Identity in European cross-border cultural policies: an evolutive referential

Abstract

Many European cross-border cooperative organisations, commonly called “euroregions”, implement cultural schemes and projects. This paper questions the identity dimension of these cross-border cultural policies. It is based on a comparative case analysis of different euroregions, mainly Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée and Grande Région, completed with other examples. The cultural policies that are developed in these euroregions suggest an evolution of the identity referential in cross-border context, with a particular dialectics between a “heritage” identity and a “creative” identity. It shows the plasticity of notions such as culture and identity. In this way, European cross-border context renews cultural and identity representations and practices, which can echo a cultural and territorial European construction. At the same time, the evolution of referential questions the discourse on culture and identity in European cross-border context, in which the performativity dimension can sometimes reveal more instrumental dynamics on culture and identity in this discourse.

Keywords: Comparative Politics, European Union, Identity, Policy Analysis, Regionalism
Introduction

The action of the Council of Europe in favour of cross-border cooperation – in particular the Madrid Convention of 1981 – and the financial support of the European Union through dedicated schemes – mainly the INTERREG programmes of EU regional policy, launched in the 1990’s – have encouraged the European territorial authorities to develop many cross border cooperative organisations that are commonly named with the generic term “euroregions”, even though some euroregions can be named differently: euregio, europaregion, Greater Region, regio, etc. (Perkmann & Sum 2002, Morata 2010). Whereas around thirty euroregions existed at the beginning of the 1990s, there are currently about a hundred organisations of this type.

Among the various policies that are developed within euroregions, culture appears to be a frequent domain of cooperation. According to a study on cross-border cultural cooperation in France, cultural projects represented 17% of the budget and 15% of the projects within the cross-border programmes INTERREG for 2000-2006 (Stange 2005). On a broader scale, a study commissioned by the European Commission estimated that the cultural projects represent 6 billion EUR within the whole EU regional policy budget for 2007-2013 and 1.7% of the funds allocated to this policy (CSES, 2010). Another study by the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON, 2013) shows that culture and tourism are the favoured themes of cross-border cooperation.

This situation makes cultural cooperation an interesting entry to analyse the evolution and reconfiguration of cross-border schemes, particularly regarding the identity dimension attached to them. Not only does culture stand as a core domain of this cooperation, but this policy field also has a particular impact on identity. Indeed cultural policies, due to their strong symbolic and intangible dimensions, allow to work on the representational and “meta-geographic” references of the territories, and thus can contribute to the identity building and institutional marketing of a specific territorial area, be it a Nation-State, a region or another territorial form (Thiesse 2001, Paasi 2009), in particular when culture is mobilised within cooperation or external relations policies (Perrin, 2012). Moreover, the implementation of cultural cooperation appears to be a learning process, through which renewed forms of governance processes can emerge, at cross-territorial level (Taylor 1995, Vanier 2006).
Finally, euroregional cultural cooperation raises broader issues relative to territorial cooperation, to cultural policies and to the European construction.

**Cross-border cultural policies: a first appraisal**

In terms of typology, we can distinguish three main dimensions in the mobilisation of arts and culture within euroregions. These dimensions are not exclusive and can combine in the same project or action. First, a “historic-heritage-dimension” refers to common historical and heritage cross-border cultural features, which can distinguish from the “national” ones of the central State (for instance in France in the regions of Basque Country, Catalonia, Savoy, Alsace and Lorraine, the Flemish North, County of Nice, etc): touring exhibitions and projects on these common heritage and history, promotion of regional languages and cultures that are shared on both sides of the border. Second, an “event-dimension” relates to cultural projects that participate to territorial marketing. The cross-border events can be diverse, with in particular festivals: cross-border Paminale festival in the euroregion of the Upper Rhine, dance festival in the Basque Eurocity Bayonne-San Sebastian, festival *Transphotographiques* on the French-Belgian border, collaboration between festivals in Girona and Perpignan on the French-Spanish border. Other types of events can be literary or artistic prizes, or occasional events: concerts, exhibitions, and other types of cultural operations that allow advocating and promoting the euroregional partnership. Third, a “networking-dimension”, which refers both to the constitution of professional and sectorial networks strictly speaking and, more generally, to the networking between authorities, institutions and audiences: official cultural declaration and conferences in the euroregion of the Upper Rhine; artistic residences and mobilities; structures and places such as the cross-border park Pamina-Rhine, the cross-border *École du spectateur* between France and Belgium, the Youth Orchestra of the Catalan countries or, also, cross-border cultural routes. Networking tools exist like cross-border passes for museums or libraries (Upper-Rhine museum pass for example), the digital platforms and web sites (site LEAD-Linked Euroregion Arts Development between Kent, Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Belgian regions), common cultural guides. There are also cross-border television programmes, such as those whom developed the channel France 3 since the 1980s in regions Alsace and Lorraine, Aquitaine and Poitou-Charentes, Brittany and Pays de Loire, Nord-Pas-de-Calais.
In terms of policy-referential – according to the definition of this concept by Pierre Muller, i.e. the values, norms and images that determine and direct the criteria, objectives and contents of public policy (Muller 2010, Demongeot & Zittoun 2010, Smith 2000) – euroregional cultural action is characterised by the centrality of the identity thematic. In cross border context, cultural policies often back the discursive strategies about an emergent territorial and institutional identity (Fátima Amante 2010). We find here a quite classical interaction between cultural, institutional and territorial features of the identity, from which most of the cultural policies proceed (Thiesse, 2001; Perrin, 2012). In this sense, cultural policies are linked to the organisational capacity-building of euroregions. At internal level, cultural schemes are expected to foster a “we-feeling” and to create a sense of belonging among the population of the euroregion, and so doing to bring them closer to rather technocratic constructions. At external level, participating to a euroregion can be an instrument of paradiplomacy for a territorial authority, and a way to reinforce its position in the European and international political arena, and culture can foster such a collective branding strategy. Many times, the cultural identity rhetoric is based on historic-heritage references. But as shown in the cases studies, more and more the cultural identity promoted can be related to the the excellence of some artistic and cultural industries and sectors from the euroregion, symbols of dynamism and creativity.

From a macro-social point of view, euroregional cultural policies illustrate broader evolutions: institutionalisation of territorial cooperation within EU regional policy and evolution of the role of cultural policies in a knowledge-and-creativity-based economy. For the programming period 2007-2013, territorial cooperation became a full objective of EU regional policy, whereas the previous INTERREG programmes, introduced in the 1990s, were additional devices that were developed at the margin of EU regional policy. This mainstreaming of territorial cooperation also meant an increase of dedicated funds. European Union also adopted, in 2006, a Regulation on a specific legal status: the European Grouping of territorial cooperation (EGCT), which allows territorial groupings and cross-border organisations to get structured into a single and common entity, and so doing to stabilise and reinforce the governance of cross-border cooperation. The Council of Europe has adopted an equivalent status in 2009: the Euregional Cooperation Grouping (ECG), which proceeds from the Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities.
At the same time, culture and cultural policies fall within the normative paradigm of the knowledge and smart economy, largely based on cognitive and intangible resources and on the notion of sustainable development, in which creative and cultural activities are considered fundamental resources. In this context, culture has progressively appeared to be a concrete asset for the development and the attractiveness of territories, and a factor of social cohesion, as shown for instance in the terms of the current EU development strategy “Europe 2020 for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (Council of the European Union 2011). These evolutions have impacted the content and the discourse attached to cross-border cultural policies.

**Presentation of the cases**

Eurorégion Pyrénées-Méditerranée was constituted in 2004 between the French regions of Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées and the Spanish autonomous communities of Aragon¹, Catalonia and Balearic Islands. Since the beginning, culture has been a mainstream domain of cooperation. The authorities supported euroregional cultural and artistic initiatives through a specific agenda that includes a Culture Portal, calls for projects, annual cultural forums. Culture was also one of the first attributions of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) that was formed in 2010 between Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées, Catalonia and Balearic Islands to reinforce the structure and governance of the euroregion.

Greater Region, which was created in 1995 following the “Saar-Lor-Lux” cooperation process that originated in the 1960s, was associated with Luxembourg to hold the title of European Capital of Culture (ECOC) in 2007. “Luxplus 2007”, which was the official name given to this cross-border European capital of Culture, was characterised by a political will to reinforce territorial cohesion and identity, and to give the Greater Region not only an economic reality but also a cultural one. In 2008, following this event, the members of the Greater Region set up an “Espace culturel Grande Région” in order to maintain the cross-border cultural dynamics that emerged during the ECOC.

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¹ In 2006 Aragon quitte the euroregion due to a territorial conflict with Catalonia.
In these cases, culture is mobilised to brand and differentiate a specific euroregional “label”, and there is an interaction between the event dimension of cultural policy and long-lasting cultural development strategies. The policies appear to focus on the economic impact of cultural activities, and on a cross-cutting approach to culture, in order to foster territorial marketing and attractiveness. At the same time, the questions of cultural diversity and of “the living together” appear to be important issues in cross-border context.

Moreover, these cases illustrate a certain evolution of the identity referential in cross-border context.

Discussion

In Eurorégion Pyrénées-Méditerranée, whereas in the 2000-2006 INTERREG programme many cross-border cultural projects dealt with historical, traditional cultures (Romanesque heritage in the Pyrenees, Catalan folk music and dance…), the historic-heritage features are less present in the projects supported by the euroregional schemes from 2006 to 2012, of which ¾ emergent artistic disciplines, innovative and even “techno-creative” actions that link digital technologies to creativity, sustainable development: projects in circus, street arts, contemporary puppetry and contemporary dance, Land Art, design and photography, network of the contemporary art museums and of the regional TV channels, etc. At the same time the orientation of cultural policy criteria towards innovation, creativity and diversity can also appear to be an instrumental evolution following the priorities of EU regional policy programmes, which remain the major financial resources of euroregion cooperation – including cultural cooperation.

Quite similarly, the Eurorégion Alpes-Méditerranée, created in 2007 at the French-Italian border, tends to prioritise a contemporary creative dynamism rather than a heritage rooted in common history. The cartoon industry is promoted as a creative sector of excellence, which is of particular interest to the Région Rhône-Alpes: collaboration between professionals and common euroregional representations at the International Market of the Cartoon Festival in Annecy, or at Cartoon Movies, the European Forum of cartoon co-production in Lyon. Other domains of interest for the euroregional cultural agenda are: the youth, performing arts and cultural events that can help promoting the euroregion.
In the Greater region, the fact that the ECOC was the first cross-border ECOC renewed in a way the corporate identity of the ECOC. Following this line, different ECOC since 2007 adopted an extended territorial map, like for instance Marseille-Provence in 2013, Mons in 2015. Luxplus 2007 also favoured young creators, new artistic expressions and targeted new audiences such as the youth or the migrants. Furthermore, the identity dimension was a core element of the Greater Region ECOC agenda, which was expected to reinforce a “Greater Region identity” through cultural and artistic events. Indeed this euroregion is the area in Europe where there is one of the highest rates of daily commuters, but studies and surveys showed that such cross-border people mobility does not mean that population interact. Many daily commuters cross the euroregion without being conscious of living in a euroregion. So the Greater Region lacks visibility and coherence, and cultural actions and schemes are expected to reinforce the euroregion internal and external projection, the ECOC year being the launching step of this agenda that is now implemented by the Espace culturel Grande Région. However, the results and appraisal of the ECOC year showed that the cultural identity promoted in the Greater Region cannot be limited to the sole promotion of a shared history or heritage that would be common to the populations and territories of the Greater Region. One interesting line in this euroregion that combines five regions, four States and three languages is the cultural diversity that it encompasses. More than 160 nationalities and 42% of foreigners live in Luxemburg. In this sense, a salient identity feature of this euroregion – and an operative line for the cross-border cultural policy – can be the project to achieve a laboratory for cultural diversity and multilinguism. But still such an agenda needs a certain support that has been available so far but that could be decreasing in an economic crisis context.

The observation of euroregional cultural policies underlines the issues and challenges of cultural globalisation. Indeed, the euroregional dynamics emphasises quite at the same time the identity dimension of cultural policies, the interactions between culture, identity and territory, and the increasing place of culture and cultural matters as major issues of the international relations. It also shows that artist and cultural professionals can be important actors to nourish the meta-geographic perceptions of territory and identity (Perrin, 2015). “Artistic work is strong enough not only to renew the perspectives of landscape perception but also imbue it with a strong capacity for political influence” (Amilhat-Szary 2012: 222).
However, euroregional cultural policy does not always show a “virtuous circle” between authorities, professionals and population. The scarcity of resources available for cross-border projects and its limited weight within the whole cultural policies’ budgets and systems, can lead to an “elitist trend” (Häkli 2004), in which only a few actors are informed on the cooperation schemes – sometimes directly by the authorities – and target a limited audience, which is all the more problematic since participation is an essential element of cultural policy. Like in any other cross-border policy field, cultural cooperation strategies can also prove to be “at odds with the interests of the immediate local border communities” (Perkmann & Sum 2002: 19), which underlines more the potential discrepancy between the discourse, the practice of cultural cooperation and the everyday life of the euroregions’ population. The actions developed so far can nevertheless be viewed as steps in the complex process of developing and institutionalising renewed forms of policies and governance, in emerging cross-territorial contexts.

Furthermore, the development of euroregions illustrates, on the one hand, a “return to territory” movement despite the crossing of borders, and on the other hand a dialectic between distinction/differentiation and dilution/integration – on identity, territorial and cultural levels –, which characterises the processes of globalisation (Fawn 2009). “Today we are living with discourses of globalization and hybridity which have paradoxically created both an illusion of a “borderless world” and a world in which borders have multiplied […] They are even folded into the identities of individual subjects” (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2010: 40).

Thus, euroregional cultural policies question the cultural and territorial dimensions of European construction, in which euroregions appear to be “socio-spatial” entities that emerge in a territorial, institutional, and even geopolitical “in-between”: between local and global, identity and diversity, convergence and differentiation. “Europe’s euregios indeed offer the sites for a potential re-negotiation and re-working of basic categories of political life normally tied exclusively to the nation-state […]. In this respect, […] border regions may be considered agents provocateurs par excellence of the early 21st century political imagination” (Kramsch & Mamadouh, 2003: 45). At a time when the reflections on a “border poetics” and on a “border art” are developing (Schimanski, & Wolfe 2010, Amilhat-Szary 2012), the governance of European cross-border cultural cooperation raise stimulating questions that can be addressed to other cross-border areas and organisations that present different forms and processes of governance.
Conclusion

With a certain renewal in the approach to cultural identity, the Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion and the Greater Region illustrate a “territorialised political exchange” (Négrier, 1997) between political and civil spheres, policymakers, stakeholders and audiences, which reveals the plasticity of the notions of identity ... and heritage. In the Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion we can see a certain influence of the political orientation - both local and supranational /European - on the projects outputs and contents and on the updating of the identity theme. The appraisal of the ECOC year 2007 in Greater Region rather shows a bottom up dynamics, where actors, stakeholders and the audience reconfigure the identity theme that was first advocated by public authorities.

In both cases, cultural identity is far from being a static concept. Nonetheless, these cases also underline the ever-present instrumental usage of culture...and its limitations, be it to change an economic reality into a cultural reality in the Greater region or to reinforce economic integration with cultural cooperation in Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion. Culture alone cannot respond to issues such as building a relevant transport system for the mobility of professionals and publics; or achieving a cross-border convergence of the rights of cultural workers.

Beyond the determinants and objectives, the analysis of euroregional cultural action also questions the policy processes. Indeed the creation and implementation of operational cultural schemes and structures at cross-border level introduce the question of cross-territoriality as a multi-level process of coordination and regulation of territorial complexity (Taylor 1995, Vanier 2006). This issue does not only refer to the cooperative articulation between the partners of the euroregion, but it also relates to the interactions between the euroregional organisation in itself and the other territorial authorities that act on the same territory without taking part in the euroregional partnership: for instance, articulation between regions and metropolis, or between the State territorial prerogatives and the actions of sub-state authorities. Cross-territoriality also relates to the inclusion of euroregions within the global territorial context. In any case, achieving a cross border interterritorial virtuous cycle can turn to be a challenge, particularly due to institutional discrepancies. In this context, cultural and identity matters are probably not the most simple to cope with.
References


