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STRENGTHENING REGIONAL CROSS-BORDER INFORMATION SYSTEMS: THE EXAMPLE OF GENEVA CROSS-BORDER REGION

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ABSTRACT

This paper in the first place briefly introduces the emerging issue of cross-border regions throughout Western and Eastern Europe and discusses the definition of cross-border cooperation. Secondly, it analyzes the development of joint institutional mechanisms for the design and monitoring of cross-border regional policies in all relevant fields including the cooperation in the field of statistics. Thirdly, the paper will describe in more detail the institutional and practical organization of the Statistical Observatory of the Geneva cross-border region. The Observatory was formally established in 2001 by the France-Geneva Regional Committee, the governance committee of the Geneva cross-border region, and produces more than 50 socio-economic and environmental indicators for a cross-border urban area of more than 800,000 inhabitants over two countries: 1/3 in France and 2/3 in Switzerland with close to 75,000 cross-border workers. The paper presents some important indicators produced by the observatory and concludes with major achievements and remaining challenges.

1. Cross-Border Regions (CBRs): development and definitions

Until recently, in Europe, state borders were considered as hermetic and securitized boundaries subject to strict immigration (and sometimes emigration) controls and restrictive customs regulations. It is only after the Second World War in the case of West European countries and in the 90's for East European countries, that the increasing mobility of goods, people, knowledge, capital and information changed the characteristics and functions of borders. Enterprises and citizens from contiguous regions from two or more nation states established gradually an economic model based on the comparative advantages of each of the states. The European integration process intensified the implementation of this new economic pattern where for example firms can set up their activities depending on conditions in terms of the national regulations, access to

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international markets and tax burden on one side of the border while at the same time benefitting from lower property prices and labour costs on the other side of the border. In well-integrated cross-border regions, studies confirm that the strong asymmetry in terms of salaries as well as goods, services and property prices lead an increasing number of workers to keep their job in a central urban area while moving their residence to the periphery, on the other side of the border. This phenomenon is reinforced further in transnational regions with a strong shared cultural identity, such as Geneva, since access to education and services (e.g. health care) on the other side of the border is not hindered by any language barrier.

Figure 1. Geneva metropolitan cross-border region

	Total	CH	FR
Area, in km ²	2,097 100%	553 26%	1544 74%
Municipalities	232 100%	92 39%	140 61%
Population	812,346 100%	528,299 65%	284,047 35%
Employment	412,444 100%	333,490 81%	78,954 19%
Housing	394,401 100%	251,779 64%	142,622 36%

2. Cross-Border Cooperation

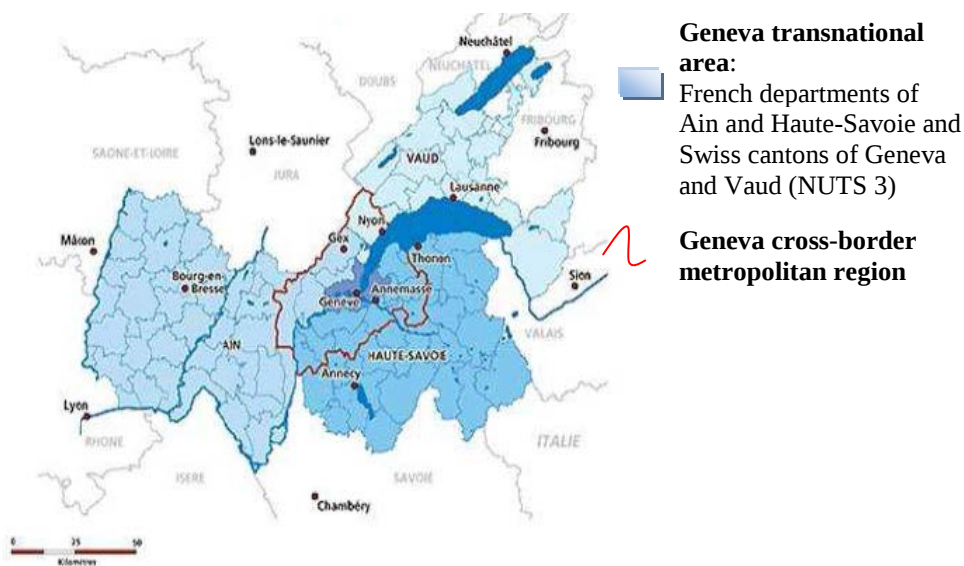
CBRs not only developed their own cultural, social and economic identities but were also gradually confronted with practical issues such as land use, transport network and the environment. The CBRs were increasingly concerned with practical problem-solving in a wide range of domains that needed a coordinated administrative response and developed, in some cases, original forms of public governance between contiguous territorial authorities across national borders.

Thus, cross-border cooperation can be defined as: cross-border collaboration mechanisms and agreements established between contiguous sub-national territorial authorities (municipalities and districts) within their own national legal systems.

Cross-border cooperation is often based on informal arrangements among participant authorities that, in some cases, can be acknowledged or even empowered by the relevant national authorities. In the European Union, the INTERREGIO programme helped to institutionalize these agreements but one should not forget that cross-border cooperation does not create some kind of supranational authorities. Furthermore, transnational metropolitan areas do not

always cover entirely two or more sub-national administrative units (regions or districts) on each side of the border. This makes the establishment of cooperation mechanisms even more difficult and complicates the production of statistical indicators since the latter are often based on sub-national administrative unit at a rather aggregated level; nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) in the EU. It is also important to distinguish cross-border cooperation from cooperation programmes that aim to promote cooperation among larger regions or even among two or more countries in Europe.

Figure 2. The Geneva cross-border region and related sub-national administrative territories



While many indicators and statistical information are available on the mobility of cross-border workers within transnational regions in Europe, (and in some cases on shuttle trade), private and public stakeholders are confronted with scarce regional cross-border statistical information in other areas such as health, education, security, housing and real estate market, trade, and environment. The main challenge for the implementation of cross-border agreements and cooperation mechanisms in these areas is to go beyond the traditional institutional organization of official statistics based on countries and national administrative regions and instead to propose statistical information and indicators according to new territorial divisions in all relevant fields for the monitoring of the development of cross-border regions.

The rest of this paper will examine the practical case of the Geneva metropolitan cross-border region which established in the 70's, cooperation

mechanisms and institutions that deal with all aspects of the daily-life and future developments of the region based on indicators produced by a regional and independent statistical body.

3. Geneva cross-border cooperation and its Statistical Observatory

3.1. Institutional setup and organization

The Geneva metropolitan region institutionalized its cooperation already in 1973 by setting up a cross-border coordination body: the France-Geneva Regional Committee (Comité Régional Franco-Genevois / CRFG). The CRFG was created by an agreement between the French and the Swiss governments and foresaw the participation in the Committee of representatives from local authorities from the departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie, and the region of Rhone-Alpes on the French side, and on the Swiss side, from the Canton of Geneva.

The aim of the CRFG is to define common strategies for the development of the cross-border region and to provide the necessary impetus for the realization of joint projects. The Committee meets in general once a year and defines main priorities and strategic programmes. For the implementation of the programmes, five sub-committees have been created that deal respectively with issues concerning travel and Security, economy and employment, housing and environment, health and social cohesion, and culture, education and sport. The functions of the CRFG and its five subordinated bodies were gradually reinforced by the entry into force of Swiss-EU bilateral agreements on e.g.: free movement of persons, overland transport, Schengen/Dublin, education and statistics.

In order to monitor the effects of the bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU on the regional integration process, the CRFG decided in 2001 to set-up a regional cross-border statistical observatory (Observatoire Statistique Transfrontalier / OST) jointly financed and managed by the statistical office of the Canton of Geneva (OCSTAT) and the INSEE Rhone-Alpes regional statistical office. Data from the Geneva metropolitan cross-border region situated on the district of Nyon are provided by the statistical office of the Canton Vaud, even though the latter is not formally part of the agreement. In 2007, Swiss and French partners in the CRFG signed a framework agreement that clarifies the mission, activities, organization and funding of the Statistical Observatory. The agreement stressed that the Observatory complies with the principles of official statistics. It benefits from professional independence, ensures impartiality in the compilation and publication of statistical information, follows the principle of confidentiality, and provides to all users simultaneous equal access to the information. Statistical information compiled by the Observatory is available on its website free of charge. The CRFG approves the annual statistical programme of work and guides the Observatory in its strategic development and research activities.

Until 2007, the activities of the Observatory were co-financed by the INTERREG III programme but since then the French and Swiss public authorities involved in the framework agreement subsumed responsibility for the funding of the Observatory. The annual budget of the cross-border statistical body is approximately €200 000. Staff costs, equivalent to two full-time positions, stand for 80% of the total budget. The remainder covers additional costs, for example, printing, shipping, service delivery to third parties and maintenance of the website of the Observatory (<http://www.statregio-francosuisse.net/>). INSEE Rhone-Alpes and OCSTAT provide additional contributions in kind by making available IT infrastructure, technical and scientific management and data access.

3.2. Territorial scope and domains of observation

First of all, it is important to stress that the Observatory is in general not conducting statistical surveys. Indicators produced by the cross-border statistical body are based on statistical information obtained from the relevant national and regional statistical offices in France and Switzerland, often at NUTS 3 level, and also administrative data transmitted by public authorities within the Geneva metropolitan cross-border region.

This is one reason which explains why the statistical information compiled by the Observatory covers two different territorial divisions (see also figure 2):

- (1) The transnational area, covering the departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie on the French side, and the cantons of Geneva and Vaud on the Swiss side (NUTS 3);
- (2) Geneva metropolitan cross-border region.

The Geneva metropolitan cross-border region accounts for about one third of the population, employment and housing of the transnational area. The metropolitan cross-border cooperation is evolving and covers gradually a larger share of the transnational area. Thus, the region covered by the cross-border cooperation does not correspond exactly to the boundary of the area covered by the Observatory. The latter outlined the Geneva metropolitan cross-border region based on employment criteria and cross-border flows of workers. For statistical reasons (comparability and coherence) it is not possible for the Observatory to change the boundary of the metropolitan region. Nevertheless, the data produced by the Observatory remain relevant for the analysis of major economic, social and environmental phenomena in the metropolitan area.

In order to provide statistical information for the cross-border cooperation process and the monitoring of joint metropolitan projects, the Observatory, after consultation with the CFRG, decided to compile more than 50 statistical indicator; some available for the transnational region and the metropolitan area, some others only for one of these two territorial division.

The indicators cover the following domains:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Population | 8. Real Estate Market |
| 2. Labour market | 9. Land |
| 3. Social balance | 10. Transport and mobility |
| 4. Education and training | 11. Economic framework and development |
| 5. Health | 12. International Trade |
| 6. Housing | 13. Public procurements |
| 7. Environment | |

The list of indicators can be found on the website of the Statistical Observatory.

3.3. Dissemination

All statistical indicators, charts, maps and publications produced by the Statistical Observatory are made available free of charge on its website. As requested by the framework agreement, the Observatory produces every year in September a statistical yearbook. The yearbook is the flagship publication of the Observatory where statistical indicators for all relevant domains are presented and complemented with short analyses, charts and maps. Besides the regular chapters, the yearbook describes and comments every year on a specific aspect of the development of the cross-border region. The yearbook covers the Geneva metropolitan cross-border region as well as the transnational area.

Thematic analyses are also carried out by the Observatory and published in Fact Sheets. Two to four fact sheets are produced every year. The domains covered by these thematic analyses are approved by the CRFG as part of the annual working programme. The Observatory also issues, on a regular basis, press-releases that inform the media and the public at large about new publications and fact sheets. On the website, detailed spread-sheets can be downloaded in Excel format. A list of all the publications and dissemination material to be issued during the year, as detailed in the annual statistical programme of work, are available on the website. It is nevertheless still not to be considered as a pre-announced release calendar since dates and time of dissemination are not mentioned.

3.4. Primary data sources

The major issue for the Observatory in the compilation of cross-border regional statistics is to some extent the comparability of the primary data sources. If the French and Swiss national statistical institutes are both following international guidelines and recommendations, a major achievement in the comparability of national statistics was the entry into force of the Swiss-EU bilateral agreement in Statistics. Through this agreement, Switzerland formalized its collaboration with EU authorities in the field of statistics (Eurostat) with the aim to achieve the compliance of Swiss statistics with the EU standards in all fields relevant for the cooperation between both partners. The comparability of

official statistics between France and Switzerland has been gradually enhanced including data at NUTS 3 level for the compilation of indicators for the transnational area: French departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie, and Swiss cantons of Geneva and Vaud. For the Geneva metropolitan cross-border region, however, most of the indicators rely on administrative data. The latter are by definition only seldom comparable which complicates the production of reliable statistical indicator for the metropolitan region.

4. Conclusions

The availability of reliable statistical indicators is a prerequisite for the development of cross-border regions. It is important that cooperation mechanisms and institutions for the development and follow-up of joint programmes and projects can rely on diagnostic tools that provide a common reference framework and a comprehensive picture of the cross-border region in all relevant domains.

Institutionalized cross-border cooperation with joint public governance mechanisms can reinforce the legitimacy of an independent cross border statistical body. A joint Cross-Regional Committee, representing the interests of the region and its major stakeholders, should not only be responsible for the establishment of a subordinated statistical body but should also be involved in the adoption of the multi-year and the annual programme of work of this institution. This secures the production of relevant regional indicators for the development and monitoring of joint programmes and projects in the cross-border region. Sub-national (territorial) statistical offices of the regions involved in the cross-border cooperation should make available and combine their respective know-how, competences and information technologies in the production of cross-border statistics. Last but not least, the sustainable development of a cross-border regional office requires budgetary contributions from all public partners involved in the project.

Nevertheless, while goodwill and political commitment from cross-border regional authorities are an important factor for the set-up of a statistical body, there are still some outstanding issues that need to be addressed; for example:

- Cross-border regions, and in particular metropolitan areas, do not match exactly sub-national administrative regions on each side of the border and the size of territorial administrative units (districts or municipalities) can diverge considerably.
- Cross-border statistical information and indicators often rely on regional statistics produced by the national statistical systems on both sides of the transnational area. It is therefore important for the comparability of the information used in the compilation of cross-border statistics that countries comply with international and European recommendations and guidelines. The capacity to produce cross-border statistics can be seen as an indicator of the degree of international harmonization of national statistics.

- Some indicators cannot rely on national or regional statistical information and need to be compiled out of administrative data. However, administrative data are often not comparable across borders. In this case, comprehensive national population and business statistical registers, regularly updated according to international recommendations, could be an excellent source of information for the compilation of cross-border statistics.
- Cross-border statistical bodies are confronted with different legal provisions concerning the transmission of or access given to third parties of confidential data. In some cases, the national legal framework does not allow, national or regional statistical institutes to transfer or give access to confidential statistical information to a cross-border statistical institution. Unfortunately, national and European legislations do not consider cross-border statistical bodies as part of the system of official statistics.

It is obviously still a challenge for cross-border regions in Europe to extend beyond the traditional institutional organization of official statistics which is based on national and sub-national divisions. However, compared to other fields with cross-border cooperation mechanisms and tools, statistics can build on a strong common professional culture and a longstanding successful international cooperation. This explains why statistics is among the most successful fields of cooperation in the Geneva metropolitan cross-border region.

Acknowledgements

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