
Local Cross-Border Networks in Mountain Borderlands. The Cases of Wipptal (Italian-Austrian Border) And Cerdanya (French-Spanish Border)

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Abstract

This presentation shows the results of the analysis of the local cross-border networks that are generated in the cross-border cooperation processes through a case study-approach. To interpret the cross-border cooperation processes at the local scale we adopt territorialist approach. In general, we can define the border territories (TF) as a territorial reality where the geographical, physical, socio-economic, cultural and political are directly influenced by the evolution of the functions exercised by the border and by changes in national, international and subnational policies. It is, in sum, a complex territorial system in which the dynamics of territorial development assume its own characteristics which differs from the internal territories. In fact, the border separates and at the same time put in contact two different political, administrative and socioeconomic systems. At the local scale, the presence of a political boundary induces in borderlands communities the reorganization of social, economic and cultural relations. In order to generate a shared endogenous local development, cross-border cooperation represents a potential territorial strategy. The study of cross-border networks building is therefore important to analyze whether a local cross-border integration process is starting or not. The selected case studies are two cross-border mountain micro-regions, characterized by strong socioeconomic and cultural similarities within them: the Wipptal, straddling the Austrian-Italian border, and Cerdanya, located in Eastern Pyrenees. Despite the historical border division has led important territorial differentiations, local communities have historically maintained trade and cross-border family relationships. In both cases Local Cross-Border Cooperation is currently very active ambitious projects have been implemented in sector like health, land use planning, economic development and social and cultural cohesion. The analysis of cross-border networks is based on two sources of information: the first is the projects of Interreg IIIA 2000-2006 and Interreg IV 2007-2013 where local stakeholder have been involved. The second is the regional funds for micro obtained and the fieldwork to interview relevant local stakeholders between 2014 and 2016. The result are the social networks diagrams elaborated with the UCINET software. In order to identify the key actors, we distinguish in the diagram the agents involved in micro-projects (blue), the one in the Interreg projects (INTERREG) (blue) or both (red). The distribution of the actors followed proximity criterion provided by software (*similarities*), which identifies the "closeness" between the partners. From the analysis of two case studies it emerges the fundamental role of the local administrations to promote cross-border networks, involving a growing number of

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economic and social stakeholder to develop bottom-up initiatives based on the enhancement of shared heritage and to face local needs. The analysis of the most significant initiatives have shown that this process is leading to cross-border interdependence of local communities, through the formation of economic clusters, clusters of small and medium-sized enterprises, health districts, strategic territorial plans, etc. In this sense, local cross-border integration seems therefore a more realist scenario. The theoretical as well as the methodological approach could be potentially extrapolated to other cross-border mountain territories.

Keywords: Cross, border cooperation, Wipptal, Cerdanya, social networks, Local Milieu, Interreg