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## ***EU - Central America Cooperation***

*Support to the Central American Integration System's  
(SICA) cross-border cooperation actions*

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Prepared by

the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)



Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)  
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)  
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)  
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)  
Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)  
Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (AGEG)  
Werkgemeinschaft van Europese grensgebieden (WVEG)  
Associação das Regiões Fronteiriças Europeias (ARFE)  
Σύνδεσμος Ευρωπαϊκών Συνοριακών Περιφερειών (ΣΕΣΠ)  
Stowarzyszenie Europejskich Regionów Granicznych (SERG)  
Ассоциация Европейских Приграничных Регионов (АЕПР)



**Administration:**

Enscheder Straße 362  
D-48599 Gronau (Germany)

Tel.: +49 2562 70219

[info@aebr.eu](mailto:info@aebr.eu)

[www.aebr.eu](http://www.aebr.eu)

**Secretariat General:**

Anna-Mackenroth-Weg 49  
D-12205 Berlin (Germany)

**AEBR Contact Point in Brussels:**

Office of Extremadura  
5, rue Saint Quentin  
B-1000 Brussels (Belgium)

**AEBR Info Center in Kharkiv (Ukraine):**

[siromed@ukr.net](mailto:siromed@ukr.net)

**AEBR Info Center in Kaliningrad (Russian Federation):**

[ipprvs@gmail.com](mailto:ipprvs@gmail.com)

**AEBR Info Center in Belgrade (Republic of Serbia):**

[ananikolov@hotmail.com](mailto:ananikolov@hotmail.com)

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*The information, opinions and views expressed in this report are those of the AEBR and other players (when indicated), and do not necessarily reflect the official position or opinion of the European Commission.*

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cross-border cooperation actions*

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REGIO DG 02 - Communication  
Avenue de Beaulieu 1  
B-1160 Brussels  
BELGIUM

E-mail: [regio-publication@ec.europa.eu](mailto:regio-publication@ec.europa.eu)

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## **Acronyms and abbreviations**

AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
AECID	<i>Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional al Desarrollo</i> (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation to Development)
AMEXCID	<i>Agencia Mexicana para la Cooperación Internacional al Desarrollo</i> (Mexican Agency for International Cooperation and Development)
ATRIDEST	<i>Asociación del Trifinio para el Desarrollo Sostenible</i> (Trifinio Association for Sustainable Development)
BID	<i>Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo</i> (Inter-American Development Bank)
CAN	<i>Comunidad Andina de Naciones</i> (Andean Community)
CARICOM	Caribbean Community and Common Market
CB	Cross-border
CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
CBM	<i>Corredor Biológico de Mesoamérica</i> (Mesoamerican Biologic Corridor)
CCSICA	<i>Consejo Consultivo de la Sociedad Civil</i> (Civil Society Consultative Council) (SICA)
CEEC	Central and Eastern European Countries
CELAC	<i>Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños</i> (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States)
CEPA	Comisión Ejecutiva Portuaria Autónoma (Port Autonomous Executive Commission)
CEPAL	<i>Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe</i> (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)
CeSPI	<i>Centro Studi de Política Internazionale</i> (Centre for the Study of International Politics )
CJDPCAMCC	<i>Comisión de Jefes de Policía de Centroamérica, México, el Caribe y Colombia</i> (Central American, Mexican, Caribbean and Colombian Police Chiefs Commission)
CONFEDELCA	<i>Conferencia para el Desarrollo Local en Centroamérica</i> (Conference for Local Development in Central America)
CRCCAM	<i>Consulta Regional de la Carta Centroamericana de Autonomía Municipal</i> (Regional Consultation for the Central American Charter of Municipal Autonomy)
CSUA	Central American Universities High Council
CTPT	<i>Comisión Trinacional del Plan Trifinio</i> (Trifinio Plan Trinational Commission)
DAC	Development Aid Committee (OECD)
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DG	Directorate General
DG DevCo	DG for Development and Cooperation (European Commission)
DG REGIO	DG of Regional and Urban Policy (European Commission)
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUROPOL	European Union's law enforcement agency
FALCA	<i>Foro de Autoridades Locales de Centroamérica</i> (Central American Forum of Local Authorities)
FEMICA	<i>Federación de Municipios del Istmo Centroamericano</i> (Federation of Municipalities of the Central American Isthmus)
FNS	Food and Nutrition Security
FRONTEX	European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the EU
FUNDE	National Foundation for Development (SV)
FUNPADEM	Foreign Service Foundation for Peace and Democracy, Costa Rica
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIZ	<i>Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i> (Society for International Cooperation)
IBM	Integrated Border Management
ICBAN	Irish Central Border Area Network

IDELCA	<i>Instituto para el Desarrollo Local en Centroamérica</i> (Institute for Local Development in Central America)
IIDC	<i>Instituto Iberoamericano de Derecho Constitucional</i> (Iberoamerican Institute of Constitutional Law)
IILA	<i>Istituto Italo Latino Americano</i> (Italian-Latin American Institute)
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO)
LACE	Linkage Assistance and Cooperation for European Border Regions
LRA	Local and Regional Authorities
MERCOSUR	<i>Mercado Común del Sur</i> (Common Market of the South)
MOT	<i>Mission Operationnelle Transfrontalière</i>
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWRCBG	North West Region Cross-Border Group
OAS	Organization of American States
OCAM	<i>Organización Centroamericana de Migración</i> (Central American Migration Organization)
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
P2P	People-to-People
PRESANCA	<i>Programa Regional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional (SAN) para Centroamérica</i> (Regional Programme for Central American Food and Nutrition Security (FNS))
PRESISAN	<i>Programa Regional sobre Sistemas de Información para la SAN en Centroamérica</i> (Regional Program on Information Systems for FNS in Central America)
PROCUENCA	Plan for the Integrated Management of Water Resources and the Sustainable Development of San Juan River Basin
SEFRO	<i>Programa Regional de Seguridad Fronteriza en América Central</i> (Central American Border Security Regional Programme)
SELA	<i>Sistema Económico Latinoamericano y del Caribe</i> (Latin American and Caribbean Economic System)
SET	<i>Secretaría Ejecutiva Trinacional</i> (Trinational Executive Secretariat) (Trifinio)
SICA	<i>Sistema de Integración Centroamericana</i> (Central American Integration System)
SIECA	<i>Secretaría de Integración Económica Centroamericana</i> (Central American Economic Integration Secretariat)
SINTET	<i>Sistema de Información Territorial Trinacional</i> (Trinational Territorial Information System)
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TEN-T	Trans-European Network of Transport
UDUAL	<i>Unión de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe</i> (Association of Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WS	Workshop
UTT	<i>Unidad Territorial Transfronteriza</i> (Cross-Border Territorial Unit)

### Country codes (ISO 3166-1 alpha 2)

		PA	Panama	CZ	Czech Republic	NL	the Netherlands
	<b>America</b>	PE	Peru	DE	Germany	NO	Norway
AR	Argentina	PY	Paraguay	DK	Denmark	PL	Poland
BR	Brazil	SV	El Salvador	ES	Spain	PT	Portugal
BZ	Belize	US	United States	FI	Finland	RO	Romania
CO	Colombia			FR	France	RS	Serbia
CR	Costa Rica		<b>Europe</b>	GR	Greece	SE	Sweden
GT	Guatemala	AL	Albania	HU	Hungary	SK	Slovakia
HN	Honduras	AT	Austria	IE	Ireland	UA	Ukraine
MX	Mexico	BE	Belgium	IT	Italy	UK	United Kingdom
NI	Nicaragua	CH	Switzerland	LU	Luxembourg		



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**EN**

After the preliminary analysis of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) in Central America included in the study "CBC in Latin America. A contribution to the regional integration process", prepared by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) for the European Commission (DG Regio) in 2011, further developments made possible to face the present project in 2013 in close coordination with the SICA (the Central American Integration System). In Central America there is an on-going and very stimulating integration process since many years, which has been closely followed by the AEBR through different partnerships, especially the Secretariat General of the SICA, main promoter of several sound cross-border initiatives, being the most suitable partner to strengthen these processes at the supra-national level in the region.

On the other hand, border municipalities in Central American countries are increasingly demanding instruments for CBC, being a growing field under permanent development.

Three main areas were identified to be the focus of this study: the Trifinio Process, the Gulf of Fonseca and the Sixaola Basin. The Trifinio Process was initiated in the 1970s in a region shared by El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, in order to preserve joint natural resources, sustain peacekeeping processes in the region and develop tri-national integration. The Gulf of Fonseca (El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua), is a growing player in the development of CBC in Central America due to its strategic location, and especially because of the discussions about new infrastructures and the necessary coordination of many national interests in a relatively small territory. The third area, the Sixaola Basin, is considered one of the most peaceful and prone to CBC area in Central America, where many international players are developing public and private initiatives with a great cross-border impact.

CBC has been a weak topic within the Central American integration process, mostly absent of local agendas because of prevailing centralism and, probably, because of the lack of an intermediate level of government. There are some bilateral agreements between local authorities across borders, making things more complex, according to some players. Some of these efforts have been made for years, but they are limited by the practice: there is no acknowledgement of municipalities as state actors by national governments. This is reflected in insufficient decentralized competences, including their financing. Border territories can be described in most cases as sub-national areas left behind, not present in some public policies due to their lesser political and economic weight, smaller in population, more rural, peripheral, apart from big cities, with most of their population belonging to indigenous or afro-descendent peoples, with development levels under national averages, and divided by different jurisdictions in an evident "border effect". The SICA is doing important efforts to define the role of municipalities in the integration process, taking into account local and national institutionality.

The purpose of this study was the development of SWOT analyses in three selected cross-border areas in Central America showing a high potential for CBC but where sustainable and systematic territorial cooperation has not yet been achieved. Within the findings of these SWOT analyses, it has always been stressed that the tasks to implement an integrated and sustained activity to protect and develop CBC initiatives in Central America should be done by institutions at supra-national, national and local level (multi-level governance and subsidiarity), as well as by other non-public actors, as it is the case of non-governmental organisations and enterprises (partnership). Cross-border local development is the keyword, and this is also in the focus of initiatives like PRESANCA I and II (*Regional Programme for Food and Nutrition Security in Central America*) and PRESISAN (*Regional Program on Information Systems for Food and Nutrition Security in Central America*) through Cross-Border Territorial Units (UTT), but the participation of the local level is yet to be strongly promoted and fully exploited.

The contribution of the AEBR and other European regional organizations, as well as their partners in Central America, has offered an exchange of expertise and good practises for capacity building in this region, where sustainable and systematic territorial cooperation is just a wish. Actually, there is a great working field in knowledge development and training, as well as in implementing permanent structures for CBC. Programmes and structures to strengthen social and economic cohesion are also very much needed, without duplication of objectives and functions between new and already existing initiatives and institutions.

These SWOT analyses in selected cross-border areas, addressing current socio-economical standing, territorial divide and identifying common challenges are extremely helpful to elaborate a feasible road map for CBC in Central America, taking into account most internal and external factors.

The situation in Central America is quite complex, despite its size, with enormous challenges regarding security, trafficking and their populations' strong trend towards migrating, especially to the US. Decision-making processes are even more complex, particularly in border areas. This needs a political vision to comprise border development and Central American integration, and this question has not been tackled by national governments yet. If we add the absence of intermediate governments and the institutional and legal asymmetries between these countries, there are little chances for some degree of harmonisation to solve some border differences and to agree on the joint management of border territories and resources. Therefore, main challenges for Central America are the definition of an institutional model for cross-border governance, opening spaces for dialogue between local authorities and decentralized institutions, and the implementation of multi-level governance, inter-institutional collaboration and CBC.

In fact, there are some specific challenges not overcome in Central America related to the border question, such as the centrality of metropolis and capital cities. Unequal relationship, misbalances and conflicts between the capitals and border populations around the management of natural resources still prevent a consequent development. It is also needed to facilitate solutions for strategic and human shortages in border populations through the building of capacities to manage shared natural resources in most of the cross-border territories identified.

After the introduction (**chapter 1**), a review of the methodology used in this study is included in **chapter 2**. **Chapter 3** deals with a territorial assessment of CBC experiences at the three selected cases in Central America; and the following chapter tackles problems encountered (**chapter 4**). **Chapter 5** is about lessons learned, best practices and obstacles, and **chapter 6** includes a series of conclusions and recommendations, as well as a proposal of "road map" to be implemented in the framework of the SICA. A section on bibliography has been included, as well as a set of annexes: the three factsheets (**Annexes 1-3**) corresponding to the cases under study, including some background information, legal regulations, existing structures, some strategic presentations, the SWOT analyses and summaries of the workshops. We have also included the report of a meeting organized in Martinique to compare CBC practices in Europe, Latin American and the Caribbean (**Annex 4**), as this activity is somehow connected with the purposes of the present study. The report has been "spotted" with some concrete examples of European initiatives and projects which may be of inspiration for certain Central American situations.

The SWOT analyses provided the basis to elaborate a road map for CBC in the territories under study, including main results, outcomes, lessons learned, recommendations and conclusions in this Final Report. Main European lessons and best practice (dynamics of territorial cooperation through EU Regional Policy support and national/regional/local co-financing) also inspired this action plan. This information brought a solid base for further discussions in the mini-workshops. A draft "Road Map" has been produced, being distributed amongst selected stakeholders and discussed during the mini-workshops with most relevant actors, organized according to the specifications. These mini-workshops took place in the Trifinio area, in the Gulf of Fonseca and in San Salvador. In this report there is a summary of

the findings, but more intensive information (geographical description, historical background, socio-economic context, strategic importance, news about trilateral, bilateral or multilateral relationship between involved countries, legal and institutional framework, operational association in the areas, structures, strategies, programmes and projects, contact persons, perspectives coming from the SWOT analyses and some specific recommendations for every area under study) can be found in the three factsheets.

Besides the mini-workshops, there were many other activities organized with various stakeholders, and some other cross-border initiatives have been identified within these and in other cross-border areas. There are also some references to the Caribbean. In particular, an initiative to coordinate CBC efforts in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean was launched by the AEBR, the MOT, the University of Guyenne and the Antilles and other European organizations with the support of DG Regio in Martinique in November 2013. A report is included as Annex 4.

Regarding the problems encountered, there is a lack of coordination between different initiatives, even promoted by international institutions, such as the EU. There are some calls for projects in Central America with a cross-border approach within the European Development Instrument, which are neither sufficiently informed nor coordinated with the relevant institutions (namely the SICA and involved local and national authorities). Another issue is the definition of CBC in every particular area. There is always a temptation to compare structures and competencies across borders. One of the main challenges is the creation of communication and exchange mechanisms based on mutual trust, as well as the promotion of a bottom-up approach, especially for decision-making on cross-border issues. More specifically, there is a lack of regulation for border municipalities. National approaches prevail without substantial support to local initiatives in border communities; there is a feeling of confrontation in some areas; most initiatives implemented in the last years lack measurable results. Main aspects of interest identified are: security issues, migration and mobility, economic and social complementarity; and, the implementation of new regulations limiting previously existing freedoms of mobility, as a result of some unilateral customs regulations.

Some of the lessons learned have to do with the lack of programmes and instruments for integration in Central America, but there is a strong will to cooperate. All initiatives should be coordinated by the SICA, following the trail of PRESANCA and PRESISAN, with the participation of other institutions, such as the Central American Parliament. The SICA five strategic axes —democratic security, environment, economic integration, economic and social cohesion, and institutional strengthening— should be developed with the participation of local stakeholders, building multi-level governance and stressing bottom-up processes. There are some Central American experiences with a great mobilizing potential, particularly in the areas of the Trifinio and the Gulf of Fonseca.

Regarding recommendations:

- CBC should overcome traditional visions about sovereignty and border as a limit.
- CBC forces to rethink multi-sector and cross-cutting needs in integration processes.
- CBC requires a multilevel governance to coordinate international, regional, national and local stakeholders.
- SICA should get directly involved in the development of CBC concepts, strategies, programmes and experiences in the region.
- Building local capacities through systematic training programmes on CBC for civil servants, politicians and other groups of interest is a must.
- International Cooperation is changing, and developing countries should pilot this change strengthening their institutionality and capacities.
- The EU-Central American Association Agreement is very much centred in trade, but its political and cooperation pillars could implement some territorial cohesion.

- A good use should be made of cross-border opportunities offered by the Sub-Regional Programme for Central America within the EU Development Cooperation Instrument, among others.
- Integration efforts will be prioritized by international cooperation agencies, but a strong coordination at all levels is very much required.
- The participation of the AEBR and other European organizations, can offer expertise and good practices.
- There is a need to build a cross-border identity to overcome historical obstacles between these countries, while respecting national limitations, and promoting synergies and complementarities.
- There is also a need of programmes and structures to strengthen social, economic and territorial cohesion, without duplication of objectives and functionalities.
- New coordination criteria are also needed to manage programmes and projects within regional integration processes.
- Tourism and promotion of Central America as a single destination.
- Creation or activation of working groups in selected border areas.
- Concentration in governance and coordination models.
- An additional effort should be made to establish an adequate legal, political and institutional framework to regulate and manage cross-border regions, respecting border issues as well as the legal and constitutional frameworks in every country.
- Take the most of existing structures and networks.
- An Information Session in Europe for selected Central American areas.
- Specific road maps for some selected border areas should be drafted at specific meetings with the participation of all stakeholders.
- A systematic exchange of views among local stakeholders, with the coordination of a European organization, could lead to the preparation of a multiannual project to develop CBC strategies and structures in the selected areas of Central America, including the implementation of *ad hoc* financial mechanisms.

As main conclusions it can be summarized that:

- Central American border areas show common problems, derived in many cases from their peripheral situation and the lack of regulatory harmonization.
- These initiatives should contribute to enhance people's quality of life.
- The future of the region depends of their political and economic integration.
- The participation of local authorities and civil society organizations seems to be a main factor to activate CBC in Central America, though their priorities are focused in local deficits.
- Main elements of interest identified by local players are security, environmental protection and human development.
- There are relevant proposals made unilaterally by some countries, and programmes promoted by the SICA, but the lack of coordination does not match national agendas, with some exceptions.
- There are opportunities in these territories for CBC, but there are no sufficient social and economic structures, and there is a lack of solid national approaches.
- Central American CBC could be a good example of South-South collaboration.
- Trifinio can be used as a pilot case for other border areas in Central America. Gulf of Fonseca can be a major exercise of coordination of policies within the framework of the SICA, which can produce benefits for the whole region. And, the Sixaola Basin could be a very successful pilot case of public-private partnership.

At the end of this report, a draft Road Map has been included to serve as a base for further debates on CBC in Central America and in every concrete cross-border area.

## **RESUMEN EJECUTIVO**

**ES**

A partir del análisis preliminar sobre la situación de la Cooperación Transfronteriza (CTF) en Centroamérica incluido en el estudio "CTF en América Latina. Una contribución al proceso de integración regional", preparado en 2011 por la Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE) para la Dirección General de Política Regional y Urbana (DG Regio) de la Comisión Europea, en 2013 fue posible afrontar el presente trabajo en estrecha coordinación con el Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA). En Centroamérica existe actualmente un profundo y dinámico proceso de integración desde hace muchos años, que ha sido seguido cuidadosamente por la ARFE a través de distintos partenariados, especialmente la Secretaría General del SICA, promotor principal de varias sólidas iniciativas transfronterizas, y siendo el socio más apropiado para fortalecer estos procesos a nivel supranacional en la región.

Por otro lado, los municipios fronterizos en los países centroamericanos demandan cada vez más instrumentos para la CTF, siendo éste un ámbito en pleno crecimiento y constante desarrollo.

Se seleccionaron tres áreas fundamentales como objeto de este estudio: el Proceso del Trifinio, el Golfo de Fonseca y la Cuenca del Sixaola, entre Costa Rica y Panamá. El Trifinio se inició en los años setenta en una región compartida por El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras, con el fin de preservar recursos naturales compartidos, sostener procesos de mantenimiento de la paz en la región y desarrollar la integración trinacional. El Golfo de Fonseca (El Salvador, Honduras y Nicaragua) es un actor creciente en el desarrollo de la CTF en Centroamérica por su localización estratégica y especialmente debido a los debates sobre nuevas infraestructuras y la necesaria coordinación de muchos intereses nacionales en un territorio relativamente pequeño. La tercera área, la Cuenca del Sixaola, está considerada la zona de América Central más pacífica y dispuesta a la CTF, donde varios actores internacionales están desarrollando iniciativas públicas y privadas con un gran impacto transfronterizo.

La CTF ha sido un tema débil dentro del proceso de integración centroamericano, generalmente ausente de las agendas políticas debido al centralismo imperante y, probablemente, a la falta de niveles intermedios de gobierno. Hay algunos acuerdos bilaterales entre municipios a través de algunas fronteras, complicando algo más la situación, según algunos actores. Algunos de estos esfuerzos se han realizado durante años, pero están limitados por la práctica: no hay reconocimiento del papel de los municipios como actores estatales por parte de los gobiernos nacionales. Ello se refleja en la ausencia de competencias descentralizadas, incluyendo su financiación. Los territorios fronterizos pueden ser descritos como áreas subnacionales rezagadas, ausentes de muchas políticas públicas debido a su menor peso político y económico, menores en población, más rurales, periféricos, alejados de las grandes ciudades, con la mayor parte de su población perteneciente a los pueblos originarios o afrodescendientes, con niveles de desarrollo por debajo de las medias nacionales y divididos por diferentes jurisdicciones en un evidente "efecto frontera". El SICA está haciendo importantes esfuerzos para definir el papel de los municipios en el proceso de integración, teniendo en cuenta la institucionalidad nacional y local.

El propósito de este estudio fue desarrollar un análisis DAFO en las áreas transfronterizas seleccionadas en Centroamérica que muestran un alto potencial para la cooperación pero donde aún no se ha conseguido un enfoque sistemático de la cooperación territorial. Entre los hallazgos de estos análisis DAFO siempre se insiste en que las tareas para poner en marcha acciones sostenibles e integradas que protejan y desarrollen iniciativas transfronterizas en Centroamérica deben ser llevadas a cabo por instituciones locales, nacionales y supranacionales (gobernanza multinivel y subsidiariedad), así como otros actores no públicos, como las ONGs y las empresas (partenariado). La clave está en el desarrollo local transfronterizo, y así se está enfocando en iniciativas como PRESANCA I y II (Programa Regional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional en Centroamérica) y PRESISAN (Programa Regional sobre Sistemas de Información para la Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional en Centroamérica) a través de Unidades Territoriales Transfronterizas (UTT), pero la participación del nivel local aún debe promocionarse mucho más para poder ser explotada en su totalidad.

La contribución de la ARFE y otras organizaciones regionales europeas, así como sus socios en América Central, ha permitido el intercambio de experiencias y buenas prácticas para generar capacidades en esta región, donde la cooperación sistemática y sostenible es sólo un deseo. En realidad hay un enorme campo de trabajo en materia de desarrollo del conocimiento y la formación, así como en la puesta en marcha de estructuras permanentes para la CTF. Hay una necesidad de programas y estructuras para fortalecer la cohesión social, económica y territorial, sin duplicar objetivos ni funciones entre iniciativas e instituciones existentes y las de nuevo cuño. Estos análisis DAFO en áreas transfronterizas seleccionadas, observando su situación socioeconómica actual, división territorial, e identificando desafíos comunes ayudan enormemente a en la elaboración de una hoja de ruta factible para la CTF en América Central, teniendo en cuenta la mayoría de factores internos y externos

La situación en América Central es bastante compleja, a pesar de su tamaño, con enormes retos en materia de seguridad, tráfico ilegal y la enorme tendencia de sus poblaciones a emigrar, particularmente a los EE.UU. Los procesos de toma de decisiones son incluso más complejos, particularmente en las áreas fronterizas. Se precisa de una visión política para comprender el desarrollo fronterizo y la integración centroamericana, y esta cuestión no ha sido desarrollada aun suficientemente por los gobiernos nacionales. Si añadimos la ausencia de gobiernos intermedios y las asimetrías institucionales y legislativas entre estos países, hay pocas oportunidades para alcanzar un cierto grado de armonización que solucione algunas diferencias fronterizas y permita alcanzar acuerdos para la gestión conjunta de territorios y recursos fronterizos. Por eso los retos principales para América Central son la definición de un modelo institucional para la gobernanza transfronteriza, abriendo espacios para el diálogo entre las autoridades locales y las instituciones descentralizadas, y la puesta en marcha de una gobernanza multinivel, la colaboración inter-institucional y la CTF.

De hecho, hay algunos retos específicos aún no superados en América Central en relación con la cuestión fronteriza, como la centralidad de las capitales. Las relaciones desiguales, los desequilibrios y los conflictos entre las capitales y las poblaciones fronterizas en relación con los recursos naturales siguen impidiendo un desarrollo consecuente. También hay necesidad de dar soluciones a las carencias humanas y estratégicas de las poblaciones fronterizas mediante la construcción de capacidades para la gestión de recursos naturales compartidos en la mayor parte de los territorios transfronterizos identificados.

Tras la introducción (**capítulo 1**), una revisión de la metodología utilizada en este trabajo se ha incluido en el **capítulo 2**. El **capítulo 3** consiste en una valoración territorial de las experiencias de CTF en los tres casos seleccionados en América Central; y el capítulo siguiente trata de los problemas afrontados (**capítulo 4**). El **capítulo 5** trata de las lecciones aprendidas, mejores prácticas y obstáculos, y el **capítulo 6** incluye una serie de recomendaciones y conclusiones, así como una propuesta de "hoja de ruta" para ser puesta en marcha en el marco del SICA. Se ha incluido una sección de bibliografía, así como una serie de anexos: las tres fichas informativas (**Anexos 1-3**) correspondientes a los casos en estudio, incluyendo algunos antecedentes, disposiciones legales, estructuras existentes, algunas presentaciones estratégicas, los análisis DAFO con algunas perspectivas, y los resúmenes de los talleres. También se ha incluido el informe de una reunión organizada en Martinica para comparar las prácticas de CTF en Europa, América Latina y el Caribe (**Anexo 4**), ya que esta actividad está conectada de alguna manera con el propósito del presente estudio. El informe ha sido "salpicado" con algunos ejemplos de iniciativas y proyectos europeos concretos que pueden servir de inspiración en ciertas situaciones de Centroamérica.

Los análisis DAFO proporcionaron la base para elaborar una hoja de ruta para la CTF en los territorios en estudio, utilizando sus resultados, productos y conclusiones principales para este Informe Final. Las principales lecciones aprendidas y las mejores prácticas europeas (dinámicas de cooperación territorial mediante el apoyo de la Política Regional de la UE y la cofinanciación nacional, regional o local) también inspiraron este plan de acción. Esta información aportó una sólida base para discusiones ulteriores en los mini-talleres. Se ha producido un borrador de "hoja de ruta", siendo distribuido entre algunos socios seleccionados y discutido durante los mini-talleres con los actores más relevantes, organizados de acuerdo a

las especificaciones. Estos mini-talleres tuvieron lugar en el área del Trifinio, en el Golfo de Fonseca y en San Salvador. En este informe hay un resumen de los hallazgos, aunque información más extensa (descripción geográfica, antecedentes históricos, contexto socioeconómico, importancia estratégica, noticias sobre las relaciones bilaterales, trilaterales o multilaterales entre los países implicados, el marco legal e institucional, asociaciones operativas en estas áreas, estructuras, estrategias, programas y proyectos, personas de contacto, ciertas perspectivas a partir del análisis DAFO, y algunas recomendaciones específicas para cada área en estudio) puede encontrarse en las tres fichas informativas.

Además de los mini-talleres, se organizaron muchas más actividades con distintos actores, y otras iniciativas transfronterizas han sido identificadas dentro de éstas y en otras áreas transfronterizas. También hay algunas referencias al área del Caribe. En particular la ARFE, la MOT, la Universidad de la Guayana y las Antillas, y otras organizaciones europeas, con el apoyo de la DG Regio organizaron en Martinica en noviembre de 2013 una acción para coordinar esfuerzos de CTF en Europa, América Latina y el Caribe. Un informe sobre esta actividad se ha incluido como Anexo 4.

En cuanto a los problemas encontrados, hay una falta de coordinación entre distintas iniciativas, incluso promovidas por las mismas instituciones como la UE. Se publican convocatorias para proyectos del Instrumento Europeo de Desarrollo en América Central con un enfoque transfronterizo, sobre las que no existe suficiente información o no están coordinadas con las instituciones relevantes (sobre todo el SICA y las autoridades locales y nacionales implicadas). Otro asunto es la definición de CTF en cada área en particular. Siempre hay una tentación de comparar estructuras y competencias a través de las fronteras. Uno de los retos principales es la creación de mecanismos de comunicación e intercambio basados en un sistema de confianza mutua, así como la promoción de un enfoque "de abajo hacia arriba", especialmente en la toma de decisiones sobre asuntos transfronterizos. Más específicamente, hay una falta de regulación para los municipios fronterizos. Los enfoques nacionales prevalecen sin un apoyo sustancial a las iniciativas locales de las comunidades fronterizas; sigue habiendo un sentimiento de confrontación en algunas áreas; la mayor parte de las iniciativas llevadas a cabo en los últimos años carecen de resultados mensurables. Los principales asuntos de interés identificados son: seguridad, migración y movilidad, complementariedad económica y social; y, especialmente, la introducción de nuevas regulaciones que limitan libertades existentes con anterioridad en materia de movilidad, como resultado de algunas disposiciones aduaneras unilaterales.

Algunas de las lecciones aprendidas tienen que ver con una falta de programas e instrumentos para la integración en América Central, pero hay una gran voluntad de cooperar. Todas las iniciativas deberían estar coordinadas por el SICA, siguiendo la estela de PRESANCA y PRESISAN, con la participación de otras instituciones, como el Parlamento Centroamericano. Los cinco ejes estratégicos del SICA —seguridad democrática, medio ambiente, integración económica, cohesión económica y social, y fortalecimiento institucional— deben desarrollarse con la participación de los agentes locales, construyendo procesos de gobernanza multinivel y promoviendo los enfoques de abajo arriba. Hay algunas experiencias centroamericanas con un enorme potencial movilizador, particularmente en las áreas del Trifinio y el Golfo de Fonseca.

En cuanto a las recomendaciones:

- La CTF requiere superar las visiones tradicionales sobre soberanía y frontera como límite.
- La CTF obliga a replantear la necesidad de enfoques multisectoriales y transversales en los procesos de integración.
- La CTF requiere una gobernanza multinivel para coordinar a los actores de los niveles internacional, regional, nacional y local.
- El SICA debe involucrarse directamente en el desarrollo de conceptos, estrategias, programas y experiencias en la región.
- Construir las capacidades locales a través de programas de formación sistemáticos sobre CTF para funcionarios, políticos y otros grupos de interés es muy necesario.

- La Cooperación Internacional está cambiando, y los países en desarrollo deben pilotar este cambio fortaleciendo su institucionalidad y capacidades.
- El Acuerdo de Asociación UE-América Central se centra mucho en el comercio, pero sus pilares políticos y de cooperación podrían impulsar una cierta cohesión territorial.
- Deben aprovecharse las oportunidades transfronterizas que ofrece el Programa Sub-Regional para Centroamérica del Instrumento Europeo de Cooperación, entre otros.
- Los esfuerzos de integración van a ser considerados prioritarios por las agencias internacionales de cooperación, pero se requiere una mayor coordinación de esfuerzos a todos los niveles.
- La participación de la ARFE y de otras asociaciones europeas, puede ofrecer experiencia y buenas prácticas.
- Hay una necesidad de construir una identidad transfronteriza que permita superar obstáculos históricos entre estos países, respetando las limitaciones nacionales y promoviendo sinergias y complementariedades.
- También existe una necesidad de programas y estructuras que fortalezcan la cohesión social, económica y territorial sin duplicar objetivos y funcionalidades.
- Nuevos criterios de coordinación y cooperación también son necesarios para la gestión de programas y proyectos dentro de los procesos de integración regional.
- El turismo y la promoción de Centroamérica como un destino único.
- Creación o activación de grupos de trabajo en las zonas fronterizas seleccionadas.
- Concentración en la gobernanza y en los modelos de coordinación.
- Debe realizarse un esfuerzo adicional para establecer un marco legal, político e institucional adecuado que regule y gestione las regiones TF, respetando las cuestiones limítrofes y los marcos constitucionales y legales de cada país.
- Aprovechar las estructuras y redes existentes.
- Una sesión informativa en Europa para las áreas seleccionadas en América Central.
- Se deben elaborar hojas de ruta específicas para algunas áreas fronterizas seleccionadas en reuniones *ad hoc* con la participación de todos los actores.
- El intercambio sistemático de puntos de vista entre los actores locales, con la coordinación de una organización europea, podría llevar a la preparación de un proyecto plurianual para desarrollar estrategias y estructuras de CTF en las áreas seleccionadas de Centroamérica, incluyendo la puesta en marcha de mecanismos financieros específicos.

En resumen, como conclusiones principales:

- Las zonas fronterizas centroamericanas presentan problemas comunes, derivados muchos de ellos de su condición periférica y la falta de armonización legislativa.
- Estas iniciativas tienen que contribuir a mejorar la calidad de vida de las personas.
- El futuro de la región depende de su integración política y económica.
- La participación de las autoridades locales y las organizaciones de la sociedad civil parecen ser factores principales para activar la CTF en América Central, aunque sus prioridades sigan siendo los déficit locales.
- Los principales elementos de interés identificados por los actores locales son la seguridad, la protección medioambiental y el desarrollo humano.
- Existen propuestas unilaterales bastante relevantes hechas por algunos países, y programas promovidos por el SICA, pero la falta de coordinación no las conjuga con las agendas nacionales, con alguna excepción.
- Existen oportunidades en estos territorios para la CTF, pero no hay suficiente estructura social y económica, y faltan enfoques nacionales sólidos.
- La CTF en Centroamérica podría ser un buen ejemplo de colaboración Sur-Sur.
- El Trifinio puede ser un área piloto para otras regiones fronterizas de América Central. El Golfo de Fonseca puede ser un gran ejercicio de coordinación de políticas en el marco del SICA, que puede producir beneficios para toda la región. Y la Cuenca de Sixaola puede ser un caso piloto muy exitoso de cooperación público-privada.

Al final de este informe se ha incluido una propuesta de Hoja de Ruta que puede servir como base para ulteriores debates sobre la CTF en América Central y en cada área TF concreta.



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 General introduction to the main aspects of the study**

After a preliminary analysis of the situation of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) in Central America included in the study "CBC in Latin America. A contribution to the regional integration process", prepared in 2011 by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) for the Directorate General of Regional and Urban Policy (DG Regio), European Commission, it has been possible to face in 2013 the present project in close coordination with the Central American Integration System (SICA).

In Central America there is an on-going and very stimulating integration process since many years: seven countries and 1,201 municipalities in half a million square kilometres, where almost 4 million people (out of 41) live in border areas. It is worth mentioning that, despite of being a small territory, it is very diverse in terms of landscape, biologic variety and human culture. This is particularly interesting in border areas, which host most indigenous ethnic groups, 40% of all protected areas and 20 international river basins. Thus, some strategic plans for the integral (and cross-border) management of these basins have already been elaborated, though their implementation is in very different levels of development.

The AEBR has followed these processes for more than a decade by agreeing and exchanging information with several regional platforms in the area. This was the case of the CONFEDELCA (Conference for Local Development in Central America), and the IDELCA (Institute for Local Development in Central America), with local NGOs like the FUNPADEM (Foreign Service Foundation for Peace and Democracy, Costa Rica) and the FUNDE (National Foundation for Development, El Salvador), amongst other partners. We have also a special relationship with the Secretariat General of the SICA. A periodical exchange of information about developments in Europe and Central America specifically regarding CBC has been established between the SICA, DG Regio and the AEBR.

We have also consulted studies and analyses made by Central American and European institutions in order to extend the scope of our study in a small, but complex cross-border area. A very interesting reference is the CBC Project promoted in 1997 by the Ford Foundation, with the main objective of facilitating spaces for inter-municipal meetings in border areas. This Foundation also strengthened a related research institution (Unit for Central American Border's Research, School of Geography, University of Costa Rica), carrying out research on cross-border relationship, limitations, etc., and some specific case-studies. It has achieved a wider scope at Central American level through the CSUA (Central American Universities High Council). There are other organizations showing a high potential to promote CBC in other fields (associations of professionals, Chambers of Commerce, etc.).

The SICA is the main promoter of several sound cross-border initiatives, being the most suitable partner to strengthen these processes through more supra-national integration, quite comparable to the European Union, but taking into account some obvious differences. SICA's initiatives, due to its own foundations, are mostly based in a "transnational" approach, involving national ministries, though the participation of associations of municipalities, *mancomunidades* (commonwealths) and Cross-Border Territorial Units (UTT) is promoted through programmes such as PRESANCA I and II (*Regional Programme for Food and Nutrition Security [FNS] in Central America*) and PRESISAN (*Regional Program on Information Systems for FNS*). There are some national approaches to CBC in SICA's Member States, being the most relevant El Salvador, with a very interesting attitude towards CBC. It is remarkable that most CBC initiatives identified involve Salvadorian territories.

Nevertheless, border municipalities in Central American countries are increasingly demanding instruments for CBC, being a growing field under permanent development. In these countries it is very difficult to talk about regions, and the municipalities are the main sub-national institution to be taken into account, but other administrative structures (departments) that may play a role in cross-border processes should also be identified.

Three main areas were selected to be the focus of this study: the Trifinio Process, the Gulf of Fonseca and the Sixaola Basin, between Costa Rica and Panama.

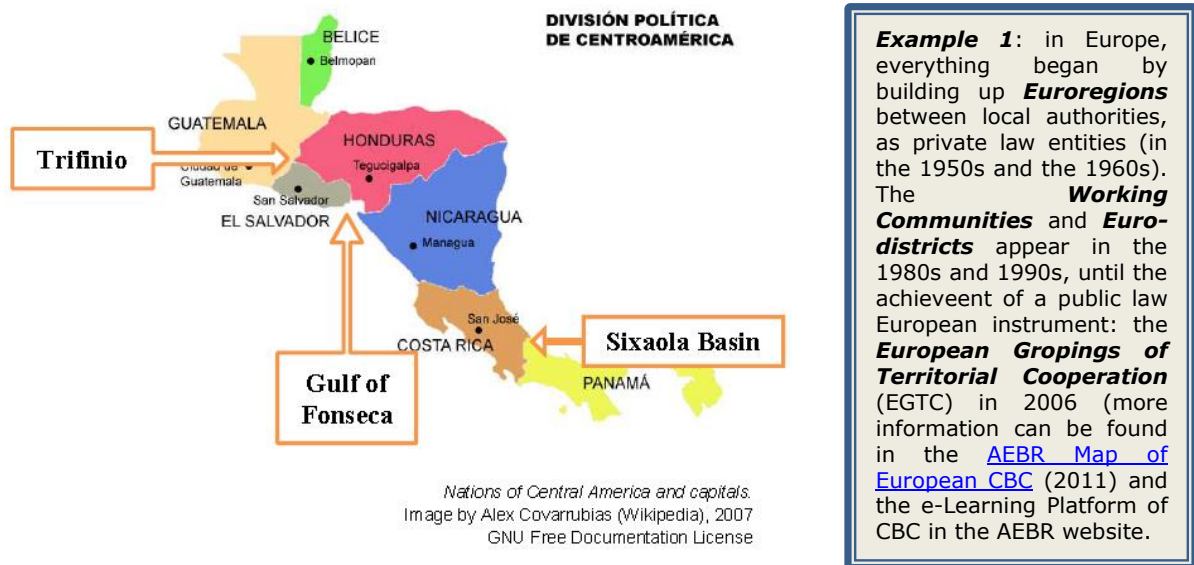


Fig. 1: CBC cases identified to be the focus of this study

Source: AEBR, 2012, (own elaboration over a Wikipedia map of Central America)

The Trifinio Process was the first experience of CBC, launched in the 1970s in a region shared by El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. CBC and Central American integration meet in the Trifinio Process, contributing to preserve shared natural resources, sustain peacekeeping processes in the region and develop tri-national integration. The Italian "Open Borders" project (implemented by the CeSPI<sup>1</sup>) was quite active here and produced several interesting documents. One of the most relevant achievements of the Trifinio Border Regional Development Plan, implemented since 1989, is the consolidation of a Tri-national Commission to develop concrete actions in order to make sustainable agriculture models possible, to strengthen commercial links between border municipalities from three countries and, the most important element, to increase the participation of civil society through ATRIDEST, a civil organization of farmers, teachers, cooperatives and development entities.

Under the input of some European development agencies, like the German GIZ (*die Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit*, the Society for International Cooperation), the Spanish AECID (Agency for International Development Cooperation) or the Italian Cooperation, some agreements have been signed to promote CBC, with pilot actions funded by the European Official Development Assistance. This has paved the way to bilateral cross-border agreements, as it was the case of the Ataco Declaration between El Salvador and Guatemala (22 October 2009) for the joint management of River Paz Basin.

<sup>1</sup> Centro Studi de Politica Internazionale, Roma.

Sustainable management of natural resources is one of the main priorities of the Trifinio Plan. The *Water without Borders 2006 – 2009* Strategy had this orientation. Since 2010, being aware of the inter-dependency between development and environmental sustainability, inclusive human development has been worked out, promoting a higher citizens' participation in development initiatives promoted by the Trifinio Plan, especially aimed at improving productivity and competitiveness in this CB trinational region.

Next, a Strategy for the Trifinio Plan 2010–2020 was agreed. By initiative of the new Trinational Executive Secretariat (SET) (July 2014 – June 2018) a workshop to update this strategy was organized on August 2014, in order to adequate the implementation of the Plan to the current context and priorities of the three governments, and to progress in implementing its main issues. Soon an update proposal of this trinational strategy for the period 2014-2018 will be made public, elaborated through a wide consultation and participation process, in order to be submitted to the Trifinio Plan Trinational Commission (CTPT) and the three national governments. A higher sensibility for governance aspects can be confirmed here, which also seem to have caught on with other cases.

Other CB initiatives in Central America deal mainly with the need to manage natural resources and related infrastructures jointly, as it is the case of the Gulf of Fonseca (El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua), a growing player in the development of CBC in Central America due to its strategic location. In fact, negotiations to build a new common port in Fonseca, based in the existing infrastructure in la Unión (SV) (instead of two or even three), and the impact in the related hinterland, could become a major initiative for this region. Many different players are working in this huge coordination exercise.

**Example 2:** during the first Interreg Programmes, in the 1990s, **Cross-Border Spatial Planning** played a fundamental role in the development of these territories. It also let connect internal development processes with most favourable ports in the neighbouring regions. This was the case of the **Port of Sines**, in Portuguese Alentejo, serving as well the interests of Extremadura (ES), which can diversify its access to the motorways of the sea between Sines (PT) and **Algeciras** (ES), making the best of available infrastructures and routes in both ports. The **Trans-European Network of Transport** (TEN-T) has taken good note, and both the **Macro-Regional Strategy of the Baltic**, the **Atlantic Strategy** and **Euro-Mediterranean Programmes** have built very dynamic port networks, taking into account their adjacent territories.

The border between Costa Rica and Panamá is another area under study, in particular the Sixaola Basin. Here there is a great interest and a permanent bi-national commission is operational since 1995. It is considered one of the most peaceful and prone to cooperation CB areas in Central America, where many international players are developing public and private initiatives in the field of CBC. European development agencies (e.g. GIZ) or even big corporations (e.g. *Chiquita*, *Corbana*, *Rewe*, etc.) are promoting a development strategy in the area, involving a growing set of local stakeholders. Apart from security aspects, main issues are: preservation of biodiversity, environmental education, community development, and green-businesses.

Not in the focus of the study, but keeping an eye on their processes, there are other interesting border areas like *Nicaragua-Costa Rica* that are very difficult to evaluate, due to low population and the *persistence of disputes* (the case of River San Juan), where there is a (theoretical) Plan for the Integrated Management of Water Resources and the Sustainable Development of San Juan River Basin (PROCUENCA), and a missing Confederation of Border Municipalities Costa Rica–Nicaragua. There are more bi-national initiatives, like the *Bi-national Programme Honduras-El Salvador*, launched by the EU and implemented between 2003 and 2009, and not operational anymore. And, in other border areas, environmental programs are the most relevant ingredient of CBC, as it is the case of *Corazón-Bosawas Biosphere* between Honduras and Nicaragua, including various protected areas in both countries, which are vulnerable to the socio-politic and economic reality, and the delicate issue of Garífuna and Miskito populations.

It goes without saying that the “external” borders of Central America are the most challenging ones. The borders between Guatemala-Belize and Mexico, and the one between Panama and Colombia are traditional paths for drugs and other types of trafficking (weapons, persons, cars, etc.). The study of these phenomena, an in-depth analysis and the generation of concrete proposals to handle illegal trafficking would also fall out of the purposes of this study, but their importance and impact is acknowledged, and the works developed by the SEFRO the *Central American Border Security Regional Programme*) are to be highlighted. It has been followed since the beginning of this study.

Even in these border areas, concrete studies could be recommended to be made, for instance in the *Biosphere Maya-Calakmul* between Guatemala and México, the biggest rain forest reserve in this border area, and very vulnerable due to non-sustainable stock farming, illegal hunting and a badly planned tourism industry.

Likewise, cultural and biological diversity in Central America also plays a main role. That’s why another important initiative is the *Mesoamerican Biologic Corridor* (CBM), going from the Mayan Jungle in Southern Mexico to the Darién in Panama, promoted by the Mexican cooperation. The main purpose of the CBM is to counteract environmental problems faced in this transition region between South-American, North-American and Caribbean ecosystems, especially their ecosystems’ fragmentation.

In 2004, the AECID made a prioritisation of actions at regional (supranational) and cross-border level in order to contribute to environmental regional integration and promote sustainable development in the region’s peripheral territories, those with highest poverty rates. Priority territories in Central America were: San Juan River (Nicaragua–Costa Rica); the Gulf of Honduras (Belize–Guatemala–Honduras); the Paz River Basin (Guatemala–El Salvador) and the Gulf of Fonseca (El Salvador–Honduras–Nicaragua).

Looking at the Central American integration process, it makes sense that CBC plays a determinant role for SICA’s Member States. However, CBC has been a weak topic in the integration efforts, being mostly absent of local agendas because of prevailing centralism and, probably, because of the lack of an intermediate level of government. There is a high level of informal CBC in Central America, implemented spontaneously by municipalities, communities and citizens in border regions (Hernández et al. 2007), the continuity of which is under threat.

One of the questions to evaluate in Central American border areas is the dialectic between top-down and bottom-up integration approaches. Actually, top-down integration lies in many cases just in the rhetoric, not being present in the political practice of Central American countries, despite of the efforts made by the SICA, and the implication of some national governments. On the contrary, in border areas where social experimentation of regional integration is constant in a daily basis (bottom-up), local and territorial actors are continuously searching to create new joint mechanisms, though running into the inflexibility of national logics.

This situation, apparently contradictory, delineates a very particular geography where border people usually are pro-integration, and central people (particularly in the capitals) show somehow some exhaustion towards regional integration and therefore are less prone to embrace this idea.

To make things a bit more complex, there are some bilateral agreements between local authorities across borders. These agreements have been given some financial support by the international cooperation, as it is the case of the *Trifinio Plan*; the public-private-partnership *Sixaola–Changuinola* in the border between Costa Rica and Panamá; the *Association of Municipalities of the Gulf of Fonseca*, integrated by 14 municipalities of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua; the *Biosphere Maya-Calakmul* between Guatemala

and Mexico; the *Biosphere Corazón-Bosawas* between Honduras and Nicaragua and the *Tri-national Association of Harbour Municipalities in the Caribbean*, integrated by eight municipalities of Belize, Guatemala and Honduras.

Some of these initiatives have been promoted for years, but they are limited by the practice: there is no acknowledgement of municipalities as state actors by national governments. This is reflected in insufficient decentralized competences, including their financing. Border territories can be described in most cases as sub-national areas left behind, not present in some public policies due to their lesser political and economic weight, smaller in population, more rural, peripheral, apart from big cities, with most of their population indigenous or afro-descendent, with development levels under national averages, and divided by different jurisdictions in an evident "border effect".

In this sense, the SICA is doing important efforts to define the role of municipalities in this integration process, taking into account local and national institutionality. CBC is denominated here "Cross-Border Local Development", and there are some renewed initiatives to incorporate local authorities in a permanent process of dialogue with the Secretariat General of the SICA. Amongst them, as a proof of the political maturity gained in this regard, the following can be mentioned:

- The process of Regional Consultation for the Central American Charter of Municipal Autonomy (CRCCAM).
- The programmes to strengthen local governments (based in the principle of local autonomy and the transfer of competences). PRESANCA and PRESISAN are concentrated in food security, but they incorporate an unquestionable supranational coordination of activities implemented in the communities. They pay attention to border municipalities through the Cross-Border Territorial Units (*Unidades Territoriales Transfronterizas*, UTT), an experience with a great interest in the perspective to build up cross-border institutionality models and networks.
- The creation of *mancomunidades* (commonwealths) at national, regional and border levels, and city-twinning.
- The networks of Central American cities, and the experience of territorial development based on municipal legal frameworks.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> dialogue SICA–local governments, to deal with local autonomy and CBC.

The Central American Local Authorities' Forum (FALCA) should also be mentioned. It is an initiative promoted by the Institute for Central American Local Development (IDELCA) since 2008 in San Salvador. In general, there are plenty of local players and some platforms have been created. The SICA has generated spaces for dialogue, and now the States are needed to agree programmes to consolidate these processes.

## **1.2 Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was the development of SWOT analyses in selected cross-border areas in Central America showing a high potential for CBC. The tasks to implement an integrated and sustained activity to protect and develop CBC initiatives in Central America should be done by institutions at supra-national, national and local level (multi-level governance and subsidiarity), as well as by other non-public actors, as it is the case of non-governmental organisations and enterprises (partnership).

Cross-border local development is the keyword, and PRESANCA is trying this approach in 90 municipalities, but the participation of the local level is yet to be strongly promoted and fully exploited. In this case, the European Commission has implemented an extraordinary input in its agreements with Central American states, but this process could be very slowly developed without the participation of sub-national and non-governmental actors.

The empowerment of the sub-national level in the implementation of CBC programmes and projects, and their ownership of the outputs, enhance the impact of CBC strategies and their sustainability. CBC can be the best example of South-South cooperation, putting border areas more central.

Local governments in border areas are to be the players to promote investment attraction for public works and to improve social and production organization in border areas (Hernández et al., 2007).

The participation of the AEBR and other European regional organisations, as well as their partners in Central America, has allowed the exchange of expertise and good practises for capacity building in this region, though sustainable and systematic territorial cooperation has not yet been achieved. Actually, there is a great working field in knowledge development and training, as well as in the implementation of permanent structures for CBC.

The growing interest in CBC and the information about the results in many European border areas make Central American stakeholders extremely willing to know better what is going on in Europe.

**Example 4:** after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the gradual access of **Central and Eastern European Countries** (CEEC) to the European process was initiated by the creation of euroregions in their borders, real training camps for CBC and European integration, where **training** was very urgent.

Within the **LACE-TAP Project**, implemented by the AEBR for the European Commission with the aim to support emerging CBC projects, practical guides and diverse thematic information was elaborated to increase capacities in the new structures. Within several projects implemented in 2010-2014 for DG Regio, this information has been updated in a **Handbook of CBC**, in Spanish, especially addressed to experts, students and people interested in this topic in Latin America, which is under permanent updating and available online.

**Example 3:** the perspectives opened by the Treaty of Maastricht in the EU, developing the **Principle of Cohesion** and the **European Territorial Policy**, besides the allocation of European funds for Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs), and the commitment of the necessary national cofinancing, drove the participation of sub-national levels in the European integration process, even in the management of the EU, through the **Commitology**.

The **Committee of the Regions** has also meant, and it growingly means, an important forum for LRAs to express their opinions on EU Policies, elaborate proposals and establish dialogues with the institutions, civil organizations, as well as economic and social players.

Modern tools like the Internet or videoconference facilitate contacts enormously, but not everywhere there is technology and skills enough to implement adequate electronic communication practices, or the needed band width. In any case, within several projects implemented with the support of DG Regio, a great amount of information about Latin American, African and European CBC experiences has been produced and systematized, which is available online in an ad hoc forum in the AEBR website (provisional location of the AEBR CBC e-Learning Platform).

It is very much recommended to establish political contacts, face to face, between European politicians engaged in CBC and the competent authorities in target countries. This would pave the way for a productive exchange of information and staff. On the other hand, experts meeting from both sides in order to identify, articulate, implement and monitor successful CB activities often need to take the form of person-to-person contact, especially in early stages.

It goes without saying, that the regular input of the European Commission to promote regional policies in Latin America has played a crucial role. The EU-Central America Association Agreement signed in Tegucigalpa on June 2012 concentrates very much in trade, but its political and cooperation pillars could break some territorial cohesion elements out. In this sense, the SICA has initiated a process to exchange information with European partners to develop the concept of border areas with shared competences between national and sub-national governments.

There is a need of programmes and structures to strengthen social, economic and territorial cohesion, without duplication of objectives and functions between new and already existing initiatives and institutions. Therefore, combining rationally horizontal and vertical policies is determinant, following the logics of subsidiarity in a framework of multilevel governance. The irreversible aspect of CBC within the processes of supranational integration and territorial cohesion in the EU makes it very attractive for Central American players. They have enormously welcomed the initiatives to promote the exchange of practises with Europe, and it is necessary at this stage to evaluate already existing and potential CBC processes in Central America.

These SWOT analyses in selected cross-border areas, addressing current socio-economical standing, territorial divide and identifying common challenges (e.g. environmental concerns, migration, transport, economic standing of rural areas, etc.) are extremely helpful to elaborate a feasible road map for CBC in Central America, taking into account most internal and external factors, favourable and unfavourable, affecting these processes. This study has used main European lessons and good practices on CBC (particularly with the support of the EU Regional Policy to Territorial Cooperation) to make recommendations addressing the following themes, as indicated in the specifications:

- Creation of working groups in the selected border areas, or support to existing ones, according to the recommendations given by the SICA
- Evaluation of training needs
- Development of common projects
- Building common strategies and programmes
- Development of common structures
- Governance model: horizontal (cross-departmental) and vertical (across levels)

The participation of the local level (and civil society) seems to be a main factor for the definitive take-off of CBC in Central America, as it is the case in all Latin America. Local authorities still need to strengthen public services and their responses to local deficits, though some of these answers could be made in a cross-border manner, offering an additional added-value in terms of regional integration and efficient use of funding. National governments and supra-national processes (SICA) have acknowledged the importance of involving local governments to promote good governance, especially in border territories.

The development of CBC is linked to supranational and sub-national processes, where multi-level governance and subsidiarity are key issues. In Europe, there is a huge knowledge on what to do (and what not to do) in the practise of CBC processes. And European border and cross-border regions (euroregions, eurodistricts, working communities, EGTCs, etc.) cumulate an enormous experience on it.

**Example 5:** the **European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation** (EGTC) is a legal instrument of public law which allows the constitution of cross-border entities between local and/or regional authorities and other organizations, in both sides of EU (internal and external) borders. Almost 40 structures have been created in Europe since 2006, managing from cross-border services in some eurodistricts to a cross-border hospital. The Committee of the Regions coordinates a [Platform](#) where updated information, news and initiatives from every EGTC are available.



### **1.3 Current Situation of CBC in Central America**

Central America faces enormous challenges regarding security, trafficking, and their populations' strong trend towards migrating, especially to the US. The complexity in decision-making processes by central governments has impeded a greater commitment to develop border areas in Central America, despite its size. This needs a political vision to comprise border development and Central American integration, and this question has not been fully tackled by national governments yet. If we add the absence of intermediate governments and the institutional and legal asymmetries between these countries, there are little chances for some degree of harmonisation to solve some persistent border differences (e.g. San Juan River dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua) and to allow agreements on the joint management of border territories and resources. In this sense, historical marginalization of border municipalities, without a clear role in the Central American integration process and the lack of a bottom-up approach or social and territorial cohesion, do not contribute to strengthen border areas. Therefore main challenges for Central America are the definition of an institutional model for cross-border governance, opening spaces for dialogue between local authorities and decentralized institutions, and the implementation of multi-level governance, inter-institutional collaboration and CBC.

Currently there are some specific challenges not overcome in Central America related to the border question, such as the centrality of capital cities, which hinder border development, as national economic, social and political powers are concentrated in a few cities. Furthermore, unequal relationship, misbalances and conflicts between the capitals and border populations related to the management of natural resources still prevent a consequent development to face urgent needs that most of Central American population has right now. And, there is also a need to facilitate solutions for strategic and human shortages in border populations through the building of capacities to manage shared natural resources in most of the cross-border territories identified.

SICA is the propeller of main CBC initiatives in the region.

These analyses have guided our work in Central America and the conversations with most relevant stakeholders, with the aim of checking all elements that melt in a very complex network of relationships, disputes, and needs.

### **1.4 Contents**

In the following chapters you will find a review of the methodology used in this work (**chapter 2**), including the selection of experts and border areas to examine, research and documentation tasks, preparations of questionnaires and interviews, organization of mini-workshops and elaboration of SWOT analyses, and a summary of tasks and deliverables. There is also a territorial assessment of CBC experiences in Central America (**chapter 3**), concentrated on the three cases under study, but pointing out at other initiatives identified. The following chapter deals with the problems encountered, solutions found or proposed and the impact on this work in future actions (challenges) (**chapter 4**). **Chapter 5** is about lessons learned, best practices and obstacles, and **chapter 6** includes a series of conclusions and recommendations, as well as a proposal of "road map" to be implemented in the framework of the SICA. A section on bibliography has also been included.

As annexes to this report, you can find the three factsheets (**Annexes 1-3**) corresponding to the cases under study, including background information, legal regulations, existing structures, some strategic presentations, the SWOT analyses with some perspectives, and the summaries of the workshops. We have also included the



report of a meeting organized in Martinique to compare CBC practices in Europe, Latin American and the Caribbean (**Annex 4**), somehow connected with the purpose of the present study. The report has been "spotted" with some concrete examples of European initiatives and projects which may be of inspiration for certain Central American situations mentioned in every case.

The AEBR and the host organizations stressed the participation of stakeholders from all levels: EU representatives, national and local authorities in Central America, cross-border programme managers, scientists, entrepreneurs and civil society organizations.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Selection of experts and border areas to examine**

#### ***Task 1 a: Selection of experts***

Coordinator: Martin Guillermo Ramirez, Secretary General of the AEBR.

Local Expert: Mario Otero.

Support and advice: José María Cruz, Welf Selke, Jens Gabbe, Haris Martinos.

Other AEBR experts took part in different phases of the project.

#### ***Task 1 b: Selection of case-studies and draft key research questions***

After proposal of the local expert, and in agreement with DG Regio, the following cases were selected during a meeting in Brussels in February 2013 (kick-off meeting):

- a) ***Gulf of Fonseca*** (SV, HN, NI), a priority for the SICA, and a potential model for integrated CBC in Central America. Many SICA efforts are concentrated in the "Gulf of Fonseca Integration Micro-Region". An observatory for this cross-border micro-region and many other interventions are planned, as the experts' team had the opportunity to discuss with the Secretariat General of the SICA and many organizations working in this area. Please refer to the factsheet (**Annex 1**) for further information (in Spanish) on geography, historical background, news about the bilateral, trilateral and multilateral agendas, its socio-economic context and its strategic importance, legislative aspects of interest, the strategic vision of the *Autonomous Port Executive Commission* (SV), some projects, contact persons and perspectives (the SWOT analysis) and a set of recommendations and conclusions from the mini-workshop organized in the framework of this project.
- b) The ***Trifinio*** (SV-HN-GT) is a traditional CBC area since several decades. Many studies have been made, with very diverse sets of recommendations, and an established CBC process can be stated there. Therefore, new studies on the area could be useless, unless concentrating in one of the specific aspects of this complex cross-border process. For instance, a standing suggested field of study is environmental protection; another one is the sustainable development of touristic projects. The *Biosphere Trifinio Fraternidad* in twelve municipalities of the three countries has recently (2011) obtained the title of Cross-Border Biosphere, being the only tri-national biosphere in America. Please refer to the Factsheet (**Annex 2**) for further information on the geography of the Trifinio, some background information, news on its bilateral and multilateral agendas, its socioeconomic context and strategic importance, legislative aspects and the institutional framework, the Strategy of the *Trifinio Plan*, some projects and perspectives (the SWOT analysis) and the recommendations and conclusions of a mini-workshop organized within this project. At the end of the factsheet, some notes have been included on the possibilities within the framework of the SICA.

- c) The border between Costa Rica and Panamá (in particular the **Sixaola Basin**), where also a great interest has been raised and a Permanent Bi-national Commission is operational since 1995, is considered the most peaceful and prone to cooperation CB area in Central America. Various international actors are developing public and private initiatives in the field of CBC. European development agencies (e.g. the German GIZ) or big corporations (e.g. *Chiquita, Corbana, Rewe*, etc.) are promoting a development strategy in this area, involving a growing set of local actors. As already mentioned, apart from security, main issues are preservation of biodiversity, environmental education, community development, and green-businesses. Please refer to the factsheet (**Annex 3**) for further information on its geography, background information, news, a presentation of their experiences in CBC, some projects and the SWOT analysis elaborated in this study, and a set of recommendations and conclusions.

To decide the areas under study, the contractor took into account SICA's recommendations. This was the most relevant input, but the biological and cultural diversity of Central America also played a role. Main environmental areas are shared by two or more countries, being the management rather complex, as Nature does not know about borders. Therefore, bi-national or even tri-national committees are required, and real joint programs are needed, with the participation of public and private actors, and civil society organizations. Here the requirements of international treaties, bi- or tri-lateral agreements, the needs and expectations of the local populations, and other elements should be combined, which would make the exercise more challenging, while empowering all players and making possible a multilevel governance process.

## **2.2 Research and documentation**

### **Task 2a: Research and documentation**

Once decided the areas under study, using traditional techniques such as literature and legislation review, the quantity and quality of available information was analysed to better evaluate the areas under study. New technologies have also been used, being the Internet a main source (but not the only one). Triangulation is used as much as possible to increase the credibility and validity of the results.

To further deepen and fine-tune the provisional research framework, a structured set of "key research questions" was elaborated in order to achieve a clear and sound framework for all desk-research activities.

The local expert began his work in December 2012 drafting a road map for CBC in Central America, and he has worked from El Salvador in close coordination with the AEBR Secretariat General and the SICA.

Initial desk research started in order to provide a substantial "backing". Related activities focused on:

1. Identifying existing documents and publications
2. Analysing this documentation according to the agreed "key research questions"
3. Elaborating a preview with respect to the state-of-the-art of CBC in the areas under research.

On-going desk-research gathered additional documents and new sources of information on CBC initiatives existing in the case study areas; which allowed the performance of background analyses, supported afterwards through the realisation of interviews and questionnaire surveys, which addressed key stakeholders involved in CBC at the selected areas.

## **2.3 Questionnaire and interviews**

### **Task 2b: Questionnaire and Interview Guide**

After the realisation of desk research, using the recommendations of the kick-off meeting, and once discussed and decided the "key research questions", a draft questionnaire was elaborated to serve as a basis for direct interviews with the authorities and key stakeholders. An interview guide was also prepared to get maximum information on all relevant aspects.

Mini-workshops with local actors were organized in order to better analyse the situation and conditions of CBC in the areas under study. They served to increase capacities and reinforce the ownership of participant key stakeholders on their CBC processes. Their accountability on these processes was also reinforced, taking part from the very beginning in their formal cycles.

## **2.4 Workshops and SWOT Analyses**

**Tasks three (a, b, c): Workshops** (for cases a and b) and **SWOT Analyses** (for cases a, b and c)

The **Inception Report (Deliverable 1)** was prepared in close coordination with the Secretariat General of the SICA, and particularly with the Executive Directorate. Most of the details were discussed in two ad hoc meetings at the SICA Headquarters in San Salvador. In this report the methodology and the procedures to apply are described, as well as the working plan and the time schedule, including the distribution of tasks.

Then, a participative SWOT analysis was carried out in the case studies corresponding to every selected cross-border area, addressing the socio-economic standing, its territorial divide and identified common challenges (democratic security, environmental concerns, migration, transport, economic standing of rural areas). Internal and external factors which favour or hinder these processes were also identified in order to draft a road map for CBC in those areas, with concrete actions and measures.

Following the terms of reference proposed in the "Specifications", the assessment focussed on lessons learned, good practises and hindering factors, as well as the relevance of the European experience to overcome those factors. All of this information was included in the **Interim Report (Deliverable 2)**, which was discussed with DG Regio in a specific meeting (in January 2014). After several circumstances that made difficult the elaboration of the **draft Final Report (Deliverable 3)**, this was submitted to DG Regio in October 2014.

Some factors to be taken into account when addressing these analyses have to do with the opportunities for these territories to develop CBC, but there are not sufficient cross-border social and economic structures yet. Sound national supporting approaches are missing, though **the supranational integration process (SICA) has assumed its role to close the circle of multi-level governance**, a pre-condition for successful CBC. The classical set of challenges for CBC also applies in Central America, and those posed by globalisation. These are described in chapter 3.

SWOT analyses provided the basis to elaborate a road map for CBC in the territories under study, using main results, outcomes and conclusions in this Final Report.

Main lessons learned and best European practice (dynamics of territorial cooperation through EU Regional Policy support and respective national/regional/local co-financing) were used to make an action plan with concrete proposals regarding:

- Creation or activation of working groups in the selected border areas, with strong institutional support, in order to establish permanent structures for CBC with the power to submit proposals.
- Addressing capacity building needs, with concrete measures regarding exchange of best practices between Central America and the EU.
- Development of common concepts, strategies, programmes, projects and structures, through appropriate training of key stakeholders.
- Focus on governance and coordination models (promoting a multi-level approach), as it has been highlighted by the SICA.

From his base in El Salvador, the local expert processed available information and performed the field work, which consisted of conducting interviews with main stakeholders. Their identification began with a comprehensive analysis of participation (list of cross-border actors), identifying competences, interests, structure, resources, activities and potential problems. The main objective was to find actions and proposals aimed to create links and sustainable benefits for the population across borders. The interviewees were local and departmental authorities, civil society movements, environmental groups, other NGOs, universities and the economic sector, being the final calendar of interviews agreed on the ground.

Then, the analysis of difficulties for CBC in Central America (during the desk research and the interviews) led to the definition of the main objectives for a **Road Map for CBC in Central America**. These problems were defined and discussed, including their causes and consequences.

Afterwards, an analysis of objectives described the future situation in case that previously identified problems are solved, stressing the benefits of coordinated bi- or tri-national action (depending on every case). Finally, a strategy analysis was done to select the intervention logic, checking local capacities, timing, impact, possibilities, etc.; and the future role and tasks of the SG-SICA (under participation of all public and private actors on both sides of the border).

A draft planning matrix helped to define some indicators, sources to verify them, and assumptions that may affect the action plan, while selecting main future initiatives and checking their benefits. Objective hierarchies following the Logic Framework Approach, the criteria of the OECD's DAC, and certain sustainability factors were also taken into account such as the following:

1. Supporting policies
2. Appropriate tools
3. Environmental protection
4. Socio-cultural aspects
5. Participation of target groups
6. Gender issues
7. Institutional and management capacities
8. Financial and economic feasibility

This information laid solid foundations for further discussion in the mini-workshops foreseen. A draft "Road Map" was produced, including main findings to that moment. This draft was distributed amongst selected stakeholders and discussed during several mini-workshops with most relevant actors (**Task 3**), organized according to the specifications. These mini-workshops took place in the Trifinio area, the Gulf of Fonseca and San Salvador.

## **2.5 Final tasks and summary of tasks and deliverables**

The **Interim Report (Deliverable 2)** was submitted by the end of 2013 with an overview of the work carried out during the first months, including:

- Complete information on the progress achieved towards the tasks to be carried out as stated in the Specifications and detailed in the inception report.
- Problems encountered, solutions proposed, and their impact on future work.
- Detailed schedule and methodology for the completion of the work.

Afterwards, details related to the Interim Report were discussed with DG Regio. With the conclusions of this discussion, the rest of the work was adapted towards the **Draft Final Report (Deliverable 3)**, addressing main results, outcomes and conclusions of research as set out in the tender. The draft final report has been discussed with the Commission and the consolidated version is presented here, taking into account all Commission's and other players' remarks.

The draft Final Report was elaborated in English, while this consolidated version of the **Final Report (Deliverable 4)**, with plenty of new contributions, has been elaborated in English and Spanish. Combined with the Factsheets for every case under study and European examples, it includes an executive summary in both languages with the following structure:

- Contextualisation;
- a brief description of the overall methodology (for desk research, interviews & mini-workshops);
- summary results of desk research activities;
- summary of workshops and topic-related conclusions;
- SWOT analyses, synthesis assessments of research and empirical evidence, and a number of aggregated conclusions and recommendations.

Due to the difficulties to implement the initial planned schedule, the complexity of tasks developed and the adaptation to the election calendar of the SICA, a series of mini-workshops was organized in Trifinio, Gulf of Fonseca and San Salvador in September 2013, and a final set of workshops at the SICA with additional meetings in San Salvador (SV) were organized on 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> December 2013, plus several working meetings of the AEBR expert along the whole year 2013.



Fig. 2: Workshop organized at the SICA, San Salvador, on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2013, with the participation of SICA's Secretary General, Mr. Ronnie Hall (DG Regio), the AEBR, several departments of the SICA and some organizations related to CBC in Central America.  
*Source: AEBR, 2013*

The topic-related conclusions of the workshops have been included in the factsheets, and the aggregated conclusions and recommendations in this report. They are aimed to reflect the best evidence available based on the results of planned tasks and the best European practice, offering clear and applicable indications for supranational, national and local institutions when they face their cross-border challenges. The reports will be available on line, at the AEBR online platform of CBC knowledge, as well as a comprehensive and well-structured collection of all relevant documents gathered and/or presented during the research project, and the contact databases developed.

Summary of tasks and deliverables			
Time	Tasks/ deliverables	Activities	Distribution of tasks
Month 0 (Nov 2012)		<b>Signature of the contract</b>	DG Regio-AEBR
		Working Meeting AEBR	AEBR, Berlin
		Contact with stakeholders	AEBR
Month 1 (Dec 2012)	Task 1a	Selection of Experts Team	AEBR selected Mr. Mario Otero as Senior Expert
		Kick-off meeting with DG Regio	AEBR, DG Regio
	Deliverable 1	Draft Inception Report	Draft sent by the AEBR to the Commission (and SICA) for comments
Month 2 (Jan 2013)	Task 1b	Selection of case-studies and draft Key Research Questions	AEBR expert
		Initial Desk Research	AEBR/SICA
	Task 2a	Identification of relevant actors	AEBR/SICA
Month 3 (Feb 2013)	Task 2a	Working meeting AEBR/SICA	AEBR, SICA
		Identification of relevant actors	Expert, AEBR, SICA
		Selection of experts to collaborate in the study	AEBR, SICA
Month 4 (Mar 2013)	Task 2b	Elaboration of questionnaire and key research questions	Expert, AEBR
		Preparation 1 <sup>st</sup> SWOT and field study	Expert
Month 5 (Apr 2013)	Task 3a	SWOT Case 1, interview key stakeholders	Expert + local partners
		Preparation of Mini-Workshop 1	Expert, local partners, SICA
Month 6 (May 2013)	AEBR study visits and adaptation of tasks and schedule to SICA election calendar		
Month 7 (Jun 2013)	Field work and adaptation of tasks and schedule		
Month 8 (Jul 2013)	Adaptation of tasks and schedule		
Month 9 (Ago 2013)	Adaptation of tasks and schedule		

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Month 10 (Sep 2013)	Task 3a	Mini-Workshop 1 in Trifinio	Expert, local partners, SICA
		Internal evaluation of work developed and remaining tasks	AEBR, Expert
		Draft Interim Report	Expert, AEBR
		Draft Action Plan	Expert
	Task 3b	Preparation SWOT and WS 2	SICA, AEBR
		Analysis SWOT Case 2 and interview with stakeholders	Expert and local partners
		Coordination workshop with SICA to prepare intervention in Gulf of Fonseca	SICA, AEBR
Task 3b	Mini- Workshop 2 in Gulf of Fonseca	AEBR, local partners	
Month 11 (Oct 2013)	Deliverable 2	Meeting with the Commission	DG Regio-AEBR
		Preparation of Interim Report	(AEBR-SICA)
		Evaluation of the work developed in Gulf of Fonseca	SICA/AEBR
		Data analysis and interpretation to prepare the draft report	SICA/AEBR
	Task 3c	Identification of relevant actors Case 3	Expert, local partners, SICA
		Preparation of the Field Study 3 (Panamá/Costa Rica border area)	Expert, local partners
Month 12 (Nov 2013)	Deliverable 2	Preparation of draft Interim Report	(AEBR-SICA)
		Delivery of Interim Report	
Month 13 (Dec 2013)	Additional activities	Final Workshop at SICA	(SICA-DG REGIO-AEBR)
		Several exchange meetings and presentations in El Salvador	DG REGIO, AEBR, local stakeholders
		Elaboration draft final report Delayed due to interference with the preparation of reports corresponding to other projects and normal calendar of the AEBR.	Expert, AEBR, SICA In order to gather and process properly all information needed, this report has suffered a considerable delay.
Month 14 (2014)		Delayed delivery of Draft Final Report, and update of contacts, information and approaches	AEBR, local stakeholders
		Meeting (exchange of information) with DG Regio	AEBR, DG Regio
	Deliverable 3 Deliverable 4	Delivery draft Final Report Delivery consolidated Final Report	AEBR

### **3. TERRITORIAL ASSESSMENT OF STUDY CASES IN CENTRAL AMERICA: prevailing problems and needs, based on already made interventions**

Main challenge for CBC has to do with the way to improve living conditions of border populations as a result of development plans and the management of issues like inter-regional migration, democratic security and environment, among others (Hernández et al., 2007).

While borders become more permeable for trade exchanges, derived from free trade agreements and custom unions, in some countries in the region show growing migration controls, hampering the mobility of persons. These growing migration exigencies and requirements can be explained by the economic and social heterogeneity of these countries, becoming some of them attraction poles for migrants. To these processes of mobility of persons across the borders, it can be added the seasonal mobility of workforce, very much linked to agriculture products, such as sugar cane and coffee. Therefore there are long-lasting border movements getting border populations in contact (Hernández et al., 2007).

**Example 6:** in 1985 several European countries signed an agreement in the Luxembourg city of Schengen in order to remove border checking in internal EU borders and move them to the external borders. This agreement, in force since 1995, establishes the **Schengen Area**, where every person who has entered regularly an external EU border or who lives in one of the signing countries can move freely.

Nowadays (2014) these are the member countries of the Schengen Area: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The latter voted on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2014 in referendum to restrict the access of European citizens to its territory, which could lead them to leave Schengen.

There are exceptions in its implementation because some countries did not agree in all issues. Croatia will join Schengen in 2015.

Other challenges for CBC in Central America have to do with traditional aspects of the political vision about borders, such as:

- The traditional concept of sovereignty;
- own national priorities;
- lack of subsidiarity to meet social and economic problems;
- the consideration of border areas as marginal;
- long-lasting border disputes;
- lack of real and efficient autonomy of local territorial authorities;
- the growing social demands to improve citizens' life conditions;
- low management capacities of local authorities;
- growing irregular migration;

An additional obstacle affecting Central American territories has to do with the growing crisis of public safety and generalized violence, using the borders for various illicit trafficking. Violence prevention and democratic security are main issues on the integration agenda.

Some authors have already noted some time ago that CBC can be a favourable condition to develop preventive diplomacy where national systems, regional institutions and local agreements contribute to prevent conflict situations, stimulating peace building mechanisms (Rhi and Oddone, 2010).



**Example 7:** The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union or **Frontex** is an agency of the EU to enhance the integrated management of the external borders of the EU Member States. Its headquarters is in Warsaw. Member States are responsible for the control and surveillance of external borders, but the Agency provides the implementation of Community measures related to these borders' management.

The **Central American Regional Programme for Border Security** (SEFRO) is developed in close collaboration with Interpol, Europol, Frontex and the border agencies of Central American states.

In other words, the creation of local networks of territorial and cross-border cooperation can contribute to spread the idea of understanding borders as peace and prosperity areas, changing the concept of border as a "barrier" to hinder circulation and growth, by a concept of "bridge" to the neighbours and to growth and development dynamics (Rhi y Odonne, 2010). Acting in Central American borders therefore requires an approach with a systemic sight to its multi-dimensionality, taking into account territorial factors (geo-economic and politic criteria), as well as a relevance hierarchy between the various dimensions (CeSPI, 2011).

In the last years, the functions and relationships happening in the border face new challenges derived from globalization, relocation and building up of commercial blocks. In this way, the border is perceived as a permeable zone for very diverse relationships, which promotes regional integration and favours CBC (Hernández et al., 2007), though border regions are particularly exposed due to their mostly fragile conditions.

On the other hand, most border areas where cooperation actions are developed present some level of tension and dispute, especially regarding border delimitation policies and recognition of States (as it is the case of Belize with Guatemala) or about the rights on shared resources (the case of Costa Rica and Nicaragua in the San Juan River dispute, or the Gulf of Fonseca). These conflicts, in different manners, affect local border development, though it is interesting to highlight that cross-border initiatives influence rapprochement between States and also with different social players that could be in conflict, for instance, with conservationist actions, as it happens with farmer and indigenous organizations or the private sector (small, medium and big banana and coffee producers), attracting and generating synergies also with the eco-tourism sector. And this also incorporates local authorities that, despite of not showing differences with conservation actions developed by environment ministries or NGOs, are not considered relevant players for this type of action either.

Workshops and interviews have been made with local authorities (Associations of Local Government representatives) in every area under study (Gulf of Fonseca, Trifinio and Sixaola Basin) in order to get accurate information on problems and needs in these zones. For the third case, online interviews have been made. The Interview Guide was used to explore which CBC experiences have been developed, obtained results, demands and pre-conditions for CBC.

It is important to remind that, in all Central American countries, the only sub-national administrative level is the municipality. The departments are only geographical expressions, without elected authorities. Unlike regional cooperation and integration, structured through inter-state relationships, cross-border territorial processes can be implemented if there is a municipal leadership, the governance capacity of which depends directly on the level of decentralization of the State (Conato, 2009).

In Central America there are several second level entities bringing together municipalities at national level, for instance, the national federations of municipalities. There is a regional federation binging together most of these national organizations: the *Federation*

of *Municipalities of the Central American Isthmus* (FEMICA) with circa 1,200 municipalities in the region. The FEMICA is member of the Civil Society Consultative Council (CCSICA) at the Secretariat General of the SICA, a civil society body organized at regional level and operational to support the integration process.

Here is a summary of the findings in the three cases under study, though more intensive information —geographical description, historical background, socio-economic context, strategic importance, news about trilateral, bilateral or multilateral relationship between involved countries, legal and institutional framework, operational association in these areas, structures, strategies, programmes and projects, contact persons, some perspectives from the SWOT analyses, and some recommendations and conclusions as a result of the mini-workshops, interviews and bilateral meetings— can be found in the three factsheets (in Spanish), included as annexes (1 to 3) to this Final Report.

### 3.1 **Case 1: Gulf of Fonseca**

In many cases, cross-border initiatives in Central America are dealing mainly with the need to manage natural resources or “infrastructures” jointly, as it is the case of the **Gulf of Fonseca** (El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua) (*SV-HN-NI*), a growing actor in the development of CBC in Central America.

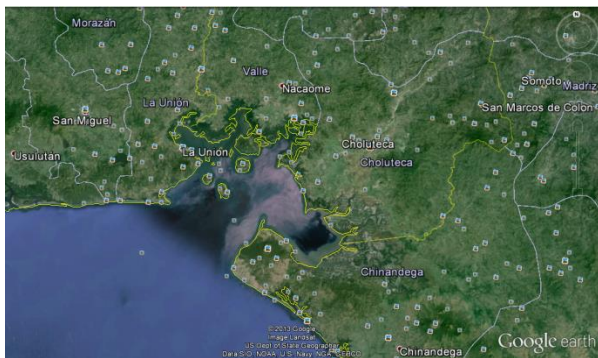


Fig.3: Gulf of Fonseca  
Source: Google Earth

The **Gulf of Fonseca** is a priority for the SICA in order to create a model integrated CBC in Central America. The *Gulf of Fonseca Integration Micro-Region* has drawn most of our attention because many SICA efforts are concentrated there. In fact, an observatory for this cross-border micro-region and many other interventions have been planned. AEBR experts had the opportunity to discuss this in depth with the Secretariat General of the SICA and relevant stakeholders, particularly those related to the Port of La Unión (SV).

More in depth information, such as historical and institutional background; current socioeconomic context, strategic importance, agendas and news at trilateral and bilateral level; legislative aspects, proposed strategies, several projects and some perspectives from the SWOT Analysis of the Gulf of Fonseca can be found (in Spanish) in the factsheet (**Annex 1**).

The provision of basic services is very unequal and usually covers only main cities or towns. A high percentage of rural households lack drinking water, solid waste and household refuse collection and other basic services, such as electricity. This contributes to pollute the Gulf and to several general public health problems (Herrera et al.). *Some cross-border interventions in terms of sanitation seem to be immediate priorities.*

The population profits coastal marine resources or subsistence farming. There are some commercial fishing fleets in the area. The appropriation of land for commercial agriculture, livestock or shrimp farming have relegated people with shortage of resources to live in more marginal areas in the Gulf. The over-exploitation of natural resources is common in the Gulf of Fonseca due to free-access conditions, though changes are expected in the next years on the property of land as a consequence of urban expansion and the growth of non-agricultural sectors. Sugar cane is the main focus of Honduran

agroindustry and corn production is an important activity in Nicaragua and El Salvador (Herrera et al., 2012).

Likewise, some gaps have been detected in relationship with (Herrera et al., 2012):

- i. the lack of spatial planning regulation;
- ii. the overlapping and/or contradictory regulations to manage water basins;
- iii. deficiencies in national fishing laws (obsolete);
- iv. the lack of regulations on the maritime and coastal zone (pollution, sedimentation, dredging, etc.).

Other factors hinder a more efficient working way among the three countries to protect the ecosystems in the Gulf:

- i. limited institutional and financial capacity to obey and promote the obedience of existing regulations;
- ii. an inadequate system to punish law violations;
- iii. lack of clarity of environmental audits and environmental impact assessments in coastal areas;
- iv. lack of a cooperation framework for the coordinated action to face main threats in the three countries of the Gulf (Herrera et al.).

Most important port facilities in the Gulf of Fonseca are La Unión in El Salvador and Amapala in Honduras. The municipality of La Unión is now a development pole since some industries, education centres and hotels have been established

(<http://www.elsalvador.travel/golfo-de-fonseca/>). An integrated intervention taking into account all resources in the area, the needed environmental precautions, and its geopolitical position in a trinational framework would be very beneficial from many points of view.

**Example 8:** besides the experiences mentioned in example 2 (page 19), since Interreg II-A in the 1990s, the Programme Italy-Albania (no. 44) comprises the Southern Adriatic maritime border between the Italian provinces of Bari, Brindisi and Lecce, and some coastal provinces of Albania. The **ports** of **Bari** (IT) and **Vlora** (AL) have improved substantially.

Programme no. 31, Spain-Morocco came to several actions in the **ports** of **Algeciras**, **Cadiz**, **Ceuta** and **Melilla**, only in the Spanish side because of some problems due to certain border disputes. Spanish Cooperation and Decentralised Cooperation (in particular from Andalucía, but also from other Spanish, Italian and French regions) compensated this fact with the implementation of development projects in various Moroccan regions, including the improvement of several port facilities. Other cases are the **ports** of **Szczecin** (PL) and **Swinoujście** (PL), the biggest ports in the Baltic, in the framework of the programmes in Pomerania (with DE and SE), or the ports in the **cross-border Irish clusters** (ICBAN and NWRCEG) (IE-UK) and many more.

The idea of the Gulf as a joint zone of peace, cooperation and development for neighbouring countries prevails (and so it has been reiterated by the three Presidents during their last Tripartite Presidential Meeting on August 2014), but some controversies stay (IIDC, 2013), like the case of the Conejo Island. On the other hand, the integrity of coastal maritime ecosystems in the Gulf and tributary basins render regional and global benefits, raising complex cross-border considerations on sustainable fisheries, pollution, sediment control or climate change that require a shared vision (Herrera et al., 2012). Statistics show a growth in the frequency and magnitude of extreme phenomena (hurricanes, floods) and repeated periods of drought (Herrera et al., 2012).

There are no consolidated structures, but there are some strategies. In the factsheet a proposal can be found of priority axes to build up an **Integrated Model of Cross-Border Development for the Integration Micro-Region of the Gulf of Fonseca** by the SICA as regards environment, democratic security, economic inclusion and social

cohesion. The main objective is to turn the Gulf of Fonseca into a territorial inclusive and connected economy, with a cohesioned society. The SICA is committed to create "Integration Microregions" in several cross-border territories, and the Gulf of Fonseca Microregion can become an experimental territory for an integrated approach for economic, social, environmental and cultural development. The role of these integration microregions was described by the CeSPI in its study from 2011, based in a study visit organized by this Italian research centre in November-December 2010. This study makes a very accurate analysis of the situation, proposes a series of heuristic hypotheses and points at a conceptual border integration model for Central America based in an observatory of the dynamics operating in this integration, its monitoring and capitalization, in the sense of the SICA's proposals, fully share by our team:

<http://www.cespi.it/PDF/CONCEPTUALIZACI%C3%93N%20%20COOPERACI%C3%93N%20FRONTERIZA.pdf>

The SICA can promote multilevel governance, as well as development, implementation and monitoring of territorial integration and cohesion through an observatory of processes, policies and activities in the region; strengthening cross-border capacities and support the exchange of good practices with other territories; promote a bottom-up approach and joint management of processes. Several meetings have taken place during the implementation of this project. A presentation on a Strategic Vision for the Gulf of Fonseca: "La Visión Estratégica 2030 para el Golfo de Fonseca" (in Spanish), made by the Port Authority during a mini-workshop with the AEBR in San Salvador on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2013, updated during a visit of DG Regio and AEBR to San Salvador on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013, can also be found in the factsheet.



Figs. 4, 5, 6 and 7: Strategic Vision for the Gulf of Fonseca  
Source: Autonomous Port Executive Commission (SV)

This is an integrated vision of the zone, incorporating several strategies, other proposed corridors in Central America and several projects in the Gulf (ferry, natural reserves, and commonwealths). A Gulf Development Corporation has been proposed, some actions and studies are recommended, and there is a series of conclusions.

**Example 9:** in the region of Kvarken, between Vaasa (FI) and Umeå (SE) the **ferry** which united both cities across the **Gulf of Bothnia** has been re-inaugurated very recently. This connection has many effects for CBC in this area, coexisting with the **Cross-Border Kvarken Archipelago**, part of the UNESCO Human Heritage site of the **High Coast** (Western coast of the Gulf in Sweden).



Source: *The Midway Alignment of the Bothnian Corridor in the Kvarken Strait*  
[European Straits Initiative](#)



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*

Most relevant projects have also been identified, showing some overlapping and lack of coordination. And a SWOT analysis has been done (see next page), including some very recommendable perspectives.

The factsheet ends with a series of recommendations and conclusions, based in the mini-workshop implemented on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2013 with representatives of the municipalities of Conchagua, Pasaquina, La Unión, Santa Rosa de Lima, Meanguera del Golfo, Goascorán and Somotillo.

The factsheet stresses some priorities and opportunities for the SICA and proposes a role for this supranational structure after deep exchanges. The framework of the SICA is very important to promote real joint initiatives, as a common harbour complex in the Gulf, served with ferry, road (and in the future, train) connections. In fact, the experts' team has followed SICA's indications in order to organize working meetings with the **SICA** itself and several related departments, the **mini-workshop**, working sessions with **civil society** organizations (FUNDE, Port City Committee) and with **special bodies** like the **CEPA**.

## SWOT Analysis of the Gulf of Fonseca

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Declaration of the GF as a zone of peace, sustainable development and security.	Predation and destruction of mangrove swamps.	Economic and environmental potential.	Territorial claims and disputes.
It has great richness and diversity of natural resources, and a huge touristic attractiveness.	Physical alteration, degradation and destruction of coastal ecosystems and habitats.	Low human development.	Incidents between navy forces and fishermen working in foreign waters.
The Gulf as an economic development pole.	Dumping of untreated pesticides and polluted nutrients to the Gulf's waters.	Poverty and unemployment.	High poverty index in coastal communities.
Port facilities in La Unión and Amapala as determinants of interior and exterior regional trade.	Over-exploitation of fishing resources and non-sustainable fishing practices.	Implementing of future projects ("Golfonseca" UE).	Increase of the presence or organized crime in the area, as well as weapons, drugs, smuggling and persons trafficking.
One of the richest biologic maritime zones in Central America.	The excess in shrimp production eliminates other marine species.	Implementation of the Port of La Unión (SV) and planning of the Port City ( <i>Ciudad Puerto</i> ), as well as the Dry Canal to flow into Puerto Cortés (HN) in the Atlantic.	Operational spilling in San Lorenzo Port (HN) and those that could happen with the programmed increase in maritime traffic, as a result of La Unión Harbour (SV).
A significant part of the total production of farmed shrimp in Central America.	Cross-border dialogue between the Gulf municipalities is very poor (Conato, 2009)		
	Lack of territorial planning in related basins.	Touristic development of the islands in the Gulf.	Vulnerability to extreme climatic phenomena and climate change.
	Effects in human health and environment of local sewage discharges.	Existence of protected areas or Ramsar sites, e.g. the San Lorenzo Bay (HN)	
	Mismanagement of water basins.		
	Lack of places for get on and get off of passengers and transport.		
	Lack of a regional institutionality and international coordination mechanisms to keep the integrity of the ecosystem and project management.		
	Dispersion of efforts developed by state and social players in the three countries.		

**Example 10:** in the last years, the EU has prepared several **macro-regional strategies**, a new generation of strategic instruments for integrated and sustainable development of these territories. Three have already been implemented: in the [Baltic Sea](#), the [Danube](#) and the [Adriatic-Ionian Region](#). In mid-2015 a strategy for the [Alpine Region](#) is expected. Though the proliferation of "macro-regions" does not produces a high enthusiasm, there are many groups working in an Atlantic, Carpathian, Black Sea, Western Balkanic or Mediterranean macro-regional strategy. Some of these strategies could be a source of inspiration for the Gulf of Fonseca.

- Main perspectives**
- An integrated intervention of the three national governments
  - Joint planning of infrastructures, their *hinterlands* and populations, following a real cross-border logic
  - Guarantee the participation of public, private, third sector and university players

### 3.2 Case 2: *Trifinio*



Fig. 8: Countries involved in the *Trifinio*  
Source: Google Maps

The **Trifinio Process** has been a traditional area of intervention to promote CBC for several decades. It began in the 1970's in a region shared by El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (SV-GT-HN), being a laboratory for Central American integration, and contributing to preserve shared natural resources, peacekeeping processes in the region and tri-national integration.

One of the most relevant achievements of the **Trifinio Border Regional Development Plan**, implemented since 1989, is the consolidation of a Tri-national Commission to develop concrete actions

Some of these actions are: making possible sustainable agriculture models, increasing commercial links between border municipalities from three countries and, the most important element, increasing the participation of civil society through the ATRIDEST, civil organization of farmers, teachers, cooperatives and development entities.

Many studies have been made directly on request of the SICA, with very diverse sets of recommendations, and an established process of CBC can be stated there. The Italian "Open Borders" project and other studies implemented by the CeSPI (*Centro di Studi Politica Internazionale*) produced some very interesting analyses and recommendations on the Trifinio.

Therefore, as already stated, a new study on the area could be useless, unless concentrating in one of the specific aspects of this cross-border process. For instance, a suggested field of study is cross-border environmental protection. The *Biosphere Trifinio Fraternidad* in twelve municipalities of the three countries obtained in 2011 the title of Cross-Border Biosphere, being the only tri-national biosphere in America.

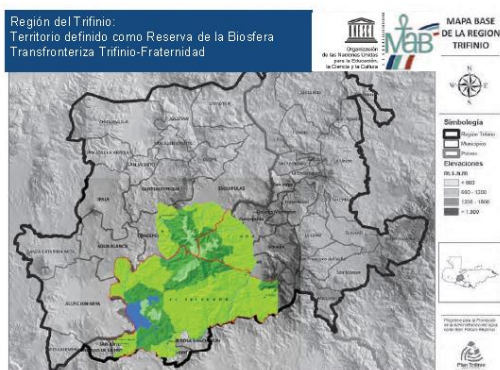


Fig. 9: Trifinio Reserve of the Biosphere  
Source: UNESCO, *Trifinio Plan*, 2011



Fig. 10: Declaration as Cross-Border Biosphere Trifinio Fraternidad (SV-GT-HN), 25<sup>th</sup> June 2011  
Source: UNESCO, *Dresden*, 2011

In the factsheet “Trifinio” (**annex 2**) you can find information on the geography, background and updated news on the bilateral and multilateral agendas, the socioeconomic context and the strategic importance of the Trifinio. Also some information can be found on the sub-regional institutional framework, the Trinational Commission of the Plan Trifinio, the Trinational Executive Secretariat, the Consultative Committee, and a civil society participation platform (ATRIDEST). The main strategy of the Plan Trifinio and its current update is also described.

**Example 11:** a good source of inspiration for the Trifinio can be found in any of the “complex” euroregions, as it is the case of the [Euroregion Meuse Rhein](#) (BE-DE-NL), the [Great Region](#) (BE-DE-FR-LU) or the [Carpathian Euroregion](#) (HU-PL-RO-SK-UA).

A good exercise can also be getting to know any of the trinational operational programmes, with the participation of non-EU territories. In this sense, it is recommended the [POCTEFA](#) (Territorial Cooperation Operational Programme for Spain -France-Andorra), most of whose information is available in Spanish, but there are many more.

The sustainable management of natural resources is one of the main priorities of the Trifinio Plan. The *Strategy Water without Borders 2006–2009* had this orientation. Since 2010 inclusive human development has been worked out, promoting a higher citizens’ participation. A Strategy 2010–2020 is ongoing and under updating for the period July 2014 – June 2018. The new updated strategy seems to pay a special attention to regional integration and CBC, as well as the management of basins and others aspects to be managed with a multi-level viewpoint.

The Factsheet also includes some information on main projects developed, some perspectives discussed from the SWOT analysis, the challenges of Trifinio until 2020 and a set of recommendations and conclusions elaborated from the mini-workshop on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013 and some other meetings and activities organized within this project. In fact, there has been several working sessions organized with the SICA (Secretariat General, SEFRO and other departments); other with specific bodies (Plan Trifinio “Agua Sin Fronteras, a very interesting presentation of which is included in the factsheet).

Within the Trifinio, there are several examples of local CBC. The most advanced is the **Mancomunidad Trinacional del Río Lempa** (Trinational Lempa River Commonwealth) (SV-GT-HN), composed by 7 Guatemalan, 7 Salvadorian and 9 Honduran municipalities. A permanent body for regional integration at the local level, with several projects identified which are implemented at the Lempa Basin or at the whole Trifinio level in a practical bottom-up approach and high participation of the local level and the communities:

- Promotion of Social Cohesion and Regional Integration of Border Municipalities in the Trifinio 2009-2012, with the collaboration of CeSPI (Italy) and the *Diputación de Huelva* (Spain).
- SINTET (Trinational Territorial Information System) (URB-AL project).
- AlfaSAN (Trinational Alphabetization Programme for Food and Nutrition Security) (within the framework of PRESANCA II (*the Regional Programme for Food Security and Nutrition for Central America SICA-EU*).
- Local Cross-border Policy (LCBP) “Clean City” (URB-AL and Oxfam Italy), to implement an inter-municipal integrated management system for solid waste.
- LCBP “Forests for Ever” (URB-AL and *Diputación de Huelva*), for the management of environmental protection areas.
- LCBP “Indivisible Territory”, to guarantee a sustainable management of the territory and resources, and the improvement of citizens’ quality of living in the Trifinio (PRESANCA II, *Diputación de Huelva*).
- LCBP “Shared Waters”, to implement a shared, sustainable and integrated management of water resources in the tri-national area, within the context of Central American integration (URB-AL, PRESANCA II, *Diputación de Huelva*).



## SWOT Analysis of the Trifinio

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
It has contributed to the conservation of shared natural resources, peace-making in the region and trinational integration: Declaration by the three countries of Reserve of the Biosphere <i>La Fraternidad</i> at the Montecristo mountains.	Low investment in socioeconomic development.  For many years, the concept of CBC was not present, nor the aspects related to integrated management of water resources (CTPT, 2004).	Richness of renewable natural resources.	Conflicts and controversies about water resources.
It has a juridical foundation and institutionality.	The presence of institutions of the central governments in charge of the promotion of socioeconomic development and the protection of natural resources has been weak and insufficient.	Great forest reserves with a valuable and complex biodiversity.	Vicious circle poverty-deterioration of renewable natural resources (CTPT, 2004).
Wide experience in implementing development cooperation projects.		Lempa, Motagua and Ulúa river basins.	Increase of population density, generating a higher pressure on natural resources, increasing demand of basic social services and the need to create sustainable productive job opportunities.
Constitution of Trifinio Associations for Sustainable Development (ATRIDEST).	Local governments did not have technical assistance, institutional capacity, or needed resources to achieve the desired impact in protecting their renewable natural resources, the promotion of economic development and the provision of basic social services.	Declaration of Reserve of the Biosphere by the UNESCO (July, 2011).	The majority of implemented projects have a conservationist character with limited effects in the communities living conditions. This type of projects do not generate interest and participation will for many communities (Conato, 2009)
Strong political will of the governments to keep on strengthening trinational integration and shared management of natural resources, creating cross-border institutionality, autonomy and capacity of action (Conato, 2009).	Shared cooperation and integrated management with the local governments in the neighbouring countries was limited.	Eco-touristic potential.	
	Weak participation of local communities and territorial institutions (Ib.)	Improve living conditions of the populations.	
Existence of a Tripartite Commission based on an Agreement which is legally binding for every country, allowing the implementation of a great number of trinational projects with an integrated cross-border management, free of administrative institutional and bureaucratic problems (Conato, 2009).	Limitations due to decision and implementation processes fundamentally vertical (Conato, 2009).	Preserve biologic heritage.	

**Example 12:** a case that can be connected with the Trifinio is the **Triple Amazonian Border** (BR-CO-PE), and other similar borders in South America, as the project "World Class" *Border Cities* at the Triple Border in Iguacu. The exchanges of points of view about daily aspects in triple borders could be a good exercise.

**Example 13:** Other examples of interest could be the Euroregion [Neiße-Nisa-Nysa](#) (DE/CZ/PL), or [Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa](#) (DKMT) (HU-RO-RS).

### 3.3 Case 3: Sixaola Basin



Fig. 11: Map of Costa Rica and Panama  
Source: Google Maps

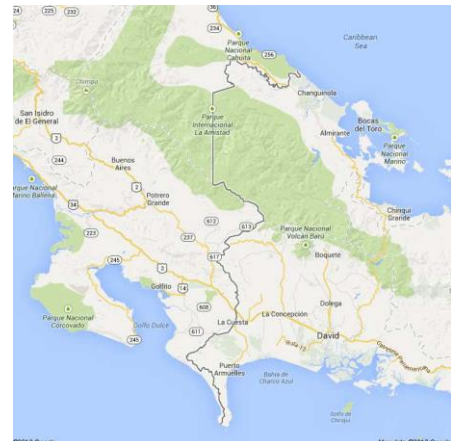


Fig. 12: Map of the border between CR and PA, with the Sixaola Basin in the North  
Source: Goggle Maps

The third area under study is the border between **Costa Rica** and **Panamá**, in particular the **Sixaola Basin**, where there is a great interest, a cooperation agreement since 1979, a reactivation for border development since 1992 and a permanent bi-national commission is operational since 1995. It has been considered the most peaceful and prone to cooperation CB area in Central America, where many international actors are developing public and private initiatives in the field of CBC. European development agencies (e.g. the German GIZ) or even big corporations (e.g. *Chiquita*, *Corbana*, *Rewe*) are promoting the development strategy in the area, involving a growing set of local actors. Main issues are preservation of biodiversity, environmental education, community development, and green-businesses.

The attitudes of both countries involved is very positive, and there is a wide participation in the Permanent Binational Commission (national and municipal, indigenous peoples and civil society), and especially the Binational Commission of the Sixaola River Basin. In its last meeting, the General Assembly decided to organize eight working groups, in charge to follow up the following topics: agriculture, environmental protection, tourism, commercial exchange, risk management, health, infrastructures and strengthening of the Commission.

In the factsheet "Sixaola Basin" (**Annex 3**) you can find the presentation "Experience of CBC between Panama and Costa Rica" (in Spanish) made by the Ministry of Economy and Finances of Panama at the 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Directors for International Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized in San Salvador on 30-31 May 2013 by the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), with the support of the Government of El Salvador.

You can also find the SWOT in the Factsheet, though it has been considered to include the three SWOT tables in this final report due to their relevance. Besides, information has also been included in the factsheet about most relevant projects implemented in the area, usually regarding environmental protection and readiness for climate change, though there are also some with a productive character promoted by private entities and others for infrastructure or governance on the initiative of public institutions and NGOs.

## SWOT Analysis of the Sixaola Basin

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental and sociocultural richness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growing environmental degradation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Neighbourhood relationships between communities around the basin.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growing environmental and sociocultural vulnerability.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cross-border cooperation initiatives present.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of territorial planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many cooperation initiatives to manage natural resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constant occurrence of extreme natural events.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional framework for cooperation between the countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipalities in the influence area of the basin, Talamanca in Costa Rica and Changuinola in Panamá, are those with the lowest Human Development Index in their respective countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The basin provides a series of environmental services to the communities, as it is the case of water resources for human consumption and agriculture, as well as fertile lands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growing interest in many energy projects (extraction of crude oil, generation of hydroelectric energy, etc.) and development of (marine) infrastructures.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmentally strategic zone for the Central American region: it is estimated that there an important biologic diversity converges, and it is one the "few extended regions with an ecosystem of virtual primary forest in Central America" (Franklin, 2007).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Populations settled around the basin belong to ethnical minorities that were culturally and economically isolated, therefore perpetuating their poverty conditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considered as one of the "most pacific and prone to cross-border cooperation borders in the region" (Giroto &amp; Granados, 1997).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of technical, financial and administrative sustainability for cooperation projects once finalized: no generation of permanent capacities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water richness, both surface as groundwater.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional limitations obstructing this cooperation process. Some of them are legal and institutional asymmetries between both countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peaceful and permeable border, with a very developed institutional cooperation framework.</li> </ul>	

**Example 14:** the AEBC is promoting a study on **cross-border minorities** in the EU, most of which do not have specific programmes. But this happens in some cases of linguistic minorities with a considerable size and a real impact in the majority culture and language, as it is the case of the Swedish-speaking community in Finland or the German-speaking community in Belgium. The Sami people in Northern Scandinavia also have a very interesting framework. This is not the case of some Roma communities and other people in this ethnic group which keep on practising nomadism.

### 3.4 Other initiatives identified

Besides the mini-workshops organized in two of the border areas under study, several meetings took place in San Salvador, with the SICA and other institutions, civil society organizations, local authorities, NGOs, etc. There were many other meetings and activities organized with relevant players for CBC and main integration issues in Central America, such as security, migration, public services or infrastructures.

Within these activities, other cross-border initiatives have been identified, within the studied cases and in other Central American cross-border areas.

**3.4.1 The national case with the greatest variety of borders is Guatemala:** information has been gathered in relationship with the different borders of this country, a special case which closes the borders of Central America and opens to Southern Mexico, a transit to the US through a complex area with jungle, indigenous communities, groups of migrants, voluntary workers, armed gangs and bands, soldiers, border guards, and a lot more besides.



Fig. 13: Map of Central America

Source: CIA World Factbook (public domain), Wikipedia

The **Guatemala–Mexico border** runs 871 km (541 mi) —other sources mention 956 km— between north and west Guatemala (the Guatemalan departments of San Marcos, Huehuetenango, El Quiché and El Petén) and the Mexican states of Quintana Roo, Campeche (194 km), Tabasco (108 km) and Chiapas (654 km). The border includes stretches of the Usumacinta River, the Salinas River, and the Suchiate River. It is across this border that most of the commerce between Mexico and Guatemala and the rest of Central America take place.

Mexico and Guatemala round **Belize**, another special case in the region<sup>2</sup>. The **territorial dispute between Guatemala and Belize** was initiated in 1859. Currently (2013) the Foreign Ministers of both countries have agreed to continue negotiations to celebrate a referendum about their centenary litigation after a meeting with the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS).

<sup>2</sup> On the NE coast of Central America, Belize is the only country in Central America whose official language is English (it was the former British Honduras until 1981), though Belizean Creole (*Kriol*) and Spanish prevail. Belize is bordered by Mexico and Guatemala and, in general, is considered a Central American and Caribbean nation with strong ties to the entire Latin American and Caribbean region. Belize is a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Central American Integration System (SICA), the only country to hold full membership in all three regional organisations.

In some models, this border represents the division between the Central American region of North America and proper North America. Every year almost two million people transit through this border, many of them undocumented, in order to try to reach the US.

Early in 2013, the Foreign Ministers of **Guatemala and México** kept a meeting where they coincided in the need to define the road to dialogue and bilateral relationship in the next years, within the following axes:

- Bilateral Cooperation
- Prosperous and Safe Border
- Dialogue and cooperation in multilateral fora

They highlighted the themes of trade and investment promotion; infrastructures for regional integration; cross-border cooperation; and prosperity and social development.

This is a selection of projects presented by the Foreign Ministry of Guatemala during the already mentioned 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Directors of International Cooperation of Latin America and the Caribbean "Regional Cooperation in the framework of border integration", organized by the SELA (Latin American and Caribbean Economic System) in San Salvador on 30-31 May 2013:

## Programas y proyectos

- Existen una diversidad de proyectos fronterizos, muchos enmarcados en los siguientes objetivos: que guardan estrecha relación entre ellos: i) el desarrollo regional de las zonas que abarcan los límites internacionales; ii) la reversión de la degradación ecológica y la ejecución de programas de ordenación ambiental; y iii) el combate contra la pobreza en las zonas cuyo desarrollo se halla retrasado.

Figs. 14 and 15: Relation of projects GT-MX presented in the meeting organized by the SELA  
Source: Directorate of Cooperation Programmes and Projects, Republic of Guatemala

## Programas y proyectos

- Plan de Manejo de las Reservas de Biosfera del Área Fronteriza Trinacional, (Belice - Guatemala - México)
  - Plan de Desarrollo Regional del Área del Golfo de Honduras, (Guatemala - Honduras)
  - Proyecto de Manejo de la Cuenca del Río Nentón, (Guatemala - México)
  - Proyecto de Manejo de la Cuenca del Río Suchiate, (Guatemala - México)
  - Proyecto de Manejo de la Cuenca Alta del Río Belice, (Belice - Guatemala)
  - Proyecto de Desarrollo Integrado de la Cuenca del Río Paz, (El Salvador - Guatemala)
  - Plan de Manejo de las Reservas de la Biosfera del Área Fronteriza, (Belice - Guatemala - México)
  - Desarrollo Regional del Área del Golfo de Honduras, (Guatemala - Honduras)
- Las acciones en materia de cooperación transfronteriza o de desarrollo fronterizo, se tratan en su mayoría, de experiencias piloto o de corta duración, aunque en algunos casos es posible hallar iniciativas que muestran mayor permanencia. Por otra parte, el tránsito hacia mecanismos institucionales ágiles, adecuados, operativos, ha sido lento. Sin embargo, existen algunas experiencias que ofrecen resultados positivos, en la construcción de mecanismos de gestión institucional de lo fronterizo.

Guatemala and Mexico have some 10 formal border checkpoints, and many more "blind" or informal border crossings.

Regarding the delimitation of the border, México and Guatemala agreed to use straight lines between known and accepted key points by both countries. Measurement and delimitation works ended in 1902. Guatemala advanced in Soconusco to the Suchiate river, and Mexico received the district of Motozintla.

**3.4.2** A wider perspective is offered by the Mexican project **Integration and development in Mesoamerica. Infrastructure and Physical Integration**. The Mexican Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AMEXCID) presented the Project "Integration and Development in Meso-America" during the XXIV Meeting of International Cooperation Directors in Latin America and the Caribbean, San Salvador, 30-31<sup>st</sup> May 2013. A strong financing (almost 100 million \$) in roads for Honduras, Nicaragua and Belize is included, as well as some border infrastructure (roads, ports, border facilities, bridges) with Belize and Guatemala.

### 3.4.3 SEFRO (Central American Border Security Regional Programme):

The SEFRO is co-financed by the EU (EU: 5,5 M€; SICA: 0,5 M€) and implemented by the Secretariat General of the SICA. The main objective is to contribute to regional integration through the support to the implementation of a Central American Strategy for Security and the reduction of civil insecurity. The specific objectives are the strengthening of border security (internal and external) in the region through institutional, technical and technological support, the promotion of a higher connectivity, and the integrated and shared management of information in border areas.

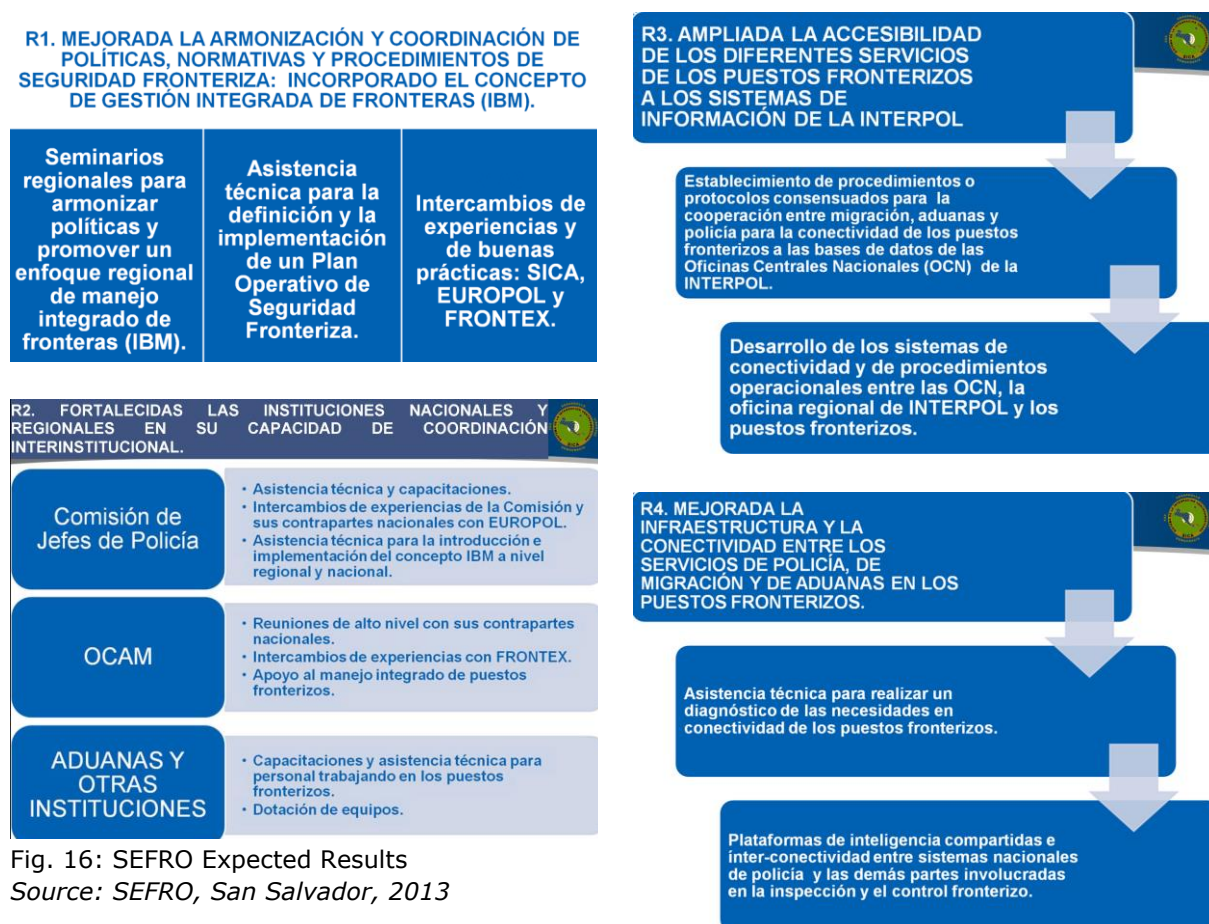


Fig. 16: SEFRO Expected Results  
Source: SEFRO, San Salvador, 2013

This project is developed in close cooperation with Interpol, Europol, Frontex and border agencies of Central American countries. 19 border checkpoints were identified and visited; and several exchanges of experiences with European partners have been made by persons in charge of security, migration and customs; as well as several regional workshops and training sessions in checkpoints.

Main challenges for the integrated management of borders in Central America are:

- Approval of the Project of Regional Agreement to Create National Commissions for Border Security Issues.
- Bilateral and regional meetings of the National Commissions for Border Security Issues.
- Formulation of the Regional Policy and the Operational Plan for Border Security, including the Central American Model of Integrated Border Management.
- Equipments and technology for interconnectivity of prioritized border checkpoints.

- Operational Implementation Phase.
- Encourage the exchange of experiences and good practices, as well as joint training sessions (police, customs and migration) at the prioritized border checkpoints.
- Continue with the support to the regional institutionality in terms of border security (OCAM, SIECA and CJDPCAMCC).

Among the principles and criteria to be used by the SEFRO to face these challenges, these are the most relevant:

- Local needs and priorities, regional approach.
- Local proposals, bilateral agreements, regional consensus.
- Centrality and priority to police, customs and migration services.
- Coordination and cooperation with national institutions.
- Alliances with national and international specialized bodies.
- Generation and multiplication of knowledge and good Central American practices.

Elements to be considered in the Central American Integrated Border Management (IBM) model:

- Definition of a public body to implement the IBM at national level and for regional coordination.
- Mechanisms for national and regional coordination between various bodies in charge of border management.
- Border control actions (inspections and vigilance), supported with risk analyses and criminal intelligence.
- Actions for detection and investigation of cross-border crime, in coordination with competent police authorities.
- Unified system of planning and training.
- Professionalization and specialization of staff in border checkpoints.
- Quick and extensive circulation of data at all organizational levels.
- Legislative base for cooperation and exchange of information between institutions and states.
- Elaboration and implementation of national and binational border security plans under an IBM focus.

### 3.4.4 References to the Caribbean

The accession of Belize in 2000 and, especially, the accession of the Dominican Republic in 2013 to the SICA have strengthened the Caribbean dimension of this supranational integration process. On the other hand, there are direct European experiences in the Caribbean, through an Interreg Programme between French Guyana and Brazil with influence in other territories in the neighbourhood. There is a growing cooperation between Colombia and Panama, and among the islands various types of organizations can be identified according to their English-speaking or French-speaking nature. Other institutions have a more Caribbean or Latin American-Caribbean scope.

There are also some particular bilateral cases (like the Dominican Republic and Haiti); as well as a growing collaboration of these territories (islands and mainland) in different fields. Supranational integration processes are very relevant in the Caribbean, as well as other initiatives promoted by the EU. It is worth mentioning several presentations made in the already mentioned meeting of the SELA in San Salvador in May 2013 (all available).

- Association of Caribbean States: *Promoting ground, air and maritime connectivity to integrate the Great Caribbean.*
- The CARICOM Development Fund: *Regional Cooperation in Border Integration*
- *Jamaica's Cooperation in Border Integration within CARICOM*
- SELA (Latin American and Caribbean Economic System): *Regional Cooperation in the Area of Border Integration: A Caribbean Perspective* (Dr. Mark Kirton)
- DG for Multi-lateral Cooperation, Dominican Republic: *Dominican Republic-Haiti: Two Nations, Two Cultures, Two States, in the Island Hispaniola.*

On 27-29 November 2013 the *Rencontres Europe, Caraïbes et Amérique Latine de la Coopération Transfrontalière* took place in Martinique, organized by the AEBR, the MOT and University of Guyenne and the Caribbean, with the support of the European Commission (DG Regio), in order to compare CBC practices. A report of this activity has been included as **Annex 4** for this Final Report. Most of the presentations and debates were recorded in video and uploaded to the AEBR channel in YouTube:

- Introduction to the „Rencontres“ 01: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4b88GewRr0>
- Introduction 02: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kr7tQWzH9i8>
- Presentations:
- Bernhard Bramlage and Fred Célimène: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lha0n9IHl40>
- Terri Ann Gilbert, Martine Camiade: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddKJdV6muIs>
- Paulo Silva: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iUxUBQCdUQ>
- Alexandre Bastos Peixoto: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoIjAkYbnvY>
- Álvaro Gómez Suárez: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtfdex2UmSo>
- Ramón López Sánchez (introduction): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EeFQVH8GbpE>
- Eduardo Galantini, Sandra Mustelier, Martín Guillermo: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtTxny8cd4U>
- Nahuel Oddone: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXb6D2xjfBM>
- Andy Pollak, R. Rodríguez Acevedo: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xxs\\_W\\_63o6g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xxs_W_63o6g)
- Working at the workshop: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U84f0dK0E5k>
- Laura Canale, Myriam Afflalo: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTigbuDUevI>
- Edwen Ramos: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_FlvtrFVX8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_FlvtrFVX8)
- Ramón López Sánchez (presentation) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkluz9QZ8xg>
- Round Table Sandra Mustelier, Exil Lucienna, Eduardo Galantini: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCRyF\\_oU3yk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCRyF_oU3yk)
- Conclusions University: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AeIlwd9Xcg>
- Interview Nahuel Oddone: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIInpehQoqE>
- Interview Birte Wassenberg: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0tbOfxDK48>



#### 4. **PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS. IMPACT ON FUTURE WORK**

Some of the problems encountered, related with the delay in preparing the reports, were already explained in the Interim Report. There were some difficulties to fit agendas and to identify some players, but fortunately they were solved and the foreseen tasks could be accomplished.



Fig. 17: Mr. Salvador Sánchez Serén, President of the Republic of El Salvador (then Vice-president and candidate to the Presidency) with Mr. Mario Otero, AEBR expert on Central American CBC, and the AEBR Secretary General in San Salvador on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2013

Source: AEBR, 2013

In 2013-2014 the Presidential Election Process also affected the implementation of the project. The candidate and today President of the Republic Mr Salvador Sánchez Serén held a private meeting with the AEBR prior to the opening of the 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Directors for International Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized in San Salvador on 30-31 May 2013 by the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA).

In this meeting there was an interesting exchange of impressions and a great interest was shown about the integration of the Trifinio and a good management of the Gulf of Fonseca.

Afterwards, once the dates and participants for the workshops on the ground were appointed, the process to replace the Secretary General of the SICA took place. It ended with the election of Ing. Hugo Roger Martínez Bonilla (SV) on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013 at the XLI SICA Summit of Heads of State and Government. He took his seat on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013 and was elected for a period of four years. Then, several changes took place in the SICA. Before that, we were dealing with the team appointed by the former Secretary General, Dr. Juan Daniel Alemán Gurdián (NI) (2009-2013). The transition took some time just in the middle of this project, being used by the AEBR to deepen the knowledge about the border areas under study.

Several working meetings took place in September and December 2013 with the Secretary General of the SICA in order to exchange views and impressions about the role of the SICA in the promotion of CBC in Central America.

Several meetings were also organized with Mr Óscar Ortiz (then) mayor of Santa Tecla, and now Vice-President of the Republic.



Fig. 18: Mr Óscar Ortiz, then Mayor of Santa Tecla (SV) and now Vice-president of the Republic of El Salvador; and Mr. Hugo Martínez, Secretary General of the SICA; with the AEBR Secretary General and Mr Mario Otero at the SICA Headquarters in San Salvador on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2013

Source: AEBR, 2013

Anyway, despite of delays and other factors, there have been very successful exchanges between the AEBR and the SICA since the appointment of the AEBR expert at the end of December 2012.

A great amount of public (national and local), private, non-governmental and “hybrid” players have been identified, with very diverse preferences, leading to the need to implement a strong coordination effort. Despite of the difficulties to bring multiple interests together, a great deal of information has been gathered, particularly related with the high expectation that CBC processes raise in many areas of Central America.

In any case, most of the expected information has been gathered, and the effects of the problems encountered have affected mostly the calendar of activities, but not the activities themselves. Nevertheless, the changes have influenced the knowledge process and have helped to deepen the discussions.

These are the challenges faced in this study:

### Main challenges

- A lack of coordination between different initiatives, even promoted by the same institutions, such as the EU.
- Common terminology and definition of CBC in every particular area.
- Avoid the terms “administrative level” and “competencies” when dealing with cross-border structure. It is just about “feasible instruments” to cooperate and the “implementation of needed cross-border tasks”, and never about creating new bureaucratic layers or burdens.
- We should not compare structures, competencies, legislations, etc.; across the border (they may not be comparable).
- It is very important to overcome the lack of expertise and cross-border skills.
- Communication and exchange mechanisms should be built up based on a system of mutual trust, and contribute to change attitudes, perceptions and approaches. The generation of trust is the main element for an efficient and long-lasting cooperation.
- Stimulate a “bottom-up” approach in local and regional development (in close collaboration with national authorities), involving all key players and taking into account particular local conditions (geographical, economic, cultural and political).
- The debate and subsequent approval of a Central American Treaty on Cross-Border Cooperation is a need in the region.
- A dialogue mechanism between the SICA and local governments will strengthen the bottom-up approach involving directly Central American territories in the integration process and promoting multi-level governance.

These are some of the **problems identified in the workshops**:

- a) Lack of regulation for border municipalities.
- b) National governments’ approach prevails over local authorities.
- c) Lack of support to border initiatives. Limited participation of local authorities and civil society (in decision-making processes).
- d) There is still a feeling of confrontation in some border areas:

- International cooperation is not making enough pressure to find practical solutions for cross-border areas in Central America.
  - There are strong conflicts in a daily basis in many border areas regarding illegal activity, migration, informal industrial practices, etc.
  - Most support goes directly to the capitals.
- e) Many initiatives, even those long-lasting, lack measurable results in relationship with the proposed objectives (this has been highlighted by the stakeholders in Trifinio).
- f) Main issues are: **security, migration** —mainly to the US through Guatemala and Mexico—; and **mobility** of persons, goods and services across Central American internal and external borders; economic and social **complementarity**; and the implementation of **new regulations** limiting previously existing freedoms of mobility, as a result of some unilateral customs regulations.

**Example 15:** European Territorial Cooperation programmes have evolved enormously. During the present programming period 2014-2020 (Interreg V) the [Cohesion Policy](#) and the [Regional Policy](#) stress thematic concentration, [Smart Specialization Strategies](#) and the measurement of the impact of European Funds. The motto is „[Growth and Jobs](#)“. However, in some territories outside the EU it can be of interest to review the previous Interreg periods: Interreg I (1990-1993), the Community Initiative Interreg II (1994-1999), Interreg III (2000-2006) or the European Territorial Cooperation Objective (2007-2013). The online version of the AEBR Handbook of CBC, 2014 updated version of the *LACE-TAP Practical Guide of Cross-Border Cooperation* (1995, 1997, 2000) including several series of project examples grouped per themes.

## 5. LESSONS LEARNED, BEST PRACTICES AND OBSTACLES

One of the first tasks implemented in this project brought the team to **revisit other studies** made by Latin American experts about border relations in Central America. With some of them we could exchange points of view and reflect jointly in several moments of the project. In general, it could be concluded that, despite its territorial, demographic and environmental relevance, Central American borders have had a peripheral and marginal character, and therefore **border regions development has been absent of Central American agenda for many years**. Borders have been considered mainly as the boundaries of national States, territorial limits and sovereignty delimitation elements, associated above all with the defence of the State and, lately, with the fight against illicit trafficking (drugs, weapons, etc.) (Conato, 2012), of persons too. In consequence, **border areas are usually the poorer, most marginalized and excluded in the States' economic development processes**, which are led by urban centres and capitals (Rodríguez, 2009). Unemployment, poverty, low salaries, lack of access to basic services and pollution or environmental degradation, among others, are frequent issues in many border regions.

Only recently some **human development** processes and implementation of productive structures are driven in these areas, based in the advantages offered by aquaculture, livestock farming, commerce, services and mining (Hernández et al., 2007).

Also until very recently it was very difficult to find references to border cooperation and integration in SICA's or national governments' documents, with the exception of some specific experiences (Conato, 2012).

Other supranational institutions have also provided new conceptual approaches in Central America, as the [development of cross-border value chains](#), defined by CEPAL.

Paradoxically, Central American borders have been historically associated to multiple and intense relations and social, economic and cultural exchanges, which facilitate

cooperation and regional integration actions in practice, therefore they have become progressively considered as strategic integration areas in a moment when a great will to cooperate has been made evident.

The own geographic and environmental characteristics of Central America have forced to reconsider the concept of border, because the influence area of a territorial unit like the water basin goes beyond national delimitations. State limits have very little to do with social dynamics, and far less with the extension of shared ecosystems (basins, forests, wetlands, etc.). The conservation of these spaces, environmentally strategic nowadays (biologic diversity, water, energy, etc.), turn complex due to their cross-border condition. In order to manage shared territories, it is necessary to appeal to dialogue, negotiation and cooperation (Medina and Rodríguez, 2011). That is to say: generation of trust.

Then we go to the concept of “cross-border basin” (Molle and Wester, quoted by Medina and Rodríguez, 2011), which means to overcome the classic notion of border as an existing limit between two or more sovereignties, as well as its geopolitical division function. However, this situation generates a fundamental problem when thinking of managing shared natural resources, as an ecosystem divided by a political-administrative border is dealt in a fragmented and very often contradictory way by the States, mainly due to different perceptions and environmental regulations in every country (Medina and Rodríguez, 2011). It is recommended to take into account European macro-regional strategies (see the example 10 in page 38).

In this sense, two perceptions of the notion of border are confronted: the border as a fixed line-limit separating two States, and the border as a region dynamized by proximity and human and environmental border interactions, generating very active neighbourhood relationships.

**Example 16:** most poor European regions were considered **Objective 1** in first territorial cooperation programmes, receiving a special handling, due to their vulnerability, as for example the bigger possible co-financing from Structural Funds. Many border regions, peripheral, rural, far from main decision-centres, have shared this category and have benefited from important investment programmes. Some of them have followed their development in the framework of other categories (intermediate development regions or developed regions) while many keep a more vulnerable situation. EU cohesion policies implement a certain “positive discrimination” in these territories, as a sign of inter-territorial solidarity.

It has even been asserted that some cross-border regions with a great environmental richness in the isthmus, as it is the case of the Sixaola River Basin, have not been “preserved” up to now as a result of a specific political will, but rather because of its isolation and the historical weakness of public investment received (Medina and Rodríguez, 2011). This has also been evident in many European border regions, which peripheral character and the lack of investment in their development has made possible to preserve their natural heritage.

In this same sense, it is convenient to take into account that the fragility of these integration mechanisms, added to the contradictions and juridical asymmetries existing between nations, can motivate “the upsurge of conflicts in border areas” (Morales, quoted by Medina and Rodríguez).

It can be mentioned that cross-border cooperation, on the other hand, stimulates the building of regional public goods, as a result of the need to correct those problems without an adequate answer from the perspective of Nation-states or without sufficient incentives for a single country to assume the costs (Rhi and Oddone, 2010).

As it is the case in all Latin America, and of course also in the context of Central American integration, the bottom-up approach keeps on lacking programmes and instrument to deploy its integration potentialities. The most evident manifestation of this deficit can be observed in **institutional governance deficits in border areas**, though

it must be acknowledged that many efforts have been multiplied in the last years to cover this gap. Likewise, the steps made to promote "integration interests" among participating countries in supranational processes cannot be forgotten.

As Darío Conato (2012) points out, there is no place in Central America at a longer distance of 260 km from its nearest border. Therefore, the relationship with the border is an own characteristic of Central American citizens.

The creation and tasks of the SICA can be considered the best practice in Central America, promoting the integration process and incorporating CBC to strengthen the role of the local levels, following the track of the experience with PRESANCA I and II and PRESISAN; besides the role of the Central American Parliament, the democratic security agenda and the shared sectorial integration agendas (infrastructure, agriculture, touristic, environmental corridors and more), the defence of common interest towards international institutions, or those advocacy and education tasks to build up a "Central American Citizenship". Nevertheless, most of the way to "bottom-up" Central American integration is yet to be built.

There is a SICA integration agenda, defined around **five strategic axes** (see table below) including limitations and the wastage of the power by the participating countries to build a united Central America and Caribbean in a regional vision of the world, due to its geo-strategic location.

This situation does not go unnoticed for many local, national, regional and international players supporting the **construction of cross-border capacities, instruments and institutionality from the local level**. It is about building integration bottom-up logics with a high level of appropriation by the stakeholders, as it is happening in the Trifinio and related initiatives, particularly the commonwealths (*mancomunidades*), and especially the River Lempa one. These logics promote social and territorial cohesion, especially in border regions which are seen as marginal by the States. However, due to their endemic poverty, quality of natural resources, biodiversity, economic relations, family links, common culture and history, they should be a priority for national governments. These should promote CBC relations to add value to human development, and to integrate Central America with a more practical vision for the people's benefit. These horizontal cooperation experiences cannot be based exclusively in SICA support, though this can promote a governance model to feed the Central American agenda back.

All in all, there are **cross-border experiences with a great mobilizing potential for the Central American agenda**, promoting identity when retaking central development issues and the cooperation between states. In this work the origin, current situation, promoted transformations, generated institutionality, legal and cooperation mechanisms and instruments to accompany public policies in some of them (the three cases under study) have been identified. This cooperation is producing some good results and, above all, allows the learning of many lessons on the building of integration and cross-border development. It is worth keeping on deepening this reflection and providing new ways for Central American societies and governments still facing global challenges with a fundamentally national vision. A paradigmatic case is the **Gulf of Fonseca**, where three national development visions meet to plan an important harbour facility. A trinational solution to manage infrastructures related to the Port of La Unión would be a milestone in the Central American integration process, showing a high degree of mutual trust and maturity, and contributing with a greater relevance as geostrategic player.

These countries have incorporated South-South Cooperation in their planning, and CBC plays a growing role in the methodological and theoretical reflections, though its practical implementation in concrete projects is not sufficiently developed.

## Strategic Axes and Prioritized Cross-Border Experiences at the SICA Integration Agenda

1. **Democratic Security.** This question stands out above the rest, at the light of the priorities expressed by the Member States and also by the SICA specialized agencies, in particular the SEFRO (the Central American Regional Security System), a programme financed by the European union to contribute to combat organized crime and guarantee Central American citizen's security through the joint work of different institutions, besides strengthening border security (internal and peripheral) in the region with institutional, technic and technological support, promoting a higher connectivity and an integrated and shared management of information in border areas.

2. **Environment and Management of Natural Resources.** Environmental management of reserves (cross-border biospheres) means an important challenge, given the great biological and cultural, landscape and habitat diversity in Central America, and its importance as a transition region between South American, North American and Caribbean ecosystems. This has made possible the historical construction of cooperation in the field of conservation and sustainable development through the initiatives of the Mesoamerican biologic corridor extending from the Mayan jungle in the south of Mexico to the Darien in Panama.

In its configuration several reserves of the biosphere have been constituted and gradually added over main environmental assets of Central America, many of which are shared by two or more countries, being its management complex since the recognition of the fact that environment does not know about borders. The reserves of the biosphere are conceived as learning places to get a balance between conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development of populations.

The cross-border reserves of the biosphere with a UNESCO declaration in Central America are the following:

- Biosphere *Maya-Calakmul* between Guatemala and Mexico.
- *Trifinio Fraternidad* between El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras
- *Corazón -Bosawas* between Honduras and Nicaragua.
- San Juan River – *Water and Peace* between Nicaragua and Costa Rica
- *La Amistad* between Costa Rica and Panamá.

3. **Economic Integration.** Economic integration elements are multiple and exceed the objectives of this work. Nevertheless, deepening the Central American integration process through the development of efficient and sustainable CBC processes is considered to contribute with an unquestionable added value to economic development in the whole region. In fact, an integration process based in economic, social and territorial cohesion of all peoples in the isthmus is proposed.

4. **Economic Inclusion and Social Cohesion.** Take the most of best available European experience to implement development policies in cross-border regions.

5. **Institutional Strengthening.** Building cross-border cooperation networks in the regions under study.

When the role of local players grows, the soundness of the process and its perspectives also grow.

The best case from the point of view of the generation of a cross-border identity is the **Trifinio**. One of the most important results of the Regional Development Plan of the Trifinio has been the consolidation of the Trinational Commission (CTPT), which has developed concrete actions in sustainable agriculture, has increased trade between border municipalities in the three countries and, the most important, a higher participation of civil society.

In this framework, several strategic lines have been proposed in the medium and long terms, as well as some objectives with the same horizon. The following challenges have been defined for the next years:

### Challenges in the Trifinio until 2020<sup>3</sup>

- The main challenge for the population in this trinational region and the CTPT lies in overcoming the situation of extreme poverty for most of the inhabitants, in the framework of a sustainable development process, in harmony with the natural resources, where persons are the *raison d'être* of the Trifinio Plan.
- The CTPT should assume a higher responsibility and incidence towards governments, to prioritize and harmonize their investments in the trinational context, incorporating local governments and civil organizations as strategic allies.
- It is necessary that CTPT members develop a higher capacity to influence decision-making instances (Presidencies, Ministries of Finance, Parliaments, Foreign Ministries and others).
- It is essential to promote an intervention model where local governments, sectorial institutions, local and community organizations, trade unions and business sector become pillars of the strategy, strengthening the tutelary political role of the CTPT as conducting instance of regional development, facilitating the coordination, articulation and cooperation among players at national and trinational level, promoting investments in the Trifinio region. This requires a re-engineering of the management model and an update of the institutionality created through the Treaty of the Trifinio Plan.
- Then, it is necessary that the Trifinio is incorporated as a priority for national and regional Central American development strategies. The CTPT is determined to build a sustainable development model, with a high level of local participation, aimed at the communities, associated with local governments, NGOs, sectorial institutions of the three countries and the civil society in general of the zone, to be the main characters of the regional development strategy. This strategy starts with the activation and consolidation of the Consultative Committee, a main figure of citizen's participation foreseen in the Treaty, as well as the creation of appropriate mechanisms to facilitate full participation of those players.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Executive Secretariat of the Trinational Commission of the Trifinio Plan (CTPT).

- In consequence, the challenge to drive the Strategy Trifinio Plan 2010-2020 is the achievement of a wide mobilization of resources, managing to get a strong participation of the States. In this sense, the CTPT pretends to increase the investment of international financial resources as a strategic challenge for the region, what means to deploy a joint work with the Foreign Ministries of the three countries, in order to consolidate current partners and project stronger efforts to draw the interest and incorporate decentralized, horizontal and private cooperation.
- It is required that the CTPT obtains the commitment of the three governments to support the implementation of this strategy. Likewise, the alliances with the local governments should be strengthened, channelled through commonwealths (*mancomunidades*) or associations of municipalities, as well as with NGOs and, in general, civil society organizations in the region, trying that these players appropriate the sustainable human development process promoted by the CTPT.
- Boost the Strategic Trifinio Plan 2010-2020 with measurable socio-economic and environmental indicators, to evaluate the achievements and impact for the benefit of people living in the Trifinio, procuring a strong participation of the States through their ministries and autonomous institutions.



## 6 **RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND DRAFT ROAD MAP**

### Recommendations

- CBC should overcome traditional visions about sovereignty and the classic notion of border as the limit between two or more sovereignties through an integrated intervention of the three national governments.
- CBC forces to rethink multi-sectorial and cross-cutting approaches in integration processes. This should be reflected in the management of public policies, and the participation of multiple players, led by the public sector, with the participation of private and civil players. Through the earmarking of technical and financial resources, organizational, management, consensus and decision-making capacities, and all directives towards facing border problematic can be coordinated, orienting all of this within the respect to competent national policies and international compromises.
- CBC requires multilevel governance to coordinate international, regional, national and local players (vertical) between the public and private sectors, the non-governmental and the Academia (horizontal) across every border. This means to coordinate efforts among national cabinets, the SICA and its sub-systems, and local governments through their local development programmes.
- All tasks oriented to implement an integrated and sustainable action to protect existing and develop new CBC activities in Central America should be performed by institutions at supranational, national and local level (multilevel governance and subsidiarity), besides other private and civil players, as it is the case of NGOs, enterprises and universities (partnerships).
- SICA should get directly involved in CBC experiences in the region and in their further development. A Directorate of CBC within the SICA would be recommendable.
- The development of common concepts, strategies, programmes, projects and structures through the appropriate training of target groups is crucial. Examples: joint infrastructure planning, paying attention to the hinterland and affected population, following a real cross-border logic and, according to the [Barca Report](#)<sup>4</sup>, with a place-based approach.
- The need to build local capacities should be tackled, through systematic training programmes on CBC for civil servants, politicians and other groups of interest, especially promoting best European and Latin American practices.
- International Cooperation is in constant evolution. The processes in the last ten years make possible to understand that the main characters of change are the players in developing countries and their institutions. Thus, it is necessary to strengthen the institutionality and management capacities regardless the origin of these resources.

<sup>4</sup> The report „An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy. A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations“ prepared by Fabrizio Barca in April 2009 at the request of Danuta Hübner, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, has been a crucial document in the development of a wide European Territorial Cohesion concept.

- The vision of cooperation agencies seems to be giving preference to regional cooperation over the bilateral one. And, regarding the decision on which initiatives to support, those tending to more integration will prevail. This is due to their own interests and because transaction costs are lower.
- Former EU Development Commissioner Andris Piebalgs already announced the **Sub-Regional Programme Central America 2014-2020** during the EUROsociAL Conference (Brussels, 24-25 March 2014). Despite of the reduction due to the progress of some countries in the region, at least € 2,5 billion have been allocated for the cooperation package for Latin America in the period 2014-2020 within the new Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). EU regional programmes for Latin America have two components. The first one, continental (AL-INVEST, EURO-SOLAR, LAIF, URB-AL, ALFA, Erasmus Mundus, Euro-Clima, etc.), is open to all developing countries in the region, including those without bilateral assistance and it is orientated towards the reduction of disparities between people, sustainable development, climate change and the advance of higher education and research. The second component is aimed to support **Central American efforts to address key developmental challenges** at sub-regional level.
- Central American countries can keep on benefiting from bi-lateral assistance. But the most interesting for CBC is the *Sub-Regional Programme Central America*, since **most of its priorities need a cross-border approach**: regional economic integration, security and climate change, prevention of natural disasters, environmental sustainability.
- One of the main objectives of this study is to **influence the EU Development Policy** in order to include a systematic support to CBC initiatives. Therefore, there are already some substantial allocations of funds for CBC, but supported initiatives are neither coordinated nor aligned with governmental agendas, with responsible integration bodies (such as the SICA), or between different services of the European Commission —this is the case of DG REGIO with DG DEVCO if we talk about CBC—. The lack of coordination can lay the foundations of a new frustration among local players who, in many occasions, have received promises, but not results. A process like this should be faced with a **multilevel governance** approach, vertical and horizontal, with the participation of a dense network of players both in Latin America as in Europe (Decentralized Cooperation is playing a growing role).
- The EU-Central America Association Agreement, signed in Tegucigalpa in June 2012 is very much concentrated in trade issues, but it's political and cooperation pillars could implement some territorial cohesion elements.
- The participation of the AEBR and other European organizations, as well as its partners in the South, can offer expertise and good practices to inspire the process of capacity building where there is no systematic approach to territorial cooperation yet. There is currently a great working field on knowledge and training, as well as in the constitution of permanent structures for CBC.
- There is a need to build a cross-border identity to overcome historical obstacles between these countries, especially in the area of the Gulf of Fonseca, while respecting national limitations, and promoting synergies and complementarities.

- There is also a need of programmes and structures to strengthen social, economic and territorial cohesion, without duplication of objectives and functionalities between new and existing initiatives and institutions. Therefore, it is very important to combine rationally horizontal and vertical policies, following the logic of subsidiarity.
- It appears a huge challenge to design new coordination and cooperation criteria to manage programmes and projects where regional integration is encouraged, in this sense the integration institutions.
- It is necessary to discuss operational themes, as well as to know long term plans of regional institutions, in order to avoid discretionality and heterogeneity of selection criteria for public investment projects. Regional integration should come back to focus the development of families in poverty and extreme poverty, going beyond trade, infrastructure or financing specific economic sectors, and concentrate more in human development.
- Tourism and presentation/promotion of Central America as a single destination is a very appropriate target for CBC, as a local development axis.
- Some concrete proposals:
  - Creation or activation of working groups in selected border areas, with a strong institutional support, in order to establish permanent cross-border structures in selected "Integration Microregions", such as an observatory for the Gulf of Fonseca.
  - Concentration in efficient governance and coordination models (promoting multilevel governance, as it has been highlighted by the SICA) could be very useful.
- An additional effort should be made to establish an adequate legal, political and institutional framework to regulate and manage CB regions, respecting border issues; as well as the legal and constitutional frameworks in every country.
- This management requires the existence of National Committees, Binational or Trinational Committees and jointly drafted management plans. This institutional cooperation base should count on the participation of public and private entities and the population. And it should also be oriented through international agreements corresponding to reserves of the biosphere and other international treaties related to biodiversity, climate change, reduction of carbon emissions, protection and conservation of forests, among others, being signed by the States. Already existing structures should be used but, in practice, the generated institutionality does not always have the capacity to manage the factors for balanced development. This is the reason to propose several additional case-studies, because some very strategic resources such as the reefs in the Caribbean do not have similar instruments like the Trifinio yet, and the strategic possibility of Central American sustainability is based greatly in the continuity of these ecosystems.

- The cases of the reserves of the biosphere *Maya-Calakmul* and *Corazón-Bosawas* are proposed as main study cases, because their territories are the most extensive in forest resources, and they are the home of Maya, Quiche, Kachikeles, Miskito and Garifuna ethnical groups, which feel their ancestral territories threatened by illegal felling, drug-trafficking and the transformation of their environment because of urban development.
- An Information Session in Europe for experts and politicians from the selected cross-border areas in Central America, as it has been made for South American border regions, is very much needed. Many local stakeholders have demanded a similar programme as those organized in 2012 and 2013, visiting different types of structures and discussing with all levels in Europe in order to test the possibilities for their own territories.
- Specific road maps for some selected borders should be drafted at *ad hoc* meetings with the participation of all stakeholders. European organizations (such as national cooperation agencies e.g. GIZ from Germany or AECID from Spain) operating in the area should be invited to take part.
- A systematic exchange of views among local stakeholders, with the coordination of a European organization, could lead to the preparation of a multiannual project to develop CBC strategies and structures in the selected areas in Central America, including the implementation of specific financial mechanisms.

At the Fonseca Workshop it was concluded that the concept of national sovereignty should be worked out in this cross-border framework, as this means a departing structural problem to develop CBC, particularly taking into account border disputes which still exist in the region. The Gulf needs interventions towards the promotion of common legal instruments in order to develop a cross-border identity and culture (see examples 1 and 5 in pages 18 and 23).

At the Trifinio Workshop the limited political participation of local civil servants and the population in decision-making processes was evidenced, reducing the impact that these could have with a higher citizens' participation. On the other hand, legal issues were also mentioned as another obstacle, because it prevents the development of CBC initiatives. A lack of trinational and cultural identity, and of CBC, is perceived.

**Example 17:** in Europe there are several models of **integrated transports without borders**: Øresund (DE-DK) is already a classic in Europe, having gone in the 1990s from airplain, hovercraft and ferry connections to the bridge-tunnel and railway; the cross-border transport consortium in the *EuRegio Salzburg-Bertesgadener Land-Traunstein* (AT-DE), the train between Münster-Gronau (DE) and Enschede (NL), the fast cross-border train between Kristinehamn, Karlstad and Arkika (SE) with Kongsvinger, Lillestrøm and Oslo (NO), or the transport system between St. Louis (FR), Basel (CH) and Lörrach (DE), very close to the EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg. The maritime ferries between Germany and Denmark, or the river one *in the Euroregio Elbe-Labe* (CZ-DE), and the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell canal in the waterway Shannon-Erne (IE-UK) can also be included.

According to the opinion of local players, there is a debt regarding the accomplishment of objectives and targets at the Trifinio Plan, or this is a theme less tackled, but with an impact in the economy and the life of people in border areas. The mobility of people, goods, services and information, economic complementarity and the social and cultural interaction between the three countries is almost non-existent. In the last years there has been a backward movement regarding free circulation (CA4) between Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, which has even caused difficulties for the free movement of persons and goods.

## Conclusions

- Central American border areas show common problems, derived in many cases from their peripheral situation, apart from restrictions to free movement of persons and goods because of legal requirements or local geographical or infrastructural conditions. A major difficulty is related with the lack of regulatory harmonization in aspects like security or the management of cross-border ecosystems, among others, and another one with the urgency to face basic human needs.
- The main argument to strengthen efficient cooperation mechanisms between and through the borders is to be close to the citizens. Human groups living in border areas wish these initiatives to really contribute to enhance their living conditions or to solve their daily problems. There is an aspiration, beyond the understanding that Central American integration goes through its borders, for development and opportunities to pass, stay and intensify in these regions.
- The international community and the nations in the isthmus agree that the future of the region depends on their political and economic integration, though institutional efforts to initiate it have progressed very little. They have promoted integration as a mean to enhance their results in several areas, being materialized mainly in supporting the creation and renewal of regional institutions, the performance of high level summits, revitalizing regional cooperation and the promotion of the region as a trade block. Border conflicts and security issues represent most important obstacles for regional cooperation.
- The participation of local authorities and civil society organizations seems to be a main factor to activate CBC in Central America, but this is also a main challenge.
- Local authorities still need to strengthen public services and offer responses to local deficits (though some of these answers could be achieved through CBC).
- There are some common issues in all border areas under study: security is a major priority for all governments involved; wrong waste management leads to negative impacts in the quality of life, and human development is still an issue in most Central American territories.
- There are very relevant proposals made by some countries to develop their border areas, but these are mainly unilateral, where CBC does not clearly match State policies, with the exception of the Trifinio Plan, where a legal framework has been established to host the strategic planning agreed by involved countries.
- The SICA's institutional framework is based on an inter-governmental scheme, usually inter-ministerial, and its scope should be extended to the local territorial arena with a multilevel governance approach, in the sense of the programmes PRESANCA and PRESISAN.
- National governments and supranational processes (SICA) have acknowledged the importance of involving local and regional governments to promote good governance, especially in border areas.

- There are opportunities in these territories to develop CBC, but there are no sufficient social and economic structures; and there is a lack of solid national approaches. However, the supranational integration process has assumed its role to close the circle of multilevel governance, a previous condition for successful CBC, through the generation of the needed political will.
- CBC in Central America could be a good example of South-South collaboration, if successfully implemented, putting border areas more central.
- Trifinio can be used as a pilot case for other border areas in Central America. Gulf of Fonseca can be a major exercise of coordination of policies within the framework of the SICA, which can produce benefits for the whole region. And, the Sixaola Basin could be another very successful pilot case.

At the workshop in the **Gulf of Fonseca**, main elements identified were environmental and social development. Another main factor is the coordination of international cooperation with local authorities to promote trust and credibility across borders. This means a concrete demand of communication and training, avoiding frustration.

The workshop in **Trifinio** considered that this model should be used as a pilot for other border areas in Central America, as a trinational mechanism to promote environmental resources and to ameliorate the quality of life of people living in these areas. However, there are very little results in terms of cross-border integration and cooperation. The lack of institutionality in the area makes social development very difficult, plus the lack of regulatory harmonization to make integration possible.

At the **Sixaola Basin** there is a perfect basement to implement an authentic public-private partnership, which is actually under development since some time, coordinating necessary environmental preservation actions with interesting initiatives for sustainable economic development in the area. The advantage of the presence of some European cooperation agencies and private enterprises in the area should be taken, with the aim to identify synergies, discuss them with local players and elaborate some prospective proposals. It is recommended an **Integration Micro-Region at the Sixaola Basin**, as one of the laboratories of CBC in Central America in order to manage the dividends of CBC.

**Example 18:** many euroregions in Central Europe have included a disposition fund to allow them implement small calls for **people-to-people (P2P)** projects and thus mobilize many sectors of the cross-border society with very little resources.

**Example 19:** many regions without industrial revolution are very much committed in the **revolution of communications and the energy revolution**, making the most of cross-border relationship as a multiplying factor: energy planning in Epirus and Western Macedonia Occidental (GR) with Albania.

**Example 20:** in September 2014, the **Cross-Border Hospital in la Cerdanya** (ES-FR) was opened fully operational to welcome patients. A more than ten years long process has ended with the opening of the cross-border service, operated under the formula of an EGTC.



## **Proposal of Road Map**

Summarizing all recommendations and conclusions, the AEBR proposes the definition of a "Draft Road Map for the development of CBC processes in Central America", based in the model below, that may serve as a base for further debates on CBC in Central America with several stakeholders, beginning with PRESANCA and PRESISAN programmes, at the light of the experience they have acquired, and in every cross-border area in particular.

In order to boost SICA efforts for Central American territorial integration, four main criteria are proposed:

1. Define and adopt a bottom-up integration perspective as a complementary modality to the efforts implemented by high governmental instances in different aspects of integration (social, political, trade, economic and monetary).
2. This perspective is articulated from the promotion of cooperation and integration among the territorial areas of the SICA space and its local government institutions.
3. Border areas are priority territories for Central American integration.
4. The agenda of border territories is made considering the following priority dimensions:
  - The identification and definition of integration (micro) regions in border areas.
  - The construction of a multi-level governance shared by the participating countries in the integration microregions.
  - The identification of driving-ideas and priority themes to allow the construction and consolidation of integration microregions.
  - The formulation and implementation of coherent development projects, structuring for integration microregions.

To this end it is very important to establish a minimum structure, for instance:

- A Steering Committee,
- a Working Group on "Territorial Monitoring" in every microregion;
- some permanent Task Forces on specific issues.

This structure can be informal and could work online. The Steering Committee could elaborate every road map with suggestions made by the Working Group on "Territorial Monitoring" and the Task Forces on the following subjects (for example):

- Security and Cooperation across borders;
- sustainable Development, including Cross-Border Trade and Business, and specific sectors, such as tourism;
- Migration, Youth and Brain-Drain;
- Infrastructures (including ports, roads and, especially, border crossings);
- Universities and Research Centres.

These subjects for the Task Forces are just a proposal. They may be changed or re-defined by the SICA, or the designated committee/agency, according to own priorities and the consensus achieved among the Member States. The Steering Committee, the Working Groups on "Territorial Monitoring" and the Task Forces should be composed by representatives from the public and private sector, universities, and civil society organizations.

The chair of these groups must not necessarily be designated by the SICA, although the SICA itself should work as a Single Secretariat, organising their meetings and preparing and distributing results. The Working Group on "Territorial Monitoring" requires its own budget to undertake small studies on social indicators, evaluate data, draft maps, analyse satellite photos and could elaborate an "Atlas of Sustainable and Comprehensive Cross-Border Development in Central America".

These groupings (working group and task forces) should meet one to three times per year at different locations.

**Draft Road Map** (model as a base for the discussions in general or in every concrete cross-border area):

**Proposals for short-term action (2014 - 2016):**

- SICA publishes this study on its web page to guarantee transparency and request to receive comments that will start a debate on its recommendations and conclusions (or any other aspect of it).
- SICA launches a consultation on the road map in general and at specific cross-border areas (Integration Microregions);
- SICA nominates an expert to coordinate all efforts at regional, national and local level. It can also be coordinated with some European partners.
- SICA should get directly involved in CBC experiences in the region and in their further development. As it has been included in the recommendations, a Directorate of CBC within the SICA would be very appropriate.
- Elaboration of a specific website for this purpose, and to follow up several national policies of interest, for instance, water resources and environment, economy and tourism, infrastructure, urban planning and road communications, research and universities, labour market and social services.
- Preparation and organization of an Information Session in Europe for Central American experts and politicians, followed by a workshop in the region with the aim of defining a final road map for every microregion, with concrete tasks and distribution among the different stakeholders.
- Establishment of the Working Group and the Task Forces in every microregion, with the participation of private and public sectors from all levels, local and provincial government representatives.

**Proposals for medium-term initiatives and projects (2017 – 2018):**

- Incorporate CBC in the institutional process of Central American Integration.
- Elaborate, coordinate and approve a "Guiding Framework"; or a CBC agreement.
- Implementation of a programme with several coordinated projects with the support of the EU and other International institutions.

**Proposals for long-term initiatives and projects (2019 – 2020):**

- Regional development strategy coordinated with several cross-border processes.
- Implementation of permanent structures at the microregions (Trifinio, Gulf of Fonseca and Sixaola Basin). Use of a common legal instrument for CBC in Central America. This instrument, based on European EGTCs, can also be tested in Mercosur and the Andean Community, as well as in the African Union.
- First evaluation of the tasks developed and results achieved.
- Central American–European(– African) Conference on CBC experiences in challenging regions.



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