(RE)DEFINING THE EUROREGION CONCEPT

Eduardo Medeiros1

Abstract:

The INTERREG-A, the largest of the Community Initiatives, has been supporting the cross-border cooperation (CBC) in European Union (EU) territory, over the past 19 years, thus contributing to redraw a new political map of Europe, by reducing the barrier effect and reinforcing common development strategies. During this period, several new partnerships and institutions have been established, creating networks that connect a wider range of local and regional actors into the CBC process, on both sides of the borders. Some of these entities have gradually started to call themselves Euroregions, based on non-rigid criteria, even though, in some cases, they lack legal personality and operate on an informal basis. Moreover, it was recently approved by the European Commission (EC), the possibility to establish European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), with legal personality, in border areas, to overcome the obstacles to the CBC process. Therefore, in this article we propose a new CBC typology which looks at the concept of Euroregion in a geographical perspective, supported on different criteria and adapted to the present-day reality of the European border territories.

Keywords: Euroregion, Cross-Border Cooperation, INTERREG-A, EGTC.

1 Full Name: Eduardo José Rocha Medeiros, Centro de Estudos Geográficos da Universidade de Lisboa, Faculdade de Letras, Alameda da Universidade, 1600-214 Lisboa, Portugal – Tel: +351 21 7940218 / 21 7965469 - Fax: +351 21 7938690 – e mail: emedeiros@campus.ul.pt
1 - Introduction:

Since the set-up of the first Euroregion, along the German-Dutch border (Euregio) in 1958, more than 70 cross-border entities started to operate under this name, in Europe, until the present day. This was done in an accelerating process involving all the border areas of the EU, stimulated by the INTERREG-A Community Initiative, financial support. This initiative was converted into the third objective of structural funds (European Territorial Cooperation), since 2007, which not only aims to reinforce cooperation at cross-border level, but also at the transnational and interregional levels, respectively related with the previous INTERREG-B and C strands.

The overall aim of this article is to elaborate on the Euroregion concept, in an attempt fill a noticeable gap in the vast body of literature concerning the CBC process in Europe, since there are not many attempts to clarify this concept, even if the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), in its Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation (EC, 2000), tries to narrow the criteria, as much as possible, to frame the European Border Regions in a restricted group of Euroregions, characterized by stronger bounds and reduced barrier effect.

Nevertheless, the spectacular overall growth in the establishing of multi-level relational networks across the EU border areas, sometimes connecting more than two countries, as changed the picture of the European territory, paving the way for the Europe of the Regions, rather than the Europe of the Nations. As such, we think that there is an increasing need to clarify the Euroregion concept, in order to identify exactly which are the cross-border European regions where the CBC process is
strong enough to make them the new building blocks of a more balanced and harmonious European territory.

For that matter, we decided to build a CBC typology, where all the cross-border regions can be fit, and compared, based on several parameters, where the Euroregion is the one of the four types of cross-border regions in Europe which shows better results in all of these parameters. To better understand this typology, in the end of this article we will analyze eight sub-regions from two large and old European border areas (Portugal-Spain and Sweden-Norway) in order to identify possible Euroregions.

The reason for choosing the Iberian border area as a case study in this paper is justified by the fact that we have been studying the CBC process in this area over the last seven years, with a view to contribute to a better understanding of the territorial effects and impacts of the INTERREG-A in reducing the barrier effect in this border area, and also to increase its socioeconomic cohesion and territorial articulation. As such, we had the chance to get to know the area quite well, through several field trips, which, in turn, let to the establishment of wide network of important contacts, on both sides of the border, which include several local and regional entities, as well as local academics and INTERREG managing authorities.

In a similar way, in the last four years we engaged an in-depth study of the CBC process in Scandinavia. On the one hand, we decided to choose this area because we already had the chance to get to know the border area quite well (family reasons), and also because we would like to bring to the Iberian programme some CBC good
practices carried out in the Scandinavian programme, since the process of cooperation here is older and, as a consequence, should have a higher degree of maturity and better outputs in generating positive and effective territorial impacts.

**2 - The Euroregion concept:**

According to the AEBR Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation (EC, 2000), an Euroregion, in terms of its organization, can be: (i) an amalgamation of regional and local authorities from both sides of the national border, sometimes with a parliamentary assembly; (ii) a cross-border organisation with a permanent secretariat and experts and administrative staff; (iii) according to private law based on national associations or foundations from both sides of the border according to the respective public law; (iv) according to public law based on international treaties which also regulate the membership of regional authorities. The same document stresses that these associations, among other things, should develop a strategic-oriented CBC in a multi-level partnership (European, governmental, regional, local), in several development domains (infra-structure, economy, culture and sports, tourism and leisure, transports, environment, health, energy, communications, education, innovation and technology, etc.).

As noted above, there are a range of factors which support the auto-proclamation of new Euroregions along the European borders, making it difficult to distinguish the ones where the CBC is strong enough to act as a main driving factor of the regional structural changes and the socio-economic development of these areas.
Indeed, if we look at the list of the Euroregions (AEBR, 2008) and the date of their establishment, it is possible to see that only 19 existed before 1990 (pre-INTERREG-A), and most of them were located along the Netherland/Germany/Belgium borders and also in the borders that separate the Nordic countries. Since then, a growing number of these cross-border structures have been created together with other similar structures like the Working Communities, in a quick response to the favourable conditions provided by the INTERREG-A funds. Under this new scenario, in all internal and practically all external EU borders, regional and communal associations followed the model of a Euroregion or similar structure which emerged on both sides of the border or as cross-border structures, working with long-term objectives and strategies (EC, 2000).

In this regard, it is also interesting to see that 60 new Euroregions and three transnational committees were created in the ten new EU Eastern Member-States, (G. Tatzberger; F. Schindegger, 2004). Concerning this subject, these authors stress also that “Euroregions are a type of bottom-up structure built by cross-border regions and offer a favourable organisational framework for project preparation, but perhaps their main significance is that establishing a Euroregion signals the intention to engage in cooperation. In the enlargement area the “density” of this type of organisations is even higher than in the Western part of Europe. Unfortunately, the actual progress in cross-border developments and cooperation is not always keeping pace with the development of the organisational framework. (Actually, there are Euroregions on some border sections where there is no international border crossing point in the region)".
Some of these new Eastern European Euroregions may not be present in the map below (Fig. 1), yet it provides a clear look of the European borders where the presence of these CBC structures is stronger: Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Czech Republic, Austria, Poland and Slovakia. It is not without curiosity that we can ask why they are more concentrated in central Europe and not so much in the South. Is it only because the number of the borders is higher there?

Figure 1 - Euroregions vs Working Communities in EU - 2006

In some degree, the intensity of the Euroregions presence could be associated with the establishment of the four INTERREG-A generations, since this Community Initiative has been the driving motor of the CBC along the UE territory. But, is there
any logic behind this assumption? Well, if we look at figure 2, we can hardly detect such strong correlation. As a matter of fact, we can visualize more Euroregions in some INTERREG IV-A border regions (Romania-Bulgaria) than the ones that have been receiving funds since the first INTERREG-A generation (Portugal-Spain, Spain-France). Why is that so? Maybe the stability of the latter borders, over time, reinforced the barrier effect, whilst in “most part of the other parts of Europe were dominated by four Great Powers; Russia, Prussia/Germany, Habsburg/Austria and Ottoman Empire, fighting each other, changing their internal boundaries until finally split up or moved according to principles set up by the victors” (Lundén, 2004), and therefore are less affected from long periods of isolation.

Figure 2 - Four INTERREG-A generations in EU

![Figure 2 - Four INTERREG-A generations in EU](image)

Source: Author
In this respect, it is important to clarify the concept of barrier effect, since “borders and their adjacent regions constitute gateways and opportunities as well as barriers” (Anderson, 2006), and the pre-conditions to set up an Euroregion involves intensified economic, social, cultural, environmental and institutional cooperation, which can only take place when border barriers are somewhat eroded in all these domains, in the Euroregion area. As a matter of fact, the study of the spatial diffusion processes, associated with the barrier effect concept, has been deeply analysed over the last decades, in particularly by known geographers (see: Hagerstrand, 1967; Abler et al., 1972; Butun et al., 1990; L. Suárez-Villa et al., 1991). For instance, the work of Torsten Hägerstrand ‘Spatial Diffusion as an Innovation Process’, published originally in Sweden in 1953, was a precursor of various studies covering the diffusion of innovations in certain areas, particularly in the United States (Haggett, 2001).

However, when it comes to the concise definition of the barrier effect concept, we follow the idea put forward by Nijkamp et al (1990), when he argues that “the barrier may be seen as a particular type of obstacle which restricts or impedes the smooth transfer or free movement of a person or commodity from one place to another”. In the same vein, Batten et al. (1990), claims that the frontier separating two nations is one of the most pervasive of all barriers, and that some “cosmopolitan centres that serve as key nodes in the international economic system nowadays have much stronger links to one another that to their surrounding regions”, thus challenging the traditional principles of geographical contiguity.
Curiously, the existing literature concerning the concept of Euroregion goes against the idea of relating it with a cross-border European region with a territory development strategy. In fact, in most cases, an Euroregion is regarded as a CBC structure without a clear distinction from the so often called ‘Working Community’, for example, regarding their legal framework and institutional capacity. Apparently the AEBR view of an Euroregion has been strongly influential on many authors. For instance, (Otocan, 2010) sees an Euroregion as a transfrontier structure, which is an arrangement “for cooperation between units of local or regional government across the border in order to promote common interests and enhance the living standards of the border populations”. The same author stresses that these structures do no lead to the creation of new administrative regional structures with juridical status, and cannot act against national state interests. In a similar way, Houtum (2002), speaks of the Euregionalisation process as the “making of new institutions to stimulate cross-border co-operation” in an attempt to open up the borders, and not as a process to empower new projects of regionalization in the European territory.

In sharp contrast, Brenner (2000) uses the Euroregion concept in a geographical perspective, but not necessarily as a cross-border structure, i.e., it can exist inside the national borders of a given European country, and should be regarded as a ‘new sub-national institutional space’ that triggers and mobilizes local and regional stakeholders for renewed economic growth, “associated with territorially specific conditions of production, socioeconomic assets and institutional forms”. This prevalence of economic growth over socioeconomic cohesion is not uncommon in the strategic guidelines of some of the EU so-called ‘Euroregions’, since ultimately they strive to be competitive with other territories (Greta and Lewandowski, 2010).
In a different line, Perkmann (2003b) advocates the idea that “Euroregions have flourished because of their increasingly relevant role as implementation units for European regional policy in a context of multi-level governance. The same author elaborates on the several concepts related to the Euroregions, such as the cross-border regions, functional regions, and concludes that “given its wide usage by both actors and observers, the notion of ‘Euroregion’ is harder to define than the ‘Working Community’. Although the notion was originally employed for a very specific co-operation arrangement, it was later extended to a broader range of initiative”.

Indeed, this author makes an interesting attempt to define the concept of Euroregion, stating that it “can refer both to a territorial unit, made of the aggregate territories of the participating authorities, and to organisational entities, usually identified with the secretariat”, and can be defined as “CBC groupings that operate on a smaller geographical scale regardless of their precise organisational set-up or the nature of the participating actors”. It is interesting to see that the spatial dimension was included in the previous definition of Euroregion. However the connection with the prevailing AEBR ‘image’, associating Euroregions with CBC entities or structures, is still there. Finally, this definition does not make any differentiation between Euroregions and Working Communities. Such a vision supports our understanding that there should be a clear distinction between the ‘CBC entity’ which should be called ‘Working Community’, and the ‘cross-border region’ where it operates, which can only be considered an ‘Euroregion’ if certain criteria is fully archived (see proposed typology further ahead).
In truth, we support the idea that the Euroregions should be understood in a geographical perspective. In fact, the Euroregion word calls to mind the word ‘region’ which, in turn, comes from the Latin “regio”, whose etymology also relates to “regere” which means “to direct, rule” (on a given territory). As is often the case, regions are marked by a certain homogeneity and/or functional integration which give it a meaningful unity and distinguish it from surrounding areas (Goodall, 1987 Bailly and Beguin, 1998; De Blij and Muller, 2004; Knox and Marston, 2004). As such, prior to engage on a more concise definition of the concept of Euroregion, we can suggest the basic idea that an Euroregion is a cross-border region, crossing two or more European countries, with a common territorial development strategy and regional specificities.

3 - A new Cross-Border Cooperation typology:

To go hand in hand with the recent and rapid transformations concerning the establishments of new cross-border structures, which aim to solidify the CBC process and to pursue the harmonization of the administrative and institutional barriers, and also to clarify the Euroregion concept, as much as possible, we propose a CBC typology, where all the European Cross-Border Regions\(^2\) can be fitted, according to some parameters that support this typology (Fig. 3).

Taking a more analytical approach of the proposed CBC typology, we should start by saying that its ‘construction’ was based, of course, in our previous knowledge of the border regions (E. Medeiros, 2005), and in some other studies concerning the

\(^2\) According to M. Perkmann (2003) a Cross Border Region is a ‘bounded territorial unit composed of the territories of authorities participating in a CBC initiative’
border areas in Europe, from which we can outline a study prepared by the Committee of the Regions (EC, 2003) which divides the cross-border cooperation into four different types:

- Old cooperation models, based on traditional cooperation, accelerated with the EU support (NW of Europe);
- More recent cooperation models, associated with political changes and accession of several countries to the EU (Spain, Portugal and Greece);
- Cooperation models which are a direct result from EU support;
- Cooperation models which are a direct result from political changes and the accession or association with the EU (Eastern European countries).

Looking more closely to these four types of CBC models, we can highlight the importance of the ‘time’ variable (old - new) in the process of CBC. Apparently, the older the cooperation the stronger are the bounds between two border areas. In this

Figure 3 - Cross-Border Cooperation Typology

Source: Author
light, another interesting piece of literature that tries to clarify the CBC process in Europe (Perkmann, 2003), gives relevance to other three dimensions:

- The geographical scope: small-scale CBC initiatives can be distinguished from Working Communities that usually involve five or more regions;
- The co-operation intensity: referring to the strategic capacity gained by the cross-border body and its degree of autonomy vis-à-vis central state and other authorities;
- The type of actors: local (municipal) authorities can be distinguished from regional (‘meso-level’) authorities.

It is interesting to see how this author does not focus so much on the ‘time’ variable, but brings into discussion the ‘space variable’ (local - regional). Additionally, Gabbe (2005), mentions the same variable, and goes a bit further when he divides the CBC into two main types:

- National/Regional: essentially uses the government or other regional development structures. The CBC is based on recommendations and proposals, but not on binding decisions;
- Regional/Local: through Euroregion or similar structures, that work precisely with decision mechanisms which are binding to its members.

Finally, another interesting study concerning this issues, (André and Moreira, 2006), goes a bit further by analyzing the CBC individual interaction process, and divides it into four different types:

- Interactions which arise from natural neighbourly relations, which are produced in the past and have intensified in the present. These interactions originate mainly intangible flows or material flows with little economic significance;
- Interactions resulting from the unilateral use of opportunities of the market enlargement and where the existence of structural discontinuity in the barrier effect sharpens even more this situation. These interactions generate significant
economic investment and have a significant importance in the development of the region (local, but also on other scales);

- Interactions that arise from the establishment of a true culture of cooperation and assume the existence of a common strategy in order to obtain capital gains on both sides of the border. Correspond to bilateral interactions, with strong significance in integrated, harmonious and balanced local development in the border areas;

- Interactions that derive from a pseudo-border cooperation, resulting from different strategies of both sides of the border that originate an unbalanced and disconnected effect in the border areas. Often these interactions are mere by-products of a separate logic of development, with minimal effects on the borders.

As we said previously, the CBC typology that we propose is based in our own personal experience and on some of the previous mentioned author’s ideas. Seen from this standpoint, we decided to divide it in four CBC sub-models, which correspond directly with a certain type of CBC region:

3.1 - Genuine CBC sub-model:

In this sub-model, the barrier effect in all its dimensions should be minimal, i.e. there should be a strong institutional cooperation coordinated by an entity with extensive and binding competences and legal personality (like an EGTC), with a common strategic-oriented cooperation for the regional development of the border area. Also, the decision making process has to be implemented in a multi-level approach, both horizontally and vertically.

In this type of CBC region, the cross-border flows are strong, providing positive socio-economic effects on both sides of the border. In addition, social equipments (health, education, sports, etc) are shared by the population living along the border, and there is a solid cooperation in the technological and economic domains (universities, companies). On the other hand, the civil society, technological centres
and the local actors have a strong and permanent participation in the CBC process. At the same time, the territorial articulation across the border area should be strong, both on the morphological (infra-structures) and on the relational dimension (ex: establishment of cross-border urban and enterprises networks).

This is an ideal CBC sub-model, which can only exist in regions with a long CBC tradition, a strong cultural identity and a clear demarcation from the surrounding areas. Only then, we can talk about the presence of an European.

3.2 - Structural CBC sub-model:

In this second sub-model of CBC we can find structural CBC regions, where the permeability of border remains high in terms of both economic flows and accessibilities. However the administrative and institutional obstacles are still strong, even if there are CBC structures working with a permanent secretariat and administrative staff. In addition, the sharing of social equipments along the border is far from a desirable situation.

This will be a kind of CBC sub-model which may fall most of the so-called Euroregions at the present moment, and many other CBC structures that started the CBC process at the beginning of the INTERREG-A Community Initiative, but where the crystallization of their institutional and administrative autonomy is still in an embryonic phase. Yet, some of these Structural CBC regions are not that far from becoming Euroregions, while others are closer to the third CBC sub-model, which will be addressed below.

3.3 - Surging CBC sub-model:
In the third sub-model, we can fit most of the CBC regions characterized by the absence of a CBC tradition and a low level of institutional CBC. In fact, even if there is a permanent CBC structure and administrative staff it will have little effect on regional and local development and no binding decision capacity.

In this **Surging CBC regions** the positive effects of the CBC only recently began to take place, and the CBC investments are, most of the times, a consequence of EU regional policy funds (INTERREG-A), and not from the genuine intention to stimulate the cooperation among the regional and local actors.

In this type of regions the regional players outweigh the local ones, most often in bilateral partnerships. However, they are not very concerned about the continuity of their actions in time and space. This is a phase that many CBC regions have to go through at the beginning of the CBC process, and is important to establish the first CBC contacts over the border, and to reduce gradually the barrier effect in all its dimensions, in order to establish solid foundations to a stronger CBC process in the future, by mobilizing the local and regional communities to this cause.

**3.4 - Pseudo CBC sub-model:**

Finally, in this CBC sub-model, one can say that it is the polar opposite of the first presented sub-model, because here, the CBC process is very week, and the barrier effect is very strong in all of its dimensions. As a matter of fact, in this sub-model, the local and regional authorities do not show a real desire to establish a genuine process of cooperation in order to jointly develop the border area. Thus, this logic of separate development has very limited impact in the territory articulation of the border area.
In such regions there is not a single supra-national entity or cabinet to promote, encourage and coordinate the CBC between both sides of the border, and it is not possible to identify any common strategy that brings local and regional participation in the CBC process, making it a quite residual and recent one.

Fortunately, we think that in the EU territory it can be difficult to find such Week CBC regions nowadays, mainly because of the INTERREG-A impacts, that have been helping the EU border regions to overcome some of its most problematic and persisting barriers, since 1990.

4 - Empirical examples:

4.1 - The Portuguese-Spanish border region (INTERREG-A NUTS III):

In the so called Raia Ibérica (Portuguese-Spanish border region), there is only one sub-region that is designated as an Euroregion for a long time, joining the NUTS II of Norte (Portugal) and Galicia (Spain). This area falls mostly within the sub-region 1 (SR1) in a criteria that divides the Raia Ibérica into five CBC sub-regions (Fig. 4). In fact, nowadays it is difficult to read any study which analyses the Norte-Galicia region which does not mention the word ‘Euroregion’ several times. To a certain degree, this means that this concept was very well accepted by the local academic and political community, and nobody tries to even dispute that idea.

To prove otherwise, or not, the following step was to fit the so-called Euroregion Norte-Galicia (SR1) and the other four Raia Ibérica’s sub-regions in our CBC typology, to provide a more meaningful picture of their position in all its parameters.
and, at the same time, to see how close they are from the Genuine CBC sub-model, associated with the Euroregions (Fig. 5).

Figure 4 - Border sub-regions between Portugal and Spain

![Map showing border sub-regions between Portugal and Spain]

Source: Author

Figure 5 - CBC typology parameters – Portugal-Spain - 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of partnership</th>
<th>CBC Strategy</th>
<th>CBC Intensity</th>
<th>CBC in time</th>
<th>Territorial Articulation</th>
<th>Type of actors</th>
<th>Regional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Medeiros, 2009) - adapted
Accordingly, an overall reading of figure 5, confirms that the SR1 (Norte-Galicia) is the one that shows closer proximity of our Euroregion CBC sub-model, since it started to unlock the CBC potentials much sooner that the other Portuguese-Spanish border sub-regions, and also reveals a more solid CBC strategy and a wider range of local agents in the bulk of the CBC efforts, promoting partnerships as a key element to the reduction of the barrier effect in this border area. On closer inspection, however, we think that, at the present moment, this sub-region should not be called and Euroregion, since it still requires significant improvements in “its accessibility (public transportations), the sharing of social and cultural equipments and infrastructures, the penetration of the Portuguese companies in Galicia territory, and the presence of a CBC cabinet with administrative and juridical capacity over the territory” (Medeiros, 2009).

With regard to the rest of the border sub-regions located in Raia Ibérica, it seems clear that they all fit somewhere between the surging and the structural CBC proposed sub-models. Yet, if we narrow such a vision to a more precise territorial scale, one can detect two other axes where the CBC has intensified in the last 16 years, and that can be included in the Structural CBC model: Évora-Mérida axis and Portimão-Huelva axis (Fig. 6), that will join the Minho-Galicia axis as the areas where the CBC is more intense along the Raia Ibérica territory. This picture also shows a positive correlation between the location of a stronger CB urban network and the CBC intensity, which justifies the investment in the reinforcement of the connexion and complementarity of these networks. For this matter it is important to establish a more efficient cross-border public transportation network (road and rail - including high speed connections).
4.2 - The Swedish-Norwegian border region (INTERREG-A NUTS III):

In the case of the Swedish-Norwegian border region\(^3\) (SNBR), which we divided into three CBC sub-regions (Fig. 7), it is possible to locate two so-called Euroregion-type structures, according to an AEBR study (EC, 2000). The first one, created in 1978, is the ARKO Cooperation, located in the south part of the SR7 (Inner Scandinavia). The latter, is called Gränskomittén (Østfold, Bohuslän/Dalsland), and is situated in the SR8 (Borderless Co-operation).

Then again, in order to realize if these two so-called Scandinavian-type Euroregions show a clear indication of permanent and strong enough CBC bounds to be called as such, we used a similar methodology of the previous analyzed border region.

---

\(^3\) This border doesn’t match exactly the INTERREG-A Swedish-Norwegian intervention area. Nevertheless, for simplicity sake, we use the all the area of the border NUTS III in the Swedish side of the border (Dalarna and Västra Götalands).
(Portugal-Spain), by fitting them in all the parameters that support our CBC typology (Fig. 8).

Figure 7 - Border sub-regions between Sweden and Norway

![Map showing border sub-regions between Sweden and Norway]

Source: Author

Figure 8 - CBC typology parameters – Sweden-Norway - 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occasional</th>
<th>CBC Strategy</th>
<th>Continued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral</td>
<td>Type of partnership</td>
<td>Several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>CBC Intensity</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent</td>
<td>CBC in time</td>
<td>Old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Territorial Articulation</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Type of actors</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Medeiros, 2009b) - adapted
In this light, one can conclude that the Gränskomittén located in the SR8 (Borderless Co-operation) is the entity that shows a closer proximity to the criteria which supports our proposed Euroregion concept. Curiously, or not, this term is not often used in the reports and strategic plans of this CBC entity. All in all, it seems that the use of this ‘term’ is not common in this border area, and the same applies to the ARKO Cooperation area, which also shows, in most of our CBC model parameters, some proximity to an effective Euroregion.

Nevertheless, and according to a deeper analysis already carried out, in 2006 none of the studied cross-border sub-regions fit in the Genuine CBC sub-model. Yet, in our point of view, all the area covered by the ARKO and the Gränskomittén associations show strong bounds to this sub-model in many dimensions, making them good candidates to future Euroregions. To reach this goal, it is however necessary to attenuate some persistent barriers: (i) juridical – administrative differences (regulations, taxes, customs, etc); (ii) the insignificant share of social equipments on both sides of the border; (iii) the absence of a clear cross-border strategy in the joint management of protected landscapes located along the border (Medeiros, 2009b).

In the rest of the studied territory, (SR6 - Nordic Green Belt), the absence of an articulated urban structure, associated with low population densities, is a major obstacle to the process of CBC, and this is why we think it fits better in the Surging CBC model (Fig. 9), even if some parts are getting closer to the Structural one. Nevertheless, this situation does not prevent that dynamic entities, located primarily in major urban agglomerations, engage valid CBC projects in order to establish better connections on both sides of the border, and exploring their natural resources,
in areas such as tourism, traditions and culture. However, if the degree of relational proximity has increased substantially in the last decade, with regard to physical proximity the improvement resulting from the reactivation of the link Trondheim - Östersund by train is far from adequate for the needs of border crossings. Therefore, it is also important to invest in better road crossings, in order to capitalize the presence of the international airport of Trondheim, which is used by residents living in the Swedish side of the border (Medeiros, 2009b).

Figure 9 - More intense CBC axes in Swe-Nor border region - 2006

Source: (Medeiros, 2009b) - adapted

5 - The EGTC and Euroregions

One idea put forward in both our empirical examples, is that the institutional and administrative barrier is still the biggest constrain to the CBC process, thus hampering the constitution of Euroregions along the European border areas. Having this in mind, the European Commission proposed the “creation of cooperative
groupings in Community territory, invested with legal personality, called European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation” with the purpose of carrying out actions of territorial cooperation (EC, 2007). Including in these actions are, of course, the implementation of CBC programmes or projects.

Seen from this standpoint, and taking on consideration that the EGTC “allows a grouping or bodies from different Member States without the need to sign prior international accords ratified by nation parliaments” (EC, 2007), we think that the constitution of such entities in areas which already show a strong CBC intensity in many domains, can became a cornerstone to the edification of an Euroregion, since “over the last years it has become more and more clear that a legal framework is needed to structure” the CBC “and to enhance its positive results” (MOT, 2007).

Curiously, in spite of the longer tradition in the Swedish-Norwegian CBC, when compared with the Portuguese-Spanish one, as far as we know, there is only one ongoing project to set-up an EGTC in the ARKO Cooperation area. On the contrary, in Raia Ibérica, there are already three of these groupings functioning (Fig. 10), all of them located in the north part of this border region. The first one (EGTC Norte-Galicia) was created in 22-09-08, and has the supreme goal to implement the existing regional strategic plan. The second one (Duero-Douro), located also in the eastern part of the previous mentioned EGTC, enters in the unpopulated area of the north-eastern part of the border and aims to develop it, both in the economic domain and in the social one, in other to counteract the “the virtual absence of inter-local and inter-regional flows and the lack of tradition in these relations” (Trigal, 2002).

The last EGTC (ZASNET), was recently created and covers almost the same territory as the previous one, and has also a wide range of development goals.

Figure 10 - EGTC and Euroregions in Raia Ibérica - 2010

There are also some ongoing projects to implement two AECT’s in the Alentejo-Extremadura border sub-region, in order to improve the cross-border relations in the area. Nevertheless, it seems that the southern part of the Iberian border is embarking on another kind of CBC strategy, involving the regional entities in the creation of two Euroregions. The first, called EUROACE, created in 21-09-09, involves the Alentejo, the Centro (Portugal) and the Extremadura (Spain) NUTS III (the first Euroregion in Europe involving tree distinct regions), and aims to foster transfrontier and interregional cooperation between the three regions, and to promote the socioeconomic development of the area, as well as improving the living condition of its citizens.
At first glance, the first draft of the EUROACE strategic plan, discussed in Évora in 13-07-10, revealed an ambitious and somewhat unrealistic intention to cover all areas of territorial development, even thought the two Portuguese regions involved (Alentejo and Centro) lack full legal capacity to make strategic decisions on the international policy domain, unlike the autonomic Spanish region of Extremadura. Further south, a similar structure, named EUROAAA (Alentejo, Algarve and Andalicia), was established in 08-06-10, with similar objectives: (i) promotion of competitiveness and employment; (ii) environment, heritage and natural environment; (iii) accessibility and territorial organization; (iv) promotion of cooperation and economic and social integration.

It seems that this recent ‘Euroregionalization’ trends in the Iberia Peninsula requires a very close monitoring and evaluation, since there are many interesting questions that need to be answered. For instance: (i) how will these Euroregions cope with the fact that they have overlapping territories; (ii) how will the new smaller EGTC’s work together with the large Euroregions?; (iii) how will the regional level react with the increasing territorial competences of this new entities? This last question might seem ridiculous. Yet, at the moment, the president of Castilla y Léon doesn’t want to collaborate with the Douero-Douro AEGT, which produced a quite interesting action plan to transform a highly depopulated area into an attractive international touristic brand. Is it because this Euroregion is bypassing a superior level of government? It is still soon to answer all this questions, but we will follow closely these developments. In the meantime, it should be emphasised that the positive results expected with the set-up of such entities in border areas may only be visible in a medium/long term, because “even when two neighbouring municipalities
separated by a state boundary want to and can legally co-operate, they often find that their legal competences differ so much that other hierarchy levels must be involved, for example the case in relations between Estonia and Latvia” (Lundén, 2004).

Nevertheless, we think that the implementation of an EGTC could end up in a positive and useful ‘experience’, not only in reducing the institutional and administrative barrier effect along the European borders, but also in a “effective implementation of cross-border activities such as common transport, sustainable development, regional promotion or environmental protection” (MOT, 2007).

6 - Conclusion

At the present moment there are more than 70 CBC entities which call themselves Euroregions, sometimes located in border areas without a high permeability level. Does this make any sense? Well, if we take on account the definition of the word ‘region’ an Euroregion should be an area with distinct characteristics from the surrounding area, which crosses one or more European borders, which differs from the AEBR concept of an Euroregion as a certain ‘type of CBC organization’ and not so much as a ‘type of CBC region’.

However, in this article we propose a different approach to the Euroregion concept, viewed from a geographic standpoint, and as the one of the four possible types of CBC regions in the European territory, where the barrier effect no longer hampers the CBC fluxes and the socioeconomic integration of the border area. In addition, the Euroregions should provide a clear strategic vision for its territory, which includes (i) legal personality - preferably with an EGTC type of structure -, (ii) the
sharing of social infra-structures, (iii) a strong participation of the local community concerning the CBC issues, (iv) high cooperation between universities or other kind of investigation entities, (v) reinforced urban and enterprises networks. This, in turn, could make the Euroregions important tools to achieve the goal of the territorial cohesion and a more balanced and harmonious European territory.

Further away, we analysed eight CBC European sub-regions, five of them located in Portuguese-Spanish border, and the rest in the Swedish-Norwegian border area, and concluded that the three so-called Euroregions present in this two old European border areas (Norte-Galicia; ARKO; Gränskomittén) show a high degree of CBC in most of parameters that support our typology. Nevertheless, in all of them there are still some steps to overcome the persistent administrative and institutional barriers, to stimulate the common use of social infrastructures and the establishment of a more efficient cross-border public transportation system. For that reason, we will try to follow, with enormous curiosity, the results of the already working EGTCs in Norte-Galicia border area, and the two recently established Euroregions in the south of the Portuguese-Spanish border area, in other to see if they give back the expected added-value to its CBC governance. If the answer is positive, then it will prove that the set-up of this kind of cross-border structures can be a major step forward for the constitution of an effective Euroregion.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank two anonym reviewers for their valuable comments on an earlier version of the article.

**7 - References:**


