Study on the statistical observation of cross-border areas 2010-2012

Abstract

The **Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière/ Transfrontier Operational Mission** (MOT)[1] and the **Fédération Nationale des Agences d'Urbanisme/ National Federation of Urban Development Agencies** (FNAU)[2], at the request of the **Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'attractivité régionale / Inter-Ministerial Delegation for territorial development and regional attractiveness** (DATAR)[3] carried out a study in 2010 on the statistical observation of cross-border areas. This study followed an experimental study carried out on this subject by the MOT for DATAR in 2006 and involving only 3 sites (Geneva, Longwy and Dunkirk).

The current study covers 10 different cross-border sites[4] and 7 different borders and aimed to:

- **Identify the priority strategic topics** which will make it possible to better understand the functioning of these specific spaces and to develop them with indicators.

- Define a **functional cross-border perimeter within which the observation will be carried out,**

- Define a **methodology to collect statistical information**: determine the sources (organizations of the countries and regions which produce this data), evaluate the comparability of the various statistical data (definition and calculation of the indicators, periodicity, perimeter involved, etc.) and do an inventory of the various obstacles,

- Propose a **methodology to process this statistical data**, to make it comparable, to include it in a database created especially for the occasion, and which can be updated regularly,

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[1] **MOT**: Multi-level government initiative governance structure, in the form of an association, grouping many cross-border authorities and in charge of assisting the Government services on cross-border issues, providing assistance to local authorities and other organizations involved, carrying out studies and forming networks including the various actors of the local, regional, national and European levels.

[2] **FNAU**: Federation grouping all of the French urban development agencies in an association. 8 cross-border urban development agencies took part in this work.

[3] **DATAR**: Inter-ministerial assignment administration which prepares, impulses and coordinates the territorial development policies led by the Government.

[4] Dunkirk-Western Flanders, Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, Luxembourg, Sillon Lorrain, Strasbourg, Basel, Geneva, Nice, Catalan Area, Basque Country.

- **Build indicators** and produce metadata sheets[5]
- **Use cartographic guidelines[6]**, with a representation on the same scale, with a legend and statistical classes common to all of the cross-border areas analyzed. The perimeters studied were defined based on an isochrone of one hour by car from the point corresponding to the main pole of employment. The cartography is based on a gridding defined in advance and corresponding mainly (with exceptions on some indicators) to the cantons on the French side, the Belgian municipalities, the Luxembourg cantons, the German municipalities and Kreis, the Swiss districts, the ad hoc municipal groupings for Italy, and the municipalities and comarcas for Spain. The result obtained corresponds to some one hundred different maps produced specially for this occasion by the various urban development agencies involved in the study,

- As a function of the results of the various indicators selected and calculated for the occasion[7] and for each of the 10 areas studied, **produce a comprehensive analysis of each of the 10 sites** but also a **transversal analysis, indicator by indicator,** in order to **compare** the functioning of each of the 10 cross-border areas studied,

- Produce a series of **transversal guidelines for analysis and conclusions,** allowing for a better understanding, through the indicators used, of the very singular and specific functioning of the important territories represented by the cross-border areas,

- Based on the **observations made**, particularly those involving the major technical obstacles relating to the comparability and the availability of statistics, **to generate recommendations** for better networking of the institutes that produce statistics in the cross-border areas, increasing the awareness of the various countries that are neighbors of France to obtain their support for coordination of the administrations and statistics institutes in this field of activity; and lastly increasing the awareness of the European Commission of the fundamental European stakes involved in having a better understanding of the functioning of these "seam" and junction zones between the European States.

In the end, this study makes it possible, in its final productions, to **create a solid and sustainable system of reference for data and geographic gridding**, selecting the information that meets the criteria of exhaustiveness, reliability, comparability, and reproducibility. These selected elements constitute the system of reference which will be available on the web site of the observatory of territories of the DATAR as of 2013, and then updated regularly.

The study, through its methodological contributions, makes it possible to **define an on-going protocol for collection of selected data**, from the producer of the data up to DATAR. The sources used, the data inventorying periods, the dates of delivery and the data formats are thus clearly explained in the presentation of the protocol.
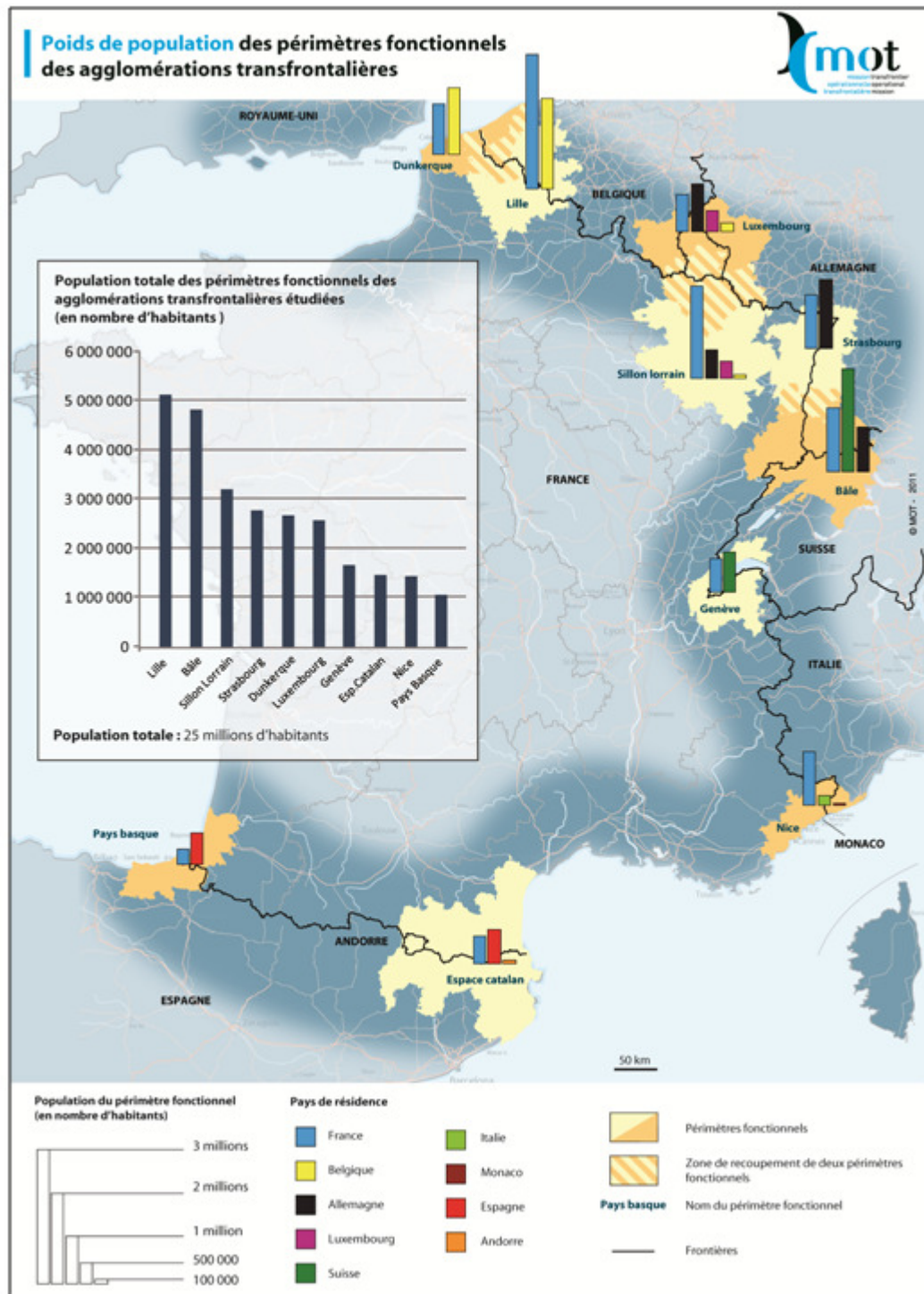
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[5] The indicators selected are: Population density; Structure by comparative ages: Under 15 years old, from 15 to 64 years old, and over 64 years of age; youth index; Average annual rate of population growth; Population by nationality of the neighboring country; Population by nationality of the neighboring country by age class; Flow of cross-border workers (by percentage of the total number of working people and in absolute value); Flow of cross-border workers by socio-professional category (in absolute value and relative breakdown between CSP); Employment socio-professional categories; Density of employment; Number of students in the place of the studies
[6] These cartographic guidelines were developed by the UMS RIATE in its first version during the study carried out by the MOT in 2006-2007.

Some points to remember among the major ideas of the transversal analysis:

The cross-border areas are characterized by a **contrasted functional dynamic on the scale of their geographic variety.**

Their **territorial functioning, which is partly standard**, does not make them geographical aberrations; they present the usual center-periphery gradients … but these are exacerbated if the center of the agglomeration is in one country and the periphery in another one.

These **areas follow in many domains the behaviors of the countries they belong to**, despite their border position (in terms of demographics in particular, in which the behaviors are very clearly linked with the trends observed on the national level in the countries involved, with the French demographic dynamism being a good example in comparison with several neighboring countries).

These cross-border territories **benefit from the border** (lower unemployment rates, higher incomes, etc.), **but also suffer from it** (real economic dependency of some of the French cross-border areas with high residentialization of their economy, massive phenomenon of home-work commuting, in which the border plays the role of a filter which impoverishes of the qualifications that are in demand, etc.). These cross-border territories are fully exposed to the processes of internationalization and globalization, while constituting melting pots of European construction, making them all the more interesting to observe.

The phenomena of metropolization that developed in these places are above all linked to the presence of a dominant major urban pole on one side of the border (Geneva, Basel, Lille, etc.) and less to the addition of the strengths and work forces present on either side of the border.

Lastly, these spaces present a diversified functional integration which justifies the implementation of cross-border governance[8], which is now more or less underway.

Recommendations:

Given the **heterogeneity of the data** (themes, zoning, periods) on the different sides of the borders and the **non-existence of cross-border data**, it is more than ever necessary to continue the work begun through centralization of the statistical data for the territories located on different sides of the borders.

In addition to the local and often occasional approaches, it is necessary to undertake a more long-term process in which the common statistical indicators are defined together, in the service of proximity cross-border observation. This coordination could be done through networking of the various statistical institutes involved, according to a protocol of exchanges of practices and work programs on such and such an indicator. A more ambitious scenario could involve a commitment of the territorial development administrations of France and its neighboring countries in favor of coordinated observation and involving the statistical institutes that produce data, the European programs (Interreg, Espon) allowing for the co-financing of such approaches, and the involvement of specialized research teams if necessary.

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[8] The perimeters benefiting from cross-border governance structures were mapped in juxtaposition with the functional perimeters studied