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## **The rise of the Euroregion. A bird's eye perspective on European cross-border co-operation**

**Markus Perkmann**

### **Abstract**

The 1990s have seen a strong surge in the number of Euroregions and other cross-border regions all over Western and Eastern Europe. The article analyses the emergence of these local cross-border institutions in public governance by addressing their context, dimensions and causal underpinnings. First, it offers a brief background on the history of cross-border regions in Europe and related EU policies to support them. Second, it provides a conceptual definition of cross-border regions and their various forms and positions them within the wider context of other transnational regional networks. Third, it gives an overview on the quantitative incidence of various types of cross-border regions, including their frequency, geographic distribution and development over time. It concludes by linking cross-border regions and in particular, Euroregions, to institutional conditions in specific countries as well as the effects of European regional policy. It is argued that Euroregions have flourished because of their increasingly relevant role as implementation units for European regional policy in a context of multi-level governance.

### **Keywords:**

Cross-border region, cross-border co-operation, Euroregion, interregional co-operation, EU, Interreg.



There are more than seventy cross-border regions in Europe today, operating under names such as 'Euroregions', 'Euregios' or 'Working Communities'. Although some of these initiatives date back to the 1950s, the 1990s saw a large increase in cross-border regions (CBRs) all over Europe. In fact, today there are virtually no local or regional authorities in border areas that are not somehow involved in cross-border co-operation (CBC) initiatives.<sup>1</sup> The European Commission supports these initiatives with approximately €700m per year, complemented by a similar amount by European nation states.

These stylised facts indicate that cross-border regions (CBRs) deserve some attention in terms of their empirical significance, particularly in view of the recent boom and growing involvement of the EU authorities. They also seem to validate the qualitative evidence put forward under the labels of neoregionalism (Balme 1996b), the New Regionalism (Keating 1998; MacLeod 2001) or the Europe 'with' the regions (Kohler-Koch 1998).

Moreover, an increasing number of cross-border co-operation initiatives have been subject to case studies in the literature. Numerous authors have produced a wealth of work in various disciplines such as geography, political science, international relations, administrative science and sociology. However, a considerable part of the literature has strong normative inflections, arguing through involvement in cross-border regions local and regional communities can emancipate themselves vis-à-vis nation-state dominance (Cappellin 1992, Murphy 1993, Gonin 1994). As a result, these works tend to neglect the empirical analysis of actual cases and concentrate on normative prescriptions.

The more empirically focused literature makes useful contributions to the study of single cases from various disciplinary perspectives (Beck 1997: 118; Church and Reid 1999; Scott 1998; Blatter 2001; Perkmann and Sum 2002). However, the overall picture tends to remain opaque. As Anderson, a long-standing scholar of borders and border regions, notes, research agendas are more common than precisely formulated arguments and clear conclusions (Anderson 1997).

This article attempts to fill a noticeable gap in the literature by addressing three main issues.<sup>2</sup> First, it aims to clarify what CBRs exactly are and how this type of international co-operation relates to other ways of international involvement of non-central governments (NCGs)<sup>3</sup> in Europe. Because of the multi-disciplinary and therefore fragmented nature of the literature, a variety of concepts have been put forward, making it difficult to grasp the significance of various types of cross-border co-operation initiatives, such as Euroregions.

Secondly, on the basis of the conceptual clarifications put forward, the article intends to shed some light on the actual empirical significance of the CBR phenomenon in Europe as a whole. This includes the simple, but yet unanswered questions of how many initiatives there are and what characteristics they have. This serves to develop a macro-view on CBC that has been so far mainly been studied from micro-perspectives concentrating on single cases.

Thirdly, a few hypotheses on the determinants of CBC are put forward, both in terms of the impact of nation-state-specific variables as well as the role of EU policy-making in simultaneously promoting and shaping CBC.

In terms of methodology, the article adopts a mix of quantitative analysis, primary case study research and secondary evidence provided by the case study literature. A directory of European CBRs created by the author constitutes the core of the quantitative evidence while interpretive judgement is provided by the author's case study research over the period 1998-2000. A total of 42 interviews with individuals involved in CBC initiatives as well as EU regional policy was carried out. Additional evidence was gathered from secondary material as well as policy documents published by CBC bodies.

The arguments are presented in the following order. The introductory section offers an overview on CBC in Europe today and the facilitating supranational context. Subsequently, a definition of CBC is developed, derived from the main characteristics of CBC initiatives in the field. From this, the notion of 'cross-border region' is derived, with particular emphasis being placed on the notion of 'Euroregion'. To locate CBC activities in a wider context of interregional co-operation, their relationship to other types of such activities is explained.



In the second main section, the concepts are related to the empirical evidence primarily through an analysis of a database of CBRs compiled for this study, allowing for the identification of the aggregate patterns characterising European CBRs. The article concludes with two main hypotheses on the facilitating factors for CBC, addressing the role of nation-specific institutions as well as EU regional policy.

### **introduction: cross-border regions and their supranational context**

The first Euroregion, the EUREGIO, was established in 1958 on the Dutch-German border, in the area of Enschede (NL) and Gronau (DE). Since then, Euroregions and other forms of cross-border co-operation have developed throughout Europe. Today, in more than 70 cases, municipalities and regional authorities co-operate with their counterparts across the border in more or less formalised organisational arrangements.

For local and regional authorities, engaging in CBC means they enter a field long reserved for central state actors. For dealing with issues such as local cross-border spatial planning or transport policy, in the 1960s and 1970s various bi-lateral and multi-lateral governmental commissions were established without granting access to local authorities (Aykaç 1994). They dealt with issues such as local cross-border spatial planning and transport policy.

But over the last thirty years the scope for non-central governments (NCGs) to co-operate across borders has been widened considerably. To a large degree, this can be related to macro-regional integration in Europe. In particular, two supranational bodies, the Council of Europe<sup>4</sup> and the European Union, were important for improving the conditions under which NCGs could co-operate across borders. Whereas the Council of Europe has been particularly active in improving the legal situation, the Commission of the European Union provides substantial financial support for CBC initiatives.

Legally, the idea of an administrative body in charge of a subnational cross-border area is relatively difficult to implement. The first CBRs were based on agreements with varying degrees of formality and mostly relied on good will. The classical form of a Euroregion is the 'twin association': On each side of the border, municipalities and districts form an association according to a legal form suitable within their own national legal systems.<sup>5</sup> In a second step, the associations then join each other on the basis of a cross-border agreement to establish the Euroregion.

In 1980, on the initiative of the Council of Europe, a set of European countries concluded an international treaty, the so-called *Madrid Convention*, as a first step towards CBC structures based on public law. The convention has been signed by 20 countries and was recently updated with two Additional Protocols (Dolez 1996). It provides a legal framework for completing bi- and multinational agreements for public law CBC among NCGs. Examples for such agreements are the BENELUX Cross-border Convention of 1989 and the German-Dutch cross-border treaty of 1991. For instance, the Euroregion Rijn-Waal on the Dutch-German border has been such a cross-national public body since 1993. However, the decisions put forward by such agencies are binding only on the public authorities within the cross-border area concerned and not on civil subjects (Denters et al. 1998).

Compared with the Council of Europe, the CBC-related activities of the EU are primarily financial. Many CBC initiatives are eligible for support under the Interreg Community Initiative launched by the European Commission in 1990; this policy was re-confirmed as Interreg II in 1994 and as Interreg III in 1999.

The current programme is one among four *Community Initiatives*. These are a special type of programme over which the Commission exerts more control than the so-called *National Initiatives* designed by the Member States.

For the period 2000-2006, Interreg III has a budget of € 4.875b (1999 prices), corresponding to approximately 2.3 per cent of the total Cohesion Policy budget.<sup>6</sup> The programme relevant for CBRs is Interreg IIIA, stipulating that all local areas located on external<sup>7</sup> and internal land borders, as well as some maritime areas, are eligible for project support.

Interreg subsidises local cross-border projects undertaken collaboratively by local authorities and other organisations located in adjoining border areas. The objective is to develop cross-



border social and economic centres through common development strategies, with eligible projects being required to have a structural economic benefit to the border area.

The allocation of funds is governed by Steering Committees that involves local actors as well as higher-level authorities such as central states and/or regions from the participating countries. As Interreg is by far the most important source of funding for most CBC initiatives, they must comply with the modalities set out in the EU regulations. Therefore, effectively, many Euroregions function as implementation agencies for this specific type of transnational regional policy (Perkmann 2002b) .

It is symptomatic for the pathway of European integration in the post-war period, that the more legalistic approach favoured by the Council of Europe – proposing CBRs as formal politico-administrative entities – was later abandoned in favour of a more pragmatic and economically oriented approach within the context of EU regional policy.

### **a conceptual exploration: cross-border co-operation and cross-border regions**

Given the recent proliferation of inter-local and inter-regional activities, sometimes subsumed under the label of 'neo-regionalism' (Balme 1996b) , what precisely are cross-border regions? To answer this question, this section aims to develop a conceptual definition of both CBC and, subsequently, CBRs. This will serve, first, to designate those cases that actually constitute CBRs and secondly, to differentiate those cases from other, related forms of co-operation between regions.

As a first approximation, cross-border co-operation can be defined as *a more or less institutionalised collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders*. However, for practical and research purposes, this loose definition needs to be operationalised. This must consider those factors which are empirically important for constituting the phenomenon and distinguish it from other phenomena. It should also be able to accommodate differences among CBC initiatives, concerning their administrative set-up, the type of public authorities involved, and the sources/modes of finance (Groß and Schmitt-Egner 1994; Hassink et al. 1995) .

CBC can thus be defined according to the four following criteria:

First, as its main protagonists are always public authorities, CBC must be located in the realm of *public* agency. Second, CBC refers to a collaboration between *subnational* authorities in different countries whereby these actors are normally not legal subjects according to international law<sup>8</sup>. They are therefore not allowed to conclude international treaties with foreign authorities, and, consequently, CBC involves so-called 'low politics'. This is why CBC is often based on informal or 'quasi-judicial' arrangements among the participating authorities. Third, in substantive terms, CBC is foremost concerned with *practical problem-solving* in a broad range of fields of every-day administrative life. Fourth, CBC involves a certain *stabilisation* of cross-border contacts over time.

This definition of cross-border co-operation is more specific than the definition proposed by an important international legal framework, the 'Outline Convention' of the Council of Europe. The Convention defines 'transfrontier co-operation' as '... any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities and authorities within the jurisdiction of other Contracting parties and the conclusion of any agreement and arrangement necessary for this purpose.'<sup>9</sup>

The definition of CBC proposed here is inductively derived through empirical generalisation, avoiding any strong assumptions on the essence of 'regions' or 'border communities'. Such assumptions are, for instance, implicit in Schmitt-Egner's definition of 'cross-border co-operation' as 'cross-border interaction between neighbouring regions for the preservation, governance and development of their common living space, without the involvement of their central authorities' (Schmitt-Egner 1998: 63, my translation) . This definition assumes that there is an a-priori common living space while the evidence suggests that in many cases such common purposes are constructed by border communities in an ad-hoc manner.



## What are cross-border regions?

When does CBC generate a 'cross-border region'? The relevant literature reveals several connotations of 'CBR'. The definition adopted by the Council of Europe, for instance, states that cross-border regions are 'characterised by homogenous features and functional interdependencies because otherwise there is no need for cross-border co-operation' (CoE 1972: 29); in other words, a 'transfrontier region is a potential region, inherent in geography, history, ecology, ethnic groups, economic possibilities and so on, but disrupted by the sovereignty of the governments ruling on each side of the frontier' (CoE 1995)<sup>10</sup>. Concepts such as 'natural economic spaces' and 'natural economic territories' (Scalapino 1991) point into a similar direction, implicitly arguing for the existence of intermediate units of 'natural' economic development cutting through state borders (Ohmae 1995).

Such characterisations can be traced back to the concept of 'functional regions' (Schamp 1995), i.e. territorial units characterised by a high density of internal interactions compared to the level of interactions outside. The 'functional region' is an important conceptual tool in spatial planning as it provides empirically grounded criteria for policy interventions. Functional regions are areas grouped together according to the interactions between them (Berry 1969). In other words, they have 'empirical boundaries' *qua* socio-economic systems which are indicated by certain quantitative indicators such as transport volumes and directions or telephone calls (Merritt 1974).

The CoE refers to the region as a functional entity because early CBC policies were significantly informed by spatial planning theories and practices. However, for a social analysis of CBRs, such a definition has limited utility. It would be unwise to assume that CBRs emerge due to their 'potential regionness', defined in functional terms. Sociologically, this would fail to ground the emergence of CBRs in social action. As Schmitt-Egner notes, a (cross-border) region is not only an 'action space' but also an *action unit* (Schmitt-Egner 1998: 37). A similar action-centred line is followed by Raich who, following Schulze, defines a (cross-border) region as a territorial unit 'that has historical, socio-economic and cultural commonalities, as well as, at least tentatively, its own regional identity and autonomous (political and social) institutions and therefore claims an autonomous definition of its needs and interests which it is capable to articulate and defend' (Raich 1995: 25).

Comprehensive definitions such as the latter reflect the ambition to produce an ultimate definition of the 'region'. Such a-prioristic, nominalist approaches are rejected here as they do not necessarily support empirical analysis. To know whether a given object *is* a region or not according to a nominalist definition, provides no insight into the regularities governing it.

The point here is that the 'regionness' of a CBR can not be taken for granted but has to be understood as the outcome of a process of social construction. Accordingly, a cross-border region can be defined as a *bounded territorial unit composed of the territories of authorities participating in a CBC initiative* as defined above. This implies that a CBR is not only understood as a functional space, but as a socio-territorial unit equipped with a certain degree of strategic capacity on the basis of certain organisational arrangements.

So far the concept parallels the definitions proposed by Schmitt-Egner and Raich. But the existence of 'commonalities' is not a necessary element of a CBR. This means one can agree with Anderson and O'Dowd's pragmatic observation that 'regions that straddle state borders' can be understood as territorial units for which 'regional unity may derive from the use of the border to exploit, legally and illegally, funding opportunities or differentials in wages, prices and institutional norms on either side of the border' (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999: 595).

In conclusion, it does not matter whether a CBR is built upon cultural or ethnic commonalities, a common historical background, existing functional interdependencies or a mere community of interests as it is precisely the *process of construction* that matters. Only if commonalities are *not* assumed to underpin CBC initiatives can the contingent nature of CBRs be grasped.

Nonetheless the *discursive* dimension of CBRs will usually be dominated by an assemblage of 'common' cultural, ethnic or economic elements. But there is no necessary or 'natural' foundation for any CBR, for precise articulation of commonalities (or differences) will always derive from a historically specific process of social construction. For example, the CBC





initiatives on the German-Polish border are built on a 'common' history of complete alienation although the discourses employed nevertheless manage to articulate a wide range of commonalities.

### **CBRs in the wider context of international regional co-operation**

The literature points to a growing number of regional and local authorities engaging in international co-operation. As noted by students of the 'New Regionalism' in international relations theory, the building of the EU as a macro-region contributes to a blurring of the distinction between what is 'international' and 'internal' politics (Hettne 1994; Joenniemi 1997). Several tendencies have been identified. First, researchers have noted the growing 'Europeanisation' of local and regional governments as they are recruited as 'partners' into various EU policy fields (Balme 1996a; Goldsmith 1993). Secondly, NCGs play an increasing role in formulating foreign and/or EU policy of nation-states (Hocking 1996). Third, an increasing number of NCGs in Europe is involved in 'interregional and cross-border co-operation' (ICC). ICC initiatives comprise direct contact among NCGs that bypass superior levels of government, a process for which the notion of 'paradiplomacy' has been used (Duchacek et al. 1988).

CBC essentially constitutes a special case of this latter type of regional activity. Therefore, before the various forms of CBC are elaborated, it is useful to relate CBC to other forms of stable international contacts between non-central governments. Types of ICC can be derived from a cross-tabulation of two dimensions: the geographical scope of the co-operation initiative, and the condition of contiguity, i.e. whether the territories of the co-operating partners are geographically contiguous (table 1).

Cases of contiguous co-operation fall under the category of 'cross-border co-operation' while non-contiguous, 'long-distance' interaction is referred to as 'interregional co-operation'. Two types of this latter type can be distinguished: *interregional networks* and *peak organisations*.

[table 1]

Among interregional networks, according to the type of the public authorities involved, inter-urban and inter-regional networks (*stricto sensu*) can be identified. Some of these networks were established in the course of proactive bi- or multilateral initiatives pursued by single regions or groups of regions. The best known example is the 'Four Motors for Europe' (Borras 1993; Raich 1995) but other co-operation initiatives exist, such as that between Hessen and Emilia Romagna or between Emilia Romagna and the Basque country (Groupe de recherche 1996).

Many of these networks emerged due to the incentives provided by EU networking policies and are therefore likely to break apart after funding support terminates (Benington and Harvey 1998; Leonardi 1995). However, some of them have functioned as incubators for more permanent networks. For instance, after EU funding<sup>11</sup> ran out, the cities and regions co-operating in the COAST network succeeded in obtaining further financial support from another EU source and recruiting further coastal resorts whose membership fees would sustain the core organisation.<sup>12</sup>

Trans-European *peak associations* with widespread NCG membership constitute a second type of inter-regional co-operation. An example is provided by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) that was granted the management of a European programme (ECOS/OUVERTURE). Other transnational associations include the Assembly of European Regions (Sänger 1997), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the Association of Regions of Traditional Industry (Bullmann 1996: 13-4). These associations attempt to represent their members' interests on the European level and also act as service organisations with a high level of expertise in regional and urban matters. Consequently, they also act as information/service providers and programme managers for the Commission, and function as network brokers providing a forum for members to seek potential partner regions or cities.

Empirically, the boundaries between inter-regional co-operation and the peak associations tend to be blurred. For instance, the 'Eurocities' grouping, an inter-regional co-operation



network, has also become a strong lobbying organisation on the European level, representing an aggregate population of over 60m (Müller 1997) .

### **Exploring CBRs: Euroregions and Working Communities**

As noted earlier, CBC refers to co-operation arrangements between contiguous territorial authorities, resulting in the emergence of CBRs. However, given the wide variation in CBRs, a more precise conceptual grid is needed. At least three dimensions are relevant:

1. geographical scope: small-scale CBC initiatives can be distinguished from Working Communities that usually involve five or more regions.
2. co-operation intensity: referring to the strategic capacity gained by the cross-border body and its degree of autonomy vis-à-vis central state and other authorities.
3. type of actors: local (municipal) authorities can be distinguished from regional ('meso-level') authorities.

Regarding the geographical scope, the smaller Euroregions can be distinguished from the larger Working Communities. The latter – most of which were founded between 1975 and 1985 – emerge from co-operation between several regions forming large areas that can stretch over several nation-states ('multi-lateral cross-border co-operation'). Examples are the Arge Alp (Kicker 1995) , the Alpe-Adria, the Working Community of the Western Alps (COTRAO), the Working Community of the Pyrenees or the Atlantic Arc. Their organisational structures usually consist of a general assembly, an executive committee, thematic working groups and secretariats (Aykaç 1994: 12-14) but activities tend to be confined to common declarations and information exchange. However, some groupings, such as the Atlantic Arc, succeeded in obtaining European funds (Balme et al. 1996) .

Given its wide usage by both actors and observers, the notion of 'Euroregion' is harder to define than the 'Working Community'. Although the notion was originally employed for a very specific co-operation arrangement, it was later extended to a broader range of initiatives. For instance, the 'Carpathian Euroregion' is more a Working Community than a Euroregion in the original sense.

In its original meaning, the term 'Euroregion' refers to a co-operation arrangement among adjoining local authorities belonging to different nation states located close to a nation state border. This form of co-operation has a long tradition in certain areas of post-war Europe, especially on the Germany-BENELUX border where this form of co-operation was 'invented'. The expressions 'Euroregion' or 'Euregio' are both used. Organisationally, Euroregions usually have a council, a presidency, subject-matter oriented working groups and a common secretariat. Thus, the term Euroregion can refer both to a territorial unit, made of the aggregate territories of the participating authorities, and to organisational entities, usually identified with the secretariat. Legally, the co-operation can take different forms, ranging from legally non-binding arrangements to public-law bodies. The size of Euroregions will usually range between 50 and 100km in width; and they tend to be inhabited by a few million inhabitants.

However, a working definition of 'Euroregion' must be broader than this original definition, which is closely modelled after the EUREGIO, a prominent Dutch-German grouping (Perkmann 2002b) . For instance, in some cases, the participating authorities are not municipalities but regional authorities. In other cases, third organisations, such as regional development agencies, interest associations and chambers of commerce have become official members. The organisational set-up can also differ from the EUREGIO-inspired model. Thus, I propose to use the term 'Euroregion' to refer to CBC groupings that operate on a smaller geographical scale regardless of their precise organisational set-up or the nature of the participating actors. In a way, this definition corresponds to the one proposed by Denters et al.: 'Euregional co-operation stands for co-operation on a subnational level between authorities that are situated at the border' (Denters et al. 1998) .

To distinguish between different types of Euroregions, the second dimension noted above is useful. The term 'co-operation intensity' refers to the degree to which the cross-border bodies



have gained autonomy vis-à-vis the single participating authorities. To take an example from International Relations, a federation would have a higher co-operation intensity than a confederation of states, and the EU would have a higher co-operation intensity than NAFTA.

For estimating the co-operation intensity of existing CBC arrangements, a catalogue of criteria proposed by the AEBR can be used. This suggests that high-intensity Euroregions are 'long-term integrated cross-border structures' with a 'political decision-making tier' (AEBR and European Commission 1997: B2 10). Organisationally, this implies that they are based on some type of legal arrangement, have a common permanent secretariat, and command their own resources. Procedurally, co-operation is based on a long-term development strategy and, substantively, co-operation is pursued in all 'realms of life' (AEBR 1998: 14).

These criteria can be used for defining CBC arrangements with a high co-operation intensity. In the following, I will refer to the small scale version of such arrangements as 'integrated' Euroregions, i.e. Euroregions *stricto sensu*, whereas the large scale version is named 'Scandinavian grouping', as this type of model can predominantly be found in the Nordic Countries. In turn, rather loose co-operation arrangements without a permanent secretariat, development plans and comprehensive co-operation schemes are characterised as 'emerging' Euroregions if they are small scale, and Working Communities if they are large scale.

[table 2]

Finally, a third dimension for distinguishing CBRs concerns the participating authorities. Empirically, most of the small scale initiatives involve local authorities as driving protagonists whereas large-scale CBC is almost exclusively driven by regional authorities. This is rather trivial, but a second factor is important here, i.e. the large variance in the territorial organisation of the European nation states. For instance, in Germany, local administration comprises two levels, the municipalities and the *Kreise*, which are self-governed and operate as groupings of municipalities. In most cases, the *Kreise* are the driving forces behind CBC initiatives. By contrast, in Italy, meso-level authorities, the *province* (provinces), are in most cases involved in CBC initiatives while the municipalities play a minor role because of their relative fragmentation compared to the German *Kreise*. In general, in countries with a strong role for inter-municipal associations, CBC will often be pursued by local actors. By contrast, in countries (such as Italy or France) with a two-tier regional administration and a minor role for inter-local action, CBC will be a domain pursued by regional authorities.

### **CBRs in Europe: the evidence**

The significance of CBRs is difficult to grasp without aggregate quantitative evidence. Important questions concern the number of existing initiatives, their institutional form, the type of participating actors, and the timing of current CBC initiatives.

Existing sources, such as the CoE 'Handbook on Transfrontier Co-operation' (CoE 1995) or a database compiled by the AEBR<sup>13</sup>, give some indication. But these lists, as well as other sources<sup>14</sup>, suffer from imprecise definitions of CBC initiatives or CBRs and are therefore reliable only to a certain degree. The problem with providing quantitative evidence is that CBRs differ to an extraordinary degree. In response to this situation, a database on existing CBC initiatives was compiled by the author (Table 3).

A main source for the database was the list published by the AEBR but additional information was gathered inductively through the AEBR web site, AEBR and EU documents, the web sites published by CBC initiatives as well as extensive internet research and interviews with individuals involved European CBC initiatives over the period 1998-2000. The database contains 73 valid entries and should provide a reasonably accurate picture of CBC in Europe today.<sup>15</sup>

In the following, the quantitative dimensions of European CBC are summarised based on the information provided in this database.

AEBR research is used to assess the co-operation intensity of CBRs (AEBR 1998: 15). Accordingly, 22 CBRs fulfil the criteria of being integrated Euroregions; in addition, eight Scandinavian cases can be categorised as Scandinavian Groupings, exhibiting high co-operation





intensity but involving larger areas than the Euroregions. Both Euroregions and the Scandinavian co-operation initiatives, operating with support of the Nordic Council, are characterised by a high co-operation intensity.

If one takes these cases together, 30 CBRs out of a total of 73 involve high co-operation intensity. Of the remaining 43 cases, 15 can be classified as Working Communities, i.e. large scale co-operation initiatives that usually involve the participation of at least four regions. By contrast, 28 cases can be classified as low-intensity co-operation on a smaller scale ('emerging Euroregions') whereas the participating authorities can either be municipalities or regional authorities.

[figure 1]

It should be noted here that the definition of 'Euroregions' used here sometimes fails to match the terminology utilised by the co-operation actors themselves. Several cases, such as the Euroregion Tirol, the Carpathian Euroregion or the Euroregion Transmanche, cannot be classified as integrated cases. By contrast, in some cases of integrated Euroregions, such as the Ems Dollard Region, the terms 'Euroregion' or 'Euregio' are not utilised by the actors.

If one abstracts from the geographical scope of CBC initiatives and considers the nature of the participating actors, the results show that an initiative is more likely to have a high co-operation intensity if the protagonists are local rather than regional authorities. Out of 31 initiatives with a predominantly local character, 19 show a high degree of co-operation intensity whereas out of 42 arrangements initiated on the regional level, only 11 are characterised by high co-operation intensity.

However, closer examination reveals that the main causal factor determining the degree of co-operation intensity might be less the nature of the co-operation partners than the 'German factor'. Eighteen out of 28 cases with German participation show high co-operation intensity, and 85% of all cases of high-intensity local co-operation involve German participation (figure 1). And given the strong position of local government and the large size of the *Länder*, in Germany the local level is almost exclusively responsible for CBC initiatives. In 20 of a total of 28 initiatives with German participation, the local level constitutes the main level of action, and in only two cases, is a strong role of local government associated with low co-operation intensity. By contrast, in other countries, the regional level is predominant because of the weakness of the local level, or the small territorial size of the meso-level of government (regions, provinces, etc.).

[figure 2]

As far as the geographic distribution of CBC initiatives is concerned, 47% of the cases involve only EU territory whereas a further 23% involve Swiss or Norwegian participation (figure 2). Approx. 22% of the initiatives span the border between EU Member States and CEECs (Central and Eastern European Countries) whereas the remainder, 8%, involves CEECs territory only.

The analysis of the chronological patterns reveals that there were two periods when the number of CBRs rose sharply. By the mid-seventies, only ten or so CBRs existed, but by 1980 their number had doubled to approx. 20 initiatives (cf. figure 3). An even more pronounced boom set in from 1990 onwards when the number of initiatives doubled from approx. 35 to the current number of >70. The graph also reveals that the majority of initiatives founded between 1958 and 1990 can be classified as cases of high-intensity co-operation whereas the number of low-intensity cases grew more rapidly over the nineties. Most of the low-intensity cases established in the seventies were actually the Working Communities whereas most of the more recent cases occur in Eastern and Central Europe. On average, high-intensity initiatives are sixteen years old as opposed to a mere ten years for low-intensity initiatives, pointing to a tendency for increasing co-operation intensity at least for small-scale initiatives.

[figure 3]



## Discussion

The evidence shows that the 1990s in particular saw a strong rise in CBRs, especially Euroregions, in Europe. What are the driving factors behind this? The evidence suggests two major conclusions addressing two debated issues: (a) the impact of nation-state specific variables on the emergence and shape of CBC initiatives and (b) the impact of EU policies on CBC.

On the first point, the impact of nation-state specific variables, notably the territorial organisation prevailing in different countries, on the shape of CBRs is striking. In particular, the 'Euroregion' is clearly a predominantly German phenomenon. In over two thirds of the cases, CBRs with a strong role of local government involve German participation. This is to a large degree due to the strong position of the local level in German public administration, but also to the fact that the Euroregion, understood as an institutional form, has been 'invented' in Germany and, for various reasons, enjoys a considerable legitimacy within the federalist German system. In this regard, it must also be mentioned that Euroregional co-operation was in most cases chronologically preceded or at least accompanied by inter-state co-operation arrangements, such as the intergovernmental conferences.

But the impact of nation-state specific variables should not lead one to adopt a mechanistic framework that derives the number of CBC initiative in specific countries from a set of simple variables. Anders Östhol's analysis exemplifies the latter approach (Östhol 1996). Östhol uses a 1991 LACE database on border regions and cross-border co-operation initiatives and identifies three possible causal factors responsible for the number of CBC initiatives affecting specific countries: (a) 'federal constitution', i.e. the extent to which the single countries are federal or unitary states; (b) 'centrality', i.e. the extent to which the single countries are economically central or peripheral; (c) EU-membership. According to Östhol's regression analysis, EU-membership and centrality are determining factors while federal constitution is not found to be significant.

Such a procedure can be challenged for several reasons. First, the 'raw' LACE database is a rather unreliable and incomplete source of information. In particular, it contains both *border* authorities and *cross-border* bodies and allows thus for a wide empirical range of cases. Second, Östhol's dichotomic classification of countries as federal/unitary or central/peripheral is rather arbitrary and does not allow one to account for truly institutional factors. A variable taken into account by the author, i.e. the number of 'border regions', runs the risk being unreliable because, practically, the number of 'border regions' varies with the geographic size of regional territories in specific countries. For instance, in Germany, almost all *Länder* would be considered 'border regions' but this only reflect the fact that the *Länder* are particularly large, as opposed to the French *régions* or the Italian *province* or even *regioni*. It must be noted that in Germany, local actors are typically the driving forces behind CBC and, thus, the number of border *Länder* in Germany can hardly be considered a determining variable.

The general lesson from such attempts is that any 'general theory' of CBC derived from regression analysis must be rejected as mechanistic and ahistorical. Some of the reasons for this are technical, i.e. there are relatively few cases and the data quality is questionable. But the main problem is that a complex process such as the formation of a cross-border networks can hardly be operationalised on the basis of variables such as economic centrality or federal constitution. And, finally, even if the analysis were methodologically correct, the use value of a general theory of CBC remains limited as institutional factors will prevent such a theory to be applied, say, to North America. On this basis, it can be argued that qualitative institutionalist explanations of CBC will provide a better picture than purely quantitative methods of inquiry.

The institutional factors explaining the predominance of *German* CBRs with *local* participation can be summarised as following. A first factor is the *administrative-institutional context* in which the Euroregions operate. In the German system, the two-level structure of local authorities – consisting of the municipalities on the one hand and district-type aggregations of municipalities (*Kreise*) on the other – facilitates collective action among municipalities. This allows the local authorities to collectively engage in strategies that are aimed at both enhancing their resource position and representation vis-à-vis the higher-level authorities.



Secondly, the administrative culture prevailing in Germany and the Benelux-countries have traditionally allowed these countries to promote decentralised cross-border initiatives while in more centralised countries such as Italy central-state authorities have been more reluctant to allow regional or local authorities to engage in international activities. This is to say that, beyond the purely legal viewpoint, a benevolent attitude rooted in an decentralisation-friendly administrative culture is a significant success factor for CBC.

The second issue mentioned above concerns the impact of supranational policy-making, notably EU regional policy, on European CBC. Commentators disagree whether the European Union should be considered as a driving force behind the emergence and proliferation of CBC across Europe. Anderson observes that, at first sight, the EU could be regarded as an important causal factor here, notably through the diminishing importance of borders, the growing regional representation at the supranational level and the Interreg programme (Anderson 1997). However, Anderson adds that the EU's impact is often overestimated as it disregards the fact that CBC initiatives are bottom-up driven. He notes that early initiatives such as the Regio Basiliensis<sup>16</sup> in the Upper Rhine area or the Working Communities in the Alps involved countries, such as Switzerland, that are not members of the EU. For instance, according to Anderson, in the German part of the Upper Rhine, 80% of FDI is of Swiss provenience, and a cross-border labour market has emerged. Similar patterns occur in the Geneva area. Thus, Anderson's argument is that many CBC initiatives emerged as a response to growing cross-border functional interdependencies.

Anderson is right regarding these early initiatives that emerged almost independently from each other in the late fifties and sixties. At that time, these initiatives received no financial support from supranational authorities although their very possibility depended on the macroregional integration driven through the CoE and the early European Communities. However, given the recent CBC boom, the argument must be qualified in two respects.

However, the extraordinary growth of CBC from 1988 onwards must certainly be related to the launch of EU support schemes dedicated to CBC initiatives in Western Europe, and, from the early 90s, increasingly in Eastern and Central Europe. From 26 initiatives in 1988, when the Directorate General 16 launched its first pilot projects, their number almost tripled to over 70 in 1999. Qualitative evidence shows that the newly founded Euroregions, for example those on the Eastern and Southern German borders, tend to be rather closely involved in Interreg implementation.<sup>17</sup> There were no Euroregions on the Austrian-German border before Austria's accession to the EU, but, between 1994 and 1998 five new Euroregions were established.<sup>18</sup> Similar evidence can be provided for many Eastern and Central European CBC initiatives. For instance, the establishment of the 'Carpathian Euroregion' was considerably connected to its role in implementing Phare and Credo measures.

In this respect, one can observe an increasing similarity among CBC initiatives in different European areas. It appears that the Euroregion has become the standard model for pursuing CBC, and in this process, EU support certainly has an important influence. To cite again the Austrian example, Austrian *Länder* were involved in several Working Communities in the seventies but small-scale Euroregions were only established after 1994.<sup>19</sup> Since they have been established, many of the Working Communities have largely stagnated in terms of political importance and financial budget, but the smaller Euroregions continue to flourish in part because they are more closely involved in the Interreg programme that only applies to narrow border areas. Leresche and Saez interpret the relative stagnation of the Working Community in terms of a 'crisis of governability' in cross-border governance. They emerged at a time when the limited problem-solving capability of the (central state driven) inter-governmental commissions became obvious but no alternative, decentralised governance mechanisms had yet emerged (Leresche and Saez 1997). Today, this alternative is provided by the institutional form of the Euroregion.

A growing isomorphism of CBC can also be illustrated with various examples of institutional transfer from Western Europe, in particular Germany and its western neighbours, to Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>20</sup> The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) was significantly involved in establishing the Euroregions on the German-Polish border in the early nineties. The Carpathian Euroregion, also far from being a fully-fledged 'Euroregion', co-operates with the Euregio Rhein-Maas on the Belgian-German-Dutch border to design a



cross-border development concept modelled after similar concepts implemented by the more advanced Western European Euroregions. Thus, the impact of EU support programmes can be ascertained in both quantitative and qualitative terms. On the one hand, they increased the incentives for establishing new CBC initiatives, particularly according to the Euroregion model, from the late 80s onwards, and, on the other, they helped to transform loose and poorly equipped communities into more institutionalised forms of co-operation (Schabhüser 1993: 663).

## Conclusions

Some general conclusions can be drawn from the analysis presented. First, on a general note, it was shown that cross-border regions are part of the administrative landscape in most European border areas today. In the context of an increasing Europeanisation and internationalisation of non-central governments, cross-border co-operation among contiguous local and regional authorities is only one special case amongst a variety of other such initiatives. As case studies show, these co-operation initiatives tend to focus on public policy co-ordination among participating authorities provided they manage to go beyond merely ceremonial declarations of common cross-border visions.

Second, these co-ordination and co-operation activities in the public policy realm are in the majority of cases linked to and promoted by the implementation of European regional policy and in particular the Interreg Community Initiative. This provides the main explanatory factor for the sharp rise in cross-border regions that could be witnessed over the 1990s when the EU launched its large-scale programme to promote CBC (Interreg). By contrast, in the period before the isomorphic pressures of EU regional policy on local CBC initiatives became relevant, nation-state specific variables played an important role in facilitating co-operation activities among border authorities. It was shown that the federalist set-up of German administration provided a fertile ground in this respect, particularly the two-tier structure of local administration that allows municipalities to engage in collective action to increase their bargaining power as well as their policy capacity vis-à-vis the *Länder* and the central state.

Third, the analysis presented drew a distinction between various types of cross-border regions. In a longitudinal perspective, the rise of the *Euroregion* as the predominant type of CBC compared to the relatively stagnating larger *Working Community* could be observed during in the 1980s and 1990s. How can this be explained? This evidence points again to the role of EU regional policy in shaping this process. It appears that the Euroregion, as an institutional form, is better suited to taking an active role in implementing EU policy measures than the larger Working Communities that suffer from co-ordination drawbacks due to the higher number of participating authorities as well as their diversity in terms of legal-administrative competencies. In this respect, it can even be argued that the institutional form of the Euroregion evolved in a way that rendered it increasingly suitable to function as dedicated implementation agency for EU measures in border areas (Perkmann 2002b). In other words, the proliferation of CBRs across Europe can be read as a process of institutional innovation through which the Euroregion became a legitimate partner of the European Commission in implementing regional policy measures targeted at border areas. As related research has shown, this process was actively shaped by a transnational network of border region interests aggregated around the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) (Perkmann 2002a). The lesson from this is that the growing 'cross-borderisation' in Europe does not necessarily point to an increasing territorial fragmentation of nation-state sovereignty. Rather, cross-border regions are to be interpreted as one amongst other forms of policy innovation triggered by the emergence of the EU as a supranational policy-maker that has no proprietary implementation apparatus. In this sense, Euroregions are part of the multi-level governance structure of EU policy-making but are far from posing an imminent threat to the authority of the member-states over these policies.

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## Tables and figures

**Table 1: Types of Inter-regional and cross-border co-operation**

Geographical scope	small	large
CBRs (Contiguous territories)	Euroregions ('EUREGIO')	Working Communities, (incl. Scandinavian groupings) ('Arge Alp')



Interregional co-operation (Non-contiguous territories)	inter-regional and inter-urban co-operation ('Four Motors for Europe')	peak associations ('Association of European Border Regions')
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With examples

**Table 2: Types of CBRs**

geographical scope	small	large
High co-operation intensity	<b>integrated Euroregions</b> ('EUREGIO')	<b>Scandinavian groupings</b> ('Oeresund Council/Committee')
Low co-operation intensity	<b>emerging Euroregions</b> ('Transmanche Region')	<b>Working Communities</b> ('Arge Alp')

With examples

**Table 3: Cross-border regions in Europe**

A directory of European CBRs, sorted according to the year of formal inauguration and stating the involved countries (using ISO country codes), the type of CBR, and the level/type of involved actors. In terms of CBR types, integrated Euroregions (E1), emerging Euroregions (E2), Skandinavian Groupings (Sk) and Working Communities (WC) are distinguished. In terms of actors involved, local authorities (loc) are distinguished from regional authorities (reg).

year	name	countries	typ	lev
1958	EUREGIO	DE, NL	E1	loc
1964	Öresundskommittén	DK, SE	Sk	reg
1971	Nordkalottkommittén	NO, SE, FI	Sk	reg
1972	Kvarken Council	SE, FI	Sk	reg
1972	Arge Alp	AT, CH, DE, IT	WC	reg
1973	Euregio Rhein-Waal	DE, NL	E1	loc
1974	The Franco-Genevan Regional Committee	CH, FR	WC	reg
1975	Internationale Bodenseekonferenz (Regio Bodensee)	AT, CH, DE	WC	reg
1976	Euregio Maas-Rhein	BE, DE, NL	E1	reg
1977	Ems Dollart Region	DE, NL	E1	loc
1977	Mitnorden Committee, Nordens Gröna Bälte	NO, SE, FI	Sk	reg
1978	Euregio Rhein-Maas-Nord	DE, NL	E1	loc
1978	Arko Co-operation	SE, NO	Sk	reg
1978	Skärgårdssamarbetet ('Archipelago')	SE, FI	Sk	reg



1978	Alpes-Adria	AT, CH, DE, IT, CR, SL, HU	WC	reg
1980	Four Corners Co-operation	DK, SE	Sk	loc
1980	Gränskommittén Østfold/Bohuslän	NO, SE	Sk	loc
1980	Nordatlantiska Samarbetet	IS,DK	Sk	reg
1980	Benego	BE, NL	E2	loc
1982	COTRAO (Communauté de Travail des Alpes Occidentales)	CH, FR, IT	WC	reg
1982	Comité de Travail des Pyrenees	ES, FR	WC	reg
1984	Benelux Middengebied	BE, NL	E1	reg
1985	Working Community of the Jura	CH, FR	WC	reg
1987	Transmanche Region (Kent/Nord-Pas de Calais)	FR, UK	E2	reg
1987	Conseil du Léman	CH, FR	E2	reg
1988	PAMINA	DE, FR	E2	reg
1989	Scheldemonde	BE, FR, NL	E1	reg
1989	EuRegio SaarLorLuxRhein (previously COMREGIO)	DE, FR, LU	E1	loc
1989	Arc Atlantique	ES, FR, PT, UK, IRL	WC	reg
1989	PACTE (Hainaut-Pas-de-Calais)	BE, FR	E2	reg
1990	Working Communities of the Riparian States of the Danube	AT, DE, HU	WC	reg
1990	Rat Wallis-Valle d'Aosta	CH, IT	E2	reg
1990	Storstrøms Amt/Ostholstein Interreg	DE, DK	E2	loc
1991	Transmanche Euroregion	BE, FR, UK	WC	reg
1991	Mont-Blanc Conference	CH, IT	WC	reg
1991	Comunidade de Trabalho Região Norte de Portugal-Galicia	ES, PT	WC	reg
1991	Euroregion Midi-Pyrénées-Languedoc-Roussillon-Catalunya	ES, FR	E2	reg
1991	Nieuwe Hanze Interregio/Neue Hanse Interregion	DE, NL	E2	reg
1991	Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa	DE, CZ, PL	E2	loc
1992	Erzgebirge	DE, CZ	E1	loc
1992	Euroregion Elbe/Labe	DE, CZ	E1	loc
1992	Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina	DE, PL	E1	loc
1992	Euroregion Euskadi-Navarre-Aquitaine	ES, FR	E2	reg
1992	Comunidad de Trabajo Extremadura-Alentejo	ES, PT	E2	reg
1992	Hungarian–Austrian Cross-Border regional Council ('West-Pannon Region')	AT, HU	E2	reg



1993	Egrensis	DE, CZ	E1	loc
1993	Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober	DE, PL	E1	loc
1993	Carpathian Euroregion	PL, HU, SK, RO, UR	WC	reg
1993	Rives-Manche region	FR, UK	E2	reg
1994	Inn-Salzach-Euregio	AT, DE	E1	loc
1994	Euroregion POMERANIA	DE, PL	E1	loc
1994	Euregio Bayerischer Wald – Böhmerwald – Sumava	AT, CZ, DE	E2	loc
1995	EuRegio Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein	AT, DE	E1	loc
1995	Euregio TriRhena	CH, DE, FR	E1	reg
1995	Arc Manche	FR, UK	WC	reg
1995	EuroRegion Oberrhein (Trirhena plus Pamina)	CH, DE, FR	E2	reg
1995	Region Insubrica	CH, IT	E2	reg
1996	Euroregion Glacensis	CZ, PL	E2	loc
1996	Union of Municipalities of Upper Silesia and Northern Moravia	PL, CZ	E2	loc
1996	Euroregion Tatry	SK, PL	E2	loc
1996	Regio Sempione	CH, IT	E2	loc
1996	Danube-Tisza-Körös-Maros Euroregion	HU, RO	E2	loc
1997	Euregio Via Salina	AT, DE	E1	loc
1997	Sonderjylland-Slesvig	DE, DK	E1	loc
1997	Nestos-Mesta	BL, GR	E1	loc
1997	Baltic Sea Islands B7	EE, DE, DK, SE, FI	E2	loc
1998	Euregio Zugspitze-Wetterstein-Karwendel	AT, DE	E1	loc
1998	Euregio Bałtyk	PL, LV, LT, SE, DK, RO	WC	reg
1998	Europaregion Tirol	AT, IT	E2	reg
1998	Danube-Dráva-Száva Euro-regional initiative	HU, CR, BOS	E2	reg
1998	Euregio Weinviertel-Südmähren/West-Slovakia	AT, CZ, SK	E2	loc
1998	Euregio Inntal	AT, DE	E2	loc
1999	Ipoly Euroregion	AT, SK	E2	reg

1 For conceptual clarity, 'CBC' refers to the activity of co-operating across borders while 'CBR' refers to the outcome as institutional arrangement.





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2 The analysis presented in this article is part of a larger study on European CBC, funded by the European Commission via TMR grant FMBICT961862.

3 Local and regional authorities.

4 The Council of Europe (CoE) – not to be conflated with the European Council which is an EU body – is a European intergovernmental organisation headquartered in Strassbourg. It was founded in 1949 and constituted the first project of European integration. It was also the first supranational organisation to provide a political arena for local and regional authorities from different countries.

5 E.g. a 'stichting' in the Netherlands or an 'eingetragener Verein' in Germany.

6 Cf. [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/interreg3/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/interreg3/index_en.htm) (viewed 30/05/02).

7 Borders with non-EU members.

8 This does not apply to the German and Austrian *Länder* or the Swiss cantons which have some rights to conclude international treaties with foreign authorities (Beyerlin 1998; Palermo 1999). In practice this is of limited relevance, mainly because the main protagonists tend to be *local* authorities as CBC rarely involves areas with more than a few million inhabitants.

9 The text of the convention is available at <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/EN/cadreprincipal.htm> (accessed 30/05/02).

10 In this study, the expression 'cross-border' is preferred to the alternative terms 'trans-frontier', 'trans-border' and 'trans-boundary'. The term 'trans-frontier' is derived from a literal translation of the French term 'transfrontalier' which is usually preferred by the CoE, whereas 'trans-border' and 'trans-boundary' tend to be used by American authors (Duchacek 1986).

11 Under the RECITE programme.

12 Personal conversation with EU official.

13 Accessible through its web site: [www.aebr-ageg.de](http://www.aebr-ageg.de).

14 According to Malchus, more than 100 cross-border initiatives existed in 1996 (Malchus 1996: 29)

15 Two further types of co-operation arrangements are not included in this figure because they do not satisfy the defined criteria for CBC initiatives. Among these, there are 17 cases of intergovernmental co-operation arrangements governed by central state authorities. An additional 11 cases have been classified as 'other'; these arrangements comprise specialist cross-border bodies, such as 'European Economic Interest Groupings' (EEIGs) or similar organisations.

16 Strictly speaking, the Regio Basiliensis is *not* a cross-border body but an exclusively Swiss organisation established in 1963 for promoting co-operation with the German and French neighbours (Speiser 1993).

17 Interview evidence 1998-2000.

18 The Inn-Salzach-Euregio (1994), the EuRegio Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein (1995), Euregio Via Salina (1997), the Euregio Zugspitze-Wetterstein-Karwendel (1998) and the Euregio Inntal (1998) (Mahnkopf 1999).

19 Notably, the Arge Alp (1972), the Alpen-Adria (1978) and the Internationale Bodenseekonferenz (1975).

20 On the concept of institutional isomorphism, cf. (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).