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# On the Territoriality of Cross-Border Cooperation: “Institutional Mapping” in a Multi-Level Context

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**ABSTRACT** *Territoriality is mostly discussed as the political competence to exert control on a certain space, in particular with regard to the nation state. Globalization and European Integration have initiated some debate on this understanding, but cross-border cooperation has rarely been linked to this debate. In these areas enormous political changes have been seen during the recent years. Still, the territorial dimension cannot be addressed, as territoriality as known from nation states is challenging politics. However, the territorial implications are manifold and are increasing throughout Europe. Against this backdrop is conceptual reflection. This paper starts with a brief overview of discussions and the empirical implementation of the territoriality debate. Based on this, the paper attempts to catch up with the political changes – the reflection of cross-border territorialities in a two-fold way. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to this field.*

*First, we propose a methodological approach to study the essential aspects. We study from a conceptual point of view, the dimensions of territoriality in cross-border contexts. These are explored as well as the political-judicial background of cross-border cooperation. Based on this, a C-B-IM-tool (Cross-Border Institutional Mapping) has been introduced, involving three steps: (a) (a1) multi-level mapping of cross-border institutions, (b) (a2) mapping of policy arenas and (c) (a3) mapping of the political topography in the sense of going beyond formalized and codified governance patterns. Secondly, with the example of the Greater Region around Luxembourg, the empirical and conceptual findings on cross-border territoriality are illustrated. We can state an establishing cross-border territoriality that does not replace domestic, state-centric territorialities but that inserts new and complex elements of a multi-level territoriality system.*

## 1. Introduction

By definition, cross-border regions do not really have their “own” territory: They gather different territories that are separated by national borders, which have been—especially

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in Europe—the dominant political structures during the last centuries. Cross-border cooperation has certainly increased immensely during recent years; however, territoriality in the sense of a formal regulative authority in a certain area can rarely be found. Nevertheless, as soon as cross-border cooperation is intensified and institutionalized, many problems occur that are linked to the role of the cross-border territories “in the making”:

- Territorial scope: in which territory does the cross-border cooperation work? How do we define the “external borders” of the cross-border cooperation?
- Territorial mandate: What does the cross-border cooperation intend to do within the given perimeter and based on what kind of political legitimation? Is it more of a single-issue cooperation (e.g. transport project) or is it a more general perspective?
- Territorial organization: Which territorial authorities, from which sides of the borders and from which level are included, and what role do they play?

Before addressing these—very politically sensible—questions from a more applied perspective, we approach the field by exploring the concept of territoriality, as well as by reflecting on the current general dynamics of cross-border cooperation. To date, cross-border cooperation perimeters are seldom discussed, and the perimeters considered are mostly summed up from the territories of the institutions involved from all sides of the borders. Since current dynamics in cross-border cooperation are strong and the subjects addressed are increasing, the territoriality of cross-border cooperation is of growing interest.

The conceptual aim of this article is, therefore, to contribute to a sound understanding of territoriality, with regard to the spatial dimension of cross-border governance. Moreover, it aims at providing reflections on the empirical operationalization of territoriality: Based on an empirical case study—focusing on cross-border cooperation in the framework of the “Greater Region Summit”<sup>1</sup>—we develop a tool for cross-border institutional mapping (C-B-IM) that encompasses three steps: (1) multi-level mapping of the *cross-border institution*, (2) mapping of the *policy arena* and (3) mapping of the *political topography* in the sense of going beyond formalized and codified governance patterns.

## 2. Conceptual Background

### 2.1 Territory and Territoriality

Traditionally, the concept of territoriality means that political control and legitimacy are linked to the clearly defined physical areas of nation states; these spatial entities are reciprocally exclusive and separated by borders (Knippenberg & Mamadouh, 2001). From a juridical and more technical perspective, national borders are the most important “legal lines separating different jurisdictions” (Anderson & Liam, 1999, p. 594). From a more normative-critical perspective, territoriality is seen as a political “strategy” that controls a given space and its inhabitants in a somewhat authoritarian way (Anderson & Liam, 1999, p. 598). However, the understanding of territoriality as a central point of national authority has been questioned over the last few years: The experience of a globalized economy, of increasing international migration and of environmental threats has questioned the dominance of *national* “containers”: The national containers started to “leak” in economic, social, and cultural dimensions (Taylor, 1994, 1995; Paasi, 2004), and

relevant changes and challenges cannot always be addressed in an effective way by national politics.

Moreover, the seemingly *fixed link* between the physical territory and the political sovereignty “container” was questioned for at least four reasons (Ruggie, 1993; Mamadouh, 2001):

First, not all kinds of regulations have a clear territorial dimension, of which nomadic property is a very obvious example. Nevertheless, from a juridical point of view, territoriality remains a crucial principle of Western legislation and democratic organization.

Secondly, the territorial dimension of sovereign regulations can be regarded as “flexible”. This has been much discussed with regard to the European Union, which has, for example, different territorial foci for the monetary union and for the common market. In this context, the notion of variable geography (Goldsmith, 2003) has been coined; with regard to the spatial planning policy, this perspective has recently developed further with regard to “soft spaces” (see Faludi, 2010; Haughton *et al.*, 2010). From a formal juridical point of view, the organization of sovereignty may still be a non-ambiguous aspect. From a political and practical point of view, sovereignty can be considered—in practice—as “negotiated de facto, and hence dispersed, multiplied, and shared among several actors, including states, sub-national governments and supra-national institutions” (Jerneck, 2000, p. 39). This aspect is one of the most sensitive aspects of democratic legitimation in the framework of Europeanization processes.

Third, territorial regulations do not have to be exclusive. Again, the European Union is an instructive example, since its territory can be regarded as a “secondary territory, an extrapolation of the pooling together of the state territories” that is attached to a certain national sovereignty (Jerneck, 2000; Mamadouh, 2001, p. 425). The territorial gathering processes, as well as the political power of different nation states and political levels have inspired much of the research on multi-level governance: In general terms, multi-level governance studies have “nested governments at several territorial tiers” (Hooghe & Marks, 2003, p. 234) and pay particular attention to the power relations, the formation of coalitions and bypassing strategies. From the beginning, research on multi-level governance has had a clear territorial focus: The founding works have been empirically focused on European regional policy. Moreover, this line of debate argues—as the citation above illustrates—with *territorial* tiers, that are conceived more or less synonym to political levels, or scales. This is why this perspective has been criticized as being essentialist (Gualini, 2006, p. 885): Though the predominance of national territoriality is questioned, the coverage of political mandates for a given territory is assumed, even if in a multi-layered context.

Fourth, the question of “de-territorialisation” has been evoked:

This concept queries the territorial dimension of sovereignty as such. Explicitly with regard to cross-border cooperation, Blatter (2004) postulated that there is a shift away from a territorial to a purely functional organization, acting without a clear territorial focus, mandate or linear limitations. Other authors argue that territoriality has become more complex but not less important (see Forsberg, 1996; Jerneck, 2000; Vollaard, 2009).

The concept of re-territorialization is very much linked to the notion of re-scaling: This line of debate postulates that there is no fixed link between the institutionalized territory of a formally sovereign actor (state, region, municipality) and its political focus and ambition. For example, economically successful metropolitan regions may bypass nation-state objectives in the arena of a globalized economy (see Cochrane *et al.*, 1996;

Brenner, 1999; Jessop, 2005). The same notion of “rescaling” has been used to conceptualize the emergence of new governance patterns at the regional level, e.g. in the so called Euro-regions (Perkmann, 2007a, 2007b). Whatever the empirical focus of studies on re-territorialization or re-scaling is, these concepts are helpful to overcome territorial traps (Agnew, 1994) that take dominantly institutionalized political levels and their official territorial mandate as the crucial explanation for power relations.

In the following, the notion of territoriality is used in the broader sense, not only focusing on sovereignty as formally legitimized control and authority over a certain space. Instead, the notion of territoriality asks to what extent and in what way territories are involved in the cross-border cooperation and—vice versa—to what extent the organization of the cross-border cooperation can be regarded as territorial.

## *2.2 Territoriality and Cross-Border Cooperation*

Over the last few decades, regional cross-border cooperation in Europe has led to the emergence of manifold forms of interregional or intermunicipal institutional frameworks and operational bodies (e.g. Euregios, Euro-Districts; see Comte & Levrat, 2006; Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (M.O.T), 2006 or Metroborder, 2010). The scholarly work accompanying this dynamic is vast, but rarely addresses territoriality issues. Cross-border studies have focused on the liberalization of borders and the increasing interaction due to globalization. The changing character of borders has been intensively described, scrutinizing the selective filter function (with regard to particular categories of goods, persons, finance and services). Conceptually, both political geography and political science analyses have almost exclusively focused on organizational and governance issues, including cooperation barriers, by mostly using actor-centred perspectives (e.g. institutional approaches, regime theory, network and policy analyses; see Perkmann, 2003, 2007a; Blatter, 2004; Paasi, 2005; Newman, 2006). Even when applying an explicit multi-level perspective and despite the so called spatial turn in political science, territorial aspects have been rarely addressed.

This may also be due to the fact that the existing cross-border cooperation does not show territoriality in the classical understanding that is much inspired by the nation-state perspective:

The territorial dimension of cross-border cooperation often has an almost arbitrary background—it is the secondary, pooled territory of the respective domestic institutions, as introduced above with regard to the European Union.

Still, cross-border cooperation rarely has a clearly defined “hard” political mandate: Often, the control of a project or programme budget is part of the field of responsibility, but mostly limited in time. Formally, all policies remain the responsibility of domestic institutions on both sides of the borders. It would be an exaggeration to consider cross-border cooperation as having unclear political mandates, with an arbitrary territorial focus. However, it is true that political mandates are not organized in a clear territorial way, as it is the case of the classical nation states.

Considering the informal influence of cross-border cooperation, the emergence of de-territorialization or variable geographies could be postulated. Indeed, as long as political mandates for cross-border cooperation remain soft and somehow abstract, political efforts to establish clear territoriality can hardly be expected and a variable territorial scope may be just logical.

This situation, however, may turn out to be an intermediary stage: There is a clear trend towards more effective territorialities, since political mandates will be more clearly defined: So far, though diverse forms of cross-border co-operation have created new boundaries by delimiting relevant border regions, sovereign political competence has rarely been transmitted to these new regionalizations. Most recently, however, a new European instrument, EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation), has been developed—originally in order to handle EU financial support in an easier way across borders (§11, European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2006). However, more generally, it allows competences held by (sub)national authorities to be transmitted to a cross-border institutional structure (Article 7, regulation no 1082/2006). These developments put cross-border territoriality on the agenda, since cross-border perimeters are likely to become much more important.

If one agrees that sovereignty, in the context of Europeanization, is increasingly subject to political negotiations, territoriality should not only be operationalized as a two-dimensional geometry that considers changes in territoriality as a zero-sum-game—in the sense that if one institution gains territoriality, the other institution loses it to the same extent (see Anderson & Liam, 1999, p. 598). Instead, territoriality in a European multi-level governance system is more complex and cannot reduce territoriality to one level. This perspective does not intend to neglect the problems with regard to democratic legitimacy and efficiency when sovereignty is seen as subject to political multi-level bargaining.

The debate on territoriality has been much influenced by the “ideal” nation state being large, non-federal, and having its capital far away from its borders, like France or Spain. In these cases, it may be true that “borders between the states are defined between the national authorities, not between those who experience them in their everyday life” (Jauhiainen, 2002, p. 159). Nation states are largely considered to be anxious about losing territorial control at the fringes of their territory, and counter-strategies are frequently being mentioned (see Anderson & Liam, 1999). However, for example, particularly with regard to small states like the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg or with regard to the relatively powerful federal states like the German Länder, the situation is not as clear as that. The reflection on cross-border territoriality has to be careful not to take a bias against national politics. Obviously, nation states tend to worry about their say at the fringes of their territory—but this constellation cannot be considered as the default explanation.

### *2.3 Institutional Mapping as a method*

The paper argues with empirical findings from a case study region, the cross-border cooperation area around Luxembourg called the “Greater Region”, bringing together actors from four countries, mostly from the regional level (for details see Figure 2 in the following chapter, for the historical background see Schulz, 2009; Wittenbrock, 2010).

This case study research has been embedded into the research project METROBORDER, funded by the EU programme ESPON (Metroborder, 2010). In this context, several metropolitan cross-border regions in Europe were analysed, among them, two case study regions which were scrutinized more in depth—the Greater Region and the Upper Rhine (the latter comprising Basel, Strasbourg, and Karlsruhe). With regard to governance issues, the main methodology was a two-round Delphi study aimed at revealing the political strategic options in the study region. In both case study regions, about 300

experts in public institutions on all levels, as well as business associations, were addressed. This survey was supplemented by around 30 expert interviews in both regions.

These enquiries have been based on, and accompanied by, “institutional mappings” aimed at sharpening the understanding of the territoriality in this particular cross-border context.

In simple terms, the objective of institutional mapping is a “visual representation of the different groups and organizations within a community and their relationships and importance for decision-making” (Rietbergen-McCracke & Narayan-Parker, 1998, p. 273).

This instrument is used in various disciplines (political sciences, sociology, marketing, etc.). The essential aim of “mapping” is to visualize and—by doing so—to reduce complexity and to simplify things to a certain extent, in institutional and geographical terms (see Aligica, 2006). Political scientists frequently *map* the institutional architecture of political contexts and at the time, geographers—while *mapping* a territory—often included the visualization of its institutional dimension. However, both disciplinary perspectives tend to underestimate the challenges of the institutional mapping, since the political perspective seldom considers the spatial dimension while mapping institutions. At the same time, the territorial perspective on institutional settings takes the risk of sticking to formal boundaries, to codified issues and overlooks the governance context in a larger sense. In the following, we aim to bring together both disciplinary perspectives in a complementary way.

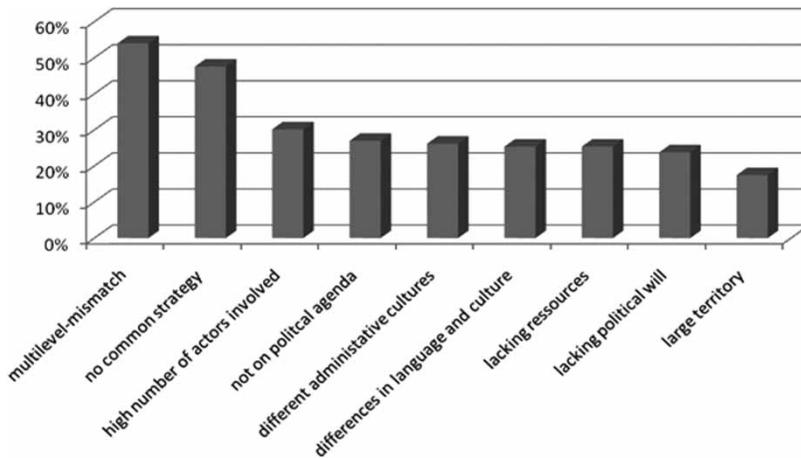
The diversity of tools and contexts is enormous and cannot be discussed in depth in this article. However, some basic elements can be identified that have to be considered in all approaches, using institutional mapping (see Aligica, 2006).

First, the *action arena* must be identified. What kind of subject, policy, or problem is the study about? What is considered as the context that will be taken into account as a potential explanation? In our case study, we focus on the political agenda of the Summit of the Greater Region, the formalized gathering of regional and state executives (see below). Neglecting other forms of institutionalizations (City networks, Euregio etc.) can be justified by the overmatching political dynamics in recent years. Still, the number of subjects and policies is enormous. For this paper, we will focus on just two policies, and we will base this selection on the outcome of our Delphi study, which shows two striking aspects when asking for the two most important barriers in cooperating across borders: The experts consider the “multi-level mismatch” to be the most important barrier. This refers to the fact that administrative or political competencies for certain matters are not assigned to equivalent levels on either side of the border(s). Further findings from the Metroborder project show that in other cross-border cooperation spaces, this problem is also one of the most pressing ones.

The experts consider the large cooperation space of the Greater Region to be the least important barrier. This result was surprising, since the size of the Greater Region cooperation space is by far larger than almost any other cooperation zone. This aspect is frequently addressed in media reporting, scientific publications, and in the expert interviews—but still this aspect was not considered as a barrier by the experts addressed in the Delphi study.

In the Upper Rhine, as well as in several further cross-border cooperation, the question of the perimeter is a crucial and sensible one also, and the multi-level-mismatches are also of broad relevance (Figure 1). The article will, therefore, concentrate on these two issues.

Secondly, the distinction between *institutions* and *actors* has to be made. Sociological studies on a micro-level will mostly be based on individual actors, whereas political ques-



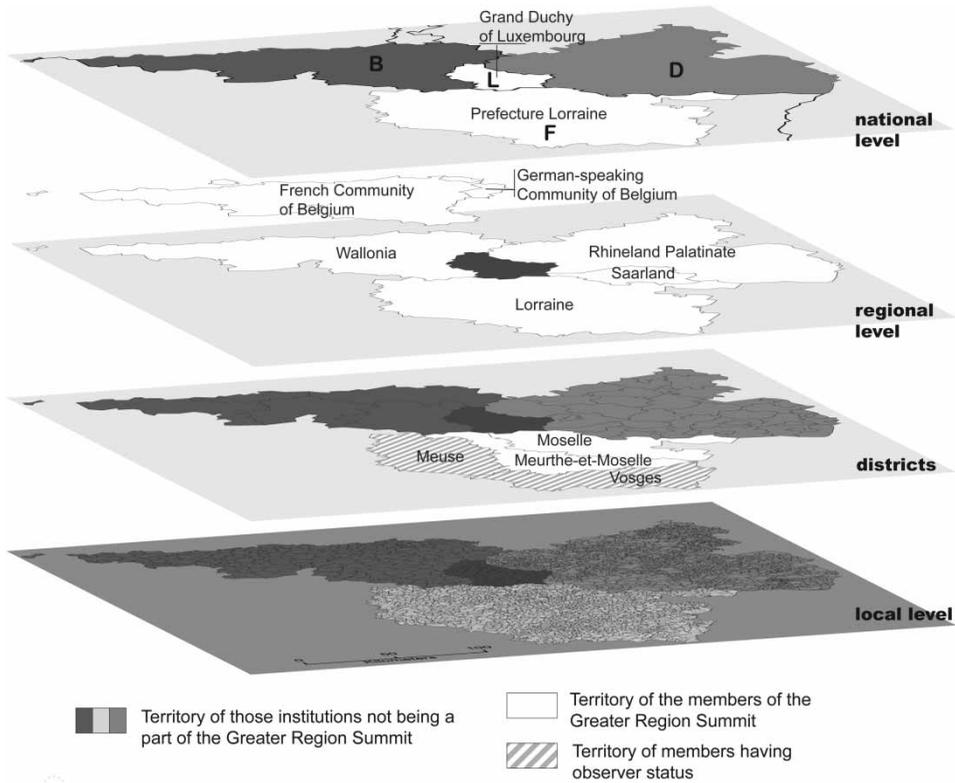
**Figure 1.** “Most important barriers for cross-border cooperation”—results from the Delphi survey in the Greater Region ( $n = 156$ ; Metroborder, 2010).

tions on a larger scale will predominantly consider institutions in a formal sense as relevant actors. In our context of political cross-border cooperation, we focus on formal institutions. Thirdly, the *time frame* has to be identified: it is important to differentiate between static and procedural approaches, between focusing on the current state or aiming to anticipate future developments etc. Given the complexity of the cross-border and multi-level context, we will concentrate on the mapping of today’s situation. Since the Delphi method focuses on future political options however, we will take into account a certain kind of future oriented vision of the experts interviewed.

Fourthly, the notion of *power* or *influence* can be an important dimension: It does make a difference if, for example, the de facto capability of the agenda-setting is addressed or if the formal juridical competences are focused on. We mainly focus on the formal side of competences that play a major role in the juridical complex cross-border context. However, we show that formal territoriality can be accompanied by informal conceptualizations.

The main focus of this paper is, however, to explore, as a fifth potential dimension, territoriality, which is mostly neglected in the existing tools or studies. We propose a three-step procedure for C-B-IM which goes beyond the simple mapping of the pooled territories of the different domestic institutions involved. The aim is to visualize the institutional structures and the related actor constellations, the territorial mandates and the actual perimeter of action and underlying political topographies.

*Step 1: Multilevel mapping of the cross-institution(s).* Our approach starts with a systematic inventory of the scale levels concerned and the formal territorial mandate of partaking local, regional, national and supranational authorities or other relevant institutions. This step reveals the formal institutional framework and provides a first understanding of the institutional and territorial complexity of cross-border cooperation. The territorial dimension is reflected only in the visualization of the physical territories formally involved—the so-called “pooled” territory in three-dimensional cartography.



**Figure 2.** Institutional mapping of the “Summit of the Executives of the Greater Region”.

*Step 2: Multi-level policy mapping.* The second step goes further by mapping the relevant domestic actors, regardless of whether they are formally involved or not in the cross-border cooperation. This step must apply to concrete policies, action arenas, and political projects. The resulting map may require adding scale levels hitherto absent. It provides a more concrete picture of the potential governance patterns. With regard to the territory, the territorial dimension is addressed like in step 1, as pooled territory.

*Step 3: Political topography mapping.* The third step goes beyond the formally institutionalized setting and is the most ambitious step. It aims—still via the perspective of institutional mapping—at conducting a more thorough analysis of the actual governance mechanisms in a concrete context and their territorial implications. It thus adds to the territorial and merely formal institutional dimension, a third governance or power dimension. Depending on the exact research question, a large variety of objectives can be addressed, among these, to evaluate the actual power relations of the enrolled actors (“power-topographies”), to uncover hidden (territorial) agendas, etc. In our example, we focus on whether or not and how the Greater Region’s experts conceptualize implicitly and informally their territorial mandate. This is just one exemplary facet of how to approach the informal dimension. The institutional mapping of the informal territorial scope is based on the aforementioned Delphi Study, too.

The following case study illustrates a first application of this three-step C-B-IM approach by looking at the Greater Region as a general institutional setting and then focusing on two policy fields. Each step follows particular research questions of the particular case study; the margin for different foci and further methodological operationalization is large.

### **3. Cross-border institutional mapping of the Greater Region SaarLorLux**

#### *3.1 Step 1: Multilevel mapping of the Greater Region*

The Greater Region cross-border cooperation involves entities from two centralized states (France and Luxembourg) and from two federal states (Belgium and Germany). Since 1995, partners involved meet in the framework of the “Summit of the Executives” which embodies the main institution of cooperation. High-level decision makers from all 5 regions—Lorraine, Luxembourg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland and Wallonia are involved (Niedermeyer & Moll, 2007). This cross-border cooperation works on the basis of a rotating presidency meeting every 18 months, while decisions taken are implemented by 19 thematic working groups (as from 2011 on, the presidency will change every 2 years).

However, far more than five representatives come together for the so-called summits. An institutional map (Figure 2) visualizes this complexity by taking two aspects into consideration:

- the territories for which institutions involved are responsible—their domestic territorial “mandate”
- the (domestic) level at which these institutions are positioned within the multi-level system

The involvement for Luxembourg and Germany is quite simple, since only one institutional level is represented (the national level for Luxembourg, and the two German federal states Rhineland Palatinate and Saarland). The situation is much more complicated for Belgium and France:

On the Belgium side, three partners from the regional level are involved, and their territories overlap: the “Région wallone” and the two linguistic communities “Communauté française” and “Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft”. The region “Bruxelles capitale” is involved in the perimeter of the “Communauté française” while it is not part of the “Région wallonne”.

In France, two sub-national levels are involved: The “Préfecture de Lorraine” represents the national state at the regional level, the “Région Lorraine” is the main regional administrative unit and 4 “départements” work at the sub-regional level (two of them are associated as observers).

This institutional mapping visualizes the complexity of cooperating across borders. It also indicates the potential influence of national and regional agendas on cross-border cooperation: Each election in a partner region involved can potentially hinder the progress of cooperation (see Jerneck, 2000).

Institutional mapping is based on the simplification of complex settings, since exclusive categories have to be defined and applied. In our case, this is true for the different levels. Whether or not the *préfecture française* should really be in the same category as the German federal states can be questioned, since their political role is very different due to

the respective domestic logic. It can be observed that the territorial size of the nation state Luxembourg is smaller than most regional territories involved. However, since this categorization is purely based on the national systems (what domestic level for which perimeter), the outcome must not be interpreted from a comparative perspective. However, the five levels may be quite established, but they are not compulsory—the differentiation of different regional or local levels in certain systems may lead to different level categories; in our case, we see not many arguments for a further differentiation or simplification.

This map possibly (over-)simplifies things with regard to the European level: Indeed, representatives of the European institutions are not systematically involved in the summit. However, the relevance of European funding (esp. INTERREG) and governance tools (EGTC, see above) is enormous. Vice versa, the efforts of lobbying “in Brussels” can be significant.

With regard to territoriality, we can state the following: The territory of the Greater Region is exclusively made up of domestic territories, a cross-border perimeter has not been defined (“pooled territory”). In that sense, we see similarities to the EU territory, though in the EU context, the trans-national quality is far stronger (e.g. considering the EU Commission). The Greater Region is organized in a purely inter-regional or inter-governmental manner, not even having a permanent secretariat as yet.

The democratic legitimacy is also organized following the logic of the interregional setting as all relevant actors of this cross-border cooperation are legitimized by their domestic system.

The political mandate of the Greater Region is restricted to interregional exchange and does not touch any “hard” domestic competence. Still, all relevant policies are addressed when exchanging in working groups, summit meetings etc.

### 3.2 Step 2: Multi-level policy mapping

In the second step, we zoom into sector policies. This policy focus is of particular importance, since it explains to a large extent the actual outcome of cross-border cooperation efforts.

The Delphi survey, conducted in the Greater Region, identified five policies for which experts particularly intend to increase cross-border cooperation: multilingualism, transport, research and innovation, professional mobility and spatial planning (for further details see *Metroborder 2010:60*). In the following, we focus on spatial planning and transport policy, since they are politically highly sensitive.

The institutional mappings (Figures 3 and 4) do not resume the territorial dimension, since they are in principle the same as in step 1. Again, we find pooled territories from different domestic logics.

We understand the concept of competence as a formal legitimization to issue public regulations. We differentiate between full and limited competences. This refers to the fact that there is often an institution that is more responsible for the implementation of the decisions made by higher levels, but this role comes together with strong involvement in the decision making process and with a high scope of concretization. However, we do not refer to de-facto or informal power relations.

Though the national understandings for spatial planning may differ largely (Waterhout, 2008; Dühr et al. 2010), the policy as such is addressed on all sides of the borders (see Figure 3).

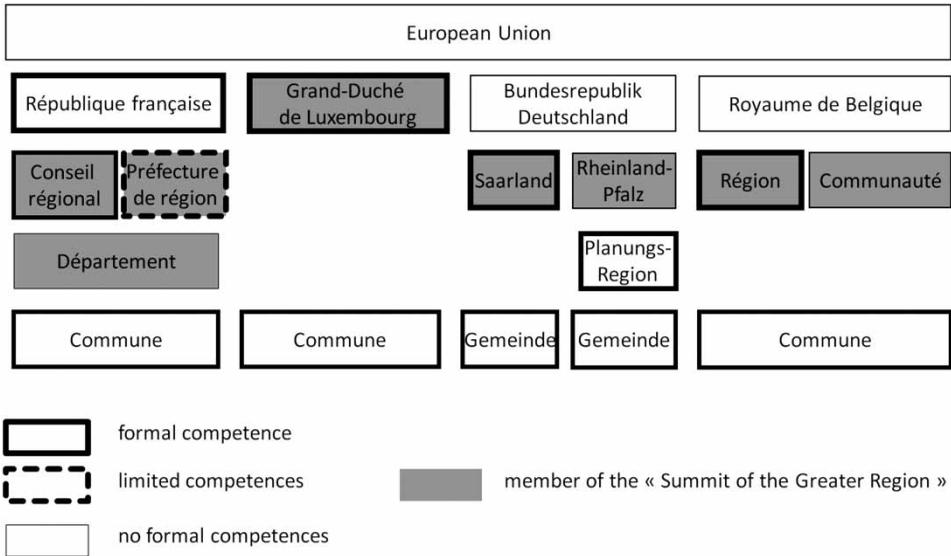


Figure 3. Institutional mapping of competences for spatial planning in the Greater Region.

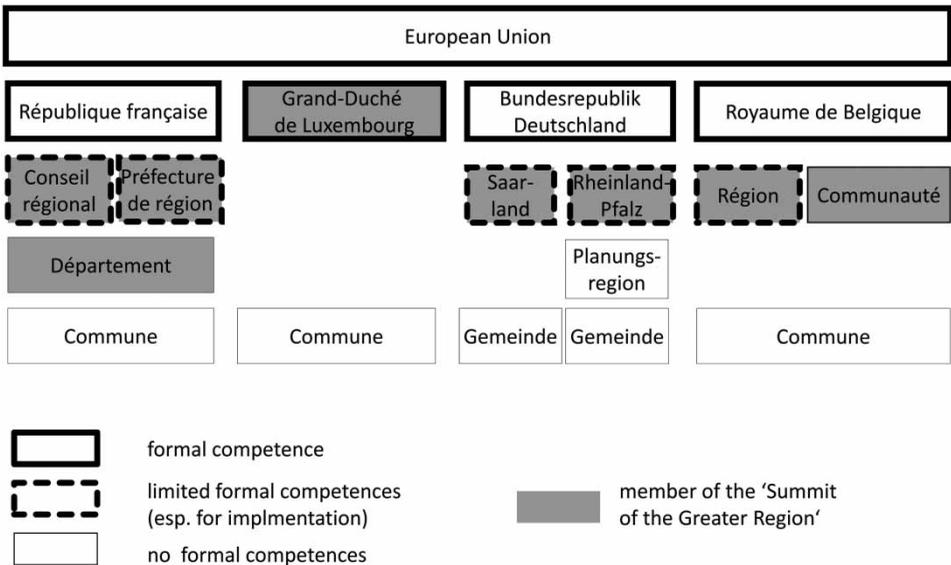


Figure 4. Institutional mapping of competences for TEN-T in the Greater Region.

Since transport policies comprise very different fields and, in that, political responsibilities (transport of goods versus persons; public versus private transport etc.), we must focus on a sub-policy. Since the connection to European metropolis is high on the political agenda, we focus on trans-European networks for high speed rail (EU regulation no 1692/96/EC, see Figure 4).

Both institutional maps not only show again the complexity of cross-border cooperation, but they in particular visualize two types of major challenges—the “multilevel mismatches” with regard to certain competences as well as the problem of important actors not being involved in the cross-border cooperation.

To start with the latter aspect: most competent institutions in spatial planning are involved at the regional level. However, there is clearly the lacking involvement of the local level. There are several cross-border cooperation on the local level (e.g. “Pôle européen de développement” for a smaller perimeter between Luxembourg, France and Belgium, or the Dutch-German Euregio for a broader scope of activities). However, if spatial planning is addressed from the Greater Region summit, the implication of the municipal level is an obvious topic.

With regard to the TEN-T policy, the situation is much more delicate: TEN-T policy is defined between member states and the European Commission. The regional institutions involved in the Summit cooperation framework may be competent for regional/national rail transport, but their formal influence on TEN-T negotiations is strictly limited to implementation aspects. If the Greater Region wants to influence the TEN-T policy, the crucial question is how to link the national actors to their objectives.

It is obvious that cross-border cooperation cannot gather all actors being responsible for all policies—this would overload the setting. This may, for example, be true for the European level. This is not only a cross-border problem but a typical problem of sub-national levels, but the cross-border situation is even more hampering.

In general, lobbying via associations (e.g. Eurocities, CMPR, AGEF, ARE, CCRE, MOT etc.; see Levrat, 2005), and diverse informal lobbying possibilities make up a wide range of opportunities. Consequently, the question of how to lobby more systematically for the cross-border regions is currently discussed intensively in the Greater Region, as well as in others.

The second obvious challenge from the institutional mappings above are the multi-level mismatches and gaps within the cross-border cooperation. In different nation states the competence to handle a thematic is not organized in the same manner, and a transregional competence has not formally been established.

The multi-level mismatch describes the situation where thematic political mandates are not allocated on the same political/administrative levels on each side of the border. This kind of misfit can frequently be found along national borders, but can also be found between federal states, between urban and rural authorities, for example.

Similarly, the multi-level gap describes the situation where there is no comparable institution on the other side of the border: This is obviously the case for the regional level that is not institutionalized in Luxembourg, but also the comparability between a French region and German Land can be questioned.

The problem of multi-level mismatches and gaps is two-fold: On the one hand, the *practical* or technical discontinuities are difficult to bridge. The understanding and reciprocal information about the setting on the other side of the border is an ongoing challenge (including legal reforms and personnel fluctuation). This comes together with the comprehension of political agendas, particularities of procedures and administrative cultures and “rituals”. The different resources with regard to budget, money, decision-making power, and agenda-setting capacity play a major role but are not easy to address in a multi-cultural context.

On the other hand, the *diplomatic* and cultural discontinuity can be a challenge: partners having different competencies and reputation due to their political level may find it difficult to bridge hierarchical distances.

Addressing these problems can be based on several approaches: Establishing *trans*-regional institutions that go beyond a bi- or multi-lateral approach are the most ambitious way. Domestic institutional reforms can try to adjust border-specific problems. In practice, however, there is empirical evidence that due to the lack of adequate institutional answers to these challenges, more informal aspects of cross-border cooperation play a crucial role. These encompass personal contacts as well as shared experiences between actors, leading to confidence and a certain tacit knowledge enabling the partners to improvise and overcome formal barriers. In accompanying these processes, institutional mapping is a promising tool, too.

The two policies show that in formal terms, neither de-territorialization nor variable geographies are evident. The Greater Region cooperation is mainly based on domestic institutions that are organized in a clearly territorial manner. Which is true for the Summit of the Greater Region could be developed for further cooperation forms (EU-Regio in the Greater Region, Upper Rhine Conference etc.). on the contrary, the highly complex situation makes it even more crucial to address the particular domestic structure—variable flexibility does not characterize the situation properly.

Given the differing institutional settings for different policies, however, a high expertise in bridging the gaps and mismatches is needed. In this sense, variable arenas *within* narrow domestic and multilateral arenas must be used. However, again, this kind of variability should not be mistaken in a sense of postmodern overcoming of national frameworks. All sovereignty and democratic legitimation is linked quite closely to domestic frameworks.

Thus, we can state that de-territorialization does not meet the factual situation, but a complication of territorial organization is without a doubt the case.

### *3.3 Step 3: Political topography mapping*

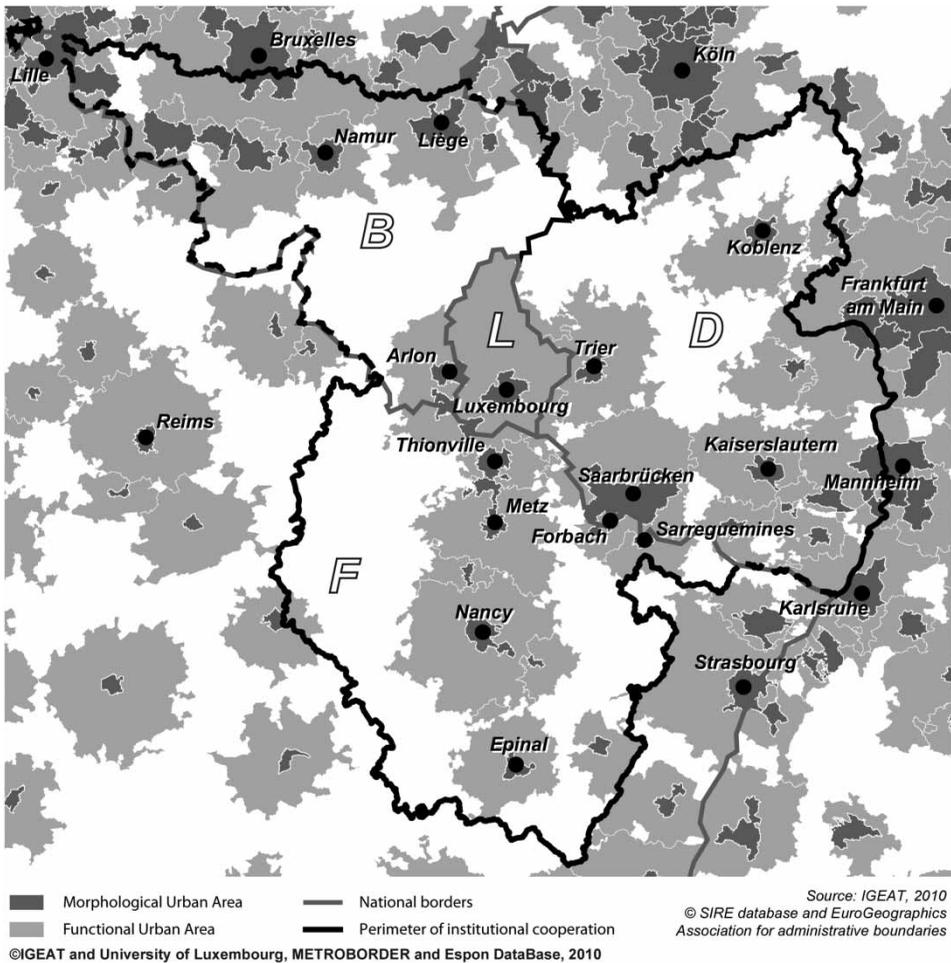
Step 3 aims to go beyond the formal and institutionalized cooperation architecture, in order to reveal “de-facto topographies” of the political life behind formalized structures. In our case, the large perimeter of the Greater Region cooperation is a complex issue as explained above. The large perimeter is widely criticized in the media and public debates, but the experts addressed in the Delphi study do not share this criticism. This has given reason to consider the existence of a not institutionalized territorialization of the cross-border focus that we wanted to scrutinize via the Delphi survey.

In general, establishing and even codifying a particular cross-border territoriality is a process of complex political bargaining. These discussions must address the territorial scope, mandate and organization, as introduced in the beginning. The process of concretizing these dimensions is highly complex, sensitive and takes time. Almost inevitably, this discussion must consider certain frameworks and contexts, especially (a) the institutional setting of the partners involved (see above), (b) the political agenda on each side of the border and (c) the functional integration, especially the economic functioning and its cross-border quality. Considering functional integration does not refer to an essentialist conception of space that could prescribe a certain institutional perimeter. However, the territorial structure plays a certain role in political discourses. So before

coming to the actual political topography mapping, we want to roughly show the territorial setting of the region, also by showing a more classical map that is not considered as institutional mapping:

Confronting the territorial boundaries of the cooperation space with its functional structure shows an interesting picture: Figure 5 shows the so-called functional urban areas (FUAs, in light grey), that are mainly the commuting zones (delimited by a 10%-threshold, for methodological details see ESPON, 2007; Metroborder, 2010).

It is politically quite undisputed that the agglomeration of Luxembourg has an outstanding economic position within the Greater Region, playing a visible role in the globalized economy at least for the financial sector. The impressive economic and demographic development also crossing the surrounding national borders is clearly based on Luxembourg city as a driving actor. Saarbrücken is larger in demographic terms without reaching



**Figure 5.** Morphological and FUAs within the institutional perimeter of the Greater Region.  
 Source: Metroborder (2010).

the economic quality to a comparable extent. Both regions have seen a dynamic development of cross-border commuters—Luxembourg attracts 140,000 commuters daily and around 30,000 cross-border employees commute on a daily basis in the Saarbrücken area.

Luxembourg and Saarbrücken form a bi-polar structure, as functional integration between both of them can hardly be found. However, a separated political treatment on the political level is considered to be not reasonable for two reasons: First, the political institutions involved in the cross-border integration process quite the same (for example, federal state of Rhineland Palatinate, Région Lorraine). Secondly, the political concerns especially in the transport sector are similar (intra- and interregional connectivity via road, rail).

Currently, the outer boundaries of the Summit of the Greater Region extend far beyond the functional integration of both poles. Nevertheless, the partners of the Greater Region agreed on a strategy of using the potentials of being a “cross-border metropolitan polycentric region” (Summit of the executives 2009: 7). The concrete actions to be taken, however, are still rather unclear.

Nevertheless and with regard to a polycentric development strategy, the implication of at least the neighbouring functional areas is not questioned (e.g. Arlon, Thionville and Trier for Luxembourg). However, the Epinal—Luxembourg axis is made up of a range of commuting zones, but both end points, almost 180 km away from each other, are only loosely related. However, the political debate on the French side stresses the importance of the development of the *Sillon Lorrain* axis between Epinal and Thionville/“Porte de France”.

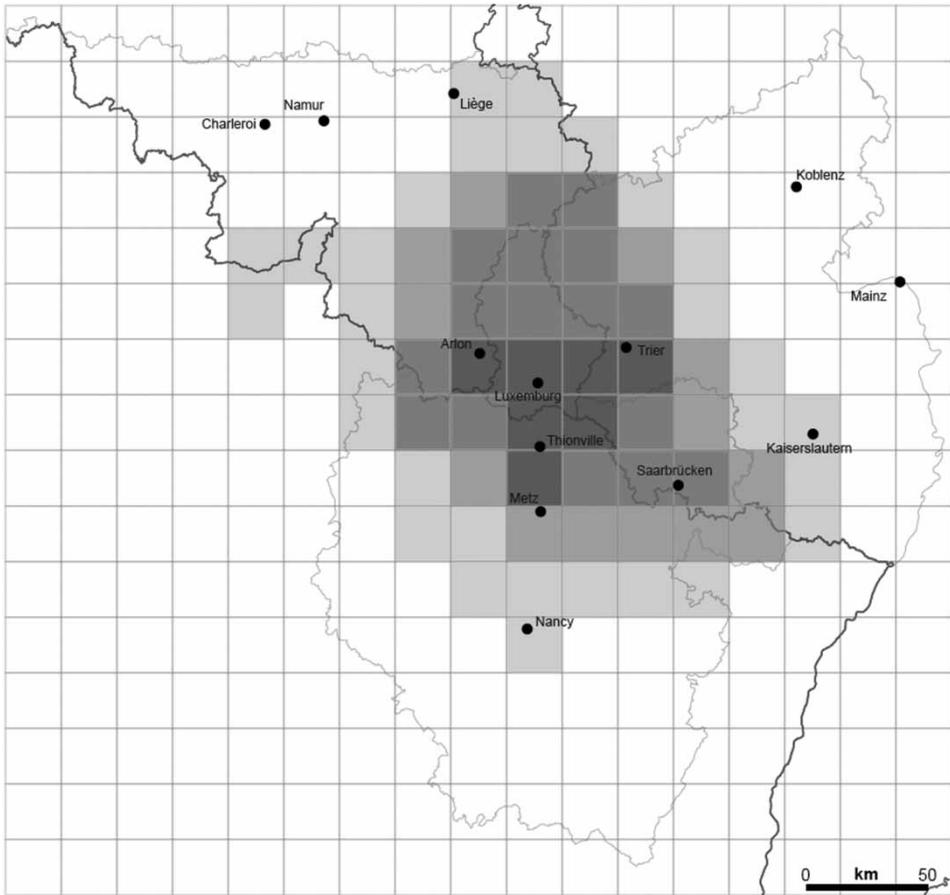
Moreover, the institutional perimeter comprises areas that are hardly involved in cross-border issues. This is obviously true for the peri-urban fringes of Brussels, Frankfurt or Cologne. And last but not least, cross-border cooperation with poles and scopes beyond the Greater Region are touched, like the Liège(-Aachen), Tournai(-Lille) or Ludwigshafen(-Mannheim) agglomerations.

Thus, this complex background does not give clear “evidence” for political processes reflecting on a cross-border cooperation perimeter.

Against this backdrop, the institutional mapping of the actual territorial focus of the Greater Region experts is of particular interest: The Delphi Study included the question, to which areas the Greater Region cooperation should pay particular attention to. The participating experts were asked to click check-boxes on a simple map of the Greater Region. The result is a clear core area around Luxembourg and comprising the Saarbrücken agglomeration (see Figure 6).

Interestingly, even when analysing the answers with regard to national backgrounds or to administrative levels, any clear difference between groups can be revealed. Therefore, we can state a general agreement among the experts that they see a common core area as prior subject to the Greater Regions political mandate. When zooming into certain policies—which was done with regard to the spatial planning and transport policies within the Delphi study—the spatial configuration is differentiated, but the overall idea of a core-area as territorial focus is very stable.

This outcome of the Delphi study can be regarded as an institutional map, as it maps the territorial mandate of a cross-border institution. As it reveals a *de facto* territorialization that is not formalized, it can be considered as a political topography: The experts *do* already *distinguish* between the territories belonging to the institutions involved and the territory of the political mandate (secondary versus primary territory). Since they do



**Figure 6.** Result of the Delphi study for the question “to which areas should the cross-border cooperation space pay particular attention to” ( $n = 156$ ).

differentiate between these types of territories, they do not fall into the territorial trap like John Agnew (1994) did. The frequent media reporting about too large territories, in contrast, can be considered as a classical kind of territorial trap, since the physical extension of the administratively defined cooperation space is automatically considered as politically relevant.

From a political perspective, the question may be if a differentiation between the pooled territory and a political perimeter of the cross-border cooperation should be institutionalized. Defining such a perimeter is not easy—questioning the territorial scope is easily perceived as questioning of the institutional setting, too. The Upper Rhine conference is a rare exception among the cross-border cooperation in that respect: It encompasses the Rhine valley from the southern parts of Rhineland Palatinate to North-West Switzerland, comprising the two cross-border poles Strasbourg and Basel. The institutional setting is in principle comparable to the Greater Region, but there is a decisive difference on the regional level (see Metroborder, 2010): From the institutional perspectives, two German federal

states (Länder) *Rhineland Palatinate* and *Baden Württemberg* are full members of the cross-border cooperation. From a territorial perspective however, only parts of their territory are considered to be subject to the political mandate of the cross-border cooperation. This can be interpreted as a first and careful step towards a cross-border territoriality. However, whereas the territorial scope may be clearer, the political mandate remains as abstract as in the Greater Region, being based on an intergovernmental and hardly institutionalized basis.

#### **4. Transferability**

Having presented one case study in depth raises the question to what extent this approach is applicable and helpful also in other border regions. The underlying research project has conducted a parallel study in the Upper Rhine where many aspects have been found similar, e.g. the multi-level mismatches being a major concern, and a certain consensus on the perimeter issue. The main difference here is that in the Upper Rhine, the cross-border perimeter is specific since on the German side the *Länder* are not fully included in the territorial sense though they are full institutional partners.

One could, however, argue that the Greater Region and the Upper Rhine region are among the politically most experienced and economically wealthiest border regions in Europe. Certainly, institutional mapping might be of much less help when cross-border integration is on a very low level (e.g. 'iron curtain' regions). But even if empirical results will certainly differ in regions with a certain cross-border integration, they will give answers to the question how the *perimeter* and the *competencies* can be linked, an issue of general importance in contemporary cross-border integration. It is also linked to the question to what extent a cross-border perimeter should be institutionalized and what kind of *trans-regional cross-border* competences should be built-up and delegated to a cross-border institution/authority.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Cross-border cooperation in Europe has seen a dynamic development during the last decades. However, despite almost countless forms of institutionalizations, neither the political mandates nor the territorial organization can be compared with national, domestic constellations. This can also be said for the Greater Region, which is a typical example of an intergovernmental cooperation form in the European multi-level context.

It is true that territoriality is a big word for describing the current situation: here is neither a formal sovereignty of its own, nor is the cooperation based on a territorial organization but instead on the will of the political executives to cooperate on different subjects. The territorial scope—officially—comprises the summed-up perimeters of the different institutions involved. However, the Delphi study that was conducted among experts and decision-makers reveals a territorial focus on a core-area comprising the most dynamic cross-border areas around Luxembourg and Saarbrücken.

However, the concept of de-territorialization does not describe the situation correctly. On the one hand, it is true, that the territorial focus of current cross-border cooperation is not very strong and that the political power is not based on a territorial logic, but more on the intergovernmental logic of issue-specific negotiation. On the other hand,

however, the institutionalization of cross-border cooperation is very much structured by the different domestic partners, who are organized in a territorial manner.

Similarly, the concept of a variable geography and de-territorialized governance does not fit very well. If inconsistencies between the spatial delimitation of a cross-border cooperation area and the actually relevant activities within this area are observed, the notion of “variable geographies” is frequently used by regional politicians to euphemistically justify obvious shortcomings in terms of acceptance of and identification with these new territorial constructs. Scientific reflection should go further than this. The C-B-IM tool presented above can be used both as an analytical tool to monitor multilevel governance in a cross-border context as well as a more prescriptive tool identifying institutional gaps and shortcomings. From a more or normative perspective, the latter allows to develop more appropriate institutional arrangements. It thus has the potential to turn the merely euphemistic notion of “variable geometries” into a more proactive one readjusting territorial parameters and adapting institutional partnerships to the respective issues at stake.

The current debates on EGTC or on European macro-regions indicate that in future, the cross-border cooperation may comprise political mandates that are “harder” than they have been so far.

Cross-border territoriality will not replace national territoriality, but it will modify the current situation. The complexity of European governance will certainly be increased by this. It will remain a challenge not to be caught by diverse territorial traps that confuses perimeters of different institutional levels and spatial foci of policy matters. In this context, institutional mapping seems to be a helpful tool when analysing these complex multi-dimensional contexts. Moreover, institutional mapping can be a stimulus of group discussions, strategy-building processes, etc., with stakes that may result in following the analytical work.

The example of the Greater Region illustrates in this paper just some of the potentials of C-B-IM. Visualising multi-level-constellations, policy responsibilities and political topographies is certainly a helpful approach in a complex and dynamic setting like the one described. The case study introduced in this paper is a first illustration of the potentials, allowing a great margin for further research foci and methodological backgrounds when addressing cross-border governance from a territorial perspective.

Visualising, categorising and simplifying comes without a doubt along with several methodological and conceptual risks. However, the territorial and geographic discipline should accept the challenge as visualization has often been its asset. This potential should be mobilized.

## Note

1. Comprising representatives from the French region Lorraine, the German Länder Rhineland-Platinat and Saarland, the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg as well as the Walloon region and the French and German-speaking communities in Belgium (see below).

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