

CROSS-BORDER OBSERVATION IN SUPPORT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Indeed, this last point regarding data is one of the major issues for cross-border territories. The observation of economic realities and forecasting procedures for these territories are based on systems that differ from one country to another, both in terms of quantitative data (statistical systems, indicators, collection methods, definitions, data gathering periods, geographical coverage, etc.) and as regards qualitative analysis (cooperation mechanisms, economic sectors of interest, political/administrative/cultural systems, etc.). While Eurostat ensures the harmonisation of statistical principles at EU level (in terms of processes, methodology, standards, procedures, contents, timetables, etc.), the data produced are essentially general and produced at the level of NUTS 2 or 3, which does not allow the degree of precision and comprehensiveness that is required to observe cross-border economic dynamics. As a result, Eurostat (which is a directorate general of the European Commission) would appear to be more of a tool to help define European policies, rather than an instrument that institutional and economic players can use for themselves at regional or local level.

Initiatives focusing on the harmonised gathering and processing of data at cross-border level have been on the increase since the 1990s:

- ↳ The **Greater Region** has its “Statistics” working group bringing together five statistical offices from across the region, as well as its statistical portal and a joint geographical information system (SIGGR).
- ↳ The **Upper Rhine** has its geographical information system SIGRS-GISOR.
- ↳ The **Jura Arc** and **Greater Geneva** have their two cross-border statistical observatories.
- ↳ The **French-Belgian border area** has its Cross-Border Atlas.

The MOT is monitoring the evolution of these initiatives, which are still too few and far between. For its part, it has published two editions of its Cross-Border Cooperation Atlas (in 2001 and 2007) and conducted a succession of studies in close cooperation with the General Commission for Territorial Equality (CGET) and the National Federation of Urban Planning Agencies (FNAU) on the observation of cross-border territories with the aim systematising and coordinating the various processes across all of France’s borders through a Strategic Statistical Observation Committee bringing together the European Commission, territories’ planning and development authorities and the statistical institutes of France and neighbouring countries.

The difficulty in updating these tools (some of which, like the atlases, are in forms that make them hard to adapt) and the fact that there are still problems with economic data, which are often not circulated (or not circulated widely) because of their commercial or competitive nature, significantly restricts institutional and economic players’ access to comparable, relevant and reliable common baselines to support the creation of cross-border strategic frameworks. Moving beyond the combining of different regional strategies and achieving greater coherence at the cross-border level remains a challenge, which is preventing the satisfactory consultation of neighbouring partners in the processes of adopting and monitoring regional strategies. The issue of financing and the provision of the funding required to launch, steer and monitor joint strategic reflections would therefore seem to be the main factor determining whether the current statistical and forecasting activities are continued and whether strategic cross-border approaches are rolled out more widely in the future.

TOWARDS CROSS-BORDER TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

France’s territorial organisation (including public policy in the area of economic development) prior to the new reforms described in the previous chapter on governance was a collective response to the lack of residential mobility and the inflexible nature of the productive model. Admittedly, national intervention continues to be aimed primarily at supporting the effectiveness of the metropolitan system¹³³ (i.e. Paris and the network of other metropolitan areas) which lies at the heart of the country’s productive system, while ensuring cohesion across the country by ensuring that the weakest territories are treated fairly. However, the balance that has been struck thus far – involving the coupling at national level of the productive economy (based primarily on metropolitan areas) and the “presential economy” – is not sustainable against the backdrop of international competition and the ageing population, and needs to be revisited.

This is not about replacing the national model with a purely local or regional development model; it is about “decentralising the structural reform agenda”.

Given that the territorial reforms that are currently being carried out in France are changing the way in which public players support economic development, we are proposing that the cross-border dimension be taken into account in a more strategic manner.

As we have already seen, regions and metropolitan areas are increasingly working together when it comes to economic intervention. That could, in certain cases, involve cross-border arrangements – notably in northern and eastern France, which are the big losers at present, according to L. Davezies.

The CGET in a note on the new regions¹³⁴, stresses that the enlargement of the regional boundaries should not lead to reducing the importance of interregional relations; We can add that this also applies to the neighbouring regions across the border. For instance, the Competitiveness

¹³³ P. Veltz, *La grande transition*, Seuil, 2008.

¹³⁴ <http://www.cget.gouv.fr/bref-1-nouvelles-regions-soutenir-developpement-equilibre-france>