



The RSA Research Network on **EU COHESION POLICY**

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THE EUROPEAN GROUPING OF TERRITORIAL COOPERATION (EGTC): TOWARDS A SUPRAREGIONAL SCALE OF GOVERNANCE? CASE STUDY: GREATER REGION SAARLORLUX

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Abstract

All over Europe, EGTCs (European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation) are mushrooming. Between 2006, when the EU regulation entered into force, and 2014, 51 EGTCs have been established. Conceived as a legal tool to facilitate crossorder, interregional or transnational cooperation, the EGTC was established after years of lobbying from cross-- border organisations. Apart from practical guidelines mostly dedicated to the legal possibilities and limitations of this tool, few academic studies examine the significance of this tool for territorial governance and as such. This contribution develops such a perspective, using the case study of the Greater Region SaarLorLux, (Lorraine, Luxembourg, Rhineland--Palatinate, Saarland and Wallonia), where two existing EGTCs are operating. The EGTC INTERREG IV A Greater Region is the only EGTC managing an EU programme; the EGTC Secretariat of the Summit supports the main political organisation in this area. This contribution argues that the EGTC tool can facilitate the emergence of a supraregional scale of governance. This contribution examines how this instrument allows the institutionalisation of a cross--border entity in terms of its capacity to embody and perpetuate the cross--border region, and to implement its strategy. It then applies this conceptualisation to the specific context of the Greater Region. The empirical analysis shows that although the two EGTCs institutionalise the cooperation, they are rather conceived as administrative and operational tools, leaving the power to structure and implement the cooperation at the regional level. The contribution concludes with possible explanations of such a mismatch between the potential of this tool and the effective use of it. A couple of years after the EU regulation entered into force, (sub)--state authorities grasp this tool for many reasons not directly linked to the supraregional potential. Institutionalising their existing cross--border cooperation and appearing on the EU map are key aspects. For these laboratories of Europe, the national and EU scales continue to be inevitable for solving concrete questions (e.g. transnational transport connections) and acknowledging cross-- border specificities, as the Lisbon Treaty did in 2007. These “pragmatic” reasons seem to leave in the background – at least for the moment and in the Greater Region – the use of the EGTC as a supraregional tool, supporting the implementation of a cross--border strategy visible to the citizens.

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