Social Capital Design and Polycentric Metropolitan Competitiveness: The “Grande Région” Agenda

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Abstract
Social capital has been considered by some scientists such as Putnam as a resource benefitting territories, and the role of public institutions in the design of such a capital has been increasingly emphasized over recent years. The objective of this article is to analyze the role played by the euroregional institution in configuring social capital linkages for the benefit of territorial competitiveness. The article is based on the analysis of the “Grande Région” case, a euroregion whose central and cross-border part is characterized by a metropolization process concerning many cities. Does the “Grande Région” executive power connect itself with urban civil society representatives in favor of a metropolitan and polycentric competitiveness? Our hypothesis is that the euroregional leaders design "weak ties" (Granovetter, M.S. 1973. The Strength of Weak Ties American Journal of Sociology 78 (6): 1360–1380) and a bracing social capital at the scale of the multi-polar urban area

Introduction
Nation-states have bargained a part of their sovereignty upwards and downwards to maintain their ability to control territorial development during the past 30 years (Castells 1996). There has been a particular increase in public–private governance arrangements at the local and urban scale to structure a stronger territorial competitiveness. Putnam (1993) has argued that the multiple connections between public and civil society stakeholders can be considered a source of social capital production benefitting the territories in which these linkages are embedded. At the same time, European states have engaged a process of power-sharing at the upper level within the European Union (Rudolph 2005), and the EU institutions have been a strong advocate of polycentric city-regionalism as the basis of spatial competitiveness. Metropolitan areas, including the multi-polar city regions, are considered by European authorities as one of the most important scales of development and efficient linkages (Newman 2000, Scott 2002).

Luxembourg City is the heart of a metropolization process (Sohn, Reitel, and Walther 2009; Sohn and Walther 2008). Its top-ranking activities generate wealth, attract qualification, and intensify flows of people, goods, and capital. The process is greatly responsible for the daily commuting of 135,000 cross-border workers employed in Luxembourg and residing in nearby Belgian, French, and German territories (Statec 2008). A functional region cross-cutting state limits is progressively emerging (Vandermotten 2010), and cross-border workers tend to concentrate themselves in the cities located in the vicinity of the Grand-Duchy (cf. Figure 1). There is a strong imbalance in terms of job flows between Luxembourg and the urban poles located on the other side of the border, but peripheral cities can have some other cross-border attractive assets such as retail centers and university poles. However, can we affirm that a cross-border polycentric regionalism based on complementarities is enacted by governmental agencies? The euroregion located in the area, namely the Grande Région, is the most institutionalized cross-border assemblage in the area, and it regroups strong public actors with a capacity to generate public–private linkages. Consequently, does this euroregional institution design social capital ties that benefit the competitiveness of the polycentric urban area?

The hypothesis developed in this article is that the Grande Région, and the state and regional authorities within it, shapes a “bracing social capital” (Rydin and Holman 2004) in favor of a cross-border multi-polar...

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urban development, a strategy influenced by EU normative policies. This shaping is structured by the agenda-setting defined by meta-governance stakeholders coming in great numbers from the cities impacted by the metropolization process. The first part of this article presents the issues of social capital design and the strength of polycentric city-regionalism in the EU policy-making. It is followed by an analysis of the ties among public and private actors engaged in the Grande Région institution and the physical location of civil society stakeholders involved in the process. Finally, the last chapter is focused on the urban rhetoric, vision, projects, and networks enacted by the Grande Région executives.

Social Capital Design, Euroregions, and EU Normative Polycentricism

According to the empirical work of Putnam (1993), social capital can be used for the benefit of specific territories when governmental agencies and civil society organizations have developed a civic multi-faceted agenda implying participation and reciprocity. Still, social capital is not monolithic. The configuration of ties, the characteristics of rules, the intensity of flows, the content of exchanges, and the duration of relations depend on the strength of values and openness of social ensembles. Rydin and Holman (2004) suggests the existence of a bracing social capital, which is above all concerned with the reinforcement of multi-scalar and multi-sectoral
links, but only within a limited set of actors. Membership of these groups is related to the ability of participants to address issues treated by each assemblage. The spatial scale of actions reinforced by these networks is variable. It depends on the projects put in the agenda setting of the partnership. The bracing social capital highlighted by Rydin and Holman is different from the bridging social capital defined by Woolcock (2001) because it implies less extensive networks and enables not only horizontal but also vertical connections. Furthermore, common norms are also considered more central for bracing social capital than for the bridging one to make relationships effective. However, rules required for the development of a bracing social capital are located at the level of strategies and not so much at the operational level. They do not imply the structural commitments found in close groups generating what is named bonding social capital (Woolcock 2001).

The role of state and local government in the development of social capital has been emphasized by political scientists (Foley and Edwards 1999; Smith, Maloney, and Stoker 2000, 2004). Lowndes and Wilson (2001) highlight that public institutions design social capital in four different ways: connections with the voluntary sector, development of opportunities for public participation, responsiveness of decision-making and arrangements for democratic leadership, and social inclusion. The role of government can be especially crucial for the development of bridging social capital, that is to say, interconnections between bonded groups. It turns out that most of the research carried out on social capital in cross-border areas is often not analyzed, even if a large number of governmental initiatives have been taken to promote cross-border regionalization and development over the past 30 years, and especially so in Europe with the help of the Interreg program. The research by Grix and Knowles (2003) in the Pro Viadrina region is relatively unique.

EU authorities have no direct competencies in the field of spatial regulation. However, they have a key role in shaping territorial strategies in favor of a European spatial cohesion. The development of euroregions can be related for instance to the communitary policies of the 1980s and 1990s (Perkmann 2003), and the euroregional concept has been “a powerful tool with which to transport European values and objectives” (Scott 2002, 158). Polycentric urban development has been one of the key norms circulated by European policymakers over the past two decades (Newman 2000, Scott 2002) even if there can be a lack of theoretical and empirical evidence that the polycentric model is the most appropriate one in terms of territorial competitiveness (Davoudi 2003). The polycentric EU agenda may have been instrumental in the configura-tion of social capital ties by public authorities involved in urban euroregions such as the “Grande Région.”

**Grande Région and the Public–Civil Society Interactions**

Our method to clarify the design of a social capital at the euroregional level is based on the analysis of the documents related to the evolving cross-border formalized networks at the scale of the Grande Région. Our objective is to find out if instruments are put in place to nurture social capital and, if so, what sort of social capital, involving which civil society representatives, and for the benefit of which area. Does the Grande Région coalition of public stakeholders promote public–private connections at the level of the cross-border multi-polar urban area fuelled by the Luxembourgish economy? After a description of the political organization of the Euroregion and spatial frame of social interactions among national public institutions, we will focus on the direct relationships between the set of executive power of that euroregion and civil society representative located in that area. Can we say that the euroregional leadership enacts a bracing social capital at the level of the multi-polar urban region?

We are aware that multiple informal connections between actors involved at the euroregional level may exist outside the official assemblages of the Grande Région and that official agreements do not necessarily lead to concrete implementation and territorial benefits. However, as Blatter (2001, 2006) suggests, we consider that the formalization of links and the intensification of institutional agreements shape the identity and preferences of the involved actors, and also have an instrumental role in creating mechanism control and incentives at a specific scale. Institutionalization brings frameworks facilitating a structural
production of social interactions and capital. The deepening of formalized relationships, especially in a cross-border environment, can be crucial for stabilizing over time the three main aspects of inter-organizational social capital: trust, reciprocity, and information/resource availability. The specificity of relationships (vertical, horizontal, multi-scale), the strength of ties (strong or loosen), the definition of agreements (votes, negotiation...), the intensity of information flows, and the spatial configurations of networks expressed in formal social networks are a good basis to characterize a public design of social capital for the benefit of certain areas.

The founding act of the cooperation in the Grande Région is the agreement for cooperation in the German, French, and Luxembourgish border region defined in 1980. It was signed by the three national governments (Accord relatif à la coopération germano-franco-luxembourgeoise dans les régions frontalières 1980). The objective of the partnership is to consolidate and to develop connections to address cross-border administrative, technical, social, and cultural issues taking place within a single spatial scale including the region of Lorraine, the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, Saarland, and the southern part of the Rheinland-Pfalz land. Following that agreement, a cross-border Interregional Parliamentary Council (IPC) was created in 1986 at the euroregional level. The objective of the 50 parliamentarians coming from the national parliament of Luxembourg and the surrounding local councils was to promote the economic, social, and cultural role of the Grande Région and to contribute to the development of cross-border cooperation (Clément 2008). The IPC produces recommendations. It cannot be assimilated to the EU or national parliaments because it has only a consultative role. It is also important to mention that its recommendations and advice cannot be provided against the will of one of its national parliamentary delegation. It allows interactions between a wider set of public actors but does not produce any coercive rules that would put at risk the sovereignty of each parliament (Conseil Parlementaire Interrégional 1986, 2004). Ten years later, another cross-border public initiative was implemented to provide a better representation of regional governments at the executive level. From 1995 onwards, a cyclic Grande Région Summit was organized to single out common recommendations shared by the government of public authorities represented in the IPC, plus the French Departmental Councils of Moselle and Meurthe-et-Moselle. The German federal state is absent from the Summit and the French state representative participates to the debate, but does not take part in the common resolutions (cf. Figure 2).

The Summit has decided to institutionalize a first series of horizontal connections among civil society representatives by enacting an Economic and Social Committee at the euroregional level in 1997 (the “Comité Social et Economique de la Grande Région” known as the “CESGR”). This organization is a consultative arena producing resolutions on cross-border economic, social, cultural, and spatial planning issues. Its objective is also to make contributions in terms of social dialog, referring to recommendations and experiences developed by its members. It receives its missions from the euregio executives and consequently must report the content of its activity to the Summit. Vertical linkages are organized between the two bodies. The CESGR has validated a large number of resolutions on various themes such as administrative barriers, transportation, economic clustering, employment, and bilingual strategies. The work is performed through dedicated groups as in the IPC (small and medium businesses, collective transports and infrastructures, vocational training, and health services). The thirty-six members of the organization are regrouped into equal and specific civil society units (workers unions, employer’s organizations, and other members), and they receive the support of experts. Their legitimacy is based on their representativeness of sectoral groups concerned by the debated issues. They are delegated by authorities located in each country.

The CESGR can take decisions through majority vote contrary to the IPC and to the Summit, but its internal procedures mention also that everything will be done to reach a consensus. Furthermore, minority views will be added into the collective resolutions when they are shared by at least six members, that is to say the equivalent of one national/regional delegation (Comité Economique et Social de la Grande Région 2004). It shows that the frames of social norms beyond the states are soft, and the production of social capital at the cross-border scale can only be based on “we-ness” recognizing the importance of cultural differences determined within states over
long periods of time. We can also measure a strong representation of stakeholders coming from the heart of the Grande Région and the main urban poles of the cross-border polycentric metropolitan area in this civil society institution. Most of the German representatives from Saarland come from Saarbrücken, and half of the delegates of Rheinland-Pfalz are located in Trier. The French actors come mainly from Metz. The French-speaking Belgian civil society stakeholders are mostly from Arlon, while the German-speaking Belgian ones are from Eupen. The Luxembourgish ones are located mainly in Luxembourg City and in Esch-sur-Alzette (Comité Economique et Social de la Grande Région, 2010). This central geographic location of stakeholders must play a role in the configuration of agenda-settings privileging issues related to that internal and urban heartland functionally integrated by important employment flows (Figure 2).

The CESGR itself has been instrumental in creating two other civil society-related networks also anchored in the central part of the Euroregion and developing vertical linkages with the executive Summit. The first partnership is the Interregional Observatory of the Employment Market. It has been proposed by the CESGR to the Summit which took the decision to put it in place. The observatory has produced
information on the job market since 2001. It has helped the other Grande Région institutions to improve their knowledge and define their concerted vision. The observatory is not a single structure, but a group of six existing centers mainly located in big cities at the center of the euregio such as Metz and Luxembourg. It is open not to ordinary citizens and experiential expertise, but to a small number of institutions that have been granted the role of “knowledge holders” (Schmitter 2002, 62) by the executive public institutions involved in the Grande Région. The public–private interactions between the observatory and the Summit enable cross-border employment flows to be focused on, and these in fact are taking place mainly in the cross-border city-region powered by the Luxembourgish economy. The second organization proposed by the CESGR and validated by the Summit is the Mediators’ Network. The objective of that partnership put in place in 2003 is to help citizens of the euroregion to formulate critics against decisions taken by administrative authorities on trans-border issues. The eight mediators working for national public authorities are supposed to work with one another to address problems coming from citizens (Grande Région 2003). That system concerns the whole of the Grande Région, but it is above all important for people living in cross-border functional area structured by the Luxembourgish employment market.

We can see, first of all, that the Summit of Executives is the public organization which initiates civil society participation and its institutionalization at the euregional level. Second, these “private” platforms are not independent from the public key players once created. The work of the CESGR and the employment observatory must be reported to the Summit. The mediators themselves are part of the public realm and they have direct contact with ordinary citizens. The arenas are consequently interlinked. Cross-border horizontal connections exist within each ensemble, and vertical links between public stakeholders and the civil society ones are institutionalized. It is also important to mention that the “official” life cycle of each platform is relatively similar. The key encounters between institutional actors are not frequent and consequently cannot be compared with those existing in national frameworks. The Summit of Executives is for instance assembled only once every 18 months (thematic working groups being organized in between to shape the agenda of the Summit and/or to implement the strategies decided by the executive power of the Grande Région). The CESGR has to organise meetings at least twice a year. It is also clear that the number of institutional actors involved in each ensembles is relatively limited (ten members in the Summit, 50 parliamentarians in the IPC, 36 partners in the CESGR, eight in the mediators’ network, six actors in the employment observatory). Finally, the rules defined in each organization are not constrained for the members. There is a constant research of consensus because of the fragility of links beyond the state. Strong jurisdictional powers within states have decided to build up a public coalition at the Euregio scale to design public–private interactions leading to a potential bracing social capital and cross-border development policies. The objective is to deepen multi-scalar connections among a limited group of key players to discuss focused issues. The 11th Summit in 2009 reinforced the interconnections of public and civil society representatives by validating the creation of an experimental cross-border task-force linking all institutional actors. The objective of the body is to make cross-border employment flows easier for the whole of the Grande Région, but in fact it will facilitate above all movements where there is already a cross-border economic integration, that is to say, the cross-border employment basin polarized by Luxembourg considered officially as the employment motor of the Euregio center (Sommet de la Grande Région 2009). Finally, the definition of norms among actors is central, but they are specific to a bracing social capital. The set of rules is situated at the strategic level. Commitments are not as constraining as those found in the production of bonding social capital. They tend to favor alliances around visions, coalitions, and time-schedule projects partly focused on cross-border city-region issues, as will be discussed in the next section.

Grande Région and the Intercity Social Interactions Design: from Vision to Actions

The work of the Grande Région over the years consisted in defining recommendations paving the way for future cooperations. Consequently, we decided to analyze the recommendations defined by the summit of the executives of the Grande Région and two concrete trans-border working programs which have been promoted in the euroregion: the cultural events organized in the framework of the "Luxembourg-Grande
Région, European Capital of Culture 2007” and the projects developed in the Interreg IVA “Grande Région” program. We are not pretending that Interreg programs and the Grande Région executive are the exclusive system of cross-border social capital design or that they create ex-nihilo long-term exchanges among series of stakeholders. But the financial incentive associated with these programs and the choice made by the euregional officials to sponsor some intercity cooperation and not some others are instrumental in favoring some social capital production at a specific spatial scale. Our objective is to determine whether some of these policies are related to a cross-border polycentric metropolitan competitiveness strategy.

The Grande Région has developed an expertise to nurture the public debate and determine common visions and norms over the years. The sharing of information and the production of cross-border knowledge have helped structure the upper-level authorities’ resolutions in favor of a cross-border metropolitan and polycentric strategy. Spatial planning strategies inspired by the EU normative policies encouraging intercity connections and metropolitan-level agreement have been circulated in the agenda-setting of the Grande Région. In 1995, the executive members of the Summit declared that a cross-border urban network development scheme should be defined in conformity with the work of the European Union (Sommet de la Grande Région 1995). The following year, the necessity for a balanced and European urban network was mentioned by the Summit. The participants found that they share some common views to build up a transnational and integrated metropolitan system (Sommet de la Grande Région 1996). A few years later, there was collective agreement on focusing debates on a common spatial planning based on a network of major cities. The objective mentioned was to organise a cross-border and polycentric metropolitan area able to compete with major national metropolis (Sommet de la Grande Région 2008). This vision had to be based on the results of an applied research project named Metroborder. That applied research study carried out within the ESPON program (European Spatial Planning Observation Network) implied the creation of two committees regrouping state and regional authorities, but also the main city councils of the metropolitan area. Public stakeholders taking part in these groups have other occasions on which to meet one another. However, the Grande Région Summit has decided to design multi-level interactions between institutional actors on a specific territorial object: the cross-border polycentric metropolitan region localized in the center of the euroregion. That design can potentially increase the bracing social capital of participating institutional actors. Cross-border urban polycentrism in the present case can be considered a “boundary object” (Häkli 2009) helping participants to interact with one another at the cross-border urban region level.

The Grande Région also mandated in 2002 a political commission to propose a vision for the euregio, the “Vision d’avenir 2020.” The following year, the group made proposals on height themes often debated among executives: culture, education/vocational training, research, economy/employment, social networks, transports, environment/spatial planning, and institutionalization. The vision presents ideal scenarios, diagnosis of the current situation, short-term projects, and cross-border institutions helping to reach the 2020 objectives. The content of this strategic report concerns the whole of the euroregion, but it also promotes the idea of a polycentric urban development. First of all, the various cross-border institutions mentioned to help structure the territory (research center, economic institute, marketing agency . . . ) are cross-border polycentric networks whose nodes would be, in fact, located in different urban poles. Second, the commission highlights that connections linking city administrations are satisfactory, but urban polycentrism must imply linkages between other actors participating in the centrality of urban poles such as researchers. Finally, the commission suggests that in 2020, the Euroregion and the cross-border polycentric metropolitan areas are two interconnected spaces of cooperation (Commission Politique “Vision d’avenir 2020” 2003). This visionary approach will not be necessarily totally implemented, but the “Metroborder” committees are already a formal platform connecting the euregional actors and city authorities at the metropolitan scale to contemplate some collective visions and actions.
The executives of the Grande Région have been an advocacy coalition towards the EU to obtain funding with a view to structure social interactions between actors located in urban centers. The most visible design of intercity links was achieved in 2007 during the “Luxembourg-Grande Région, European Capital of Culture.” As suggested by Heinelt and Kübler (2005), place-related events can play an important role in stimulating metropolitan governance by changing the political agenda and generating new linkages between actors. We can see a stimulation of multilevel and polycentric urban networks in the present case. Normally this type of event is concentrated around one capital city, but the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg decided to send to the EU authorities a proposal including events taking places in the cross-border area after the agreement of its Grande Région partners in 2001. That proposal has been validated by the European Union. A quarter of implemented projects (a total of 139) have been cross-border ones. Many cross-border actions took place in major cities such as Metz, Nancy, Trier, Saarbrucken, and Luxembourg-City. The implementation has implied decision-making rules linking executives’ powers of the Grande Région but also local partners at the city scale, both levels being interconnected because of the financial flow existing between upper-level authorities, local ones, and the voluntary sector. The initiative has enabled the development of time-scheduled interactions between cities and urban civil society representatives such as theater companies and cultural associations (Luxembourg and Grande Région, European Capital of Culture 2007, 2008; Sohn 2009). The cross-border cultural dynamics was prolonged by the creation, in 2008, of a cross-border association named “Espace Culturel Grande Région” whose objective was to maintain a cultural coordination and cooperation. That organization, regrouping 12 public authorities coming from the four countries involved, is supposed to develop ties with the cultural and associational sector. National and regional governments are among members but also the city council of Trier and Luxembourg. The action plan for the network is currently sponsored by the Interreg IVA Grande Région program. Cultural policy is one of the key strategies performed by all metropolitan areas to differentiate themselves from one another on the global scale. We can see that the cultural strategies in the Grande Région case are partly polycentric and developed beyond the state borders.

The Grande Région is also in charge with the coordination of the Interreg IVA program. More than 80 projects have been approved between the launch of the program and July 2010 (Interreg IVA Grande Région 2010). A global approach to validated actions shows that there are not many interurban projects, but one of the most sponsored projects consists in structuring a polycentric university network (the “Université de la Grande Région” project). All active partners in this initiative are in the major cities situated in the urban core of the euroregion except the Belgian one located in Liège. A budget of €6 million was been defined in 2008 to develop interactions in the academic sector. Previous connections were developed between universities since the signature of an academic charter in 1984. The associated national and regional governments leading the Grande Région have not created an academic network, but they have decided to support financially polycentric linkages in that particular segment of the civil society instrumental in metropolitan competitiveness. Furthermore, the resolution of the first “academic education and research” inter-ministerial meeting of the Grande Région organized in 2009 mentions the possible creation of a euroregional fund to intensify future interactions between researchers (Sommet de la Grande Région 2009). Consequently, we can conclude that the euroregion is a public force which can be instrumental in reinforcing inter-urban links related to polycentric metropolitan competitiveness.

Conclusion

Cross-border partnerships can potentially increase the social capital of participants and have an impact on territorial development. However, people and organizations can be tempted to under-invest in social capital as each actor contributing to it will have a small share of benefits (Coleman 1988). It is also true that local governmental actors may limit their expenditures in favor of metropolitan development because surrounding local authorities located in the same functional area will capture benefits generated by their actions. They may be inclined to wait for spillovers related to nearby jurisdictions’ policies, a strategy damaging the whole area, hence the necessity of institutional mechanisms to contemplate collective gains (Barnes and Ledebur 1991). Finally, the territorial development policies based on polycentric
metropolitan strategies and multi-level, public–private governance networks is a strong EU normative policy, even if spatial competitiveness is deeply contextual (Storper and Salais 1997).

The national public authorities managing the Grande Région have progressively shaped organizations to intensify some social interactions leading to a potential increase in participants’ social capital. Connections took place at the beginning only between state representatives, and progressively, there has been a widening of networks to sub-national authorities and civil society representatives. If we follow the Lowndes and Wilson (2001) approach on institutional design of social capital, we can say that the coalition of public institutional actors at the euroregion level has implemented such a design by (1) connecting with the voluntary sector (e.g. European Capital of Culture program), (2) developing opportunities for public participation (there has been an enlargement of civil society members associated directly and indirectly over the years), (3) responding to civil society proposals (e.g. the employment observatory is a proposal coming from the GRESC), and (4) facilitating social inclusion (e.g. the establishment of the mediators’ network to resolve cross-border problems faced by citizens living in the region). It also turns out that this design can benefit mainly the central, urban, and multi-polar part of the euroregion because involved civil society actors come from there, and most cross-border functional flows take place in this area. This does not mean that cross-border social interactions and social capital do not exist without that euroregional design or that the public incentive of cross-border ties leads without any doubt to the production of social capital and polycentric territorial development; but states and regions involved in the Grande Région are powerful jurisdictions deciding collectively to connect with specific civil society representatives, connections reducing the transactional cost of information flows mainly between city actors within an urban functional area located at the center of the euroregion.

However, we need to keep in mind that the social links developed by the Grande Région can above all facilitate a bracing social capital, helping to address focused issues and implying the definition of common rules at the strategic level. The euroregion has not produced rigid blueprints but shared desirable policy directions. Connections are mainly weak ties creating multidimensional opportunities in overlapping arenas. A more stable design of cross-border social interactions at the polycentric and urban scale would imply a movement from the EU short-term sponsorship of urban webs to the structural funding of interactions for a more balanced polycentric metropolitan development.

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