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**“INTERREGIONAL AND TRANSFRONTIER CO-OPERATION:
PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT”**

Trieste, Italy

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REPORT

**“SUSTAINING AND PROMOTING INTERREGIONAL
AND TRANSFRONTIER CO-OPERATION”**

by

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The lecture focuses on methods and tools to sustain and promote interregional and transfrontier co-operation.

Information are, as far as possible, substantiated with data on the state of the art of cross-border cooperation in Europe. From 2003 to 2007, the Institute of International sociology of Gorizia - ISIG has carried out, for the Council of Europe, the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of CBC in the Balkan-Danube are, in Central Europe and in the Baltic Sea Region-Western Russia area, for a total of 53 cross-border areas. Such data take into account actors, shapes and objectives with a particular attention to the Euroregional process.

The lecture is organised as follows:

1. Brief introduction on the definition of border
2. Brief introduction on the definition of cooperation
 - a. Interregional cooperation
 - b. Transfrontier cooperation
 - c. The CTE framework
3. Euroregions, EGTC, EGC
4. Sustaining and promoting cooperation across borders
 - a. Tools for analysis
 - i. A model to evaluate the role of cooperation in overcoming the peripheral condition of border areas
 - ii. SWOT analysis to evaluate the state of the art of cooperation
 - b. National resources for interregional and transfrontier cooperation

The following paragraphs¹ outline the theoretical and operational background within which the lecture is plotted.

1. Theoretical framework on the definition of border

The attempt to synthesize the different theories on border studies emphasises the necessity for a multidisciplinary approach to the subject, with the aim of fully understanding the concept of border in its special sense, therefore distinguishing the relevant functions and effects. Depending on the level of intersecting and overlapping between objective and subjective borders, a border area develops specific functional characteristics; these determine the relationship with the national system, that is the relationship between centre and periphery. The peripheral condition of border areas can be attributed to one or more sub-systems (economic, cultural, infrastructural, linguistic, etc.) and it can be, therefore, more or less onerous in terms of limits for and integrated development of the area.

From a systemic perspective, borders can be defined by a number of structural – in terms of the degree of closure and/or opening – and functional characteristics, connected to their barrier or relais effect. All of these characteristics can vary depending on categories of flows passing through borders or being stopped by them, in terms of space and time. We must therefore add to their definition another dimension, concerned with mobility or the lack of it. With these assumptions, starting from the taxonomy of border situations defined by Strassoldo (1979), in a double entry table in which we add the dimension of border movement (mobile/immobile) to the structural dimension (degree of opening/closure), we can derive four typical situations, corresponding to four specific border structures. In the case of a border's mobility and opening

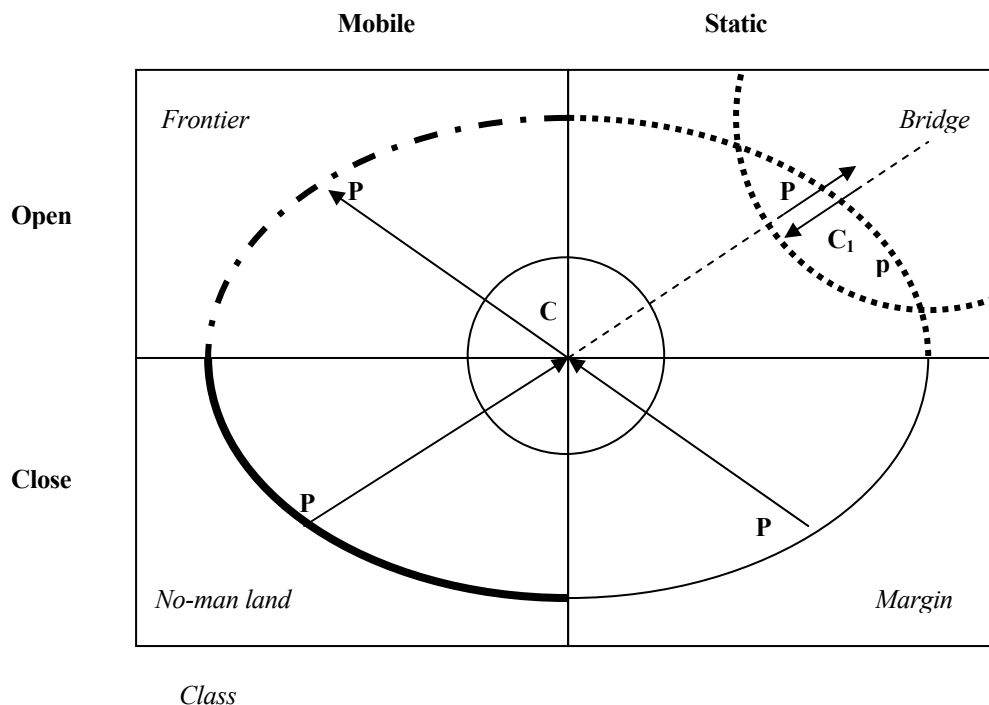
¹ Paragraphs 1 to 3 are an excerpt of D. Del Bianco, (2010) *Prospettive euroregionali per il futuro della governance dei territori transfrontalieri* in "Studi di Sociologia, Vita e Pensiero" – in print and were translated by the author; Paragraph 4 is taken from A. Gasparini, D. Del Bianco, (2010) *SWOT Analysis of the Balkan Danube area*, CoE – in print.

to the outer environment, and of a consequent exchange between two systems, even if unequal, we can talk about a *frontier*, in the opposite case of a coexisting immobility and closure of the border, we can talk of *margin border*. In the other two cases, the border acts as a *filter*, a systemic relais when, although immobile, it shows opening; it acts as “*no man’s land*”, buffer zone, burnt land, when, although mobile, the border is basically closed, not allowing for the exchange of information and resources between the systems. The degree of opening of a border depends on the level of overlapping of borders perceived by each single subsystem; this perception develops from the interpretation of the proportion between dimension, diffusion and density of such subsystems on the basis of the mentioned criteria.

The spatial application of the concept of borders implies the research of the structuring of the whole

The following graph adds to the previous two dimensions mobility/immobility and opening/closure a relational dimension centre/periphery.

Graph 1.1 – Classification of border situations in the centre-periphery relation



Following the traditional approach to the four major border situations, whose specificity is illustrated by the width and the type of line of a hypothetical system border, the graph underlines the vectors of the centre-periphery relation for each one of them: from *P* to *C* in the case of the “No-man land” border and margin border; from *C* to *P* in the case of a frontier and bridge border. However, in the case of a frontier, the vector indicating the transfer of power from the centre to the periphery stops at the peripheral area of that system, whereas in the case of a bridge border is trespasses it pervading the contiguous system.

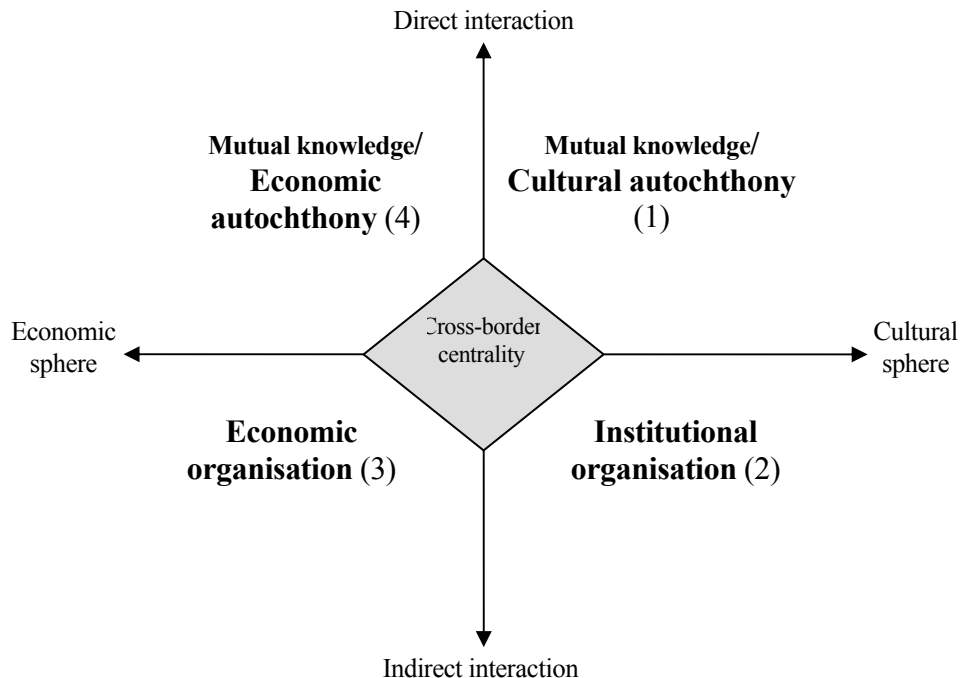
Moreover, it is hypothesised that the transfer of power from *C* to *P* is less intense than the fluxes of resources and information exchanged, which are experienced in the new sub-system as delimited by the inter-penetration of the peripheries of the two contiguous systems (*P* and *p*). According to the intensity of such fluxes, to the relation with the respective centres and to the activation of lasting inter-systemic relations, the new sub-system may endow itself with its own centre (*C₁*)

2. The Cooperation (a)Cross-border(s)

The need to enact cooperative cross-border processes is generated in the joint, reciprocal and similar recognition of border areas about their peripheral condition (Galtung 1969, Johansson 1982, Martinez 1994, Ferrara 2001, Gasparini 2003a, Del Bianco 2007, Gasparini, Del Bianco 2008).

The analysis of the fundamental variables of the systems general theory and of the social interaction in space (Gasparini 2000b), has led to the theoretical elaboration of a tool allowing for the evaluation of the capacity of cross-border cooperation (CBC) to *re-centre* a border area, starting from the thematic spheres of CBC and the types of interactions characterising it. CBC is here defined as the strategy elaborated (and action implemented) by the actors operating in peripheral areas separated by a political border as an answer to the mirror problems caused by the existence of the border itself. The capacity attributed to CBC to re-centre an area is greater where there is a balance between activities carried out in the economic and cultural spheres and between indirect and direct relations by which such activities are enacted. Adding to the definition of CBC its schematic presentation, it appears that cross-border cooperative processes do not only vary in terms of operative spheres and relations, but also that their nature depends on elements which are contingent in time and space. Such elements are: the organisational configuration of nation-states, the definition of the concept of and the delimitation of the cross-border area, the presence or absence of cross-border institutions and of the legal tools substantiating their nature and functions. Through the analysis of the variety of cross-border cooperation instances and of their characterising elements within the European context, fifty-three cross-border areas were plotted within four specific sectors of re-centring (*cultural autochthony, institutional organisation, economic organisation and economic autochthony*)

Graph 1.2 – Re-centring sectors of cross-border cooperation



According to the degree of imbalance compared to the intersection of the two axis, cooperation is (quadrant 1 in the graph) primarily focused on actions referring to the cultural sphere. Such actions are mostly carried out by local actors who developed a close relational network and direct relations and are directly involved in the promotion of mutual knowledge and of the *cultural autochthony* of the cross-border area. This situation is usually experienced during the initial phases of CBC and consists in the organisation of meetings, conferences, joint seminars

on specific topics aiming at underlining the historical, artistic, ethno-linguistic, etc continuity within the cross-border area. Ethnic or linguistic minorities in the area often represent a proactive factor – especially when the border separates them from a majority which they feel they belong to and they interpret their role and continuity as a *trait d'union* between the two communities separated by the border. Given the ambivalent nature of CBC, cooperative actions in the cultural sphere aiming at strengthening the sense of a cross-border territory and community tend to have positive spill-overs in the economic sphere. When this happens CBC is seen as strengthening mutual knowledge in order to promote the *economic autochthony* (i.e. economic specialisation) of the border area (quadrant 4). This seems to be the case for the majority of CBC actions undertaken in Europe within the earlier INTERREG funding opportunities. Local economic actors are not often taking a direct role in the organisation and structuring of CBC actions. They are rather involved by local cultural actors (cultural association, scientific agencies, etc) and by local institutional actors (local authorities, municipalities, etc) in specific CBC actions aiming at stimulating the mutual knowledge among all CBC actors in the border area. An example is given by the involvement of restaurateurs and hoteliers in CBC projects targeted to the promotion of historical or “wine-and-food” routes trespassing the border; or to the opening of public cross-border transport lines which, starting from inter-municipal agreements, connect specific spatial references. If this is the case, it is possible to establish the basis for a joint and cross-border marketing of a product with a clear cross-border added value and thus to produce an autochthony, interpreted as a joint strategic outlook on specific productive characteristics of the border area. Both cultural and economic autochthony embody CBC processes mostly concerned with building robust links between communities separated by borders on the daily-life level. When CBC actions within the cultural sphere are developed through larger national and international networks, cross-border cooperation is mostly concerned with the *institutional organisation* (quadrant 2) of the border area. Here local institutional actors are key players. They act within their respective national networks (i.e. indirect interaction) as to evaluate and implement the opportunities for developing a wider cross-border institutional framework. This is the case of the joint consultation among local actors separated by a border with their respective national networks, of the experimentation of new organisational cross-border working groups, of their joint cross-border requests to the respective competent national authorities and supra-national agencies and authorities (European Commission, Committee of the Regions, Council of Europe). The objectives characterising such cooperation are linked to the recognition of the limits imposed on to the cross-border area by the respective national institutional arrangements (i.e. an excessive state centralisation, the lack of subsidiarity, local authorities with different powers/competences on the two side of the border, double-taxation problems, the need to harmonise the education systems in the border area, etc). The evolution of CBC relations in the Upper Rhein area is an emblematic example of such type of CBC. In order to facilitate the cooperation among Germany, France and Switzerland – states characterised by very different institutional arrangements in terms of federalism and state centralism – concerned institutional local actors, moved by a common need, have interacted with their respective national networks so to find solutions legitimating CBC by activating (new) institutions with similar powers and competences.² Where CBC actions are mainly carried out in the economic sphere and managed by functional networks, cross-border cooperation is mostly concerned with the *economic organisation* (quadrant 3) of the border area. Here the direct cooperation among areas separated by a border give space to the synergies of economic and institutional actors (and part of civil society) aiming at strengthening the competitive positioning of the cross-border area in terms of structural variables (i.e. development of multi-modal infrastructures for the transport of goods and people, connecting the border areas infrastructure within the

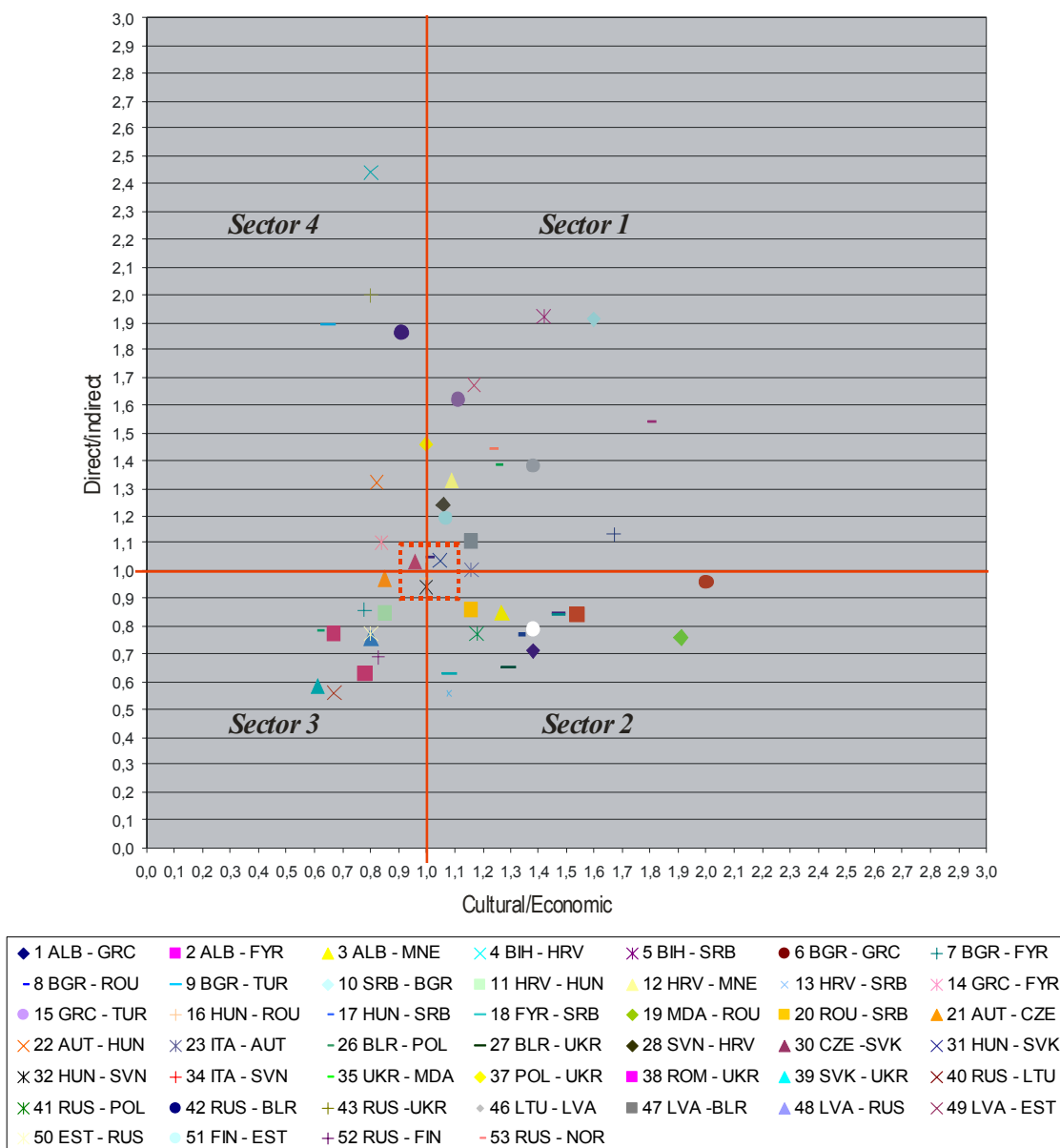
² Such is the case of the Regio Basiliensis which acts as a private association within the CBC processes with the other private association founded in Germany and France within the normative framework of the Regio Trirrhena, but it also operates as “service détaché de l’Etat” within the French-German-Swiss Commission and in the Upper Rhein Euroregion.

(pan-)European Corridors, establishing of scientific parks, joint participation in innovation fairs in other regions or continents, etc). Local economic actors on both sides of the border (among which there are direct relations), similarly to what local institutional actors do in the previous case (i.e. institutional organisation), make available their functional networks activating a multiplier effect (or indirect relations) to reach a given joint set of targets. An example can be found in the earlier cross-border labour market between Germany and the Netherlands. The synergies developed by local economic and institutional actors played a key role favouring the necessary exchange of information for the elaboration of joint strategies facilitating the development of a cross-border labour market (Struever 2002). Finally, the *area of centrality* indicates an achieved (or potential) re-centring of a cross-border area which has enacted a balanced CBC in operative, structural and relational terms.

3. Euroregions: The governance of cross-border cooperation

The analysis of 53 cross-border areas has made it possible to identify those setting themselves in the so-called area of (cross-border) centrality (Graph 3.1). Focusing here the analysis on these cross-border areas only, it is possible to notice that, among all other factors determining their re-centring, the institutionalisation of CBC in specific structures, loosely defined as euroregions, plays a key role. Within these areas, existing euroregional structures guarantee the efficient management of the existing material and immaterial resources for CBC, the coordination among the most adequate relational typologies to be implemented to capitalise on the incentives to cooperate in the area, thus overall stimulating actions aiming to overcome the obstacles to its integrated development.

Graph 3.1 – Re-centring typology of CBC in 53 European cross-border areas.

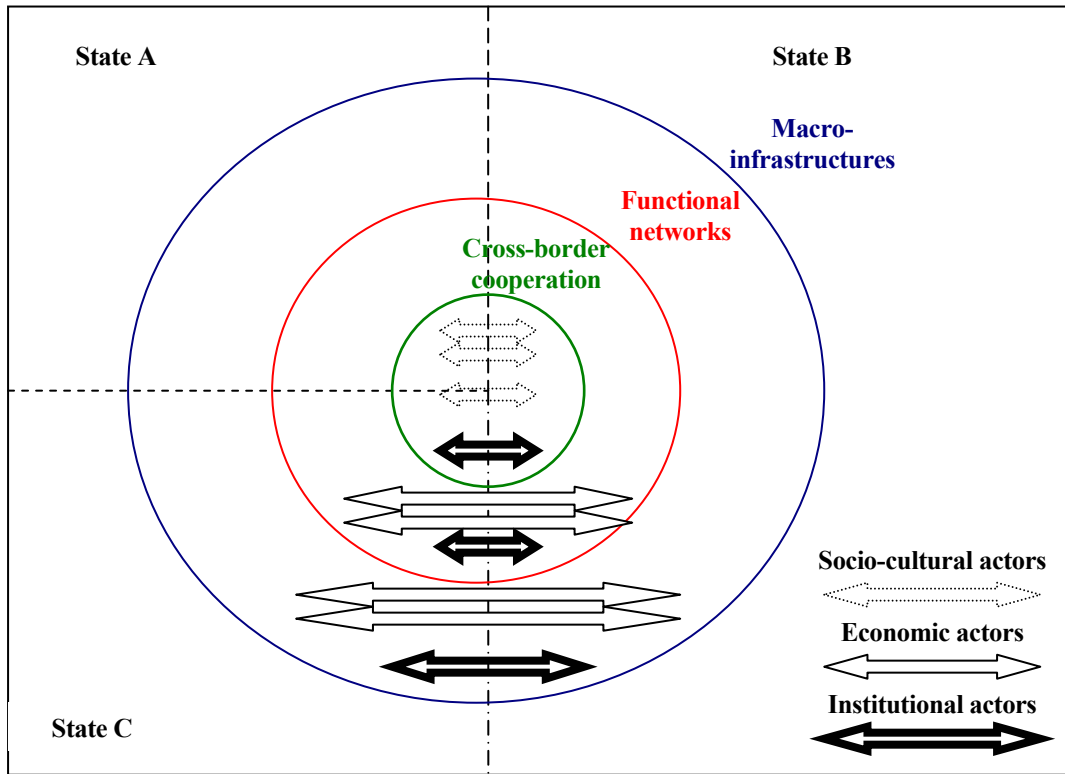


Analytically reading the cross-border context in all 53 areas, however, it highlights the fact that the majority of them are characterised by the presence of one or more, often self-defined, euroregions. Examining the legal nature, the structures composing them, the statutory objectives (where formalised), and their *modus operandi*, these euroregions are characterised by a very high degree of heterogeneity. It appears, therefore, evident that - given its complexity and the missed juxtaposition of the available legal and financial instruments at the national and European levels, the euroregional phenomenon is most heterogeneous and complex. We define here a Euroregion as the most institutionalised form of cross-border cooperation; institutionalised in an association that, whatever legal personality it may have or acquire, does not represent a new institutional level but a “front-office” for the coordination of existing CBC action and for the promotion of new one according to specific functional vectors. This definition³

³ Lacking of a legal-institutional definition of an euroregion at the Community law level, ISIG definition appears more elastic and functional than other definitions as those proposed by the Association of European border regions (AEBR) or other authors (Strassoldo 2005) since it focuses on all actors involved in CBC and on its operative dimensions (Del Bianco 2008a).

stresses on the organisation assets, the functions and the objectives of a Euroregion. Within this perspective it is possible to elaborate an euroregional theoretical model integrating three functional levels: the *Cross-border cooperation euroregion*, the *Functional networks euroregion* and the *Macro-infrastructures euroregion* (Gasparini 2001b, 2003a).

Graph 3.2 – The three euroregional models: territory and actors



According to its structure and to the type of actors it activates, a euroregion is able to influence specific sectors of the cooperative process in a cross-border context between two or more border regions. Studying both the forerunner examples of euroregions founded in Central-Western Europe and more recent, but yet emblematic, ones developed on the South-Eastern borders of the enlarged Europe, it is noticeable that the actors most actively involved in the euroregional process are the local institutional actors. They work in accordance or jointly to the members of their respective national networks and activate, case by case, the socio-cultural and economic actors most attentive and sensible to specific CBC activities in order to achieve a given set of goals.

On the other hand, however, the level of cooperative activity across borders in the cultural sphere, first, and in the economic sphere later on, follows the traditional phases of CBC, whether or not there is a working euroregional structure. The operative interpretation of this fact determines the nature of a euroregion, which can be either the result of the preceding CBC or the coordinating knot of the existing cooperative network. A euroregion privileging the latter interpretation appears to be a more adequate structure by which local institutional actors elaborate coordinating strategies for CBC activities in a given cross-border territory and promote new activities – such as those in the field of welfare – which bring about the re-centring and the integrated development of the cross-border area.

4. SWOT analysis for the self-evaluation of cooperation across borders

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Swot analysis was born in those strategic planning offices created by enterprises in order to rationalize market reality, bringing together the elements that make it analytically functional, and identifying the most appropriate actions to be undertaken in order to limit the effects of negative elements and to maximize the possible effects of positive ones. In the case at hand, swot analysis is crucial because it attains sets of heuristically relevant indicators from cross-border cooperation processes. The elements of the up-to-date analytical scenario thus delineated can be modified so as to positively influence future scenarios. Cross-border cooperation is bound to benefit from careful strategic planning, as well as from practical actions organized by a Euroregion body for transfrontier areas.

Thus, the main function of SWOT analysis is to determine rationally a cross-border region's future prospects, set between an operational present (*current scenario*) and a future predominantly marked by cross-border cooperation fostering local development (*latent scenario*) (Gasparini 1988). The SWOT method involves both an analysis of what occurs and, above all, of how we want it to occur, between time t_0 and time t_1 .

These being the conditions, cooperation might well result from the ideology of empathic and expressive action, which commonly lead to expect something more from a common effort in relations and networking. As true as this may be (*ideological matrix*), SWOT analysis, action and strategies within the Euroregion, all do in fact challenge the ideology itself, by assessing the capability of producing an ontological transformation of values and culture in practical terms. This could not in any case take place without a mixture of concrete action and ideological drive in order to reach, on either side of the border, the shared targets of the two cooperating regions.

SWOT analysis furthermore "unmasks" ideological interpretations of cross-border cooperation, given that it is based on a very concrete system of indicators: it can identify the factual processes by which a particular cooperation is carried out, and, above all, provide reliable relations between indicators and forecasts.

4.2 Cross-border cooperation: theoretical elements and internal/external functional aspects

Cross-border cooperation is the active outcome of the proximity of cultural diversity. That is, it stems out of the differences between distinct sovereign areas; while these variations generally appear in legal, administrative and economic regulations, or in the cultural and linguistic reconstruction plans of those nation-states that favour the strengthening of stereotypes in relation policies, here instead, such factors are exploited with creativity, which in turn thrives on diversity itself, providing new opportunities to establish relations, and to benefit from advantages that would not exist in the absence of differences between sovereign areas.

Therefore, on either side of the border the two sovereign areas have to partially sacrifice their autonomy and act pragmatically as regards concrete everyday economic, social or cultural issues (see Gasparini 1996). In these cross-border regions, sovereignty concerns central national issues or national politics alone, while in regional matters, the sense of sovereignty has been lost (it is no longer possible to say "yes or no", "all or nothing" with respect to this or the other region).

In this way, the cross-border region becomes a transition area, as the territory takes on a new meaning (Badie 1996) which differs from that of the national system, in such a way that national regulations are worth less than elsewhere in the country. Moreover, the transition is continuous,

being based on the balance between the actions of the bordering population and the administrative, institutional and economic regulations, which must themselves be constantly adjusted according to this precarious equilibrium, made unstable by the passage of time and by changes taking place within the countries to which the two cooperating regions belong.

Cross-border cooperation is thus caught up in a perpetual instability, due to local internal factors, which constantly change and, remarkably, offer advantages which could not be possible without cooperation. Such cooperation is faced with endless challenges coming from the countries involved (which, as legal systems, fear impending self-determination, or that the national borders to be redrawn into regional ones, etc.); these challenges put to the test the will towards cooperation of the bordering population, and may well engender frustration.

Having thus defined cross-border cooperation, we can better understand its importance by distinguishing between its endogenous and exogenous dimensions (within and without the cross-border area), evaluating above all those dimensions which extend beyond the regions involved, finding their *raison d'être* in the two or three nations themselves, in their internal and bilateral policies.

Dimensions with operational implications:

1. Propensity towards cross-border cooperation
2. Level of training and coordination
3. Cross-border relations in each activity sector
4. Institutional obstacles for cross-border cooperation
5. Economic obstacles for cross-border cooperation
6. Socio-cultural obstacles for cross-border cooperation
7. Institutional factors for effective cross-border cooperation
8. Administrative factors for effective cross-border cooperation
9. Economic factors for effective cross-border cooperation
10. Linguistic, cultural and historical factors for effective cross-border cooperation

4. 2.1. Internal dimensions and indicators

The first endogenous (*internal*) dimensions concern the existence of a basic form of collaboration, based on products derived from *the active collaboration found in a civil society*: such collaboration is of deep importance and it is considered essential, as it produces results otherwise impossible to obtain. As far as this research is concerned, there are two such dimensions:

1. *Propensity towards cross-border cooperation*. This is defined by indicators which refer to operators in industry (1), commerce (2), culture (3), institutions (4). In short, a high propensity for cross-border cooperation in all four operator types, means that there are realistic opportunities to develop stable cooperation.

3. Cross-border relations in each activity sector

These relations are expressed by the indicators of relations among institutions (9), planning and environment (10), transports and telecommunications (11), work and economy (12), tourism (13), culture and education (14), everyday services (15). The indicators specify the connection among civil societies on either side of the border. Such aspects represent the structural (but local) side of the propensity towards cooperation indicated by Dimension 1. If there is already such a structural dimension (number 3), the following dimensions will be easier to obtain.

A less relevant *second level* of endogenous dimensions is represented by two other dimensions, concerning the *characteristics of institutions* and the *context*.

2. Level of training and coordination

These indicators define the *characteristics of institutions* and their personnel. The indicators highlight the formation of local élites (5), the coordination among different local and national administration sectors (6), the coordination between local organisations and social and

economic stakeholders (7), the coordination among central administrations (8).

9. *Economic factors for effective cross-border cooperation.*

This dimension describes the context in which cross-border cooperation should take place. These indicators detect whether or not borders act as a “filter” (44), if the economies are integrable (45), if economic action is not exclusively oriented towards the centre of the national system (46), if there is a significant participation in programmes such as Phare, Interreg, etc. (47), and if road, rail and waterways are in good conditions (48).

A *third level* of internal dimensions, still less central than the previous ones, consists of two further dimensions, which relate to the cultural *context* of the cross-border area. Such cultural dimensions are considered to be less relevant than economic policies, assuming that cross-border cooperation is predominantly linked to business interests and to basic services, rather than to cultural and linguistic attractions and values (which nevertheless play a remarkably positive role). The latter may form subsequently; in fact, stereotypes and linguistic matters can be developed or solved according to varied and complex modalities, as each of the national areas might have to deal with its own specific issues.

6. *Socio-cultural obstacles for cross-border cooperation*

These obstacles are evaluated according to their impact on cross-border cooperation. The indicators taken into account are as follows: negative national and/or regional stereotypes (31), language barriers (32), weak or no reaction to proposals for socio-cultural cooperation (33).

10. *Linguistic, cultural and historical factors for effective cross-border cooperation*

This is another cultural dimension of the *context*. Its indicators outline a specific situation, that is, the existence of a common historical *background*, free from stereotypes (49), a common language or widespread knowledge of each other’s language (50), the ratification of the 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (51), a tradition of cooperation (52), good transboundary transport routes (geomorphology, passes, types of transportation) (53).

4.2.2. *External dimensions and indicators*

The exogen (external) dimensions of cooperation in cross-border areas concern national, European and international conditions, which may favour or not the development of cooperation in a cross-border area. There are four external dimensions, and they are thought to have a progressively lower gradient of direct influence on a specific cooperation process. Such declining gradient does not result from the last dimension (in the presentation) being essential as a general (European) framework, but it implies that other dimensions are necessary, in order to activate the specific mechanisms of cooperation.

5. *Economic obstacles for cross-border cooperation*

This dimension is based on countries' complementary development levels in a specific cross-border area. The selected indicators are: differing economic development levels/rate (25), technology gap (26), reluctance due to overcoming competition (27), labour market protection (28), customs and fiscal issues (29), weak or absent reaction to opportunities for economic cooperation. All of these obstacles generate from the lack of balance between the two cross-border areas.

4. *Institutional obstacles for cross-border cooperation*

These obstacles as well result from unbalance between cross-border areas. The indicators are: state centralisation (16), lack of adequate structures for cross-border cooperation (17), differing competences on either side of the border (18), restrictive regulations on cross-border cooperation (19), lack of credibility from cooperation agencies (20), low degree of mutual knowledge and trust (21), insufficient financial resources (22), different political-ideological orientation (23), weak or absent reaction to opportunities for institutional cooperation (24).

8. *Administrative factors for effective cross-border cooperation*

This dimension concerns the relation between local borderland administrations and the powers

yielded to them by central authorities. This shows in the relations between the two bordering areas, and in the connotation of the area, which can be contiguous to the border, or wider, to the point of including several regions in order to carry out special functions (for instance, macro infrastructures). The pertinent indicators for this dimension are: official definition of cross-border areas (39), non-centralised countries with local administrations granted with wide decisional powers (40), local authorities encharged of foreign relations (41), local authorities with competent management (42), local authorities with independent financial administration (43).

7. Institutional factors and international relations

This dimension concerns the accession of the two countries to conventions and international protocols, as well as clean acceptance of its status of borderland region. The pertinent indicators are: signature of the 1980 Convention to Madrid (34), signature of the 1995 Additional Protocol to the Convention of Madrid (35), signature of the 1998 Protocol II of the Convention of Madrid (36), international recognition of borders (37), good institutional and legal framework (38)

4.2.3. Measurement of indicators

Swot analysis is based on two sets for the evaluation of variables: one is concerned with positive (*Strengths and Opportunities* for the cross-border area) or negative (*Weaknesses and Threats*) variables, while the other identifies variables as either internal or external to the cross-border area. In order to locate variables within a SWOT framework, it is necessary to first measure them, as SWOT only takes into account extreme values, either positive (SO: strengths, opportunities) or negative (WT: weaknesses, threats).

Measurement is carried out as follows:

First of all, each indicator is evaluated according to “very high”, “high”, “medium”, “low”, “very low” values; the modalities of cross-border sector activities (Dimension 3) instead are evaluated as: “cooperation” in a sector on either side of the border, “consultation”, “information exchange”, “no relations”, “competition”. A symbol is associated to each evaluation and modality: “++”, “+”, “±”, “-”, “--”; an ordinal scale, formed by the numbers “2”, “1”, “0”, “-1”, “-2”, is then applied as a convention to each of these symbols.

Measures of indicators:

Evaluation of intensity and modality		Symbol	Numeric value
Very high	cooperation	++	2
High	consultation	+	1
Medium	information exchange	±	0
Low	no relations	-	-1
Very low	competition	--	-2

2.4. SWOT analysis methodological process

Swot framework is based on detecting the *dimensions* and the *internal indicators* of a cross-border area, and the *external* ones referring to central governments or Europe, in order to subsequently *measure* the indicators, allowing to evaluate them as positive or negative, according to the intensity of their presence. There are *variables*, self-explanatory in their (positive or negative) presence; there is “*noise*”, which consists in existing indicators with low

intensity, and thus not capable of generating a context; and finally, there is *neutrality*, in the presence of indicators of medium or poor relevance, which as such, have no influence on cross-border cooperation, *in the present scenario as outlined by SWOT analysis*.

It is finally possible to define SWOT variables, and redraw the previous table, in order to show a possible SWOT scenario outline:

Cross-border area for cooperation			
Measure of indicators		Internal	External
+ 2	Swot variables	Strengths (S)	Opportunities (O)
+ 1		positive context	positive context
0		“neutral” (non-relevant)	“neutral” (non-relevant)
- 1		negative context	negative context
- 2	Swot variables	Weakenesses (W)	Threats (T)

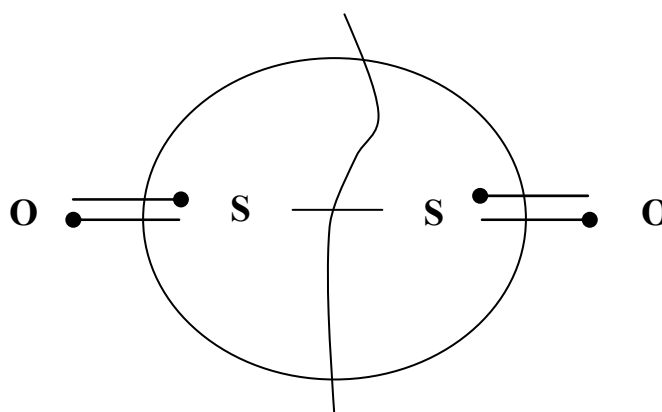
By this complex data processing, SWOT analysis allows to define the conditions of cross-border cooperation in a specific area, and at the same time, it helps to highlight any potential for cooperation, by operating on the given elements so as to emphasise strengths (S) and opportunities (O), while limiting the negative effects of weaknesses (W) and threats (T).

2.5. Action strategies

Action strategy needs to be rationalised within the frame of a scenario, outlining the future by which, starting from the present situation, the area can establish effective cross-border cooperation. The chosen *strategy*, the one considered to be the most appropriate for a specific future target, is the primary tool for action, and the general frame within which decisions are made. On the other hand, when dealing with several realistic options for cross-border cooperation, it becomes necessary to devise differing action strategies. In this research, *five types of strategies* are taken into account.

a) First strategy: Strengthening strategy. This strategy is based on the strengthening of positives, both internal and external to the cross-border area, assuming that by so doing, negatives will be critically abated and bypassed or absorbed by positives.

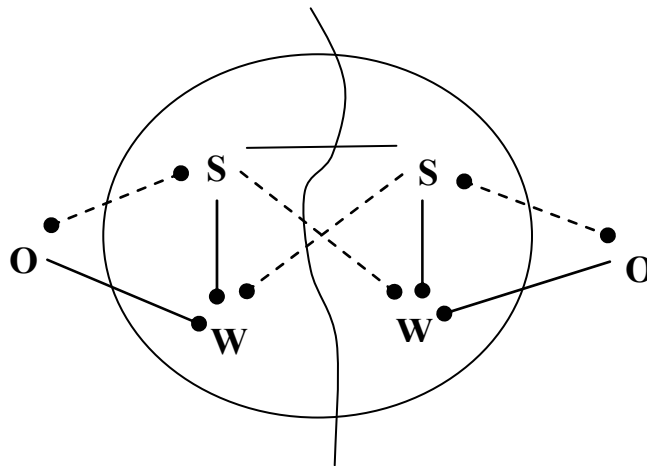
This strategy is expressed in the following diagram:



Such strategy should be applied where it is possible to act on already large, strong, stable strengths (S) and opportunities (O), so as to spur the rest of the system, transforming or mitigating the weight of few and unrelevant weaknesses (W) and threats (T).

b) Second strategy: Overcoming strategy. This strategy is more cautious and systemic, and less expansionist than the first one. Applying a reverse logic, it acts on positives (strengths and opportunities), in order to decrease if not deactivate internal negatives (weaknesses). The aim of this strategy is to preserve and balance stakeholder participation, preventing major internal fractures.

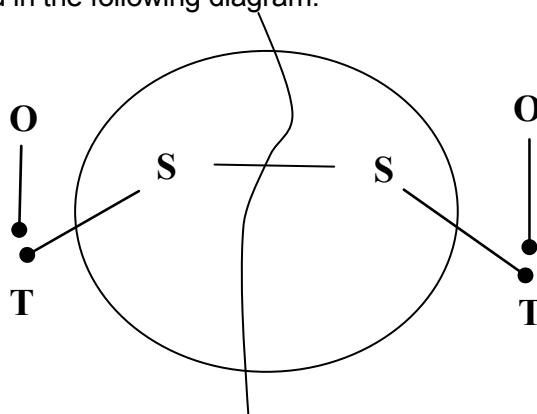
This strategy is expressed in the following diagram:



Besides applying this strategy to a rational development plan backed by political will, it is more generally appropriate where together with evident and substantial obstacles, there are also enough widespread strengths (S) and opportunities (O) to overcome the existing weaknesses (W).

c) Third strategy: Mobilisation strategy for context control. This strategy emphasises the effect of strengths (S) and opportunities (O) on the negative (T) context, which poses serious challenges to the establishment of a positive system.

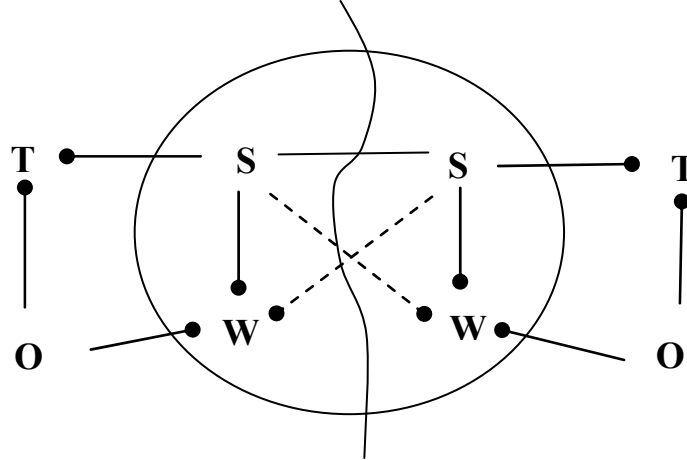
This strategy is expressed in the following diagram:



This strategy is appropriate where external threats (T) are so overcoming or widespread, that it becomes necessary to exploit strengths and opportunities in order to limit the influence of external threats (T).

d) Fourth strategy (Combining the second and the third strategies): negatives control strategy. This strategy is based on the joint action of strengths and opportunities (O) in decreasing weaknesses (W) and threats (T), therefore abating overall negatives.

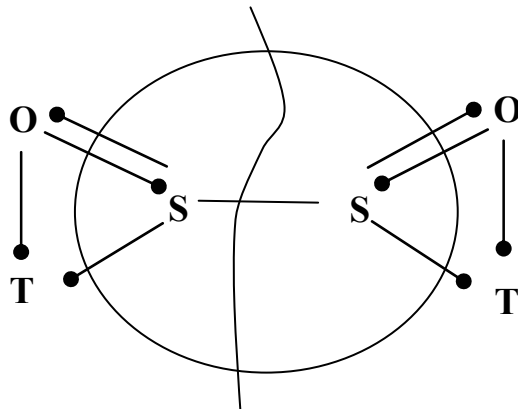
This strategy is expressed in the following diagram:



This strategy is suitable where both weaknesses (W) and threats (T) are strong. In this markedly negative environment, all available resources, limited as they might be, have to be employed to tackle heavy unbalance and counteract negatives.

e) Fifth strategy (Combining the first and the third strategy): joint internal-external coalition for context control. This strategy consists in employing available strengths (S) and opportunities (O) of sufficient level, in order to face consistent threats (T); this is made possible by the absence of influential weaknesses (W) in the cross-border area.

This strategy is expressed in the following diagram:



This strategy is applied where there are plenty of positive strengths and opportunities (O) (more specifically, if pro-activeness is wide-spread), and weaknesses (W) refer to non-relevant elements. In this case, strategy focuses on decreasing those threats (T) which might affect the present positives.