

Collective learning through transnational co-operation
– The case of Interreg IIIB

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Texts and maps stemming from research projects under the ESPON programme presented in this report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ESPON Monitoring Committee.

Foreword

As we move towards the new Structural Funds programming period, increasing interest has been expressed in what has been achieved thus far, and thus also in what the likely lessons may be the future of territorial policy. This report summarises some of the experiences of the Interreg IIIB programme as well as some of the lessons learned, with a particular focus on the 'collective learning' aspect that this may have entailed in relation to spatial policy processes, concepts and goals, e.g. ESDP and polycentricity.

Based on our analysis, we claim that the epistemic community that has gradually formed around the Interreg Community Initiative constitutes the resource upon which the integration of spatial policy objectives and territorial policy instruments should be based, as Interreg type co-operation enables the spatial development issues to nurture the regional development dynamics. The study also suggests that Interreg projects provide the framework for increased regional consciousness and learning across Europe on the issue of spatial development, as illustrated by the example of polycentric development. In that sense, Interreg projects enable practitioners to improve their knowledge of spatial policy issues outside their own national frameworks.

The study was undertaken as a part of the ESPON 2.2.1 project, 'Territorial effects of Structural Funds' at *Nordregio* by Alexandre Dubois and Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith, ably assisted by Julien Grunfelder. The authors would also like to thank Erik Gløersen from *Nordregio* for his insightful comments on the draft version of the report. Finally, the preparatory work on the questionnaire was undertaken in close co-operation with Lisa Van Well and Camila Cortes from the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, as they were preparing a similar questionnaire in relation to their ESPON-INTERACT study on cross-border co-operation.

The final report of the project, 'Territorial Effects of the Structural Funds', which includes this study in its entirety, is available at www.espon.eu.

Stockholm, September 2006

1. Introduction

1.1 The starting point of our investigation: How to promote learning through transnational project activity? ¹

The study on Interreg IIC reported in the spring of 2005, as part of the ESPON 2.2.1 Project upon which this Annex Report is based, showed that Interreg IIC had the ability to increase participants' awareness and knowledge of polycentricity and functioned as a dissemination instrument for EU policy ideas to regional and local actors. It did this by influencing the way in which project participants view their neighbours (increased understanding and trust), but perhaps even more importantly, by influencing how regions perceive their own roles and positions in the wider European picture. It was further concluded after this first round of our survey investigation in spring 2005 that increased awareness and knowledge of polycentricity were manifest in particular at the transnational and regional levels. In this light, it was further argued that the importance of the regional level could be explained by the existence of a number of obstacles to transnational, interdisciplinary co-operation, a process that supports the strong role of regional sub-groups. An additional explanation offered here was the orientation of the various projects towards 'common' rather than 'joint' challenges. It was additionally argued that the greatest potential for Interreg to contribute to polycentric development was at the regional (*micro*) level, as it was mostly within sub-projects that such learning occurred. At the transnational level, the building of a common identity and of relations of trust is a good starting point for future developments towards increased polycentricity at that level. The establishment of constant co-operation patterns could actually then be regarded as the first step in the implementation of relational polycentricity.

Concerning the motivation and benefits of the co-operation, emphasis was placed on the need to build permanent co-operation networks. This was a theme that was carried over to the second extended round of our survey in 2006, as this was also seen as having repercussions for area designation, with more sustainable effects and applicable lessons emerging in most cases more easily in co-operation areas with a longer history of co-operation. The coherence of area designation and the need to build upon already existing networks were identified as the relevant lessons here, while it should also be noted that, in respect of the cooperation areas, their varying degrees of maturity should be taken into account.

The questions addressed in this initial stage of our Interreg investigation were however deemed insufficient to address the current and future challenges of learning from Interreg while the geographical coverage and temporal focus remained limited. This then was the starting point for the additional investigation reported here, where we sought to address, for instance, the following questions:

¹ In this Report, for the sake of consistency we have chosen to use the concept of Interreg as referring to the type of activity previously undertaken under the umbrella provided by the Interreg Community Initiative, while acknowledging that in the 2007-2013 period this activity will take place in the context of Objective 3, European territorial co-operation.

- How does Interreg co-operation, through projects and their partnerships, contribute to learning in the context of spatial policy themes, in particular in relation to the case of polycentric development?
- What kind of learning takes place and under what conditions?
- How to better integrate ESPON and Interreg activities, each of which currently address spatial policy objectives?

Recent studies, including the investigation on the territorial impacts of the Structural Funds, which this article is a continuation of² (ESPON 2.2.1; see http://www.espon.eu/mmp/online/website/content/projects/243/330/index_EN.html) have suggested that the Structural Funds do have an impact on territorial cohesion. Potential impact areas include those issues pertaining to ‘organisation’ or ‘collective learning’, as well as spatial planning themes (e.g. ‘polycentric development’). In the first instance, the study on Interreg IIC reported as part of the ESPON 2.2.1 project in 2005 showed that this Community Initiative did indeed increase the participants’ awareness and knowledge of polycentricity, and thus that it has clearly functioned as a dissemination instrument for EU policy ideas to regional and local actors. The ways in which this actually takes place were a particular focus of the work carried out here.

Interreg co-operation has influenced both the way in which project participants view their neighbours (increased understanding and trust), but perhaps even more importantly, how these regions perceive their own roles and position in the wider European structure. In this second stage of the study, we extended OUR investigation to include the Interreg IIIB areas. Interest in the effects and impacts of a more qualitative nature has increased dramatically, not least since the traditional instruments of European and national territorial policy have been increasingly integrated and co-ordinated in order to improve their efficiency (e.g. Bachtler and Wishlade 2005, viii).

Rather than concentrating on the nature and form of learning processes as such, our initial interest was more closely related to the actual content of learning and the effects of participating in Interreg activity. Here we sought to investigate the dimensions of polycentric development where learning effects could perhaps be particularly easily identified. This also allowed us the possibility of drawing broader conclusions on learning and discursive integration, providing an exemplary case of policy learning, which could be used as an inspiration in other areas of transnational integration in respect of territorial/spatial policy. The main dimensions seemed to relate to transport issues and co-operation aspects. It seemed, moreover, that the level of ‘awareness’ as regards polycentricity increased over time, *even in the projects that were not directly linked to the theme* (partly due to increased self-understanding and the emergent spatial vision). As such then, learning in respect of polycentricity was among the indirect effects of INTERREG co-operation. As it was also concluded in the report that currently, Interreg is the only EU instrument promoting co-operation and as fostering cooperation between centres with similar development profiles across Europe in the context of the Structural Funds may support polycentric development; this seemed a natural connection to investigate further. The nature and future policy implications of such learning processes were only tentatively addressed in the original final report (from March 2005). This question therefore provides a major focus of this paper. What kinds of learning processes have previously been instigated through Interreg, what possible differences are there between programme areas, and what can we learn from these differences? How can the learning potential of Interreg be further developed?

The self-understanding that emerges through learning is thus one of its main aspects, and one of the key effects identified here. It was concluded that Interreg co-operation did increase the participant’s awareness and knowledge of polycentricity and functioned as a dissemination instrument for EU policy ideas to regional and local actors, often influencing the way in which project participants viewed their neighbours (increased understanding and trust), but perhaps

² ESPON 221; see http://www.espon.eu/mmp/online/website/content/projects/243/330/index_EN.html

even more importantly, how the regions themselves perceive their own role and position in the wider European structure. In other studies on European spatial policy, it has been argued that polycentric development is essentially about promoting learning (Waterhout, Meijers and Zonneveld 2003,1) and discursive integration (Lähteenmäki-Smith, Fuller and Böhme 2005), which seems to support the choice of 'case study' in our analysis of trans-national learning processes.

As argued above, already in the first stage of the survey study undertaken as part of the study on the territorial effects of the Structural Funds, reported in March 2005, learning in relation to polycentric development through Interreg was already discernible. The dimensions of polycentric development considered were mainly related to transport issues and co-operation aspects. It seems however that the level of 'awareness' in respect of polycentricity has been increased even in those projects that were not directly linked to the theme (partly due to increased self-understanding and the emergent spatial vision). At for the trans-national level, the building of a common identity and of relations of trust is a good starting point for future developments towards increased polycentricity at that level. While the establishment of constant co-operation patterns can actually be regarded as the first step in the implementation of relational polycentricity.

We also wanted to link the analysis to the nature of partnerships and partnership-building, where rather more generic conclusions could potentially be drawn. Does more learning occur in partnerships that are of a longer duration? What type of partnerships and learning processes are most effective in disseminating learning about polycentricity? These are some of the questions addressed in this investigation.

These were the starting points that were carried forward from the first round of our investigation. In the section on methodology (section 1.4) the changes undertaken after the initial round and analysis are described in more detail.

1.2 ESPON and Interreg: Past, present and future

1.2.1 Past: the links between spatial and territorial themes in the wake of the ESDP

The Interreg IIIB Programme is one of the three strands of the Interreg Programme, financed in the framework of the Structural Funds. Strand B of the programme focuses on transnational co-operation, while Strand A is dedicated to cross-border co-operation and Strand C to inter-regional co-operation (less territorial and more sectoral). For many, the Interreg IIIB transnational areas are the first attempt to put into practice the wish to develop Global Integration Zones outside the core areas of Europe, but most importantly they also aim to stimulate a bottom-up approach to the development of links between regions (Zonneveld, 2005).

The ESPON programme is a part of the Interreg initiative, and is an applied-research programme that aims to analyse the territorial trends currently facing Europe. The objectives of the ESPON programme are to foster co-operation between spatial planning researchers in Europe and to provide policy-makers with scientific data on the territorial trends of Europe. At the same time one important side effect of ESPON is the creation of a common understanding of spatial planning, which has traditionally varies greatly across the Member States, thus posing additional challenges to trans-national and cross-border initiatives such as Interreg (e.g. Moll 2002, 22).

Both programmes referred to above are closely linked to the European spatial planning agenda. The ESPON programme was set up essentially with the aim of providing a scientific basis for a potential upgrade of the ESDP (Van Gestel and Faludi, 2005). Since its founding in 2002, ESPON has achieved impressive results in the form of the collaboration of hundreds

European researchers producing thousands of pages of published reports. The Interreg IIIB programme was well set up in the wake of the ESDP (Faludi, 2002) and is considered by some to be the *de facto* field of implementation of the ESDP's rationale and policy goals. The inter-linkages are summarised below in figure 1.

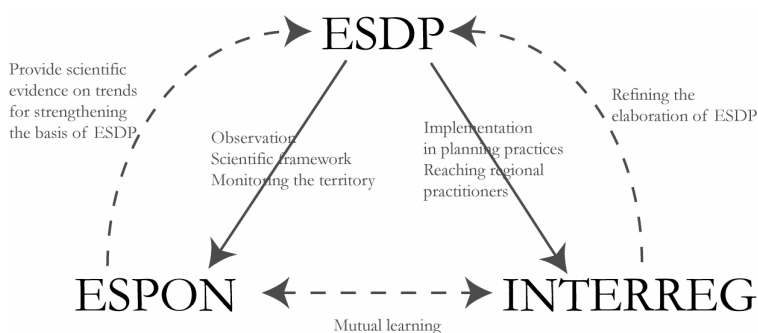


Figure 1: ESPON and Interreg in the wake of ESDP

Both programmes were set up with the firm intention to provide relevant feedback into the ESDP process. As Nadin confirms, the Interreg IIC programme (and its successor IIIB) are not only implementing the ESDP principles, but is also expected to refine its elaboration (Nadin & Shaw, 1998). Moreover, although the ESDP process has been put on hold (at least formally), the debate on European spatial planning remains ongoing and could greatly benefit from the careful analysis of the experiences acquired and results developed in both programmes.

1.2.2 Present: similar scope, but little connection between ESPON and Interreg

Reviewing the *raison d'être* of both programmes stresses the fact that, in the mind of the European policy-makers, Interreg and ESPON were meant to be complementary in their scope and in the perspectives taken. At this stage, one can definitely say that this was wishful thinking, and as such, difficult to put into practice, as there are few connections between the ESPON research community and the mainly practitioner-based community of Interreg. A late attempt to make up for this perceived deficiency is the development of thematic studies commissioned by both ESPON and INTERACT (the coordinative body for Interreg programmes). The aim of these studies is to disseminate the ESPON findings and results to the Interreg Community, rather than developing an effective platform for mutual learning.

In its paper presented to the ESPON community in Luxembourg, Hague (2005) makes the point that 'practitioners are relatively unaware of ESPON findings [...] and [...] in general they have not been explicitly using ESPON to set the territorial context'. In substance, Hague stresses two interesting points, focusing on the visibility and comprehensiveness of the ESPON programme.

Consequently, the questionnaire sent to the Interreg IIIB Lead Partners gave us the ability to 'test' these assumptions, enabling us to present a certain 'state of the affairs' concerning the embeddedness of ESPON in Interreg, and thus to focus on the following questions:

- ✓ How embedded is ESPON in the Interreg community?
- ✓ How useful have the ESPON results been for this community?
- ✓ What are the ESPON themes of relevance for Interreg co-operation projects?

The embeddedness of ESPON was assessed by asking the Interreg practitioners to express their degree of awareness, the possible answers ranging from ‘Never heard of it’ to ‘Yes, very much’, as well as two more shades of positive response. The results are illustrated below, in figure 2.

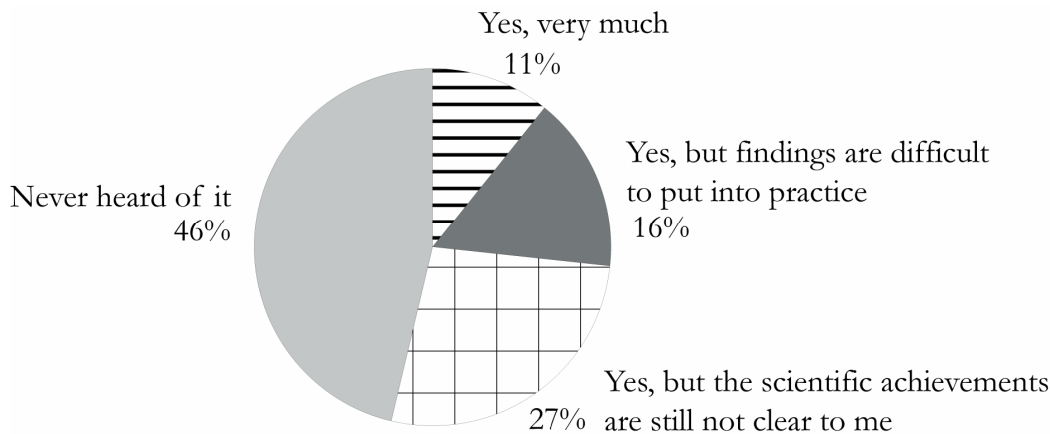


Figure 2: Awareness of ESPON in Interreg

From the diagram, two observations can be made. Firstly, almost half (46%) of the Interreg Lead Partners affirm that they have never heard of ESPON. From that, it seems reasonable to assume that ESPON lacks clear visibility from within the Interreg community. Not knowing about ESPON makes it highly unlikely that the practitioners will use its findings in order to ‘set their territorial context’ (Hague, 2005). A second point of interest relates to the right side of the pie diagram, i.e. the share of Interreg practitioners who *do* know about ESPON.

This second feature directly relates to the issue of the practitioner’s ability to understand the ESPON findings and outcomes. Indeed, only 11% of the respondents seem to be fully aware of the ESPON programme, while 16% state that its findings are ‘difficult to put into practice’ and 27% that its scientific achievements are ‘still not clear’ to them.

These answers provide clear support to the assumption made by Hague (2005), i.e. that ‘few (...) projects seem to have made explicit use of ESPON’, by stressing that knowing ESPON as a programme does not imply that it has been effectively used in practice. This is even emphasized by the fact that approximately 90% of the respondents assert that they have not been able to use the ESPON findings in their Interreg project.

To conclude on this point then, a very large proportion of Interreg Lead Partners, representing the members of the Interreg community that have the greatest awareness of their own programme, have little or no use for the ESPON findings and outcomes. This is all the more surprising, as ESPON and Interreg do share a number of common areas of work, as well as objectives.

Indeed, as Hague (2005) points it out, ‘many Interreg projects are dealing with issues that in principle overlap with ESPON themes’. In order to know more about this possible ‘overlap’, one of the questions in our survey focused on assessing the degree of relevance of selected ESPON themes (without saying explicitly that they were ESPON themes) applied in the context of Interreg projects.

The selected themes were the ones used in the context of ESPON-INTERACT studies:

- ✓ Transport and communication
- ✓ Environmental hazards and risk management
- ✓ Spatial visions and scenarios

- ✓ Cross-border co-operation and development
- ✓ Polycentricity and rural-urban relations

An initial comment here is that all five themes are assessed as being quite relevant for Interreg partnerships. This stresses the fact that there is a strong compatibility with the themes addressed in ESPON. In that sense, the relatively poor integration of the two programmes is not due to an incompatibility of interest, but more to the abovementioned obstacles to interaction.

The analysis of the answers shows that two themes are seen as more relevant for Interreg co-operation: 'Environmental hazards and risk management' and 'Cross-border co-operation and development'. This is hardly surprising as these two themes are the ones with the strongest local correlation, and thus the ones that speak more to the Interreg participants' concerns, as predominantly consisting of local and regional practitioners.

This brief overview of the 'state of the affairs' concerning the dialogue between ESPON and Interreg has shown that in spite of the often similar scope of work, the programmes have little connection, amounting to a weak interface between them, which makes the objective of improved mutual learning difficult to achieve.

1.2.3 Future: potential for improved integration?

In this light it is clear that a significant level of effort still needs to be put into encouraging greater exchanges of experience and knowledge between ESPON and Interreg. This may in some cases be hampered by the changes that will take place before the onset of the new Structural Funds programme period, e.g. the fact that spatial planning seems to have a more ambivalent role in the trans-national programmes of Interreg type, and the fact that cross-border and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) policies predominate in funding terms. Thus regional or territorial policies seem to be better disposed to make their mark, while spatial themes are only relevant where they can be seen to support territorial policy objectives (e.g. in respect of competitiveness and the Lisbon Agenda, see for instance the Strategic Guidelines; CEC 2006, 30).³

Indeed, greater visibility and better ability for mutual understanding seem to be prerequisites for enhancing co-operation between ESPON and Interreg. For ESPON, the main challenge would then be able to translate its research findings into material that is meaningful to the practitioners involved in Interreg projects. This can be seen to refer to both conceptual and substantive clarity, as the lack of a shared language or rather a shared vocabulary was seen to be one of the main challenges here. As Hague (2005) suggests, the ESPON community has been much too timid on the policy analysis side, which is, of course, the most interesting for the local and regional practitioners that make up the Interreg community. The focus should then be put on extracting the key messages relating to the ESPON working themes in order to create the conditions for a dialogue between the two communities. In this sense, it would be possible for the ESPON community to receive feedback on what the most important perspectives are from the point of view of the Interreg practitioners.

Indeed, despite their strong convergence in terms of scope (spatial development), ESPON and Interreg have shown few signs of real collaboration in exchanging experiences and knowledge. This is, in part, the purpose behind the elaboration of the ESPON-INTERACT studies, the intent of which is to disseminate more efficiently the key ESPON findings. More importantly however, it would be more useful to develop closer links between the actors in each programme, i.e. researchers and practitioners, thus fostering deeper networking. Here the call for

³ The strategic guidelines also leave room for articulating spatial policy objectives, e.g. '...territorial cohesion extends beyond the notion of economic and social cohesion, its objective being to help achieve a more balanced development, to build sustainable communities in urban and rural areas and to seek greater consistency with other sectoral policies which have a spatial impact. This also involves improving territorial integration and encouraging cooperation between and within regions.' (CEC 2006, 29.)

better co-ordination of these issues and a more targeted learning process can be of relevance. National strategy documents on territorial development also raise the theme of learning as increasingly central. This is the case, for instance, in the recent national strategy for regional competitiveness and employment published by the Swedish government for 2007-2013 period, where the topic is referred to in different programme management contexts, but particularly as a need stemming from the increasing cross-border and international programme contexts (Näringsdepartementet 2006, 51).

1.3 Why the interest in learning?

The need to understand how things are learned is a logical consequence of being faced with increasing complexity and even perceived chaos. Learning is part of the process of creating order in complex situations. Programme theory has in its own way sought to create order and understanding in this world of perceived complexity produced by our late modern societies. This is also explains part of the interest underlying our study reported here.

The policy responses that emerge in response to some of the problems and challenges brought about by such complexity have also lead to more constructivist responses being called for, also seeking to accommodate perceived chaos and the tensions that this brings about. Theories of learning organisations (e.g. Senge, Nonaka et al 2003, Saarinen 2004), thus have paid increasing attention to the need to increase social capital and collective processes of creating learning, and in so doing bring order to a situation of perceived disorder and chaos. Network solutions for learning and the co-operation that these necessitate have thus been seen as particularly fruitful. As all learning necessarily takes place in a more or less explicitly articulated and structured social context, the systems of interactions and their embeddedness (e.g. Granovetter 1985) are the key to understanding learning. While living in the midst of continuous complexity and perceived chaos causes anxiety for an individual and turbulence in organisations, the collaborative process that collective learning and teamwork entail can relieve this anxiety and instead form processes of creative tension where uncertainty and chaos prevail, while learning also takes place. These processes also necessitate that answers and explanations to policy intervention be produced and disseminated through different methods than previously: thus the focus on process evaluation (e.g. Patton 2002), self-evaluation and capacity building in recent years.

We argue here that there has been a shift from monitoring and evaluation as, first and foremost, an external and in some respects a more technical exercise (based on micro economic input-output models and similar), necessitated by the need to realise and improve the accountability of public interventions of different kinds to a more qualitative and internally inspired, complex process of learning and improving, requiring new evaluation methods and concepts. This has entailed a simultaneous shift from focusing on the effectiveness and impact of policy intervention as well as absorption capacity and efficiency. The outcomes and results of projects, programmes and policy initiatives have thus increasingly been accompanied by an interest in processes, the nature and substance of activities put into motion through Structural Funds instruments: not only is there an interest in knowing what is being done with public funding in terms of indirect results and outcomes, but also what kind of processes are set into motion through these activities and what gradual changes they entail among the actors, organisations and institutions involved in these policy measures. What is being learned, how and by whom, have become questions of increasing interest in the context of public policy interventions.

This shift is reflective of a certain maturity within the Structural Funds as a certain type of policy instrument, but also of methodological learning which has taken place within the research and evaluation community. With the gradual development of both evaluation practice in general

and within the Structural Funds in particular, greater emphasis has come to be placed on the learning aspects of evaluation, as well as on capacity building. Learning has entailed increased concern for explanatory factors. That is to say, there is an increasing interest in the reasons behind why some interventions succeed, while others fail, and the general lessons that can be learned from individual 'success stories'. In order to provide explanations for, and generate understanding of, increasingly complex interventions rather than just monitoring and controlling their efficiency and accountability, there has thus been a gradual shift towards a more multi-faceted, learning-oriented evaluation, which necessarily builds on a variety of methods and data sources. While quantitative indicators are still of the utmost importance, qualitative aspects are however increasingly highlighted.

Investigating learning within the cross-border and trans-national contexts has been a focus of other recent ESPON studies. For instance in the study on territorial governance, it was found that the cross-border context is an area where many at times conflicting governance dynamics are at play. The dimensions of analysis that were seen as particularly important challenges for closer integration and more successful territorial governance and Europeanization were related to funding (availability of Interreg funding in particular), identification of final beneficiaries, stakeholder and interested parties, as most of the trans-national cases are based upon and developed as exercises in co-operation for the local authorities, and cross-sector co-ordination. In the case of cross-border initiatives in spatial planning, the most important potential for learning was identified within improving and creating new channels of information, the exchange of experience and learning, as the cross-border initiatives can be used as 'laboratories' through which trans-national ideas can be channelled and tested (e.g. Farinos Dasi et al. 2006, 20). Information and marketing tools and working practice are among dimensions where organisational innovation has been found.

Examples of evaluative studies indicate how the interest on how interaction and collaboration takes place and how co-operative ties are strengthened (or alternatively overlooked or severed) abound. The interest in collaborative and collective processes of change, necessarily involving learning is hardly surprising. In an evaluative study of the North Sea Interreg IIIB Programme, a number of dimensions of learning were previously identified. Interestingly for the theme at hand here it was concluded that the organisations benefiting from the Interreg IIIB projects mainly relied on the trans-national focus to achieve such learning effects (something that is already done within the organisation, but without the trans-national 'value added'). Similar projects may have been undertaken even without the Interreg impetus, but *without the same confidence or trans-national 'value added'*. In this respect, the project partners in the study tended to echo the Lead Partners. Benefits often cited by the project partnerships here included:

- *Confidence building*
Learning from others and co-operating internationally helps one put ones own work and expertise into perspective.
- *Cross-sectoral 'value added'*
Cross-sectoral benefits and results, perhaps not from the beginning but later on in the project implementation – what connections does our project have to other sectors through organisational learning.
- *Working methods*
Differences in methodology in mobilising and communicating resources for the benefit of the projects.
- *Concrete tools*
Guidelines, best practice guides, definition systems in order to ensure that all have the same conceptual vocabulary in the sector in question.

- *Lessons in project management*
These were also lessons that can be used in other contexts and activities and are part of the competence-development of individuals and organisations involved. Here leadership and communication were often referred to as the key issues. In many cases, good project management skills (in general terms) are the key, but they are not sufficient, as trans-national/Interreg co-operation has its specificities. Leadership and learning are particularly important in broad partnerships.
- *Internationalisation*
The whole sector or organisation/unit benefits from the international learning and internationalisation (improving the international competence of personnel for instance).
- *Partnerships*
Interreg co-operation can bring together different parties that are not used to working together, in some cases, parties that did not have constructive relations previously – Interreg operations often have a positive effect in terms of solving inertia problems in this respect.
- *Expertise development*
In the best-case scenario the project allows for complementary expertise to emerge from the partners. (*Nordregio* and *Eurofutures* 2005, 55.)

These types of ‘added value’ effects seem to be more generic, thus not merely related to the North Sea context. The ‘value added’ of European interventions has in recent years been the object of increased interest (e.g. Tarchys 2005; Skålnes and Moen 2004) while the ‘value added’ debate can also be seen within the context of learning: ‘value added’ after all emerges only after a process of learning and change. Whether such effects can be identified in the Interreg survey will be the question we turned to next, after an introduction to the methodology used in our study of learning through Interreg.

1.4 Methodology: A survey-based study

The present study is an analysis of the features of collective learning in Interreg IIIB projects mainly based on the results of a survey that was sent to the Lead Partners of the projects. The survey targeted the ‘continental’ programme areas, excluding the overseas Interreg areas such as Azores-Madeira-Canarias, Réunion, or the Caribbean Space. Moreover, because no project has been approved yet in the area, the survey was not sent to the Archimed area.

We want to emphasise here that while the study reported here represents evaluative and applied research, it is not an evaluation *per se*, but rather an investigation of both theoretical and empirical interests and ambitions. We have not identified policy recommendations, though at times there are policy implications identified, e.g. in relation to how one could better integrate spatial planning and territorial policy objectives and methods.

Unlike the first batch of questionnaires sent in 2004-05, this survey was designed to reflect a progressive and thematic approach to the issues relating to collective learning in Interreg, and was thus divided into three main parts, namely ‘Collective learning processes’, ‘Aspects of trans-national co-operation’ and ‘Learning on polycentric development’. The questionnaire consisted of a set of 32 multi-choice questions with the possibility, in some cases, for the respondent to

make comments via open questions. The questionnaire is included at the end of the present report as an attachment.

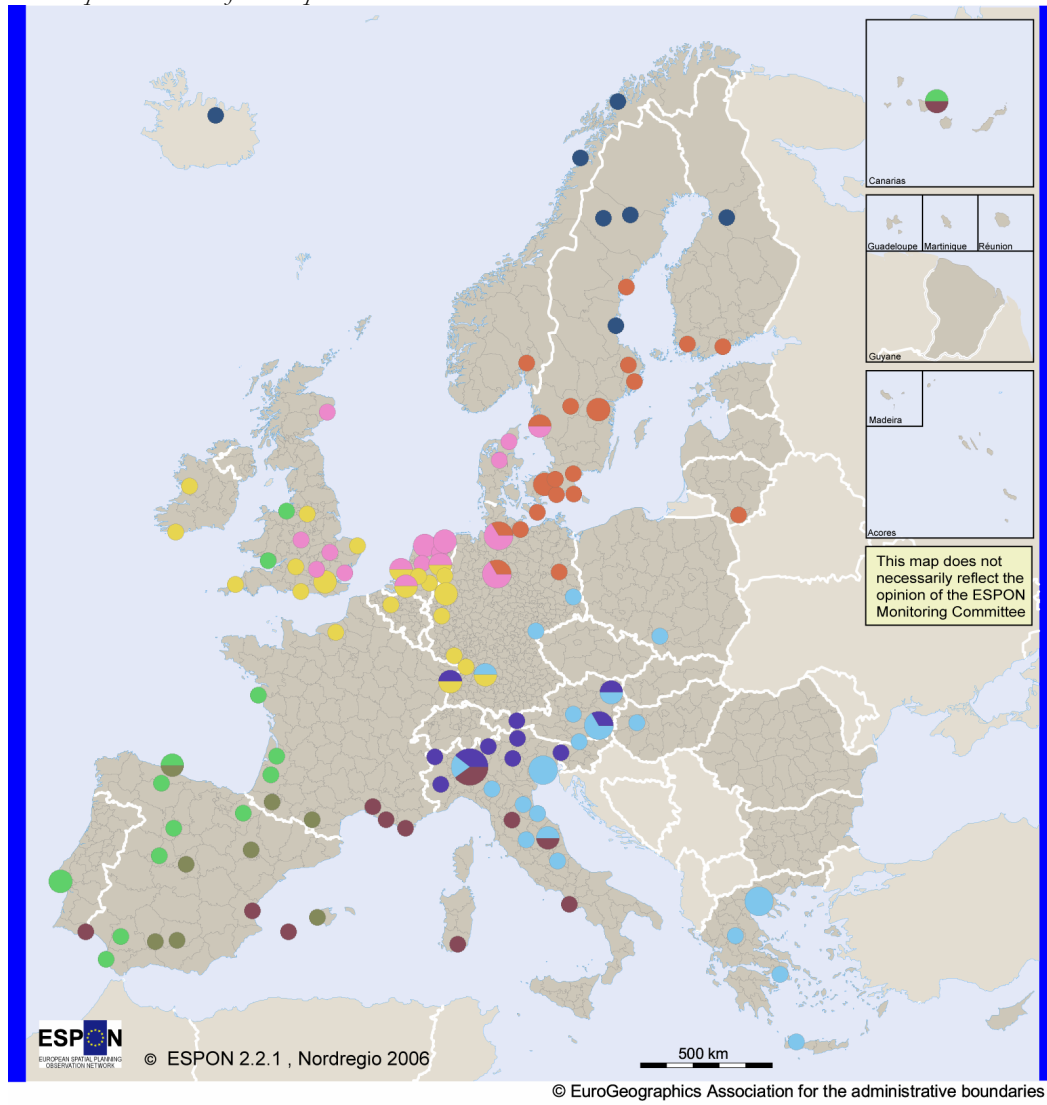
The Lead Partners of the Interreg IIIB projects were identified thanks to the ESPON-INTERACT database that was provided to the project team by the ESPON Coordination Unit. Although the coverage of the database was fairly comprehensive, some further updates were nonetheless necessary, as the contact information of the Lead Partners was in some cases either missing or outdated. This update was made by a brief survey of the projects' website, where available. The final step was the sending of an electronic version of the questionnaire to the identified Lead Partners, as well as a follow-up phone call to 25 project leaders in order to increase the response rate in the regions with a rather low turn-out, especially South West Europe and the Northern Periphery.

The survey only targeted the Lead Partners of Interreg projects, and not all project participants, for two main reasons. The first was practical, as it would have been too large a task to gather and process all the contact information for all the Interreg IIIB projects, which could not be performed in the framework of this project. The second was rather more qualitative in nature, as it was assumed, based on previous projects, that the LPs tended to have the best knowledge and the widest perspective on the processes that took place during the project.

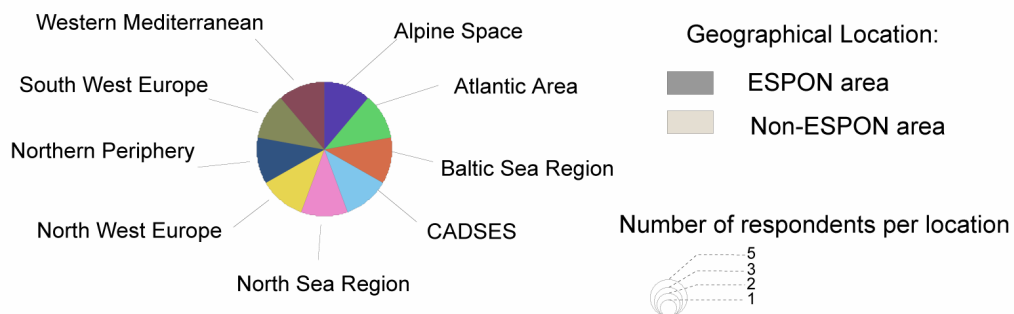
From the approximately 800 questionnaires that were sent, 147 completed answers were received and processed, which corresponds to a return of approximately 20%. Initial expectations as regards the returns were essentially twofold. Firstly, as returns in similar studies tended to be low, our main interest was instead focussed on achieving a fairly even distribution of responses throughout Europe, thus enabling the analysis to be truly European in its range, as the lack of responses outside the northern regions of Europe in the first batch limited the pertinence of the first study. Secondly, the survey should be based on reasonably large samples of answers for each programme area, to be certain that our analysis is built upon a solid basis of Interreg IIIB areas, so that the results could fairly represent the perspectives from the entire Interreg IIIB Community, rather than being based on a limited number of Interreg IIIB areas (40% of the answers in the first batch came from the Baltic Sea Region programme alone).

The map 1 displays the location of the Interreg LP that responded to the survey, as well as the number of respondents per city (i.e. that two LP from distinct projects coming from the same city are displayed by the same points). While the map shows a fairly good spread of respondents across Europe, it also points to a number of other interesting features. One such feature is the lack of responses from the central parts of France as well as from Paris. Another is the low rate of response from the New Member States, which is perhaps to be expected as they only joined the European Union in 2004, and thus were not eligible to be part of the Interreg programme.

Map 1: Location of the respondents



Respondents by location and INTERREG area



The map also shows the locations where two or more projects responded to our survey. The locations from which two projects responded are to be found in the Netherlands, in the southern part of Scandinavia as well as along the Franco-German border. In the cities of Venice (Italy), Graz (Austria), Thessalonica (Greece) as well as Hanover and Hamburg (Germany), three LP have responded to our survey, while five responses have been collected from the city of Milan.

The second main target of the survey was to have the most homogenous sample of responses between the various Interreg areas. Table 1 proposes an overview of the number of answers received per Interreg area and per country. The responses cover all of the Interreg areas targeted, with the number of answers per area ranging from 26 (CADSES) to 7 (Northern Periphery). Overall, 20 responses have been collected from four different areas: CADSES (26), North West Europe (24), Baltic Sea Region (22) and North Sea Region (21). The countries that have contributed the most with their responses are Italy (24), and Germany and Spain (17 each).

Table 1: Distribution of the responses by INTERREG area and country

INTERREG area	Country	Number of responses
Alpine Space 12 (8,2%)	Italy	8
	Austria	3
	France	1
Atlantic Area 14 (9,5%)	Spain	8
	France	3
	UK	2
	Portugal	1
Baltic Sea 22 (15,0%)	Sweden	11
	Germany	4
	Denmark	3
	Finland	2
	Lithuania	1
	Norway	1
CADSES 26 (17,7%)	Italy	10
	Greece	6
	Austria	5
	Germany	3
	Hungary	1
	Poland	1
North Sea Region 21 (14,3%)	The Netherlands	9
	UK	5
	Germany	4
	Denmark	2
	Sweden	1
North West Europe 24 (16,3%)	UK	7
	Germany	6
	The Netherlands	6
	France	2

	Ireland	2
	Belgium	1
Northern periphery	Sweden	3
7 (4,8%)	Norway	2
	Finland	1
	Iceland	1
South West Europe	Spain	6
8 (5,4%)	France	2
Western Mediterranean (MEDOCC)	Italy	6
13 (8,8%)	France	3
	Spain	3
	Portugal	1
	Total	147

As is typical for Interreg co-operation more generally and also became apparent in our survey, the organisational types represented are (in an order of the number of respondents) primarily regional authorities, local authorities, sector authorities and universities and research institutes. A few respondents also came from companies (mainly through chambers of commerce) and expert groups (consultants), as well as the voluntary sector, foundations etc. There are very few politicians among the respondents.

2. Summarising the findings: Learning effects of INTERREG

Firstly, it was of course our interest to investigate *who* the actors involved in learning actually were, and subsequently, whether the learning was in fact collective in nature, or more individually based. It was indeed seen that the trans-national group and its individual members are the most central actors within the learning process, though organisational learning often follows. This can be understood in the sense that individual learning is the starting point for any wider process of learning; though it also seems to suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which project results and learning processes were communicated. Almost without exception, all of the partners were seen as benefiting from the learning process.

We also sought to investigate the nature of partnerships within Interreg and how these may influence the particular learning patterns involved.

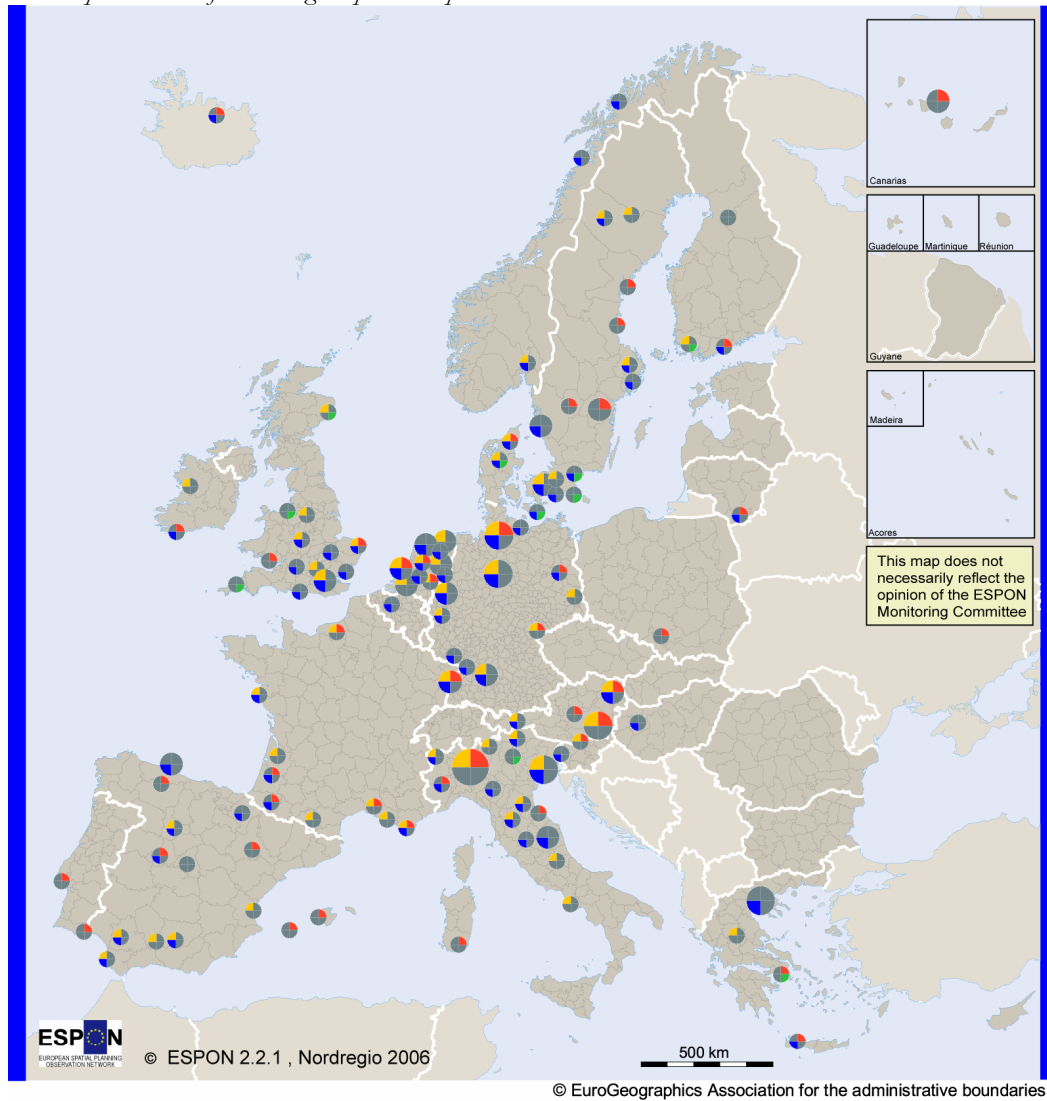
2.1 Nature of partnerships

The question of partnerships has also been extensively investigated in recent years; we did however want to include it in our survey, as it seems to lie at the core of collective learning processes and communication.

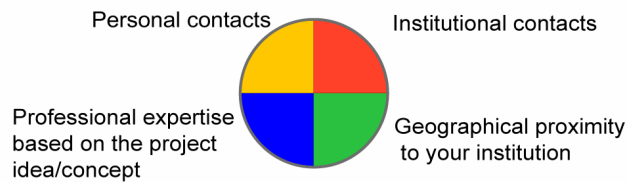
As already noted previously, the Interreg partnerships tended to be dominated by public sector authorities, in particular from the regional and local levels. In addition to the organisation of partnerships we were also interested in what brings them together, namely, what are the motivations and criteria for partnership-building?

As for the individual or organisational motivation to entering into a project partnership, most respondents saw the search for new solutions to similar problems as the main motivation, followed by establishing new transnational networks. As for the partners most interested in these issues, and the most willing to become involved, regional authorities were deemed to be most active, followed by research institutes and universities and local authorities. National agencies were deemed to be least active. As for the criteria in becoming involved, professional expertise and personal contacts were the two top criteria, followed by institutional contacts and geographical proximity. What brings partnership together is then their shared thematic interest, more than administrative or professional commonality of purpose.

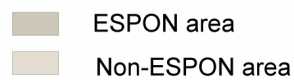
Map 2: Criteria for building the partnership



Criteria chosen for building the partnership



Geographical Location:



Number of respondents per city:



What is also interesting here is that partnerships seem quite stable over time, with a high degree of continuation: most respondents were hopeful that co-operation could be continued across time and into the next programming period.

2.2 Learning effects

Catalyst effects emerged in the form of the creation of new collective knowledge within the trans-national project groups and in the form of generating entirely new solutions through collaboration. Questions over the nature and form of interactions and learning processes, already referred to in the opening section were of particular interest here, as only by understanding the nature and processes through which learning takes place can we elaborate in a more concrete fashion on the processes of learning that should be supported within the future Interreg activities.

The majority of projects involved both innovation and learning, i.e. learning primarily took place in the form of generating entirely new collaborative solutions to problems, as well as through adapting external solutions to problems. Benchmarking solutions, i.e. solutions where successful problem-solving approaches from other regions were duplicated were however less common, despite the general 'hype' over bench-marking solutions in recent years.

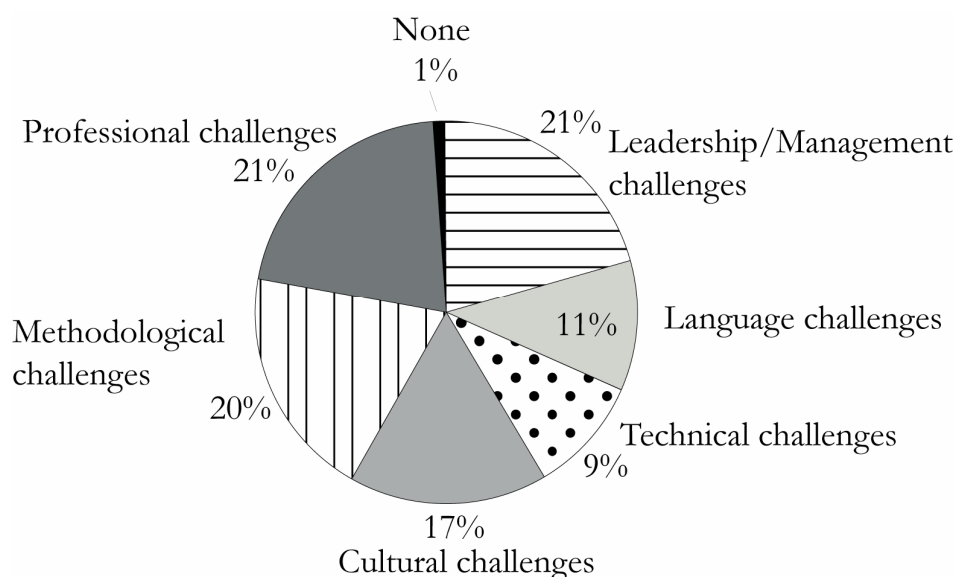


Figure 3: Most significant challenges hampering co-operation

Partnerships and project management also face challenges and our survey sought to identify which challenges the project Lead Partners most identified with. These are summarised in the figure 3 above. Here one of the key results was that challenges exist in particular in relation to commitment and *leadership*. As far as the processes of learning are concerned, and in light of the focus on interaction, it seems justified to look for bottlenecks in the ways in which communication and interaction may be hampered in trans-national project partnerships. The problems do not primarily seem to be connected to language: the majority of projects use English as the working language, and language differences are among those problems least mentioned, second only to technical problems. Rather the problems of communication are connected to professional differences (i.e. differences in administrative, political or professional styles and cultures), as well as to challenges relating to leadership and management styles.

Different ways of organising work and cultural variations (such as those relating to different understandings of the same notions or concepts) are also among those challenges most often identified, which seems to suggest, yet again, that it is more likely that the lack of a common language in terms of conceptual or professional contexts is more of a challenge than differences in linguistic skills. It has in fact been pointed out in Interreg mid-term evaluations that the creation of a common 'language' and understanding of shared issues is one of the main aspects of 'value added' (e.g. Görmar et al. 2004, 12). The prevalence of leadership and management as the issues most seen to represent a challenge is also very interesting, and is a finding that is not too dissimilar from other recent studies on organisational learning in general, or from the experience of Interreg in particular (ibid, 15).

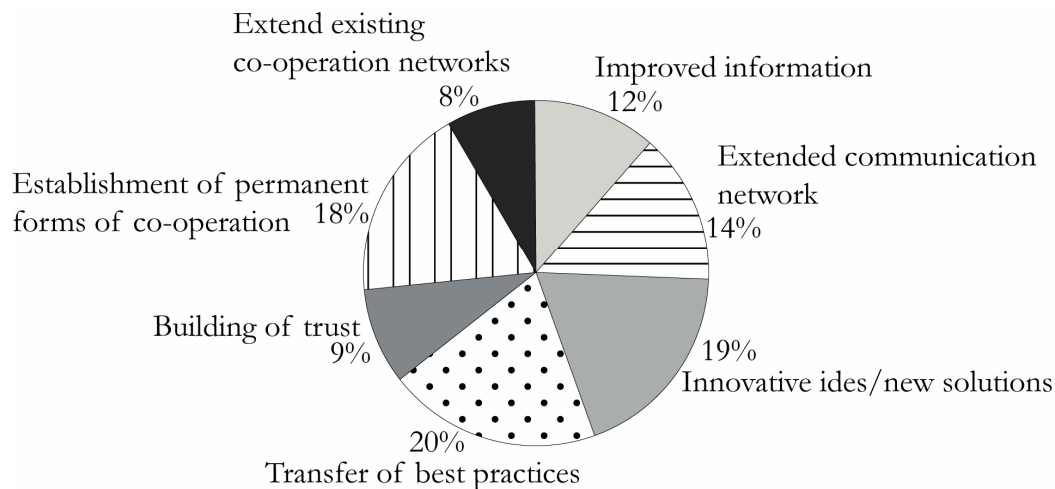


Figure 4: Main benefits of transnational co-operation

The nature of the learning process is naturally only understandable within the context of the actual content of the practices and solutions to concrete problems, referred to above. What it is then that is actually learned within Interreg partnerships is in turn summarised in figure 4 above. The types of learning content most often reported included the transfer of 'best practices' as well as innovative ideas and solutions (similarly to what was reported previously in relation to the solutions to problems), followed by establishing more permanent co-operation forms for the future and extending and increasing communication networks. In terms of individual learning and the increasing understanding of spatial and regional dynamics and processes, the respondents most often referred to aspects of individual learning such as increasing human and institutional potential and capacity for co-operation. In addition, issues such as the sharing of available human resources (e.g. in relation to R&D, education or culture) were identified. More locally based learning aspects and benefits, such as strengthening entrepreneurial or local/regional employment initiatives or revitalising small and medium-sized cities were generally however only rarely identified as relevant.

How to best promote learning in the future, in similar collaborative project contexts was a question of interest for the new programming period. Here networking skills were identified as being particularly important and in a majority of cases they were judged as good. This can indeed be seen as an important aspect of the capacity building, that has been ongoing and that increases with more long-term commitment to collaboration.

Thematically we wanted to investigate how much the prevalent discourse on European spatial planning and territorial cohesion has influenced project content and thematic focus: are the current 'buzzwords' of cohesion policy actually dominant in the projects, and what kind of

conceptual learning may be involved? Regional Competitiveness, Territorial cohesion, and the need for active cross-border co-operation were the themes that emerged as being particularly central. We also wanted to ask whether learning is in a way a self-perpetuating process – the more we participate in Interreg, the more we see that it is necessary? The more we work in trans-national contexts, the more need for this we see? There are, in fact, many aspects of ‘thematic learning’ that relate to learning in terms of the content and utilisation of various terms within territorial policy and spatial planning, including Polycentric development, and Sustainable development. Overall, learning on polycentricity is less pronounced than that in other themes such as sustainable development or regional competitiveness.

In many areas, co-operation at least initially, can bring about confusion and raise more questions than it answers. Learning through trans-national co-operation is clearly not without its problems. Most ‘confusion’ was associated with ‘learning’ in respect of issues which were generated by rather more recent policy concepts, e.g. territorial cohesion and polycentricity both emerged here as themes where not that much learning (in relative terms) has, as yet, taken place, and thus confusion resulted. The need for cross-border co-operation and regional competitiveness were on the other hand seen as less problematic. In the next section, we will investigate more closely the learning and other effects relating to the contested notions of polycentricity and polycentric development.

3. Delving deeper: polycentric development in Interreg

3.1 Introduction to the concept

Polycentric development has been a core issue in the context of the Interreg IIIB programme. As has been shown by recent studies (Dubois et al., 2006; Viehauser et al., 2006), polycentric development, as one of the key policy objectives of the ESDP, has been applied extensively in the programme documents used to define an area's objectives as well as in designing the priorities and measures that build the framework for the allocation of the programme's funds and the approval of projects.

On average, at least one measure in each of the Interreg areas investigated in this report takes polycentric development as a policy focus. However, the interpretation of the notion is not the same in each of the programme areas, depending on the socio-economic preconditions and the specific needs for future development in the region, thus understanding polycentric development as a 'malleable' policy objective that ought to be 'adapted' instead of directly 'imported'.

It is thus interesting to distinguish this top-down approach to policy development, conceptualising a policy objective to be applied at the lower tiers of territory, to a more bottom-up approach focusing on how the notion is locally and regionally understood, interpreted and put into practice. Indeed, as Nadin and Shaw state, Interreg provides the opportunity to shape a 'bottom-up process of formulating transnational planning policy' (Nadin & Shaw, 1998). In this context, it becomes all the more relevant to focus on how the Interreg participants understand the concept of polycentric development.

This paper investigates the understanding that the Interreg participants, here represented by the Interreg IIIB Lead Partners, have developed on the concept of polycentric development. In that sense, the study is complementary to the recent 'ESPON-INTERACT' study on polycentric urban development and rural-urban partnership', which is more focused on how the Interreg projects have translated polycentric development into project objectives.

Nadin and Shaw also stress the importance of Interreg programmes (then IIC) as they make it possible to incorporate the transnational dimension in planning practices (Nadin & Shaw, 1998). Indeed, past studies have already focused on the wide array of applications of polycentric development in the European countries, as for instance the work performed by Zonneveld and his colleagues in the framework of the ESPON 1.1.1 project (Zonneveld *et al.*, 2004). These studies provide us with a pertinent picture of how polycentric development is implemented at the national level in Europe. As we conceive it, the 'added-value' of our present investigation lies more in focusing on how the Interreg community, i.e. the Interreg participants, understand and interpret the concept of polycentric development from a transnational perspective, beyond the mere addition of national perspectives.

3.2 Some ESPON findings on polycentric development

Polycentric development has been one of the main focus areas of the ESPON research programme, funded by the Structural Funds, bringing together scientific institutes and public authorities dedicated to research on spatial planning issues from all over Europe. Defining polycentric development has been the specific focus of a number of ESPON projects (notably ESPON 1.1.1 and 1.1.3).

The objective of polycentric development advocated by the ESDP is formulated as a strategy to counterbalance the strong regional disparities currently existing in Europe. The large concentration of people and economic activities in some specific areas is causing a strong imbalance in development. At the European scale, the imbalance comes from the significant concentration of people and activities to the so-called Pentagon, the area between the cities of Paris, London, Hamburg, Munich, and Milan. At the national level, some countries, such as France and Ireland, are strongly focussed on their internationally competitive metropolitan areas (Paris, Dublin). Finally, at the regional scale, metropolitan areas act as a strong magnet for activities, undermining the development of their direct surroundings, either rural or urban (small and medium-sized towns for example).

The concept of 'polycentricity' within 'polycentric development' relates to how the urban system is shaped and to how that system actually functions. In its attempt to measure polycentricity, ESPON 1.1.1 (*Nordregio* et al., 2004) identified two complementary aspects of polycentricity. The first aspect is urban morphology, which can be described by the hierarchy of cities in an urban system. The classical way of measuring this aspect is to look at deviations from the 'rank-size rule', or 'Zipf's law'. This implies measuring the extent to which the distribution of cities in a country deviates from a Pareto distribution, stating then that these deviations are an indicator of the polycentric or mono-centric nature of the urban system. These measures are however blind to the geographical patterns of the urban network and therefore need to be complemented by looking at the spatial distribution of urban areas in each country. The second aspect of urban polycentricity is the functional or relational one, corresponding to the analysis of functional profiles of cities and to the flows of various kinds (i.e. transport, communications and co-operation) between them.

ESPON 1.1.1 also investigated the extent of the application of polycentric development in national policies (Zonneveld et al., 2004). In 16 countries, polycentric development is assessed as being a major national planning policy objective, while it is considered as being only a minor object in a further five countries. Polycentric development in national policies essentially targets two distinct objectives: 'diminishing urban disparities (cohesion)' and 'enhancing urban competitiveness' (Zonneveld et al., 2004).

Echoing Davoudi, when she affirms that 'polycentricity means different things when applied to different scales' (Davoudi, 2003), the ESPON 1.1.1 project has emphasized the need to have policy objectives adapted to each scale (the 'macro' scale corresponding to the European level, 'meso' to the trans-national and national levels and 'micro' to the regional and local levels), showing that implementing polycentric development leads to different implications at each of these scales. The policy recommendations made by ESPON 1.1.1 reflected this multi-scalar approach.

The tools and typologies developed in ESPON 1.1.1 essentially approach polycentric development as a spatial concept. This can be clearly perceived in the attempt to measure the degree of polycentricity for each of the 29 countries participating in the ESPON programme, as it takes the urban system as purely a network of places with essentially morphological attributes (size).

Nonetheless, ESPON 1.1.1 provides interesting ‘food for thought’ also for the analysis done here in pinpointing the potential gains that closer co-operation between urban areas could bring about. For instance, by assuming that physical proximity is the main incentive for co-operation, its systematic application at the scale of the Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) provokes counter-intuitive results as the areas gaining the most from co-operating are –perhaps surprisingly – situated in the core areas of Europe.

It seems then that, for it to be convincing, the ESPON approach to polycentric development is still lacking in term of complementary argumentation. In this sense, it also raises some important issues. Primarily, taking the urban networks as a purely spatial system misses the institutional and economic dynamics that are, in fact, predominant. Secondly, a systematic promotion of polycentric integration solely based on physical proximity may enhance the European scale contrasts in development.

In relation to these specific points, one could ask whether polycentric development can indeed be achieved ‘in spite of the space’, i.e. by taking the spatial characteristics of the urban network not as a cause, but as a consequence. In that sense, the feedback from Interreg projects may shed some light on these questions and provide us with some elements of a possible answer.

3.3 Learning on polycentric development

As noted previously, Davoudi affirms that polycentricity ‘means different things to different people’ (Davoudi, 2003). In order to explore what this assertion could actually imply in the Interreg context, we decided to investigate what polycentric development means to the Interreg participants. The Interreg community is here taken as comprising the representatives of a new breed of practitioners, namely, transnational spatial planners.

Indeed, the Interreg participants represent different professional profiles (researchers, regional actors, town planners...) representing different fields of regional development or spatial planning activities. Most importantly, they are also constituted by several nationalities. In that respect, focus on Interreg participants as a transnational community enables us to go beyond national perspectives on polycentric development, as analysed in the ESPON 1.1.1 project (Zonneveld *et al.*, 2004).

Both natural and historical reasons exist as to why Interreg and ESPON should have such close ties. As ESPON was set up in the wake of the ESDP process (Faludi, 2002) and because polycentric development was a cornerstone of that document, investigating the inter-relationship between the programme (Interreg) and the concept (polycentric development) is both logical and worthwhile in the endeavour to better understand both the spatial planning discourse and its content, and its connection to Interreg more broadly. This is exemplified even more when it comes to learning processes that can be promoted through its well-developed collaborative methodology. Indeed, Interreg IIIB areas are, in themselves, an attempt to put into practice the concept of polycentricity as their implementation aims to nurture and create larger integrated zones across the European territory.

As was noted in the previous section, polycentric development has been used at the Programme level for drafting the main priorities and measures in the Programme documents of the Interreg IIIB areas, which, in practice, means that a certain percentage of the approved projects will have to deal with this issue and will thus contribute to the implementation of polycentric development in European regions.

Moreover, polycentric development can also be understood as an attempt to remove the obstacles to co-operation, especially linked to planning practices, such as national boundaries for instance, and to create networks (Hague & Kirk, 2003). From that point of view, coupling Interreg with polycentric development makes sense as the programmes are designed specifically to foster co-operation on a transnational basis.

Mainly designed as a political concept, polycentric development is often perceived as an ambiguous and rather vague concept, allowing for multiple interpretations (Waterhout, 2002; Faludi, 2004). Because of its nature as a multi-layered 'bridging concept' (Faludi, 2004), polycentric development constitutes a very interesting object of study when investigating transnational spatial planning practices, themselves deeply rooted in a multi-level methodology.

3.3.1 The 'embeddedness' of polycentricity in Interreg practices

In their policy recommendations for the application of polycentric development in European countries, Zonneveld and his colleagues suggest that polycentricity should gradually become embedded in policy, without being doctrinal and not amenable to mutual learning (Zonneveld et al., 2004). They also stress the importance for the practitioners to be able to use (European) spatial planning concepts in their daily practice. The aim of this section is thus to assess the 'embeddedness' of polycentricity in the practices of practitioners involved in the Interreg Community.

The work performed in the context of the ESPON 2.3.1 project, and the ESPON-INTERACT study on polycentricity and rural-urban partnership, has shown that polycentric development has been extensively used for the elaboration of the Interreg priorities and measures in most of the Interreg IIIB areas. A direct consequence of this is that the projects approved for these priorities should have polycentric development as a central theme.

Even if the application of the principles of polycentric development at the programme level is uncontested, the final step towards their full implementation on the project level may perhaps be less palpable (Stead & Waterhout, 2006). Indeed, if the term 'polycentric development' or its synonyms ('balanced', 'integrated'...) are also used by the projects in their project description, its 'embeddedness' in the project work needs to be assessed. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, polycentric development, despite its strong focus at the programme level, is evaluated by Interreg LP as a much less relevant topic in the Interreg context than 'environmental hazards and risk management' or 'cross-border co-operation'.

Moreover, the ESPON-INTERACT study on polycentric development and rural-urban partnership study make the point that despite the fact that more than 150 projects have measures related to polycentric development, less than a third are deemed to be of direct relevance to the concept (Dubois et al. 2006). However, this study is mainly based on the analysis of Interreg projects' description and stated objectives, and not on the outcomes or actions of the projects per se.

In this light, one of the main questions of our research became that of being able to assess the 'embeddedness' of polycentric development in Interreg practices, simply by asking the Interreg IIIB Lead Partners if their project dealt 'explicitly', 'implicitly' or 'not at all' with the concept of polycentric development. Here 'explicitly' implies that polycentric development was clearly stated as a main theme of investigation or action in the project description, while 'implicitly' relates to its use in the project practices. The results are summarised in the figure 5 below.

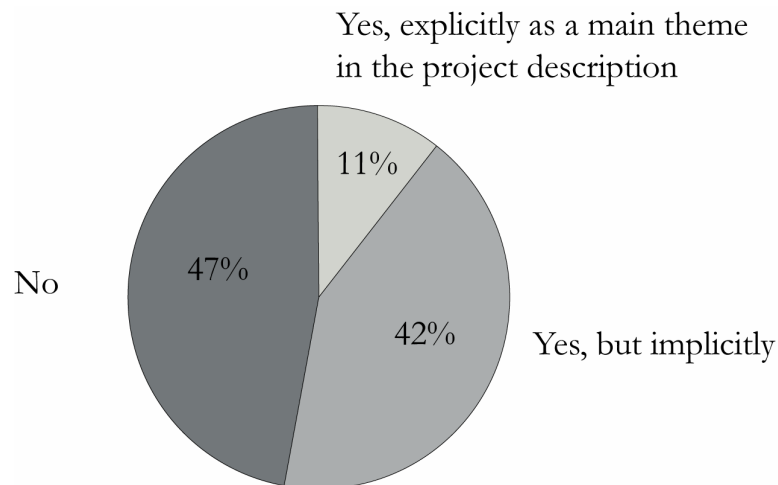


Figure 5: Polycentric development as a theme in Interreg projects

Figure 5 thus displays the distribution of the project between the three possible answers. The ‘explicit’ category represents only 11% of the answers (15 responses) whereas the implicit use seems to be the rule for projects dealing with polycentric development, corresponding to some 42% of the responding project leaders.

The ESPON 2.3.1 project and the ESPON-INTERACT study have already shown that measures related to polycentric development accounted for approximately 15% of the total funding available in the Interreg IIIB programme, considerably less than the themes of parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge, or wise management of cultural and natural heritage (Viehauser et al. 2006, 129). However, the answers above demonstrate that polycentric development is strongly embedded in the project practices, as more than 50% of the respondents admit that their project deals with polycentric development. In addition to this, the ESPON-INTERACT study on polycentric development and rural-urban partnership has already pointed out to the large variety of interpretations (of the concept) when put into practice in Interreg projects, covering different territorial scales (micro-meso-macro) and different themes (Economic development, spatial structure or governance) (Dubois et al., 2006).

Another point of interest here is the rather significant gap between the explicit use score (11%) and the implicit use score (42%) in relation to concept use. Consequently, echoing the results presented by Waterhout and Stead, this implies that there is a gap between the application of the concept in Interreg IIIB programmes and its implementation in practice within the Interreg projects (Waterhout & Stead, 2006). Whereas the programme level embraces the discourse of the ESDP quite thoroughly, Interreg projects use the ESDP terminology rather more sparingly.

The results displayed above have shown that polycentric development is rather well embedded in the project practices of the Interreg IIIB programme. This appropriation of the concept into the project practices can be witnessed by the great variety of its implementation in Interreg projects, covering different territorial scales and themes. In that sense, one can say that Interreg has created the modality for the operationalisation of polycentric development in planning practices throughout Europe.

Moreover, as discussed in the first sections of this study, Interreg projects provide the possibility for its participants to experience active collective learning and a beneficial exchange of experiences. In this regard, the experience of working in practice with the concept of polycentric development seems to have enabled a large majority of participants to improve their understanding of the concept. Indeed, 65% of the participants that belong to a trans-national project group dealing with polycentric development assess themselves as having improved their understanding of the concept, and especially its relevance for its application for trans-national

regions. In that sense, participating in such projects might help European regions to perceive the relevance of the concept beyond the national framework.

3.3.2 An actor-based approach to polycentricity

The preceding sections sought to provide an analytical framework that would enable us to understand the relevance and usage of the notion of polycentric development within the context of Interreg projects. The concept has proven to be of high relevance in the projects. As such, it would be interesting at this stage to go one stage further and assess how the concept was understood by the Interreg community. Based on our analysis, we claim that public authorities and other stakeholders on the regional and local levels, as well as within the national authorities, where applicable, are the resource upon which the integration of spatial policy objectives and territorial policy instruments should further be based. As such, their perspective on spatial policy is necessarily one concentrating on actors, and in particular, their mobilisation and capacity-building abilities. As the European Commission has also emphasised in its Strategic Guidelines and in the general approach to the 2007-2013 programming period, the ownership of programmes (and projects) is an essential prerequisite for successful cohesion policy, which needs additional attention.

One of the questions in our survey asked the Interreg IIIB Lead Partners to assess the aspect(s) of polycentricity that, were, for them, most relevant. In order to channel the answers into a manageable subset of responses, respondents were given four aspects, derived from the work done in the framework of the ESPON 1.1.1 project, from which to choose. Indeed, ESPON 1.1.1 defined polycentricity as been made up of two main components: morphological and relational.

The first component ('morphological') focuses on the distribution of urban areas and economic activities over a certain territory, and takes into consideration features such as the urban hierarchy, the size of the urban areas or their even distribution in space. This aspect refers to the urban areas as points in space. The second component explores the importance of relationships between urban entities for grasping the concept of polycentricity. Relationships are of mainly two kinds: co-operation and flows (either tangible or intangible). This second aspect interprets polycentricity as entities in interaction.

Departing from these two general aspects, the project team stressed four central aspects relating to polycentric development. The first takes into consideration the size of the urban areas, both in demographic and economic terms. The second emphasizes the role of the physical connections between urban areas, whereas the third focuses on the collaboration links as a constituent of polycentric development. Finally, the functional specialisation and potential complementarities between cities constitutes the fourth aspect identified.

In the survey, the respondents could choose any combination of answers, as they were not limited to only one aspect. The collected answers provide a very pertinent insight into the understanding that the Interreg community has on the issue of polycentric development.

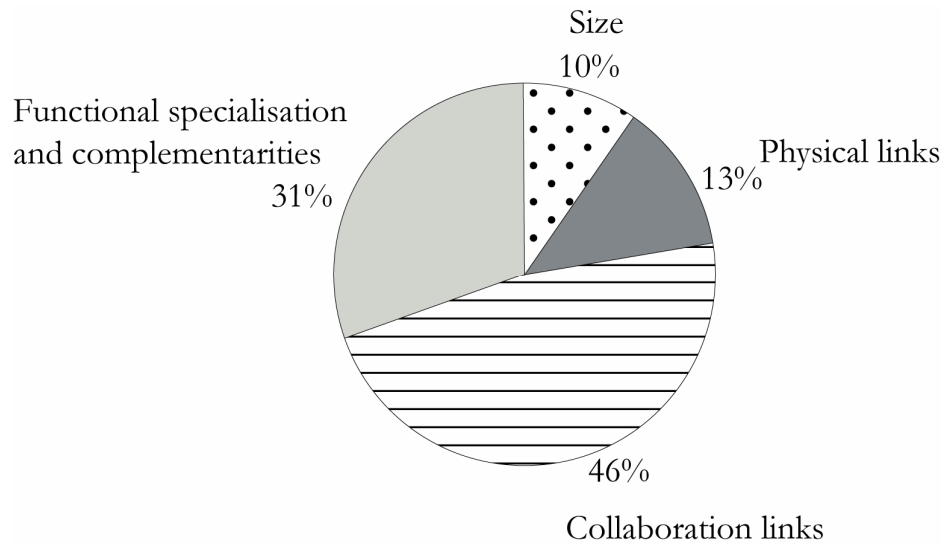


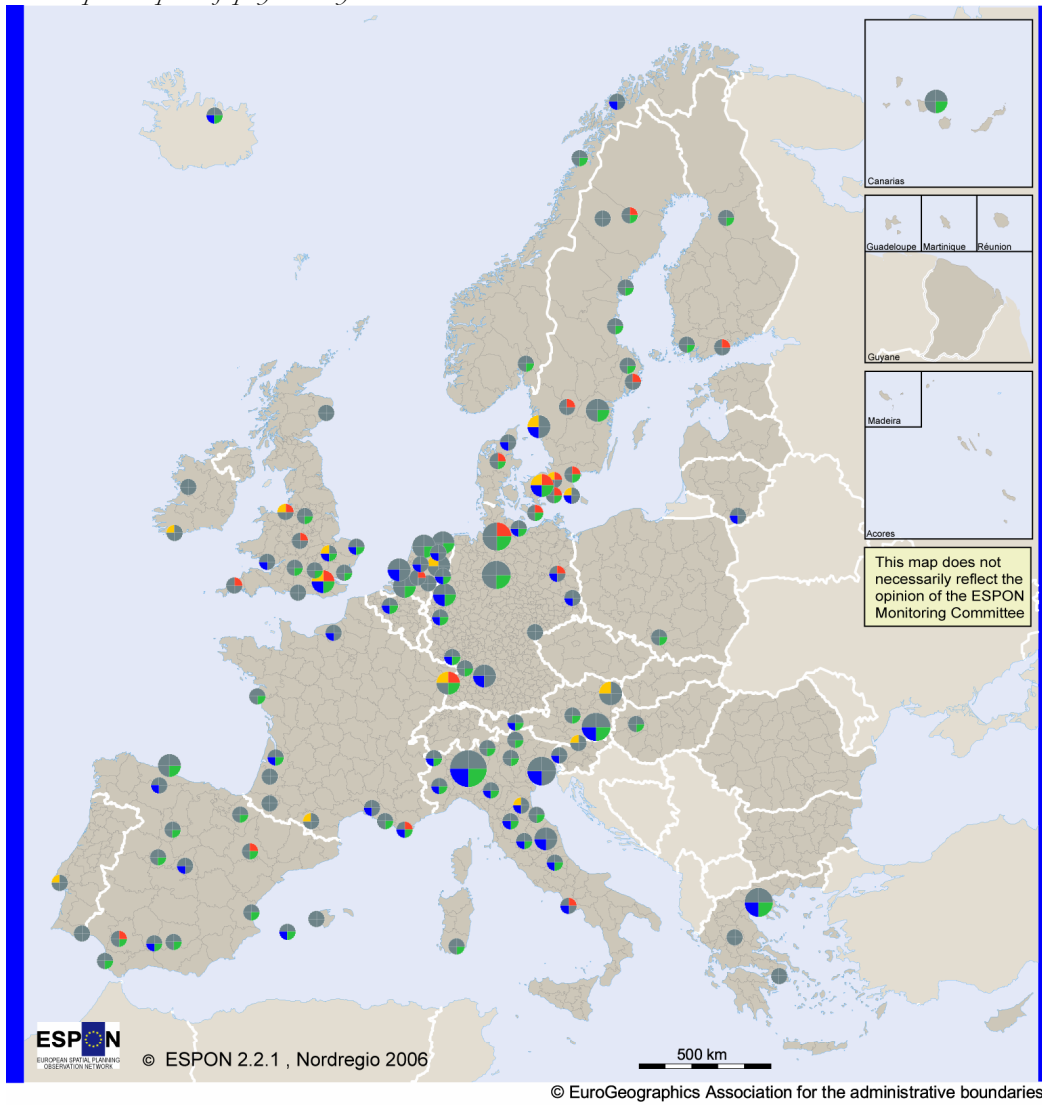
Figure 6: Thematic aspects of polycentric development

Figure 6 displays the results for the whole sample of questionnaires collected. Here we can see that collaboration links are seen by Interreg LP as the most relevant aspect of polycentric development, representing nearly half of our respondents (46%). The second most important is the functional specialisation and complementarities corresponding to nearly one third of the answers. Size and physical links are considered as much less relevant aspects of polycentricity. Specialisation and complementarities and collaboration links are not only perceived as the two most relevant aspects, they are also perceived as being strongly connected to each other. Indeed, 31 respondents considered that both aspects were as relevant as each other, while only 12 saw physical and collaboration links as equally important. The other possible combinations of aspects were marginal and do not provide any additional insights.

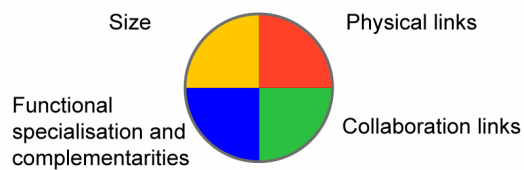
We also charted the differences in terms of the geographic location of the respondents. This is summarised in the map 3 below.

Map 3 illustrates the pattern of responses by location, and makes it possible to pinpoint some of the interesting differences in terms of how polycentricity is understood by the Interreg community throughout Europe. First of all, the participants who responded by checking ‘collaboration links’ (green on the map) seem to be located quite evenly across the continent’s territory. This suggests that the relevance of ‘collaboration’ links is not influenced by the location of the participants in one area or another. However, the picture is quite different when looking at the ‘physical links’ (red) and ‘functional specialisation’ (blue). Indeed, the locations where ‘physical links’ were the dominant answer, seem to be mainly situated in the more peripheral areas of Europe (as viewed from the Pentagon). This is particularly true of the regions around the Baltic Sea, and around the Öresund, the sound separating Denmark from Sweden, where almost all the responding projects stated that the question of ‘physical links’ was a highly relevant aspect of polycentricity. As regards the ‘functional specialisation’ aspect, the pattern is somehow contrary, as respondents here seem to be concentrated in the region of the ‘Blue Banana’. It is moreover worth emphasising that the responses here reflect more the content of projects and the learning that has taken place than what the respondents may view as the most dominant policy trends in their respective regions.

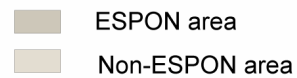
Map 3: Aspects of polycentricity



Relevant aspects of polycentricity



Geographical Location:



Number of respondents per city:



3.3.3 Interreg-ESPON: Two complementary perspectives on polycentricity

What the latter section illustrates is that Interreg IIIB participants do have an essentially actor-related understanding of what polycentric development is. Indeed, the two aspects of ‘Collaboration links’ and ‘Functional specialisation and complementarities’ provide a view of the territory not as first and foremost a spatial entity, but rather as a ‘human’ one. The complementarity of the approaches taken here is necessitated by the differences in their starting points and methodology, i.e. the interpretation of what the territory represents in each case. From the ESPON point of view, the analytical perspective is the one of the territory as a spatial or statistical entity (something to be studied, mapped and understood through analysis), whereas within Interreg it is viewed more as a sphere of action or as an institutional entity (a sphere of activity, identity and institutional adherence). In consequence, the aspects linked to the spatial dimensions of the territory, namely, ‘Size’ and ‘Physical links’ are assessed as being of much less importance in grasping the concept more generally. The latter provides an interesting alternative perspective to the work undertaken in ESPON 1.1.1, as, in its attempt to measure polycentricity, the project used parameters such as the rank-size rule or the connectivity of the urban system to assess the degree of polycentricity for each of the 29 ESPON countries.

However, instead of opposing these two perspectives on polycentric development, it seems more useful to perceive them as complementary, one taking the perspective of territory as a space, and the other taking the perspective of territory as being made up of interacting actors. Table 2 synthesizes how the two approaches are complementary.

Table 2: Typology of aspects of polycentric development

	Actors	Territory
Locational	Functional specialisation and complementarities	Size
Relational	Collaboration links	Physical links (Connectivity)

The tentative typology proposed is constituted by our four aspects of polycentric development as articulated in the survey. It also illustrates the two main dimensions of differentiation. The first dimension (vertical) distinguishes ‘locational’ and ‘relational’ aspects. The ‘locational’ aspects are linked to the characteristics of a place, while the ‘relational’ one stresses the potential interactions between places. The second dimension (horizontal) differentiates between actor-related aspects and spatially-related ones. In the figure, the understanding of polycentricity developed by the Interreg and ESPON communities would be differentiated vertically, respectively ‘Actors’ and ‘Space’, both of them containing a main ‘locational’ and a ‘relational’ aspect.

3.3.4 A multi-scalar learning process

The previous section highlighted some of the main features of the understanding that the Interreg Community has of the polycentricity concept. These features were used, in the main, a static image (how they understand polycentric development) with a thematic perspective (the thematic dimensions). The geographical dimension has thus far however barely been touched upon. This section therefore examines the influence of the geographical dimension on the learning process in respect of polycentricity.

In the projects funded by the ESPON Programme, a three-level approach has been systematically used in order to differentiate the impacts that spatial policies have at different territorial scales. These scales represent the European level (Macro approach), the transnational or national level (Meso approach) and the regional and local levels (micro approach). The ESPON projects dedicated to the question of polycentricity are no exception to this rule, emphasising in their policy recommendations the different implications of the concept at these three different scales (see in the introduction of this chapter).

In the survey, the Interreg Lead Partners were asked to assess the combination of themes and geographical scales on which they felt they had improved their knowledge of polycentricity. However, instead of ESPON's analytical 'micro-meso-macro' division, we chose to express the geographical scales in more familiar terms such as local, regional, national, cross-border and trans-national (each was also explained in the survey leaflet).

Figure 7 below synthesizes the results from the survey concerning the question related to the increase of knowledge on polycentric development, following the two main axes of our argumentation: thematic aspects and territorial dimensions.

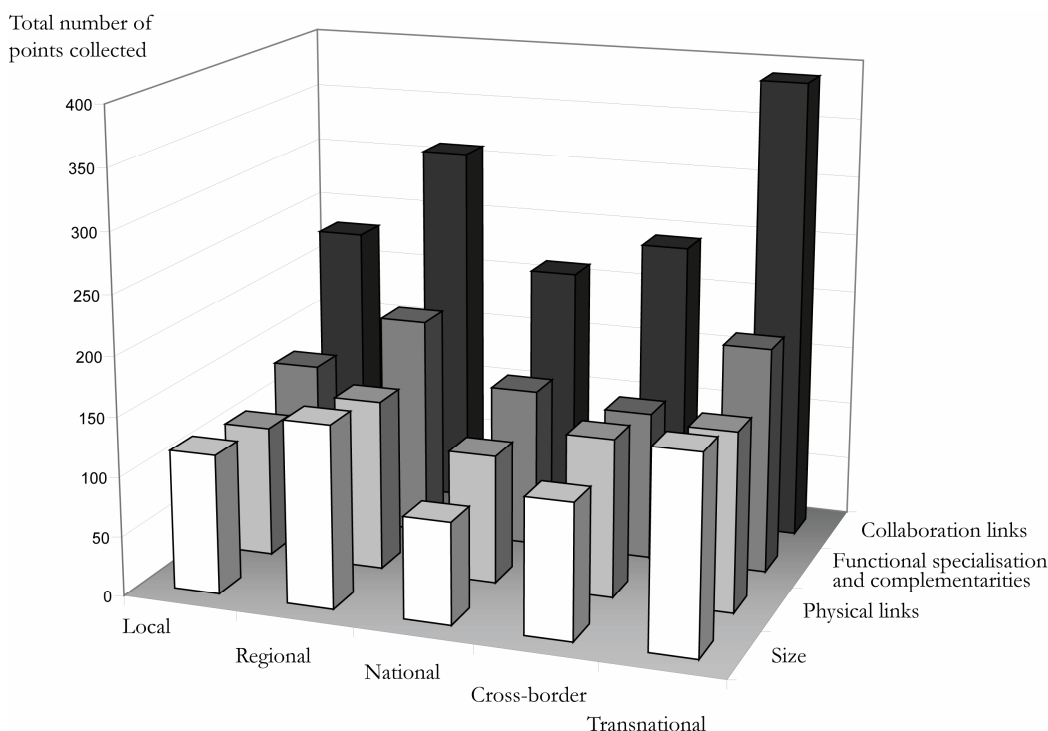


Figure 7: Improved understanding of polycentric development. Crossing themes and geographical dimensions

For each of the five territorial dimensions proposed in our questionnaire (transnational, cross-border, national, regional and local), the collaboration aspect is seen as the one on which the participants assess themselves to have improved their knowledge to the greatest degree. As this aspect was already considered as the most important when dealing with polycentric development, its relevance in the Interreg context is now even more apparent.

Inversely, for each of the thematic aspects considered, the responses show a rather similar pattern, with a strong emphasis on the transnational and regional levels. The national level seems to be the territorial context on which the participants have increased their knowledge as regards polycentric development least.

Text-Box 1: Improved collaboration networks

Networking is also one of the main aims of the Interreg programme. Assessing how polycentric development is put into practice in this context can be achieved by evaluating the type of partners that Interreg participants are mostly networking with. Four types of partners were distinguished, following a territorial logic: European, transnational, national and regional.

	Regional partners	National partners	Transnational partners	European partners
Improved collaboration links	26,1%	20,2%	30,6%	23,1%

It appears that no clear pattern can be seen to emerge from the results. The percentages relative to the four types range from 20 to 30%. However, collaboration links with transnational partners seem to have been those that were most improved through participation in an Interreg project. This tends to emphasize the fact that such projects are used by local and regional actors to position their region in a wider co-operation network. Moreover, the fact that the improvement of collaboration links with regional partners shows that Interreg projects are also important in revitalising co-operation at the micro level, i.e. influencing the regional governance system. Linkages with national partners are the least improved of the four.

From the previous sections, we have learned that Interreg participants understand polycentric development mainly as being actor-related, relating in particular to the interaction of actors in networks (collaboration links). In addition, it has also been possible to assess whether these collaborative links, in practice, they are mostly improved with transnational or regional actors. If the previous sections have set the stage for assessing the importance of polycentric development in the Interreg context, the next section focuses on the learning process relating to polycentric development.

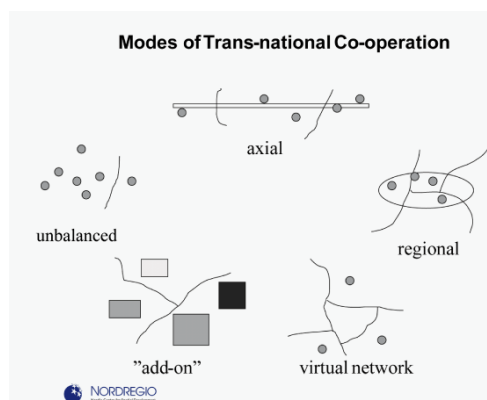
In that sense, it becomes clear that Interreg projects provide the framework for increasing regional consciousness across Europe on the issue of polycentric development. Thus, Interreg projects enable the practitioners to learn about polycentricity outside the national framework. The consequence for the regions is that they gain the ability to position themselves in the polycentric discourse both nationally (See Zonneveld et al., 2004) and trans-nationally.

3.3.5 Regional and 'virtual' patterns of co-operation

Analysing the geography of the projects provides an interesting insight into the logic of co-operation of the projects concerned, as assessed by the project leaders themselves.

In a previous project concerning 'Transnational Nordic-Scottish co-operation', *Nordregio* performed an analysis of the territorial context of Interreg IIC projects by emphasizing five main modes of geography for them (Böhme *et al.*, 2003). This 'geography' is not only about assessing the distribution in space of the project partners, but it also utilises the degree of involvement of the partners in order to assess the type of integration at stake. The five types display different degrees of transnational integration in the project (See Text-Box 2).

Text-Box 2: Different types of INTERREG partnerships (Böhme *et al.*, 2003)



Axial: corresponds to a project based on an existing or planned transport axis or natural corridors (waterway).

(Trans-national) regional co-operation: describes projects based on an existing or emerging functional region, or on a localised trans-national cluster of enterprises.

Unbalanced co-operation: describes any project in which the great majority of partners belong to the same country.

'Add-on' projects: refers to projects gathering already functioning regional networks.

Virtual network: refers to projects aiming at the sharing of experience, with partners often distant.

The modes of co-operation listed here present different patterns of transnational co-operation. The different modes differ from the locational (relative position of the partners) and a relational (involvement and integration of actors) points of view. Indeed, the *axial*, *transnational regional* and *add-on* types are based on a high degree of integration between the regions. The notion of integration is mainly expressed here by the strong functional or physical integration between them. The *virtual* mode is, to a certain extent, independent of the close territorial context, as it consists of distant regions that are not functionally integrated but do share a certain interest in investigating specific issues. The unbalanced mode is an extension of the national processes of co-operation that might then be more focused on national issues, rather than on truly transnational ones.

From the answers provided by the Lead Partners, it seems that there are two main logics of co-operation taking place in the Interreg projects. These are summarised in figure 8 below. The main territorial dynamic relates to the ‘virtual’ mode of co-operation (46% of the responses), i.e. of distant regions sharing a strong common interest and thus collaborating. The second main logic of co-operation emphasizes strong regional integration across a border, as 31% of the respondents chose the ‘regional’ answer.

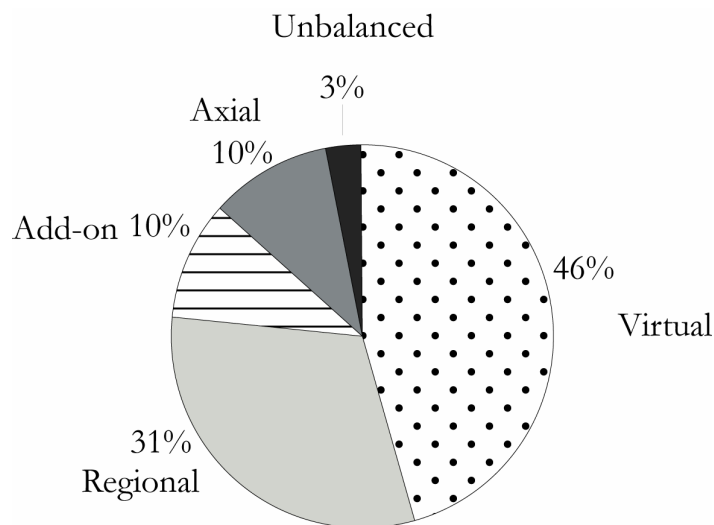


Figure 8: Modes of co-operation in responding Interreg IIIB projects

These two logics of co-operation can potentially be seen as both *centrifugal* and *centripetal* forces: *Centrifugal*, because Interreg type co-operation clearly enables the regions to position themselves in a wider European context, in an effort to develop active partnerships with similar but non-adjacent regions; *Centripetal*, because it also creates the conditions to strengthen the collaborative links with its close regional neighbourhood, even across the border, thus increasing overall regional coherence. The results also seem to suggest that the potential that the Interreg type activity provides for virtual learning communities is important, while, at least in the light of our survey, the potential for axial co-operation that would seem to fit nicely with many of the themes for the 2007-2013 programming period (e.g. connected to risk prevention and other issues in relation to waterways and other similar natural areas) still needs further attention.

4. Conclusions

As outlined above, we have proposed an analysis concentrating on the ‘embeddedness’ of the spatial objectives and concepts within the broader trans-national policy sphere. We have identified the dual focus of ESPON on spatiality (the analytical, cartographical and statistical notion of territories and spatiality) and the more institutional and actor-based perspective of spatiality and territoriality, more clearly pronounced within the sphere of Interreg. ESPON seeks to bridge these two perspectives and knowledge interests. Actors and stakeholders are the key to integrating spatial themes into territorial policies. At the same time, the experiences of policy learning from the spatial policy sphere, as exemplified in particular in relation to the ESDP process, can help us to understand more clearly policy learning and discursive integration.

Through the case of polycentric development, this study has investigated the features of how spatial development concepts are implemented in regional and local planning practices, in particularly pinpointing the ‘embeddedness’ of the use of such concepts in planning practices, as a result of enhanced transnational co-operation. Moreover, the understanding that the practitioners have developed is essentially based on interacting agents, rather than interacting places. Finally, the related learning processes can be characterised as multi-scalar, occurring essentially at the regional and transnational levels. The work on spatial development issues performed in the framework of Interreg projects has enabled the related concepts to gain more relevance for the regional or local actors, further enabling them to embrace and interpret them as they wish.

Based on our analysis, we claim that the epistemic community that Interreg has gradually formed (in particular authorities and stakeholders on the regional and local levels, as well as within the national authorities), now constitute the resource upon which the integration of spatial policy objectives and territorial policy instruments should be based. Clearly, Interreg type co-operation enables the spatial development issues to nurture the regional development dynamics. The survey responses do moreover suggest that Interreg projects provide the framework for an increased regional consciousness across Europe on the issue of spatial development, as illustrated by the example of polycentric development. In that sense, Interreg projects enable the practitioners to improve their knowledge on spatial policy issues outside their own particular national frameworks.

There is clearly some ambiguity as to the role of spatial policy objectives within the territorial policy *palette* of the EU, and a certain dominance of territorial/regional policy objectives at the expense of spatial ones is to be perceived. Yet there remains room for policy innovation and learning that can help bridge the gap between the two. Spatial concepts and objectives can also contribute to our improved understanding of territorial development matters. Here the role of ESPON will also need further elaboration, in order to avoid the risk that the previously fruitful interactions between Interreg and ESDP are lost.

Indeed, thus far, ESPON and Interreg have reflected two distinct types of the ‘operationalisation’ of the same spatial development concepts: while ESPON investigates the territorial development trends across Europe and the potentials for achieving the ESDP’s goals, Interreg focuses on the regional dynamics, essentially linked to collaboration and capacity-building. Both perspectives fuel the spatial development debate and increase the relevance of its concepts in planning policy practices. A major result emerging from the present study then is the significant potential for developing further actor-territory synergies, aiming at the further convergence of regional development and spatial development interests.

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Attachment 1

List of projects represented by the survey respondents

Area	Project	Country	City
Alpine Space	Via Nova	Austria	Graz
	AlpNaTour	Austria	Vienna
	MONITRAF	Austria	Innsbruck
	E-Motion	France	Strasbourg
	WOMEN-ALPnet	Italy	Lecco
	Via Claudia Augusta	Italy	Trento
	CULTURALP	Italy	Milan
	NEPROVALTER	Italy	Udine
	ALPCITY	Italy	Torino
	WALSER ALPS	Italy	Aosta
	LexALP	Italy	Bolzano
	Catchrisk	Italy	Milan
Atlantic Area	VALBIOMAR	France	La Rochelle
	Medachs	France	Talence
			Villenave
	CastaneaREG	France	d'Ornon
	ECAS	Portugal	Lisboa
	Atlantic-Net	Spain	Gijon
	SAL	Spain	Cádiz
			San Juan de
	ATLANTECH	Spain	Aznalfarache
	Red TELECEM	Spain	Valladolid
	AtlantisBPnet	Spain	Pamplona
	BIORREG-FLORESTA	Spain	Avila
	COAST ATLANTIC	Spain	Figaredo
	DEPURANAT	Spain	Santa Lucia
	PREMI	United Kingdom	Cardiff
	PARTNER	United Kingdom	Liverpool
Baltic Sea			Nykobing
	STRING II	Denmark	Falster
	MECIBS	Denmark	Copenhagen
	Baltic Cruise Project	Denmark	Copenhagen
	BSR Eagle	Finland	Turku
	SEAREG / ASTRA	Finland	Espoo
	EuRoB II	Germany	Berlin
	COMMon MINDscapes	Germany	Hannover
	B-SME	Germany	Hamburg
	Baltic Sea Virtual Cam- pus	Germany	Lübeck
	Innovation Circle	Lithuania	Alytus
	CONNECT Baltic SEA		
	Region+	Norway	Oslo
	BERAS	Sweden	Uppsala
	Advantage Hardwood	Sweden	Linköping
	Destination Vikings Liv- ing History	Sweden	Höllviken
	PROMIDMORD	Sweden	Härnösand
	South Baltic Four Cor- ners	Sweden	Ystad
	Defris	Sweden	Linköping
	Baltic Palette	Sweden	Stockholm

	BIRD	Sweden	Skara
	ABC II	Sweden	Malmö
	RANE	Sweden	Göteborg
	Baltic+	Sweden	Kristianstad
CADSES	DonauHanse	Austria	Vienna
	SURE	Austria	Irdning
	Matriosca-AAP	Austria	Graz
	TECNOMAN perspectives	Austria	Graz
	CONSPACE	Austria	Klagenfurt
	PROSIDE	Germany	Stuttgart
	REKULA	Germany	Großräschen
	READY	Germany	Oelsnitz
	EMBRACE	Greece	Thessaloniki
	ELISA	Greece	Athens
	COHESION	Greece	Trikala
	5C105 RARE	Greece	Thessaloniki
	ISOTEIA	Greece	Chania
	BCROSS	Greece	Thessaloniki
	HERITOUR	Hungary	Ajka
	SMS VOLSLESS	Italy	Forli Cesena
	ROMIT	Italy	Rimini
	ACCRETE	Italy	Parma
	Hydrocare	Italy	Camerino
	Development of a sustainable tourism	Italy	L'Aquila
	Information Development	Italy	Venezia
	INCLUDE	Italy	Milan
	Migralink	Italy	Venice
	GO NETWORK	Italy	Venice
	SISMA	Italy	Perugia
	MAGIC	Poland	Katowice
North Sea	North Sea RURAL	Denmark	Viborg
	NTN II	Denmark	Aalborg
	SEAPLANE	Germany	Hannover
	Green North Sea Docks	Germany	Hamburg
	POWER	Germany	Hamburg
	BurVal	Germany	Hannover
	Save the North Sea	Sweden	Gothenburg
	Town-Net	The Netherlands	Assen
	URBAL Development	The Netherlands	Zwolle
	Safecoast	The Netherlands	Den Haag
	PURE North Sea	The Netherlands	Groningen
	B-SURE	The Netherlands	Rotterdam
	Water City International II	The Netherlands	Leeuwarden
	Urban Water Cycle	The Netherlands	Almelo
	Mopark	The Netherlands	Leeuwarden
	LancewadPlan	The Netherlands	Groningen
	NAVE Nortrail	United Kingdom	Aberdeen
	North SEafaring	United Kingdom	Colchester
	SPARC	United Kingdom	Solihull

	Canal Link SmartLife International	United Kingdom United Kingdom	Watford Cambridge
North West Europe	SCALDIT Hospital Cooperation EMDI SAFER Urban Water WaReLa Artery ERIH II ELFE TESIS Corepoint NENSI-2 SDF TRUST LiRa-2 Crossing the lines JAF Streets for living ESPACE ITISS CYCLEAU Spatial Metro SAUL POLYNET	Belgium France France Germany Germany Germany Germany Germany Germany Ireland Ireland The Netherlands The Netherlands The Netherlands The Netherlands The Netherlands The Netherlands United Kingdom United Kingdom United Kingdom United Kingdom United Kingdom United Kingdom United Kingdom United Kingdom	Aalst Strasbourg Rouen Stuttgart Essen Trippstadt Essen Cologne Karlsruhe Galway Cork Hengelo Arnhem Rotterdam Den Haag Utrecht Almelo Swindon Winchester Manchester Bodmin Norwich London London
Northern Periphery	Rural Business Women Coping With the Socio Economic Effects of Mega Projects in the Northern Periphery Based Tourism Sustainable rural health care networks Cultural Community Business ELAV PNASTINA	Finland Iceland Norway Norway Sweden Sweden Sweden	Kajaani Akureyri Bodo Finnsnes Storuman Soderhamn Malå
South West Europe	BIOFEP ATI TECNOEMPRENDE Admitron PIRENE II TERRA OLEA PLACA 4S ISNOVA	France France Spain Spain Spain Spain Spain Spain	Foix Pau Madrid Jaén Zaragoza Baena Gijon Palma De Mallorca
Western Mediterranean	INTERNUM MED DIET NET and MY- TILOS Réseau Optique Méditér- anéen	France France France	Arles Toulon Marseille

	RECOFORME	Italy	San Sebastiano al Vesuvio
	Enplan	Italy	Milan
	MedCypre	Italy	Florence
	WERMED	Italy	Camerino
	BLUe	Italy	Milan
	Macimed	Italy	Cagliari
			Vila Real de Santo Antonio
	Sete Sóis Sete Luas	Portugal	
	RITMO	Spain	Ibiza
	AQUAMAC	Spain	Santa Lucia
	Aquatex	Spain	Valencia

Attachment 2

Questionnaire



NORDREGIO
Nordic Centre for Spatial Development



INTERact



ESPON 2.2.1. - Territorial Effects of the Structural Funds ESPON - INTERACT Study on Cross-border co-operation

Survey on

The contribution of INTERREG Programmes to trans-national co-operation and polycentric development

Dear Sir or Madam,

As the current Structural Funds programming period is drawing to a close, the European spatial planning community is promoting all available means in an effort to distil our conclusions on the successes and lessons of the current period. As part of the ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network) network, Nordregio (Nordic Centre for Spatial Development) is responsible for the research project on the territorial effects of the Structural Funds, where among other things, they sought to investigate the learning experiences of INTERREG activities, relating specifically to European co-operation and the development of greater awareness of spatial dimensions in this context. Moreover, KTH, the Royal Institute of Technology, in Stockholm has been recently granted the task to perform the ESPON-INTERACT study on Cross-Border Co-operation, more specifically intending to examine the special role of border regions in Europe and what the preconditions are for effective cooperation within the INTERREG III framework. Both institutes have collaborated for the elaboration of this survey, which will serve as a basis for their respective studies. The basic question informing the survey is, to what degree INTERREG contributes to the awareness concerning the idea of polycentric development in Europe, as advocated in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). Moreover, the questionnaire can be an important contribution for the design of future Interreg programmes and projects, and to improve the conditions for better transnational and cross border co-operation.

In order to take a progressive approach in the survey, it has been divided in three parts focusing on different aspects of trans-national and cross-border co-operation: the **methodology**, by focusing on the collective learning processes; the **project environment**, dealing more specifically with the challenges of working in a trans-national group; and finally, the **scientific context**, focusing on the understanding and handling of the notion of Polycentric development in the context of your INTERREG project.

You have been selected by our research team to participate in this survey in your quality of Lead Partner, and your response will be taken as representative of your project as a whole.

It is also worth emphasising here that this investigation is part of a research project investigating the effects of Structural Funds' activity more broadly, and therefore **not an evaluation** of your project.

We do hope that you can provide the research team with your assistance in their investigation by responding to the survey sent and by providing them with the information needed.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith
Senior Research Fellow
Nordregio, Stockholm

Lisa Van Well
Research Fellow
KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm

NOTICE ON THE SURVEY

For validating an answer, you just have to 'click' one time on the appropriate box.

After you have filled all the questions, you can easily submit the questionnaire by 'clicking' on the 'Submit by email' button, and your questionnaire will be directly sent to us!

Thank you for your co-operation!

If you have any question, please contact:

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SE-111 86 Stockholm
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Please submit your filled questionnaire before the 31st of March, 2006

BASIC INFORMATION ON YOUR PROJECT

Name of your INTERREG IIIB area:

Name of your INTERREG project:

Name of the respondent:

Name of the respondent's organization:

Where is your organization located?

Country:

Region:

City:

COLLECTIVE LEARNING PROCESSES

In this first section of the questionnaire, we intend to focus specifically on the learning processes that occurred in the framework of your INTERREG project.

The learning process is often described as one of the main expected outcomes of the INTERREG projects. Learning is a dynamic process that is based on the interaction of different actors and the exchanges of knowledge and know-how.

1. How would you assess your contribution to the exchange of knowledge in your project?

- ☐ Mainly by transmitting knowledge (learning to the others)
- ☐ Mainly by receiving knowledge (learning from the others)
- ☐ Mainly as a catalyser for the creation of new collective knowledge within the project group

2. The learning process can occur at different levels, which can be complementary to one another. In the framework of INTERREG projects, we could summarize them as 4 distinct levels: individual, organizational, regional and trans-national. From your experience of this INTERREG project, for which level has the learning process been the most positive: (0: not relevant; 1: only slightly positive;...; 5: very much positive)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Yourself (individual)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your institution (organizational)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your region and its actors involved in the project (regional)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your country (national)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The whole project group (Trans-national)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. Do you perceive that the Interreg project in which you have been involved is/was considered as a good learning experience by the other partners?

- ☐ Yes, to all partners
- ☐ Yes, to some partners
- ☐ Yes, but to one or two partners
- ☐ No

4. Would you say that, in your case, the output of the learning process consisted in:

- ☐ Adopting in your region solutions that were successful in other regions?
- ☐ Importing but also adapting external solutions to your own regional context?
- ☐ Generating entirely new solutions through collaboration?
- ☐ Generating further research in a collaborative approach?
- ☐ Other:

5. What are/were the most significant communication challenges you experienced in your project?

- ☐ Leadership/management challenges
- ☐ Language challenges
- ☐ Technical challenges
- ☐ Cultural challenges (different understanding of the same notions)
- ☐ Methodological challenges (different ways to organize work)
- ☐ Professional differences (e.g. differences in administrative, political or professional cultures)
- ☐ None of the above

6. In your project, which language was the most commonly used by the partners when exchanging (oral or written) information?

- ☐ English
- ☐ German
- ☐ French
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Other:

Is this your own native language?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. Would you say that participating in a trans-national project has improved or confused your understanding of the following notions:

	Improved	Confused	Not made a difference
Polycentric development	☐	☐	☐
Sustainable development	☐	☐	☐
Regional Competitiveness	☐	☐	☐
Territorial cohesion	☐	☐	☐
Need for active cross-border co-operation	☐	☐	☐

8. As the Lead partner representative of your project, do you feel that all of the partners possessed the knowledge and resources needed to cooperate in a transnational framework?

- ☐ Yes, all partners possessed the knowledge and resource capability for cooperation
- ☐ Most of the partners possessed this knowledge and resources
- ☐ Many of the partners
- ☐ Only a few

9. As Lead Partner of the project, what factor seemed to be most important for implementing the exchange of ideas between partners?

- ☐ Expertise about the issues or themes of the project
- ☐ Good network contacts
- ☐ Expertise in implementing ideas for concrete results
- ☐ None of the above

10. In your view as Lead Partner of the project what seemed to present the greatest challenge to the processes of cooperation and learning?

- ☐ Lack of knowledge or unrealistic expectations of INTERREG projects
- ☐ Lack of political commitment within the partners' organisations to the project
- ☐ Difficulties in implementing knowledge and learning
- ☐ Problems with project coordination
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other:

ASPECTS OF TRANS-NATIONAL CO-OPERATION

In this second section, we will more specifically address the process and outcomes achieved in the framework of your INTERREG project.

The good implementation of a trans-national project is often determined by its very first steps, i.e. how it has been conceived from the beginning. The involvement of the partners is closely connected to their own motivation for collaborating.

11. As regards your project, what was your main motivation for entering the partnership?

- ☐ Search for new solutions to the same problem affecting the entire programme area (e.g. pollution in the sea)
- ☐ Search for new solutions for similar problems existing in all areas (e.g. regions co-operating in tourism or urban regeneration)
- ☐ Exchange of experiences or benchmarking
- ☐ Establishment of transnational networks on (the following issues):

12. What were the criteria chosen when building the partnership in your case?
- ☐ Personal contacts
 - ☐ Institutional contacts
 - ☐ Geographical proximity to your institution
 - ☐ Professional expertise based on the project idea/concept
13. What are the main benefits of the project?
- ☐ Improved information about the region and its role in the broader European context
 - ☐ Extended communication network
 - ☐ Identification of innovative ideas / new solutions
 - ☐ Transfer of 'best practices'
 - ☐ Building of trust between actors
 - ☐ Establishment of more permanent forms of co-operation for the future
 - ☐ Being able to extend or solidify previously existing forms of co-operation
14. Of the partners in your project, which ones would your or your institution like to cooperate with after this project, whether in a future INTERREG project or in another research framework:
- ☐ National Partners?
 - ☐ Regional Partners?
 - ☐ Partners that share your specific thematic interest?
 - ☐ Partners with whom you have a good working relationship?
 - ☐ None of the partners
15. Do you think the interactions between partners *in your project* were most relevant on a:
- ☐ Trans-national level (all or most partners in the project)
 - ☐ Bilateral level (special relationships developed between two partners)
 - ☐ National level (increased understanding or cooperation between regions or partners within the same country, e.g. other regions or national authorities)
 - ☐ None of the above
16. Often there are great differences in the degree of regional development among the various partners. Have regional disparities
- ☐ A positive effect creating the preconditions for cooperation and mutual learning
 - ☐ A negative effect hampering cooperation and learning
 - ☐ Neither positive nor negative

17. Has your project enabled to increase your understanding of the following trans-national aspects: (0: Not relevant; then 1 low to 5 high)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Revitalising small and medium size cities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strengthening entrepreneurial and local/regional employment initiatives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Encouraging a greater sharing of human resources, especially when related to research and development, education, culture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Improving transport, information and communication networks and services, water and energy systems	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increasing human and institutional potential and capacities for cross-border cooperation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. What has been the most important outcome of your project?

- ☐ The scientific and/or policy-related findings
- ☐ Networking with partners from other countries/regions
- ☐ Networking with partners from other sectors
- ☐ Other:

19. Would you say that the heterogeneity of actors has been:

- ☐ Positive: increasing knowledge and expanding perspectives
- ☐ Negative: requiring too much coordination efforts and resulting in inferior outcomes
- ☐ Not particularly relevant

20. Do you or your organisation envisage participating in an INTERREG project in the next Programming period?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe, it depends on the programme

[illegible]

☐ Yes, very much

☐ Yes, but findings are difficult to put into practice

☐ Yes, but the scientific achievements are still not clear to me

☐ Never heard of it

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ How? Please specify

[illegible]

AN EXAMPLE: LEARNING ON POLYCENTRIC DEVELOPMENT

In this final section of the questionnaire, we will more focus on the learning process directly connected to the notion of *polycentric development*.

Polycentricity has two complementary aspects. The first relates to morphology, i.e. the distribution of urban areas in a given territory (number of cities, hierarchy, distribution). The second concerns the relations between urban areas, i.e. the networks of flows and cooperation. These flows are generally related to proximity, though networks can also be independent of distance.

Polycentricity appears in two different situations. Looking at an urban system from a continental or national perspective, polycentricity occurs when the system is characterized by several cities at different levels rather than just being dominated by one city. At this level, polycentric policies stimulate the growth of centres and regions outside the core. At the regional or local scale, polycentricity occurs when two or more cities have functions that complement each other and even more so, if the cities co-operate with each other in order to be able to act jointly as a larger city. At this level, policies for polycentricity stimulate the functional division of labour, as well as the flows and the level of co-operation between neighboring cities. The two situations are interlinked when e.g. polycentric integration at the regional level contributes to counterbalance the dominance of the national centre. (Extract from ESPON 1.1.1.)

In the context of this survey, polycentricity is understood as a function of size, physical links, collaboration and the degree of specialisation of a functional urban area.

25. First of all, is/was your project directly dealing with *polycentric development*?

- ☐ Yes, explicitly as a main theme stated in the project description
- ☐ Yes, but implicitly
- ☐ No

26. Do you think that participating in your project has improved your understanding of the concept of *polycentric development*?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Especially its applications to trans-national regions:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

27. From what you understand of the concept, what are its most relevant aspects?

- ☐ Size of the territorial units (in economic or demographic terms)
- ☐ Physical links
- ☐ Collaboration links
- ☐ Functional or institutional specialisation and complementarities

28. Please try to assess the degree to which, through the project, you have been able to improve permanent co-operative links between your organisation and: (0: not relevant; 1: very little;... 5: Strongly)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Regional co-operation partners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
National co-operation partners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trans-national co-operation partners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
European co-operation partners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

29. From the literature, it is possible to distinguish different types of 'geography' of the trans-national projects. The geography of the project is intending to assess the proximity of the project partners in terms of 'geographical proximity', but also in terms of 'collaboration proximity' (Böhme, 2003). Five cases can be highlighted:

From your own perception of the geography of your project, to which type of co-operation is your project the most similar?

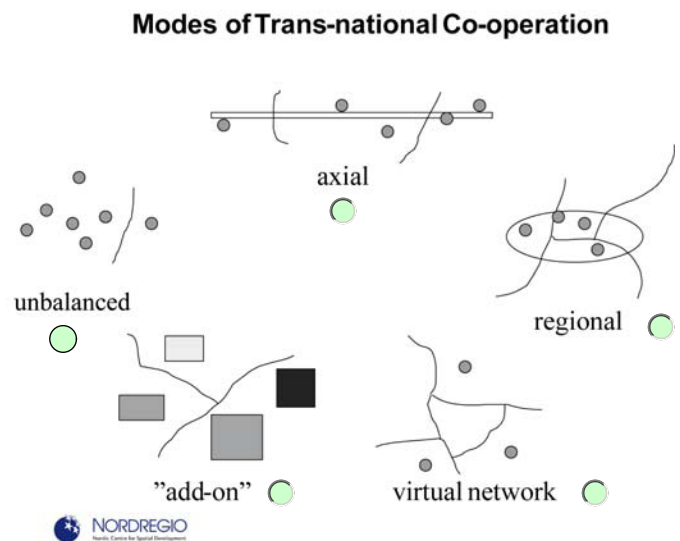
Axial: corresponds to a project based on an existing or planned transport axis or natural corridors (waterway).

(Transnational) regional co-operation: describes projects based on an existing or emerging functional region, or on a localised trans-national cluster of enterprises.

Unbalanced co-operation: describes any project in which the great majority of partners belong to the same country.

"Add-on" projects: refers to projects gathering already functioning regional networks.

Virtual network: refers to projects aiming at the sharing of experience, with partners often distant.



30. Do you think that the geography of your project has had an impact on your understanding of polycentric development?

☐ Yes How?

☐ No

By using the table below, please indicate on which combination of these aspects and geographical dimensions do you think you have increased the most your knowledge, in the framework of your project. (0: *not relevant at all*; 1: *a little bit*;...; 5: *Very much*)

	Local	Regional	National	Cross-border	Trans-national
Size of the urban areas (in terms of population and economic size)					
Physical infrastructure between urban areas					
Networking of actors					
Functional Specialisation and complementarities of the urban areas					

A large and diversified labour market

0 1 2 3 4 5

A high potential for the development of tourism

A highly developed Knowledge-intensive Service Activity sector and/or well developed higher education facilities

A concentration of decision-making
public actors

COMMENTS ON THE SURVEY

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