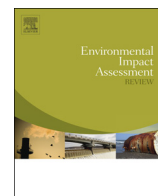




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Cross-border cooperation in inner Scandinavia: A territorial impact assessment

Eduardo Medeiros

^a Centro de Estudos Geográficos (CEG), Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning (IGOT), Edifício do IGOT - Rua Branca Edmée Marques, 1600-276 Lisboa, Portugal^b Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

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ABSTRACT

The use of territorial impact assessment procedures is gaining increasing relevance in the European Union policy evaluation processes. However, no concrete territorial impact assessment tools have been applied to evaluating EU cross-border programmes. In this light, this article provides a pioneering analysis on how to make use of territorial impact assessment procedures on cross-border programmes. More specifically, it assesses the main territorial impacts of the Inner Scandinavian INTERREG-A sub-programme, in the last 20 years (1996–2016). It focuses on its impacts on reducing the barrier effect, in all its main dimensions, posed by the presence of the administrative border. The results indicate a quite positive impact of the analysed cross-border cooperation programme, in reducing the barrier effect in all its main dimensions. The obtained potential impact values for each analysed dimension indicate, however, that the 'economy-technology' dimension was particularly favoured, following its strategic intervention focus in stimulating the economic activity and the attractiveness of the border area.

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1. Introduction and methodology

The main goal of this paper is to assess the main territorial impacts of the Swedish–Norwegian (S–N) Inner Scandinavian (INS) INTERREG-A sub-programme (INS INTERREG), since its first implementation phase (INTERREG II-A 1996–1999), until the present moment (2016), including data and analysis from the early stages of the present phase (INTERREG V-A 2014–2020).

Conceptually, this research builds on two European Union (EU) Cohesion Policy mainstream processes: the cross-border cooperation (CBC) and the territorial impact assessment (TIA). The CBC has been formally in the making since the mid-1900s, namely in the north-west of Europe (Benelux, Germany, and France), and in the European Nordic Countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland). The CBC saw a rapid rise in the EU since the first INTERREG-A Community Initiative was implemented, in 1989, not only in these regions, but gradually into the remaining EU border regions (south and east), due to the availability of specific European funding for border regions (Huggins, 2013).

Indeed, this exponential rise of the CBC process in the EU can be seen by the growing number of CBC structures (Perkmann, 2003), such as the Euroregions and Working Communities (Medeiros, 2011, 2013a), the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) (Estelle, 2016; CoR, 2016). Moreover, the INTERREG-A, initially launched as the cross-border strand of the INTERREG Community Initiative, was 'upgraded' into one of the main EU Cohesion Policy goals (European Territorial

Cooperation), in the 2007–2014 programming period, as a demonstration of the crucial role of EU border regions which cover about 60% of the EU territory and 40% of its inhabitants - NUTS3.

In short, Europe is a patchwork of small, medium, and large-sized states, forged by historical events (AEBR, 2008). For its part, the EU is a unique economic and political partnership between 28 member-states (Rodríguez-Pose, 2002). As such, the need to promote territorial cooperation, understood as the "process of collaboration between different territories or spatial locations" (Medeiros, 2015: 100), is an inherent and essential part of the EU policymaking process. Again, the CBC process can be regarded as a pivotal type of territorial cooperation for the EU. Indeed, for a long time, many European border regions have lived 'back to back' (EC, 1990). This resulted in a combine negative effect in loss of economic competitiveness, in reduced efficiency (in making use of public services), and in increased obstacles of all sorts for the citizen's lives.

Curiously, from the onset, the CBC process was regarded by the EU institutions as a tool to instil cooperation between neighbouring administrative authorities adjacent to an internal or external frontier of the EU (Cranfield and Luccese, 1996), and to compensate for the introduction of the Single Market, as well as the negative effects expected from the abolition of economic borders (EC, 2015). Also important was the recognition of the existence of different levels of CBC in Europe, with old and mature CBC processes (Nordic and Western European countries) living hand in hand with more recent forms of CBC (South and Eastern Europe). And even now, the official EU narrative on the main goals of the INTERREG-A (CBC) is that it aims at "tackling common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth

E-mail address: emedeiros@campus.ul.pt.

potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purposes of the overall harmonious development of the Union".¹

As a matter of fact, for the most part, the INTERREG-A programmes' intervention strategies tend to follow the EU current strategic development paradigms such as EUROPE 2020 for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth (EC, 2010). There already are, however, ongoing local, regional, and national development instruments which are used by border areas. As such, in our view, the CBC process should be seen as a specific process which mainly aims at reducing the barrier effect in its economic/technological, social/cultural, environmental/heritage, accessibilities, and institutional/legal dimensions (see Medeiros, 2010a, 2015), provoked by the presence of a borderline between two countries.

From a conceptual point of view, a barrier can be defined 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" (Nijkamp and Batten, 1990: 233). Understandably, barriers can have different intensities and types of effects on the movement and diffusion of tangible and intangible elements (see Nijkamp et al., 1990; Abler et al., 1972; Hägerstrand, 1967). From a logical point of view, the stronger the barrier, the higher is barrier effect to a certain movement or diffusion process. Following this rationale, and on our own previous studies on border areas, we identified five main dimensions of barrier effect to assess the impacts of CBC Programmes: Cultural/Social, Institutional/Legal, Economy/Technology, Environmental/Heritage, Accessibility (see Medeiros, 2014b).

Based on this conceptual framework, our analysis adapted an existing territorial impact assessment (TIA) tool called TARGET_TIA to specifically evaluate CBC programmes (see Medeiros, 2015). Generically, a TIA can be understood an evaluation procedure which takes into consideration the main impacts of projects/programmes/policies in all the dimensions, and respective components, of territorial development or territorial cohesion (see Medeiros, 2013b, 2014a, 2016a; EC, 2009). Nevertheless, this procedure can be adjusted to specific sectoral policies/programmes as long as they have a clear territorial dimension. This is the case of CBC programmes (INTERREG), because they have an impact on a wide spectrum of territorial development dimensions (economic competitiveness, social cohesion, territorial articulation, environmental sustainability, and territorial governance), and cover significant portions of the EU territory.

Curiously, the INTERREG-III final evaluation report recognizes that "over recent years, more attention has been paid in the academic literature to the role and impact of territorial cooperation programmes. However, there is to date no comprehensive analysis of the impacts of different forms of territorial cooperation on social, economic or territorial cohesion across the EU" (Panteia, 2009: 34) which, according to this report, is mainly due to the variety of types of EU cross-border regions. Even so, in large measure, this evaluation reveals a broad focus on the notion of the added value of EU CBC programmes, namely on learning processes and policy transfer, and in understanding differences in institutional/administrative/regulatory frameworks.

Methodologically speaking, a wide variety of data sources was used and further complemented by a specific input from the programme managers, in a combined number of methods. Hence, this evaluation report did not use a tailor-made methodology to assess the main impacts of EU CBC programmes, as we propose in this article. Interestingly, at the present moment (2016), however, the EC is financing a more focused evaluation report on 'collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by INTERREG cross-border cooperation programmes', based on the analysis of five main dimensions and related components: economic cohesion, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, territorial articulation, and governance.

From a methodological standpoint, in this article, we made use of the TARGET_TIA tool to produce the potential impacts values of the INS

INTERREG investments, in all the analysed dimensions of the barrier effect concept, and an overall potential impact value. In a nutshell, this tool is an easy to use, yet relevant, multidimensional, flexible, and multivectoral TIA technique which, based on the qualitative and quantitative inputs, produces a potential impact value (−4 to +4) of projects/programmes/policies, either for the ex-ante or ex-post phases or project implementation.

It is easy to use as it basically requires the insertion of the potential impact values in a spreadsheet, which already contains the formula to calculate the final policy impacts in each analysed dimension, as well as the final average impact of the evaluated intervention. It is relevant because the selection of the adequate impact value is based on a deep analysis of available qualitative (bibliography, interviews, project analysis) and quantitative (statistical analysis) data, which can shed light on the direct and indirect impacts of the evaluated project/programme/policy.

It is multidimensional because it not only makes use of common economic and social elements of evaluation, but it also includes components related to other pivotal territorial analytic dimensions, such as environmental, governance, and spatial planning. It also is flexible because it can be adapted to specific projects/programmes/policies, such as CBC programmes, transport policies, urban policies, and many others.

Finally, it is multivectoral, because it makes use of several vectors of counterfactual evaluation, such as the identification of short-term/sustainable impacts, substitution/multiplier impacts, and exogenous/endogenous impacts. It can be used to assess the potential impacts of a project/programme/policy before it is implemented, by making use of qualitative elements (see the formula in Fig. 1). It also can be used to assess the main territorial impacts of a given project/programme/policy after it is implemented (ex-post). For this, an average of three years of data is required.

There are several reasons for selecting TARGET_TIA over existing ESPON TIA tools when evaluating CBC programmes. Firstly, the large majority of these tools (TEQUILA, EATIA, and Quick Check TIA) were designed for ex-ante assessment of the potential impacts of EU initiatives, through the European Commission's Impact Assessment procedure (EC, 2009; EC, 2013; Fischer et al., 2015). Indeed, they were especially focused in assessing potential ex-ante impacts of EU directives (see Golobic et al., 2015) in a simple and quick way. Generically, they are supposed to be implemented not only by experts on policy evaluation, but also by any official, in a way to make it possible for EU Directorate General Units to use them when needed. Instead, our goal is primarily centred in obtaining ex-post potential impacts. Also, as any policy impact evaluator would argue, assessing impacts of policies requires time and resources to produce sound and relevant potential impact values. And this is particularly true when it comes to assessing territorial impacts, as they encompass several analytic dimensions (see Medeiros, 2014a).

Secondly, and unlike the existing ESPON TIA Tools (Table 1), TARGET_TIA allows for the use of counterfactual policy evaluation elements which are essential to obtain a more precise fictional impact of the evaluated programme/policy (EC, 1999). In this sense, the selected TIA tool not only uses the typical positive-negative impact analytic vector which characterizes all the ESPON TIA techniques, but complements it with some other fundamental analytic counterfactual evaluation vectors, as previously explained.

For this specific analysis we made use of a vast array of both qualitative and quantitative information. More particularly, a project database was prepared by the INS secretariat which made it possible to associate each approved INS INTERREG project to each regional province (NUTE3), type of partner; barrier effect dimension, and the project and financial distribution for each phase and respective intervention axes. Moreover, interviews with several experienced regional politicians (members or former member of the sub-programme Steering Committee - see Annexes), and programme secretariat officials provided crucial insights to better understand the INS INTERREG. A wide array of literature focusing on the evaluation of this sub-programme

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/pt/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border/.

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