# Cross-border mapping and cooperation: integrating and dividing practices

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Abstract:

*Cross-border cooperation (CBC) has emerged as a prominent domain of practices within the European framework, aligned with the European Commission's objectives to foster harmonious development. This article addresses the empirical field of CBC between regional political stakeholders and public administrations in regional and local contexts at Europe's internal borders. Despite the establishment of cross-border regions, borders are still perceived as barriers, prompting actors in CBC to develop strategies to transcend territorial boundaries. One such strategy is cross-border thematic mapping, which visually represents topics like infrastructure, demography and cultural heritage. The article explores how cross-border thematic maps contribute to the creation and thinking of the cross-border space as a region in the context of CBC. It presents empirical research and an interpretation, arguing that while cross-border cartography advances cooperation, it also poses unintended challenges. Applying a praxeological approach, the study conceptualizes map usage as practices, drawing on ethnographic data from public events in an anonymized cross-border European region. The study explores the practices of map usage and develops a theorization to understand the social dynamics of cross-border building with maps. By bridging the gaps in practice-oriented cross-border studies and CBC research, the article contributes to the understanding of the role of cross-border maps in regional development and social dynamics.*

Citation (APA):

Connor, U. (2024). Cross-border mapping and cooperation: integrating and dividing practices. *Border and Regional Studies, 12,1*, 7-33.

## 1. Introduction

Cross-border cooperation (CBC) stands as an increasingly prominent field of practices within the European framework. Aligned with the objectives of the European Commission, CBC endeavors aim to facilitate the "harmonious

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development of the Union" by addressing "common challenges" and capitalizing on the "untapped growth potential" (EC, 2023) within border regions. While the budget's share in the overall EU budget may be minimal, the overall increasing allocation of funds and the expansion of programs in recent decades highlight CBC as a crucial element in European integration strategies. The outcomes of these strategies are gradually becoming evident, particularly in terms of cross-border interaction and exchange (Böhm, 2023; Frątczak-Müller & Mielczarek-Żejmo, 2020).

Nonetheless, amid the progress, it is important to acknowledge the differences in the intensity and forms of cross-border integration processes across the expansive European territory. Factors such as geographical proximity, historical relationships, economic disparities, and administrative intricacies contribute to the diversity of outcomes in different cross-border regions. Scholars from cross-border research highlighted these differences and the regional hetero- geneity within the integration efforts (Durand & Decoville, 2019; Medeiros, 2018; Reitel & Wassenberg, 2020).

The article focuses on CBC in its regional and local manifestations at the internal borders of Europe. The focal point of inquiry relates to the collabora- tive endeavors between stakeholders from the realm of regional politics and public administrations across these borders. One of the outcomes of these efforts is the establishment of cross-border relationships and the proliferation of cross-border regions within the European Union. These regions, exemplified by Euroregions, are underscored by Noferini et al. (2019, p.35): "Today hundreds of Euroregions exist in Europe as formal organizations promoting, coordinating and/or implementing cross-border joint initiatives".

Despite the progress in implementing cross-border regions, borders are still perceived as "barriers and obstacles" (Svensson & Balogh, 2018, p.115). Actors engaged in CBC encounter these obstacles on various levels within their professional domains, e.g., language, cultural or legal barriers (Durand & Decoville, 2018, p.240; Klatt & Winkler, 2021). However, the advancement and incipient institutionaliza- tion of cross-border regions reveal that actors are developing strategies to transcend territorial borders and collaborate collectively. One such strategy is the employment of cross-border thematic mapping, which serves to visualize the cross-border region and its attributes (e.g., demography, mobility, cultural heritage etc.). An increasing number of cross-border regions are using thematic maps to illustrate the cross-border space, thus aiding in orienting CBC by addressing its topics[2].

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2    Examples include the Lake Constance geodata pool (LDBV, 2023), the geoportals for the

The article explores the research question how cross-border thematic maps contribute to the region building and social relations in CBC. It focuses on the ways of thinking and collective actions that create the cross-border space as a common region. Adopting a sociological perspective, the primary emphasis centers on the social productivity of cross-border thematic maps in the context of CBC. In light of this, the article presents both empirical research and a theoretical framework that expound upon the process of cross-border integration through the usage of maps.

The central argument put forth is that cross-border cartography not only contributes to the advancement of cooperation but also gives rise to unintended challenges. While the former aspect has been acknowledged to some extent in prior scholarly works (as evident in the works of Gaberell & Debarbieux, 2014; Grosjean, 2019), the latter facet has largely been overlooked. The here followed argument posits that a comprehensive consideration of both dimensions leads to a more nuanced understanding of a pivotal dynamic inherent in cross-border regionalization processes when engaging with cartographic representations.

In order to examine the social dynamic of cross-border mapping within the framework of CBC, the study being presented adopts a praxeological approach. Consequently, the article formulates a conceptualization of map usage as a series of practices, aligned with the tenets of practice theories (e.g., Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001; Schmidt, 2012). The empirical insights of the investigation, centered on the practices involving map usage, draw on an ethnographic exploration conducted during public events within a cross-border region situated in the European context[3]. The central data collection method is observation and the writing of observation notes, which were analyzed using interpretative methods. By characterizing cross-border maps as practices along the ethnographic data, the study develops the different social practices of the usage of maps and their social consequences.

The presented research draws upon prior studies and seeks to make a contribution to the advancement of two distinct research domains. Firstly, it extends the domain of practice-oriented border or cross-border studies. While the

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Upper Rhine region (GeoRhena, 2023, see Figure 1) or the Saar-Lor-Lux border region (GIS-GR, 2023) as well as publications of the Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa (ERN, 2019, see Figure 2) or the „Atlas Transfrontalier" (DGA, 2012). One of the earliest examples provides the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative (CEI, 2001).

3   It is worth noting that specific identifiers such as the cross-border region, place names, and distinctive personal attributes have been deliberately left out in the subsequent text to uphold anonymization protocols and safeguard the privacy of the individuals under observation.

term "practice" has been established in some segments of this field, there remains a scarcity of studies that consistently employ a sociological, practice-oriented research methodology (Beck, 2019  p. 15; Connor, 2021).

Secondly, the article follows the insights of Gaberell and Debarbieux (2014) and the connection of cross-border mapping and region building. The article develops the field of research encompassing CBC and the examination of region-making processes in the European context (Evrard, 2017; Medeiros, 2018; Perkmann, 2007; Pupier, 2020; Sohn & Reitel, 2016). Notably, the usage of mapping practices and their social consequences as a focal point for studying these processes has thus far remained largely unexplored, both empirically and theoretically from a praxeological standpoint. The primary objective of the article is to develop insights into the practices and social productivity of cross-border maps and their contribution to the construction of the cross-border space as a region.

Subsequently, the article offers an outline of CBC and the cross-border region building along Europe's internal borders. It also provides an overview of the current state of research concerning cross-border cartography within the field of CBC. Furthermore, the article develops a praxeological research approach to delve into cross-border cartography and explains the methodology employed for data collection. Central to the study are an empirical scrutiny of the usage of cross-border maps within the context of CBC and the formulation of theoretical concepts that capture the process of constructing a cross-border region through mapping practices. Lastly, the article concludes by discussing the findings in relation to the broader research context, thus bringing together the various components explored within the study.

## 2. The context of cross-border mapping: CBC and cross-border regions

CBC across internal European borders has shown notable growth in quantity and institutionalization during the recent decades, despite some setbacks (e.g., border closures during the coronavirus pandemic). These collaborative endeavors trace their historical roots to the 1950s, a period that witnessed the inception of pioneering cross-border initiatives and partnerships (Beck, 2019, p.13; Wassenberg, 2015, p.77). The focal points of CBC often pivot upon issues localized to specific regions, such as cross-border mobility or labor market, thus engendering a diverse array of manifestations. Accordingly, attempts in the research field to define CBC turn out to be relatively open. For example, Wassenberg et al. state, "Cross-border cooperation refers to all types of relations (institutional, contractual, or informal) which occur on a regular basis between

actors who live on either side of one or several national borders and are within relatively close geographical proximity." (Wassenberg et al., 2020, pp.37-38) Since their beginnings, the scope and number of CBC have grown significantly. European funding programs are one of the main drivers of this development and the European Commission now counts 73 cooperation programs for the period 2021-2027 (EC, 2023).

The emphasis here is oriented more towards the interactions amongst administrative and political entities within the implicated regions, rather than the cooperative endeavors involving civil society stakeholders. In the research field on CBC authors highlight the demarcation of borders as the hallmark of cross-border regions, a salient characteristic that manifests itself through obstacles and challenges for cooperation (Durand & Decoville, 2018). Consequently, distinct challenges arise within CBC, traceable to the context of the nationally fragmented borderland. As articulated by Beck, these challenges revolve around the questions of "functional equivalences" (Beck, 2019, p.17) between disparate political-administrative systems engaged in cooperation. This encompasses an adequate production of knowledge about the cross-border region, the optimization of the interplay between stakeholders characterized by diverse cultural orientations and expectations, and the identification of suitable forms of organization and their institutionalization (Beck, 2019, pp.17-18).

Borders as obstacles become particularly evident in the field of cross-border spatial planning. The conceptualization of obstacles relates to the collaborative undertakings involving the national administrative entities of distinct sub-regions within the cross-border region, collectively engaged in the pursuit of cohesive territorial development and cross-border land utilization (Durand & Decoville, 2018; Peyrony & Denert, 2012). In spatial planning, the challenges arise within cooperation: A lack of cooperation experience, disagreements between participants, institutional asymmetries between cooperating authorities as well as language barriers, cultural differences and prejudices play a role (Knippschild, 2011, p.631-632). Furthermore, Caesar and Pallagst refer to the "special border situation" and the "barriers" in cross-border spatial planning and mention, for example, the differing "planning cultures" of the cooperation partners, the lack of a "complete statistical database for border areas" or non-existent knowledge about "planning processes and instruments in the cross-border context" (Caesar & Pallagst, 2018, p.23, translated by UC).

One response to counter the challenges and obstacles outlined is the ongoing process of constituting cross-border regions within the broader European framework. CBC not only contributes to unite actors across territorial borders, but

also serves as vehicle for the production of cross-border regions as a framework to tackle common challenges. The establishment of cross-border regions stands as a hallmark of the institutionalization of CBC. Illustrations are for example the many Euroregions across the European space (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011; Liberato et al., 2018; Opioła & Böhm, 2022). From a scientific point of view, a cross-border region can be comprehended as the "action space" or "arena of action" (Hartz et al., 2010, p.500, translated by UC) to which CBC refers. This arena of action is distinctively characterized by its transcendence of national boundaries and institutional jurisdictions. Collaborative endeavors that address and perpetuate this arena of action thus engage in a process of cross-border region building (Becker, 2005, p.88; Evrard, 2017, p.20). Through CBC the border space assumes a renewed significance within the purview of cross-border projects, thereby engendering a trajectory of regionalization.
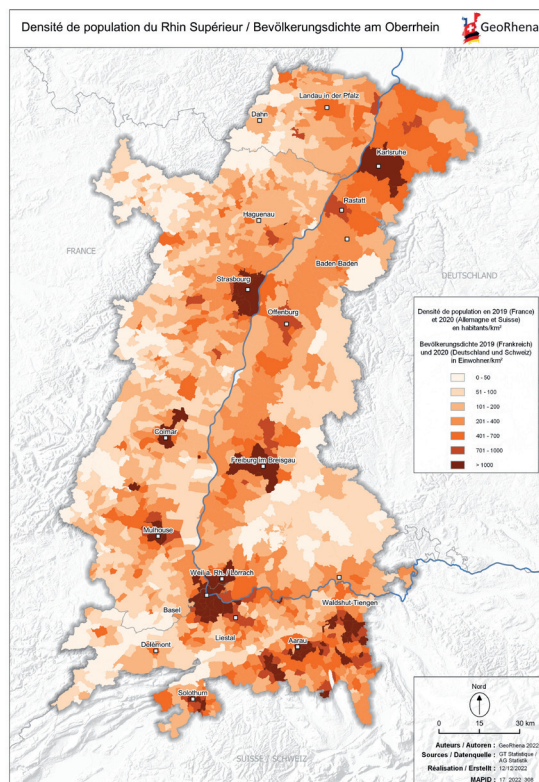


**Figure 1: Example of a cross-border thematic map: Population density in the Upper Rhine Region**

Source: GeoRhena, 2022

### 3. CBC and Cross-border cartography

The fact that maps play an increasing role in the process of European integration and cohesion policy can be traced back to the development of European spatial planning. Waterhout, for example, stated in 2008:

> [I]f we are to have a debate on European territorial development with a view to increasing territorial cohesion, learning to think in spatial and structural terms is essential. [...] It is fair to say, then, that spatial concepts and maps play a vital role in spatial positioning and thus in conceiving planning as communication. (Waterhout, 2008, p.29)

In which form maps have an effect on such communication in spatial planning as well as spatial positioning in CBC is of interest in the following. For this purpose, some studies dealing with the role of maps in CBC will be examined in more detail.

In general, maps are considered to play a fruitful role in CBC and the different construction processes of cross-border regions. For instance, Gaberell and Debarbieux, in a comparison of cartographic practices within CBC in the Alpine region and the Carpathians, emphasize that map production is not only a result, but can furthermore be described as part of the "region-making process" (Gaberell & Debarbieux, 2014, p.123). The authors attribute a strong influence to maps on a successful establishment of cross-border regions:

> Mapping appears to be an important process for conceiving, creating and consolidating project regions: it spatially depicts and delimits such projects, shapes and communicates arguments for their institutionalization, and provides vehicles for their ongoing assessment and monitoring. (Gaberell & Debarbieux, 2014, p.135)

Following this statement, both the activity of mapping and the collective use of maps play a role in the construction of a cross-border region. As developed by the authors, maps support the process of defining and communicating the cross-border space as a region as well as strategies of justifying and implementing CBC.

In the continuum of research on cross-border cartography, authors highlight the communication and orientation function of maps within CBC. As posited by Durand and Decoville (2018, p. 235-236), maps, particularly in

the domain of spatial planning, furnish a shared linguistic medium through which the purpose of CBC and its overarching objectives can be articulated and pursued. This phenomenon is further studied by Grosjean who, in the context of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, expands upon this function. In the analytical framework presented, the region is fundamentally an "elaborated mental construct grounded upon describable realities," which thereby endows "spatial images" (Grosjean, 2019, p.1, translated by UC). Grosjean consequently accentuates the potential within CBC concerning the conception and conceptualization of the cross-border region through the prism of cartographic endeavors (Grosjean, 2019, p.1-2).

Grosjean also mentions an additional function of cross-border maps. The spatial depictions of cross-border regions offer the opportunity to identify a unit of stakeholders associated with them. For instance, these actors may reference the region in their communications (Grosjean, 2019, p.1). Haude similarly explores this facet, using the case of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. In his work, Haude seeks to trace the "development of a cross-border, 'euroregional' collective identity" (Haude, 2017, p.41, translated by UC) through the evolution of cross-border cartographic representations of the border region over time.
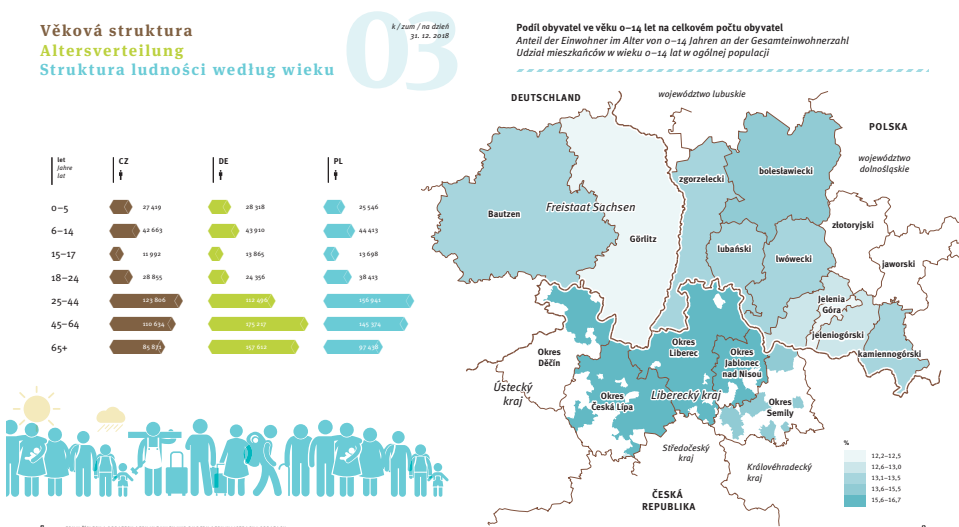


**Figure 2: Example of a cross-border thematic map (Proportion of residents aged 0-14 years as a percentage of the total population) in a brochure about the Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa**

Source: ERN, 2019, p.8-9

In the case of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, Haude concludes that the empirical validation of a "logo formation based on maps, which is essential for cartographic identity establishment" (Haude, 2017, p.55), can only be empirically proven to a limited extent. However, drawing from Benedict Anderson's concepts presented in "Imagined Communities" (2006), Haude asserts that the understanding that "the map is not merely an image but a representation of political reality" (Haude, 2017, p.44; translated by UC) is equally applicable to the development of cross-border institutions.

In summary, existing research on cross-border cartography emphasizes the social productivity of maps within the context of CBC. Authors underscore the various roles that maps play within social settings. However, what remains lacking is a comprehensive empirical understanding of how maps unfold this efficacy within actual social practices.

## 4. Theoretical and methodological approach

The article adopts a praxeological perspective to examine the usage of cross-border thematic maps within the context of CBC. Since the beginning of the "Practice Turn" (Schatzki et al., 2001), a multitude of approaches have emerged within the academic research field that investigate the social through the lens of practices. Praxeological approaches do not adhere to a singular cohesive doctrine; rather, they draw from a range of sources, including the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, Anthony Giddens, Theodore R. Schatzki, Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkel, among others (Hui et al., 2017; Nicolini, 2012; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001; Schmidt, 2012; Shove et al., 2012; Spaargaren et al., 2016).

Notwithstanding their diversity, these approaches share foundational conceptual orientations with regard to social research. A common thread among them is their perspective of social practices as a dynamic process characterized by the interplay and interconnectedness of practices across various situations. Within this framework, practices are seen to "emerge, evolve and disappear" (Shove et al., 2012, p.4). They are concurrently understood as "ongoing routinized and recurrent accomplishment" (Nicolini, 2012, p.3).

Praxeological approaches direct their attention towards various facets of practices in order to comprehend their dimensions and attributes. These approaches accentuate, for instance, the engagement of physical bodies within social processes. In alignment with this perspective, Schatzki conceives of practices as "bodily doings and sayings" (Schatzki, 2002, p.72). Here, practices are brought

into being and sustained through the actions of bodies, which are, in turn, shaped by social practices such as processes of socialization (Bourdieu, 1980).

Beyond the physical aspect, another focal point of praxeological approaches is the material dimension of practices (Latour, 2005; Shove et al., 2012, p.10). These approaches investigate how objects contribute to social situations and the various "roles, that things can play in practice" (Shove, 2017, p.156). Hence, both bodies and objects, along with their processual unfolding, become essential elements of description when scrutinizing the social through a praxeological lens.

Praxeological approaches center their focus on "symbolic structures of meaning" (Reckwitz, 2002, p.244), which find expression within the processes of bodily or material manifestations (Schmidt, 2012). Applied to the object of study, cross-border maps, this praxeological viewpoint redefines maps in contrast to everyday interpretations. Within this analytical framework oriented towards practices, concerns about the factual accuracy of map depictions or their adherence to reality take a secondary role. Instead, the interest lies in cross-border maps as instruments of constructing reality and as vehicles for social processes of visualization (Wintzer & Hirisig, 2018, p.358).

In this context, the praxeological understanding employed here aligns with constructivist perspectives on maps developed within the field of geography (Crampton, 2001; Harley, 1989). For instance, its interpretation of maps resonates with scholarly discussions centered around the concept of "critical cartography" (Perkins, 2018). What a practice-oriented perspective shares with these discussions is the idea that maps "are not (and cannot be) value-free or neutral" (Perkins, 2018, p.80) and that they have consequences for the world they aim to depict. Rather than being mere representations, maps emerge as products of social relationships and practices, simultaneously influencing and contributing to these practices such as common orders of knowledge.

If maps play a productive role within the social processes of cross-border region building, this assertion implies that they shape perceptions of reality and courses of action. In the following, the forms in which this influence is exerted is investigated from the vantage point of a sociology of practice, achieved through the observations of situations, activities, and settings. To grasp practices in the processes of their occurrence, the study presented here employs ethnographic methodologies for data collection. The ethnographic methods and modes of description align with the ideas of praxeological approaches when it comes to analyzing the social as a series of practices encompassing their symbolic, material, and corporeal dimensions (Gobo & Molle, 2017, p.163-178).

The insights and data presented in this study stem from an ethnographic investigation of public events conducted within a cross-border region. The events target a wide spectrum of individuals, such as citizens or stakeholders of the cross-border region. Regularly, the group of employees from CBC in the studied region make up a large part of those present. As conferences or round table discussions, they revolve around topics and concerns related to the cross-border region, occasionally featuring the display of maps in front of the audience. Participant observations and interviews centered around the usage of cross-border maps serve as the data and foundation of the presented study. Notably, the writing of "fieldnotes" (Emerson et al., 2011, p.5) on observations constitutes the essential components of the data collection process[4]. Empirical and theoretical saturation is attained through the iterative observation as well as the development and refinement of concepts.

Adopting a praxeological standpoint, the evidence presented in this context does not hinge on the quantity or frequency of practice occurrences. Instead, the focal point of interest when analyzing cross-border maps from a praxeological lens lies in their capacity to enable. This signifies that those practices of maps create possibilities for subsequent practices to emerge. What holds significance, in order to comprehend the inherent logic of the practices, is the fact that these subsequent practices are rendered possible by and are inherently embedded within the initial ones (Bourdieu, 1972). The concept of social productivity embodies this perspective presented herein.

## 5. Findings: Maps as practices in the ethnographic focus

To investigate the social productivity of cross-border thematic maps in the context of CBC, the praxeological examination draws on ethnographic data collection in the following. Within the research field of the anonymized cross-border region, situations of using maps manifest during public conferences or discussions. The analytical focus centers on the usage of maps as distinct situations occurring within these settings. These settings possess a distinctive material and bodily configuration within official venues designed to accommodate a broad

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4    The dataset utilized in this study primarily comprises on-site observations. The author has engaged in approximately 25 public events within the cross-border region under examination between the years 2015 and 2020. In addition, a selection of five interviews has been incorporated. These interviews were conducted during a concentrated six-month participatory research expedition in the anonymized cross-border region with participants that work in the field of cross-border cartography (Connor, 2023). During this time, around 70 different maps were collected in the field. All quotes of fieldnotes have been translated by the author to ensure their comprehensibility.

audience. Conventionally, during presentations, the speakers and their materials are positioned on one side of the space, while the seated audience faces them from the opposite side, their bodily orientation directed toward the presentation area. Crucially, cross-border maps are projected onto screens as integral components of these presentations, residing within the audience's visual purview.

Subsequently, the ethnographic data is studied through the application of two developed analytical modes of practice. The initial mode develops maps as practices that envision the cross-border region as a common space associated with uniting various actors such as stakeholders, employees, or experts of CBC. In contrast, the second mode underscores maps as practices that delineate the shared territory into distinct zones, occasionally correlating with the division of the involved actors. Both employed practical modes illustrate the processual social construction of the cross-border region, oscillating between two contrasting perspectives. In the first perspective, the cross-border region emerges as a cohesive and interconnected whole, while the second perspective accentuates its fragmentation into competitive spaces.

### 5.1 Integrating practices

*Viewing the cross-border region as a united space*

The findings indicate that cross-border thematic maps play a formative role in shaping collective understandings of the region. When incorporated into presentations, maps contribute substantively to the presented topics and explanations by speakers (e.g., on cross-border labor market questions). The dataset, composed of fieldnotes derived from observations, contains numerous instances where presenters utilize maps as a means to communicate topics related to the cross-border region and CBC.

Of particular significance is the observation that the process of knowledge building on the region is closely intertwined with the depiction of the cross-border region as an integrated spatial entity. This entails differentiating it from alternative spaces such as other "border regions" or the adjacent "territorial" spaces (fieldnotes). Notably, the establishment of knowledge is pivotal in characterizing the regional space during the discourse of stakeholders and CBC experts on different topics.

Thematic maps depicting the cross-border region play an enabling role within these settings. The dynamics of presentation scenarios revolve around consistently acknowledging and portraying the cross-border region as a distinct

entity, characterized by identifiable boundaries and associated knowledge. This is notably facilitated by the availability of a specific name for the cross-border region, COREGIO[5], familiar to the participants. The maps contribute significantly to the creation of this space by rendering the region visible and visually demarcating it from its neighboring areas, achieved through map selections, delineated borderlines, or emphasized highlights.

During presentations, speakers use cross-border maps to reinforce their discourse. By referencing the maps and elaborating on the COREGIO, presenters communicate the notion of a cohesive spatial unit tied to a specific topic. This engagement allows the audience not only to hear about the region as a whole but also to apprehend it visually as a cartographic territory, depicted on the maps with distinctive boundaries. Consequently, the social productivity of maps as practices becomes manifest in these moments, as they contribute to the creation of a collective knowledge-space framework.

An illustrative example showcasing the situational emergence of the cross-border region as a unified entity unfolds within the context of observing a conference focused on economic development within the cross-border region. In the course of a presentation, multiple maps portraying the region are displayed and commented upon by the speaker. The fieldnotes documented by the ethnographer detail the following:

> The speaker announces that she is about to get to the 'analysis of [economic] development and regional needs.' She wants to do this 'through five maps' [...]. Then on the slide appears the map on [economic growth] in the [COREGIO]. [...]. The speaker continues: 'So the first map is about the general [economic] development in the [COREGIO]. So now some numbers [in year X] about the [COREGIO]. (Fieldnotes)

The distinctive characteristic of the spatial construction within the provided empirical example resides in the portrayal of the space as a cohesive unit. The cross-border region is depicted as a unified and homogeneous entity, devoid of internal divisions such as territorial boundaries or consideration of surrounding areas within the context. In this instance, the region is presented as a self-contained space of knowledge.

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5    The term is fictional to keep the name of the studied cross-border region anonymous.

*Viewing the actors of CBC as a united group*

The practices of viewing maps are not limited to the situational production of space and knowledge. Presenting space as a unified entity is an act that is directly connectable to practices that bring actors together as members of CBC. Within the findings presented here, there are two distinct forms of connecting practices that are oriented to actors and the collective of employees in the cross-border setting. The first views the employees and stakeholders as discernible group of employees of the cross-border space that act as experts on it. The second provides this group with an identity, as delineated in the subsequent description.

The spatial construction in the studied case provides a framework for group building practices. This pertains specifically to a cohort of professionals engaged in CBC or associated domains, actively participating in cross-border initiatives. Consequently, the conceptions of reality concerning the region that emerge within this context can be linked through practices to the discourse aiming to rationalize and legitimize notions and undertakings pertaining to cross-border collaboration, and consequently to validate the presence of a collaborative body accountable for its advancement. An empirical instance drawn from fieldnotes, elucidating the presentation of population dynamics in the cross-border region, serves to illustrate this premise:

> At the end, the speaker comes to a slide with which she talks about the 'challenges' in the [COREGIO]. She emphasizes that it is important to consider regional differences when designing further strategies to develop the areas. Developing a 'cross-border approach' is important, she says. (Fieldnotes)

Despite the absence of formally binding or legally effective resolutions regarding cross-border initiatives during public gatherings in the studied case, it becomes apparent that these resolutions are at least partially embedded within the cartographically oriented delineation of the region. The spatial and knowledge practices under scrutiny establish a foundational framework upon which collaboration can be constructed as a subsequent practice. This becomes evident, for instance, when mutual directions and objectives are formulated. As the empirical illustration delineates, the region, considered both in spatial and cognitive dimensions, serves as the originating standpoint for adopting a cross-border outlook. Within this perspective, political and administrative endeavors can be conceptualized and formulated to transcend territorial boundaries, thereby acquiring a substantive rationale for their existence.

The findings demonstrate how inclusive practices engage in the setting, specifically when the visual representation on the map is coupled with addressing the cohort of employees involved in CBC through the objective of collaboration. These situations arise within the observed field when the overarching objectives of cross-border goals are articulated or when concerted political agency is sought to be cultivated. For instance, when actors state, that "we have to do more in […] Brussels" (fieldnotes) to enhance the visibility and support for the cross-border regional projects and integration measures. In these circumstances, the COREGIO transcends its mere cartographic depiction; it additionally embodies the collective assembly of stakeholders engaged in these discussions. This is especially pertinent in situations where the task is to establish a nexus between shared attributes and a shared way of life, thereby crafting a narrative of collective memory in which "we" cross the "borders" and "live in peace" (fieldnotes).

These integrating practices in form of identifying the group of actors as a "we" are not always explicit and sometimes more implicit in the settings. Maps can be the hook to spin of narratives of success of cooperation in talks and used as starting point for further cooperation, as the following example from the fieldnotes illustrates. The example describes a presentation by a speaker in a large hall with an audience. She begins her talk by presenting a cross-border project.

> Then the speaker says: 'We try to start from the existing, that is, from documents that already exist.' There is a pause in her speech, and something moves on the screen. Several maps or charts appear on the screen and overlay each other, so that after a short time the lowest level is no longer visible. [...] On some maps, the outlines of the [COREGIO] are clearly visible. (Fieldnotes)

Beginning her discourse "from the existing," the speaker establishes the foundational context for the project under consideration. The maps on the screen visibly represent the outcomes of preceding collaborative endeavors. These cartographic presentations exemplify the accomplished handling of the cross-border region across diverse projects and discussions. Once again, the COREGIO emerges as a prominent symbol and space for these activities, implicitly directing attention towards the group of CBC participants. Notably, among the audience, several individuals who were previously engaged in the addressed projects can identify with the projects and with one another. This shared connection, symbolized by the accomplishments of their collaborative undertakings, contributes to the narrative of achievement. Participants can thus identify with each other and in the sign of a success story of their cooperation.

In summary the chapter explores integrating practices within CBC and cross-border knowledge-building. Thematic maps participate in the practices of shaping collective understandings of the region, aiding presentations and communication. The spatial depiction of the cross-border region as a cohesive entity, facilitated by these maps, influences knowledge-building and fosters a shared perception. Moreover, these practices of space and knowledge point to the formation of a unified group identity among actors engaged in CBC, reinforcing a sense of expertise and unity. The chapter illustrates how maps can serve as narrative tools, enhancing cooperation, legitimizing initiatives, and showcasing shared successes.

## 5.2 Dividing practices

### Viewing the cross-border region as a divided space

When investigating the social productivity of thematic cross-border maps within CBC contexts, it becomes evident that integrating practices constitute only one form of subsequent practices. The usage of maps also gives rise to practices that accentuate the different parts of the cross-border space. With focus on the social construction of space in the researched case, this signifies that the cross-border region is not solely conceptualized as a cohesive entity. An inherent characteristic of the spatial construction is the emphasis on its internal segmentation in different national or administrative sub-levels. In these cases, the concurrent production of knowledge occurs through the practical delineation of borders on maps and the establishment of distinctions among sub-regions within the cross-border space.

The practices of comparing distinct sub-regions of the cross-border area, often delineated by national boundaries, emerge as a prevalent approach in the examined setting of public events on the cross-border region. An illustration of such a division within the cross-border space is illuminated through the subsequent fieldnotes excerpt. The observation captures a situation during a lecture concerning population dynamics in the cross-border region with the purpose to develop and discuss cross-border measurements. As the speaker concludes her discourse, a map of the cross-border region is displayed on the adjacent screen, with linear demarcations separating individual national sub-regions. Clusters of red and blue circles are highlighted on the map dispersed across the cross-border space. The speaker briefly outlines the regions within the area where population growth or decline has been observed:

'I'll finish by showing another map from [colleague C] on the issue of building development. Here it is simply,' the speaker is searching for words, 'in reality it

is simply that the inner cities between [country A] and [country B] do not show the same dynamics at all. It is a reverse dynamic, because in [country A] the downtowns are emptying with blue circles, for example in [city D] or blue in [city F]. The reverse is the situation in [country B].'" (Fieldnotes)

The cited passage from the observation notes transcends the portrayal of the cross-border region as a mere entity on the map. Rather, the lecture's practices are orientated to emphasize the internal divisions within the space ("country A" vs. "country B"). This approach involves contrasting and juxtaposing distinct national territories and the resulting challenges for developing the cross-border region. The focus shifts towards highlighting the divergent attributes of various national territories, effectively subduing the notion of a unified cross-border unit.

The process of spatial construction is closely intertwined with knowledge practices within this context. The analysis of the speaker prominently spotlights distinctions visible among the sub-areas of the cross-border region on the map, focusing on the topic of the lecture. Consequently, the cross-border space is invoked in its fragmentation through the illustration of borders on maps or the identification of distinct sub-areas. Additionally, division is achieved during the discourse itself, employing thematic contrasts wherein map areas are differently shaded and subjected to comparison. The speaker's interpretation of the map and her emphasis on differences culminate in the thematic subject itself serving as a distinguishing hallmark among sub-areas. Within the lecture practices, the division of the cross-border space is achieved through the visual representation on maps and equally manifested in the knowledge contributed and disseminated.

## Viewing the group of actors in competition and conflict

Spatial division practices frequently manifest in depicting the cross-border region under investigation. They can feature prominently in motivational speeches advocating approaches of CBC, yet conversely, they may also accentuate differences among actor groups engaged in CBC. The practices of spatial representation employed for separating distinct sub-regions through border demarcations are then intrinsically linked to the partitioning of the employee group of CBC. The demarcation lines featured within cross-border thematic maps facilitate a distinct interpretation in this regard. By representing the internal borders of the COREGIO, a comparative perspective is made possible, wherein sub-regions and their stakeholders can establish relations among themselves. These entities are thus addressed not solely as integral components of the COREGIO, but also as visible subdivisions with distinct attributes in comparison to each other.

According to a cartographer specializing in cross-border maps within the studied region, the emphasis on national borders serves a distinct social function within the context of CBC. In the process of CBC when using maps, as explained by the cartographer, competitive dynamics can arise, as exemplified through a specific case: During a collaborative effort aimed at developing joint transportation networks, one of the cartographer's maps was particularly "well received" from cooperation members. This reception was attributed to the map's capacity for "comparison," as described by the cartographer. With the help of the map, it became visible, as the cartographer comments, "here [Region A], we are already further ahead than you, we are doing more. They are further ahead in the area of [railroad expansion] than the other regions of the [COREGIO] and can be proud of that" (fieldnotes).

However, the discussion of maps does not only lead to comparison or competition practices between members of CBC. While cartographers may aspire to produce maps that facilitate collaboration and cohesion among employees originating from diverse sub-regions, achieving this objective often presents intricate challenges. Furthermore, as stated by a cartographer, maps can lead to complex situations in the social constellation of CBC. In this instance, a particular map gave rise to disagreements among cooperating employees representing distinct subregions. Specifically, the cartographer explains that the map in question highlighted various geographic areas within the border region, with each location marked for its potential contributions to the broader regional development goals. Originally conceived as a tool to guide a unified strategy for the coordinated planning and advancement of select sites within the overarching COREGIO framework across its constituent sub-regions, this vision encountered challenges due to divergent perspectives of participants on the selection and portrayal of specific sites on the map.

Instead of orienting common strategies, representatives from sub-region A expressed their discontent with both the depiction of their economic sites on the map and the proposed political courses of action suggested in relation to cross-border considerations. The cartographer's reflections shed light on the social relations at play: "Especially with the [Region A] side, there were always complicated situations in terms of interpretation and scope based on the map and interpretation of the [sites]." Ultimately, the map was excluded from the specific project to preempt inconclusive discussions. These instances underscore that while maps indeed have the potential to engender competition among various parties, they can also serve as catalysts for disputes and conflicts among representatives of the participating subregions within the larger COREGIO framework. Such instances illuminate the multifaceted role that maps play in the CBC landscape.

In conclusion, the chapter delves into the social dynamics of spatial practices and knowledge construction as well as group building within the context of CBC. The usage of cross-border thematic maps not only facilitates integration among diverse actors but also sheds light on the internal divisions within the cross-border space. While maps can serve as tools for collaboration, their depiction of divisions can also lead to competition and conflicts among sub-regions and their stakeholders. The juxtaposition of national boundaries on maps underlines both the unity and fragmentation of the cross-border region, while also influencing the perceptions and interactions of stakeholders. The intricate interplay between spatial visualization and knowledge dissemination shapes the discourse and outcomes of cross-border endeavors.

## 5.3 Theorization: The oscillating dynamic of practices of cross-border maps

The article investigates the social productivity of cross-border thematic maps within the context of CBC. To address this inquiry, the article introduces a praxeological framework for examining map usage. Within this framework, the interactions with maps are developed and described as practices occurring within publicly observable contexts. The collection of data through a participatory ethnographic methodology renders these practices visible and accessible to analysis. By offering illustrative instances from the data in the form of fieldnotes and documented conversations with cartographers gathered during fieldwork, the article provides insights that suggest further conceptualization and broader generalization of the underlying phenomena and social dynamics.

In the preceding section, the article initiates a first level of conceptualization rooted in the outcomes of ethnographic exploration. The findings point to two distinct categories of practices concerning the cross-border region and cooperation, particularly when actors explain or display maps. This distinction prompts the formulation of two fundamental modes of practices: firstly, the integrating mode, wherein maps enable the presentation of the cross-border region as an entity, fostering unity among actors or addressing their collective identity and achievement; secondly, the dividing mode, which aligns ideas and actions with the depiction of the cross-border region as a fragmented space. Additionally, this latter mode links with practices marked by competition and conflict between the different spatial parts, represented by actors from various countries.

Both modes of practices serve to illustrate that the usage of cartographic representations of the researched cross-border region is not a strictly linear nor coherent process in itself. The practices of employing maps do not exclusively

point towards the integration of the cross-border region and its stakeholders as a singular entity. Instead, these practices consistently indicate a dual perspective: one that perceives the space and its stakeholders as both unified and fragmented simultaneously. Consequently, the endeavor to generalize the process of cross-border regionalization through the lens of map practices necessitates the conception of a bifurcated social process (see Figure 3). The process of doing region using maps entails an oscillating dynamic interplay of practices capable of transitioning between modes of integration and division.
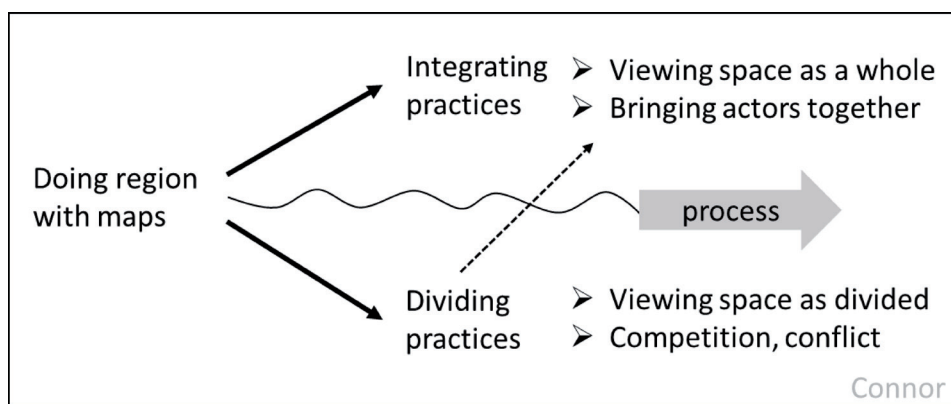


**Figure 3: The oscillating cross-border regionalization process with thematic maps**

Source: own elaboration

However, it is important to note that the two modes within this oscillating process do not hold equal significance when it comes to influencing CBC within the researched context. Instead, the findings indicate that perceiving the cross-border space as divided not only correlates with conflict and competition but can also serve as a catalyst for promoting further integrative practices. This is particularly evident when a cartographic representation of the space as a divided is employed to validate the necessity of adopting cross-border approaches and collaborative efforts. In this scenario, the unfolding practices exhibit their openness. Nevertheless, the mode of division practices remains linked to openly performed situations of competition and conflict (unlike the first mode, which lacks such a connection).

The aforementioned observation raises the question regarding the scope of the study's investigation and its potential for generalization. Given that the praxeological approach does not prioritize quantification as the primary means of constructing scientific knowledge, it becomes essential to acknowledge that

instances of publicly observable competition and conflict among members are relatively infrequent within the findings. However, this scarcity does not necessarily imply that such practices are uncommon in the broader context or that they hold lesser significance within the process of regionalization. Rather, it suggests that these practices might be less conspicuous in public events and discourses, potentially taking place more prominently on the "backstage" (Goffman, 1956, p.69) of events and on a national level when deliberating cross-border matters. In this regard, the study encounters methodological limitations. Nonetheless, it retains the capacity to shed light on the patterns and rationale underlying practices of division inherent in the usage of maps.

The study encounters a second methodological limitation pertaining to its research field and focus. Given that the examination solely revolves around a solitary cross-border region, serving as the foundational premise of the study, and merely delves into a small segment thereof, specifically manifested through the exemplification of map usage, it unavoidably goes along with scope constraints. While the study attains empirical saturation concerning the scrutinized practices, its capacity to extrapolate the findings onto a comprehensive process of cross-border regionalization applicable to the entirety of the investigated region, as well as to other regions, remains circumscribed. Consequently, there is a need for additional research initiatives aimed at elaborating on this aspect. Such endeavors can build upon and enhance the model that has been presented.

## 6. Conclusion

The presented research builds on existing studies and aims to advance the existing body of knowledge by focusing on the topic of CBC in Europe, specifically employing the practices of cross-border thematic maps in public settings as an illustrative example. To achieve this, the study redefines CBC and map usage as distinct practices. It delves into ethnographic observations of public contexts where knowledge and spatial representations on the cross-border region are produced.

The study bridges the void in scholarly exploration to describe the social productivity of cross-border maps in the context of CBC by endowing a praxe-ological perspective. As a result, it delivers empirical viewpoints and augments the theoretical grasp surrounding the empirical phenomenon. The study goes beyond mere practice descriptions and ascends to the conceptualization and gene-ralization of the underlying social dynamics. This is accomplished through the development of a model grounded in empirical analyses of map usage within the public settings of the cross-border region under scrutiny.

The examination of map practices within the cross-border context unveils a specific tension inherent in the empirical field: an oscillation between practices that foster integration and those that engender division. Within the current research on cross-border regions, the study develops the existing understanding of cross-border regionalization. It underscores the particular challenge of cross-border integration, where the regionalization process necessitates balancing the differences of national and cross-border regional interests. As such, the findings of this study provide an empirical illustration of what Sohn refers to as the "double process of deterritorialization-reterritorialization" (Sohn, 2020, p.73) within the cross-border region building. They highlight the intricacy that these regions do not form a homogenous entity; rather, they emerge from the amalgamation of distinct elements originating from separate political systems.

The presented research enriches these overarching conceptualizations by introducing a praxeological dimension. It effectively elucidates how this "double process" manifests in actual practices, particularly in the context of constructing region-related knowledge within a public setting. The ramifications of these practices and the strategies employed by stakeholders to navigate them become visibly evident.

Furthermore, the study both affirms and elaborates upon the findings of Durand and Perrin in their research on the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai. Particularly, the concept of "Coopetition" (Durand & Perrin, 2018, p.237), which the authors gathered from their interviews, resonates strongly with the findings presented herein. At the level of the scrutinized practices, actors consistently navigate the involved interplay of cooperation and competition. They perpetually generate and reiterate a distinct tension inherent in cross-border practices: the simultaneous recognition of national and cross-border dimensions.

This dynamic might offer insight into why the notion of a "laboratory" (e.g., Becker, 2005) within EU-discourses aptly applies to cross-border contexts. The social processes governing the contemplation of cross-border spaces and organizations inherently remain open-ended. These processes allude to an unfolding future yet to be fully defined. Consequently, actors are tasked with translating this challenge to their practices and devising innovative modes of cross-border coexistence that will eventually become future practices.

Finally, it is worth noting that the processes under consideration here have historical antecedents within the development of state societies. "Imagined Communities" (Anderson, 2006) as well as related spatial concepts and their visualization, for instance through maps, has long played a vital role in the emergence of political entities and their cognitive and practical accessibility (Thongchai,

1994). In this context, the border region is similarly invented and conceived through cartographic imaginaries, serving as a construct to facilitate political cooperation (Connor, 2023). While not constituting a political "territory", the practices described herein parallel historical processes of spatial invention.

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