

SOFT, MOBILE OR NETWORKED? CROSS-BORDER
COOPERATION AND THE TOPOLOGY OF THE EUROPEAN
UNION EXTERNAL FRONTIER

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to evaluate the rationale of cross-border cooperation initiatives between EU member countries and their non-EU neighbouring countries, in light of recent research about the European Neighbourhood Policy and about the changing spatiality of contemporary borders. To this end, we will review the main theoretical approaches for the analysis of contemporary rebordering processes, distinguishing between geopolitical, institutional, topological and constructivist perspectives, to see how these perspectives have been applied to the specific case of the EU external frontier. We will present, moreover, a critical evaluation of cross-border cooperation initiatives implemented within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Along the EU's external border, it is argued, cross-border cooperation is a policy transfer of previous initiatives conducted within the EU, but differs in many respects: the role of sub-national authorities is merely complementary and the attempt is to discriminate between the negative function of borders as obstacles to cooperation, and their positive function in keeping Europe secure. The imaginary of cross-border cooperation, on the one hand, give visibility to the EU's commitment toward softening its external frontier while at the same time, on the other hand, participate in the construction of a peculiar kind of border that is simultaneously mobile, fragmented and networked.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the paper is to reflect upon the changing spatiality of contemporary political borders, by focusing on the specific case of the European Union external frontier. In order to do so, we will critically evaluate the rationale of cross-border cooperation initiatives between EU member countries and their non-EU neighbouring countries, in the light of the main theoretical perspectives for the analysis of contemporary bordering and rebordering processes, on the one hand, and by offering a review of the literature about the European Neighbourhood Policy on the other.

The cross-border cooperation policy (CBC), in recent years, has captured the attention of many social scientists. The programme was created at the end of the 1980s to weaken the so called 'border effect' among the EU's countries. Since 1994, CBC has been extended to pre-accession countries and since 1996 to Eastern European neighbouring countries. The literature on CBC has shown that cross-border programmes do not simply contribute to transforming borders from fences to bridges; the policy is rather participating in an ongoing rescaling and rebordering of State power in an age of globalization, along with the end of the cold war and the strengthening of European integration. The diffusion of CBC, moreover, has much to do with the rise of regionalism and with the attempts to create a "Europe of regions" based on multi-level governance, allowing sub-national authorities to improve their international projection. In short, CBC can be considered an innovative but only partially effective and even controversial attempt at renovating the meaning and functionality of borders and border regions, both within the EU and – more recently – across the EU's external frontier.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), on the other hand, has as well captured the attention of political geographers and public policy analysts. A number of criticisms have been highlighted that challenge the effectiveness of the policy. The ENP, it is argued, constitutes a policy transfer that it is hardly adaptable to the EU's external border. It aims at the Europeanization of the neighbourhood, rather than just promoting cooperation, while it does not offer adequate incentives and is internally contradictory.

CBC has been a component of the ENP from the very beginning. Since 2007 (when the programme became operative) 13 initiatives have been launched. Research about the specificities of CBC initiative within the European Neighbourhood Policies is lacking, and this article is an attempt to fill that gap both through a critical review of the existing literature and through a preliminary analysis of key political texts.

A focus on the ENPI CBC may be helpful in dealing with one of the main issues that has been highlighted in the literature: the function of borders within the institutional and discursive strategies that the EU is adopting towards its neighbourhood. Despite good wills - it has been argued - the

ENP results in the strengthening, rather than in the weakening of the EU's external border as it reinforces the same image of the "fortress Europe" that it is trying to oppose.

In the next section, we offer a review of what the main theoretical approaches for investigating the ENP and the transformation of the EU's external border are, distinguishing between geopolitical, institutional, topological and constructivist perspectives, and through a discussion of the concepts of soft borders, mobile borders and networked borders. A summary of the main criticisms regarding the ENP is outlined in section three in order to see - in the later sections - the role that the ENPI CBC is supposed to play in this frame. To understand the material and symbolic function that cross-border cooperation initiatives have along the EU's external frontier, section four is dedicated to the critical analysis of the ENPI CBC Strategy Paper. The final section offers some concluding reflections upon the function of the ENPI CBC in the construction of the European political space and for EU's relations with its neighbouring countries.

2. SOFT, MOBILE OR NETWORKED? THEORIES AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHANGING SPATIALITY OF THE EU'S EXTERNAL BORDER

Most of the existing research on the ENP can be said to fall under four different but overlapping perspectives, each adopting a specific conceptualization of borders.

The first is a geopolitical perspective where States are considered the main actors; here, the ENP is investigated in the framework of the foreign policies and of the (conflicting) geopolitical priorities of EU and of its member States (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005). We may say that, in this frame, borders are conceived as jurisdictional dividing lines and the discussion is mostly based on the distinction between hard and soft borders (Kostadinova 2009, 238), that is complementary to the discussion of hard versus soft power. The hard borders of modernity, it is argued, are becoming more permeable, while military means to secure borders are partially replaced by the soft power of ideologies and political imaginations. European integration is a standing example in this regard (Manners 2002), while at the EU's external border the question is if a "fortress Europe" is emerging and what kind of soft/hard means are put forward to manage EU's relations with its neighbouring countries.

Secondly, we can distinguish an institutional perspective where ENP is analyzed as a form of external governance of the EU, in relation and with the same methodologies that apply to the analysis of other EU policies. Institutionalists do not confine the analysis to the role of States but consider a wider range of actors, both within single institutions (e.g. within the EU), and outside the domain of formal political authorities (e.g. civil society). The ENP, as any other policy, is considered the result of the interaction between governance models - the different logics and power of various actors - and

organizational/historical antecedents (path-dependency). Europeanization of the neighbourhood is considered to be the main aim of the ENP, to be pursued not through a unitary but a composite and fragmented policy. The border itself is fragmented and networked, as the EU discriminates between different external actors, different policy domains, in order to adopt a strategy of simultaneous inclusion/exclusion, openness/closure, cooperation/control (Berg and Ehin 2006, Walters 2006).

Thirdly, we can distinguish what could be defined as a topological perspective. The changing spatiality of State power implies that borders are not only to be found at the perimeter of national and (even more) of EU territory. National borders are not being replaced by a single, more or less 'hard', EU external border. A border topology is changing both within and outside the EU (Delanty 2006, 192). Non-territorial topologies are supposed to better represent contemporary borders and - among those - networked, fluid and mobile topologies are frequently proposed (Delanty 2006, 183; Axford 2006, 165). The idea of a mobile border, in its simplest version, may refer to the fact that the EU still needs to decide where the external border will definitively lie. The shift toward a networked/mobile border, to give another example, is due to the relocation of border controls away from the borderline and closer to strategic locations, e.g. ports, airports, islands (Walters 2006, Mountz 2011).

The fourth perspective is a social constructivist approach, inspired by post-structuralism, discourse analysis and cultural studies (Kramsch 2006). The focus is on ontology, rather than topology. Constructivists emphasize the social and cultural embeddedness of borders, rather than just their legal and political relevance. Whereas power and norms in traditional international relations scholarship are often seen as antidotes (Diez 2006, 244), constructivists think the opposite: the hard border of military controls and repression goes hand-in-hand with a 'soft' and civilian border that includes normative power (Manners 2002), surveillance, ideologies, biopolitics. The focus is on processes of bordering, rather than on borders per se. "It is not only the politics of delimitation/classification, but also the politics of representation and identity that come into play" (Paasi 2011, 62). Consequently, in terms of spatial imaginaries, borders may be said to be "everywhere" and diffused throughout society, through means of - for example - emotional bordering, technical landscapes of control, ubiquitous and unmediated contacts with the outer world (Balibar 2009, Paasi 2011).

The four perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive of one another, but rather overlapping: "borders have symbolic roles in defining the political community; they have functional roles with respect to the internal administration and political control of populations and markets, and they have a geopolitical role in respect of territorial defence" (Delanty 2006, 188).

Such overlapping is evident in the literature about the ENP where, besides differences in methods and in the focus of research, we find a substantial agreement about what the main limits of the policy are, as we will see in the

next section. According to those studies, ENP is inherently characterized by some tensions that, on the one hand, undermine the effectiveness of the policy while, on the other hand, can help in revealing some of the most intriguing transformations of contemporary borders and border politics.

3. CONTRADICTIONS AND PARADOXES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD

A first criticism to the ENP, mostly highlighted by authors adopting an institutional perspective, is that the ENP is a policy transfer that is hardly adaptable to the specific domain to which it refers. It is well known that the ENP was designed as a response to the EU's enlargement. The "dividing lines" that the ENP should help to avoid are, on the one hand, those resulting from the Schengen Agreement: the ENP should attempt to avoid a freedom of movement within the EU that could be obtained at the expense of strengthening the EU's external border (Beck and Grande 2007, 176). On the other hand, the ENP is a reaction to the enlargement and the "dividing lines" that it is trying to avoid and which are mostly those between Eastern European countries that have become EU members and their non-EU neighbours.

Enlargement not only represents the challenge that ENP wishes to respond to but also serves, somehow, as a "model" for its design. As stated by Zaiotti (2007, 152), "the ENP was not developed with the neighbours in mind"; the policy is "the result of a process in which the EU was primarily concerned with itself" (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005, 10). There is no doubt whatsoever that the ENP was designed with Eastern Europe in mind and, consequently, it is less adaptable to the specificities of the Mediterranean (Zaiotti 2007).

The consequences are various and bring us to the second main criticism to the ENP: the fact that an "enlargement methodology" (Gawrich *et al.* 2010) was adopted towards the neighbourhood challenges the effectiveness of the policy as long as, in the case of ENP, the request for the adoption of the *acquis* is not supported nor justified by an enlargement perspective. More generally, the ENP generated a gap between the expectations raised by the policy and the EU's "capacity to deliver" (Cremona and Hillion 2006, 18), both in terms of financial resources and of concrete perspectives for integration. The incentives offered in the ENP framework may therefore be too limited to support domestic drivers for institutional reform (Gawrich *et al.* 2010). The adoption of the enlargement model, finally, creates ambiguity and false expectations regarding what the final aims of the policy are.

A third frequent criticism of the ENP is that the ring of friendship that it is trying to promote is incoherent with the emphasis on security issues and on 'hard' threats, such as illegal migration and terrorism (Zaiotti 2007, Lynch 2005, Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2009). Throughout the ENP, EU institutions try

hard to balance this emphasis on securitization by prioritizing other dimensions of cooperation - to contrast the image of a fortress Europe with the idea of a borderless Europe - as we will see in the next sections. But it is difficult to deny that the main aim of the EU is to use cooperation and friendship for the securitization of its external border, rather than as a goal in and of itself. The two goals, moreover, are contradictory and create ambiguity in the implementation of the policy (Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, 143).

A fourth related criticism is that - despite good will and even throughout those parts of the ENP that emphasize cooperation and friendship - the policy results in strengthening, rather than weakening, of the EU's external border. The narratives that the policy is putting forward are controversial in this regard; such controversy has been described by Kostadinova (2009) as the result of an ambivalence between the attempts to define, on the one hand, the "common values" (e.g. democracy, the rule of law, human rights) on which relations with external partners should be based while, on the other hand, to establish the proper "repertoire of differences" between EU and non-EU countries. Diversity between the EU and its non-EU neighbouring countries is sometimes perceived as an obstacle toward integration, at other times as a rationale for cooperation and much less in terms of something that should be preserved or respected.

The definition of both differences and commonalities ends up reinforcing the perception of a hard border between the EU and the outside world (Kostadinova 2009, 249); a border which is not only political and military, but cultural in the first place (Kostadinova 2009, Dimitrovova 2010, Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, Delanty 2006).

Common values that Europe should be sharing with (or exporting to?) its neighbours, are mostly defined in Eurocentric terms. The tendency to impose a 'package' of economic, political and institutional norms, that are considered un-negotiable, is an explicit attempt at the Europeanization of the neighbourhood (Lavenex 2008), and has led some authors to stress the neo-colonial nature of the ENP (Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, 131).

We may say that the design of the ENP is influenced, on the one hand, by the colonial past of European countries that forces them to respect the autonomy of their partners. There is, on the other hand, a "colonial present" (Gregory 2004), in that European institutions "continue to think and to act in ways that are dyed in the colors of colonial power" (15). Europeans cannot resist considering their values as universal, superior, something that most neighbours still do not possess but need to, in order to access the benefits of the ENP, and that they will probably possess in the future - with the help of the EU - through modernization, institutional reforms and economic development.

The discourse of common values, "is structured in such a way that the neighbours are the subjects of the ENP policy rather than partners" (Dimitrovova 2010, 477). Diez defined this ambivalence as the "normative

power paradox" (2006): the tendency to elevate Europeans' values as universally good thus reinforcing the border between the EU and the outside world. "The ENP on the one hand creates an image of an inferior neighbour that urgently needs to move towards European standards and on the other hand produces a speech politics of mutuality and dialogue" (Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, 130). "Both the content and form of the initiative reinforce the asymmetry characterizing the two sides" (Zaiotti 2007, 151). "The approach is dominative, rather than universalistic or cosmopolitan" (Barbé *et al.* 2009, 379).

The ENP, moreover, as well as the strategies of European countries toward their neighbours, are contradictory in this regard. This is the fifth main criticism to the ENP: although democracy and human rights are the first priority in the ENP Action Plans, it is hard to say that they are the most important priority. Energy resources or strategic interests, for example, are usually more important (Dimitrovova 2010, 479). The same applies to the issue of migration control. Readmission agreements are, in some cases, included in the ENP Action Plans (Smith, 2005) and, according to many authors (Fekete 2005, Peers and Rogers 2006), they imply violations of the same human rights that the ENP is supposed to promote.

The EU, moreover, as argued earlier, is not only unable to directly impose good governance to its neighbourhood, but does not offer the proper indirect incentives - e.g. funding, conditionality¹ - for neighbours to voluntarily do so. There is the impression that values themselves, as stated once by Ferrero-Waldner (cited by Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, 136), should constitute the "weapons" for pushing neighbours to achieve the requirements of the ENP and to adopt the norms of liberal democracies.

The 'soft power' that the EU is adopting towards its neighbors seems to be too soft indeed. A confirmation of most of these criticisms is that the ENP infrastructure - and EU institutions more generally - have proven to be unable to cope with the challenges of unexpected changes in Arab countries.

The Arab revolutions, moreover, have shown what the risk of having governments, rather than countries, as political partners is. Another criticism of the ENP is indeed the overwhelming role of central political authorities of neighbouring countries with respect to, for example, sub-national authorities or the civil society (O'Dowd and Dimitrovova 2011, Scott and Liikanen 2011, Scott 2011). A review of the ENP is currently undergoing and, according to the Joint Communication of 25 May 2011, "A new response to a changing neighbourhood", the role of civil society should increase in the future.

The Arab revolution has shown that democratization is a rather complex process and that we still need to learn how to deal with it through soft means and pro-actively, rather than through the 'hard' power of military

¹ For a discussion on the role of conditionality within the ENP, see: Kelley 2006; Cremona and Hillion 2006, Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011, Kramsch, 2011.

intervention. Not surprisingly then, although protesters in the Arab countries fight for the same democratic ideals that the ENP is trying to promote, they are very sceptical with respect to the commitment of European countries in this regard. They fight for our 'common values', but are sceptical toward our 'common politics', and perceive Europe as a controversial ally in this regard.

4. THE NARRATIVE FUNCTIONS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Given the above mentioned limits of the ENP, and the crucial role that borders and bordering processes assume within the policy, what is the function of the ENPI CBC, the cross-border cooperation component within the ENP?

The ENPI CBC draws its main orientations and narratives from the two policy domains from which it originates: on the one hand, the ENP and, on the other hand, the previous CBC initiatives.

If the ENP has been criticized for being a policy transfer, as reported in the previous section, we may say that the ENPI CBC is a policy transfer within a policy transfer. Cross-border policies were first put in place with the aim of managing EU internal borders and, even in that domain, the Interreg programme was an adaptation (or transfer) of a model that developed from the bottom-up along the German border at the end of the 1950s. The model has been appropriated, more recently, by European institutions for its potential impact on the local development of border regions and for the construction of a borderless "Europe of regions" (Leitner 2004, Perkmann and Sum 2002, Perkmann 2007, Popescu 2008).

Being a policy transfer, per se, is not necessarily negative. Problems arise when the originating model does not fit with the specificities of the context to which it is applied, and when there is no proper attempt to acknowledge differences and to provide adaptations.

If we look at the texts, we see that the ENPI CBC is strongly influenced by what Kostadinova (2009) defined as the "language of integration": the idea that cooperation across the EU's external frontier should go hand-in-hand with the softening of borders, while promoting a common and integrated strategy toward sustainable development. The aims of "integrated and sustainable development" and "harmonious territorial integration", that are typical in CBC programmes within the EU, are transposed to the ENPI CBC. Concepts like the "isolation of border regions" (EC 2007, 24)² - indicating the marginality and peripheral status that border regions have in their respective countries - or the relevance of borderlands in terms of geographical extension and population (7), are recalled in the strategy

² Unless otherwise indicated, this and all the following quotations are extracted from: ENPI. *Cross Border Cooperation. Strategy Paper 2007-2013*. The page number is indicated in brackets.

paper and are typical arguments by which the EU justifies an increasing attention to the specific needs of border regions within member countries.

The insertion of a CBC component within the ENP is justified in order “to *remove obstacles* to effective cross-border cooperation along the external borders of the European Union” (7). The imaginary of borders is therefore similar the one proposed by Jean Monnet (Walters 2006, 155), interpreting borders as ‘artificial’ divisions and ‘obstacles’ that prevent the development of cross-border relations that would otherwise flourish given the ‘natural’ integration of borderlands.

At the same time, the CBC component within the ENP assumes the same objectives of the ENP: to promote prosperity and good neighbourhood; to decrease differences in living standards across borders; to share common values and to address common challenges; to avoid the creation of new dividing lines, both material and symbolic, that may arise from the EU’s enlargement.

A key objective of the EU in general and of the ENP is to enhance the EU’s relations with its neighbours on the basis of shared values and provide opportunities to share the benefits of the EU enlargement, while help avoid any sense of exclusion which might have arisen from the latter (8).

Enlargement, in this frame, is considered both a challenge and an opportunity. The aim is:

To address the challenges and opportunities following on EU enlargement or otherwise arising from the proximity between regions across our land and sea borders (5).

Proximity is another key term: proximity to the EU is a crucial element in the definition of a European neighbourhood that deserves specific attention and resources. It is crucial as well, although at a different scale, in the creation of cross-border regions. Proximity is defined as something that both emphasizes differences (“differences in living standards across the borders”) and offers opportunities for cooperation that should help to reduce those differences.

The reworking of the EU’s external border, as stated in the previous section, is a crucial narrative and justification for the ENP. Consequently, the insertion of a CBC component is coherent and fits with the ENP very well. On the other hand, the ENPI CBC suffers from the same limitations of the ENP, while most of the controversies that we referred to in the previous section, are even more evident.

The first tension is the potential contradiction between, on the one hand, the aim to promote economic development and to address common challenges while, on the other hand, to create “efficient and secure borders”. The idea is that the same aim which the CBC has between member countries (decentralized cooperation and economic development), can “best

be achieved by combining external policy objectives with environmentally sustainable economic and social cohesion”³.

We have already referred to this controversy in section two. The contradiction, in this case, is even more evident given that CBC is explicitly designed to increase the permeability of borders and emphasizes the commitment of the EU to the ideal of open borders (Axford 2006, 172).

As argued before, the representation of borders between EU and its neighbours is, on the one hand, similar to the one proposed in the CBC programmes within the EU where - following Monnet - borders have always had an exclusively negative connotation. On the other hand, and more precisely, the attempt here is to discriminate between the negative function of borders as obstacles to cooperation and economic exchange, and their positive function of keeping Europe secure and protected (Walters 2006, 155):

An integrated and harmonious regional development across the EU border is particularly important in a situation characterized by different rates of economic development, high income disparities and different demographic dynamics. Joint development strategies may help in addressing these disparities and assist in dealing with their most visible effects, such as the increase in legal and illegal, temporary and permanent migration flows, as well as with organised crime (10).

The above mentioned statement, moreover, shows that the link between the aim of promoting economic development and the aim of securing the border is identified in the fact that the former is a drive toward the latter, thus revealing what is considered the ultimate goal of the programme.

Another tension, also evident in the above mentioned statement, is between the narrative of differences and the narrative of common values, as pointed out by Kostadinova (2009) in relation to the whole ENP (see section three). Having a border in common, border regions (like countries) are not only supposed to face the same challenges, but they should also share the same values and priorities.

To support the perspective of “common values”, the ENPI CBC assumes the same narratives of CBC programmes among member countries, representing regions across the EU’s external border as having a common cultural and historical heritage:

Another essential characteristic to take into account in the context of CBC is the deep-seated and long-standing historical and cultural links which have been established over the centuries across what are today the external borders of the European Union. The border region in these areas often have a long common history (8).

This is not necessarily untrue, but it surely does not apply to the EU’s entire external border. A border that, moreover, has been ridden with

³ Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006, p. 2.

conflicts and divisions. Besides the insistence on common history and friendly relations across the borders, the documents indeed offer a variety of references to what can be defined as the “repertoire of difference” (Kostadinova 2009). In line with the ENP narratives, differences are almost exclusively identified between who’s ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ the EU. Although substantial differences among neighbouring countries are recognized - especially between Eastern and Southern partners (7-9) - the concept of “common challenges” allows the whole neighbourhood to be dealt with in a rather unified and homogenous manner; this is parallel to the need of applying a single strategy to a variety of different contexts:

Notwithstanding the substantial differences which characterise the different regions on the EU's Eastern and Southern borders, a number of common challenges can be identified: issues such as regional development, the environment, public health and organised crime are of particular importance in a transboundary context, as is the question of ensuring efficient and secure borders (9).

Another key issue that derives from the application of the CBC model to the EU's external frontier is the role that sub-national authorities are supposed to play. CBC within the EU was not only aimed at promoting a “borderless Europe”, but also at strengthening the role of local and regional authorities, contributing to the constitution of a “Europe of Regions” and to the promotion of the multi-level governance. In the framework of the ENP, the CBC component may potentially produce an intermediate scale of intervention which is in-between multilateral and bilateral approaches to the management of relations with neighbouring countries. It may consequently offer a response to the criticism mentioned in section three, regarding the overwhelming role of national authorities in the ENP.

The ENPI CBC does in fact stress the relevance of regions and local authorities in the implementation of CBC initiatives:

The local partners will be the key actors in the programme, and will be jointly responsible for establishing the priorities of the programme (17).

Local and regional authorities in the border regions have been shown to be enthusiastic in working together in addressing common opportunities and challenges. A bottom-up approach, with full local ownership, is essential, as seen under especially the Interreg programmes (14).

The effective involvement of sub-national authorities, however, is difficult to achieve, and is not justified by the perspective that local and regional authorities will have to manage EU projects and funds, as is the case for new member countries. Most neighbouring countries, moreover, have a highly centralized political system and sub-national authorities do not have any previous experience in any sort of decentralized cooperation.

The main challenge in this regard is identified by the EU as a risk that sub-national partners will lack the willingness or the capacity to properly cooperate with their European counter-parts (25):

The new possibilities offered by ENPI will change this situation dramatically, but the local partners will also need time to become fully familiar with this new way of working (14).

The difficulties in involving subnational authorities is not, however, a merely technical problem nor only due to the lack of institutional capacity; it is also and more properly identified as an inherently political problem due to the weakness of regional and local public authorities in neighbouring countries. However, this problem is supposed to be a responsibility of neighbouring countries, to be addressed at the national level:

In this context, questions of local government reform are of particular importance, and are often part of national reform agendas as reflected in the ENP Action Plan (6).

The empowerment of sub-national authorities is indeed part of the “good governance” model that the EU is trying to promote in its partner countries or, in other words, an essential component in the Europeanization of the neighbourhood. The incentives in this regard, however - as stated in the previous section - are by far insufficient.

An additional controversy in this regard - that is also, but to a lesser extent, evident within the EU - is that the management of borders is a national responsibility. The role of the central States is dominant.

In short, the Strategy Papers identify central governments as the key actors for the implementation of the ENPI CBC, while the role of local and regional authorities is considered “complementary”:

Many of these issues are being addressed in our bilateral cooperation with partner countries, but CBC at the regional and local level still has an important complementary role to play (...); a close cooperation at the local and regional level (...) on both sides of the EU's external borders will be a valuable complement to cooperation at national level (...); in many respects this requires close cooperation at the national level (10).

CBC initiatives, indeed, can work as well (and they often do) when the involvement of subnational authorities is marginal, and the role of national governments is crucial; although this severely reduces the significance of the programme.

To conclude, as has already happened in the application of CBC within the EU (Perkmann 2007), the logic of the programme might be effective in areas that are already strongly interconnected - for example along the Romania-Ukraine-Moldova border (Popescu 2008) - where a tradition of cooperation has already been established, where an efficient meso-regional framework might encompass single initiatives and where the proper participation of sub-national authorities is possible. The policy, on the other hand, provides insufficient incentives and an inadequate policy framework for other areas to establish proper cooperation initiatives.

5. SOFT, MOBILE OR NETWORKED? CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AND THE EU'S EXTERNAL BORDER

The question of borders within the ENP is crucial in many respects, and this is why the ENPI CBC necessitates closer scrutiny, as we have attempted to outline in this article. The ENP on the whole has much to do with the bordering of the EU, as long as the same identification of which countries should be included or excluded from the ENP is a (temporary) decision about where the border between the EU and the outside world lies (Dimitrovova 2010, Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2009).

This, and other criticisms that we have mentioned in previous sections, has led many authors to stress that the ENP is, to a large extent, “a bordering and not a cross-bordering policy” (Boedeltdje and Van Houtum 2011, 124): the ENP reinforces the same image of the “fortress Europe” that it is trying to oppose.

We think that such an evaluation is pertinent within a discussion based on the distinction between hard and soft borders, while the crucial issue is rather *what kind* of border is in the making – a border that may be hard and soft at the same time.

The ENP is an attempt to transform both the meaning and the materiality of the EU's external border in a manner that cannot be properly captured by reference to a single topology.

What is the role of the CBC component in this frame? The representation and visualization of cross-border initiatives is certainly an attempt to subvert the idea of a fortress Europe. More precisely, the geographical imaginary of CBC gives visibility to the EU's commitment toward softening its external border, while at the same time produces a peculiar kind of border that is simultaneously mobile, fragmented and networked. CBC contributes to the definition of a complex and multilayered ‘border regime’ that includes the juxtaposition of different institutions, actors and policies, instead of the adoption of a single and univocal representation of the EU's external border.

The EU's strategies toward non-EU countries, more precisely, have been said to materialize in a logic of “concentric circles” (Moisio 2007, Zielonka 2006): the EU, pre-accession countries, neighbouring countries and – among those – a distinction between good and bad partners, which is projecting a sort of ‘soft’ (or ‘mobile’) path toward closer integration with the EU, and which is opposed to the ‘hard’ lines that other EU policies are putting forward (e.g. Schengen). The logic of CBC, in this frame, may be said to both represent a space in-between and to cut through those concentric circles.

CBC is therefore proposing the imaginary of a fragmented and mobile external border of the EU: as long as some areas are more integrated and cooperative than others, through CBC they should have the possibility to strengthen their relations further and to provide an example for other areas to follow.

Through the reference to cross-border 'regions', and through the image of cooperative 'networks' of cross-border governance, the ENPI CBC may also be said to propose the constitution of a networked border. External regions and actors, while being formally excluded from full membership, have the possibility of being included in a networked political arena with 'fuzzy borders' (Lavenex 2004, 681).

Throughout the ENPI CBC, consequently, the EU seems to be trying to replicate the integration model that it applies within its borders. While for many authors - according to the policy transfer argument - this is one of the main limits of the policy, we think that this is rather the policy's ultimate goal and that it is coherent with the Europeanization strategy that the EU is pursuing both within and beyond its borders.

The diffusion of CBC initiatives at the EU's external border, toward pre-accession countries in particular, has always been - *inter alia* - a means of transferring, to the EU's external partners, the institutional management model adopted within the EU. The ENPI CBC tries to replicate this strategy in neighbouring countries, through (selective) Europeanization and through the promotion of the same imaginary of 'soft' cooperation, multi-level governance and regionalism by which the EU is rescaling and rebordering its internal political space.

It is certainly true, consequently, that through the ENP (as already mentioned in section three), the "EU was primarily concerned with itself" (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005, 10). Besides the re-imagination and the Europeanization of its 'exterior', the ENP is a powerful instrument to re-imagine the European 'interior' as well.

One of the main logics that guides the development of the EU's strategies toward its neighbouring countries is indeed the need to mediate between the role of the EU vis-à-vis the role of member States in managing relations with external partners. The ENP is an attempt to delimitate a space for the EU's intervention in a policy area that is traditionally a national responsibility, notwithstanding the Lisbon Treaty which has strengthened the role of the EU in this regard.

The geography of cross-border regions, in this frame - through the delimitation of areas that cut through existing political topographies and that involve (in most cases) a plurality of member and non-member countries/regions - is a powerful justification for an increasing activism of the EU in neighbouring countries.

At the same time, the fact that external policies and geopolitical relations are, for the most part, a matter of member countries, this may constitute an explanation for the tendency of the EU to act as a normative power, rather than strategically, in its relations with the outside world (Manners 2002); and it confirms the neo-medieval and post-Westphalian character of EU spatial politics (Zielonka 2006). It is worth noticing, in this frame, that one of the main characteristics of a neo-medieval politics is the tendency to use moral and normative power, rather than just military power and formal rules, as a

legitimizing strategy and in order to define and to defend political borders (Ibid, 144).

That being said, the 'power' of geographical representation in supporting ideologies and political imaginations should be taken seriously into account (Anderson 1991). The role of geographical imaginaries in both allowing the visualization of geopolitical strategies, and in the mobilisation of political actors, is one of the main lessons learned from the history of political geography. The "territorial turn" that EU policies have undergone in the last few years demonstrates that the EU has learned this lesson.

It is essential, for the same existence of the EU as a political actor, that Europe is not defined as a "territory", but rather as an undefined "area" (Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2005, Walters 2006). The value of cross-border cooperation, in this frame, has more to do with the geographical imaginaries that it refers to, rather than with the effective achievements that it aims to realize (Celata and Coletti 2011). The geography of cross-border regions, per se, suggests a complex topology which is consistent with the spatial politics and with the institutional architecture that the EU is trying to materialize: a European political space that is not just the sum of the political space of its members, and that surely does not correspond to the space of modern territorial boundaries.

Whether or not the EU, or the ENP, is successful in proposing this (counter)imaginary is not an issue that we can definitively address in this article. The literature to which we referred to in the previous sections seem to suggest that it is not. But those are the terms upon which, in our opinion, an evaluation of the ENP CBC policy should be based. A more in-depth analysis of single CBC initiatives would be needed in order to confirm and enrich this evaluation.

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