



Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai: Cross-border integration with or without the border?

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Abstract

For 30 years, the opening of internal borders in the European Union has engendered many cross-border exchanges in borderlands. European cross-border regions created within this context are thus framed and characterized by the simultaneous dynamics of bordering and cross-border integration. This paper examines these two processes and the analysis is based on the representations of stakeholders from the Eurometropolis of Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai. It highlights two main results. First, the representations of stakeholders shed light on bordering dynamics that can be combined even though they can also appear to be contradictory. In particular, the paper unveils the dimension of ‘a-bordering’, which refers to a certain *status quo* of and about the border. Second, the representations of stakeholders show ambivalent and concomitant visions of a ‘cross-border integration with the border’ and a ‘cross-border integration without the border’. These representations challenge the implementation of cross-border policies and schemes.

Keywords

Border, cross-border integration, cross-border metropolitan region, Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai, representations

Introduction

Borders are geographical objects designed and built mostly by political authorities to assert their influence and to defend their sovereignty on a given territory. They constitute inherent elements of any society and present ambivalence, since they both spatially separate and distinguish populations but also bring them into contact and generate relationships between them (Kolossoff et al., 2012). From the end of World War II borders have evolved in their functions and practices (Green, 2012). Contemporary borders are mobile: ‘Border functions no longer tend to

be constrained to the established limits of national sovereignty areas, but to be pushed back and forth, and become spatially projected, multiplied or diffused’ (Amilhat-Szary, 2013: 2). As Balibar (2002) suggests, borders ‘vacillate’; they are not only a line

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of demarcation but also have multiple aspects and can appear everywhere. In Europe, the mutation of state borders is a salient issue in European Union processes. It also questions the role of regions and sub-state authorities in this process, and the constantly evolving territorial, symbolic and institutional shaping of these authorities (Paasi, 2001). This situation is particularly interesting to observe within European cross-border regions, which face various challenges not only in the organization and structuring of their spaces, but also in the building of a common cross-border living area.

This paper aims to contribute to the scientific debate on the ‘changing spatialities of the current world’ (Paasi, 2001: 7), focusing in particular on European cross-border areas. To deal with this topic, the paper mobilizes the academic literature of border studies, which developed the concept of borderscape to address and better understand the construction of these cross-border areas. Borderscape has been defined as the evolution of society in its territorialities, representations, narratives and socio-spatial practices or experiences *at and with* the border, including transnational flows and migration (Brambilla, 2015). Two main processes intervene in the production of a borderscape. The first, the bordering process, highlights the evolving construction of the border, its nature and its mutational dimension. The second main variable that shapes the borderscape is the cross-border integration process. It refers to the socio-spatial dynamics that connect and bring populations closer on both sides of the border.

Following this framework, the main objective of the paper is to examine how the evolution of a particular borderscape can modify both the perception of the ‘traditional’ state borders and the structuring of cross-border areas. The analysis is based on the representations of regional stakeholders and practitioners of cross-border initiatives and projects. This specific approach to borderscape, through actors’ representation, is expected to provide useful insights on how cross-border spaces are built, lived and comprehended by the very people that inhabit and act in these spaces. On this basis, two main research questions have been elaborated, each one investigating one of the two dynamics of the borderscape. The first question addresses the significance of the borders

and the perception of the bordering dynamics by the local and regional stakeholders. The second question deals with the forms and processes of cross-border integration and their significance for local/regional stakeholders.

The research is based on fieldwork conducted within the Eurometropolis of Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai, in the framework of the EU FP7 project EUBORDERSCAPES. This cross-border region is historically an area of intense cross-border trade and relations, where cross-border cooperation appears to be one of the most successful, and presumably ‘integrated’, in Europe (Sohn and Reitel, 2016).

This paper is organized as follows. We first propose to review the two key notions of the research: bordering and cross-border integration. Then we discuss the methodology used and the case study of the Eurometropolis of Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai. Next, the main results are set out, revealing the ambivalent complexity of the representations of cross-border dynamics in this region. Finally, we discuss these results and perspectives about the borderscape of the Eurometropolis.

The various facets of bordering and the multi-dimensionality of cross-border integration

From the 2000s onwards, the concept of bordering has emerged in relation to theories of the social construction of space and its application to the study of borders (Newman, 2006; Scott, 2011; Van Houtum and Naerssen, 2002). This concept changed the understanding of borders and their related social phenomena, and renewed perspectives in the field of border studies (Amilhat-Szary and Giraut, 2015; Hamez et al., 2013). Bordering can be defined as the on-going process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of borders through political discourse and decision-making, as well as individual and collective representations (Kolossoff et al., 2012). This concept has been operating in particular to form the concept of borderscape and to analyse cross-border areas.

The European Union’s discourse and policies particularly illustrate the phenomenon of bordering. From the 1990s, EU policies and programmes have

fostered and supported the transformation of borders and the development of cross-border cooperation initiatives, which resulted in new socio-spatial forms and modalities of governance all along European borders: cross-border regions, Euroregions and Interreg programs (Perrin, 2011). The European Neighbourhood Policy with the Union for the Mediterranean countries and with the Eastern partnership also shows a certain evolution of European borders (Scott, 2009; Wesselink and Boschma, 2016). The concept of bordering conveys a dynamic, not static, vision of the borders. ‘The notion of “bordering” suggests that borders are not only semi-permanent institutions but are also non-finalizable processes’ (Kolossoff and Scott, 2013: 2). Two main forms and trends of bordering dynamics are distinguished (Rumford, 2006): on the one hand, there is a de-bordering process, which reduces the effects of a border. Linked to the construction of the European Union, it has for decades promoted cross-border interactions by opening up borders in order to facilitate movements across border, the development of partnerships, of the single market and of the Schengen Area. On the other hand, there is a re-bordering process, which reinforces or reinstates border effects. Owing to a many-faceted crisis (socio-economic, political and identity-based), Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, used the phrase ‘polycrisis’¹, this latent process is challenging European integration with, in particular, the emergence of regionalist or nationalist movements that can show a willingness to re-establish borders.

Defining cross-border integration remains a delicate question. For some authors, this concept can be described as ‘a process of increasing and intensifying relations among entities that leads to the emergence and expansion of an inclusive integral whole’ (Svensson and Nordlund, 2015: 373). For others, it refers to the access quality of the physical infrastructure and on the facility to cross the border (Matthiessen, 2004); to the history and intensity of relationships across border, leading to a *market-driven* or *policy-driven integration* (Perkmann, 2007); or to the setting-up of cross-border regional innovation systems which engender the inclusion of the business sector at a cross-border scale and a ‘bundling of scientific and economic strengths, complementary expertise and innovation capabilities’

(Trippel, 2010: 151). However, cross-border integration is seen to be an elusive concept, not reducible to any simplistic vision (Sohn, 2014). In the academic literature, the concept of cross-border integration is both linked to interactions that have developed between territories, notably economic ones (Anderson and Wever, 2003; Krätke, 1998), and to phenomena of convergence and territorial homogenization which play a role in bringing border territories in closer contact (De Boe et al., 1999; Decoville et al., 2013). In addition, another remark can be formulated highlighting the linear and sequential conception of the dynamics of cross-border integration (Lundquist and Trippel, 2013; Martinez, 1994) which never takes into consideration some potential factors, such as the closing of border, the hardening of relationships or the loss of trust within cross-border governance, that could alter and even reverse this dynamics. Even though all these conceptions define different aspects of cross-border integration, this concept harbours a fundamental ambivalence about its interpretation. Cross-border interactions can result ‘as much from the symmetries and similarities between border territories as from the asymmetries and existing differentials on either side of a border’ (Durand, 2015: 315). To take into account the complexity of the concept, cross-border integration can be seen as a multidimensional process characterized by the dynamics of inter-linkage. Four principal dimensions of this process can be formulated (Figure 1):

- The functional dimension, which is linked to cross-border flows whatever their nature (for working, studying, shopping or tourism). It delineates to some extent the space within which a cross-border system is functioning. This dimension is linked with the concept of ‘functional regions’ developed by Schamp in 1995 (Perkmann, 2003).
- The institutional dimension, which is characterized by the networking between actors (public or private) and by the policies and strategies implemented to cooperate.
- The structural dimension, which concerns the structure or the organization of a border territory: socio-economic and spatial characteristics, business and fiscal environments. Focused on the dynamics of convergence on either side

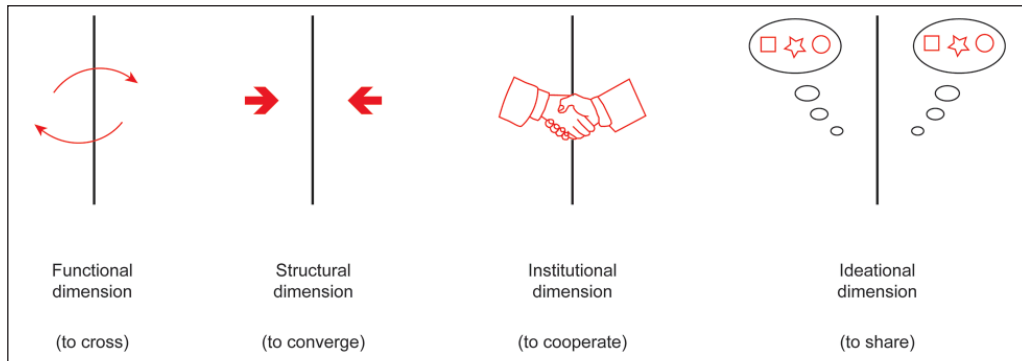


Figure 1. Cross-border integration, a multidimensional process.

of the border, this dimension also defines in a way the attractiveness of border territories, thus fostering or hindering the cross-border flows.

- Lastly, the ideational dimension, which designates a variety of more subjective elements, linked to individual and collective representations, such as the sharing of common values or references.

Thus, in the European context, bordering and cross-border integration appear to be key processes in the development and institutionalization of socio-spatial, cross-border initiatives and organizations, in the formation of borderscape. The objective of the present research is to confront the previous research about the dynamics of bordering to cross-border actors' representations. The paper also aims to bring insight to the concept of cross-border integration, by discussing how some stakeholders who have cross-border occupational activities perceive this concept, and what it means to them in terms of 'lived spatiality'. Analysing these phenomena with the representations of local and regional stakeholders can provide a 'grassroots vision' of the functioning of cross-border regions. In this way, the paper aims to deliver an analytical corpus that can be further applied to other academic results for a broader comparative approach. It seems also particularly stimulating to examine the stakeholders' representations of policy discourses and schemes that address cross border issues, in order to try and match the political and the practitioners' expectations in the

building of cross-border regions (Harrison and Growe, 2014). Such an objective appears all the more salient as European construction is facing a growing unpopularity in public opinion (Brack and Startin, 2015).

The representations of stakeholders at the heart of the research framework

The representations of actors were collected via a series of semi-structured interviews with local and regional stakeholders as well as practitioners of cross-border cooperation, located on either side of the French–Belgian border. The interviews were conducted between October 2014 and March 2015 and involved 28 actors (15 French, 13 Belgian; see Table 1), working in the political, economic and civil society spheres. These stakeholders have been selected in conformity with the method decided by the consortium of the EUBORDERSCAPES FP7 project, described as follows.

- Using a positional approach based on the institutional setting, completed with a reputational approach (expert-knowledge).
- Three spheres are targeted: political/institutional (representatives of local/regional authorities, heads of public administrations, heads of cross-border structures); economic (economic entrepreneurs, chambers of commerce, professional associations) and civil society (journalists, actors involved in culture, academics,

Table 1. List of the interviewees.

ID	Position	Organization	Country	Town Location
LI01	Coordinator of Cross-border cooperation	Observatoire franco-belge de la santé	FR	Lille
LI02	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	Conseil de Développement WaPi	BE	Mouscron
LI03	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	Lillesagency	FR	Lille
LI04	Coordinator of Cross-border cooperation	LEIEDAL	BE	Kortrijk
LI05	Administrator	EUROMETROPOLE	BE	Kortrijk
LI06	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	CCI Grand Lille	FR	Lille
LI07	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	CCI Grand Lille	FR	Lille
LI08	Administrator	CCI Franco-Belge	BE	Lille
LI09	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	POM	BE	Bruges
LI10	Coordinator of Cross-border cooperation	Parc naturel régional scarpe-escaut	FR	Saint-Amand-les-eaux
LI11	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	WVI	BE	Bruges
LI12	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	Hainaut Développement	BE	Mons
LI13	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	Région Nord Pas-de-Calais	FR	Lille
LI14	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	MEDEF	FR	Lille
LI15	Administrator	Théâtre La Virgule	FR	Tourcoing
LI16	Administrator	IDETA	BE	Tournai
LI17	Coordinator of Cross-border cooperation	Région Wallonne	BE	Namur
LI18	Journalist	La voix du Nord	FR	Lille
LI19	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	EURES (Pôle Emploi)	FR	Lille
LI20	Administrator	Conseil de Développement Lille Métropole	FR	Lille
LI21	Administrator	Forum Eurometropole	BE	Tournai
LI22	Manager	Lille métropole	FR	Lille
LI23	Manager	West Vlanderen Province	BE	Bruges
LI24	Administrator	Rose des Vents / Festival Next	FR	Villeneuve d'Ascq
LI25	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	IEG	BE	Mouscron
LI26	Administrator	Département Nord	FR	Lille
LI27	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	Département Nord	FR	Lille
LI28	Manager of Cross-border Affairs	VOKA	BE	Kortrijk

representative of trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs),).

- Approximately 30 actors were interviewed, according to a principle of diversity and fair distribution among countries and spheres.

The main line of investigation is to mobilize the discourses and insights of the interviewees in order to question and analyse the significance of both the border and cross-border integration. To do so, we used a specific interview grid that follows this double conceptual approach.

This approach to borders is derived from structuration theory and considers the bordering dynamics through their structuring effects: constraining and enabling (Herzog and Sohn, 2014). This allows different meanings of the border to be grasped. Based on this approach, we first asked the interviewees to mention up to five or six keywords that best represent their current understanding of what the French–Belgian border means to them. These keywords could relate to images, ideas or metaphors that they associate with the border. In a second step, we presented them with a list of predetermined meanings

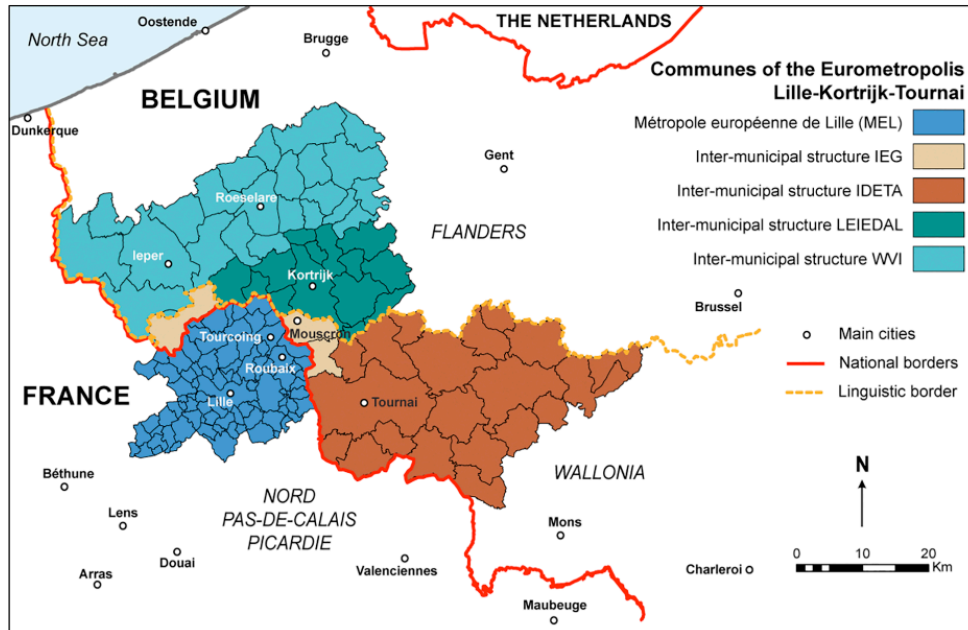


Figure 2. Location map of the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai.

related to borders (interface, resource, threat, obstacle, shelter, etc.), after which they were asked to indicate to which predetermined meanings their keywords best refer.

As regards cross-border integration, the objective was to find the stakeholder's point of view about different phenomena that can be related to this process of integration. We first asked them to assess the importance of each of these phenomena in their own cross-border region. We also asked them to point out which of these phenomena they consider to be a challenge for improving cross-border integration.

The Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai, a cross-border region divided by various borders

The French–Belgian border is a stable one (its 300 years of existence were celebrated in 2013²) and can be currently characterized by its porosity. Talking about the border in the Eurometropolis of Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai also involves talking about the various possible forms a border can take. This cross-border area is defined by a multi-layer borderscape:

the state border between France/Belgium, the regional border between Wallonia/Flanders/Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie and the linguistic border between the French and Dutch speaking zones. *De facto*, this cross-border metropolis is a complex cross-border space made up of several territories and three types of borders. For some stakeholders on both sides of the border, the linguistic border is even more important than the national and regional borders.

The Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai is a dense cross-border conurbation of 2.1 million inhabitants (60% France, 28% Flanders, 12% Wallonia), on a total area of 3550 km², located at the centre of the Brussels/London/Paris triangle. This cross-border metropolis is organized around three cities: Lille (France), Kortrijk (Flanders) and Tournai (Wallonia). The cross-border urban fabric is partially continuous. In France, the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai covers the inter-communal institution *Métropole européenne de Lille* (MEL). In Belgium, it extends over seven districts. In total, 147 municipalities have decided to come together in this territorial project (Figure 2).

The cross-border metropolis encompasses a dense road network in the urbanized parts including two motorways. This region has a long history of cross-border contacts and interactions and the flows of cross-border workers are rooted in this history. These flows increased at the end of the 19th century for economic and industrial reasons, even though they evolved in terms of size and direction: around 100 000 Belgian workers came to work in the textile industries in Lille during the interwar period (Lentacker, 1973), although that number dropped in 1936 to 50 000 workers due to the economic crisis (INSEE, 2006). Today, the cross-border flows are still quite important (47 000 inhabitants of the *Métropole européenne de Lille* travel to Belgium daily, and 32 000 Belgians enter the conurbation of Lille each day (Lille Métropole (LMCU), 2010)). The reasons for this cross-border mobility appear to be diverse. Only a third of journeys are reported to be for work or study, about a third of journeys are made for shopping and using services and the remaining third of the trips that involve recreation, tourism and other activities.

At the institutional level, contemporary cross-border cooperation was originally supported by local authorities. Launched during the 1990s thanks to Pierre Mauroy, mayor of Lille and former French Prime Minister, the ambition to build a cross-border metropolis, with French and Belgian actors, has strengthened the institutional links on either side of the border. A first cross-border structure was created (COPIT) in 1991 around local initiatives (MEL, four Belgian inter-municipalities). However, the partnership quickly encountered difficulties in implementing its cross-border agenda. The primary obstacle was a lack of both financial and political capacity to follow through on collective projects, particularly when implementation required the cooperation of senior levels of government. In 2002 the French and Belgian governments signed the Brussels agreement to reduce the roadblocks to cross-border cooperation. The agreement established conventions and a legal framework for cross-border cooperation between local authorities. In addition, a French–Belgian Parliamentary Working Group was created in November 2005. This group of 12 parliamentarians was asked to identify the main legal, legislative and regulatory obstacles limiting effective cross-border cooperation and to define

conditions for institutional experimentation in the Greater Lille metropolitan area and along the Franco–Belgian border more generally. Since 2008, cross-border institutional cooperation is driven by a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) regrouping 14 partners drawn from all French and Belgian institutional levels (from local to national/federal), which initiates and orchestrates discussions between French and Belgian actors. In addition, these cross-border cooperation dynamics were bolstered by the local elites of the metropolis of Lille choosing a ‘European development path’, particularly where planning and urban policies were concerned, and showing three milestones (Perrin, 2016).

The significance of border and cross-border integration

A certain ambivalence in the perception of the border

In general, the interviewed actors of the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai have the feeling that the border today is more significant than before. They are aware that the border is more than just a simple line. They see the complexity of the border and its effects, the difficulties of cooperating and implementing cross-border projects.

In the results about the meaning of the border, it becomes clear that a majority of local and regional stakeholders of the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai primarily (and in an equivalent manner) perceive the border in three ways: as a resource, as an interface, as well as a marker of identity (Table 2). These results reveal certain ambivalence in the perception of the border, somewhere between disappearance and permanence. Indeed, perceiving the border as an interface (creating a junction between people and between territories), or a resource (opportunities and benefits associated with the border), conveys a vision in which some functions of the border appear to be ‘contested and constantly by-passed’ (Sohn, 2014: 594). In this vision, the border can be jointly mobilized from both sides and the delimitation and separation functions of a border disappear. At the same time, the notion of marker of identity maintains this separation–delimitation function of the border, the one that has to do with identity,

Table 2. Significance of the border.

	Interface (bridge)	Resource (opportunity)	Symbolic place	Marker of identity	Shelter / refuge	Obstacle	Source of conflict	Other
Number of links between keywords chosen by interviewees and the eight meanings	57	56	39	59	15	34	27	22

cultural practices and sense of belonging. This approach is all the more interesting as the question of symbolic, or identity-providing, activities is generally associated with a process of hybridization, convergence and, in a way, disappearance of the border so as to recreate a new ‘common cross-border territorial identity’ (Sohn, 2014: 604). In this representational frame, stakeholders have simultaneously integrated the ambivalent character of the border: ‘There is a border, there is no border [...] the cross-border flows related to work and shopping erase the existence of the national border in its materiality, but at the same time the French and the Belgians consider themselves as different’ [Belgian actor LI11]; ‘People wish to easily cross the border, and they are happy to do so to find different products and dishes on the other side’ [French actor LI03]. Another stakeholder expresses this idea as a mantra: ‘Both need the border and need to cross it’ [French actor LI18]. In this way, the interviewees’ representations reveal at the same time a vision of de-bordering, which aims at dismantling the border to make it more porous to flows and exchanges, and another vision of permanence of certain functions of border, in particular those associated with cultural identity and national belonging.

Thus, the actors’ representations analysed in this paper suggest another form of bordering process, the ‘a-bordering’. The ‘a’ prefix is intended to show that the border effect has been reduced in some points, but has not entirely disappeared, especially in people’s representations. A-bordering is different from de-bordering or re-bordering. It refers to a continuity of the border despite global changes and institutional and socio-economic evolutions in the borderscape. Moreover, like these two concepts it does not refer to a static border, but rather to a *status quo* of the border, that is to say, the permanence in time of some

functions and meanings of the border, whilst a recognition of the inherent evolutions of the borderscape. Thus, this innovative conceptual insight extends the knowledge on the issue of bordering and proposes a new dimension of this process.

As regards the perception of cross-border cooperation dynamics, the stakeholders conceive current cross-border cooperation as being at a new stage. In terms of politics, the stakeholders report that a new generation of leaders has been elected on the French side and also in the Flemish and Walloon parts of the Eurometropolis, mainly at the local level (mayors, burgomasters, local councillors, etc.), which is also the crucial level in terms of involvement of the actors (Durand and Lamour, 2014). At the legal level, it gained new momentum thanks to the setting up of new cross-border organizational structures with the status of EGTC. This new frame has revitalized cross-border governance and a new cross-border strategy has been elaborated (Nelles and Durand, 2014). In addition, at the level of policy, a general consensus emphasizes the necessity and fruitfulness of cross-border cooperation. All local actors are convinced that the common future is to be together. Though they are aware of the fact that there is strong competition between the territories of the Eurometropolis, they will cooperate with neighbours to share public facilities and to seek complementarity between the territories. The actors try to go beyond any duality by taking advantage of the positive aspects, both of cooperation and of competition. ‘Coopetition’ is a word that comes back very frequently in the interviews. In terms of work culture, many interviewees recognized that they had learned from their partners. They also observe a mutual influence on their ways of working. For instance, in spatial planning policies: ‘the French tend to become more and more pragmatic and concrete in their actions, while Belgians tend to be more and

more strategic in their work, and they tend to project mostly over the medium and long term' [Belgian actors LI04 and LI16]; in economic affairs, 'French investors and entrepreneurs incrementally follow their Belgian counterparts and cross more often the border to develop partnerships and make business' [French actors LI03, LI06, LI07].

The multiform meanings of cross-border integration

As regard the issue of cross-border integration, the stakeholders' representations convey a different degree of significance with respect to the four dimensions of this process (Table 3).

The perception of phenomena linked to the functional dimension appears mostly strong for all the actors. For the *cross-border labour market* and *cross-border shopping*, this is due to the relatively large number of people who cross the border (almost 80 000 people cross the border every day). For the *cross-border communication networks*, the reason is that the cross-border transportation services are not considered to be efficient outside the Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai triangle. In addition, Flemish people are not so concerned by the labour market and the residential mobility in relation to France. Nonetheless, Flemish economic actors seem to be interested in the French and Walloon workforce for recruitment purposes, as long as any linguistic issues can be overcome.

The perception of phenomena related to the structural dimension is rather moderate for the French actors and weak for the Belgian ones. For the *socio-economic convergence*, it can be explained by the fact that the Flemish province is richer than the Lille region and the Walloon province of the Hainaut. These different regions are not convergent, especially regarding GDP or unemployment indicators.

As regards the institutional dimension, the perceptions are contrasted, not to say contradictory, but all the actors have the same opinions. The *institutionalization of cross-border cooperation* is seen as strong (thanks to the long history of collaboration and the creation of the EGTC). In contrast, *cross-border planning and policies* are weak in the mind of actors (actors highlight the lack of concrete achievements and the lack of strategic and operational planning).

With respect to the ideational dimension, the responses fluctuate more widely: the *sharing of similar references* and the *sense of belonging to a cross-border region* appear uniformly as weak for Flemish actors, whereas they are considered as more important to the Walloons and the French. We can assume this is mainly due to the different linguistic practices.

Beyond these perceptions, stakeholders point out some important challenges to the improvement of cross-border integration within the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai. The main challenges identified concern cross-border transportation (cross-border links and services have to be improved), cross-border

Table 3. Phenomena related to the cross-border integration process.

Dimensions of integration	List of phenomena	French perceptions	Belgian perceptions	
			Flemish	Walloon
Functional	N°1 – Cross-border labour market	Strong	Moderate	Strong
	N°2 – Cross-border mobility for shopping and leisure	Strong	Strong	Strong
	N°3 – Cross-border residential mobility (i.e. people crossing the border to live on the other side)	Moderate	Moderate	Strong
	N°4 – Cross-border communication and transportation networks	Moderate	Weak	Weak
Structural	N°5 – Socio-economic convergence between the two sides of the border (income, living conditions)	Moderate	Weak	Moderate
Institutional	N°6 – Cross-border planning and policies	Weak	Weak	Weak
	N°7 – Institutionalization of cross-border cooperation	Strong	Strong	Strong
Ideational	N°8 – Sharing of similar cultural references	Moderate	Weak	Moderate
	N°9 – Sense of belonging to a cross-border region	Moderate	Weak	Strong

policies and a sense of belonging to a well-defined cross-border living area.

Speaking more generally, the interviewed actors conceive of cross-border integration in the Eurometropolis as an intensive process. The fieldwork conducted led us to consider four principal ways in which this process is perceived and understood. First, a majority of them see cross-border integration as something positive, linked with the idea of erasing borders or border effects (supposedly negative): 'It is when the border has disappeared' [French actors LI03, LI06, LI07, LI10; Belgian actor LI07, LI16, LI23]; 'cross-border integration should bring about a harmonization of rules on either side of border' [French actor LI01; Belgian actor LI02]. It is thus related to the idea of the de-bordering process: 'You don't make any differences according to which side of the border you are on' [French actor LI22; Belgian actors LI08, LI09]. They perceive cross-border integration as a removal of the restricting aspects of the border. This process means that no obstacles toward free movement exist anymore.

Another aspect of cross-border integration is linked to the economy, which is really relevant for the cross-border metropolitan regions, since, in a globalized context, cities and metropolises compete to be attractive urban centres. In such a perspective, cross-border integration constitutes a benefit for the territorial development of the cross-border space. It is a means to create close partnerships across borders, to seek economic complementarities or synergies, but also to develop the attractiveness of the Eurometropolis by providing a common labour market with increased facilities for working. As mentioned both by French and Belgian actors [LI11, LI20]: 'cross-border integration is an expansion of the catchment area and trade across the border'. Hence, the border is perceived as a means to develop the commercial and economic potential of border regions. Taking advantage of trade opportunities and firm-to-firm collaborations, as well as of cross-border supply chains and cross-border investments, a unique economic area is thus created, going beyond the institutional state borders.

Some actors think that cross-border integration is above all a grass-roots phenomenon (made by people-to-people interactions), but at the same time, it

must be regulated: authorities must manage the cross-border flows and their spill-over effects through cross-border collaboration which responds to the needs of citizens and businessmen. *De facto*, cross-border integration is related to the institutionalization of cross-border cooperation and to the achievements of common initiatives made for citizens: 'It is when there is cooperation at all levels, joint initiatives, a sharing of public facilities' [French actor LI13]. Cooperation and integration appear as synonyms, and are steered by institutional actors. This confirms the political leadership in the construction of cross-border territorialities (Chilla et al., 2012).

Lastly, cross-border integration should also lead to the transcending of existing mental and cultural barriers in order to create a cross-border living area where people think that they belong to a recognized and named space. According to a stakeholder statement, 'cross-border integration is when cross-border spatial proximity is more important than national belonging' [Belgian actor LI11]. This means that socio-spatial practices occurring at the local scale define a living area that transcends the border and that is more significant than a national identity based on traditional civic elements.

Evolution and challenges of the border perceptions

The results concerning the meanings of border and cross-border integration raise three points in relation to the development of the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai envisaged by local and regional stakeholders: the Janus face of cross-border dynamics, the specific temporality of cross-border cooperation and the interaction between actors' representations and the European and regional strategies and policies.

The Janus face of cross-border dynamics

The dual perception of the bordering dynamics on one hand, and the different levels of perception of cross-border integration on the other hand, show that various visions can coexist in the same area, expressing different and somehow paradoxical outlooks on cross-border dynamics, from the creation of cross-border links to the emergence of a new polity.

One actor's interview on cross-border integration illustrated this ambivalent perception: for this actor, the phrase cross-border integration is an oxymoron, since there is a certain opposition between the two components of the phrase: 'the term "integration" means belonging to an integrity, while the term "cross-border" refers to the relationship between two distinct sides' [French actor, LI15]. This conception puts to the fore the dual rationale of the border relation or even a sort of 'border schizophrenia'. This situation engenders a certain blurring on the border apprehension, and reminds the term of 'penumbral border' mentioned by Paasi and Zimmerbauer (2016) which define the border as membrane that both allows and blocks flows and ideas. Indeed, one and the same person can think, without even being completely aware of it, about the cross-border integration process both with and without the border. But that one perspective does not exclude the other. This underlines a potential simultaneity in these two different perceptions of cross-border dynamics. Yves Barel (1979) demonstrated, in his essay on the social fantastic, that the apparent incompatibility between a vision and its opposite reveals the paradox of a social system, which is expressed by a double discourse which is materialized by the implementation of a dual strategy. This paradoxical dimension of representations is thus characterized by 'a choice as well as by a refusal of choice' (Barel, 1979: 214). This can be transposed, in the study of cross-border integration, by an ideational conception of the border's disappearance, associated with a more practical approach that reminds us of the impossibility of ignoring the presence of physical and/or mental borders. Indeed, in the context of European construction that advocates a Europe without borders, the discourses and representations of the border are disrupted and multiple. Consequently, the paradox around the border forces the actors to adopt a pragmatic approach to deal with these contradictions in adapting their discourse to suit their needs or activities, a situation which the notion of 'a-bordering' also encompasses. This approach is especially reflected in the spatial planning and territorial cooperation in Europe since 'the Commission promotes soft planning in soft cross-border and transnational spaces as part of its Cohesion policy' (Faludi, 2013: 1312) while the

existence of different national territorial systems remains and complicates the implementation of concrete cross-border projects, or restrains the elaboration of cross-border territorial strategies (Decoville and Durand, 2016).

Thus, the fieldwork and analysis of the interviews show that, in relation to the a-bordering dynamics identified and developed earlier, the actors have two main lines of representations of cross-border integration, which can play simultaneously.

- **'Cross-border integration with the border'** expresses a 'centripetal vision' of the border. The border still exists and constitutes a central element around which local and regional actors exchange and build their cross-border Eurometropolis. The border continues to be a marker of territorial sovereignty and a marker of territorial identity. It cannot be avoided, but its interface function feeds cross-border cooperation. This cooperation aims at mutualizing resources, combining means and sharing skills: for instance, the action programme of the Eurometropolis aims at fostering the learning of the neighbours' language. Moreover, coordinating the tourism offer and improving the networking of cultural stakeholders are also means promoting existing heritage and cultural structures or events. In this realistic approach, actors insist more on the institutional nature of cross-border cooperation: the border still distinguishes two territorial systems with different rules and cultures. Cooperation across the border can develop while maintaining cultural, economic or political differences. Cross-border cooperation tries to respond via a set of initiatives and actions to the needs of citizens, businessmen and entrepreneurs.
- The results also reveal a **'cross-border integration without the border'**, which can be referred to as a 'transcendent vision' of the border. This vision intends to erase the border and to facilitate cross-border activities and meetings between people within the Eurometropolis. There is a wish to delete the physical and mental barrier function of the border. In this view,

cross-border cooperation aims first to enable the crossing of the border by implementation of cross-border services, by erasing all border symbols and buildings (border crossings), and second to provide a cross-border ideal (or a long-term vision) that is deprived of the presence of the border and imagines a common future for the different populations. At the empirical level, this can consist of developing a shared territorial marketing policy (e.g. participation of the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai at MIPIM, one of the most important global real estate exhibitions), creating cross-border clusters (notably in textiles, innovative materials, design) or *ZOAST - Zones organisées d'accès aux soins transfrontaliers*, a special cross-border zoning that allows anyone to use the neighbouring care facility without prior permission. The construction of the Jacques Delors³ square, a common cross-border square of the cities of Halluin (France) and Menen (Belgium), also illustrates a certain attempt at integration obliterating the border. Thus, this idealistic vision suggests a transformation of the Eurometropolis into one vast metropolitan area without borders, where there is no problem in working, living or studying wherever one wants. It provides a cross-border ideal (or a long-term vision) that is deprived of the presence of the border and that imagines a common future shared by the different populations.

The specific temporality of cross-border cooperation

The different feedback provided by local and regional actors allowed us to trace back a specific evolution of cross-border cooperation process, following different and particular sequences. For the case study of the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai, three periods can be observed and cross-border cooperation can be seen as a learning process (Table 4).

The early 1990s was a phase that could be described as euphoric: the beginning of Interreg programs, symbolic of European integration, ideals of

the blurring of boundaries, an experimental time of cooperation, building of high-speed train lines and the Channel Tunnel. This favourable context opened up unprecedented possibilities for achieving cross-border integration. From the 2000s, however, actors in charge of cross-border issues began to realize all the difficulties in operationalizing and implementing cross-border projects with their neighbours. Successful projects faced different obstacles: the uncovering of legal barriers, of heavy administrative barriers and the slow pace of negotiations (Decoville and Durand, in press). This evolution is close to what Knippschild mentions about the German–Polish–Czech border region: ‘a certain “cooperation fatigue” among the participants has become evident’ (Knippschild, 2011: 631). In this perspective, cross-border cooperation (understood in the technical sense) may appear as a hindrance to cross-border integration, since the objectives covered by cooperation, to improve/strengthen integration, were not ‘achieved’. In this sense, the actors who are most active in cross-border cooperation are those that face up the most to the administrative and technical discrepancies: ‘Since I set up a cross-border project, I rediscovered the regulatory differences between the territories, differences in status, bottlenecks and slow administration’, contrary to people who almost never face border deadlocks when carrying out their various cross-border activities (shopping, travel and tourism, or even healthcare, etc.). More aware now of the difficulties, but also of the opportunities that both symbolic and pragmatic cross-border integration offer, the institutional actors have a more realistic and mature attitude towards coping with the challenges and issues of the Eurometropolis project. They try to take into account the slower pace of cross-border cooperation and adapt their political agendas accordingly.

5.3. Representations of cross-border integration, regional priorities and European programmes: challenging the identity issue at cross-border level

The results of the case study of Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai eventually allow a more general perspective on the policy aspects of cross-border

Table 4. CBC in the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai: a learning process.

Period	Prevailing trend	Perception of CBC in relation with CBI
1990s	'Beginners' euphoria'	CBC an opportunity to achieve CBI
2000s	'Cooperation fatigue'	CBC a hindrance to CBI?
2010s	'Maturity'	Adaptation to CBC features, realistic vision of CBI

CBC, cross-border cooperation; CBI, cross-border integration.

cooperation to be drawn. Of course such a perspective cannot pretend to be completely and entirely transferable to all the other European cross-border regions, which all present very diverse functional, structural, institutional and ideational profiles. This was shown, for instance, by the results of a European survey, which nonetheless also suggests some common features of cross-border regions (European Commission (EC), 2015). The qualitative data of this case study are rather mobilized as an 'experimental corpus' to discuss the evolution of cross-border dynamics and of the borderscape, concerning, in particular, the potential response of EU programmes to the field expectations that the research identified in the stakeholders' representations. In this way, the analysis suggests some of the priorities of the European programmes of territorial cooperation should be reconsidered. In so doing, this case study also calls forth further research on a broader range of cases, so as to reinforce the assumptions and points of discussion presented here.

On the one hand, the varied understandings of cross-border integration and the policy priorities of the interviewees focus mostly on the functional and ideational dimensions of cross-border integration. The stakeholders include in their representations not only the importance of the ideational dimension of cross-border integration, but also the maintenance of the border as a marker of identity. On the other hand, the main EU schemes dedicated to cross-border cooperation and integration put most emphasis, not only on the functional, but also on the institutional and structural dimensions of cross-border integration. We can refer to the implementation at the

regional scale of some European-wide policies, such as the Trans-European Networks policy or the Regional Policy. One must not forget that the orientation and content of the EU programmes are determined and conditioned by the prerogatives of member states that, as sovereign authorities, are not really inclined to transfer or transform the symbolic ideational and identity relation they have established with the population they govern. This situation points out the difficulty and complexity of all the debates on identity, territorialities and cooperation when it comes to European cross-border areas (Prokkola et al., 2015).

Yet it is currently acknowledged that the institutionalization process encompasses an important symbolical–ideational dimension for stakeholders, especially in a cross-border context (Blatter, 2003). The growth capacity and the institutional legitimacy of cross-border areas and entities are particularly based on intangible, symbolic and identity-providing variables and elements (Perrin, 2012; Sohn, 2014). In this way, the importance given by stakeholders to the ideational dimension of cross-border integration raises questions as to how to foster the ideational dimension of cross-border integration in relevant European programmes. For instance, the France–Belgium Interreg programme addresses the issues of reinforcing the cross-border sense of belonging and identity by providing cross-border public services (axis 3 and 4 of Interreg IV, axis 4 of Interreg V). One can wonder whether these projects can truly provide a cross-border sense of belonging to the people, or whether there is an opposition here between an ideational requirement and a functional/structural response. If a sense of belonging and its shared symbols are essential to build a cross-border polity, how can EU programmes and schemes support such development in a context characterized by multiple, diverse and multi-level identity references? How can a sense of belonging be fostered at the cross-border scale without interfering with the will to maintain national references and prerogatives, and to respect the cultural and identity differences (as expressed by stakeholders)? How can one build a common specificity while keeping the existing specificities?

These questions therefore seem to confirm the peculiar 'in-between' nature of cross-border areas at different levels, not only the ideational one but also

the territorial, geopolitical and institutional levels (Perrin, 2015). Addressing these questions can constitute a crucial challenge for cross-border regions and illustrates the European challenge, and EU motto, 'Unity in Diversity' (Bufon, 2014). If cross-border regions can be considered antechambers to the territorial and ideational construction of Europe, they not only reflect the progress, but also the obstacles and hindrances to such a construction. More globally, the paradoxes of cross-border policies and strategies underline, when it comes to the ideational or symbolic level, 'the complicated constellation of identifications that people normally have [...]. Some of these identities may be linked with a territory, some with other territories, some may be non-territorial' (Paasi, 2009: 146). In this sense, cross-border regions often reveal a nested identity ('Russian dolls' identity), which comprehends local, regional, cross-border, national and European references.

Responses to such challenges can make cross-border regions loci for social innovation, which is one of the main objectives targeted by the EU 2020 strategy. At operational level the stakeholders' feedback suggests that European cross-border schemes and policies should insist on things such as living together and bringing people to sporting, cultural, educational or vocational events as instruments for changing the representations people have of their living spaces. Moreover, it seems essential that such an agenda does not contradict, but rather complement, the identifications and symbolic attachment at other levels. More generally, EU policies and programmes could be instruments to advocate a renewed vision of identity and territorial sense of belonging, which both appear as crucial incentives to reinforce cross-border relations while promoting EU process. This implies to dedicate an important part of EU policies to such thematics, for instance to mainstream the questions of cultural and ideational 'unity with diversity' as a core objective of the regional policy. Some EU macro-regional strategies, a recently developed scheme for territorial cooperation (Gänzle and Kern, 2016), can be launched and primarily work on the people's representation and sense of belonging to the EU. Some other programmes can also focus more on the inclusion of EU questions and references in national cultural or educational schemes. This can be a first step

to reorient the future EU programming after 2020 and to tackle EU rejection and Euroscepticism (Brack and Startin, 2015). European cohesion and regional development is not only based on infrastructure and socio-economic development, but it also comprehends an 'intangible' development measured in the people's recognition and will to belong to the European Union.

Thus, the case of the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai also raises further questions about the role of the EU in fostering such a 'multi-scale' identity referential that would simultaneously preserve differences and fosters unity, and respond to the citizens' expectations. Whatever the evolution of the debate on this question will be, it raises stimulating perspectives to reconsider the means and meanings of EU policies: do nationalisms condemn the European project (Ménasse, 2015), or must the EU construction necessarily be based on national states (Lefebvre, 2013)? And finally, how can EU policies contribute not to replace or reproduce national, state and other ideational/identity references, but rather to overstep the apparent contradiction between the attachment to (state-)national belongings and the building of a supranational culture and sense of common destiny? These questions are all the more salient, as the ideational/identity dimension appears to be particularly significant in the increasing movements of democratic rejection of EU process and of the representatives who believe in it.

Conclusion

The study of the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai confirms that, in the context of European construction, the border has evolved from a political and geopolitical device to a locus where new territorialities emerge, where social and economic interactions and opportunities multiply. Stakeholders' representations show this evolution of the notion of border towards a more democratized, individualized and socialized use. More and more the residents of border regions appropriate 'their' borderscape and the dynamics attached to it. However, the current issues of security, terrorism, large-scale migrations and xenophobia, added to the lasting economic, financial and identity crisis, modify the European agenda and raise questions about open borders, in

particular the Schengen system. Several institutional and academic events have begun to highlight these current topics.⁴ Much political discourse and many actions have already seized the moment to condemn the Union's construction, with a growing consent from the population.

The results of the fieldwork in the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai highlight two main findings. First, different bordering dynamics simultaneously interact, as shown by the ambivalent and dual representations of the stakeholders. The paper identified a particular dynamic of a-bordering, by which the actors recognize both the maintenance and disappearance of certain functions of the border. In this way, the paper contributes to renew and enrich the conceptual approach to the bordering process. In addition, linked to this a-bordering dynamics, the analysis puts forward the twofold conception of a cross-border integration with and without the border, a vision that overpasses the border whilst recognising the existence and prevalence of the national borders. These results suggest that the development of European borderscapes requires processes of adjustment to this twofold conception, so that the maintenance of the border does not become an obstacle to cross-border integration. On a pragmatic level, this requires innovative schemes to respond to the evolution of European societies and politics in cross-border regions and tackle the contradictory dynamics, and related issues, that were highlighted in this study. For instance, the launching of the Integrated Territorial Investment for the current period of the EU Regional Policy is expected to favour a more inclusive approach to the cross-border issue. However, as this paper has made clear, the ideational challenges might not be the simplest nor the least significant of the issues that need to be addressed.

Notes

1. President's New Year's press conference – 15 January 2016 (<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I115044>)
2. <http://www.300ansdefrontiere.fr>
3. Jacques Delors, former president of the European Commission (1985–1995), and father of the current mayor of Lille (Martine Aubry).
4. For instance, the *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière* (MOT) organized conferences with international partners: 'Reform Schengen what impacts for border areas?' (March 2016), 'Security and development: how to manage the border?' (July 2016); ESPON held a seminar 'A world without borders: Refugees, cooperation and territories' (December 2015).

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