



“Cross-border territories: Day-to-day Europe”



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Workshop 7

“Cross-border rural and natural territories”

- ❖ **President:** Joël GIRAUD, vice-president of the Provence Alpes Côte d’Azur regional council (FR)
- ❖ **Debate animated by** Daniel MIO, president of the Scarpe Escaut regional nature park (FR)
- ❖ **Presentation of the framing memorandum**
Michel MARCHYLLIE, Director of the Scarpe Escaut regional nature park (FR)
- ❖ **Project 1:** The Hainaut cross-border park project (FR-BE)
Reinold LEPLAT, director of the Plaines de l’Escaut nature park (BE)
- ❖ **Project 2:** Espace Mont Blanc, (FR-IT-CH)
Jean-Marc BONINO, Director of the Chamonix Mont Blanc planning and mountain department (FR)
- ❖ **Project 3:** Cross-border cooperation in the Krkonose/Karkonosze (Giant Mountains) (CZ-PL),
Hanna PETRIKOVA, Director of the Krkonose/Karkonosze cross-border biosphere reserve (CZ)
- ❖ **Presentation of the recommendations**
Michel MARCHYLLIE, Director of the Scarpe Escaut regional nature park (FR)
- ❖ **Discussion with the floor**



Introduction

Although cross-border cooperation first developed in urban settings, over the last ten years or so it has also been introduced in rural spaces, which account for the majority of cross-border territories by number on European borders as a whole. These vast territories, coast, mountain or plain, often sparsely populated, are subject to specific constraints related to their more limited financial, technical and human resources compared with urban spaces. Whether the border cuts across an existing cross-border living area or physical or historical constraints make it more of a barrier, to an increasing extent cross-border cooperation is a necessary means of local development for these spaces. Such cooperation enables them to organise their territory in a more coherent manner, looking for complementarities or pooling certain endogenous assets, facilities and services to the population, and also to be identifiable more easily in a changing Europe.

Structured as rural districts (such as the "*pays*" in France), parks or other types of organisation, benefiting from targeted national and European aid (Leader, Interreg), these cross-border rural spaces should form networks to identify their needs, discuss their successful experiments and outline options for consideration in order to improve their day-to-day cross-border cooperation.

They are characterised not only by their natural links across borders but also by the diversity of the topics of cooperation that link them. At the cross-border scale, protected spaces are examples of increasing provision for sustainable development, through the preservation of natural resources but also of the characteristic landscapes and know-how of such spaces. This means that they can also be the basis of a new type of economic development for rural territories, through upgrading of local production sectors, promotion of tourism and joint planning.

Within this overall context, cross-border experiments conducted in protected natural spaces (national parks, regional nature parks, nature reserves, etc.) should be highlighted. They are breathing spaces in a Europe where urbanisation and its consequences on the natural environment are becoming more visible every day.

Cross-border rural spaces are confronted with specific problems

❖ Cross-border spaces under border pressure or experiencing population loss

Depending on their geographical situation, there is at one extreme an abandonment of the most isolated cross-border rural spaces (a large proportion of the French-Spanish border), while conversely at the other extreme some rural spaces are under pressure from urban territories, sometimes located on the other side of the border (examples of the French-Belgian and French-Luxemburg borders, and part of the French-German and French-Swiss borders).

For a long time the presence of a border made some of these spaces dead ends, at the outermost limits of the national spaces and so outside national development priorities, failing to attain a critical mass that would give them a higher profile. The isolation of some of these spaces, far from major communication infrastructures, the limited provision of public services and the small number of jobs make growth or even keeping a working-age population in the region difficult.

Nevertheless, some of these cross-border rural or natural spaces are true interstitial breathing spaces within urbanised cross-border spaces from which they are under pressure: various cross-border flows, peri-urbanisation through neighbouring urban populations taking up residence, intensive tourism practices (particularly at weekends). Actions intended to control this phenomenon of sprawling of neighbouring conurbations are all the more difficult to implement when the urban centres are located on the other side of the border (Ain and Haute Savoie with Geneva, Haut Rhin with Basle, Lower Austria with Bratislava, etc.).

❖ Natural spaces to be preserved, the resources of which would benefit from coordinated management

Cross-border rural territories are also fragile spaces, with many and related heritage riches (architecture, landscapes, flora, fauna, know-how, etc.) on either side of the border. These enable the development of tourism which benefits the territories, a tourism which may also be a potential factor threatening their balance. This situation calls for a joint cross-border policy of preservation and enhancement of these shared resources.

❖ Disruption of the cross-border link that forms part of the identity of these rural and natural spaces

Many cross-border rural spaces have shared a common culture (language, landscapes, architecture, know-how, farming traditions, festivals, etc.) for a long time. Changes in the societies living there, driven by economic and social changes, have resulted in these populations being drawn towards the respective national urban centres located on their peripheries, leading to gradual disappearance of this cross-border rural culture and part of the identity of these territories.

❖ Low level of networking of cross-border rural spaces and little recognition and consideration of their specific characteristics in regional, national and European spatial planning policies

Cross-border rural spaces suffer from a lack of recognition at national and Community levels because they are far from the decision-making centres and often have no technical

expertise, effective networking, lobbying or body to federate them with regard to cross-border cooperation. This relatively low profile means that it is difficult for them to access the policies and budgets from which cross-border urban spaces benefit.

Furthermore, the failure to take the cross-border situation into account in their local spatial planning documents is still more obvious than for the urban spaces (mutual lack of understanding and problem of limited internal technical capacity), and the same applies to higher-level planning documents (particularly at regional level).

This low recognition of their specific cross-border characteristics makes it all the more difficult to arrange cross-border pooling of a certain number of services and facilities which are increasingly difficult to maintain in this type of space (health, culture, natural hazard management, accessibility, etc.).

Proposal for recommendations

❖ Develop the management of biodiversity and natural resources at cross-border level

The management of biodiversity and natural resources at cross-border level is often the starting point for cooperation between natural and rural spaces. A joint action is needed to manage the protection of all components of ecosystems, including soils, water balance, vegetation, fauna and the natural operation of all the processes at work in complex systems such as forests, rivers, mountain ranges and seashores. Coordination or even standardisation of management tools is at the core of this type of cooperation, which many parks have understood for a long time but which has not yet become customary in other rural spaces.

❖ Maintain and pool public services at cross-border level, and improve cross-border territory accessibility and internal cross-border "irrigation"

Those cross-border rural spaces experienced as being on the outermost fringes of national territories have difficulties maintaining the public services necessary for their satisfactory operation. They need to consider the added value of their cross-border position, the pooling and maintenance of certain services (health, human services, schools, etc.), overcoming the real national administrative barriers there may be. In addition to the issue of local public services, there is also that of cross-border internal linkage of these territories by effective means of communication (mobile telephony, broadband, etc.) which must be installed there, and the accessibility of the cross-border territory to external public services via transport infrastructures.

❖ Manage urban and tourist pressure on a cross-border basis within these "breathing spaces"

Some cross-border rural or natural spaces are true interstitial breathing spaces within urbanised cross-border spaces. Measures to ensure that their urbanisation is controlled should be coordinated at cross-border level (joint management of the space). In these spaces it is important to monitor sprawl (rural urbanisation) of peripheral conurbations located in some cases on the other side of the border. Some remarkable rural and natural spaces are also under strong pressure from visiting tourists and the increasing provision of facilities for accommodating tourists. Actions to accommodate tourism should be coordinated so that such spaces can benefit from sustainable tourism without compromising their fragile balance.

❖ **Encourage economic development and employment in cross-border rural territories**

Some cross-border rural and/or natural spaces have incorporated economic development into their operation through actions intended to maintain activities and populations or to attract new ones.

The priorities of such development might include:

- diversification and upgrading of local economic sectors (local production related to the resources of the territory: agriculture, forestry, crafts, small-scale specialised local industry, marketing of this production) which could be the focus of centres of rural excellence
- development of innovative activities, for example by combining two different themes (e.g. tourism and agriculture)
- the residential economy and tourism development (by labelling and joint communication at cross-border level of the two parts of the territory located on either side of the border)
- work on opening up the territory (accessibility by road and by public transport).

All of these priorities are intended to consolidate the social and cultural link which can join the components of these cross-border rural and natural territories.

❖ **Organise the governance of the cross-border territory project in these natural and rural spaces**

Like urban territories, in certain cases cross-border rural spaces consider drawing up a proper cross-border territory project, with joint governance and, if necessary, a suitable legal structure (e.g. EGTC). They need to be assisted in the creation of this governance at the service of their territory project by aid for the networking of the different spaces concerned and appropriate operational assistance, along with support from higher geographical levels.

❖ **Recognition and networking: obtain recognition of these cross-border natural and rural spaces as “linking” spaces in the construction of Europe, in the same way as urban spaces, through lobbying and networking so that they are taken into consideration to a greater extent in planning documents and in regional, national and Community strategies**

Their number and their size give natural and rural spaces a legitimate place in the European edifice, not only on the western borders but also as vector of peace on consensual subjects in central and eastern Europe, on sometimes more conflictual borders (in the Balkans, for example). Overshadowed for a long time by urban cross-border cooperation, their cross-border programmes need to be recognised and encouraged in a Europe under construction. Very varied, their cross-border programmes do not have an overall organisation, although certain categories of space (mainly protected natural spaces) are beginning to organise themselves on cross-border issues (the regional nature parks in France, with their national federation and the MOT, the European section of the IUCN Global Transboundary Protected Areas Network, the Natura 2000 network, the UNESCO network of transboundary biosphere reserves, etc.). The actors of these territories, on either side of the borders, should be networked at European level both politically and technically to enable sharing of good practices and technical transfer between different cross-border rural and natural spaces in Europe. Federating them should give them greater recognition and ensure that their cross-border dimension is taken into account in local, regional, national and European planning documents.