

## “Borders are the Scars of History”? Cross-border Co-operation in Europe – the Example of the EUREGIO

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Cross-border co-operation is nowadays one of the most important policy areas of the European Union. The INTERREG program serves as structural funds for the promotion of cross-border co-operation within the European Union and it is one of the main instruments of European cohesion and regional policy in order to settle differences in the development of European regions and to strengthen the economic cohesion within the EU. Between 2014 and 2020 a budget of 6,6 billion Euro is exclusively provided for cross-border co-operation in the border regions of the EU.<sup>1</sup> The objectives are both economic and political by creating economic synergy effects on the one hand, and by strengthening the community spirit within the EU on the other. Within the Community borders should lose their separating character as geographical, political and linguistic barriers. The historical narrative of European integration as a project for peace and “unity in diversity” goes hand in hand with the idea of breaking down tollgates at the border crossing points and the creation of a Europe without borders. Literature on cross-border initiatives often uses the catchy metaphor of borders as “scars of history” which shall be an allusion to the wounds caused by the excesses of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalism and the creation of border lines that separated previously entwined regions.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that cross-border co-operation is one of the more generously funded EU-policy fields today and regulated by EU law, it was modest in the beginnings and far away from being a distinct EC initiative. As a regional activity it challenged the nation state’s responsibilities for foreign and international policy. For the EC cross-border co-operation initially was a blind spot and it acted surprisingly reluctant. It were indeed the regional actors who fostered the idea of building Europe via the regions and to promote particularly the cross-border co-operation in the border regions. The communities were pioneers when they established a Mayor’s Union in 1950 already, at first for Franco-German reconciliation and then for European co-operation with the aim of institutionalizing partnerships between towns and municipalities.<sup>3</sup> In 1957, the Council of Europe took the initiative of a European Municipal

1. See on the official website of the EU Commission [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/de/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/de/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/). Not mentioned the supplementary contributions to the European Neighbourhood Policy and other cross-border measures.
2. AAM [Archive Alfred Mozer, Institute for International History, Amsterdam] 114, First Alfred Mozer, typed manuscript, 26.11.1971; AAM 116, Alfred Mozer erläutert die “Euregio“-Idee, Interview in: *Congress*, 2(1975), p.21. See also V. FREIHERR VON MALCHUS, *Partnerschaft an europäischen Grenzen. Integration durch grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit*, Europa Union Verlag, Bonn, 1975, pp.14 f. and finally the official rhetoric of the working community of the border regions in Europe: [www.aebr.net](http://www.aebr.net).
3. L. FILIPOVÁ, *Erfüllte Hoffnung. Städtepartnerschaften als Instrument der deutsch-französischen Aussöhnung, 1950-2000*, V&R, Göttingen, 2015, p.12.

Conference to lay the grounds for regional co-operation across borders. The local actors seemed to be best placed to act as true Europeans in contrast to the national governments. In 1966, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recommended to allow co-operation between the regions by means of legal cross-border contracts. It required over one decade to fix this idea in the Framework Agreement of Madrid in 1980 which was however not binding.<sup>4</sup> In the context of EC policy regional policy gained more importance as part of the European Regional Development Fund set up in 1975 initially to better include poor and structurally weak regions, albeit this did not include transnational regions. The financial instrument of INTERREG was implemented in 1990 with incrementally growing budgets. The Territorial Agenda of 2007 created a legal frame and broader strategy for promoting a balanced spatial development in peripheral regions by means of constituting “trans-national functional regions”.<sup>5</sup>

What is characteristic for the implementation of cross-border co-operation is the fact that the initiators were local or regional representatives or civil actors. When starting in the 1950s the initiative gained momentum within the core countries of European integration, in particular in the Benelux, Germany and France. In this context, the EUREGIO is one of the oldest cross-border initiatives which originated in the year 1958. For most of the following co-operation forms it served as a model and as a catalyst for the idea of cross-border co-operation and inspired further foundations of euro-regions. The Dutch-German-Belgian border area was in a vanguard of constructing Euregios that followed deliberately the EUREGIO example by content as well as by naming.<sup>6</sup> The cross-border co-operation went on step-by-step. Until the end of the 1970s just twenty Euregios and similar structures had been established at the internal borders of the European Community. During the 1980s the number slightly increased by twelve regions whereas the 1990s saw a veritable boom of cross-border regions. After the fall of the Iron Curtain 54 foundations were to be announced primarily – albeit not only – on the borders of Central and Eastern Europe that were expected to become members of the EC/EU. The currently 185 border and cross-border regions are band together in the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) as umbrella organization that covers a variety of forms of cross-border co-

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4. M. KLATT, *Common, Cross-Border Regional History as an Approach to People-to-People Cooperation and Cross-Border Regional Integration*, in: M. HURD (ed.), *Borderland Identities: Territory and Belonging in Central, North and East Europe*, Förlags ab Gondolin, Eslöv, 2006, pp.109-146, here: 115 f.
  5. S.M. BÜTTNER, *Mobilisierte Regionen. Zur Bedeutungsaufwertung des subnationalen Raums in einem erweiterten Europa*, in: U. JUREIT, N. TIETZE (eds), *Postsouveräne Territorialität. Die Europäische Union und ihr Raum*, Hamburger Edition, Hamburg 2015, pp.210-229.
  6. The Euregio Rhine-Waal (1971), the Euregio Meuse-Rhine (1976), the Ems-Dollart-Region (1977), and the Euregio Rhine-Meuse-Nord (1978). EUREGIO without additional geographical denomination remains the privilege of the first foundation.

operation.<sup>7</sup> Among them the Euregios have the strongest forms of institutionalization and liability which have in common their relatively small-scaled geographic dimension and often a shared tradition and entangled history. Other cross-border regions are of larger scale, less institutionalized, pursue different objectives and have established various forms of co-operation. Actors and actor levels can differ remarkably. The denominations show a variety of naming: despite the already mentioned Euregios there are so-called Euroregions, Eurodistricts, Large-scale Cross-border Co-operation, the European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation or large-scale spaces as the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Alps Adriatic Committee, the Upper Rhine Conference or the Euroregion Black Sea with 10 members, some of them non-EU countries.<sup>8</sup> Each of these cross-border regions is unique in its formation process, in its history and objectives. The necessary systematic comparison and historical analysis are still in its early stages.<sup>9</sup> This is all the more surprising as the cross-border regions are located in the contested field of region, nation and Europe. Research has to be done on the interaction between these fields to examine the role of the cross-border regions in the European multi-level system. Some scholars have recently pointed out the emergence of a new form of post-sovereign territoriality beyond the nation-state for which the cross-border regions might serve as a sound example.<sup>10</sup>

Right from the origins, the Euregios formed a self-perception as “laboratory” or “experimental field” and the “motor” of European integration.<sup>11</sup> Research findings differ with regard to the importance of regions on the whole and of transnational regions in particular.

Some scholars hold the view that regions are “nur in begrenztem Maße politischfähig” (capable of formulating a policy to a limited extent) as long as they do not dispose of appropriate corporate forms and functions in order to be able to be active politically.<sup>12</sup> Others complain that in particular the cross-border regions do not fulfil their self-view of “laboratories of Europe” due to their basically national organised intergovernmental and precisely not supranational structure. The Governance within the Euregios is often characterised by quarrels on competence, misunderstandings

7. For the development of regional cross-border co-operation see the data in: ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN BORDER REGIONS (AEBR) (ed.), *Zusammenarbeit Europäischer Grenzregionen. Bilanz und Perspektiven*, Nomos, Baden-Baden 2008, pp.46 f. as well as the constantly updated interactive map on the website of the AEBR, [Http://www.aebr.eu/de/mitglieder\\_karte.php](http://www.aebr.eu/de/mitglieder_karte.php) (20.08.2016).

8. For categorization see *ibid.*

9. See however now: B. WASENBERG et al., *Die territoriale Zusammenarbeit in Europa. Eine historische Perspektive*, Amt für Veröffentlichungen der Europäischen Union, Luxemburg, 2015.

10. Contributions in: U. JUREIT, N. TIETZE (eds), *op.cit.*

11. See for instance the discussions in: Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Rheinland, NW 400, Nr. 202, Empfehlungen aufgestellt von der Konferenz aus Vertretern der auftraggebenden Ministerien und Gebietskörperschaften, 25.06.1969.

12. W. LOTH, *Regionale, nationale und europäische Identität im Wandel der Staatlichkeit*, in: *Essener Unikate*, 14(2009), pp.30-37, here: p.30.

and institutional asymmetries of co-operation.<sup>13</sup> A second group of researchers, however, qualifies regions as not being a peripheral phenomenon but on the contrary attributes centrality to them.<sup>14</sup> Normally, the angle of vision for borders and border regions were defined by the centre of the nation state. The plea is now to turn the viewpoint and to regard the centre through the angle of the peripheral region. What does it do with the centre of the state and in how far is it able to influence and modify the centre? In this way, border regions do not serve as passive objects of history but do behave as actors of their own rank.

### Borders as a research subject

“Borders are booming” is one of the judgements of recent research on borders and border areas.<sup>15</sup> There is a number of reasons, among them the secular caesura of 1989/90 and the subsequent reinforced process of globalisation with the gradually loss of importance of the nation state. More and more, territorial borders become porous or even vanish in many fields.<sup>16</sup> The process of European integration is certainly the best example, namely the creation of the Single Market that necessarily requires the removal of borders. Of course, the elimination of physical barriers does not automatically translate to the abolition of all mental or legal-administrative barriers. Furthermore, the loss of meaning of internal Community borders comes along with new forms of border regimes at the external Community borders. In this respect, borders indeed still play a large role in Europe and have become a contested field in European debates. Borders still matter and as a result cross-border co-operation will be of ever-widening interest for European policy as well as for research on European integration.

Essentially, the history of international relations has something to do with borders. The existence of the sovereign territorial states depends inherently on the existence of borders as an unquestioned fact. Meanwhile, this essentialist stance is partly overruled and widely replaced by a constructivist approach inspired by research on nation and nationalism. Assumed that the nation-state is an invention or an imagined com-

13. T. CHILLA, *Grenzüberschreitende Verflechtung – ein Fall von postsouveräner Raumentwicklung?*, in: U. JUREIT, N. TIETZE (eds), op.cit., pp.191-209.
14. P. THER, *Das Europa der Regionen*, in: *OWEP*, 1(2009), in: <https://www.owep.de/artikel/701/europa-regionen>, previously A. PAASI, *Constructing Territories, Boundaries and Regional Identities*, in: T. FORSBERG (ed.), *Contested territory: border disputes at the edge of the former Soviet empire*, Edward Elgar, Alderhot, 1995, pp.42-61, here: p.45.
15. É. FRANÇOIS, J. SEIFAHRT, B. STRUCK, *Grenzen und Grenzräume. Erfahrungen und Konstruktion*, in: Ibid. (eds), *Die Grenze als Raum, Erfahrung und Konstruktion: Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen vom 17. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt, 2007, pp.7-33, here: p.77.
16. Ibid. Further examples: R. BAVAJ, *Was bringt der "spatial turn" der Regionalgeschichte? Ein Beitrag zur Methodendiskussion*, in: *Westfälische Forschungen*, 56(2006), pp.457-484, here: pp. 477 f.

munity, then this must be applied to the nation-state’s borders as well.<sup>17</sup> This view is held by historians as well as by geographers or other disciplines involved. The spatial turn in historiography or sociology went along with a cultural turn in geography.<sup>18</sup> The studies of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre have a pioneering role in the discussion of space. According to him space is a social product which can be described in a conceptual triad of (1) spatial practice of a society, (2) representations of space created by scientists, planners and social engineers and (3) representational spaces: “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols”.<sup>19</sup>

Current research and debate is standing on the shoulders of previous scholars. In sociology it was Georg Simmel who already had described the border as a sociological fact that is shaped by human.<sup>20</sup> The French historian of the *Annales* School, Lucien Febvre, in his famous book on the Rhine held the view that borders are not limited to their official function for the territorial integrity of a nation state, but as a highly emotionally loaded social construction that created ‘otherness’ beyond the border by stressing the differences in ethnic, linguistic and cultural terms.<sup>21</sup> By the same token, the French geographer Jacques Ancel in 1938 did not describe the border in terms of a dividing line between two different cultures, but as a social space with a distinct binational ‘border society’.<sup>22</sup> In principle, the results of the German “Kulturraumforschung” thought along similar lines by doing research on cross-border cultural areas. The differences lay in the conclusions of their findings that were embedded in a clearly revisionist stance. The “Westforschung” summarily declared the Rhine as part of “geographical Germany” from the spring to the mouth of the river. The modern methodological approach of transgressing borders in intellectual thinking was poisoned by postulation of new borders along the asserted spaces of Germanic culture, race and language which should comprise the Benelux and parts of France.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from this tradition of (self-)instrumentalization of researchers in Germany it remains the central finding that the border should not be interpreted as a dividing line, but as contact zone and space of an own specific character. It forms a hybrid spatiality, real and imagined at the same time. Borders in their effects and functions are at least ambivalent or even a sort of paradox. For one side, the border creates political, social and cultural distinctions between two societies. At the same time, however, the border produces networks and interaction systems that do not only go

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17. A. PAASI, *Constructing Territories...*, op.cit.; pioneering and widely received: B. ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1991.
  18. C. DIPPER, L. RAPHAEL, “Raum” in der Europäischen Geschichte, in: *Journal of Modern European History*, 9(2011), pp.27-41.
  19. H. LEFEBVRE, *The Production of Space*, Wiley, Oxford, 1991 [first published in 1974], p.39.
  20. G. SIMMEL, *Der Raum und die räumliche Ordnung in der Gesellschaft*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1908, Wiederabdruck in: M EIGMÜLLER, G. VOBRUBA (eds), *Grenzsoziologie. Die politische Strukturierung des Raumes*, Springer, Wiesbaden, 2006, pp.15-24.
  21. L. FEBVRE, *Der Rhein und seine Geschichte*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt, 2006. [first published in 1931].
  22. J. ANCEL, *Géographie des frontières*, Gallimard, Paris, 1938, pp.182 f.
  23. B. HENKENS, A. KNOTTER (eds), *De “Westforschung” en Nederland*, special issue of *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis*, Assen, 2005.

across the border but even are induced by its existence. Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel distinguish between “interdependent borderlands” where contacts and communication are very tight, and “integrated borderlands” characterized by removal of all physical barriers. The other extreme would be “alienated borderlands” without any cross-border contacts or “coexistent borderlands” with rudimentary forms of exchange.<sup>24</sup> The synchronic description of types of borderlands can at the same time be rediscovered in each border region in a diachronic perspective. Existing networks can be dissolved during the process of nation state building, and then in case of the border being an accepted social reality once again to be recreated in new forms under the auspices of a borderland society.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the question is about the geographical dimension of the border region: How far does a borderland reach into the interior of a country? Where does the borderland end and where does the hinterland begin?<sup>26</sup>

### Transnational co-operation in border regions

Cross-border co-operation became prominent as a research topic since the late 1990s.<sup>27</sup> According to the common definition of transnational regional science cross-border co-operation is defined as “cross-border interactions between neighbouring or non-neighbouring regions and their actors without intermediate interventions of the respective nation states”.<sup>28</sup> This definition includes inter-territorial regions that must not necessarily be connected by borders. To define the Euroregions it is obligatory to refer to them as a form of “neighbourly co-operation in all spheres of life between adjacent areas, regional and/or municipal or other authorities in border areas”.<sup>29</sup> A regional research focus is on the cross-border co-operation in the Franco-German border regions, in particular the Upper Rhine.<sup>30</sup> The Dutch-German border region

24. M. BAUD, W. van SCHENDEL, *Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands*, in: *Journal of World History*, 2(1997), pp.211-242, esp.p.220.

25. *Ibid.*, pp.223 f. He speaks of embryonic borderland, then adolescent borderland followed by the phase of the adult borderland and at least a declining or defunct borderland.

26. *Ibid.*, p.221.

27. G. BRUNN, P. SCHMITT-EGNER (eds), *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in Europa. Theorie – Empirie – Praxis*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 1998.

28. P. SCHMITT-EGNER, *Die “Europäische Kompetenz von Regionen” – ein Paradigma des Transnationalen Regionalismus?*, in: *Interregiones*, 5(1996), p.16.

29. J. GABBE, *Europäische Modelle interregionaler und grenzüberschreitender Kooperation*, in: *Interregiones*, 6(1997), p.7.

30. See the results of an interdisciplinary research project at the University of Strasbourg in co-operation with the Euro Institute in Kehl: B. WASSEBERG, J. BECK (eds), *Vivre et penser la coopération transfrontalière*, 6 vol., Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2010-2014. Questions of method and other regional examples are also involved.

has already become subject of several studies. Some adopt a comparative perspective,<sup>31</sup> others put the focus on the EU financial instruments<sup>32</sup> or the place of cross-border regions in the system of European Multi-level-governance.<sup>33</sup> For several reasons, the history of regional co-operation in the European border regions has on the whole been relatively rarely discussed.<sup>34</sup> One of them is the usually 30-year period of blocking the access to official archival sources. In addition to that, researchers have to consult a series of very disparate archives to get information on cross-border co-operation. Normally, there is no single cross-border administrative body providing the required sources. It is rather a number of public archives on the European, national, regional or municipal level and private archives, business archives or of chambers of industry and commerce.

In addition, the issue is a sort of falling through all the cracks. The transnational history scarcely deals with transregional history. European integration history is hardly interested in the history of regions and cross-border regions since research on these small-scale spaces has a little flavour of provinciality. The actors normally are not high-rank national politicians which is particularly problematic for a diplomatic history with a bias towards high-level politics. Cross-border co-operation is not at first about the nation state and its representatives, but to a greater degree about local or regional authorities and actors as mayors and regional planners, semi-public actors or representatives of civil society that are acting in a complex mixture.<sup>35</sup> However, it is the micro-historical perspective that seems to be appropriate to better find out the motives, patterns of action and strategies of the actors on various levels. “The return of the concrete space”, as the German scholar Jürgen Osterhammel pointed out, “draws the attention from the diplomatic actions and world political strategies to

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31. S. RAICH, *Grenzüberschreitende und interregionale Zusammenarbeit in einem "Europa der Regionen": dargestellt anhand der Fallbeispiele Saar-Lor-Lux, EUREGIO und "Vier Motoren für Europa". Ein Beitrag zum europäischen Integrationsprozess*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 1995; K. BÖTTGER, *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in Europa: Erfolge und Misserfolge der Kooperation am Beispiel der EUREGIO (Rhein-Ems-Ijssel), der Euregio Maas-Rhein und der Euro-region Neisse-Nisa-Nysa*, Europ. Zentrum für Föderalismus-Forschung, Tübingen, 2006.
  32. V. MÜLLER, *INTERREG I und II – Eine Bilanz am Beispiel der EUREGIO*, Diss., Shaker Verlag, Aachen, 2009.
  33. M. PERKMANN, *The Emergence and Governance of Euroregions: the case of the EUREGIO on the Dutch-German Border*, Paper presented at the workshop: Euregions: experiences and lessons, University of Barcelona, 2005 <<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace-jspui/bitstream/2134/743/3/EUREGIO.pdf>> (10.8.2015); Ibid., *Cross-border regions in Europe. Significance and drivers of regional cross-border cooperation*, in: *European and Regional Studies*, 10(2003), pp.153-171; Ibid., *Globalization, Regionalization and Cross-Border Regions*, Palgrave, Houndmills/Basingstoke, 2003.
  34. For Ems-Dollart see M. MOLEMA, *European Integration from below: the Construction of the Ems-Dollart Region, 1964-1978*, in: *Journal of European Integration History*, 2(2011), pp.271-283.
  35. C. BRÜLL, *Europäische Integration und Europa der Regionen. Überlegungen zur Geschichte der grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit in den Beziehungen Belgiens und Nordrhein-Westfalens*, in: *Geschichte im Westen*, 30(2015), pp.127-144; M. LIBERA, *Les recherches historiques sur la coopération transfrontalière dans l'espace du Rhin supérieur*, in: J. BECK, B.WASSENBERG, *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit leben und erforschen*, vol.5: *Integration und (trans-)regionale Identitäten*, Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2008, pp.101-114.

the concreteness of regional and local conditions”.<sup>36</sup> It demonstrates the significance of dissolution and deterritorialization in the modern time. Borders are migration zones, settlement areas, subject to international policy and indicators for the change of statehood and territoriality. To concentrate on border regions therefore does not mean a further super specialization, but to deal with a small object of a greater history and major issues of historiography as mentioned above.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, the micro-history of border regions tells us about history and the state of the European integration process. Today, the border regions cover about 30 percent of the EU’s territory with about 30 percent of the EU’s inhabitants living there. The importance of border regions and their policy is evidently by the sheer dimension of the phenomenon. They can be seen as role model for European integration with regard to economic, political, administrative or legal forms of co-operation. They can also be qualified as a laboratory for all forms of co-operation which are not communitarized yet, for instance, on the field of social legislation. They play a pivotal role as a hinge between two or more different national systems.<sup>38</sup> They represent a “Europe in miniature”, as the Dutch PM Joop den Uyl had put it.<sup>39</sup> In the following chapters the history of the EUREGIO Rhine-Ems-Ijssel shall serve as an example for the difficulties that the actors of cross-border co-operation had to face in the beginnings. I will briefly outline the first ideas and steps of collaboration, the actors involved and their ideas and motives as well as the outcomes of this first cross-border co-operation within the EC. Cross-border co-operation, I would argue, is not only a side effect of European integration, but more a precondition for the deepening of European co-operation within the EC/EU.

### The EUREGIO: From difficult beginnings to a “role model” for cross-border co-operation

The initial situation in the subsequent EUREGIO region and in most other border regions has some recurrent characteristics. Usually, these spaces, peripheral to their national centre, are structurally weak and normally share the same problems on both sides of the border. Although it seemed natural to try in cross-border co-operation they were lacking any single competence to act. Spatial planning and regional de-

36. J. OSTERHAMMEL, *Raumbeziehungen. Internationale Geschichte, Geopolitik und historische Geographie*, in: W. LOTH, J. OSTERHAMMEL (eds), *Internationale Geschichte. Themen – Ergebnisse – Aussichten*, Oldenbourg, München, 2000, pp.287-308, here: p.291.

37. *Ibid.*, p.302.

38. J. BECK, *La coopération transfrontalière, objet de recherche interdisciplinaire. Quelques réflexions sur un programme de travail scientifique*, in: B. WASSENBERG (dir.), *Vivre et penser la coopération transfrontalière*, vol.1: *Les régions transfrontalières françaises*, Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, pp.34-46.

39. J. VAN DEN UYL, *Ein Europa im Kleinen schaffen. Mozer-Kommission kann weiter im Grenzgebiet arbeiten*, in: *Münstersche Zeitung*, 28.04.1975.

velopment were exclusively of national concern, for which the intervention of another state was taboo and inconceivable to do spatial planning for the territory of the neighbouring state.<sup>40</sup> *De facto*, cross-border co-operation was a kind of foreign policy on a small-scale. However, it is well-known that international policy is the *domaine réservé* of the nation state governments. Loose forms of co-operation or non-binding meetings were uncomplicated as long as they would not end in consolidation and sustainable forms of co-operation. The nation states had high barriers for institutionalized cross-border activities. When the jurisdiction of one state is not allowed to be applied to another, the solution is in the creation of independent international institutions or co-operation treaties between the respective national administrations. Even then it remained the question of how to find an adequate legal form for the unprecedented case of transnational co-operation in borderlands. There was neither a transnational legal instrument nor a sort of European law of association that would allow establishing a legal form of cross-border co-operation. That is the reason why the grouping under the conditions of one national law was the solution that was applied. It was then the decision between the form of a registered association in accordance with German law (“eingetragener Verein”) or a Dutch “Stichting”.<sup>41</sup> The nonexistence of a legal personality for these forms of co-operation was a practical problem for all cross-border initiatives.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, the differences in the administrative regional and municipal structures and responsibilities in each nation state made it more challenging to establish cross-border regional governance. As a result, it was difficult to obtain an actor constellation in which all partners involved disposed over the same rank and responsibilities. The Dutch provinces and their competences, for example, are not comparable with the German federal state’s Länder. In the Dutch system of State – Province – Municipality, the latter were rather strongly oriented towards a more centralistic state level. Spatial planning was on the whole not pooled in one distinct policy within the regional or local administration, but a section of fields as housing, transport, agriculture etc. In the Federal Republic of Germany, on the other hand, Bund – Land – Regierungsbezirk (administrative region) – Municipality were four levels with clearly defined competences in the field of spatial planning following the principle of subsidiarity.<sup>43</sup>

In the case of EUREGIO, the initiators and actors were the municipalities and the regional authorities on both sides of the German-Dutch border who came together in a first cross-border conference in 1958. This was the starting point of a long-lasting

40. T. CHILLA, op.cit., p.198.

41. Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Rheinland, NW 736, Nr. 346, Erstes Europäisches Symposium der Grenzregionen. Die Zusammenarbeit europäischer Grenzgebiete, Straßburg, 1972.

42. Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Rheinland, NW 400, Nr. 202 (see fn. 11).

43. Grenzüberschreitende Beteiligung in der Euregio Rhein-Waal. Eine Übersicht der grenzüberschreitenden Beteiligungsmöglichkeiten bei Aufstellungsverfahren von nationalen, regionalen und kommunalen Plänen mit räumlicher Relevanz sowie Genehmigungen, die sich daraus ergeben, 1995.

cross-border co-operation in this region.<sup>44</sup> The principal actor on the German side was an initiative group consisting of municipal decision-makers (Kommunale Interessengemeinschaft Rhein-Ems). On the Dutch side it were two equivalents, the Gemeenschap Twente Oost-Gelderland and the Samenwerkingsverband Oost Gelderland. Consequently, a territory in the German-Dutch border region between the rivers Rhine, Ems and IJssel was covered which enclosed in Germany parts of North Rhine-Westphalia and a very small part of Lower Saxony: the Landkreis Grafschaft Bentheim and the Münsterland with the districts of Borken and Coesfeld. On the Dutch side it covered parts of the provinces Gelderland and Overijssel (the Regions Achterhoek, Twente and municipalities from the provinces of Overijssel and Drenthe).<sup>45</sup> They decided to henceforth co-operate by combining their strength and know-how to give voice to their common interests. In 1965 they chose the neologism EUREGIO as name. In 1966, the first Dutch-German EUREGIO working group was founded. Secretarial and staff positions were delegated from the municipalities' administrations and were settled on three sites.<sup>46</sup>

The starting point for concrete co-operation projects were the results of a jointly commissioned study that was to collect data and facts about the region, to evaluate the problems and finally to draw up proposals. The three municipal organisations hoped to gather arguments in order to put forward substantial claims in the regional and national governments as well as in Brussels.<sup>47</sup> It were the actors on a local level that articulated the special problem situations of – as they felt it – forgotten peripheral regions: Rural, sparsely populated areas suffering from a massive loss of jobs in the textile and agricultural sector with declining population despite high birth rates; a level of prosperity significantly below the national level; a poor infrastructure with regard to connecting the sub-regions to the national transport system as well as between the two sub-regions; and the most significant missing in the social infrastructure in particular in the fields of education and health care.

For the initiators of the study it clearly touched a sore spot and gave evidence of “how national borders were a break” for economic ties by reducing the catchment areas of the border towns. It was obvious that the existing development potentials were under these circumstances unable to completely develop the full scope of their activities. The border regions were expected not to be able to solve problems by their own efforts: “An active restructuring of the study area that is characterized by attractive agglomerations cannot be achieved by a cure to the symptoms, but only by a causal therapy”. A self-sustaining growth could only be generated when the “barrier effect” of the border would be abolished and the hitherto existing peripheral national

44. M. KOHLE, *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit im deutsch-niederländischen Gebiet EUREGIO*, in: *Neues Archiv für Niedersachsen: Zeitschrift für Stadt-, Regional- und Landesentwicklung*, 1(2000), pp.79-101, here: p.83.

45. The map of today's EUREGIO [http://www.euregio.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/EUREGIO%20Karte\\_EUREGIO%20kaart.pdf](http://www.euregio.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/EUREGIO%20Karte_EUREGIO%20kaart.pdf).

46. Enschede, Gronau and Doetinchem, each of them the seat of the local authorities.

47. AAM 114, Strukturuntersuchung Twente-Oostgelderland, Westmünsterland, Grafschaft Bentheim, Kurzfassung, hg.v. der Kommunalgemeinschaft Rhein-Ems, [undated].

situation of the border region be transformed into a favourable inner European border.<sup>48</sup> Alone, the means and resources of the regional actors were limited. Even though the states disposed of a national regional policy there were no means intended for cross-border regions. National programs aimed at providing support for areas with specific structural problems. The so-called borderland funds (Grenzlandfond) had the purpose to fund border regions with problems arising from the specific border situation. Alone, these funds could only be applied to one – the German – side of the border and did not make provisions for cross-border projects.

Although in 1967 a German-Dutch commission for spatial planning had been launched, the effectiveness of this body of experts was limited. Conceptions of spatial planning were discussed and by that the existence of national differences, without finding an agreement about the premises and objectives of a development plan for the EUREGIO. On the whole, the regional planning commission could only make recommendations anyhow.<sup>49</sup> The regional policy of the European Community, of the other part, had no concrete strategies and financial instruments for the development of border areas. Even though the European Investment Bank provided funding to support targeted projects, no money was foreseen for a ‘holistic’ approach as the EUREGIO. The regional policy suffered from the fact that the Member States of the European Community considered this as an area that should lay in their own national responsibility. Cross-border spatial planning and initiatives fitted into no grid.

The measures and objectives that were held for necessary for the EUREGIO were very precise. Primarily, it was a question of creating a cross-border region by connecting the two sub-regions infrastructure. The development of the regional and national transport infrastructure was on the top of the agenda in order to establish a connection to the Federal motorways as well as the Regional Airport Twente. In general, the EUREGIO strove for more participation in regional development plans of German and Dutch administration. In more concrete terms the EUREGIO aimed at facilitating every-day life of the inhabitants of the border region concerning the so-called local border traffic for daily commuters as well as for consumers: the possibility to go into hospital on both sides of the border regardless of the respective nationality, for instance, the expanding of the opening hours for small checkpoints, establishing service centres for advice and consultation concerning all problems induced by the border – to refer to only some examples.<sup>50</sup> It was a pragmatic and practical program with a consistent orientation to the needs of administration, economic and civil society’s interests. But this was only one part of the story.

Furthermore, the EUREGIO actors pursued something like an idealistic goal which was qualified as the social-cultural dimension of cross-border co-operation.

48. Ibid., pp.11-12.

49. Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Rheinland, NW 379, Nr. 61, Ergebnisprotokoll der Mitgliederversammlung der Kommunalgemeinschaft Rhein-Ems, 23.05.1969.

50. J. GABBE, *EUREGIO – regionale grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit auf kommunaler Ebene*, in: *Staatsgrenzen überschreitende Zusammenarbeit des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Institut für Landes- und Stadtentwicklungsforschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (ILS), Dortmund, 1984, pp.87-95.

Previous studies had stressed an understanding of the border and the integration of border regions that was more complex than the sole elimination of custom barriers. This study confirmed the common perception of living in a cross-border region with almost identical structures and problems on both sides of the border. Nevertheless, the societies and mentalities differed remarkably and in a way that would hinder further development. The Dutch border population, for instance, was thought to be better “in adapting to the guiding principles of modern function society”.<sup>51</sup> The border region was hence regarded as a “crucial link” between the still different European national cultures and should serve as a role model for the ideal of European integration. The creation of a “euregional identity” was from then on one of the declared main objectives of the EUREGIO. For this, a cross-border commission for social-cultural exchange was established in 1970 that should take steps to bring individuals and people closer together to form a common cross-border region identity. This commission should consist of an equal number of Dutch and German local representatives and was foreseen as a body of experts that should develop initiatives and act by means of persuasion to win all the stakeholders for their projects. The commission was not empowered to take any measures at the expense of existing administrative local or regional authorities. It obtained an own but rather modest budget.<sup>52</sup>

Alfred Mozer, a German-Dutch retired EC official, who had settled down in the region was appointed as chairman. He was responsible for actively setting up a program and was soon accepted and respected by all sides. He led the Commission, which has been named after him, until his decease in 1979. And until today the Euregio Mozer-Commission plays a central role within EUREGIO structure. Mozer was an active lobbyist for the cross-border co-operation who subtly used his old contacts in Brussels.<sup>53</sup> His main driving force surely was European idealism, his tools were modern public relations work. He classified his measures in such for “general” and such for “targeted awareness building”. The Mozer commission was responsible for the publication of a bilingual glossy brochure which appeared six times a year in order to disseminate the whole idea and the projects of the EUREGIO to a wider public.<sup>54</sup> Newspaper articles about the EUREGIO were collected and put out in a collective publication. An agency was hired to design a EUREGIO logo that emblazoned on EUREGIO car stickers and key rings, a promotional film, EUREGIO posters, regional exhibitions etc. For schools a wall map of the EUREGIO should directly

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51. Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen. Abteilung Rheinland, NW 379, Nr. 61. ”Die Grenze – Trennung oder Begegnung?”. Recommendations of experts commissioned by the Dutch Ministerie van Cultuur, Recreatie en Maatschappelijk Werk (Marga Klompé) and German Bundesministerium für Jugend, Frauen und Gesundheit (Käte Strobel).
  52. 100,000 florins from the Dutch Ministry of Culture, Leisure and Social Order, 50,000 DM from the Federal Ministry for Youth, Women and Health and 50,000 DM from the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Land NRW, *ibid*.
  53. D. VON REEKEN, *Mozer, Alfred*, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 18 (1997), pp.246 f.; F. WIELENGA, *Alfred Mozer: Europeaan en democraat*, in: M. KROP et al. (eds), *Het twaalfde jaarboek voor het democratisch socialisme*, Amsterdam, 1991, pp.132-164 sowie P.J. WELLER, *Alfred Mozer (1905-1979). Portret van een strijdvaaarding Europeaan*, BA thesis, Leiden, 2010.
  54. AAM 114, 1(1972).

address the young generation as well as the annual German-Dutch youth exchange that was organized at Easter period or an annual EUREGIO sports day. Examples of further activities for targeted awareness building were the publication of a social insurance brochure for commuters, which informed about the different insurance systems. It had met with great success and appeared in several editions. To promote language learning a Dutch language course was prepared for the Volkshochschulen in the border region that should amongst others prepare to study at the Dutch Technical College of Twente.

Like Michael Billigs concept of “banal nationalism” these activities can be described as “banal regionalism”.<sup>55</sup> The “banal”, in a sense of everyday and discreet representations of the national as flags, anthems, sport events etc. are here adapted on the local level. Icons and symbols like the EUREGIO logo and common sports events can be interpreted as social representations of the regional in order to create a cross-border identity.<sup>56</sup> For the same purpose was designed a joint historical narrative about the historical origins of the EUREGIO according to which it was founded on the basis of a long shared history that rooted even in the Middle Ages. Only with the Congress of Vienna in 1815 a border had been built that nearly exactly matched the borders of the subsequent national borders between the Netherlands and Germany. In principle, however, the EUREGIO space had formed one linguistic, cultural and economic unite which even survived the building of territorial state borders. The lively exchange, migration processes and economic links were not eliminated. A common dialect, the “Twentse Plat” facilitated contacts between both sides of the border even during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until the Second World War there were religious, social and cultural relations and family ties between Dutch and German people that were then capped during and after the war. It was now that the border became a separating line. This historical narrative can be found in nearly all brochures and other self-representations of the EUREGIO as well as in a bilingual German-Dutch history book of the EUREGIO history for use in schools.<sup>57</sup> According to this narration the EUREGIO corresponds *au fond* to nothing else than to the restoration of a former, ‘natural’ situation.

Basically, it were these two strands that ran together in the cross-border co-operation of the EUREGIO: a quite pragmatic approach in order to improve people’s living conditions as well as an idealistic approach that aimed at creating a euregional identity. On the normative level such a process of identity formation may certainly

55. M. BILLIG, *Banal Nationalism*, Sage, London, 1995.

56. A. PAASI, *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness. The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*, Wiley, Chichester, 1996, pp. 70 f.

57. AAM 117, EUREGIO. Bericht über die Gesamtsituation 1975 anlässlich der Erhebung über die europäischen Grenzregionen des Ausschusses für Raumordnung und Kommunalfragen des Europarates. Report by Jens Gabbe, pp. 9 f.; Die Grenze – Trennung oder Begegnung. Report edited by EUREGIO-Mozer-Kommission, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, undated; AAM 119, EUREGIO – eine europäische Grenzregion und ein Programm, edited by EUREGIO/Gronau, 1978; EUREGIO. Materialien für die Sekundarstufe II. Lesmateriaal voor de bovenbouw van het voortgezet onderwijs. Geschiede – Geschiedenis, Gronau o.D., [1984].

be easily described. The more difficult is to answer the question of whether in Jacques Ancel's words a binational border society has actually been established. Some observations seem to present an obstacle to this, for example the development of the language skills in the border region. Increasingly rare is the number of young Dutch speaking German and vice versa the Dutch language skills of young Germans are even worse. Linguists consider dialect to have lost its former status as common basis for communication which has been replaced – as in the whole of Europe – by English.<sup>58</sup> Another indication is the difficult search for a common cultural memory. The strongest burden for German-Dutch relations was the period of German occupation during the Second World War. This put the relationship under strain for a long time.<sup>59</sup> It was not until May 1995 that the first EUREGIO commemoration of the day of liberation was held.<sup>60</sup>

In so far it is doubtful whether a strong institutionalization of cross-border cooperation as it can be asserted in the EUREGIO can always serve as a solid indicator for a special closeness and intensity in the relations. In fact, the deepening of cooperation and the process of institutionalization went forward step by step. In 1978, the EUREGIO Council was founded as a common parliament which consists of an equal number of representatives of the German and Dutch municipal councils.<sup>61</sup> It can be characterized as a “para-parliamentary institution” in so far that it does not have legislative competence but above all a consultative function.<sup>62</sup> The financial basis of the EUREGIO is ensured by contributions of the members (i.e. the municipalities and municipal associations) which is a certain amount per inhabitant (85 Pfennig in the middle of the 1980s). In 1985, the three offices have been merged in a joint secretariat in Gronau which employs a mixed Dutch and German staff. The work of the EUREGIO takes place in committees as the Committee for Economic Affairs and Labor, for Housing and Infrastructure, for Tourism and Leisure and finally for Education and Social Affairs. Until today the EUREGIO Mozer committee exists as a separate program with its own budget co-financed by the German Länder, the Dutch provinces and EUREGIO; its task consists of organizing the encounter between the EUREGIO inhabitants. The EUREGIO has gained a special expertise in the management of the INTERREG funds for all the German-Dutch Euregios and presents itself optionally as a “hub”, “platform” or “voice” of the border regions. Its procedures and tasks are in networking, advocacy, advice and information, project development and management. It has therefore become a kind of public service in terms of the

58. G. CORNELISSEN, *Politische Grenzen als Sprachgrenzen. Die deutsch-niederländische Grenze im Westen von Nordrhein-Westfalen*, in: *Geschichte im Westen*, 30(2015), pp.85-100, here: p.100.

59. F. WIELENGA, *Vom Feind zum Partner. Die Niederlande und Deutschland seit 1945*, Agenda Verlag, Münster, 2000; J. PEKELDER, *Neue Nachbarschaft. Deutschland und die Niederlande. Bildformung und Beziehungen seit 1990*, Agenda Verlag, Münster, 2013.

60. C. GUNDERMANN, *Zwischen "friedlicher Invasion" und "grenzoverschreitende herdenking". Erinnerungskulturen an den Zweiten Weltkrieg in der deutsch-niederländischen Grenzregion der EUREGIO*, in: *Geschichte im Westen*, 24(2009), pp.7-40.

61. For this and for further development, see V. MÜLLER, *25 Jahre EUREGIO-Rat. Rückblick auf die Arbeit eines politischen Gremiums im "kleinen Europa"*, EUREGIO, Gronau/Enschede, 2003.

62. M. PERKMANN, op.cit, p.165.

Euregios. In that capacity it is the central point of contact for all questions of border regions and for their promotion in the institutions of the EU. Surprisingly, the legal situation remained a problem for a long time. The EUREGIO was not a body of public law but an association under German private-law and was organized as German “eingetragener Verein”, which was a discriminatory situation for Dutch members. It was only in 2016 that this legal form could be changed into a German-Dutch special purpose association (Zweckverband). As a consequence the status of the Dutch municipalities improved within in the EUREGIO because they can now act as formal members.<sup>63</sup>

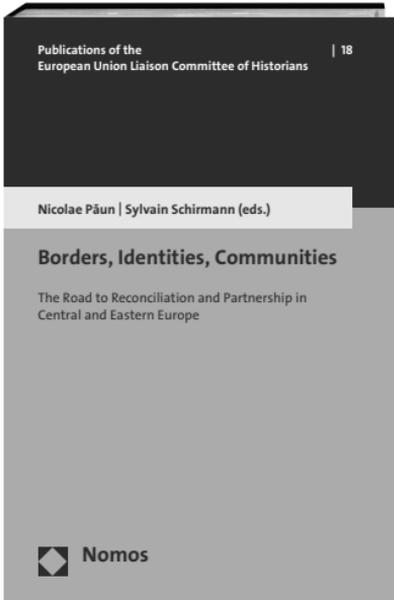
## Conclusion

The EUREGIO is a border region that has, according to the Baudel/van Schendel scheme, the characteristics of an integrated borderland gradually grown from the border heartland in its earlier times to a cross-border region that reaches far into the inland. In terms of Lefebvre it can be described as a perceived space, a designed space as well as a living space. It has played an important pioneering role and experimented with forms of co-operation that have been imitated in many cases and been adapted to the respective regional characteristics and requirements. The EUREGIO was initiated by different actors at local and regional level. Despite legal and administrative obstacles they managed to move forward gradually and to adopt a regional governance structure which consists of network-like, more or less strongly institutionalized forms of governance of regional development, in which meanwhile all actor levels, the local, regional, state and European level work together.<sup>64</sup> Compared to other cross-border co-operation forms the EUREGIO has developed a strong legal position basing on a complex administration and a parliament. Within the multi-level system of European governance the EUREGIO and all subsequently established forms of cross-border co-operation represent a distinct level. The EUREGIO, in particular, has an outstanding position as administrator of the INTERREG funds which is a prominent role within the financing of cross-border regions. In this respect, the EUREGIO has demonstrated a capacity of politics albeit the logic of action often remained national. Insofar and as it initially had developed independently with regard to Brussels it established its own method which is not a supranational Community method on the whole. Further historical research has to be done to understand the formation of this form of cross-border co-operation in all phases and to see more clearly the historical premises that lead to certain and in each case unique forms of co-operation. From that we can measure if cross-border co-operation is sustainable enough to save the idea of open internal EU-borders in the future.

63. <http://www.euregio.eu/de/%C3%BCber-euregio/geschichte>.

64. B. DENTERS, R. SCHOBLEN, A. VAN DER VEEN, *Governance of European Border Regions: a legal, economic and political science approach with an application to the Dutch-German and the Dutch-Belgian border*, in: G. BRUNN, P. SCHMITT-EGNER (eds), op.cit., pp.135-161.

# and Partnership



## Borders, Identities, Communities

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