

Cross-border policies of France and Italy: problems and solutions

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Abstract: The paper analyzes a cross-border aspect of the relationship between France and Italy. The evolution of state and territorial actors in the framework of cross-border relations is considered. A number of cross-border space models describing innovation and creativity of local authorities reflect the dynamics of integration.

Keywords: border, policy, space, cross-border cooperation

1. Introduction

When considering relations between France and Italy, the notion of “cross-border territory” often arises. The border areas have long been perceived as a place of competition, if not hostility, and European institutions want to reverse this trend. The implementation of cross-border policy is a remarkable component in the development of institutions and territories. The French-Italian example illustrates how territorial actors develop different strategies that are different in themselves but that nevertheless lead to the dynamics of integration.

Relations between Italy and France are characterized by geographic proximity. The existence of a common border is a space in which specific relationships are established that flow not only from history, but also from the evolution of economies and institutions. We should recall two main points about the border between France and Italy. First of all, this is a special geography, complex, marked by both mountains and the sea, where there are many obstacles that need to be overcome. Second, this border is a place of competition between French sovereignty and Italian (or Proto-Italian) language.

These two points, characteristic of the Franco-Italian border, reinforce the differences in border areas [1]. Europe intervenes to change this territorial division, which is often perceived as negative, by formulating voluntaristic policies aimed at changing the meaning of the border. Changing the meaning of a border from the point of collapse to the privileged concept of integration is the vision that corresponds to the actions of Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission.

2. Borders in the EU Context

A border is a special place that allows one to see the difference between the two state sovereignties. At the same time, a border is a political distinction and a marker of identity [2]. Today, a border looks like a “complex object, a place of paradoxical relations” [3]. It also serves to designate separation, but as Jean-Luc Permeijer stressed, it is the site of the “springboard” projection. Olivier Dehnert and Harold Hurel speak of a “revolution” to describe changes in the border area in the context of European construction [4]. The abolition of customs borders is one of the most tangible elements of these

changes, as well as a factor contributing to the creation and effectiveness of cross-border cooperation policies [5].

In the late 1980s, the cross-border cooperation policy was developed in a European context, and then it was implemented in the early 1990s. In 1984, France signed the Madrid Framework Convention, and France and Italy signed a bilateral cooperation agreement in Rome in 1993. This is the first transboundary cooperation agreement signed by France (De Guttry and Ronzitti, 1994). It falls within the context of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of borders in Eastern Europe. Also, it corresponds to the desire to develop European regions. The development program INTERREG was launched to develop cross-border cooperation in Europe.

European territorial cooperation, known as Interreg, aims to promote the balanced development of the EU territory and thereby contributes to the achievement of regional policy objectives and cohesion policy. The allocated budget of 8.9 billion euros for 2014-2020 is intended to encourage European territories to cooperate with each other, regardless of state borders, jointly solve common problems related to their regions, share best practices in urban, rural, and coastal development, promote economic relations and networking of small and medium enterprises. For 37% of the EU population living near the border, i.e. 200 million people, this is a daily reality.

Cross-border cooperation raises a number of problems around the French-Italian border. This facilitates mobilization of various participants for joint projects. Cross-border cooperation is a dynamic that can have long-term consequences. Our attention is attracted by the evolution of state and territorial actors in the context of these cross-border relations. Thus, we can illustrate the change of position and mutation of the roles of different actors in this game.

Cross-border cooperation between France and Italy has become one of the promising topics in local administrations. This is a typical case of internationalization of the actions of regions and local administrations who see economic logic in this type of cooperation. At the same time, this logic is a response to a perspective according to which economic development of a border area is limited in its peripheral nature, taking into account the national context [6]. Of course, there is an unintended effect for border structures (regions, departments, municipalities, Italian provinces) that can benefit from a specific cross-border program, which can be divided into a number of projects that encourage public investment in the territories [7]. The desire to acquire relative importance in relation to the center of the state, the capital is added to these specific considerations. Border regions, often peripheral, sometimes feel politically orphaned because of the distance that separates them from the capital, from the center of real decision-making. This is especially true in France, where the Paris central administration plays the most important role in public policy [8].

Territorial communities claiming to be bordering also do so within the framework of traditional competition between territories and their elites in relation to the center with the search for cultural and political differentiation, which should bring them to the forefront of European construction [9]. Thus, political views that push for the integration of border areas sometimes represent much more concepts of approval within the respective national frameworks than a real cross-border and territorial community that could only be affirmed by defeating “obstacles” of the border, as described in the Interreg programs. If we return to the French-Italian example, it seems that Turin uses various internationalization tools, including cross-border cooperation, to distinguish itself and increase its weight if compared to Milan, a large metropolis of northern Italy.

Cross-border cooperation reflects the mutual influence of regional and international policies taken into account by the regions. In this context, the growth of subnational mobilizations, i.e. representing subnational interests, is on the agenda. This aspect was illustrated by Silvia Bolgherini and Charlotte Riouf when they describe the state's adaptation to this regional dynamic [10]. For his part, Birthe Wassenberg talks about a “small foreign policy” created by cross-border cooperation [11].

The border is “moving”: it is possible that local authorities and the processes of creating institutions for cross-border cooperation did not yield the results expected by conditional “creators.” But this allows for these differences in decision-making mechanisms between member states to be taken into account. Thus, cross-border cooperation is a modification of the border between France and

Italy, since it already changes the institutional border because of the resolution of these issues by local actors who no longer refer to the traditional mechanisms of representation sovereignty of one state over another.

3. Regional Policy Examples

An example of regional policy shows that we are witnessing the process of creating a new range of functions and new institutions. Among these phenomena of institutional creation, we should note the Conference of the French-Italian Alps and the Euroregion of the Mediterranean Alps. The first one is an association founded by local authorities in 2000, and the second one is a memorandum of understanding, which was signed in 2006. The French departments of the Maritime Alps, Alpes Haute Provence, Hautes Alpes Isere, Savoie and Haute Savoie, the Italian provinces of Imperia, Cuneo and Turin, and the autonomous region of Valle d'Aosta are members of the Conference. The Euroregion includes Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur, Rhone-Alpes, Autonomous Region of Aosta Valley, Liguria, and Piedmont.

Therefore, we see how local and regional authorities strive to organize and think over the border using two lines of action: the “clean” cross-border zone, which corresponds to the Interreg Alcotra financial zone in the context of the Conference, and an overview of the border regions in relation to the Euroregion. Even if the Euroregion declares its will to impart to itself the legal form of a European group of territorial cooperation (in order to be able to continue the course in its institutional existence), at the moment, these two initiatives remain a framework for cooperation and exchange.

The actions of these organizations also vary according to political impulses from the leaders of local authorities, depending on elections. However, we should note that, despite the alternating stages, both the Conference and the Euroregion are still functioning. Their initiatives are supported, if not growing. They often position themselves as a means of pressure for various territorial associations: they can increase visibility in the European framework. These objects provide a mapping that is part of a “subnational” activity. They do not represent the true institutional development of local authorities in a transboundary context but may portend actions by actors who can increase their decision-making powers. Thus, the Conference and the Euroregion are cross-border institutional structures and symbolize the potential future development of local authorities.

4. Key Thoughts

It appears that subnational mobilization is growing rapidly, not only in quantitative terms, which is associated with interregional programs and funding, but also in qualitative terms due to the development of identity discourse related to internationalization.

France is the main source of internationalization concepts for the border areas of Liguria and Piedmont. Admittedly, this is not an exceptional relationship, since the Italian regions are free from geographical vision when establishing functional or identification partnerships. Thus, the cross-border framework allows the Italian side to emphasize this logic of international integration. Thus, we see local authorities mobilizing around the border.

The federal and regional Italian model internalizes development on the periphery and is based on connecting various territories and their communities in international dimension. Here, the Italian approach to globalization appears. And a vision appears that can be contrasted with models that advocate national strengthening to meet the demands of globalization.

Thus, we can formulate a hypothesis that cross-border cooperation illustrates a new, more complex and rich control in a game with an increasing amount.

5. Conclusion

Certainly, the concepts of territorial competitiveness, which are developing in Italy around the expression “internationalization,” are those practices that would later need to be questioned in order to draw inspiration from them. Of course, cross-border cooperation, sometimes criticized for its weaknesses, has the advantage of uniting these actors on both sides of the border and creating

emulation, which is often instrumental but simultaneously quite real. Territorial institutions represent a living and developing fabric, the course of which is not linear. The transboundary space illustrates the space of innovation and creativity, which reflects the dynamics of integration. Also, it may seem encouraging that the national mention may disappear in favor of the new wording. Various statements of identity contribute to this. This authority mapping illustrates the merits of multiple integration, which supports the subsequent delineation in adjacent or non-contiguous territories with completely peaceful evolution. Thus, in these very limited places, which are borders, the spaces of institutional creativity and freedom appear.

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