

Bridging cities for building Europe :
The case of the French North-Eastern Border.

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Europe is a recent construction at the scale of the history. In 1958, its ambition was to ensure peace in a continent which has known a lot of wars and crises. One aspect has concerned the effacement of the borders, if not their disappearance. So, since the 80's, crossborder cooperation have been encouraged. A programme like Interreg is emblematic of this orientation. But one of the most interesting evolution concerns the territorial cooperation, linked to territorial project in metropolitan areas and main cities located in border regions, such as Aachen, Maastricht, Liège (Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium), Vienna and Bratislava (Austria and Slovakia), Frankfurt-on-Oder and Slubice (Germany and Poland).

The case of the French North-Eastern Border is surely emblematic of this evolution toward peace and development due to the role of crossborder projects around metropolises and main cities. From Dunkirk in French Flanders to Mulhouse and Saint-Louis in Alsace, cities and metropolises along the frontier with Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany constitute the new gates of the French « open field », in reference to the theory of the « *Pré Carré* » (France considered like something as an enclosure) of Vauban, military engineer of the king Louis XIV, who fortified, in the XVIIth century, all the cities, from Flanders to Alsace against enemies and invaders. But neither citadels, neither the « *ligne Maginot* » (the underground line of defense, built between the world wars one and two) did succeed to prevent war, for centuries, until the end of the second world war in 1945. Dunkirk, Lille, Longwy, Strasbourg are now so many open citadels opened to the neighbors, developing crossborder strategies, bridging the cities.

The question, here, is how these strategies are managed, according to the different planning systems and different governance frameworks in each country, even if they are neighbors ? What are the tools which are used to push these crossborder strategies, specifically in the case of the metropolises ? What is the role of people in these process ? Particularly, the civil society ? Are these process only the result of a technocratic vision and, or, a political will, or are people also involved ?

These questions refer to the approach of collaborative planning by Patsy Healey (P. Healey, 1997). The elaboration of strategic plan concerns not only the policies, but also the process, such the institutional organization and the implementation, also the capacities of territories to develop systems of relations, what Alain Motte also says « *le processus est plus important que le plan* » ou encore « ... *la planification stratégique spatialisée est autant concernée par le processus que par le contenu : une stratégie ou un plan ne coordonnent pas grand-chose en eux-mêmes. C'est le processus social d'élaboration des principes et des usages ultérieurs des schémas qui permet la coordination et la mise en œuvre* ». (Motte A., 2011), (The process is more important than the plan... Spatial strategic planning is as much concerned by the process as the contents : a strategy or a plan do not coordinate much there themselves. That is the social process for the elaboration of principles and later uses of plans which allows coordination and implementation).

We will organize the paper in three main points. First, we will present the geographical and historical context of this border and the challenges which run from. This border opens France towards the north-western Europe in terms of relations and symbolic value.

In a second point we will present a statement of the initiatives and crossborder projects in main cities or metropolises : Dunkirk and the belgian Flanders, the Eurometropolis of Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, the European Pole of Longwy and the Alzette-Belval project near Luxembourg, the Eurodistrict of Saar-Moselle, the Eurodistrict of Strasbourg-Ortenau, Trinational District of Basel, with Saint-Louis, on the French side. We'll present the different tools to implement strategies.

We will focus on the case of Lille to analyse the process of such a crossborder cooperation. This is justified by the fact that it is the first EGTC, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (2008) created in Europe. Specifically, we'll focus on the question of the role of the civil society in the process : local arenas of debates exists, for civil society, in Lille (Conseil de Développement), Tournai (Conseil de développement de Wallonie picarde) and Kortrijk (Transforum), which work together within the « Euroforum », as a stakeholder of the process, facing the politics ones.

We'll try to conclude on the potential and the limits of these processes, and the influence on the recent evolution of local institutions in France, (new *Métropole européenne de Lille* and *Eurométropole de Strasbourg* for instance).

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