

**Cross- border aspects of regional governance in the Alps- Adriatic
borderlands: from euroregional experiences to EGTC prospects**

Sigrid Lipott, PhD*

* **Sigrid Lipott** holds an MA in International and Diplomatic Sciences and a PhD in Transborder Policies. She is post- doc research fellow at the University of Klagenfurt am Worthersee, Department of Sociology, for the academic year 2013 – 2014. Contact: sigridlipott@hotmail.com

1. Introduction

During the last few decades, many local and regional authorities have undertaken a series of cross- border cooperation initiatives within the European Community internal borders but also along the Community external borders. The 1990s and the 2000s have seen an impressive flourishing of cross-border regions all over Europe, which have surged in particular because of their increasingly relevant role as drivers for territorial development in the national context, as well as implementation units for European regional policy in a context of multi-level governance. This has led to the creation of over 130 cross- border bodies all over Europe, with a large variety of organizational structures, legal statuses and operational strengths. The development of EU regional policy, especially in connection with the Eastern enlargement, has encouraged Member States and EU institutions to create a common institutional framework under EU law with a new juridical instrument, the EGTC, which has led so far to about 45 Conventions, applied to a variety of territorial formats (macro scale Euroregions, medium scale regions, inter- municipal cooperation).

Cross - border cooperation in the Alps- Adriatic region has a long history, which evolved from the first transborder contacts and the establishment of Trigon (later Quadrigon) in the 60s', to the Working Community experience in the '70s and '80s, and to different euroregional proposals during the '90s and '2000s. The aim of the EGTC "Euregio without borders", whose Convention concluded between the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Carinthia, is to politically reposition the Alps- Adriatic region at the core of Mitteleuropa, turning it into a self - centred area. The initiative was born in 2005 but was later left in a lethargic state due to a number of questions to be partly solved yet: its nature, its size and membership and its functional scope. However, the initiative gained momentum in 2012, when the project was officially presented at the European Parliament, together with the promise of including the whole Slovenian territory and the Croatian Istra, and was recently concluded between Italy and Austria at the end of 2013.

My paper seeks to analyse processes of cross- border cooperation and dynamics of cross- border governance in the Alps – Adriatic region. The main research question is: "Which patterns of cross- border cooperation (CBC) are emerging in the Alps- Adriatic transborder space? Which tools have been used so far and which ones are being implemented?" "Which are the main difficulties in the construction of a cross- border governance along the Alps – Adriatic borders?"

The paper analyses the different political / legal tools which have been used in order to create a transborder region in the area; secondly, it investigates whether some kind of transnational governance is emerging in the above- mentioned region, permitting it to supersede the national level, and difficulties with implementing it.

The research makes use of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and draws on extensive field - work based on targeted in- depth interviews to experts of cross- border cooperation and national and regional officers.

2. Tools of cross- border cooperation in the Alps- Adriatic area

2.1 The Alps- Adriatic border region: territory and features.

As the Transfrontier Euro Institute points out, there is no clear or commonly accepted definition of the region geographically and politically described as the Alps – Adriatic. In a broad sense, it can be conceived as extending along the Eastern Alps, encompassing Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary and Croatia. Nevertheless, since the 60s, the term is generally used in association with formalized transborder cooperation between Austria (Carinthia), Italy (FVG) and Slovenia (Valentin 2007). The territory thus comprises an autonomous region, a unitary State and a federal State. In a European policy discourse, however, the area consists of 4 NUTS region (one in Italy, one in Austria and two in Slovenia). A broader definition, however, sometimes includes also the Austrian Styria and the Italian Veneto.

Figure 1: spatial perimeter of the “narrow” Alps Adriatic cross- border region



Source: www.transfrontier.eu

The Austrian – Italian – Slovene border is a Schengen border and as such, has lost many of its most obvious functions. And yet, the border was formerly, at least partly, an old European border and a ‘hard’ border: until 1989 the Iron Curtain marked the border between Austria and Slovenia and the border between Italy and Slovenia represented a divide between two different political and ideological systems as well as an EU external border. Until 2004, which saw the emergence of the Republic of Slovenia, the region constituted a mixed border region, positioned along the former East / West divide, the Great Border.

Nevertheless, the Alps-Adriatic region is most typically characterised by its heterogeneity and to a significant extent also by regional disparities. First of all, the border area is not just characterised by linguistic, cultural, ideological or politico-administrative borders, but is in fact also characterised by very real and imposing physical borders (Knappitsch 2011: 3): the Karavanken mountains run between Carinthia and Slovenia, the Carnic Alps run between Carinthia and Italy and the Julian Alps run between Italy and Slovenia. Historically, the different territorial units within the region experienced very different patterns of social and economic development, with the result of very political and topographic situations.

Secondly, the Alps-Adriatic region is largely characterised by regional disparities. This becomes evident if we look at the regional gross domestic product for each of the territories for 2011 (PPS per inhabitant in % of the EU27 average). The figure for Friuli Venezia Giulia was 115, for Carinthia 107 and for Slovenia the figure was considerably lower, with great variation in the figures for the eastern and western parts of Slovenia: the figure for Western Slovenia was 100 and that for Eastern Slovenia was 69. This seemingly dramatic difference between the two parts of Slovenia, with the GDP for part of Slovenia significantly lower than the EU average, is less surprising bearing in mind that the capital Ljubljana and its surrounding area is located within the NUTS2 region of Western Slovenia. Distribution of wealth in the region is also quite heterogeneous. In terms of the labour market, disparities can also be seen if we consider for example unemployment rates (again from a NUTS level 2 perspective). In 2012 the unemployment rate in Friuli Venezia Giulia was 6.8% (1); in Carinthia it was significantly lower, at 4.7%, while in Western Slovenia it was 7.5% and in Eastern Slovenia the figure was highest at 10%.

One element in common is that the primary sector plays a relatively minimal economic role in all three territories, nonetheless in Slovenia in 2009 it did account for 8.7% of persons employed and in Carinthia for 6.1%. For the tertiary sector, all three territories show GDPs lower than the European average of 72%, as of year 2009.

The region has also experienced strong growth in high technology sectors such as information technologies, in Carinthia this has also been the case in the microelectronics sector and in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Slovenia in advanced telecommunications and integrated logistics. In Friuli Venezia Giulia, human resources employed in science and technology in 2012 were about 35%; the figure for Carinthia and Eastern Slovenia were very close (about 36% both), while it was surprisingly much higher in Western Slovenia (46%)

Figure 2: Regional disparities in the Alps- Adriatic

| | FVG | Slovenia | | Carinthia |
|---|------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| | | <i>Western</i> | <i>Eastern</i> | |
| GDP per inhabitant in % of the EU average | 115 | 100 | 69 | 107 |
| Unemployment in % | 6.8 | 7.5 | 10 | 4.7 |

Source: Eurostat (2013) for NUTS 2

The Alpine – Adriatic region presents both weaknesses and strengths for future development. The area has a condition of relative peripherality to the European core can be also considered as a bridge and interface between the most developed EU areas and those regions of the EU classified under the GDP average.

According to Migliorini (2010: 128), one of the major features of the Alpine Adriatic area is its urban polycentric organization, without any dominant town, which places the area in a subaltern position in respect of the surrounding continental metropolitan areas. The Alpine-Adriatic area is neither metropolitan nor exclusively rural (Fabbro, Cressati 2010: 119), on the contrary it is based on clusters of small – medium- sized urban centres and some functional urban areas, according to ESPON studies (2). These urban centres are historically and administratively separated each other by national and regional boundaries and they do not exhibit any special hierarchy among them. They are relatively close, but too far for daily commuting. They also have potential complementarities at the level of activities and services. Alpine Adriatic cross - border cooperation must be thus intended as an integrated strategy

centred on multi – regional metropolitan polycentrism and based on functional complementarities (Fabbro 2010).

The region is also characterized by limited accessibility standards since the infrastructure system is still incomplete in particular if referred to the railway network and its performances. One other character is the maritime exposition of the area as upper terminal of the Adriatic sea; Trieste, for example, is dramatically enhancing railway traffics directed to Austria, Germany and Eastern Europe thanks to foreign enterprises (3).

2.2. History of cross – border activity in the Alps – Adriatic area.

The transborder area between Italy and Slovenia shows the vagueness of the East/ West geopolitical division: this territory in fact oscillates between these two realities, not only due to its position at the core of Mitteleuropa but also because of common historical roots. As Langer (2003: 17) points out, this territory can be intended as a “whole” because of at least two historical focuses: one is the ancient unity in pre-roman times, when Carnuti, a celtic tribe, settled this region, and left their name to Carnia (the Alpine part of Friuli) and to Kranj as well as to Carinthia; the second focus is the litorale (primorje, Küstenland), i.e. the administrative unity of Gorizia, Trieste and Istra, under the Habsburgs.

After WWII these territories soon found a common relational ground in this common Mitteleuropean historical – institutional architecture, as described by Langer. In other terms, the Alps Adriatic area may be thus seen primarily as a historical construction of the Habsburgs. The region is also peculiar in its multilingual and multicultural make up: the region represents a gateway for Europe’s three main cultural traditions – the Germanic, Romantic and Slavic traditions.

With the normalization process of the geopolitical map following WWI and WWII and the quite recent border delineation, potential conflict arose due to overlapping cultural and ethnic spaces, which create difficulties in boundary – making processes which sought ethnically based political borders (Bufon 2002).

The dismantling of the Iron Curtain has added to the interpretation of the Alps Adriatic space as a strategic territory and a proactive laboratory for European integration, at the centre of the new Europe. Indeed, Austria, Italy (FVG) and Slovenia have a quite long tradition of cooperation. The idea of a Euroregion in this territory can build on the experience of several decades of CBC initiatives which have been established within different legal and political

frameworks: at plurinational level, at national level, at regional level and at local level, giving surge to numerous bodies of territorial cooperation, both at bilateral and, less often, at trilateral level.

In general, while in Western European countries cross- border cooperation started to develop by the desire to remove barriers and to overcome everyday problems affecting the inhabitants of border regions (for example public administration structures and planning, social security, training and education, road construction, environmental issues), in Eastern European countries the process was massively fostered only since the '90s as a part of pre-integration policy to combat regional marginalization (Scott 2001). However, the Central – Eastern part of Europe has also produced some forms of cross- border structures which could be called regions within regions (Bufon 2002: 180), in which there is usually no cross- border frame provided, unlike in the example of Western Euregios, but where grass- roots cross- border relations try to maintain and reproduce formerly existing common social spaces.

Many studies on cross-border co-operation contrast that while cross-border co-operation stemmed from the local and regional level bottom–up in Western countries, it was instead top–down (European level) in Eastern European countries. A special case is the one of cross- border collaboration between countries separated by the former East – West divide: here, cross- border cooperation usually has a stronger historical tradition than East – East cooperation. Despite of the lack of systematic cooperation during the cold war, there is an increasing will to improve transboundary contacts, especially in those border regions where a hard political border is a relatively recent fact. One characteristic is that the first organized cross- border contacts started at an informal level between community organizations and groups, based on kinship relationships.

The beginning of cross- border cooperation Italy- Slovenia – Austria can be traced back to the '60, when Friuli Venezia Giulia, Slovenia and Carinthia established the Trigon, a pioneer project of cooperation for territorial and touristic planning. The Trigon was later extended to Croatia and changed its name into Quadrigon.

A further important experience was the foundation of the Alpe- Adria Working Community, established in 1978 in Venice, which became the driving force for the concept of Alps- Adriatic cross- border region and the motor of further initiatives along the borders. The Working Community was primarily intended as an agency of territorial cooperation among institutional actors; its primary role was to foster cross – border cooperation along the Great Border, the Iron Curtain.

According to Devetak (1988), the establishment of the Working Community was an example of revitalization of European regionalisms leading to what is also known as macro-regionalism. Today, as in the 1980s, the national and sub-national authorities are still the main driving forces of this process which aims to strengthen and stabilize cooperation across the territories of FVG, Carinthia and Slovenia (Pantaleo 2008) through the creation of a formal institution, be it a Euroregion or an EGTC.

The Working Community, which does not have legal personality, operated through an assembly of presidents of member local authorities and five operational commissions, with technical competences in five sectors: i) territorial organization and environmental protection, ii) economy, transport and tourism, iii) culture and society, iv) healthcare and social affairs and v) agriculture and forests. More recently, the Community was mainly concerned with facilitating the exchange and production of analyses and information for the strategic planning of member territories (Proto 2008). Nevertheless, in spite of providing strong political mobilization, the lack of legal personality remained one of the most serious weaknesses towards the creation of a cross-border governance structure.

The role of the Working Community has greatly changed over the years (Valentin 2007): its initial function, i.e. overcoming political and ideological barriers under the umbrella of Alps Adriatic, had to be reformulated after the EU entries of Slovenia and Hungary and its new Millennium concept refers to the necessity of accepting new cooperation experiences.

Nevertheless, it is clear that there was a lack of political will to use the Alps- Adriatic Community as an effective tool or to revitalize it through a new form of cooperation. The Working Community, after the departure of some of its members, became nothing more than a declaratory tool and a good neighborhood instrument.

2.3 Euroregional initiatives in the Alps - Adriatic region since the 1990s.

After having reinforced political and social links between Carinthia, FVG and Slovenia with the common organisation of the Winter Olympics (Valentin 2007: 125) during the Nineties, cross-border cooperation under the Alps- Adriatic Working Community – also due to the strengthening of nationalistic movements and tensions between national minorities- soon lost ground and since then, a number of attempts have been made in the region in order to establish different types of Euroregional experiences, with varying degrees of institutionalization and success. The actual form of such highly debated Euroregion ranged

from a Working Community without legal personality, on the basis of the larger Working Community created in 1978, to a non-profit making association or public body.

The existing structures symbolise good neighbourly relations at the political level and are constituted upon ties among the mayors, in other cases they carry out some form of administrative functions. However, they generally seek to attract EU financial support (especially bilateral Interreg funds).

The initiatives carried out during the last two decades have two other main characteristics: they are often run parallel to each other and are characterized by high territorial competition and lobbying, giving lack of consistency to a common bottom up euroregional project.

One of the problems attached to the Euroregion initiatives in the Alps-Adriatic space pertains to the fact that these different initiatives, led by different regions, have not completely solved yet three of the main issues towards a successful establishment of a cross - border cooperation body: the nature of cooperation and of institutionalization, the size and membership and its functional scope.

First of all, it is necessary to clear out that the area concerned in the potential development of euroregions emerging in or around the vicinity of the Alps-Adriatic space does not correspond directly to the territory constituting the Alps-Adriatic region as defined above, but to the narrow Alps – Adriatic territory, i.e. that including Friuli Venezia Giulia, Slovenia and Carinthia.

Notwithstanding the partly problematic inter-state relations concerning the status of national minorities in the Alps-Adriatic region, the development of good neighbourly relations over the years has compounded the idea that the territories of Carinthia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Slovenia represent some form of unit. Since the beginnings of cooperation in the '60, numerous formal and informal structures and initiatives aimed at developing cross-border cooperation throughout this space have emerged, ranging from personal and business networks, political relations, loose and more structured associations.

There have also been a number of programmes funding cross border cooperation in the area, albeit no one programme funding projects specifically on a trilateral basis for the Alps-Adriatic region (Knappitsch 2011: 7). This is also true of Interreg (now referred to as Operational Programme). Interreg programmes are run on an Italy-Austria, Italy-Slovenia and Slovenia-Austria basis. Lack of common funding or a set of common priorities for the programme area encompassing all three territories poses significant difficulties in terms of

organising projects on a trilateral basis. Discussions on remedying this situation have taken place, but concrete solutions have not yet materialised.

Until the 1990s, the Alps Adriatic Working Community was certainly the only cross-border body established across the Iron Curtain that geopolitically divided the European West and East. After that, closer cooperation was mostly initiated and conducted in the narrower part of this community, including Slovenia, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia in Italy and Carinthia in Austria (the so-called Three-borders region).

In fact, after 1990, only Carinthia expressed more interest for the Community, hosting the Alps-Adriatic General Secretariat in Klagenfurt, whilst the common management is still performed according to the member rotation principle (Valentin 2007).

In order to strengthen trilateral cross – border cooperation, several euroregional projects have been proposed by politicians. Illy, for example, was since the beginning of the 2000s the main promoter of the establishment of a trilateral euroregion, rooted in bilateral talks with the former Carinthian governor Haider. This euroregion was meant to include also Slovenia, Veneto and the Croatian Istra and was intended as a milestone for a North Eastern euroregion of macro – infrastructures, aiming at fostering common development through joint logistics and transports projects.

Since 2003, in all regular meetings between the former FVG, Veneto and Carinthian governors, Illy, Galan and Haider, the importance of the foundation of a common Euregio has been emphasized. This Euregio should include these three regions, furthermore to be created Slovenian regions and the Croatian region of Istra and, possibly, also the region of Rijeka (Platzer 2007: 216). Since then, bilateral friendship agreements have been signed by Carinthia and both Italian regions.

In 2004, an agreement was signed between Illy and Galan (governor of Veneto). The first step for the actual implementation of this Euroregion was taken in 2005 in ‘Villa Manin’ (this is why the Euroregion is sometimes referred to as the Upper Manin Adriatic Euroregion). On this occasion, a ‘Declaration of intent’ was signed and the possible future participation of Slovenia was positively discussed.

However, when the document was sent to Slovenia, the state refused to sign it because they argued that Slovenia lacked domestic territorial agencies and the two regions were not allowed to sign bilateral agreements with Italy, which did not ratify the Madrid Convention.

In 2006, a common idea to create an Euroregion under a new vest for the Alps-Adriatic space was developed and later formalized through a Convention by the *Land* of Carinthia, the

Veneto region and FVG region. By that time, the new cooperation instrument of EGTC had already been adopted by the European Commission, thus it was decided that the Euregio without borders would have been created under the vest of an EGTC. It was also agreed that it would be necessary to strengthen and expand this agreement evaluating the possibility of including Slovenia and the Croatian Istra county.

The EGTC is new legal instrument at European level, which allows local and regional authorities to establish cooperation groups with legal personality and whose aim is to organize and manage measures and actions of cross border cooperation which may receive or not receive EU funding. The concept of EGTC was set out in 2006 (Regulation 1082/2006), under the pressure of border regions in particular, who were calling for a stronger legal foundation for their cooperation, often based on certain civil law agreements, differing widely across Europe (Spinaci, Vara -Arribas 2009:3). This Regulation represents an important progress towards the institutionalization of territorial trans-border governance structures. The EGTC depends on EU law and not on national legislation and there is not transferral to it from regions or local authorities. The EGTC main purpose was therefore to provide a more homogeneous a common institutional and legal framework for cross - border cooperation phenomena at European level. The EGTC provides public actors at different levels with a sole legal tool for developing and implementing a territorial cohesion policy, at cross- border, transnational and interregional level (Interact 2013). Cross- border agreements act outside the state's framework: although the state has to ratify the instrument, the EGTC is independent from their states with EU legal personality. This means that regions, or sub national actors, may directly interact with the EU level, by-passing the state. It has been argued that the EGTC favours not only multi- level but also supra – national governance. As Langer points out, the EGTC has the same genetic code as the EU Commission has (Langer 2007): in this sense, it promotes the concept of supranationality of borders, which is a completely different one from the intergovernmental vision which has been overwhelming in the establishment of cross - border bodies so far, in particular of Working Communities. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the EGTC as a legal and political tool will prove to be successful for all CBC profiles.

Going back to our case study analysis, according to the ESPON (2006), in 2005 the number of projects carried out in the Alps – Adriatic space was already rather high: more than 80 project cooperations were carried out in Slovenia in the framework of Interreg III; between 40 and 80 in FVG and nearly 20 – 30 in Carinthia. However, if the number of projects is

weighted by population (in 100,000), the intensity of cross – border activities was ranked 4 over a scale from 1 to 5 in either side of the border.

In 2007, a the first official trilateral meetings took place and it was decided the euroregional head office would be located in Trieste. The agreement of cooperation was signed in Villa Manin (Udine) and few months later a Trilateral Protocol of Cooperation between Carinthia, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto was signed in Klagenfurt am Wörthersee (Carinthia).

This initiative seemed for some time overlapping with two other forms of cooperation in the area: the Working Community and the EU- Future Region Adri – Alp – Pannonia (AAP), including also other Austrian, Hungarian and Croatian regions. The EGTC Alps Adria Pannonia has been for some years regarded as the natural inheritor of the Alps Adriatic Community and a proposal of statute has already been elaborated at the same time when agreements for the smaller Alps Adriatic EGTC started to be taken.

The AAP-Region was envisaged as a macro regional model of cross – border cooperation which intends to advance from the well established inter-regional cooperation within the Alps-Adriatic region to larger-scale in order to play the role of an effective interface between the Danube space, the Alps space and the Adriatic space.

The euroregional project was then for some time left in a lethargic state for some time and did not develop further. However, whilst the 'Illy Euregio' made some steps forward, the two other forms of cooperation soon lost ground. On the basis of Illy- Galan – Haider agreements, the three regions agreed on forming a working group of specialists who would work on details of a Euregio (whose first named was in fact to be euroregion Euregio).

A first Statute was adopted by the three participating territories in 2009, when approval from central authorities was still is pending, and the name decided for the new cross – border body would be Euroregio without borders / Euregio Senza Confini. At the same time, investigations have been conducted on how to make the enlargement possible. In 2011, it was agreed on the prolongation of the trilateral cooperation contract. In 2012, Carinthia, FVG and Veneto approved the statute and agreement for the EGTC, which soon afterwards received 'green light' from Rome.

At the end of 2012, the founding treaty was signed in Venice and the EGTC was registered in the official list of EGTCs. The joint statement and the statute of articles of incorporation of the EGTC was formally adopted. On the same occasion, the president (Zaia, governor of Veneto), the president ad interim (Platzer), the technical working groups and the board of

auditors were appointed. The city of Trieste was designated as headquarters, in spite of the fact that Klagenfurt did host the constituent assembly of the EGTC.

In the beginning of 2013, a constitutive meeting held in Klagenfurt am Wörthersee. During a meeting held in November 2013 in Trieste, the EGTC statute was finally approved, the budget was defined and the three governors - Zaia, Serracchiani and Kaiser – again stressed their willingness to extend the EGTC to Slovenia and Croatian Istra. Finally, on 25.11.2013 the 2nd Assembly of the EGTC in Venice approved the Internal Rules and Procedures and to appoint the Director and the Members of the Board of Auditors. The EGTC started to operate in the beginning of 2014.

The general aim of the EGTC is to facilitate and promote transborder, transnational and interregional cooperation among the partners, in order to strengthen economic and social cohesion. In order to achieve these aims, the statute defines five major objectives (article 6):

- strengthening economic, social and cultural ties among the populations
- contributing to the development of the respective territories through specific actions of cooperation in the fields of: energetic resources, transports and infrastructures, culture, sport and education, healthcare, civil protection, science, innovation, research, technology, productive activities, communication infrastructures, professional education and commerce
- fostering enhanced cooperation in joint participation in European territorial cooperation programmes and other programmes
- representing the interests of the EGTC at European institutions and national authorities
- implementing other specific actions of territorial cooperation in the field of joint cooperation.

According to art. 7, the EGTC carries out the following activities: definition and implementation of projects of territorial cooperation; promotion of the interests of the EGTC at European and national institutions; participation in bodies, associations, networks which have the same objective as the EGTC; management of operative programmes in the field of territorial cooperation; implementation of any other action in order to contribute to the achievement of its objectives of territorial cooperation.

According to the statute, cross-border cooperation rests thus on a rather general concept and encompasses a vast number of topics: considerable emphasis is placed on transborder

welfare and health care, harmonisation of transport infrastructure, improvement of economic cooperation and spatial planning. Another important area is tourism, while agricultural, innovation sectors and transborder mobility receive considerably less attention.

The EGTC has duration of 30 years and the organs of the EGTC are: the Assembly, the director, the collegium of auditors. The director is appointed for a period of three years at unanimity. The assembly gathers in principle once a year and its main tasks are: to approve the annual and pluriannual programme of the activities and actions of the EGTC; to approve the balance sheet; to appoint the director; to approve the organization and functioning of the statute; to decide on the entry of new members.

Activities and actions put in place by the EGTC are regulated by the EU and the Italian law and controversies resulting from the application of the Statute are decided by the competent judicial bodies of the member state where the EGTC has its headquarters. Art 15.3 also provides the possibility of concluding agreements of recognition which may be necessary for the concrete aims and objectives of the EGTC.

The EU Regulation No. 1082 from 2006 based on the Commission's proposal for closer cross-border cooperation has thus introduced a new legal and political order in the Alps-Adriatic practice.

Despite the progress of cross-border regional cooperation in general and of EGTCs throughout Europe, progresses in the Alps - Adriatic region have shown ambiguous. In the past few years, we can notice an increased cooperation between the Italian regions Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and the Austrian region Carinthia, aiming at establishing a new cross-border entity Euroregion to replace the old Alps-Adriatic Working Community, also in the sense of rising common transport interests related to the Baltic-Adriatic corridor, which has been established as one of the priority EU development axes within the TEN-T programme.

As Bufon - Professor at the University of Primorska- notes (interview), this development demands more intensive inter-state and local cooperation in the area of transport, spatial and environmental planning. This goal, however, is quite remote, which is proven by the not yet completely defined Baltic-Adriatic "corridor", where three different versions of crossing the Alps are possible (see *infra*). To this regard, the European Commission has suggested all parties to improve inter-state and inter-regional cooperation, and especially to improve transport and planning cooperation between Trieste and Koper, which would enable a joint and coordinated accession of both main North Adriatic ports to the European development axes.

2.4 Evaluation on the state of art of trilateral cross – border cooperation

Many questions, which have caused repeatedly delay in the project implementation, are still left unanswered. These will be analysed through three dimensions elaborated by Perkmann (2003), who suggests to take into account three dimensions in order to evaluate whether a Euroregion, or a network of similar nature, may be considered effective. It is argued that a Euroregion becomes efficient when a certain level of institutional thickness is reached. We argue that the same methodology of evaluation can be applied to the EGTC, which is – in principle - an even more institutionalized cross – border body than a Euroregion. In particular, the following dimensions can help evaluating this thickness level:

- 1) Political mobilization: the creation of social/institutional bases that supports or contrasts the new super-regional body, thus legitimizing its role and functions. As mentioned above, the lessons to be learnt from the first EGTCs are that stable forms of long – term institutionalized cooperation require a strong political commitment from the beginning onwards.
- 2) Governance creation: the cross – border institution has a well-defined structure, that governs the relations between members (horizontal governance) and externally (vertical governance).
- 3) Strategic unification: the members of the cross- border institution identify common strategic guidelines and follow them, implementing concrete project actions.

What follows is an analysis of the main features of the forthcoming Alps Adriatic EGTC according to the dimensions identified by Perkmann. It could be argued that the existing EGTC Euregio Without Borders covers an enormous potential for implementing these three interrelated dimensions in the Alps Adriatic region; nevertheless, its application is still fraught with difficulties.

1. Political mobilization.

Political mobilization has to be regarded as an essential precondition for the formation of the required social basis underpinning the creation and emergence of any EGTC where cross –border issues can be addressed jointly.

The Alpine Adriatic EGTC brings together some regions presenting relevant common historical and cultural roots and, at the same time, a relatively inhomogeneous socio – economic situation. The first aspect compensates for the second, making the development of a joint collaboration possible. The historical-cultural factors proved to be fundamental for the birth and survival of cooperation among the members. This applies in particular to the case of the old Alps Adriatic Community. Nevertheless, also economic and infrastructural elements are to be considered: from this standpoint, there is great interest revolving around the creation of Corridor 5.

Behind the EGTC Euregio Without Borders there is also a strong political mobilization. First, cross-border cooperation originated from the need to renew and/or create infrastructures for transport, obtaining, through lobbying activities, relevant results. Later, a wider involvement of the population began, through themes related to culture in a wide sense. The role of the political elites is however still prominent.

According to Johannes Maier, though, political restrictions are still significant: Slovenia did not join the EGTC because of political reasons; the Italian difficult application procedures – requiring approval of 5 ministers - for the establishment of the EGTC have slowed down the momentum; the Constitution of Carinthia provides that when a Land concludes a formal agreement, it must be treated as a state agreement, undergoing all standards of approval of a federal agreement. This is why he believes that the Länder relies largely on private cross- border cooperation in order to circumvent the state's procedures. He further argues that the media in Carinthia hardly report on cross- border initiatives and an overall lack of engagement can be detected, which results in the absence of politically motivated conferences and meetings. However, the role of political mobilization should not be overestimated: he in fact does not express himself in favour of a politically intended EGTC: political engagement is important during the phase of establishment, though the EGTC should remain only a tool of cooperation beyond borders, in order to solve common problems, and not as a political entity.

2. Governance creation.

The governance building enables coordinated cross- border decision making processes by channelling the different interests and it provides the framework required for the building up of a true shared cross- border knowledge base and facilitates cross- border learning with a long term focus. This factor has probably been one of the biggest weaknesses within the framework of a trilateral cross – border cooperation. The Working Community, due to its very

nature, has not been able to create an actual cross- border governance; within the Community, decisions are subject the strategic guidelines of the President.

The institution of an independent body with legal personality such as the EGTC will most definitely guarantee more consistent results. Now, at the basis of cross- border cooperation there is a formal juridical agreement and not a simple Protocol of Understanding.

Moreover, the merely functional character of cross- border cooperation, carried out mostly by means of project, is overcome and partly replaced by a – at least in theory - comprehensive approach centred on a soft political power.

One of the main criticalities for which an actual Euroregion has not been instituted yet is the difference in administrative powers of the various areas involved: Friuli Venezia- Giulia is a special statute region (Veneto is not), Carinthia enjoys a fair amount of autonomy, but not as much as Friuli Venezia-Giulia and, finally, Slovenia currently has no local bodies and, therefore, can only take into account certain issues by involving the central government.

The Alps-Adriatic cooperation model is traditionally based on collaboration at subnational level. Good experiences with this cooperation model suggest building on this type as main cooperation level. However, in specific questions multilevel and multi-actor collaboration within the EGTC will be indispensable. Coordination and cooperation between different types of actors (political, social and economic) as well as various governance levels (local, regional, national) is needed to reach to a consensus and ensure proper results. This multi-level structure brings with it different levels of power, resources and capabilities.

As Johannes Maier points out, that of governance is an open problem: the EGTC can be certainly regarded as a good example of EU multilevel governance at horizontal, vertical and cross vertical / horizontal level. However, it is necessary for the EGTC to have a well prepared staff engaged in cross- border issues: to this regard he expresses himself in favour of seconded experts when the EGTC does not have a significant geographical dimension.

The reform of the EU EGTC Regulation provides a new possibility: the Assembly of the EGTC can decide to determine fees for common infrastructures and services. In this sense, as Johannes Maier suggest, “a law at low level can be set by the EGTC”, giving consistency to the idea of a cross- border supranational body.

3. Strategic unification.

Strategic unification assists also the implementation of what Haselsberger defines the Euro Regional Planning Approach (Haselsberger 2010: 158).

The Working Community has been mainly concerned with facilitating the exchange and production of analyses and information for the strategic planning of member territories. Due to its legal nature, it was not able to play a relevant role in strategic unification building. The EGTC may become lead partner of trilateral cooperation projects and have a relevant role in the framework of Interreg programmes, for example assuming the role of Managing Authority.

To this regard, three main difficulties can be mentioned. FVG, Carinthia and Slovenia have significantly different internal institutional set-ups. First of all, the composition of the envisaged Alps – Adriatic EGTC may be very unbalanced, with a region, an autonomous region, a Land, one county (Istra) and a whole State (Slovenia).

Second, competencies at subnational levels are characterized very differently, with Slovenia having no regions yet and Croatian Istra, has an entirely different organisational structure than Italian or Austrian regions. Added to this, the 'subregions' of the Alps Adriatic have very different spatial and economic power: as Seger (2007: 110) points out, the main interest of both Trieste and Udine are directed towards the Italian market, especially towards Veneto. Slovenia has a powerful core area in Ljubljana, however its main interests corresponds to the intensification of its traffics with the east; interests towards FVG and Austria appear to be limited; the strongest ties relate to the axis Maribor - Graz, at the Eastern borders of the Alps Adriatic space. Carinthia also seems to have limited intensity of connection with both Slovenia and FVG. Furthermore, there are no intensive daily commuting flows in the area, and cross- border transports are on the average less developed than in all other Western European border regions.

Secondly, functional scopes are also to be cleared. The main areas of cooperation in the original Euregio project were economy, tourism, education and infrastructure. In spite of Illy's emphasis on infrastructural projects, cooperation seems to be carried out mostly at bilateral level, between municipalities and in the framework of Interreg programming.

Another point of criticality, according to several interviewees, may be that the objectives determined by the EGTC Statute recall the vague and broad functional scopes of the old Working Community, with a typical vocation for the economic development.

2.5 Obstacles in implementing euroregional projects and EGTCs

Hence, the main difficulties in implementing effective cross – border cooperation in the core of the Alps – Adriatic area can be summarized into 3 main points: territorial competition between the three main capital towns of the EGTC; differing political and strategic interests; differing administrative systems.

2.5.1 Territorial competition

Some kind of competition to this regard can be envisaged along the axis Klagenfurt - Trieste. Whilst Klagenfurt has always host the General Secretariat of the Working Community and has always sought to be the central hub of the Alps Adriatic activities, FVG seems to have played the leading role in the elaboration of the EGTC project, as well as of other euroregional projects. Now, the implementation of the EGTC has become one of the priorities of the Regional government of FVG for the new period 2014 – 2020. It was decided few years before the formal constitution of the EGTC that the new cross- border body would have its headquarter in Trieste. A co –seat was then set up in Klagenfurt.

Carinthia, and especially Klagenfurt, plays a special role in the development of contacts between the three regions. In fact, it was here that the term Alpe Adria was firstly used; and it was in Klagenfurt that the Secretariat of the Working Community was established. During the 1960 and 1970, Carinthia was the actual driving force of trilateral cooperation, with the governor's visits to Trieste and Ljubljana. Later, a consistent setback occurred during the '80s and the '90s as far as political mobilization concerns. Nevertheless, the Alps- Adriatic vocation is often stressed both at the grass- roots and at the institutional level, as confirmed by numerous institutions which carry the 'Alpe Adria' name: the Alpe Adria job agency in Villach, the Alpe Adria University in Klagenfurt, the Hypo Alpe Adria Bank, the Alpe Adria path connecting the Grossglockner and the Adria, inaugurated in 2012.

Carinthia has recently played a major role in the establishment of the Alps- Adriatic Alliance, which was founded in 2013 on the initiative of Carinthia's governor Dr. Peter Kaiser. It represents a completely new, dynamic, flexible and low-threshold network-structure for project-oriented cooperation in the Alps-Adriatic area. The founding members include three Austrian Lander, six Croatian Counties, one Hungarian country and Slovenia. Cooperation within in the framework of the Alps-Adriatic Alliance is open to public authorities, private organizations and NGOs. The new network aims to close the gap between

existing transnational cooperation areas such as the Alpine- , Danube- and Adriatic-Ionian program- areas. Core objective of the Alps-Adriatic-Alliance is the comprehensive and efficient use of transnational EU-programs for the benefit of its members. The concrete project-oriented cooperation is carried out by so-called Thematic Coordination Points (TCPs), which currently deal with the topics agriculture & ethnic heritage, energy & environment, Europe, equal opportunities, inclusion, culture, mobility, sports and economy. All members have established Alps-Adriatic-Contact Points to be of service for interested stakeholders. The Contact Point of Carinthia also acts as General Secretariat of the Alps-Adriatic-Alliance.

Friuli Venezia Giulia, by its part, due to its particular geopolitical location, places in direct contact with a multicultural and multilingual border situation, stretching from the Alps to the Adriatic sea. It is worth remembering that it was from FVG that the first attempts to create a network of cooperation between bordering regions were made with the establishment of Trigon, later Quadrigon. Further on, FVG's cooperative activity was improved by the participation in Interreg programming periods Italy –Slovenia and Italy- Austria (Ambrosi 2007: 130).

The administration has also promoted and supported the Community project Interreg IIIB Cadres Matisson AAP- Management tools for new interregional organization aimed at strengthening the cooperation among Adriatic – Alps – Pannonia regions, an ambitious project initiated in 2007 in partnership with Veneto, Austria (Carinthia, Burgenland and Styria), Hungarian counties, Croatian counties (including Istra) and Slovenia.

Strengthened by this initially positive experience, FVG showed its Adriatic partners a similar project, which interests all those regions situated on the Adriatic coast (including Slovenian coastal region). The Adriatic Ionian Euroregion is an association of cooperation among regional authorities belonging to the coastline Countries, founded in 2006 in Pula (Croatia), with the general aims of strengthening stability in the Adriatic and Balkan area and promoting sustainable development, as well as economic and social cohesion among the bodies that have joined the Euroregion. The Euroregion has also an operative seat in Brussels.

Another aspect pertains to the different political interests of the single territorial bodies within the Alps Adriatic region. To this regard, a competitive attitude between Trieste, Klagenfurt and Ljubljana can be witnessed to have occurred in several occasions. It has been pointed out by both Italian and Slovene, as well as Austrian officers, that Ljubljana, as a

capital of a young nation state, seeks its partners mainly in Rome and Vienna, rather than in Trieste and Klagenfurt.

FVG finds itself at the core of several other CBC projects, where it covers a central position: it is part of the Adriatic Euroregion, of the macro-region Alpine Space and Adriatic-Ionic Space, and of the CRPM (Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions). Moreover, it has promoted the establishment of the first EGTC involving the region, i.e. the EGTC Gorizia- Nova Gorica and Sempeter Vrtojba.

As Nadalutti (2012: 186) has pointed out, this region has been dynamic and attentive in seizing the opportunities provided by the EU in order to internationalize and develop a network of cross-border and EU-level links, and it plays a leading role in cross-border co-operation activities with neighbouring countries too.

To this regards, some facts can be mentioned. One is that the region maintains an office in Brussels, with the tasks of both lobbying and establishing ties with other regional actors. The leading role of FVG is confirmed by the fact that it became the Joint Managing Authority (JMA) of Interreg Italy–Slovenia with the Community Initiative Programme Interreg IIIA 2000–2006, 2007 – 2013 and 2014– 2020, resulting in becoming the only referent for all programmes. It seems thus that the region has been to some extent ‘equalized’ to the governmental level in dealing with this programme. This has implied ‘enhanced stability of the structure through accumulation of expertise’ (interview with Iztok Skerlic, Slovenian national officer in the JTS). Interviewees also point out that the Slovenian counterpart of the Joint Technical Secretariat, the operative arm of the Surveillance Committee of Interreg Italy- Slovenia, is an office of the Ministry and plays the role of National Authority. The office operates like an Info Point and under coordination of the JTS, though it depends on the Slovenian governmental body for EU cohesion and development and is composed only of Slovene national officers.

By its part, Slovenia is Joint Managing Authority of the bilateral cross – border programmes with Austria, Croatia and Hungary. This asymmetric and potentially conflictual governance scenario established within the EU Initiative Communities is likely to reflect itself onto the newly created EGTC. Slovenia, by its part, is called to act both as a state and a region at the same time. While the state participated in the first meeting of discussion regarding the creation of an EGTC in the Upper Adriatic, it did not sign the agreement to be part of the founding group. Prime Minister Jansa clearly stated that Slovenia would enter the Euroregion as a state. Besides, it was suggested from the beginning that Ljubljana, and not Trieste, would

become the central city of a future EGTC. In this way, Slovenia has been seeking to assert its leading role over a region which is already Managing Authority of Interreg Italy – Slovenia and to affirm its being as the barycentre of Interreg Austria – Slovenia.

Cooperation with Austrian Carinthia and Styria, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and other ‘Western’ regions was also crucial for the Slovenian geopolitical re-orientation from the Balkans to Central Europe, with which Slovenia had strongly identified itself already in the 1980s. Paradoxically, being an independent state, Slovenia shows a notable tendency towards the decrease in such forms of cooperation. This tendency may be the result of its statehood, due to which Slovenia cannot act as an equal partner to Italian and Austrian regions (interview with Bufon). It has been also pointed out by most interviewees that Trieste has been the focal point to which all local, regional, supranational actors refer cross- border cooperation issues are at play, with partial exclusion of Slovenia.

No one supposes that cooperation will be able to extinguish competition, which must be considered as a part of the game, but the cooperation/ competition principle must as well be seen as one of the key elements for improving the repositioning potential of the EGTC.

2.5.2. Differing strategic interests

So far, three projects including FVG both at micro and macro level, have attracted international attention: EGTC GO, which led to the establishment of the EGTC between Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Sempeter Vrtojba; the Alps – Adriatic Euroregion; the Ionic - Adriatic Euroregion. In general, they aim to foster cross-border co-operation both as a tool for European integration and for micro- regional / macro- regional socio-economic development. These three projects differ to as regards their operative dimension, status, scope, tasks and governance (Gasparini 2008).

These different types of euroregional prospects base on very different presuppositions, objectives and actors, though they have two characteristics in common. First, their role is not mutually exclusive: on the contrary, in the development of Italian – Slovene cross – border cooperation, it is possible to detect a sort of Matrioška model, a concentric system of euroregional bodies, where each level can activate and be supported by the other. Second, they recognize the centrality of the Italian – Slovene border which collocates itself at the centre of three types of Euroregions (Lipott 2012).

Within this context, the EU Regulation for a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation appears to be both strategic and innovative for the development of cooperation in the Alps-

Adriatic space. This structure could make it possible to create an interregional outline encompassing states' prerogatives.

Trieste and Ljubljana have a metropolitan potential, along with connections along the axes towards the Baltic and the Danubian areas, while Klagenfurt (and Udine), as well networked regional hubs, support a coherent and balanced structure at the meso - level.

Promoting polycentric complementarities could be thus an asset for the Alpine Adriatic EGTC, and a certain competition between cities and territories has to remain, though cooperation must be promoted at the higher levels in order to allow also an effective competition of the whole area with other European metropolitan areas. For example, a strong cooperation between the Alpine – Adriatic universities at the higher education level could allow to offer in the area wide programs that could generate a flow of students in the other direction and also maintain a local capacity of high level research. Likewise, enhanced cooperation in high – level services networking and management, as well as in territorial land use planning may allow the area competing efficiently and address more effectively social and environmental challenges.

One point of concern is that cross- border dimension in spatial planning is largely disregarded and almost absent from national spatial legislation in Slovenia. The Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia supports the development of certain areas on the Slovenian side of the border as a counterweight to urban agglomerations in Italy or Austria, but does not promote the integration into a polycentric settlement network (Berdavs 2010: 138) and even the number of projects dealing with spatial planning within Interreg IIIA is rather low, with the relevant exception of the cross- border area Gorizia – Nova Gorica.

According to Johannes Maier, differing strategic may hamper cross- border cooperation: the difference in strategic interests is one of the causal underpinnings of the failure of the Matrioska Alps – Adriatic Pannonia project, aiming at bridging together too different entities with too different political backgrounds and strategic problems.

According to Mocnik, Slovene Senior Diplomat, the Alps- Adriatic area has several strategic interests in common, such as cooperation in the sectors of tourism, transport and small-medium enterprises. However, these interests are simply not pursued efficiently because of different agendas at the central level. In the field of cross- border cooperation, in Austria relations with South Eastern Europe are deemed priority; in Italy attention is focused on the establishment of an Adriatic 'potential' connected to security and defense policies; Slovenia is mostly interested in a common mutual management of the Northern part

of the Adriatic, in particular in the system of early warning in the sea and the implementation of ecological standards.

2.5.3 Differing administrative systems

And yet, one of the main problems in the realization of an Alps- Adriatic EGTC is represented by Slovenia (Nadalutti 2012). At present Slovenia is a unitary state with two administrative levels, the state level and the municipal level.

In terms of NUTS 2, Slovenia is divided into two informal ‘statistical’ regions (the Western region including Ljubljana and the Eastern including Maribor), whilst in terms of NUTS 3 organization it will probably consist of 8 provinces, but their status and scope of jurisdiction are not yet clearly defined. There are only regions at statistical level, but they almost completely lack operative powers.

Until now, no administrative NUTS 3 regions (e.g. provinces) - with political representation - have been established in Slovenia, due to long-term professional and political debates about the number and size of these regions. For analytical purposes 12 NUTS 3 “statistical” regions in Slovenia (known in 1980s as “planning” or geographical regions) have been used since mid-1990s for statistical and analytical purposes, mainly by the Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia (SORS) and EUROSTAT as well as by the Government Office and Institute for Macro-Economic Research and Development (responsible for macro-economic monitoring and policy evaluation). Since year 2002 these 12 NUTS 3 regions are also known as “developing” regions in the new national and regional policy documents. From January 2008 there are also two NUTS 2 European cohesion regions – more developed West Slovenia NUTS 2 region and less developed South-East Slovenia NUTS 2 region - but there are also without political representations (Černe, Kušar, 2006; Pichler-Milanović, Lamovsek 2013).

The current administrative system of Slovenia is thus incomparable with its neighbouring countries. This fact also inhibits to some extent the institutional cross-border cooperation, whilst the functional cross-border cooperation and the related activities are fairly developed (Bufon 2010:11 and interview).

Another consequence is that the Slovenian state, and not the subnational authorities, remains the gate-keeper of cross-border co-operation activities and projects. Hence, Slovenia - also due to its size - would most definitely enter the EGTC as a state. Thus Friuli-Venezia-Giulia will most likely have a major role within the EGTC, since the city of Trieste will co-

ordinate cross-border co-operation activities. Accordingly, since all actors within an EGTC enjoy equal dignity, in spite of belonging to different state structures, FVG will be formally on the same level as Carinthia and Slovenia.

However, even though in the EU discourse Ljubljana will be responsible for cross-border cooperation activities carried out in Slovenia, it is both geographically and psychologically too far not to devolve some of the implementation powers to sub national actors; but here another difficulty arises from the fact that Slovenian municipalities do not yet have the necessary experience and bureaucratic framework to implement cross-border co-operation programmes and projects alone (Bache & Andreou, 2010). Although a best practice could come from the lesson of Gorica – Nova Gorica, due the limited territorial scope and recent experience of this EGTC, this precedent cannot easily be applied to all types of territorial cooperation. According to Cremasco (Italian officer in the region FVG, Service for International Relations, interview) Slovenia's entry into the EGTC Euregio Without Borders does not seem very likely in the short term; nevertheless, she underlines, "Slovenia's inclusion may be facilitated by the participation of EGTC GO in the broader EGTC". This hypothesis has not been formalized yet, though it gained momentum during the last EGTC Assembly.

This envisaged asymmetrical network arrangement creates unbalanced relationships and jurisdictional confusion. This explains the reluctance of Slovenia in participating in the project and two of its politically based proposals: the establishment of a bigger Euroregion, including also Styria and part of Hungary, in order to balance the overwhelming strategic role played by FVG; on the other side, the proposal of becoming the managing authority for the Upper Manin Euroregion, which has now become the EGTC Euregio Without Borders.

Slovenia is currently excluded from the new regional cooperation, since on the EU level, it operates as a rather centralised country-region. Therefore, it has more problems in the process of including in the system of sub-state European cooperation or does not show much interest for such cooperation (Bufon 2008). Anyhow, it is expected that the Adriatic region will now become more and more central in the European development and planning context after Croatia entry in the EU (July 2013). This situation will slowly improve regional cross-border cooperation in the area, as Croatia, as opposed to Slovenia, is already divided in sub-state administrative units (regions), and they are also intensifying their integration in the European system of inter-regional cooperation.

As Mocnik - Slovene Senior Diplomat – points out, the main problem in the issue of regionalization of the country is the lack of consensus. Nevertheless a new paradigm is emerging as a compromise: Slovenia is represented in the Alps- Adriatic Alliance through the Association of Municipalities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed an agreement with the Association, delivering all activities related to transfrontier relations. This way – he states – a sort of outsourcing of cross – border cooperation is taking place in Slovenia. At the moment this paradigm is confined within the context of the alliance, but it may become a model of reference for the entire conduction of cross- border cooperation with neighbouring countries. However, Mocnik underlines, it is not easy to organize sub national authorities working together. Municipalities have no expertise in cross- border cooperation and carry out at most projects with single municipalities across – border, especially with Italy. Furthermore, three different types of Associations of Municipalities exist in Slovenia, and they hardly provide any form of coordination in cross – border activities.

It can be also mentioned that the sub national planning scales Land (Austria) and Regione (Italy) hold significant legislative planning power in the respective countries, including competences for planning legislation and implementation. In contrast, this planning scale does not exist in Slovenia, where the national planning scale has to be considered as corresponding in terms of competences and powers. While the subnational planning laws in Austria and Italy as well as the national Planning Law in Slovenia define the framework conditions for all lower planning scales, in none of the three cases do the supra local planning scales have specific competences, powers or common definitions (Fabbro and Haselsberger 2009).

3. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Alpine – Adriatic EGTC

Established forms of trilateral cross-border cooperation in the Alps – Adriatic have so far shown both strengths and weaknesses, i.e. advantages and obstacles, as listed below.

3.1 Strengths of development of regional cross-border cooperation in the Alps – Adriatic area:

The establishment of the EGTC has opened up a broad field and a lot of possibilities for cross-border cooperation such as the following:

- EGTC runs high level initiatives and projects which can not be realised in better way on local level or directly among the regional administrations;
- EGTC succeeds in projects with strong involvement on political and administrative level;

- EGTC is a platform to identify new approaches and missing links in transborder cooperation;
- EGTC can also run European projects;
- EGTC profits by participating in the CoR-GECT-Platform.

Most important, the EGTC has legal status and can be applicant for EU subsidies, unlike any other bodies with public or private personality, as Johannes Maier - Officer of the Regional Government of the Land Carinthia - points out. The jointly elaborated cross- border regional strategy creates added-value in multiple dimensions: better coordination of sectoral strategies with territorial impact; addressing challenges which could not be addressed at the level of individual regions or countries; stronger coherence of policies at different levels (regional, national, EU); better coordination and exploitation of the means of territorial financial instruments; overcoming administrative divisions and fostering of transnational economic synergies.

The EGTC appears to be the right institutional tool to stabilize cross- border cooperation processes for the realization of a polycentric cross- border region, for which a policy making based only on cross- border projects seems to be insufficient. (Berdavs 2010: 135).

In this sense, the EGTC overcomes the mere functional nature of other cross- border bodies such as the previous Working Community, which aims at dealing with problems that are in common to the member partners at informative and functional level (see art. 3 of the Protocol of Understanding). Even though the exercise of public powers in strict sense is hindered, the EGTC assumes a deeper political / legislative significance. In this sense, further advantages can be mentioned:

- Partnerships stimulate the exchange of experience of competent professional authorities, ensuring a more effective use of instruments under Interreg programmes and especially faster transfer of the know-how in the preparation and implementation of operational programmes at regional and local level.
- The EGTC concretely enables a deeper integration, i.e. the harmonisation of development plans for spatial planning, nature protection and other common problems in border areas.
- EGTC partnerships contribute to greater recognisability of border regions, enabling the latter to be more directly involved in international efforts (for example, in the Committee

of the Regions or in other EU and CE bodies) and in this manner represent the interests of local communities.

- The EGTC does not only allow horizontal, i.e. spatial integration, but also promotes several vertical forms of cooperation between public administrations of local character, companies and other institutions and civil society organisations. It is urged that different stakeholders are (NGOs, business associations, etc.) become partners of the Alps Adriatic EGTC in order to create a more balanced and sustainable system, as well as a true multi level governance (interview with Bufon).

In the case of EGTC Euregio Without Borders, a further advantage is given by the possibility to “capitalize the cross- border expertise gained by the Alps- Adriatic regions in different fields” (interview with Cremasco, Italian officer at Region FVG).

3.2. Weaknesses

One major weakness is conceiving an Alpine Adriatic EGTC including Slovenia stems from the above mentioned significant difference in the administrative system of the country in respect to the neighbouring states. Slovenia lacks a regional level of spatial planning and Slovenian spatial legislation defines any development on the order line as the jurisdiction of the state (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 2007). The Slovenian system of spatial planning is too weak and inefficient to fulfil its role in coordination of spatial development in cross- border areas. This may lead to numerous cases of duplication of functions (Berdavs 2010: 140) with a consequent loss of efficiency of services. The most heavily exposed public example is cooperation between the ports in Koper and Trieste, where an attempt to introduce cooperation between the ports failed in 2005. One other example comes from waste management: the waste from South Primorska is now transported to central Slovenia, whilst an effective incinerator is operating in Trieste. Furthermore, in the beginnings of the 2000s the University of South Primorska was founded, whereas the University of Trieste – located at only 30 km of distance - offers a high quality of study programmes and research excellence in most of fields.

Nevertheless, according to Johannes Maier, the fact that the EGTC combines different kinds of authorities at different levels “should be regarded as an asset, and not as a disadvantage or a weakness”. He affirms that the EGTC offers in fact the possibility of combining different actors in one single structure and supply the necessary competences for solving common problems, no matter at which administrative level these competences are to

be found. In other words, the problem of different administrative levels is more a political problem than a real problem: if competences for planning implementation, for example, are held by the State in one country and by the region or the municipality in another country, the agreement should be concluded at the level that enables cooperation in this specific field.

Based on interview analysis, personal qualification and organisation of cross-border cooperation within the existing EGTC seem deficient, while the lacking financial means necessary for the implementation of joint projects remain unstable or only partial, which subsequently leads to competition between the neighbouring local administrations rather than their earnest sustainable cooperation. One major weakness is that the EGTC does not hire its own staff but relies on the administrative staff of the respective states.

Furthermore, it must be mentioned that the intertwining of the cross-border realizations between the Council of Europe and the European Union gives rise to specific spatial disfunctionings, namely confusion, redundancy, oversizing and entropy (Sanguin 2013). The Alps Adriatic case study perfectly illustrates the degree of confusion, which has spread throughout the European cross-border organizations: Working Communities, Euroregions, EGTCs. Both first are structures of the Council of Europe whereas the EGTC are structures of the European Union (Sanguin 2013: 5). In the Alps - Adriatic area, some of the conceived Euroregions stem partly or totally from the Alps- Adriatic Working Community, and even before being established, following EC Regulation, the Upper Manin Euroregion, instead of keeping its original denomination, has changed its status into EGTC. Now, such a development brings up contradictions because the proliferation of initiatives has been concomitant with institutional statuses which are few adapted (Perkmann, 2003).

Moreover, the Alps Adriatic planning space is becoming a very crowded arena, constituted by differing planning scales (transnational, subnational, national) and this ambiguous situation complicates the work of existing structures of stable cooperation. Besides, this is also one of the reasons why it is so difficult to build up new institutions (Haselsberger 2010: 161).

One example is a further and very young interesting initiative of cross-border cooperation between Carinthia and Slovenia, namely the Geopark Karawanken: 14 municipalities and further (touristic) organization (mining museums, etc) in the border area of Carinthia/Slovenia are collaborating on concrete issues of regional development, implementing the UNESCO cultural heritage of Geoparks, development of specific touristic offers and protection of the nature. They founded as a first step a Working Community in 2013 but they obliged

themselves to establish an EGTC in the nearby future. They have already found a first solution of common budgeting, which was one of the greatest challenges. The statutes and the convention for the setting up of an EGTC are in preparation. The aim of this EGTC is primarily to be a tool to have a common platform of binding decisions and to get easier to EU-subsidies and projects in future.

As we can see, several cross-border bodies can exist in parallel, though one condition must be met in order not to lead to disfunctioning such as entropy and confusion: the tasks must be determined individually and not be overlapping.

Some interviewees expressed concern saying that at the operative level, the ratio and functioning of EGTC in the Alps – Adriatic may resemble the old Working Community rather than a new supranational tool, although their task is a limited membership.

According to Bufon (interview) the Alps – Adriatic area is experiencing what may be called ‘banal coexistence’: conflicts have been overcome, but the degree of interrelation at functional level is still low: political mobilization is not as strong as it used to be during the 1980s and the 1990s and administrative burdens have not been removed.

Technical difficulties in implementing the EGTC also exist, for example as regards the harmonization of laws and regulations (interview with Cremasco).

3.3. Opportunities

The Alpine Adriatic area has a strong maritime exposition as well as a strong maritime vocation as a whole. In particular, the North Adriatic Port Association comprises 4 towns which are already in the EGTC (Trieste and Venice) or are foreseen to become part of it (Koper and Rijeka). The infrastructural stock improvement of the area represents one of the keys for the future success of the EGTC and the deployment of its potentials.

Furthermore, the high Adriatic coast represents a strategic asset for the future European economy development perspectives if a common action in attracting the South East Asiatic trade flows crossing the Mediterranean sea from Suez to Gibraltar will be developed by the international community surrounding the Adriatic sea, and in particular by the Italian, Slovenian and Croatian coastal regions.

One other opportunity for the whole area is represented by the development of metropolitan potential nodes included in the EGTC territory. Trieste, with Koper, Gorizia and Nova Gorica constitutes an innovative cross – border metropolitan ring, especially after the establishment of EGTC GO. Ljubljana itself also constitutes a node with the potential of a

national capital town. The branches of the metropolitan network may be considered inclusive of all other towns like Udine, Klagenfurt, Maribor, as well as of the minor centres (Jesenice, Villach, Monfalcone, etc...).

In this sense, the area may greatly benefit from the Trans Europe Network – Transport strategy for the South East of Europe, whose scenario includes the proposed Baltic Adriatic corridor. In this sense the Alps Adriatic EGTC, showing an intermediate size in the EU ranking, perfectly agrees with a bottom up approach the EU transport and infrastructure policy.

The Alpine Adriatic area also benefits of a sort of Alps Adriatic *acquis* which consists of a heritage of networks, projects and investments which have been realized since decades in order to favour economic and entrepreneurial activities in the border areas (Mascia 2010: 109). In particular, the most important section of this *acquis* regards the consolidated experiences in the field of relations between the local and regional government institutions. One indicator is constituted by the high number of projects and meeting organized within the last few years as well as the numerous meetings and contacts, also at informal level or outside the framework of any cross- border body, between the governors of the regions.

Furthermore, the multi linguistic and multicultural social background of the region may be seen both as an opportunity and a threat at the same time. However, the positive role of this feature may constitute an added value of any territorial design in the context of the wider multicultural and multi linguistic building process of the EU, in particular in the education field and the cross – border political cooperation, partly envisaged by the EGTC.

According to Bufon, the fact that the Alps –Adriatic presents itself as polycentric may not necessarily constitute a hindrance. Both Ljubljana and above all Trieste have potential for turning into strong functional centres, though they have been not been able to develop complementarities and the former remain self referential whilst the latter is engaged in pursuing an autonomistic vision. However, the paradigm of multilevel governance in the Alps – Adriatic context provides the possibility of combining two different models: the model of Regio Basiliensis, based on functional network developing from a strong centre, and the model of Euregio, based on flows and exchange of complementarities. Bufon states that a successful strategy may make use of concentric forms of ‘euroregions’: a macro Alps-Adriatic EGTC/ Euroregion could be complemented by the establishment of smaller EGTC.

Interviews show that further opportunities are given by enhanced opportunities for the coordination of common actions; a closer exchange of information; institutionalization of governance; enhanced opportunities for the attraction of funds.

3.4. Threats

One of the underpinning motivation for the establishment of an Alpine Adriatic cross- border entity can be traditionally sought in the wish to rise common transport interests related to the Baltic-Adriatic corridor, which has been established as one of the priority EU development axes within the TEN-T programme.

As Bufon notes (2013), this development demands more intensive inter-state and local cooperation in the area of transport, spatial and environmental planning. This goal, however, is quite remote, which is proven by not yet completely defined Baltic-Adriatic corridor, where three different versions of crossing the Alps are possible, namely right after Innsbruck (which would be to the advantage of the port of Venice), right after Villach (which would be to the advantage of the port of Trieste), or right after Ljubljana (which would be to the advantage of the port of Koper). To this regard, the European Commission has suggested all parties to improve inter-state and inter-regional cooperation, and especially to improve transport and planning cooperation between Trieste and Koper, which would enable a joint and coordinated accession of both main North Adriatic ports to the European development axes. The effort in gaining extra profits deriving from the TEN – T Strategy may enhance territorial competition among the partners involved.

Conclusions

In some European countries, the idea behind the formation of an EGTC is still not yet very well welcomed yet (Medeiros 2012: 4). Interestingly, the first EGTCs in the Alps Adriatic region were among the last ones to be established in Europe, despite the long back to back cross-border cooperation history between the involved regions and states, which makes the entire Alps Adriatic region a case study at European level in this issue.

However, it could be argued that the EGTC in the sense of a cooperation and government tool covers an enormous potential for implementing different cross- border soft spaces of interaction, organised and structured by a clearly defined cooperation and governance platform. The EGTC appears to be the right institutional tool to stabilize cross- border

cooperation processes for the realization of a polycentric cross- border region. The Alps – Adriatic case, however, has showed that, apart from the lack of national EGTC laws in certain countries or delay in approval from central authorities, difficulties can be traced back in some ambiguities which seem to relate mainly to two domains: difference in the interpretation of the nature of the instrument and difference in status and number of authorities as well as differences among the national regulations concerning the various levels of local government, which lead to a lack of connection between authorities and to the lack of a common concerted strategy.

The case study reveals the need for a more appropriate governance of different policies in planning cross- border cooperation in a Central European area characterized by several contradictory tendencies and persisting planning and spatial divergence, despite the strong cultural and historical linkages.

The analysis has also shown that the EGTC has opened up new problems in the construction of the multi-level governance of cross-border initiatives, in particular as regards the overlapping of initiatives and the dualism between the already established Euroregions and the increasingly powerful regional governments, which would like to become the main actors in the creation of the new EGTC ‘architecture’ and thus the recipients of the EU Interreg funds.

Notes

1. Unemployment in FGV raised of one point during 2013.
2. For example ESPON (2004): Potentials for polycentric development in Europe, Nordregio, Stockholm; ESPON (2005) Urban Rural relations in Europe, Helsinki University of Technology – Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Helsinki; ESPON (2007) Spatial Scenarios and Orientations in relation to the ESDP and Cohesion Policy, IGEAT, Brussels.
3. Hundred cargo trains per week is the record of intermodality sea – railway which is foreseen to be overcome by May 2014, see Il Piccolo 16th March 2014.

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