

An empirical approach to cross-border spatial planning initiatives in Europe

Antoine Decoville & Frédéric Durand

To cite this article: Antoine Decoville & Frédéric Durand (2021): An empirical approach to cross-border spatial planning initiatives in Europe, *Regional Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/00343404.2021.1902492](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2021.1902492)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2021.1902492>



Published online: 21 Apr 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 78



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



An empirical approach to cross-border spatial planning initiatives in Europe

Antoine Decoville^a  and Frédéric Durand^b 

ABSTRACT

Cross-border spatial planning is a means by which to enhance territorial continuities between border regions still hindered by differences and sometimes tensions, and thus to make more tangible the political paradigm of European integration. This article offers a systematic analysis of all the Interreg IV A projects related to cross-border spatial planning that were conducted along all Europe's internal borders between 2007 and 2013. It reveals the diversity of the initiatives that fall under this scope according to whether they aim to create or improve actors' networks, produce spatial observations, develop strategies or achieve tangible outputs at the cross-border scale.

KEYWORDS

spatial planning; Europe; Interreg; cross-border cooperation

JEL R58

HISTORY Received 13 March 2020; in revised form 1 March 2021

INTRODUCTION

More than 25 years after the abolition of border controls and the Schengen agreements starting to be put into effect, Europe has become an increasingly integrated area, where border regions are intertwined by multiple types of flows. Whereas border regions were until recently still considered as territorial margins, they are now areas of contact and interface, and serve as 'laboratories of the European integration' (Kramsch & Hooper, 2004, p. 3), which is a policy paradigm of the EU. However, the multiplication of interactions between territories that are separated by national borders is still often hampered by tensions and differences concerning the coordination of spatial development. This is largely because strictly speaking there is no EU-level agenda concerning the spatial strategies and visions for border regions, since there is no competence in spatial planning at the EU level (Medeiros, 2014). Several official EU documents mention the importance of spatial planning at the European level, such as the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), the territorial agenda and the green book on territorial cohesion; however, they remain relatively vague regarding the specific cross-border scale. Therefore, in practical terms, European integration along internal borders is envisaged and driven mainly (but not entirely) through the EU's regional policy,

and in particular with the help of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Interreg programmes (Dühr et al., 2010).

The objective of the current paper, which is at the interface between the fields of spatial planning and border studies, is to better understand how European integration is envisaged, conceived, built and materialized in space, and particularly in border areas. Its postulate is that cross-border spatial planning (CBSP), can be an instrument to boost and strengthen the European integration process at the regional level by improving territorial continuity and coherence beyond borders. CBSP can make the somewhat abstract concept of European integration more tangible to the general public. It influences what researchers in the field of border studies term the 'borderscape': a concept initially intended to define a physical landscape marked by the presence of a boundary (Dell'Agnese & Amilhat-Szary, 2015). This concept has evolved to encompass a dynamic and complex system of representations in which 'different ideas of space, territoriality, sovereignty as well as identity, citizenship and otherness in and across the nation-state boundary lines are formulated, reformulated, negotiated and acted' (Brambilla, 2015, p. 19, quoting Suvendrini Perera).

With the mutation of the EU's internal borders and the importance of cross-border practices (Durand &

CONTACT

^a (Corresponding author)  antoine.decoville@liser.lu

Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg.

^b  frederic.durand@liser.lu

Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg.

Decoville, 2020; Decoville & Durand, 2019), new needs have emerged that require better organization of flows, the reshaping of border areas to promote a cross-border regional identity (Paasi, 2013) and also a common vision for territorial development paths. In terms of spatial planning, these needs call for responses that are not only functional, pragmatic and adapted to the situation, but also in line with the European ideals of stability, solidarity and peace. However, spatial planning does not fit well with the notion of borders (Faludi, 2018). Traditional spatial planning aims to bring coherence between sectoral policies to influence the development of a space according to a project or a political vision held by the public actors in charge of it. By contrast, as markers of the political situation, borders refer to the idea of rupture, discontinuity and the physical limits of sovereignty (Longo, 2018). They are lines of demarcation vis-à-vis another space, to which other spatial development dynamics and regulatory tools apply. States are very keen to maintain sovereignty over their national territory (Scott, 1999). Consequently, CBSP actions are most frequently initiated by local public authorities close to the border, although they are often administratively and financially supported by the EU, particularly through the Interreg cooperation funds (Decoville et al., 2015).

Relevant academic literature counts several articles that describe – mostly through case study analyses – actors' strategies regarding CBSP, their concrete achievements, and the difficulties and limitations encountered. In such a context, the contribution of the current paper is to provide a broad analysis of CBSP projects on all of Europe's internal borders by looking at their locations, budgets, governance and types of outcomes. By doing so, we aim to offer a better scientific understanding of the actual notion of CBSP, what it stands for and what it covers concretely. The purpose is also to uncover whether CBSP initiatives lead to concrete and local achievements for the citizens of border regions, or instead to soft planning initiatives developed at large spatial scales.

The multiple faces of CBSP

In a strict sense, and from a theoretical perspective, CBSP refers to the desire to organize territorial development and land use across borders (Durand & Decoville, 2018). It implies 'an institution-building process whose primary emphasis is on the facilitation of collective action with regards to the shared natural, built, and human environments constrained by territorial politics and boundaries of nation-states' (Peña, 2007, p. 1). However, behind this very general definition, there is logically no clear consensus about what CBSP is or should be, since it is a practice that varies in its objectives as well as in its implementation from one country to another. The 'spatial planning' terminology is thus a compromise adopted by the EU that is sufficiently neutral and broad to encompass the different planning practices carried out in Europe (Nadin & Dühr, 2005). Indeed, each country has its own spatial planning concepts, practices and regulatory systems, all of which have already been analysed and

compared in 'grey' literature such as the EU compendium of spatial planning systems and policies (European Commission, 1999) and the Compass project (European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON), 2018), as well as in scientific literature (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009; Newman & Thornley, 1996). These various national planning cultures differ in their ambitions, their means, their subjects and their modes of governance; although they are all influenced by the Europeanization of spatial planning, referring to the impacts of EU policies on planning in the member states (Evers & Tennekes, 2016; Faludi, 2018). The diversity of planning practices and land regulations in Europe therefore inevitably leads to a very broad and heterogeneous set of CBSP initiatives, which can vary between 'hard planning' and 'soft planning' approaches. The former refers to a type of planning that is grounded on a legal and statutory basis, with laws, instruments and institutions regulating spatial development. Such an approach is set in national legislation, in which territorial powers establish the objectives, tools and procedures to frame the spatial development within their sovereign space. By contrast, 'soft planning' approaches are characterized by more informal ways of acting and most often lead to the elaboration of joint visions and strategy-making (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009). Such approaches introduce new scales and mechanisms of policy- and decision-making, and bring new actors to the table (Purkharthofer, 2016). However, they are often less binding, and sometimes lead to disillusionment regarding their concrete outcomes.

The other key element analysed in this article concerns the forms of cross-border governance that can be observed in CBSP initiatives. To date, research in this domain has shown that actors are constantly torn between on the one hand, a logic of action inspired by the formalized national framework, and on the other hand, the necessity to adapt the usual approaches and open a new space for reflection and experimentation – notably in terms of governance – in which borders are porous and allow informal working relationships to be established beyond these borders (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016). Effecting CBSP thus leads the local initiators of planning to cooperate closely in order to navigate between the strands of the 'web of transnational jurisdictions' (Hooghe & Marks, 2010, p. 25) and to exploit the interstices left empty by national actors in terms of spatial development regulations. This requires thinking 'outside the box' and going beyond technical, cultural, institutional, relational and legal obstacles. Planners not only have to be able to apply brokering abilities in the cross-border context (Dörny & Decoville, 2016), but also to determine and acknowledge the nature of the cross-border interdependencies that tie the border regions together. The governance structures can therefore be influenced in contrasting ways in cross-border regions. The cross-border context can potentially offer a space of freedom for experimentation and innovation in CBSP governance (Durand, 2014); however, it can also lead to a multiplication of public actors in the governance, due to a lack of clearly established legitimacy. Indeed, some

actors may be tempted to participate in a cooperative approach just to be present in the discussion arena for possible future initiatives, but without being really involved.

Given the variety of practices and regulations, there is a need for an empirical and structured analysis to categorize the initiatives falling under the scope of CBSP and to offer a better understanding of how it contributes to the European integration paradigm. Through case studies, scientific literature has already demonstrated that CBSP initiatives can range from very rapid and localized operations – such as small-scale urban redevelopment projects carried out at former border crossings (Peña & Durand, 2020) – through transregional initiatives (Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2020), to overseas strategies (Walsh & Kannen, 2019) and even transnational or supranational ones (Fabro & Haselsberger, 2009; Zimmerbauer, 2018). The first part of this analysis provides an overview of CBSP practices in Europe by looking at the locations of CBSP projects, the number of actors involved and the budget allocated at the level of the Interreg programming areas. Second, attention is paid to the real nature of the CBSP projects. In view of the difficulties already mentioned in implementing spatial planning operations at a cross-border scale, we hypothesize that a significant proportion of the Interreg projects do not lead to concrete results, but instead to preliminary steps such as the networking of actors or the production of expertise or policy documents. Third, we examine the governance networks of the CBSP projects and their spatial scales. The objective is to verify, through the investigation of a large number of examples, the assumption that the broader the scale of cross-border cooperation in spatial planning, the less the cooperation will tend to deliver concrete outcomes that have an impact on space (Jacobs, 2016).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current paper relies on a systematic approach (as it covers all the European internal border areas) to the CBSP initiatives that were co-financed through the Interreg IV A programme for the 2007–13 period. Using a database with information about 6758 cross-border cooperation projects for this period, some 483 CBSP projects were identified and investigated. Interreg A is a financial tool for European regional policy that promotes cooperation at a cross-border scale, with tens of thousands of projects having been funded since the first wave of Interreg activities in 1991. All the data on Interreg projects can be accessed via the keep.eu website. The 2007–13 period was chosen because it is the only one in which all territorial cooperation programmes are taken into account, with a rate of information on completed territorial cooperation projects of 93%.

A selection was made from this database to identify CBSP-related projects based on the specific themes to which projects are associated (in the keep.eu database, each project is characterized by one to three themes). Four themes were selected: regional planning and

development; urban development; transport and mobility; and improving transport connections. All the projects linked to the themes rural and peripheral development or coastal management and maritime issues are de facto included, since they all also fall within the previously mentioned themes. In addition, the selection covers transport-related projects that are essential for the integration of border territories and are at the heart of the European territorial integration policy (European Commission, 2018a), even if they are part of a sectoral policy. All the Interreg IV A programmes are included in the selection, except for countries located at the external borders of the EU. As a result, 51 programming areas are taken into account for the analysis. In order to complete and check the relevance of the material used to identify CBSP projects, another database was produced using information available on the official website of the European Commission's Regional Policy concerning the content of the different operational programmes and their political priorities.¹ Between two and five priorities are indicated for each of the selected programming areas for the 2007–13 period. An analysis was carried out to see whether 'planning' or 'accessibility' thematically appeared as a priority in the different programmes. This allowed us to recontextualize the different projects.

The projects were then categorized into four different types, depending on their aims. The first concerns the networking of actors, aimed at enabling them to get to know each other and understand each other's practices, concepts, visions and ways of working. This can help create the bonds of trust and legitimacy necessary in order to work together towards a common objective. For Lundquist and Trippel (2013), the success of cross-border integration depends less on the physical or institutional distance between actors – as this can be relatively easily overcome – than on the cognitive distance and the differences in culture or language. Above all, the actors involved in CBSP initiatives are often civil servants attached to a non-cross-border space, who perform this task in addition to their main function. Therefore, cross-border partners need to have trust in each other to exchange sensitive information, even if the competition between territories remains, particularly with regard to attracting investors. In a sense, all Interreg projects contribute to strengthening these links, but the projects classified as belonging to the 'network' type have the enhancement of ties between partners as their main targeted outcome. The second type of project, titled 'observation', aims to produce detailed information about a cross-border area and to address the lack of common knowledge at this scale. Such projects are intended to provide a better understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics of border territories, as well as the constraints and assets. They should make it possible to identify the cross-border needs or problems encountered by the populations and actors, but also the issues and possible fields in which CBSP approaches can be undertaken. This type of project involves studies and territorial expertise, as well as observation, survey, data collection and treatment. The multiplication of cross-border

observatories shows the interest in these approaches (European Commission, 2016). The third type of project has the main purpose of producing co-constructed strategies at the cross-border scale, whether general and multi-thematic, or more specific and focused on a predetermined field of intervention, such as economic development, transport or innovation. The fourth type of project refers to initiatives that target very concrete achievements and aim to influence the cross-border area in a visible and tangible manner, such as through infrastructure projects or the construction of buildings. Some of the cross-border projects investigated in this study fall into more than one category, as they have several of the above-mentioned aims.

Analyses were also carried out to gain a better understanding of the governance of CBSP in Europe, focusing on the types of actors involved. The actors were distinguished according to their legal status (public actor, company, association/agency or university), their institutional level (local, regional, central or specifically active at a cross-border scale) and lastly their location. The spatial scales of the governance networks set up for the different projects were compared in order to see if their structures are related to the nature of their achievements. For this, the calculation of the average distance between the actors and the barycentre of the spatial distribution of all the actors involved for each project was realized using a geographical information system (ARC GIS). Lastly, data relating to the total budget was used to calculate the average costs per type of project and per programming area.

This systematic approach to empirically investigating CBSP has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, it is based on data from the keep.eu website, which lists Interreg-funded projects but does not encompass CBSP projects that have other sources of funding. Using only this database may result in overrepresenting certain types of projects among all the existing CBSP initiatives, due to the Interreg funding rules. On the other hand, it guarantees excellent comparability at the European level. Second, there may be input errors when projects are entered into the keep.eu database, particularly with regard to the themes they refer to. These potential errors were mitigated by an analysis of the description of each project and by recategorizing them if any discrepancy was identified. A third limitation relates to the potential underestimation of the partners involved in the different projects. This is because only the operator partners are detailed in the database used and not the methodological ones, as the latter do not receive any proportion of the Interreg budget. These non-funded partners can actively contribute to the networks of actors, although their actual contribution is usually relatively limited.

Various intensities of CBSP in Europe

Before looking at the types of cross-border projects carried out, it is important to have in mind some general background information at the European level. As already mentioned, a total of 6758 cross-border projects were carried out during the Interreg IV A programming period

from 2007 to 2013, involving 35 countries and 17,742 partners (here, the partners are institutions and not individuals), with a total budget of €7.75 billion. Using the classification method presented above, 483 CBSP projects were identified, representing 7.1% of all Interreg IV A projects and involving 1780 actors. The total budget dedicated to CBSP projects was approximately €845 million, or 11.75% of the total EU budget spent. In relative terms, the proportion of CBSP projects in the total Interreg IV A project budget fluctuates significantly throughout European border regions. For example, it amounts to 42% in the Romania–Bulgaria programming area, whereas it is less than 1% in the Poland–Slovakia and Italy–Malta areas. Physical obstacles, low human density and even seas can be major obstacles to the development of CBSP projects, but the policy priorities mentioned in the different operational programmes also explain these differences.

The first observation concerns the localization of the actors involved in CBSP projects. Figure 1 shows the number of partner institutions involved in CBSP projects along the internal European borders. In absolute terms, the most populated countries – such as Germany, France and Italy – have the highest numbers of partner institutions involved in CBSP projects, although some less populated countries such as Slovenia, Austria and Estonia indicate an overrepresentation of organizations involved in CBSP projects in relation to the size of their population. At the level of the Interreg programming areas, a substantial diversity of cooperation dynamics can again be observed, with some regions in which planning actors are particularly numerous at the cross-border scale, such as the Portugal–Spain programming area (188 actors involved), the Upper-Rhine area (100 actors) and the Romania–Bulgaria area (98 actors). By contrast, other dyads do not mobilize a significant number of stakeholders on spatial planning issues, for example Slovenia–Hungary or Poland–Slovak Republic (four actors).

Figure 1 also highlights that most of the institutions involved are located in the border regions and not in the more central areas, revealing that CBSP is a deconcentrated practice, mostly piloted and implemented at the local or regional levels close to borders. Nonetheless, it can be seen that in countries with a more centralized tradition, such as Sweden, Greece, France and Spain, the presence of state actors (even when deconcentrated to the level of regional administrative capitals) remains necessary. This is particularly the case when projects require the approval of certain ministries, for example to develop railway projects or establish cross-border strategies. In these cases, the state needs to be involved because of its powers and competences in the field of spatial planning.

With regard to the importance of the CBSP issue in each programming area, Figure 2 shows that 10.8% of the total Interreg IV A programme budget was allocated to this thematically related area (€844,945,726 allocated for CBSP projects out of the €7.8 billion spent during the 2007–13 period). This proportion varies between 13.9% for the 24 cross-border regions that prioritized spatial planning in their operational programme

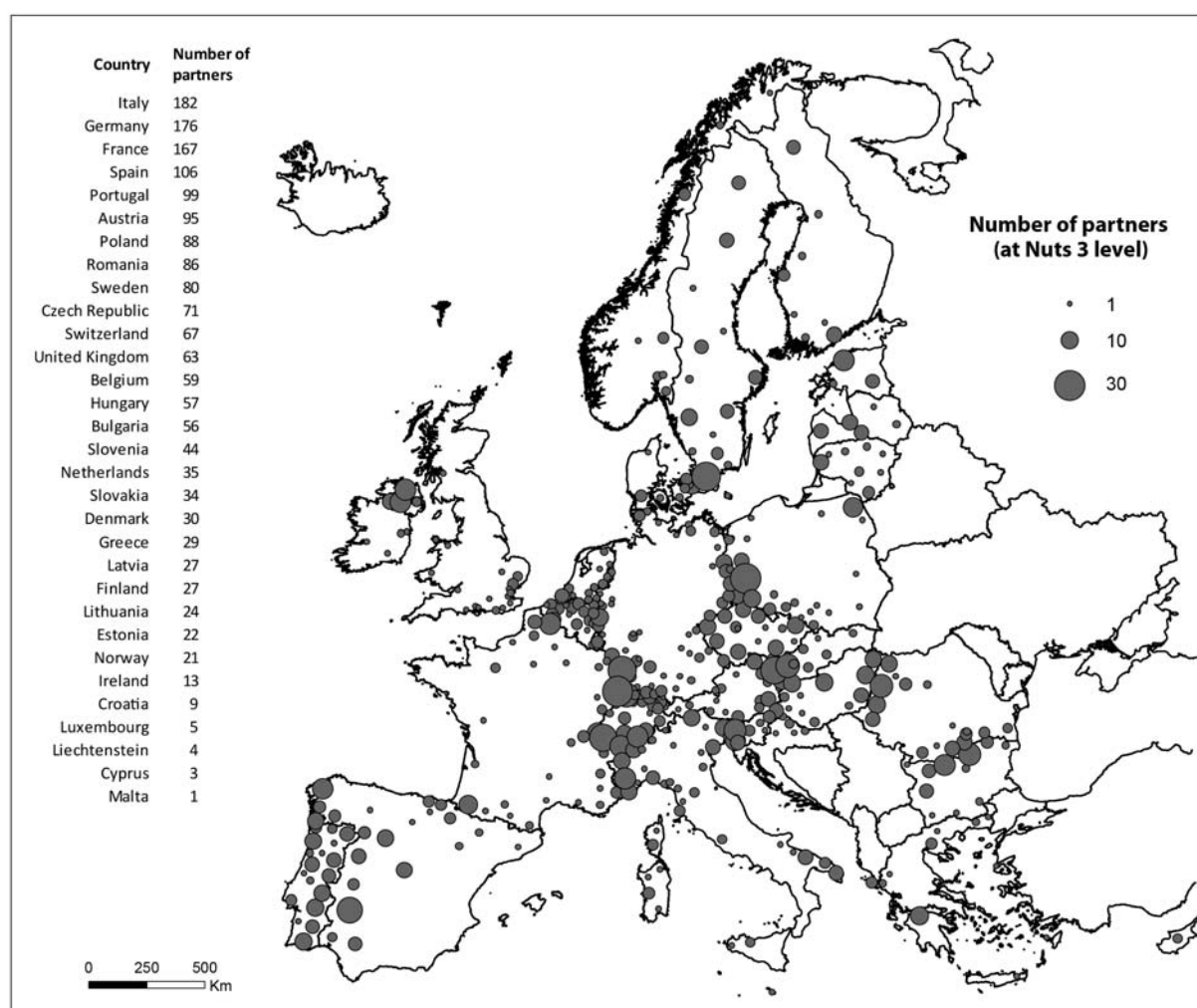


Figure 1. Distribution of the partner institutions involved in cross-border spatial planning (CBSP) projects.
Source: keep.eu.

(€590,764,882) and 7.1% for the 27 others that did not (€254,181,843). This highlights a degree of coherence between the political priorities put forward and the reality on the ground concerning the setting up of CBSP projects, although there are some exceptions.

Beyond these initial contextual elements, it is important to categorize the different types of projects related to CBSP in order to better understand the purposes for which they are implemented, the territories in which they are carried out and lastly, which types of actors are involved.

A majority of CBSP projects without concrete effects on space

Different types of CBSP projects have been achieved along the EU's internal borders. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the budgets allocated by categories and reveals that 'concrete' projects account for more than 52% of the total costs of CBSP projects compared with about 17% for 'network' and 'observation' projects, and 13% for 'strategy' projects. This is not surprising, given that the 'concrete' projects are also by far the most expensive, with an average budget of €3 million. Indeed, these projects are sometimes associated with the construction of costly infrastructure or the

renovation of roadways, etc. However, more than two thirds of the CBSP projects (such as 'network' and 'observation' projects) do not lead to any concrete impact on space. These projects instead aim to consolidate the bonds between actors and to carry out studies that may facilitate the implementation of concrete projects in a second step. The relatively small number of 'strategy' projects indicates their complexity or the lack of willingness to develop this type of joint cross-border action, which requires a certain amount of trust between actors and the identification of converging priorities and interests across borders.

Figure 3 shows the various purposes for which the Interreg budgets for CBSP were used in the different border regions examined. The Romania–Bulgaria Interreg programming area shows by far the largest budget for cross-border development projects (€135 million), followed by the France–Switzerland, Spain–Portugal and Lubuskie–Brandenburg programmes, with total budgets of €57 million, €53 million and €51 million, respectively. The majority of the cost of CBSP projects is concentrated on eight programming areas. In 26 programming areas, the total amount of money for CBSP projects is thus less than €10 million for seven years of cooperation.

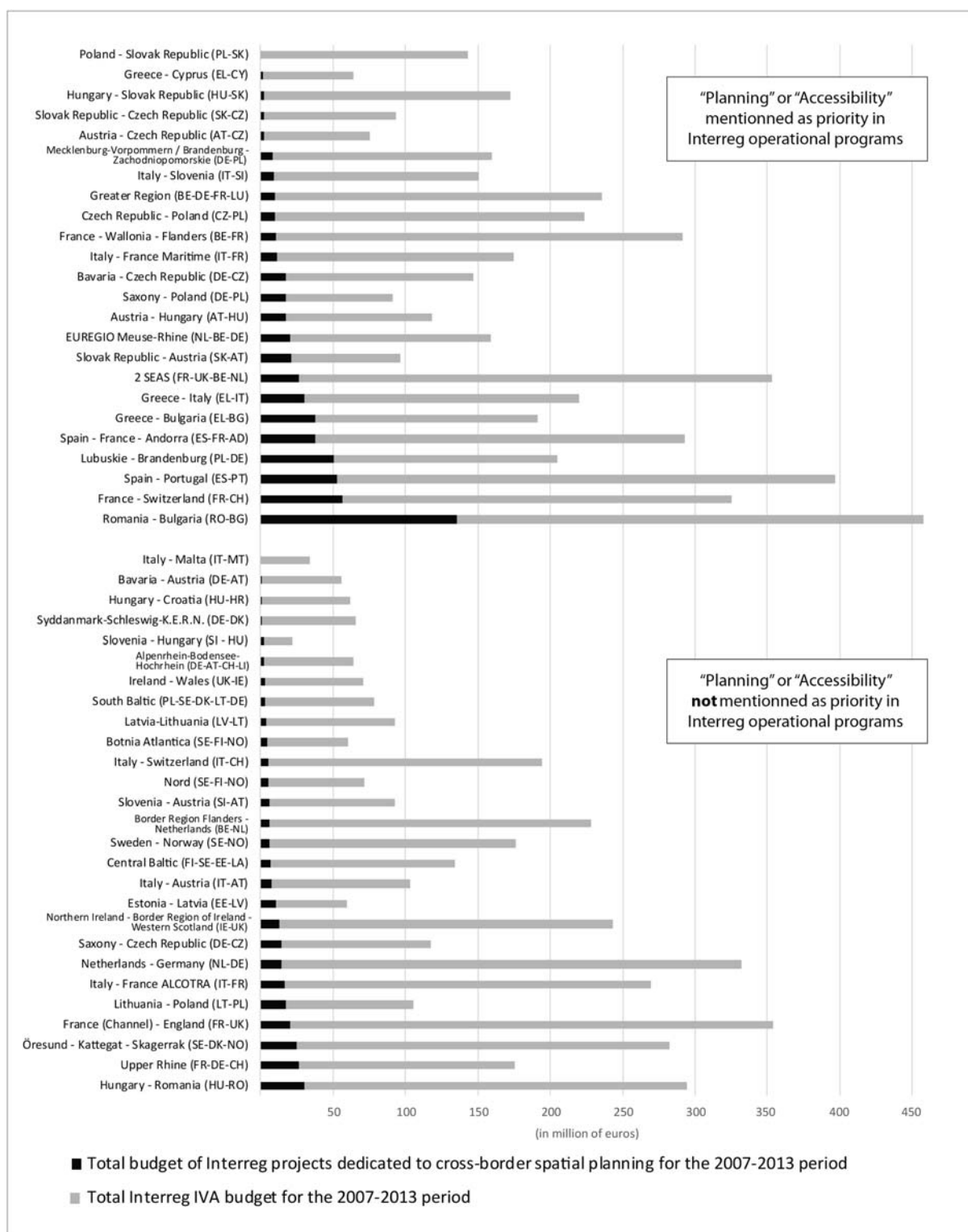


Figure 2. Proportion of the Interreg budget dedicated to cross-border spatial planning (CBSP) projects per programming area. Source: keep.eu.

The money spent on CBSP projects in the framework of Interreg is allocated to notably contrasting types of outcomes. It appears to be mainly used for concrete results in many East European border regions (100% at the Slovenia–Hungarian border, 95% for Latvia–Estonia and 82% for Romania–Bulgaria) whereas in some other regions – often those presented

as models of cross-border cooperation – it is completely or mostly spent on observation, networking or strategy-building, for example, France–Switzerland (89%) or the Øresund Region between Copenhagen and Malmö (100%).

A deeper look at the thematic content of the CBSP projects (not represented on the map), emphasizes certain

Table 1. Categorization of cross-border spatial planning projects.

Type of cross-border spatial planning project	Number of projects	Total budget (€)	Numbers of actor per project	Average budget per project (€)	Average distance between the actors (km) ^a
Network	114	134,992,015	3.6	1,184,140	85.29
Observation	120	132,065,269	3.7	1,100,544	71.41
Strategy	55	97,892,235	4.5	1,779,859	77.01
Concrete	132	398,931,037	3.1	3,022,205	61.25
<i>Network + observation</i>	8	6,382,285	3.6	797,786	97.23
<i>Network + strategy</i>	10	6,722,489	6.3	672,249	73.31
<i>Network + concrete</i>	9	23,339,628	3.3	2,593,292	62.13
<i>Observation + strategy</i>	19	16,581,951	3.5	872,734	120.40
<i>Observation + concrete</i>	9	15,135,527	5.0	1,681,725	87.60
<i>Strategy + concrete</i>	4	5,330,976	8.0	1,332,744	62.79
<i>Network + observation + strategy</i>	3	7,572,308	4.3	2,524,103	95.63
Total	483	844,945,720	3.7	1,749,370	74.77

Note: ^aBased on their distance to the barycentre of the spatial distribution of the project's consortium (only projects including two or more partners have been taken into account).

Source: keep.eu.

characteristics that are specific to some cross-border regions. Some of these regions have a broad approach and deal with different aspects of cross-border development, such as the construction of infrastructure and public facilities, urban regeneration operations or the development of economic activity zones, although the last of these are less common (Spain–France, Greater Region or Upper-Rhine). Others focus on one ‘planning’ theme, in particular cross-border mobility through the development of road networks, railway systems or cycle paths, confirming the policy choices made in the Interreg operational programmes to prioritize cross-border accessibility (Lubuskie–Brandenburg, Austria–Hungary and Italy–Slovenia). This reflects the fact that CBSP projects funded by Interreg aim more to facilitate and increase cross-border flows than to create the facilities and services required as a result of the growth of these flows. The vast majority of these transport projects are concentrated along the borders of the former Eastern bloc countries, especially along the Romania–Bulgaria and Romania–Hungary borders. In these cross-border areas, the improvement of communications networks (which are often in poor condition) seems to be the target for the Interreg funds. This observation has already raised the scepticism of some authors with regard to the ‘outcome of the Community Initiative ... in terms of enduring transboundary governance structures and sustainable development’ (Leibenath et al., 2008, p. 190).

Local actors as drivers of CBSP cooperation

Beyond the types of CBSP projects and the associated budgets, the current paper also explores their governance. Local public authorities are by far the most represented bodies among the different governance structures put in

place to administer the projects (with 39% of all the actors) (Table 2), followed by regional public authorities (23%). Central actors (the state and decentralized services) are poorly represented (2.5%) and may even be absent in most of the programming areas. The ‘associations and agencies’ category – which includes urban planning agencies, chambers of commerce, consultancy firms, foundations and associations – provides an important number of partners in CBSP projects (17.4%). Despite their eligibility, companies are only marginally involved in the projects (7%), while universities are proportionally strongly represented (9%). Lastly, 36 cross-border cooperation structures are also engaged and count as proactive partners in setting up CBSP projects.

Table 2 also sheds light on the distribution of the different types of CBSP projects according to the categorization of actors. Projects relating to ‘observation’ have the greatest number of actors involved (442), primarily composed of local (33%) and regional actors (27%). Universities are also notably present in this type of project, in accordance with their territorial expertise. Projects of this nature are aimed at carrying out studies and diagnostics, and can either produce general knowledge or precede the implementation of concrete CBSP projects, for example the extension of a tramway line or the construction of a bridge or cycle path. The local and regional actors anchored in the territory concerned are the most able to realize these diagnostics, as are – to a lesser extent – the universities or research centres located in the cities where these projects are piloted. Projects that target the improvement of networks of governance (406) mainly involve associations and agencies (30%), as well as local (26%) and regional actors (23%). Projects with tangible outcomes (404) are made up of a majority of local actors (56%) and to a lesser

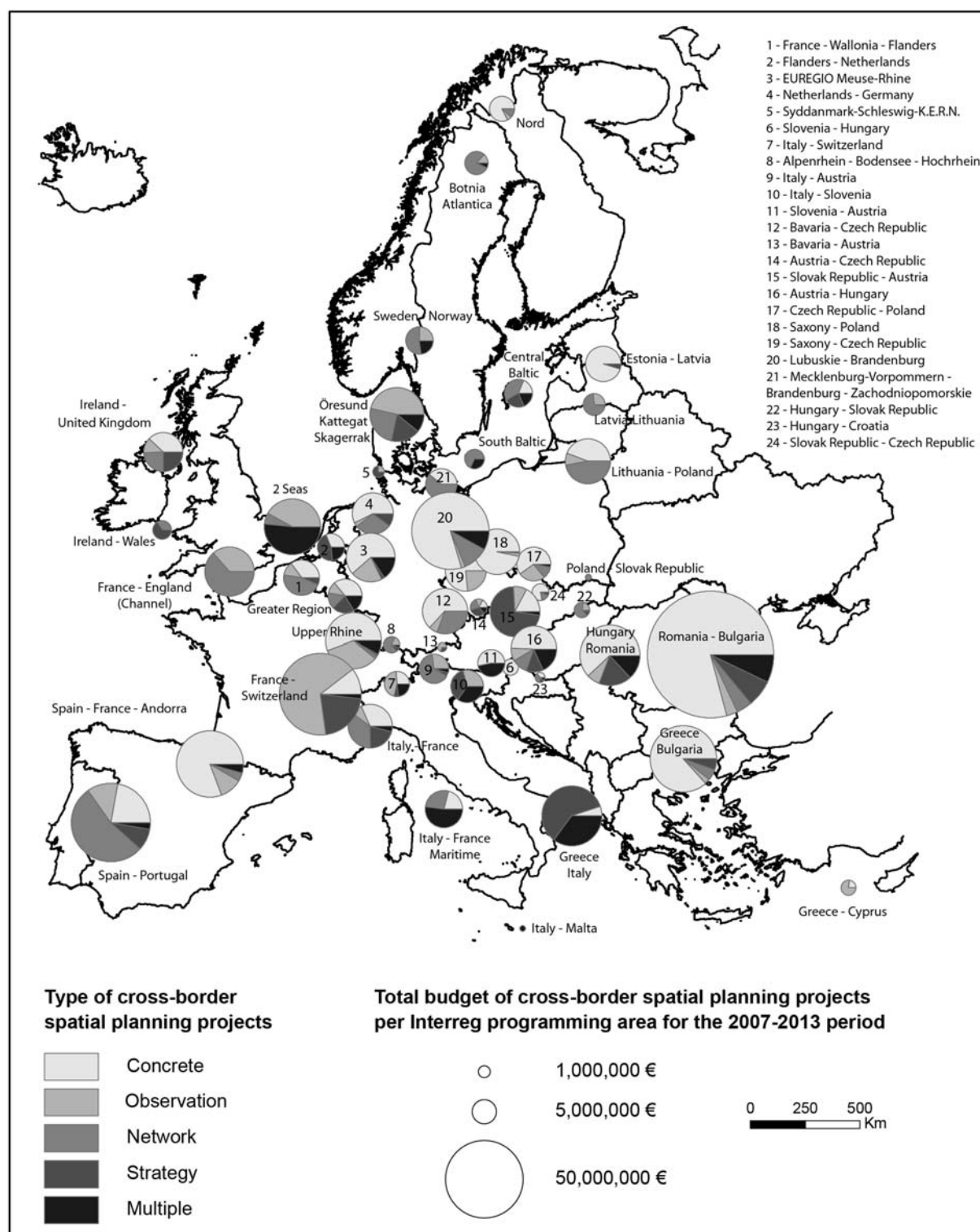


Figure 3. Budget of cross-border spatial planning (CBSP) projects by type of targeted output in the Interreg programming areas. Source: keep.eu.

extent, regional actors (19%), thus confirming their role as initiators and leaders of CBSP projects. Lastly, the projects labelled 'strategy' involve 250 actors from local (37%) and regional authorities (27%). State actors are relatively highly represented in these projects (5%) compared with all the CBSP projects (2.5%). This highlights their willingness to become involved in strategic projects.

The right-hand column of Table 1 shows the average distances between actors according to the type of CBSP project. It should be noted that only NUTS-3 regions, which differ greatly in size from one country to another, are eligible for Interreg funding.² This implies that the actors involved in large-scale programming areas are potentially more likely to be dispersed

Table 2. Types of actors involved in cross-border spatial planning projects by type of projects.

Type of project	Public authority			Association/ agency	Cross-border cooperation structure	Company	University	Total number of actors per type of project
	Central	Regional	Local					
Network	7	94	106	120	19	18	42	406
Observation	16	119	147	55	10	32	63	442
Strategy	12	67	92	45	3	19	12	250
Concrete	6	76	227	45	1	34	15	404
<i>Network + observation</i>	0	7	12	7	0	1	2	29
<i>Network + strategy</i>	2	10	31	9	0	2	9	63
<i>Network + concrete</i>	0	6	16	3	0	5	0	30
<i>Observation + strategy</i>	2	12	18	12	1	5	16	66
<i>Observation + concrete</i>	0	10	19	6	2	7	1	45
<i>Strategy + concrete</i>	1	5	22	4	0	0	0	32
<i>Network + observation + strategy</i>	0	3	3	5	0	1	1	13
Total number of actors	46	409	693	311	36	124	161	1780

than those in smaller ones. However, the results clearly indicate some differentiation between the types of CBSP projects. Concrete ones have the smallest average distance between actors. Added to this, it has previously been observed that local actors are the most involved in the implementation of these projects. This accordingly supports our second working hypothesis; that the smaller the scale defined by the actors' network, the more tangible the output of the projects. In other words, the CBSP projects carried out at the local level seem to have more concrete and direct impacts on the daily life of citizens than those carried out in large-scale cooperation areas.

By contrast, 'network' type projects account for the most dispersed actors, who potentially would not be interconnected without the Interreg input. 'Network' projects are similar to 'strategy' projects in some ways. They bring together the actors or institutions that contribute to reflection about the future of a cross-border area, thanks to their competences, skills or experience. This may involve state actors or universities, and thus increase the average distance between all the actors. The observation projects present intermediate figures, since they include a wide variety of actors. Although counterexamples can be identified among these types of CBSP projects, it still shows that the more the projects are inscribed in local scales, the more they seem to be conducive to concrete output.

DISCUSSION

Without a supranational authority capable of specifying mainstream lines of action for spatial planning across borders, the initiatives in Europe remain very diverse. This makes it difficult for the population to properly understand what this discipline really involves. The observation of what has been done under the umbrella expression of CBSP in the frame of the Interreg IV programme allows us to better grasp which actors (both private and institutional) are involved in such projects in Europe, in which territories, with what purposes and at what financial cost.

Theoretically, the *raison d'être* of CBSP is to intervene in space to ensure the smoother fluidity of cross-border flows and to allow the emergence of a cross-border region, endowed with an identity that is acknowledged and appropriated by the populations on both sides of the border. However, the current paper shows that not all regions' participants treat this domain with the same degree of involvement and in the same way. In Eastern Europe, projects addressing urgent structural needs – such as the interconnection or maintenance of road networks – account for a significant proportion of the EU funding spent. In other border areas, CBSP is seen more as a means to make strategic territorial priorities more convergent across borders. Lastly, in many other regions, CBSP seems to be considered as very marginal in view of the small amount of funding dedicated to it.

The attention paid to the results of the CBSP projects also reveals that an important proportion of them do not directly lead to concrete outcomes for the population. This probably plays against the understanding that spatial planning can have a role in the European integration process. CBSP initiatives have to go through different steps, starting from the establishment of contact between stakeholders, followed by the observation and exchange of information regarding the cross-border area, then by the drafting of strategies to finally enable their concrete implementation. However, CBSP is not a linear process; it requires constant efforts to strengthen existing cooperation networks and to renew the production of factual knowledge concerning the cross-border area, which is in perpetual evolution. CBSP initiatives have to be considered as parts of an iterative process over a long period, and thus need to proceed by trial and error in order to allow the cooperation to move forwards. The need to promote the mechanics of cooperation by ensuring that governance is maintained or reinvigorated sometimes tends to monopolize human and financial efforts, to the detriment of concrete actions that are more visible to the public. The contribution of CBSP projects to the materialization of the European integration process therefore varies widely from one project to another, and even from one Interreg programming area to another. However, projects without immediate concrete results are often necessary in order to enable, maintain and strengthen the bond of trust between actors, or as preliminary steps towards the implementation of further, more tangible outcomes. Even if they do not lead to concrete results, they can contribute to the process of European integration, albeit in a very modest and indirect way.

Nevertheless, this eternal 'starting over' can lead to disillusionment over time, or even fatigue among the actors involved (Knippschild, 2011); especially because in many cases, cross-border cooperation in spatial planning leads to results that may appear limited. This can be explained by the complexity of the implementation and the many obstacles encountered by planners, which then lead the decision-makers involved to find a consensus described as the 'smallest common denominator', that is, the least restrictive possible (Decoville & Durand, 2016, p. 11).

Furthermore, it is necessary to see how the results of this analysis can feed into the state of the art on the evolution of spatial planning practices overall, and on the distinction between 'soft planning' and 'hard planning' in particular. It is now generally accepted that planning practices have evolved over several decades from a logic of regulation and control to a spatialized, strategic approach (Albrechts et al., 2003). This involves more open forms of governance practices that aim to steer territorial development in a more entrepreneurial manner (Healey et al., 1997), with representatives from the private sector, and that go far beyond the mere idea of planning as control (Albrechts, 2015). Domestic spatial planning has thus often become more a policy for the economic development of territories than a policy for regulating spatial development.

With regard to CBSP, our results show that the space and scale of cooperation matter. At a large scale, CBSP tends to present a certain number of points in common with the major trends in spatial planning. It seems to produce more soft planning – that is, a process of mutual learning, cooperation, negotiation and coordination (Purkarthofer, 2016) – in soft spaces (Faludi, 2010) than hard planning, with its rigid regulations restricted to precisely delimited territorial frameworks. Nevertheless, at a local scale, CBSP can be applied with the aim of addressing very concrete problems. It also differs from the strategic spatial planning shift in the sense that our results suggest an underrepresentation of private actors in CBSP initiatives, as well as a very low number of concrete projects aimed at producing economic development. Although some projects are identified as being aimed at increasing the attractiveness of cross-border regions, it is clear that few projects go beyond relatively modest territorial marketing strategies.

One of the specificities of CBSP is that it brings together institutional actors from several countries. The challenges are to find a common vision for a cross-border region that concerns all of the actors, to identify priorities and initiatives to be carried out within this particular area and for there to be the willingness to work together in spite of the technical, legal and cultural difficulties that the border context entails. However, agreeing on common needs requires a consensus that may not be easy to reach. Indeed, the institutional stakeholders that develop these CBSP projects are embedded in their domestic territorial boundaries, and they give priority to spatial development within their national territory. This reveals a contradiction that is inherent in cross-border cooperation. Institutional actors often behave in a paradoxical way, trying to act in the interest of their own territory, and at the same time, for the good of the cross-border regional area. However, interests can sometimes be opposed. For example, there is still frequently strong competition between border areas to attract investors and to produce added value in the territory over which institutional actors are sovereign, and on which they can levy taxes. To overcome this hindrance, the European Commission has proposed a voluntary mechanism to resolve legal obstacles in border regions: the *European cross-border mechanism*. If adopted, this regulation will allow one member state to apply the legal framework of a foreign member state for a specifically defined project (European Commission, 2018b).

Beyond the fact that this legal possibility may exist, the question is whether the interest in cooperating at the cross-border scale is great enough to change domestic practices. CBSP is both a pragmatic response to the needs arising from the European integration process and also a fully fledged experience of the political construction of Europe with, among other things, the creation of networks of actors and the structuring of cross-border governance capable of engendering a cross-border space. In this way, CBSP appears as a component of the European learning that is aimed at inventing the modalities of trans-state territorial governance and at shaping a better

organization of the European space. Indeed, even if it is enacted slowly, CBSP modifies the uses, habits and working methods of spatial planning, while renewing the ways of thinking and conceiving space. Furthermore, developing CBSP contains a strong symbolic dimension that is crucial in order to build, step by step, a European project that will be more appropriated by the population.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

NOTES

1. See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2007-2013/.
2. Article 7 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32006R1083/>.

ORCID

Decoville Antoine  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8935-0039>

Durand Frédéric  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2658-7597>

REFERENCES

- Albrechts, L. (2015). Ingredients for a more radical strategic spatial planning. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 42(3), 510–525. <https://doi.org/10.1068/b130104p>
- Albrechts, L., Healey, P., & Kunzmann, K. (2003). Strategic spatial planning and regional governance in Europe. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 69(2), 113–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360308976301>
- Allmendinger, P., & Haughton, G. (2009). Soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries and metagovernance: The new spatial planning in the Thames Gateway. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 41(3), 617–633. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a40208>
- Brambilla, C. (2015). Exploring the critical potential of the borderscapes concept. *Geopolitics*, 20(1), 14–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.884561>
- Decoville, A., & Durand, F. (2016). Building a cross-border territorial strategy between four countries: Wishful thinking? *European Planning Studies*, 24(10), 1825–1843. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2016.1195796>
- Decoville, A., & Durand, F. (2019). Exploring cross-border integration in Europe: How do populations cross borders and perceive their neighbours? *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 26(2), 134–157. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776418756934>
- Decoville, A., Durand, F., & Feltgen, V. (2015). *Opportunities of cross-border cooperation between small and medium cities in Europe*. Report realized on behalf of the Department for Spatial Planning, Ministry for Sustainable Development and Infrastructures in Luxembourg in the frame of the Luxembourg, Italian and Latvian EU Trio Presidency. DATER.
- Dell'Agnese, E., & Amilhat-Szary, A.-L. (2015). Borderscapes: From border landscapes to border aesthetics. *Geopolitics*, 20(1), 4–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2015.1014284>
- Dörny, S., & Decoville, A. (2016). Governance and transportation policy networks in the cross-border metropolitan region of Luxembourg: A social network analysis. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 23(1), 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776413490528>
- Dühr, S., Colomb, C., & Nadin, V. (2010). *European spatial planning and territorial cooperation*. Routledge.
- Durand, F. (2014). Challenges of cross-border spatial planning in the metropolitan regions of Luxembourg and Lille. *Planning Practice & Research*, 29(2), 113–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2014.896148>
- Durand, F., & Decoville, A. (2018). Establishing cross-border spatial planning. In E. Medeiros (Ed.), *European territorial cooperation theoretical and empirical approaches to the process and impacts of cross-border and transnational cooperation in Europe* (pp. 229–244). Springer.
- Durand, F., & Decoville, A. (2020). A multidimensional measurement of the integration between European border regions. *Journal of European Integration*, 42(2), 163–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1657857>
- European Commission. (1999). *The EU compendium of spatial planning systems and policies*. Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy.
- European Commission. (2016). *Collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes*. Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy.
- European Commission. (2018a). *Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border rail transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders*. Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy.
- European Commission. (2018b). *Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context*.
- European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON). (2018). *COMPASS (comparative analysis of territorial governance and spatial planning systems in Europe)*. ESPON EGTC.
- Evers, D., & Tennekes, J. (2016). Europe exposed: Mapping the impacts of EU policies on spatial planning in the Netherlands. *European Planning Studies*, 24(10), 1747–1765. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2016.1183593>
- Fabbro, S., & Haselsberger, B. (2009). Spatial planning harmonisation as a condition for trans-national cooperation. *European Planning Studies*, 17(9), 1335–1356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654310903053521>
- Faludi, A. (2010). *Cohesion, coherence, cooperation: European spatial planning coming of age?* Routledge.
- Faludi, A. (2018). *The poverty of territorialism: A neo-medieval view of Europe and European planning*. Edward Elgar.
- Healey, P., Hakee, K., Motte, A., & Needham, B. (1997). *Making strategic spatial plans: Innovation in Europe*. UCL Press.
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2010). Types of multilevel governance. In H. Enderlein, S. Wälti, & M. Zürn (Eds.), *Handbook on multi-level governance* (pp. 17–31). Edward Elgar.
- Jacobs, J. (2016). Spatial planning in cross-border regions: A systems-theoretical perspective. *Planning Theory*, 15(1), 68–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095214547149>
- Knieling, J., & Othengrafen, F. (2009). En route to a theoretical model for comparative research on planning cultures. In J. Knieling & F. Othengrafen (Eds.), *Planning cultures in Europe* (pp. 37–61). Ashgate.
- Knippschild, R. (2011). Cross-border spatial planning: Understanding, designing and managing cooperation processes in the German-

- Polish–Czech borderland. *European Planning Studies*, 19(4), 629–645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2011.548464>
- Kramsch, O., & Hooper, B. (2004). *Cross-border governance in the European Union*. Routledge.
- Leibenath, M., Korcelli-Olejniczak, E., & Knippschild, R. (2008). *Cross-border governance and sustainable spatial development – Mind the gaps!* Springer.
- Longo, M. (2018). *The politics of borders sovereignty, security, and the citizen after 9/11*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lundquist, K. J., & Tripp, M. (2013). Distance, proximity and types of cross-border innovation systems: A conceptual analysis. *Regional Studies*, 47(3), 450–460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2011.560933>
- Medeiros, E. (2014). Is there a new ‘trust’ in inner Scandinavia? Evidence from cross-border planning and governance. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 96(4), 363–386. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geob.12057>
- Nadin, V., & Dühr, S. (2005). Some help with Euro-planning jargon. *Town and Country Planning*, 74(3), 82–84.
- Newman, P., & Thornley, A. (1996). *Urban planning in Europe: International competition, national systems and planning projects*. Routledge.
- Paasi, A. (2013). Regional planning and the mobilization of ‘regional identity’: From bounded spaces to relational complexity. *Regional Studies*, 47(8), 1206–1219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.661410>
- Paasi, A., & Zimmerbauer, K. (2016). Penumbral borders and planning paradoxes: Relational thinking and the question of borders in spatial planning. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 48(1), 75–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X15594805>
- Peña, S. (2007). Cross-border planning at the U.S.–Mexico border: An institutional approach. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 22(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2007.9695666>
- Peña, S., & Durand, F. (2020). Mobility planning in cross-border metropolitan regions: The European and North American experiences. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2020.1769716>
- Purkharthofer, E. (2016). When soft planning and hard planning meet: Conceptualising the encounter of European, national and sub-national planning. *European Journal of Spatial Development*, 61, 1–20.
- Scott, J. W. (1999). European and North American contexts for cross-border regionalism. *Regional Studies*, 33(7), 605–617. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343409950078657>
- Walsh, C., & Kannen, A. (2019). Planning at Sea: Shifting planning practices at the German North Sea coast. *Raumforschung und Raumordnung Spatial Research and Planning*, 77(2), 147–164. <https://doi.org/10.2478/rara-2019-0020>
- Zimmerbauer, K. (2018). Supranational identities in planning. *Regional Studies*, 52(7), 911–921. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2017.1360481>
- Zimmerbauer, K., & Paasi, A. (2020). Hard work with soft spaces (and vice versa): Problematizing the transforming planning spaces. *European Planning Studies*, 28(4), 771–789. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1653827>