

Manifesto for the Recognition and Greater Consideration of “cross-border living areas” in public policy

Following requests from its network, the MOT conducted a study on “cross-border living areas” with the support of local partners in five pilot regions along France’s borders¹. Based on the results of this work, the MOT and its network call for greater consideration of border territories and their needs in public policy.

Call for a shift in perspective: from border territories to cross-border living areas

- ▶ Considering the **strategic positioning of border territories** as “living laboratories of European integration”²,
- ▶ Considering that border territories are built around cross-border interdependencies that impact multiple aspects of life in these areas and for their inhabitants. Residents cross borders not only to work, but also to shop, access services and facilities, seek entertainment, or maintain personal relationships.
- ▶ Considering **the lack of knowledge, recognition, and consideration** of the specific characteristics of these border territories in territorial strategies and public policies,

the MOT and its network call for a shift in perspective among stakeholders to view these territories as true cross-border living areas: territories linked by functional interdependencies and the richness of their historical, cultural, and interpersonal ties, endowed with a sense of belonging to a shared territory and a commitment to cross-border territorial cohesion.

Toward Greater Recognition of the Shared Challenges Facing Cross-Border Living Areas

Due to their unique circumstances, cross-border living areas face specific challenges that must be addressed to ensure territorial cohesion.

1. **For residents of cross-border living areas, daily challenges include access to markets, facilities, and services.** Whether it involves accessing public transportation, healthcare facilities, administrative services, or employment, residents of cross-border living areas face numerous legal, technical, informational, and cultural obstacles, as well as public policies that are ill-suited for cross-border contexts. Living in a border territory should not mean reduced access to markets, essential services, and facilities; rather, it should present an opportunity for complementarity and cooperation in accessing them.
2. **For territories and their stakeholders, this raises issues of territorial imbalances and reciprocity.** Within the same cross-border living area, areas with sometimes divergent socioeconomic, fiscal, or legal systems coexist. While these asymmetries can be sources of complementarity and attractiveness, they

¹ Link to the study report and summary: espaces-trans-frontaliers.org: “Cross-Border Living Areas” Study: Understanding and Taking Action at the Level of Cross-Border Living Areas

² European Commission, 2022: [REPORT on the EU’s border regions: Living laboratories of European integration | A9-0222/2022 | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

can also lead to significant territorial imbalances. These imbalances negatively impact the ability of territories to equitably meet the needs of businesses and residents (housing, transportation, public services, etc.). Without sufficient consideration of these impacts on both sides of the border, socioeconomic inequalities and spatial segregation risk increasing in cross-border living areas, undermining the attractiveness and the sustainable and cohesive development of these territories.

3. **For cross-border living areas and their stakeholders, challenges lie in knowledge and recognition.** While both statistical and qualitative data are essential for informing territorial strategies and public policy, stakeholders in border territories face a lack of existing data at the cross-border level (e.g. cross-border flows). The lack of knowledge about cross-border living areas and their strengths and challenges can reduce their visibility in public debate, even though they deserve special attention given their unique characteristics.
4. **For stakeholders in cross-border living areas at all levels, governance challenges arise.** Cross-border living areas are complex and constantly evolving territories, at the intersection of multiple territorial scales, sovereignties, and issues. On the one hand, it is necessary to support sustainable frameworks for cross-border dialogue and political and technical co-operation. On the other hand, it is essential to experiment with forms of governance that allow for adaptation to the rapid evolution of cross-border territories and their challenges. Balancing these two imperatives requires the involvement of stakeholders at all levels (local, regional, national, and European).

Principles to Guide Reflection and Action at the Level of Cross-Border Living Areas

Through the principles proposed below, the MOT and its network advocate for a **paradigm shift for border territories**, with the aim of turning their unique characteristics into an asset for territorial development.

- **A principle of synergy and complementarity:** The differences in organization, operation, and resources among the territories within cross-border living areas are a source of richness. These differences should be leveraged through a framework of complementarity and synergy to enhance the quality of life in border territories. While these areas are often located on the periphery of decision-making centers, capitalizing on these complementary strengths can help transform them into hubs of innovation and improve residents' access to

services and facilities across cross-border living areas. (Proposals 1–6).

- **A principle of co-development and reciprocity:** Given the sometimes significant disparities that exist within cross-border living areas, stakeholders at all levels must work together toward the balanced development of the area, guided by a spirit of territorial solidarity rather than mere competition. To foster social and territorial cohesion, the development of one part of the cross-border territory cannot come at the expense of the other. On the contrary, cross-border territorial strategies must be based on principles of reciprocity and co-development to ensure sustainable, equitable, and attractive territorial development. (Proposals 7–10).
- **A principle of understanding cross-border living areas:** To facilitate effective and coherent action at the level of cross-border living areas, it is necessary to rely on cross-border quantitative and qualitative data. Recognizing cross-border living areas as coherent living and project territories cannot be achieved without a better understanding of these territories, how they function, and their interdependencies. (Proposals 11–12).
- **A principle of multi-level, multi-stakeholder governance:** Cross-border living areas lie at the intersection of multiple territorial scales and the actions of numerous public and private stakeholders. To adopt territorial strategies tailored to these areas, it is necessary to identify and involve the relevant stakeholders at all levels (local, regional, national, and European) and to engage in dialogue with all stakeholders in the territories (researchers, civil society, economic and environmental actors, etc.) in order to build a shared vision of these areas. Cross-border mutual understanding and the willingness of local elected officials to work together are essential to ensuring effective governance of cross-border living areas at various levels. (Proposals 13–14).

14 Proposals for the Sustainable, Equitable, and Attractive Development of Cross-Border Living Areas

To address the specific needs of cross-border living areas, the MOT and its local partners have explored various courses of action as part of the cross-border living areas pilot project.

Facilitating daily life and equitable access to markets, services, and facilities in cross-border living areas

- ▶ **Proposal 1: Health** - toward mutual recognition of the neighboring country's healthcare system to facilitate access to care in the cross-border living area, within a win-win framework that involves the necessary efforts to develop key medical facilities on both sides of the border.
- ▶ **Proposal 2: Health** - adapt the options for choosing a primary care physician in cross-border living areas, in particular by allowing patients to designate a physician located on the other side of the border.
- ▶ **Proposal 3: Transportation** - move toward harmonizing fares on cross-border public transportation routes.
- ▶ **Proposal 4: Administrative Services** - Create single cross-border administrative service centers, similar to "Maisons de Services" (French service centers) but on borders.
- ▶ **Proposal 5: Remote Work** - Waive the permanent residence requirement in cross-border living areas to facilitate co-working for cross-border workers.
- ▶ **Proposal 6: Citizenship** - Pilot cross-border resident cards in cross-border living areas to facilitate the movement of residents in these areas, even in the event of a border closure.

Promote balanced development and reciprocity in cross-border living areas

- ▶ **Proposal 7: High-demand occupations** - Pilot a residency allowance for people working in high-demand occupations in cross-border living areas.
→ Additional ideas mentioned: Cross-border funding for training, pilot programs for affordable housing in border areas with tight housing markets...
- ▶ **Proposal 8: Cross-border buffer mechanisms** - Pilot mechanisms for private-sector participation in infrastructure development (transportation, housing, etc.) in cross-border living areas (e.g. cross-border employer contributions to building efforts similar to the French PEEC, cross-border mobility fund contributions).
- ▶ **Proposal 9: Training** - Enable the automatic recognition of credentials, particularly for occupations facing labor shortages, in cross-border living areas.
- ▶ **Proposal 10: Land-Use Planning** - Systematically include consultations with neighboring countries' territories in planning documents and projects that may impact neighboring territories within cross-border living areas.

Improve understanding and recognition of cross-border living areas

- ▶ **Proposal 11: Data** - Pool and harmonize statistical and geographic data at the cross-border level.
- ▶ **Proposal 12: Data** - Promote the production of high-quality, context-sensitive data at the cross-border level.

Develop governance models tailored to cross-border living areas

- ▶ **Proposal 13: Contractualization** - Develop cross-border partnership tools (such as "cross-border reciprocity agreements").
- ▶ **Proposal 14:** Improve mutual understanding among stakeholders (both technical and political) through training and professional exchanges on cross-border living areas.

To ensure that border territories are effectively taken into account and that action is taken on their scale, it is necessary to act at all levels

At the local level

- ▶ Systematically adopt a "360° territorial perspective" to better account for cross-border dimensions, particularly in local territorial strategies, surveys (e.g. travel surveys), and prescriptive land-use planning documents (in France: SRADDET, SCOT, PLU(i), etc., and their equivalents in neighboring countries).
- ▶ Place border issues on the agenda at the local and regional levels.
- ▶ Leverage opportunities to adapt and tailor local actions (in France: the 3DS Law, the 2021 Law on Pilot Programs) to test initiatives and mechanisms tailored to the needs of cross-border territories.
- ▶ Establish and sustain frameworks for cross-border dialogue and collaboration, at both the technical and political levels.

At the national level

- ▶ Establish an interministerial committee on cross-border issues to address the obstacles encountered by territories and ensure a coordinated response.
- ▶ Adapt and strengthen national initiatives and programs in border territories, following the example of programs

such as France Services, “Small Towns of Tomorrow,” and “Villages of the Future”.

- ▶ Take cross-border issues into account in impact assessments conducted prior to French legislative proposals.
- ▶ Promote bilateral frameworks at each border modeled on the Treaty of Aachen.
- ▶ Define “cross-border regions” at each border, as provided for in the Schengen Code, and take them into account in border management.
- ▶ Confirm the MOT’s role as a “trusted third party” at the national and bilateral levels, and secure its funding.
- ▶ There are laws governing coastal and mountain areas... Why not consider a law addressing border areas, that recognizes their unique characteristics and the importance of adapting to their needs.

At the European level

- ▶ Adopt the draft “Facilitating Cross-Border Solutions” (FCBS) regulation, which should improve the resolution of cross-border obstacles, particularly through the development of a network of cross-border coordination points at each border, in capital cities, and at the Commission.
- ▶ Maintain the European cohesion policy beyond 2027, particularly the INTERREG programs.
- ▶ Reaffirm the MOT’s support, alongside the AEBR and CESCO, for the European Cross-Border Platform of the Committee of the Regions (network of cross-border stakeholders), as well as for the European Commission and the European Parliament.

More info:

- ▶ <https://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/>

MOT study and summary:

- ▶ [espaces-transfrontaliers.org](https://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/): “Cross-Border Living Areas” Study: Understanding and Taking Action at the Level of Cross-Border Living Areas
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