 8. Establish an interministerial cross-border steering committee**
- 9. Appoint border referent prefects**
- 10. Bolster the observation of cross-border issues**
- 11. Consolidate the position of cross-border cooperation in the Partnership Agreement**
- 12. Ensure the coherence between Partnership Agreements of France and neighbouring States concerning aspects related to cross-border cooperation**
- 13. Respect the principle of partnership in drafting and monitoring the Partnership Agreement**
- 14. Give a cross-border dimension to diagnoses of the Partnership Agreement and cooperation programmes**
- 15. Implement the integrated tools for territorial development**
- 16. Improve the development process of programmes**
- 17. Implement coordination mechanisms between Funds and programmes**
- 18. Better distinguish different types of projects**
- 19. Improve the implementation of programmes**
- 20. Consolidate the tools for capitalisation and networking**

