

Inspire policy making by territorial evidence



# ESPON ACTAREA

## Thinking and planning in areas of territorial cooperation

Targeted analysis

**Final report**

Version 30/11/2017

This targeted analysis is conducted within the framework of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme, partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the members of the ESPON 2020 Monitoring Committee.

### **Authors**

Erik Gløersen, Nathalie Wergles, Clément Corbineau, Sebastian Hans, Sindi Haxhija  
Spatial Foresight (Luxembourg)  
Tobias Chilla and Franziska Sielker,  
Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (Germany)  
Jacques Félix Michelet and Lauranne Jacob,  
University of Geneva,  
Hub of Environmental Governance and Territorial Development (GEDT) (Switzerland))

### **Advisory Group**

Project Support Team:  
ESPON EGTC: Sandra di Biaggio

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank to Steering group composed of the Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE), the German Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure and the International Spatial Development Commission "Bodensee" (Lake Constance) for the stimulating dialogue throughout the duration of the project. Stakeholders of case study areas and survey respondents have also provided precious inputs, without which the present report could not have been produced.

Information on ESPON and its projects can be found on [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu).

The web site provides the possibility to download and examine the most recent documents produced by finalised and ongoing ESPON projects.

This delivery exists only in an electronic version.

© ESPON, 2017

Printing, reproduction or quotation is authorised provided the source is acknowledged and a copy is forwarded to the ESPON EGTC in Luxembourg.

Contact: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)

ISBN: 978-99959-55-18-2

**ESPON ACTAREA**  
Thinking and planning in areas of  
territorial cooperation

## Table of contents

|          |  |           |
|----------|--|-----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Soft Territorial Cooperation: Definition, Policy Issues, State of Play</b> .....  | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.1      | Conceptual framework & objectives .....  | 1         |
| 1.2      | Dimensions of soft territorial cooperation .....   | 5         |
| 1.3      | Soft Territorial Cooperation in Europe .....   | 8         |
| 1.3.1    | Trends regarding the size of cooperation areas .....   | 8         |
| 1.3.2    | 'Strategic', 'implementation' and 'instrumental' cooperation .....   | 9         |
| 1.3.3    | Role of cooperation cultures .....   | 10        |
| 1.4      | Selection of soft territorial cooperation areas and frameworks .....   | 15        |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Soft territorial cooperation in Europe: synthesis of case study findings</b> .....  | <b>17</b> |
| 2.1      | Strengths of soft territorial cooperation .....  | 17        |
| 2.2      | Bottom-up and top-down approaches are combined to fit different institutional contexts .....   | 24        |
| 2.3      | Rationales for cooperation are linked to involved actors' positioning in wider geographic contexts .....                               | 29        |
| 2.4      | Common strategic objectives evolve over time in an iterative process .....   | 33        |
| 2.5      | The role of 'soft' cooperation options in the achievement of strategic objectives .....  | 35        |
| 2.6      | Some basic financing is essential, but dedicated funding is not vital for maintaining the cooperation .....                            | 38        |
| 2.7      | Most TCAs take a pragmatic approach to region-building and combine different regionalisation logics .....                              | 39        |
| 2.8      | Dynamic cooperation instances place project-type activities in the context of a wider process of change .....                          | 43        |
| 2.9      | Most TCAs involve public actors in a MLG structure, but few involve private stakeholders as cooperation partners .....                 | 44        |
| 2.10     | Cooperation topics and types of activities are specific to the cooperation area and change over time as the TCA evolves .....          | 46        |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Soft cooperation as emerging instruments of territorial governance</b> .....  | <b>49</b> |
| 3.1      | Background: reframing 'territorial cohesion' as an objective pursued through territorial governance .....                              | 49        |
| 3.2      | Soft territorial cooperation as 'communities of intent' .....  | 50        |
| 3.3      | Promoting 'Territorial cohesion' through territorial governance .....  | 52        |
| 3.4      | Roles of soft territorial cooperation frameworks .....   | 53        |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Policy recommendations</b> .....  | <b>54</b> |
| 4.1      | Public and private actors at different levels can benefit from capacity building in the field of collaborative planning know-how ..... | 56        |
| 4.2      | A result-oriented dialogue process can help to enrich and widen the scope of soft territorial cooperation progressively .....          | 56        |
| 4.3      | Elements of 'softness' can be essential for the achievement of cooperation objectives .....  | 56        |
| 4.4      | Public actors can initiate a 'spiral of growth in cooperation' .....   | 57        |
| 4.5      | Bottom-up cooperation processes do not lead to consistent multi-level governance ....  | 58        |
| 4.6      | Facilitators play an important role in ensuring continuity of the cooperation .....  | 59        |

|     |  |           |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 4.7 | Soft territorial cooperation areas benefit from the provision of territorial evidence .....          | 59        |
| 4.8 | Cooperation frameworks have a catalytic effect on the emergence of soft territorial cooperation..... | 59        |
| 4.9 | Needs for further research and work.....   | 60        |
|     | <b>References .....</b>  | <b>61</b> |
|     | <b>Annex 1: Overview table of case studies .....</b>   | <b>64</b> |
|     | <b>Annex 2: Methodology .....</b>  | <b>70</b> |
|     | Step 1: Development of a conceptual and methodological framework .....                               | 71        |
|     | Step 2: Identification of soft territorial cooperation areas .....                                   | 73        |
|     | Step 3: Selection of case studies .....  | 75        |
|     | Step 4: Implementation of case studies .....   | 77        |
|     | Step 5: Transversal analysis and development of policy options and guidance .....                    | 80        |
|     | <b>Annex 3: Tools for enhanced dialogue:</b>   |           |
|     | <b>mapshots, institutional mapping and spider graphs.....</b>  | <b>81</b> |
|     | Introduction to institutional mapping .....  | 81        |
|     | Introduction to mapshots .....   | 82        |
|     | Methodology .....  | 83        |
|     | A differentiated approach to mapshots and their contextualised uses.....                             | 86        |
|     | Introduction to spider graphs .....  | 88        |

## List of Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1.1: Positioning soft cooperation instances<br>in complex systems of geographic and sectoral interdependencies..... | 5  |
| Figure 1.2 Development of the territorial size of the cooperation formats over time.....                                   | 8  |
| Figure 1.3 Type of cooperation – development over time.....  | 10 |
| Figure 1.4 Cooperation cultures and the rise of soft cooperation formats over time .....                                   | 12 |
| Figure 1.5 Soft planning culture and kind of cooperation (strategic orientation).....                                      | 14 |
| Figure 1.6 Synthetic overview .....  | 14 |
| Figure 2.1: Cooperation area.....  | 18 |
| Figure 2.2: Gotthard Action Area.....  | 20 |
| Figure 2.3: Cooperation map Swiss Capital Region AA.....   | 22 |
| Figure 2.4: Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion cooperation area .....   | 23 |
| Figure 2.5: Halmstad cooperation area .....  | 27 |
| Figure 2.6: Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino.....   | 31 |
| Figure 2.7: Territorial Pole ‘Pays de Retz’ .....  | 32 |
| Figure 2.8: Institutional map .....  | 32 |
| Figure 2.9: Aareland Action Area .....   | 34 |
| Figure 2.10: Spider graph (1–very low to 4–very high) .....  | 36 |
| Figure 2.11: Cooperation landscape around the ROK-B cooperation.....   | 36 |
| Figure 2.12: Belfast-Dublin corridor.....  | 40 |
| Figure 2.13: Institutional map of Jura Massif AA.....  | 42 |
| Figure 2.14: Institutional map of Lake Geneva AA.....  | 45 |
| Figure 2.15: Greater Copenhagen Business Region .....  | 48 |
| Figure A3.1: Example of a spider graph.....  | 89 |

## List of Tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1.1 Dimensions and characteristics of soft territorial cooperation instances .....            | 7  |
| Table 1.2 Soft cooperation culture types.....   | 11 |
| Table 3.1 Territorial governance versus functional governance .....                                 | 52 |
| Table A3.1 Visualisation of analytical dimensions in spider graphs.....                             | 89 |
| Table A3.2 Assignment of spider graph values<br>based on cooperation instance characteristics ..... | 90 |

## List of Text Boxes

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Box 2.1 Regional strategic planning Lower Austria – Region north of Vienna.....     | 18 |
| Box 2.2 Gotthard Action Area and the San Gottardo Programme .....                   | 20 |
| Box 2.3 Swiss Capital Region Action Area and Swiss Capital Region Association ..... | 22 |
| Box 2.4 Euroregion Alps-Mediterranean.....  | 23 |

|          |   |    |
|----------|---|----|
| Box 2.5  | Hungarian Regional Development Council (RDC) .....            | 24 |
| Box 2.6  | French Territorial Poles .....                                | 25 |
| Box 2.7  | Halmstad cooperation.....                                     | 27 |
| Box 2.8  | Swiss Spatial Strategy and Action Areas .....                 | 28 |
| Box 2.9  | Danish Business Regions.....                                  | 28 |
| Box 2.10 | Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino .....                   | 31 |
| Box 2.11 | Territorial Pole Pays de Retz.....                            | 32 |
| Box 2.12 | Aareland Action Area and Aareland Association.....            | 34 |
| Box 2.13 | Spatial Development Commission of Lake Constance .....        | 36 |
| Box 2.14 | Belfast–Dublin corridor and Newry-Dundalk gateway .....       | 40 |
| Box 2.15 | Jura Massif Action Area and the Arcjurassien Cooperation..... | 42 |
| Box 2.16 | Lake Geneva Action Area and the Lake Geneva Council.....      | 45 |
| Box 2.17 | Greater Copenhagen Business Region.....                       | 48 |

## Abbreviations

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| AA      | Action Area   |
| ARE     | Schweizerisches Bundesamt für Raumentwicklung                                   |
| CBC     | Cross-border cooperation  |
| EC      | European Commission   |
| ECP     | ESPON Contact Point   |
| EGTC    | European Grouping of Territorial Cooperaiton                                    |
| ERDV    | European Region Danube-Vltava   |
| ESF     | European Social Fund  |
| ESIF    | European Structural and Investment Funds  |
| ESPON   | European Territorial Observatory Network  |
| EU      | European Union  |
| IBK     | Internationale Bodensee-Konferenz   |
| MP      | Metropolitan Pole   |
| NGO/GO  | Non-governmental organisaiton/governmental organisation                         |
| NRP     | Swiss New Regional Policy   |
| NUTS    | Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics                                |
| ROK-B   | Raumordnungskommission Bodensee / Spatial Planning Commission Lake<br>Constance |
| SCOT    | Schéma de Cohérence Territorial   |
| SSS     | Swiss Spatial Strategy  |
| RMT/TMO | Région métropolitaine trinationale / Trinationale Metropolregion Oberrhein      |
| TCA     | Territorial cooperation area  |
| TFEU    | Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union                                 |
| TNC     | Transnational cooperation   |
| TP      | Territorial Pole  |

## Executive summary

ESPON ACTAREA has analysed 24 examples of 'soft territorial cooperation areas' across Europe, taking as a starting point Swiss efforts to promote thinking and planning in so-called 'Action Areas' (AAs), i.e. new forms of soft governance spaces with fuzzy, flexible boundaries that span across national and regional administrative boundaries and link urban and rural development policies. It has identified good practices and developed tools to describe and develop cooperation across Europe, considering both individual cooperation instances and cooperation frameworks put in place primarily by national authorities.

**Soft territorial cooperation areas** are instances of territorial governance. They bring together actors concerned by a set of territorial challenges and opportunities and who are prepared to elaborate and implement strategies to address them jointly. Their sectoral scope and geographical boundaries are generally defined in an 'open' or 'fuzzy' way. When choosing case studies, the project focused on initiatives with the following characteristics:

- a medium to long term integrative perspective (i.e. are not limited to the implementation of a single project);
- an ambition to enhance the capacities of involved players, making them actors of their own development;
- a determination to renew relations between institutional levels, sectors of activity and types of actors (e.g. NGOs, private companies, local and regional authorities, agencies...).

Soft territorial cooperation instances can also be approached as '**communities of intent**'. The existence of such a 'community' is the output of a cooperation process. However, it only emerges if a convergence of interest between involved actors can be achieved. Proponents of soft territorial cooperation are therefore typically actors that manage to **identify** potential such 'communities' and to **facilitate** the process leading to their emergence. This requires concrete competencies in fields such as process design and workshop facilitation, combined with intimate knowledge of local and regional contexts ('Fingerspitzengefühl').

## Findings

Soft territorial cooperation initiatives typically progress by identifying **win-win situations**. The focus typically needs to be on issues where involved actors share the similar interests because they are embedded in the same territory. However, soft territorial cooperation is not an appropriate solution when dealing with conflictual issues, or issues with a potentially asymmetric outcome (e.g. in terms of resource allocation).

Cooperation is not an end in itself. It is generally a process driven by the identification of issues that are either not addressed, or dealt with in a sub-optimal way by established 'hard' structures.

### **Soft territorial cooperation are not alternatives, but complements to ‘hard’ structures.**

The review of soft territorial cooperation frameworks and concrete instances has shown that these are not alternatives, but complements to ‘hard’ structures. Thinking and planning in soft territorial cooperation areas can overcome some of the constraints of dealing with territorial development within administratively defined territories and by means of ‘hard’ statutory planning instruments. Frequently invoked constraints are linked to the observed failure of political-administrative territories to address functional interlinkage, the ‘silo-mentality’ of traditional sectoral planning and rigid institutional systems. Case studies have brought to light several strengths of soft territorial cooperation areas:

- The organisational flexibility of soft territorial cooperation instances increases ownership and implementation. Due to the participatory nature of governance in soft territorial cooperation areas, actors are encouraged to take charge of their own development. This instils a sense of ownership and is likely to increase the commitment to implementing planning outcomes.
- The territorial fuzziness of soft territorial cooperation areas provide flexibility to tackle territorial issues at the ‘right’ geographical scale as it allows public authorities to optimise the scale and geographic boundaries of policy design and implementation.
- Membership variety of soft territorial cooperation instances make it possible to involve different tiers of government and public and private stakeholders on equal footing. Cooperation in soft territorial cooperation areas can potentially strengthen multi-level governance, leading to a renewal of relationships between various tiers of government.

### **‘Soft’ cooperation options are important for the achievement of strategic objectives.**

Soft territorial cooperation instances were analysed and compared regarding their degree of ‘softness’ in terms of their territorial fuzziness, thematic openness, organisational flexibility, resource diversity and membership variety. This review has revealed that soft territorial cooperation instances individually combine ‘softer’ and ‘harder’ elements, but that ‘softness’ plays in all cases an important role in the achievement of cooperation objectives.

- **Territorial fuzziness:** Findings show that soft territorial cooperation areas take a pragmatic approach to region-building and combine different regionalisation logics. There is also not necessarily a one-to-one relation between territories and communities. Soft forms of cooperation are not always embedded in a ‘territory’ that would satisfy the notion of ‘region’ as a continuous area. They may also be linked to a network of places (e.g. the City Network of Jura Massif (RVAJ), the Metropolitan Pole ‘Sillon lorrain’). Such approaches may raise issues concerning territorial cohesion in the area as a whole. Forums for dialogue and exchange established by a cooperation instances between urban nodes may for example exclude rural stakeholders, and therefore make their issues and ambitions less visible. Findings have also shown that the fuzziness of the geographic cooperation perimeter is, in practice, rather limited.

This may be explained by the fact that the development of a cooperation culture, i.e. a 'habit' of cooperation, requires continuity and, hence, a degree of stability in the cooperation partnership and area.

- **Thematic openness:** Most of the analysed soft territorial cooperation areas have an integrative, multisectoral focus and only few focus on a single topic. They often start out with one (dominant) topic and add new cooperation topics over time, adjusting the cooperation to recent policy developments (e.g. Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino). Some of the cooperation initiatives (e.g. Metropolitan pole 'Sillon lorrain') are mainly implemented through individual projects within single sectors, while others have not yet really moved beyond the level of networking activities (e.g. European Region Danube-Vltava). Findings show that dynamic cooperation instances manage to place project-type activities in the context of a wider process of change.
- **Organisational flexibility:** Analysed cases present different degrees of formalisation and types of institutionalisation, from open cooperation configurations with no dedicated cooperation structure or a very limited one to highly institutionalised collaborations with a dedicated body having own legal personality. All these arrangements can be equally valid, depending on the pursued outcome. Actors may intentionally use the soft character for strategic reasons, e.g. because they want to organise coordination and address identified challenges without creating an additional formal structure that adds to institutional complexity (e.g. Metropolitan pole 'Sillon Lorrain'), or because they see themselves as complementary to other existing and more institutionalised collaborations (e.g. Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine). Expected concrete and 'hard' results (e.g. binding regional strategic plans in Lower Austria) seem to require a higher degree of formalisation than soft cooperation results.
- **Resource diversity:** 'Resources' are understood as the sum of statutory, financial and discursive instruments that are mobilised for a given cooperation instance. Reviewed cases demonstrate the critical importance of organisational and methodological support to soft cooperation initiative. Basic funding is a vital part of it as it ensures that facilitation can be stable over time, that past experiences are capitalised upon and that competence in the field of cooperation can be accumulated. Findings also indicate that dedicated funding of soft territorial cooperation activities is not a prerequisite for the development of a dynamic cooperation.
- **Membership variety:** Analysed cases of soft territorial cooperation are more or less 'soft' with regards to their openness to different stakeholders. While participation of private sector stakeholders and the general public is an important ingredient of territorial governance, case studies showed that there are also situations in which it makes sense to keep cooperation to the level of public actors only: a) early-stage collaborations that are still in the phase of fathoming what the different positions and objectives of the public partners are and where the involvement of other bodies would

disturb the process (e.g. Halmstad), and b) collaborative planning processes that aim to produce a politically endorsed result that protects general public interests and where single private stakeholder interests ought not play a role (e.g. strategic planning region north of Vienna).

### **The core challenge is to stimulate a ‘spiral of growth in cooperation’.**

For soft territorial cooperation to remain relevant over time, it has to continuously develop, adapt to changing conditions, and create new cooperation momenta. Typical phases are

- Intense dialogue, identification of relevant actors, networking, exploration (‘getting to know each other’), consensus-building...
- Implementation
- Collection and processing of experiences
- Renewal of cooperation based on accumulated experiences and evolution of framework conditions.

Cooperation objectives and organisational setups are in these respects in a dialectic relation to each other. This dialectic relation may translate in operational terms into successive mutually reinforcing feedback loops and a ‘spiral of growth in cooperation’: an initial organisational setup triggers a first set of strategic actions, of which the implementation leads to adjustment in the organisational setup, which may itself generate revised ambitions for cooperative action. For this ‘spiral of growth in cooperation’ to happen, soft territorial cooperation requires continuous encouragement, even if one may succeed in establishing a territorial ‘brand’ or ‘shared identity’, and in changing working habits so that cooperative initiatives become easier to implement. The understanding of the cycle is important for the assessment of soft territorial cooperation dynamics and can guide its implementation.

### **The importance of providing a framework for result-oriented dialogue processes**

‘Soft territorial cooperation’ builds on the identification of perceptions, interests and objectives that tend to be shared by actors of a specific territory. Designing and implementing concrete cooperation initiatives on this basis requires appropriate frameworks for dialogue. Since relevant actors do not necessarily possess the skills and resources needed to organise a collaborative, consensus-oriented cooperation process, European and national frameworks are needed to provide access to a wider range of human and financial resources and to facilitate cooperation. Furthermore, soft cooperation often has to position itself in the complex field of sectoral and territorial interdependencies and institutional settings, which calls for a cooperation framework that coordinates cooperation. The role of national and European authorities is therefore essential in a number of different respects:

- Providing support and necessary expertise as well as instruments to cooperation processes
- Coordinating different cooperation initiatives
- Providing legitimacy to the territorial cooperation approach

- Proposing a policy narrative on the role of territorial cooperation in the promotion of a more sustainable and cohesive development
- Providing a regulatory framework
- Helping to disseminate good practices
- Providing essential basic funding to ensure continuity in the processes.

The Swiss delineation of 'Action Areas' is a component of a comprehensive national framework developed based on a dialogue between national, regional and local stakeholders. This experience has shown that a joint elaboration involving actors from different levels is helpful, but not sufficient, to establish an effective soft territorial cooperation framework. Continuous efforts are needed to identify potential fields of cooperation, mobilise relevant actors, facilitate dialogues and implement measures. The extent to which these efforts need to be supported in top-down depends on pre-existing cooperation traditions. When regional and local organisations have well-established cooperation capacities and cultures, they may use a framework more independently. In other cases, support is needed. Evidence shows that it typically takes multiple decades to develop strong cooperation capacities and cultures, and cross-border cooperation often functions as a catalyst for enhanced cooperation within countries.

# **1 Soft Territorial Cooperation: Definition, Policy Issues, State of Play**

The starting point for the present analysis are Swiss efforts at promoting thinking and planning in so-called 'Action Areas' (AAs), i.e. new forms of soft governance spaces with fuzzy, flexible boundaries that span across (national) administrative boundaries and link urban and rural development policies, which can also be described as 'soft spaces', a concept developed by Allmendinger and Haughton (2009). In parallel, collaborative and bottom-up territorial development initiatives in other parts of Europe have been explored.

The project group has sought to identify initiatives through which public authorities adjust the scale and geographic boundaries of policy design and implementation so that they are meaningful from a functional point of view and embedded in groupings of stakeholders that can share a joint development project. Such initiatives will in many cases be the result of national meta-governance policy frameworks, such as subsidy schemes, guidelines and conditional policy delivery, aiming at stimulating bottom-up initiatives (Waterhout, 2010: 5).

The objective is, first, to identify good practices with regard to different governance models, and the implementation and long-term impacts of these initiatives.

Second, preconditions for different types of solutions have been reviewed, both in terms of division of responsibilities between levels of government and possibilities to rely on non-public actors to support the elaboration of territorially embedded, joint strategies. There is no one-size-fits-all solution that provides a blueprint for initiation of territorial cooperation. Substantial differences in challenges, conditions and needs of regions require a context-sensitive approach and limit the transferability of one successful model between regions (cf. European Commission, 2015:51). Transferability of cooperation frameworks, methods and techniques has therefore been critically assessed.

Third, the project has produced a series of methods and tools for analysing and visualising soft territorial cooperation and frameworks set up to promote such cooperation: an analytical matrix with eight dimensions and spider graphs (see section 1.2), as well as 'mapshots' and institutional mappings (see Annex 3).

## **1.1 Conceptual framework & objectives**

The objective of the ACTAREA project is to identify and analyse examples of soft territorial cooperation and draw generalizable lessons from them on

- Reasons for establishing soft territorial cooperation initiatives and advantages/disadvantages over more traditional and, mostly, 'harder' approaches to territorial development;

- Policy frameworks and (successful) strategies to stimulate the (bottom-up) emergence of cooperation initiatives, motivate actors to participate, and overcome barriers to cooperation;
- Appropriate structures and necessary resources for the implementation of soft, bottom-up collaborations, approaches to region-building/ regionalisation and promising areas of intervention through soft cooperation;
- The potential long-term impact that soft cooperation has beyond the concrete cooperation objectives.

A crucial aspect of the study was to circumscribe the object of study. Many territorial cooperation initiatives have been established in Europe (e.g. Interreg, EU macro-regional strategies), some of which have been analysed extensively in other studies (including ESPON studies, e.g. ESPON TERCO). However, the Swiss AAs represent a specific type of territorial cooperation: their geographies extend beyond functional urban areas and stretch across domestic and, partly, also national borders, their perimeters are deliberately fuzzy, and they lack designated formal structures for their implementation, but instead rely entirely on bottom-up initiatives from stakeholders on the ground.

Rather than trying to identify identical examples of territorial cooperation, the study set out to identify and analyse initiatives that follow the same type of logic and fit the following definition:

**Soft territorial cooperation areas** are initiatives that define the sectoral scope and geographical boundaries in an 'open' or 'fuzzy' way, based on a notion of 'community of intent'. Their other main characteristics are:

- a medium to long term integrative perspective (i.e. not limited to the implementation of a single project);
- seeking to enhance the capacities of involved players, making them actors of their own development;
- renewing relations between institutional levels, sectors of activity and types of actors (e.g. NGOs, private companies, local and regional authorities, agencies...).

The scope and focus of the study was shaped against the backdrop of a number of important contemporary debates on European spatial development:

#### a) Territorial governance

European integration and EU regional policy gave rise to the debate on 'territorial governance', which refers to the management of territorial development without necessarily relying on hard statutory planning instruments (Zonneveld et al., 2012). Territorial governance (cf. ESPON & Nordregio, 2014) relies on resources of spatial development that go far beyond juridical mandates, regulations and rules, but focus on interactive resources that include practices and techniques, coordination, integration, and mobilization. It further has a multi-level character, linking public authorities and, importantly, various other stakeholders in a joint endeavour of territorial development.

## b) Territorial Capital, Place Based Policy and Smart Specialisation

In recent years, important strands of the debate have focussed on regional development that builds on specific characteristics of the territories. On the one hand, the concept of 'territorial capital' was brought up, referring to "the set of localized assets – natural, human, artificial, organizational, relational and cognitive – that constitute the competitive potential of a given territory" (Camagini and Capello, 2013:1387). On the other hand, the notion of "place-based approach" was coined by Barca (2009), stressing the need of territory-specific action to tackle the "persistent underutilization of potential [...] in specific places". Both concepts have influenced the 'smart specialization concept' that promotes "tailored policy recommendations, contingent on the region's existing knowledge assets" (McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2015:1300).

## c) Functional regions and soft space planning

A third important debate relates to observations of a certain misfit between political/administrative spaces and functional interlinkages that result from territorial, economic and political dynamics and the relevance of considering functional areas when addressing different spatial development trends. 'Soft spaces', on the other hand, describe the relevance of open frameworks with respect to processes, participants and territorial boundaries and timeframes in order to overcome constraints presented by fixed borders and rigid institutional settings (Allmendinger et al., 2014; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009).

**Soft territorial cooperation areas**, as understood here, are considered as instances of territorial governance, building on specific territorial challenges and opportunities and having a strategic outlook. They are conceived as '**communities of intent**'. This implies that actors seek to identify common perceptions, interests and objectives linked to their shared belonging or embeddedness to a cooperation area. This leads them to jointly address current territory-specific opportunities and challenges and agree on strategic development options.

***Community of intent** stands for a voluntary collaboration open to public and private actors who decide to jointly address territory-specific opportunities and challenges. They cooperate across institutional levels and administrative boundaries on strategic development options based on needs and strategic ambitions linked to their shared territorial embeddedness ('intent'). The 'community' is a networked set of actors that seek to enhance their influence within certain fields without applying a rigid concept of membership.*

It is important to clarify that territories that get together to form a 'community of intent' are not necessarily 'glued' together by functional linkages. The cooperation 'glue' may also be a sense of community or the search for allies in an effort to better withstand external pressures (see more on cooperation rationales under 2.3). However, in the medium to long term cooperation may in many cases result in functional integration. Causality relations of functional spaces and

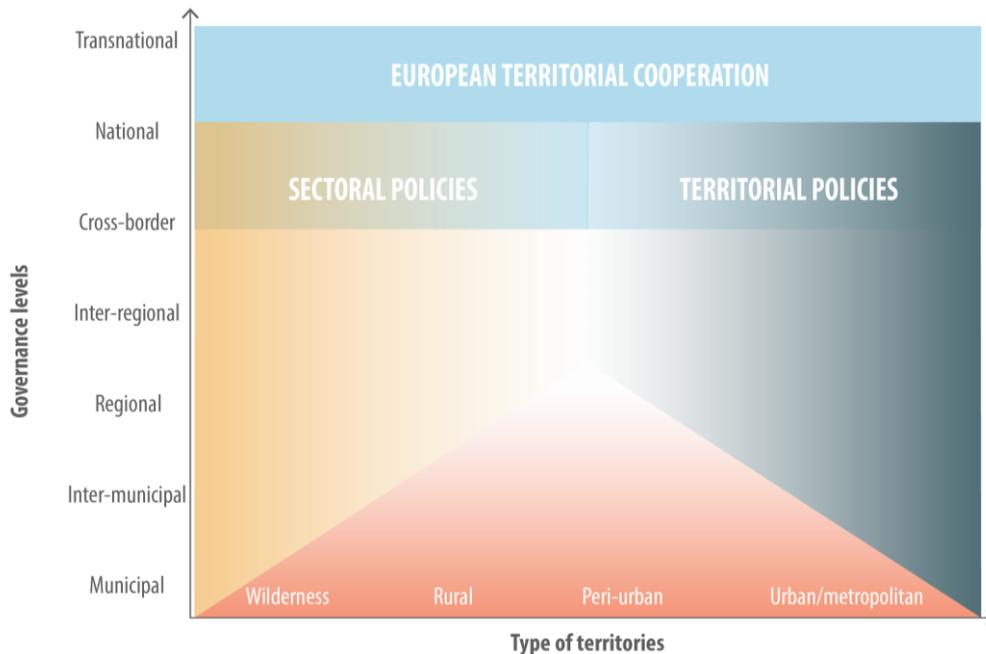
communities of intent are therefore, in some respect, inverted. Furthermore, and in spite of its voluntary nature, even if the notion 'community of intent' may suggest mainly bottom-up driven initiatives, they often require a considerable deal of 'top-down' stimulation. In many of the analysed cases, they are the result of European, national or regional policy frameworks that can for example take the form of strategies, subsidy schemes, guidelines or conditional policy delivery. Top-down stimulation can also be in the form of facilitation (c.f. the Twin City Newry-Dundalk, the regional strategic planning in Lower Austria). From a conceptual point of view, the notion of 'communities of intent' refers to two debates: Firstly, the debate on deliberative democracy underlines that political action cannot only rely on formalised procedures organised in territorial 'boxes' but has to consider practical and dynamic aspects, too (e.g. Davoudi, 2015). At the same time, communities of intent follow a neo-institutionalist thinking that considers institutions to be more than jurisdictional issues but focus on accepted ways of doing things (Rodrik, 2007).

#### **d) Dealing with complexity**

Soft territorial cooperation is a component of a strategy to address complexity. Sectoral and hierarchic forms of policy-making tend to be inefficient when confronted to the increasingly interconnected nature of the trends and influences at different levels shaping the social, economic and ecological environment of individuals and communities. When seeking to overcome this challenge, traditional spatial planning strategies may be confronted both to the reluctance of sectoral authorities to transfer authority to coordinating bodies, and to the difficulty of managing sectoral interdependencies without putting an unacceptable additional burden on relevant parties. Soft territorial cooperation allows actors to flexibly identify the most relevant issues, partners and methods when confronted with concrete challenges resulting from this complex system of interdependencies.

From the perspective of a national or European authority seeking to promote or monitor soft cooperation, it may be purposeful to describe how different initiatives position themselves within these complex fields of sectoral and geographic interdependence. Figure 1.1 illustrates this complex playing field in which territorial governance has to move, dealing with different governance levels, types of territories, sectoral policies (e.g. agriculture, energy, transport and environment) and territorial policies (e.g. metropolitan, regional and rural policies). Soft territorial governance has to take these dimensions and interdependences into account. At the same time, it has the potential to break open existing structures and competence areas and/ or achieve better coordination among them.

Figure 1.1: Positioning soft cooperation instances in complex systems of geographic and sectoral interdependencies



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

## 1.2 Dimensions of soft territorial cooperation

Following the project definition of 'soft territorial cooperation' introduced above, the project took a further step towards its operationalisation: eight dimensions characterising soft territorial cooperation instances were defined as well as different possible manifestations of these dimensions:

- 1.) **Strategic ambitions:** Soft territorial cooperation instances predominantly focus on integrated strategy and governance development. Cooperation is not limited to the implementation of single projects (e.g. infrastructure development).
- 2.) **Degree and type of formalisation:** Different organisational structures are possible, but informal, semi-formal forms of organisation prevail. The soft territorial cooperation provides the framework for bottom-up concretisation.
- 3.) **Resources:** The notion of 'resources' is understood as the sum of statutory, financial and discursive instruments that are mobilised for a given cooperation instance. Soft territorial cooperation relies mainly on non-statutory instruments and may have some own financial resources, but mainly draws on a variety of external funding sources.
- 4.) **Territorial dimension:** It describes the geographical scale and territorial coverage. The perimeter of soft territorial cooperation areas is predominantly defined bottom-up by the cooperation partners and open to modifications. Fully flexible, fuzzy geographies are also possible. Often the cooperation area involves various territories across national or international borders. Main focus is on regional cooperation, encompassing

multiple urban nodes (towns/cities) and their surrounding influence areas (e.g. commuting area), and other rural areas.

- 5.) **Temporal dimension:** It refers to the degree of continuity and stability of the cooperation. Soft territorial cooperation tends to have a medium to long-term perspective.
- 6.) **Levels and actors:** Soft territorial cooperation is open to a variety of actors, public as well as private, and often involves different tiers of government.
- 7.) **Areas of intervention:** It refers to the cooperation topics addressed. Soft territorial cooperation is not limited to one sector policy, even though a specific sectoral cooperation need may have triggered the cooperation in the first place.
- 8.) **Kind of activities:** Soft territorial cooperation focuses on a diversity of activities. Cooperation is not limited to a single project implementation.

Table 1.1 gives an overview of the eight dimensions characterising soft territorial cooperation instances, their different possible manifestations and how they relate to the ACTAREA definition of soft territorial cooperation.

Table 1.1 Dimensions and characteristics of soft territorial cooperation instances

|                          | Dimension  | Potential characteristics   | ESPON ACTAREA Definition   |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| Policy context           | <b>Strategic ambition</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strategic long-term goals</li> <li>- concrete implementation tasks</li> <li>- few opportunities for influence ('opening up')</li> <li>- open-ended process vs. process with pre-defined objectives</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- predominance of <b>strategic</b> integrated goals</li> <li>- not limited to implementation of particular projects</li> <li>- <b>'open-up'</b> the elaboration of strategies and plans</li> <li>- actor constellation allows involved players to enhance their capacities ('empowerment')</li> </ul>   |
|                          | Degree and type of <b>formalisation</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- informal vs. formal</li> <li>- own executive committee vs. no own institutionalization</li> <li>- relevance of ad-hoc activities</li> <li>- governance arrangements</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>given framework for bottom-up concretisation</b></li> <li>- <b>predominance of informal, semi-formal non-statutory forms of organization</b></li> <li>- different governance settings possible</li> </ul>  |
|                          | <b>Resources</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- juridical mandates</li> <li>- financial resources, incentives, human resources</li> <li>- discursive tools (agenda-setting, marketing...)</li> <li>- concrete missions vs. open framework</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>predominance of non-judicial instruments</b></li> <li>- no precondition as regards to budget</li> </ul>  |
| Geographical logic       | <b>Territorial coverage / geographical scale</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- amendable vs. static</li> <li>- fuzzy boundaries</li> <li>- domestic or cross-border</li> <li>- size: small – large (sub-local, local, urban, metropolitan, regional, national, macro-regional,...)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>flexible perimeter</b> (bottom-up)</li> <li>- not limited to but linked with administrative spaces</li> <li>- <b>crossing borders</b> of domestic and in most cases national borders</li> <li>- ideally, the geographical scale should be <b>regional, i.e. encompassing multiple urban nodes (towns/cities) and their surrounding influence areas / commuting areas, and in some cases also other rural areas.</b></li> </ul> |
| Time-frame               | <b>Timeframe / Historicity / Continuity</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- duration, open-ended vs. fixed timeframe</li> <li>- short, medium, long-term</li> <li>- defined vs. undefined</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- medium to long-term perspective</li> <li>- no precondition as regards to fixed vs. open timeframe</li> </ul>  |
| Levels & actors          | <b>Levels and actors</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- public stakeholder (administration, ministries)</li> <li>- NGOs or GOs</li> <li>- private stakeholders</li> <li>- regional to EU level</li> <li>- no. of stakeholders</li> <li>- Amendable vs. static</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>more than two (types of) stakeholders</b> (public/private, regional/local level, ...)</li> <li>- <b>open</b> for new membership and for exits</li> </ul>   |
| Patterns of intervention | <b>Areas of intervention</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sectoral policies</li> <li>- spatial planning</li> <li>- integrative vs. sectoral approach</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>more than sectoral policies</b></li> <li>- however, often start with sectoral needs</li> </ul>   |
|                          | Kind of <b>activities</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strategy development</li> <li>- Projects</li> <li>- Roundtables</li> <li>- ....</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>diversity</b> of activities possible</li> <li>- not limited to a single project implementation</li> </ul>  |

Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017).

### 1.3 Soft Territorial Cooperation in Europe

The project started with an exploration of soft cooperation in Europe, carrying out a survey among planning experts across Europe to identify and characterise instances of soft cooperation. Additional inputs were collected by through desktop research and literature review (see Annex 2 for details on the methodology). The objective was primarily to identify individual cooperation initiatives and related policy frameworks, but the results of the survey were also analysed as such by classifying, where possible, the collected (qualitative) data in order to obtain quantitative data that can be analysed and presented in the form of institutional maps (see Annex 3). The present section synthesises results of this European survey, based on a cross-analysis of four categories (strategic ambitions of the cooperation, role of planning cultures, territorial size and the year of initialisation).

Results show that the understanding of 'soft cooperation' differs from country to country and from region to region. The survey was exploratory and open-ended, asking respondents to name soft territorial cooperation instances that would fit into the above-mentioned definition. Hence, the survey brought up a large variety of soft cooperation instances, comprising e.g. cluster projects, city region cooperation and general strategic frameworks for spatial development.

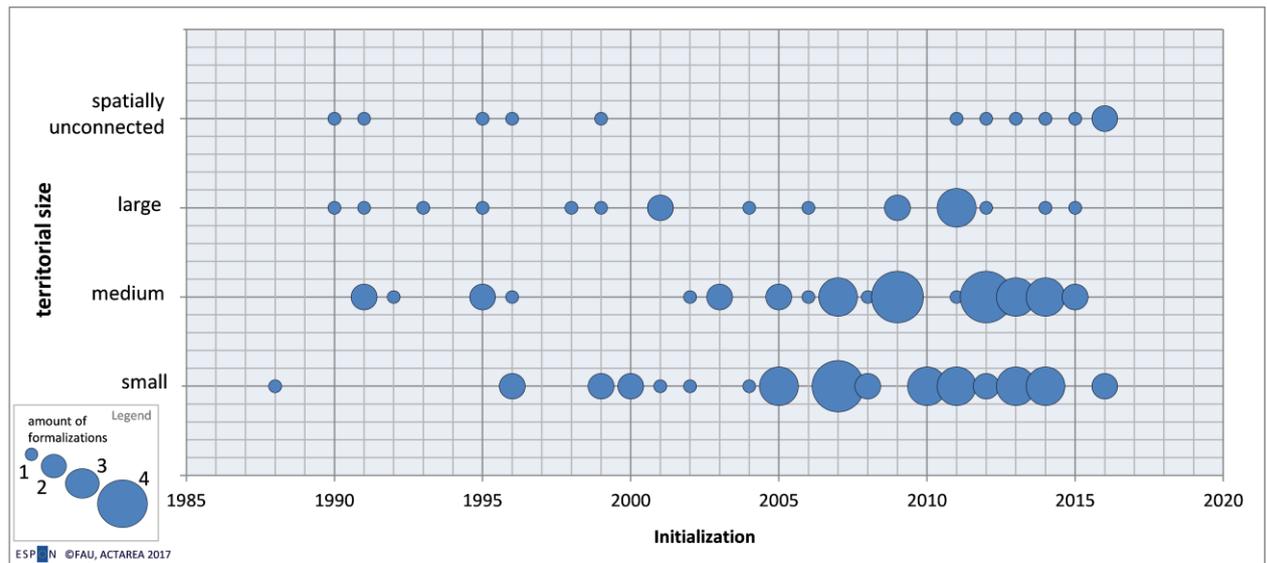
#### 1.3.1 Trends regarding the size of cooperation areas

Figure 1.2 shows the development of the size of cooperation instances that interviewed experts considered to be 'soft'. Answers are categorised in four classes: categories 'small', 'medium' and 'large' reflect the extent of the cooperation areas in square kilometres. The fourth category corresponds to 'spatially unconnected territories' (i.e. networks) as e.g. the Union of the Baltic Cities. The figure suggests that many cooperation initiatives were initiated after 2005. However, this may also be linked to the fact that interviewees tend to focus on newer examples, especially when it comes to 'instrumental' forms of cooperation. This aspect is further elaborated below.

Keeping this limitation in mind, one can observe the following patterns:

- Many medium-extent cooperation initiatives were established in the last decade. Most of the ESPON ACTAREA case studies belong to this category.
- Many small-extent cooperation initiatives were established in the 2000s. This can partly be explained by an emerging interest in functional interlinkages within metropolitan regions (Leber and Kunzmann, 2006). Typical examples here are the *Métropole européenne de Lille* or the *Arnhem Nijmegen City Region*.
- Territorial cooperation networks (i.e. 'spatially unconnected' cooperation areas) were mainly established in the 1990s. City networks are the most prominent form of such cooperation (e.g. Metrex, Union of Polish Metropolises).

*Figure 1.2 Development of the territorial size of the cooperation formats over time (Small  $\leq 7.500$  km<sup>2</sup>; medium = 7.501 - 75.000 km<sup>2</sup>, large  $>75.000$  km<sup>2</sup>)*



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

The driving forces behind this dynamic in soft cooperation formats are manifold:

- EU regional policy does trigger new dynamics in territorial cooperation. Many funding opportunities initiate or support cross-border or interregional cooperation networks.
- Processes of globalisation have encouraged the emergence of new forms of cooperation since the 1990s. This trend encompasses a) the regional positioning in a wider, transnational context, b) regional ambitions to reach a critical mass to assert themselves internationally (e.g. Greater Copenhagen) and c) regions seeking to influence EU policies (e.g. Brussels representation offices).

### 1.3.2 ‘Strategic’, ‘implementation’ and ‘instrumental’ cooperation

Since the 1990s, ‘planning’ has increasingly been characterised as ‘strategic’ (Albrechts, 2006). This implies that the focus is on defining long-term sectoral and territorial priorities. EU regional policy has also played a significant role in this re-orientation following the crisis of more technical forms of spatial planning during the 1980s.

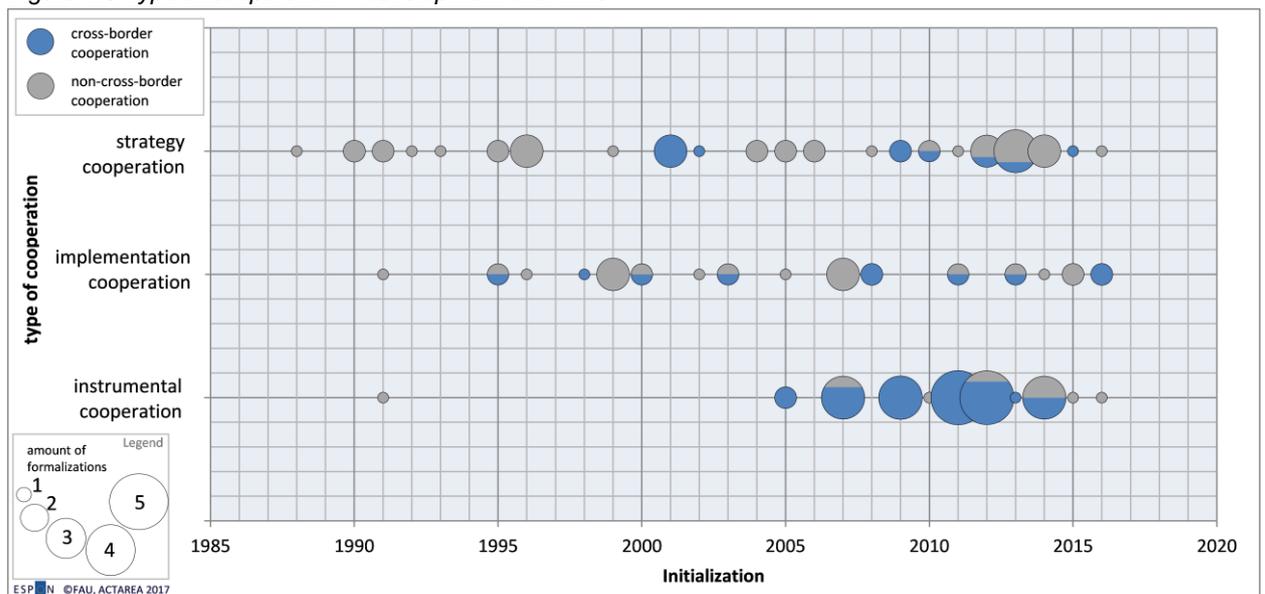
Figure 1.3 reflects this development by categorising three types of territorial cooperation.

- **‘Strategic cooperation’** is of more general character. It is open to concretisations and agenda-setting over time. Figure 1.3 shows that this understanding of territorial cooperation is a very constant element since the 1990s. The case of the ‘European Region Danube- Vltava’ illustrates this type of approach (see Annex 4). Within this type, sectoral priorities are an output of the cooperation process; they are not defined in advance.
- **‘Implementation cooperation’** started gaining momentum in the late 1990s. It implies a shift of focus towards a concretisation of development agendas. At the same time, implementation is not only considered as sorting under traditional, domestic administrative institutions. The Lower Austria ‘regional strategic planning’ exemplifies

this type of approach (see Annex 4). The central objective of cooperation initiatives sorting under this category is to facilitate the implementation of spatial planning objectives. The ‘Thames Gateway Development Corporation’ that accompanied the Dockland development and local brownfield conversion is an often-cited example of such cooperation.

- **‘Instrumental cooperation’** instances have a narrow thematic focus and concentrate on achieving concrete sectoral or territorial objectives. One should not over-estimate the fact that all identified such cooperation instances were initiated from 2005 onwards. This kind of cooperation typically only lasts for a short time and has limited visibility. Interviewed experts may therefore have considered older initiatives as irrelevant. An instructive example of such cooperation is the project MOBI2GRID which aims to increase electro-mobility in the Euroregion Galicia-Norte-de-Portugal.
- The figure also describes the extent to which cooperation initiatives have a **cross-border dimension**. Interestingly, instrumental initiatives are more often of cross-border character than those that focus on implementation and strategy. Overall, a majority of identified cooperation instances have a cross-border dimension.

Figure 1.3 Type of cooperation – development over time



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

### 1.3.3 Role of cooperation cultures

When conducting the interviews and analyses, it became clear that understandings of what soft cooperation is and the roles it may play vary depending on the region that is considered. Observed differences follow some geographical patterns that correlate with previously described classifications of planning cultures that have been central in the description of European spatial policies over the last decades. The basic idea is that spatial policy and planning are embedded in a variety of societal norms and habits (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2015; Stead et al., 2015). The contexts comprise formal planning tools, institutional planning

systems and societal bases like the organisation of the welfare state. It is not surprising that the development of territorial cooperation formats is part of this system.

Planning cultures have been classified in different and sometimes contradicting ways (ESPON, 2006; European Commission DG REGIO, 1997; Nadin and Stead, 2008). On the basis of our empirical data we can classify the 'soft cooperation families' in the following way. This classification is based on similar patterns in the temporal development and the characteristics of the cooperation formats.

Table 1.2 Soft cooperation culture types

| Soft cooperation culture types    | Countries                  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Scandinavian / Baltic             | SE, NO, DK, FI, LT, LV, EE |
| British and Irish                 | UK, IE                     |
| Central-West                      | AT, DE, NL, BE, CH, IT     |
| Iberian-French                    | LU, FR, PT, ES             |
| Central East                      | SI, SK, CZ, HU, PL         |
| Eastern Mediterranean & Black Sea | BG, RO, MT, CY, EL, HR     |

Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

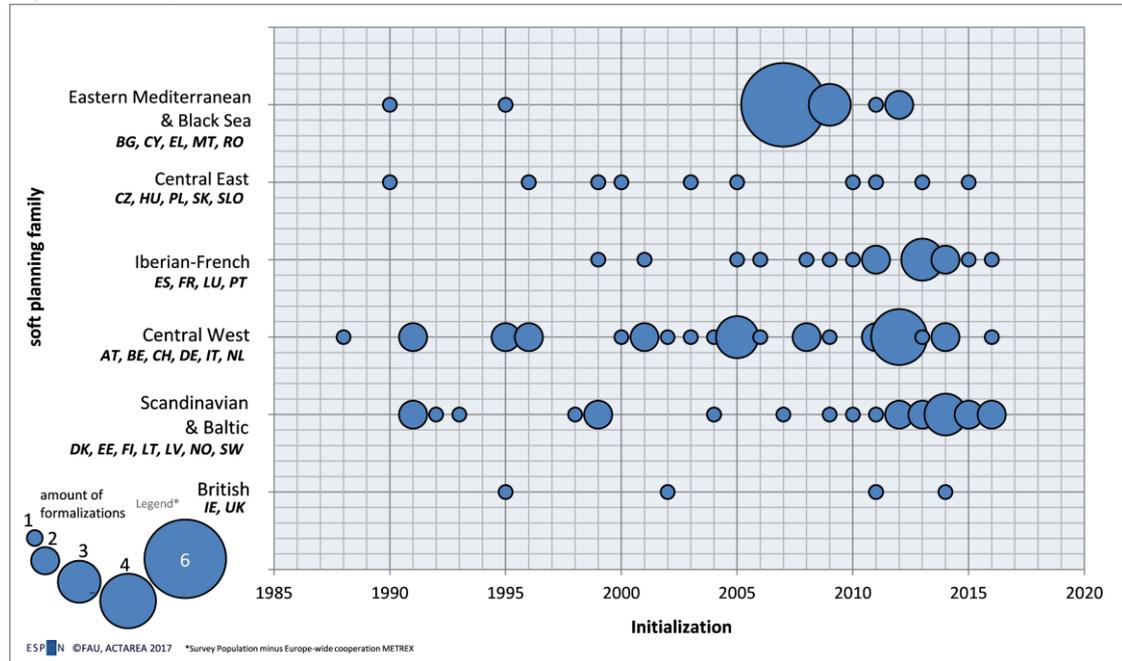
Figure 1.4 shows the differences between the different culture types in a visual way over time. The following points are of particular relevance:

- Soft cooperation initiatives are not evenly distributed across Europe.
- The countries of the **Central-Western** group continuously initiate new cooperation instances. Characteristic features of this group include a particularly strong focus on strategic planning and a comprehensive approach to instrumental setting (Stead and Nadin, 2009). This group also includes Switzerland (see description of case studies in Annex 2 and 3).
- Also the **Scandinavian** planning systems are well known for the strategic focus in planning. In our study, observed patterns in the Baltic States and in Scandinavia are similar. They are clearly distinct from those of other countries that accessed the EU between 2004 and 2007.
- **British and Irish** planning culture is traditionally considered to focus on land use planning rather than on strategic aspects. This also holds true for observed soft planning initiatives.
- The **Iberian-French** cooperation culture has seen a growing activity over the last decade. This is to be seen in the context of the reforms of the planning systems and territorial organisation in France. Soft cooperation can be a means to accompany territorial reforms.
- In countries where a **Central-Eastern** planning culture prevails, interest in soft cooperation formats is stable but moderate. This country group shows different characteristics than other Eastern European countries that have often been treated as one group in the planning literature. Compared to the Baltic and Black Sea countries

they show differences in the initialisation rates and, as we will see later, in the strategic approach.

- The **Eastern-Mediterranean and Black Sea** cooperation culture is characterised by a limited interest in soft cooperation formats. European cooperation programmes prevail over independent initiatives.

Figure 1.4 Cooperation cultures and the rise of soft cooperation formats over time



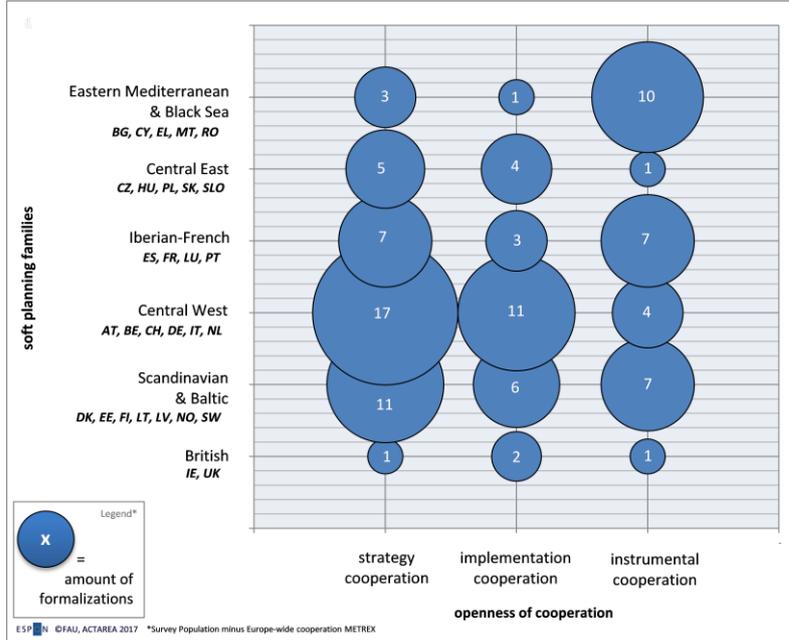
Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Figure 1.5 goes a step further and links the soft cooperation culture back to the type of cooperation as introduced above. Again, we differentiate the degree of strategic cooperation. We can state the following:

- The very active performance of the **Central-Western** group is striking. These countries often have a federal system (AT, CH, DE, BE) and they are characterised by longstanding debates on polycentric development. This contexts might serve as a good basis for informal, softer types of territorial cooperation. The rise of cooperation in metropolitan regions is the most prominent example of recent years. Interestingly, many cases are based on a common policy framework and not only on individual cooperation (e.g. Belgian 'Intercommunale'). Moreover, many of these young cooperation formats are of a 'meso' size, which often have a cross-border dimension and are of strategic character.
- The **Scandinavian and Baltic** countries show a similar picture as the Central-West countries as the activity is quite high. The difference with regard to the group of the Central-West countries is the more experimental character and the much more prominent role of the cross-border and transnational dimension. The more experimental character comes along with a relatively high relevance of the implementation and instrumental cooperation. A good example is the project 'Baltic Sea Region Stars' that aims to catalyse innovation development on the transitional scale. On a regional level, the 'innovation loop project' is a yearly cycle to develop innovations amongst a broad range of actors. In this country group, policy frameworks are an important tool (e.g. the Norwegian 'Bymiljøavtalen' programme literally translated "Urban environmental agreement").
- The **British and Irish** cases show moderate activity, not only due to the small size of this group. The contemporary situation is characterised by "gateway"-thinking and development of corridors such as the Irish spatial planning strategy. There is a strong influence of private stakeholders in planning implementation and a focus on temporary institutionalisations such as e.g. the Atlantic Gateway or the Thames Gateway.
- The **Iberian-French** cooperation culture has seen a growing popularity of soft cooperation over the last decade. This is to be considered in relation to the series of reforms of territorial organisation and the planning systems. In this context, soft cooperation is a means to pave the way towards a reformed planning landscape. In many cases, the cross-border dimension plays an important role, e.g. for the 'Pôle métropolitain européen Sillon lorrain' (see Annex 4), and for the Eurocities 'Guadiana' and 'Elvas-Badajoz'.
- The **Central-East** cooperation culture shows a stable but not very active interest in soft cooperation formats. The cooperation is often based on EU programmes (Interreg) with a comparably small role of private actors. In recent years, many more strategic policy frameworks for regional development have been enacted, e.g. the 'Integrated Spatial Investments' in Czech Republic or the 'Regional Development Councils' in Hungary.

- The **Eastern-Mediterranean and Black Sea** cooperation focuses on implementation and instrumental cooperation. Typical examples here are the cross-border EGTCs or the Regional CBC Data Centre between Bulgaria and Romania.

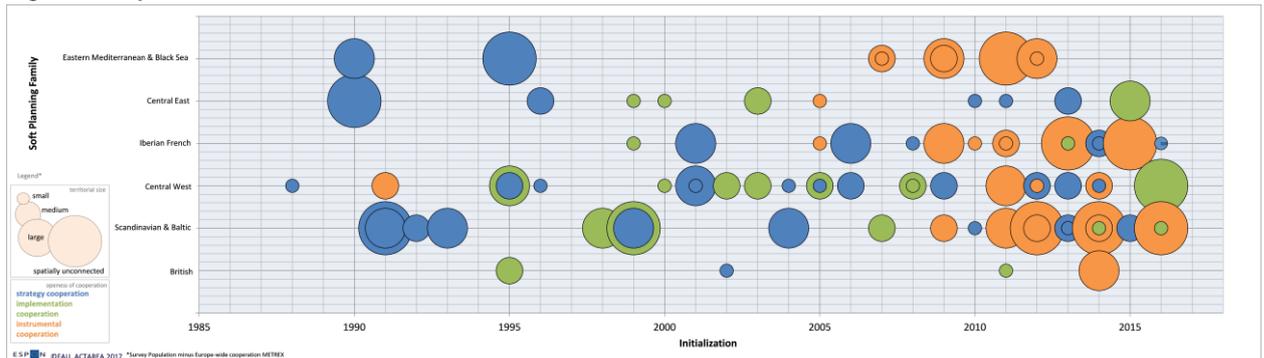
Figure 1.5 Soft planning culture and kind of cooperation (strategic orientation)



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Overall, the European survey of soft cooperation instances has shown that they are not evenly distributed across Europe. Countries and regions of the Central-West and the Scandinavia-Baltic region have been most active in promoting such type of cooperation. Moreover, we see a rising importance of soft cooperation initiatives that have the ambition to concretise the strategic agenda. This is in particular true for the Scandinavian & Baltic countries, but as a trend also for most other groups. Figure 1.6 shows all information introduced above in one single graphic, summarising the aspects discussed so far.

Figure 1.6 Synthetic overview



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

These findings suggest a number of working hypotheses for the case studies (see section 3):

- a) The socio-economic strength of involved regions contributes to explain the extent to which soft cooperation has been initiated in different country groups. There seems to be a positive correlation between economic prosperity and active development of soft cooperation formats.

- b) The performance of the country group “Central West” indicates that federal structures play a role. Federal structures may increase the number of actors and initiatives in territorial governance, and they may be more experienced with cooperation patterns across territorial and institutional boundaries. Metropolitan regions and cities play an important role. This is also linked to the focus on functional regions and the ambitions to participate in an efficient way in the globalised economy by reaching a ‘critical mass’.
- c) Differences within the EU can also be explained by the phases of European integration, as shown in particular by the group of countries that accessed in 2004 and 2007, and that has performed as a more or less homogenous group of transformation states in the early years. Now, more than 25 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain and more than a decade after EU accession, their planning practices develop in different ways, often drawing inspiration from their respective neighbouring countries.

#### **1.4 Selection of soft territorial cooperation areas and frameworks**

The European survey led to the identification of 100 territorial cooperation instances and showed that a large number of initiatives have emerged over the last years that share one or several characteristics of the Swiss Action Areas. They varied strongly in geographical reach (from macro-regional to local), scope, stakeholder composition and maturity. For the in-depth study of soft territorial cooperation areas, a meaningful selection of the multitude of examples identified had to be made.

The main rationale for the selection was to identify examples that provide instructive cases for comparison, that fit into the ACTAREA definition of soft territorial cooperation instances (cf. 1.1) and that, at the same time, are able to depict the diversity of soft territorial cooperation initiatives in Europe. Given that the Swiss Action Areas are very heterogeneous with respect to their size, underlying concepts of regionalisation, but also in terms of pre-existing long-term cooperation structures (such as inter-cantonal ‘governmental conferences’, metropolitan conferences, international conferences as well as cross-border cooperation programmes), the selection of case studies had to consider a number of criteria:

- A good balance between a ‘top-down’ supportive framework and a ‘bottom-up’ driven process that is based on local needs;
- open cooperation frameworks that allow for a wide and flexible participation of actors, including civil society, that involves multiple levels of governance and extends across national and/or administrative boundaries;
- flexible perimeters that are not defined by existing institutionalised hard spaces and that can be dynamically adapted to different policy fields;
- cooperation areas that span across administrative and/ or national borders;
- collaborations based on jointly developed integrative strategic frameworks (e.g. strategy or vision) that form the basis for concrete joint actions in specific policy fields, embedded in the territorial context;

- cooperation frameworks that have been established with a medium to long-term perspective in mind;
- different governance set-ups and forms of institutionalisation, however, with preference given to informal or semi-formal non-statutory forms of organisation;
- cooperation instances that are potentially open to different areas of intervention.

The focus of the selection was not exclusively on recent examples that have not yet been described in literature. Looking into mature cooperation initiatives allowed making observations regarding possible evolutions of territorial cooperation over time. At the same time, the selection was balanced against principles of geographical spread in order to have different parts of Europe represented in the study. Nevertheless, preference was given to examples from Austria and Germany as well as other countries of the Alpine region.

The resulting selection of 12 examples of soft territorial cooperation areas and frameworks is well-argued, but has no claim to statistical representativeness. A full list of selected case studies, as well as justifications for their selection can be found in Annex 1. All detailed case study descriptions can be found in the “European Atlas of Soft Territorial Cooperation Areas”.

In parallel, the 12 Swiss Action Areas (AAs) were analysed regarding the existence of supra-regional cooperation instances in Switzerland that can be directly linked with the implementation of the AA as referred to in the Swiss Spatial Strategy (SSS) or that can function as levers for the promotion of AAs, some of which were then studied in greater depth. All twelve Swiss AA descriptions can be found in the separate report “Swiss Spatial Strategy and Action Areas”.

In the following, the main key transversal observations from the analysed soft territorial cooperation instances and policy frameworks are presented, drawing on the full range of case studies. In the last chapter of this report, findings were translated into policy recommendations and an outlook for further research is given.

## 2 Soft territorial cooperation in Europe: synthesis of case study findings

This section presents key transversal observations from the analysed soft territorial cooperation instances and policy frameworks. The comparative analysis was guided by the set of eight dimensions that characterise soft territorial cooperation areas, which were introduced in section 1.2. As with all comparative analyses, we have to add a disclaimer also to this one and caution the reader to not interpret findings as a blueprint for how to successfully initiate and set up soft territorial cooperation<sup>1</sup>. All presented cases must be considered within their wider context. Differences in the challenges, conditions and needs of regions limit the transferability of one successful model between territories. Nonetheless, this section presents some general lines of arguments for why more flexible approaches to territorial governance, in terms of geographic delineation, thematic focus and objectives and stakeholder involvement, are beneficial for territorial development.

### 2.1 Strengths of soft territorial cooperation

Thinking and planning in soft territorial cooperation areas can overcome some of the constraints of dealing with territorial development within administratively defined territories and by means of 'hard' statutory planning instruments. Frequently invoked constraints are linked to the observed failure of political-administrative territories to address functional interlinkage, the 'silomentality' of traditional sectoral planning and rigid institutional systems. They have often been brought forward as arguments for more flexible geographies and networked forms of territorial governance. However, rather than replace the traditional 'hard' spaces for spatial planning, soft Territorial Cooperation Areas (TCAs) provide complementary opportunities for territorial development. Case studies have brought to light several strengths of soft TCAs:

**The organisational flexibility of TCAs increase ownership and implementation.** Due to the participatory nature of governance in TCAs, actors are encouraged to take charge of their own development. This instils a sense of ownership and is likely to increase the commitment to implementing planning outcomes. Case studies show that thinking and planning in TCAs can help prevent or counter potential resistance towards specific measures. One example is the regional strategic planning approach taken by the Government of Lower Austria (see Box 2.1). It builds on the voluntary participation of municipalities in the development of a binding zoning plan. Such a plan defines areas of residential and business development on a regional scale. It encroaches severely on municipalities' rights to define their own development for the sake of managing development in the entire region. By opting for a 'planning with' rather than a 'planning for' approach, the Government of Lower Austria ensured that understanding for the measure among municipal actors was high. By way of consequence, these actors actively advocated the measure when interacting with other stakeholders.

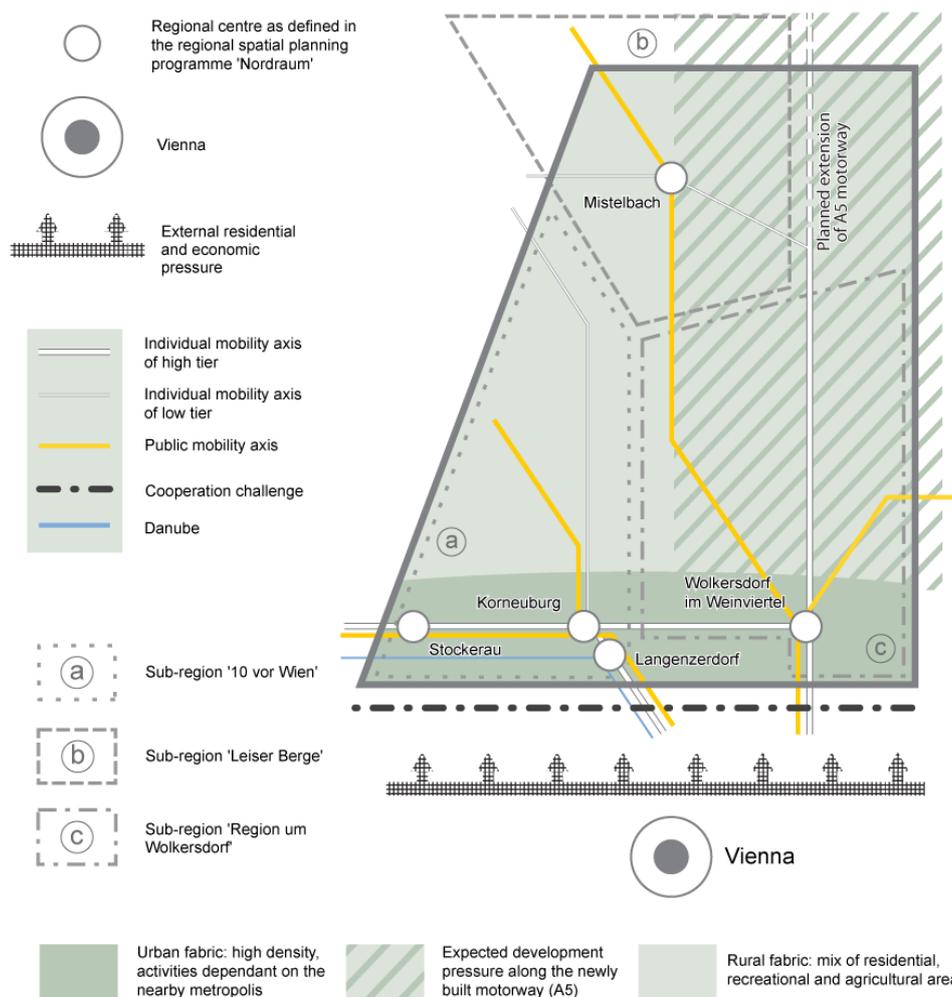
---

<sup>1</sup> The ESPON ACTAREA has produced a separate *Guide to developing soft territorial cooperation*.

## Box 2.1 Regional strategic planning Lower Austria – Region north of Vienna

The **strategic planning region** is located just north of the City of Vienna along the newly built (and yet unfinished) highway A5, connecting Vienna (AT) with Brno (CZ). The highway will improve the accessibility of the region and reduce commute time to Vienna. In connection with the relatively cheap land prices in the region, this is likely to lead to increased building development and pressure on available land. In order to manage growth and development, 25 municipalities got together, under the auspices of the Office for Spatial Planning and Regional Policy of Lower Austria, to develop a binding regional spatial planning programme that defines centres as well as boundaries of growth on a regional scale, using the regional strategic planning instrument (“*Regionale Leitplanung Niederösterreich*”).

Figure 2.1: Cooperation area



Source: ESPON ACTAREA, 2017

The **regional strategic planning instrument** is a soft and flexible planning instrument that combines two existing instruments:

- the very soft, bottom-up sub-regional development concept (“*kleinregionales Rahmenkonzept*”), which supports the bottom-up formation of so-called sub-regions as self-governed groupings of municipalities that receive subsidies for developing a joint concept and typically implement soft type of interventions;
- the hard, top-down regional spatial planning programme (“*regionales Raumordnungsprogramm*”) as a planning instrument for the management of spatial development on a regional scale (1:50,000) with a binding outcome. The Federal Province of Lower Austria has the legal mandate (and obligation) to, when the need arises, enforce regional spatial planning programmes and may develop them in a top-down planning process.

The rationale behind combining the two instruments is to make use of the cooperation culture in the existing sub-regions and move it to a next, more strategic level. That increases the ownership and acceptance of the planning outcome, and avoids a lengthy and costly consultation process that would have to follow a more top-down planning approach.

However, the case also shows that cooperation issues with a potentially asymmetric outcome (e.g. in terms of resource allocation) require a considerable degree of top-down initiation, steering and mediation. They cannot rely entirely on bottom-up initiatives from stakeholders on the ground and on their ability to manage the process autonomously. TCAs are primarily an option when cooperation promises to produce a win-win outcome for all cooperation partners.

**The territorial fuzziness of TCAs provides flexibility to tackle territorial issues at the ‘right’ geographical scale.** The geographic perimeter of soft TCAs is defined flexibly. This allows public authorities to optimise the scale and geographic boundaries of policy design and implementation. However, taking full advantage of this possibility may imply that new ad hoc cooperation alliances are formed for each cooperation topic. Case studies have shown that the development of a cooperation culture, i.e. a ‘habit’ of cooperation, requires continuity and, hence, a degree of stability in the cooperation partnership and area. This may explain why all analysed cooperation instances have a more or less fixed perimeter. Case studies suggest that there may be a trade-off between flexibility in defining the cooperation area and partnership on the one hand and durability and efficiency on the other.

**Membership variety of TCAs makes it possible to involve different tiers of government and public and private stakeholders on equal footing.** Cooperation in soft TCAs can potentially strengthen multi-level governance, leading to a renewal of relationships between various tiers of government. Local actors benefit particularly from a multi-level governance structure as they can capitalise on the expertise and resources available at the regional and national levels. In the Gotthard Action Area (see Box 2.2) the cantonal level plays an important role in helping the local level adapt to the closing down of military bases and the decline of mountain agriculture. The cantonal level of the four cantons of Uri, Ticino, Graubünden and Valais established an intercantonal New Regional Policy (NRP) implementation programme called San Gottardo 2020 in response to the withdrawal of the army from the region in order to identify early counter measures to prevent economic decline. The programme is defined on an intercantonal level to be in line with each canton’s NRP strategy, but implementation is the responsibility of four sub-regional entities in their respective cantons, each organised as association of municipalities. They are each in charge of developing their own strategy in compatibility with the inter-cantonal implementation programme. Thus, harmonious strategy development and implementation from the intercantonal down to the local level is ensured.

Furthermore, stakeholders from all political/administrative levels benefit from an enhanced understanding of each other’s positions and needs. This was, for example, an important side-effect of the collaborative planning approach taken by the Lower Austrian Regional Government in the region north of Vienna. It considerably increased the understanding of local actors of the need for an intermunicipal approach to spatial development and raised awareness on the provincial level for the wishes of the local level for legislative changes.

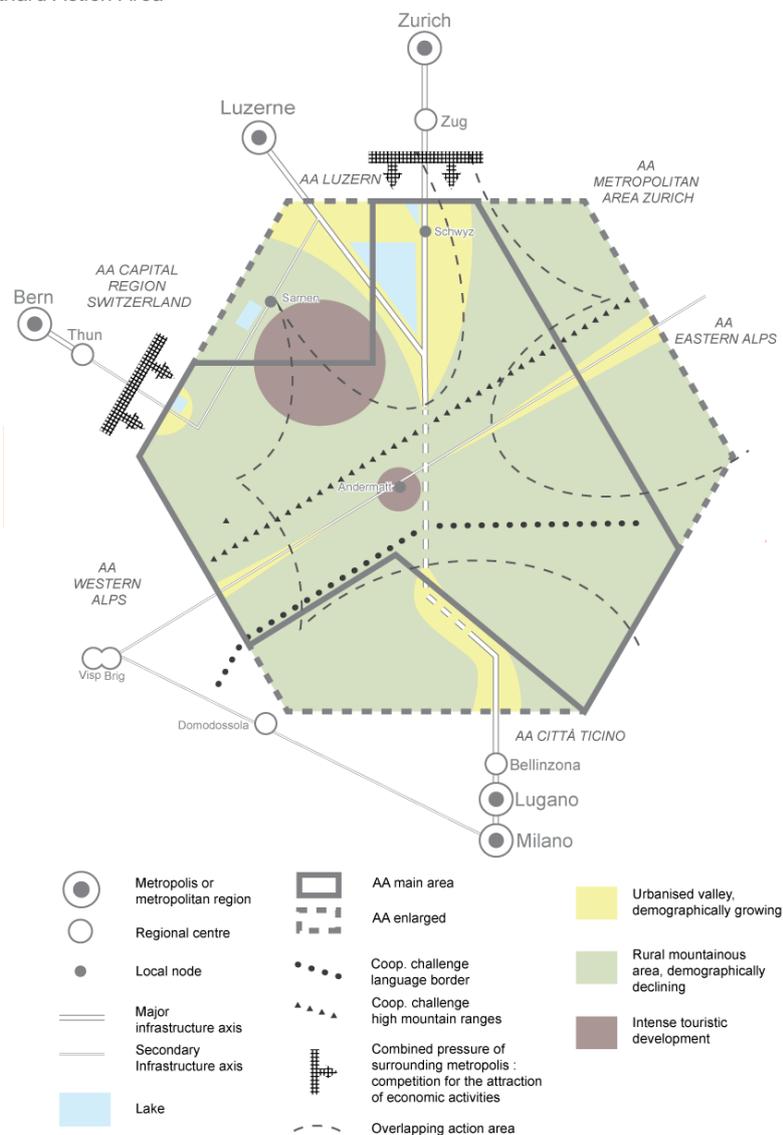
### Box 2.2 Gotthard Action Area and the San Gottardo Programme

The **Gotthard Action Area** is nested in the core of the Swiss Alps, at the crossroads of north-south and east-west Alpine corridors. It is characterised by small and scattered settlement structures within high mountain environment. The Action Area has no major urban centre, and is faced with the progressive decline of traditional economic activities such as the ones related to agriculture and forestry.

Due to the withdrawal of the military from the region also employment opportunities got lost. That gave the impetus for the establishment of a dedicated intercantonal initiative of the cantons of Uri, Ticino, Graubünden and Valais to counter economic decline in 2007 under the former Swiss regional policy and then continued under the New Regional Policy (NRP) in 2008.

It has since led to an intercantonal **NRP implementation programme** called **San Gottardo 2020** that supports the Gotthard AA to create its own identity, also in view of better exploiting the region's touristic potential. The implementation programme aims at strengthening specific potentials of the region, fostering innovation for the creation of added-value and support cooperation in the perspective of sustainable development. Emphasis is put on tourism, marketing/branding, and collaboration with a focus on both "hardware" (tourist infrastructures with related actions in industry, agriculture and commerce) and "software" (cooperation capability, product development, marketing, and task coordination). The implementation of the programme is the responsibility of four intermunicipal entities in their respective cantons, each of them being in charge of developing their own strategy in compatibility with the intercantonal implementation programme, thus in tight cooperation with the cantonal and federal authorities

Figure 2.2: Gotthard Action Area



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Regional planning and development in soft TCAs also provides the opportunity for a stronger involvement of the private sector and civil society than tends to be possible within statutory regional planning. Among other potential benefits, public participation may improve the quality of planning as different types of knowledge can be tapped into, leading to new ideas and outcomes.

On the other hand, public participation may raise issues of democratic legitimacy of planning results with regards to the balanced representation of stakeholders. For example, in the case of the Swiss Capital Region Association (see Box 2.3), founded in response to the perceived competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis other Swiss metropolitan areas that arose during the development of the Swiss Spatial Strategy, a certain bias towards urban cooperation topics could be observed. Cooperation topics relevant for the rural parts of the cooperation area proposed in the Swiss Spatial Strategy were not picked up by the association. This is a likely result of the association's membership rules that only grant membership to individual municipalities when their population size exceeds 9,000 inhabitants. Smaller, more rural municipalities only have the possibility to become voting members as part of an intermunicipal association that is member to the Swiss Capital Region Association. While increasing its operational effectiveness, this may lead to a certain bias towards the more urbanised parts of the AA, especially since not all municipalities are organised in intermunicipal cooperation associations and not all intermunicipal associations are members of the Swiss Capital Region Association.

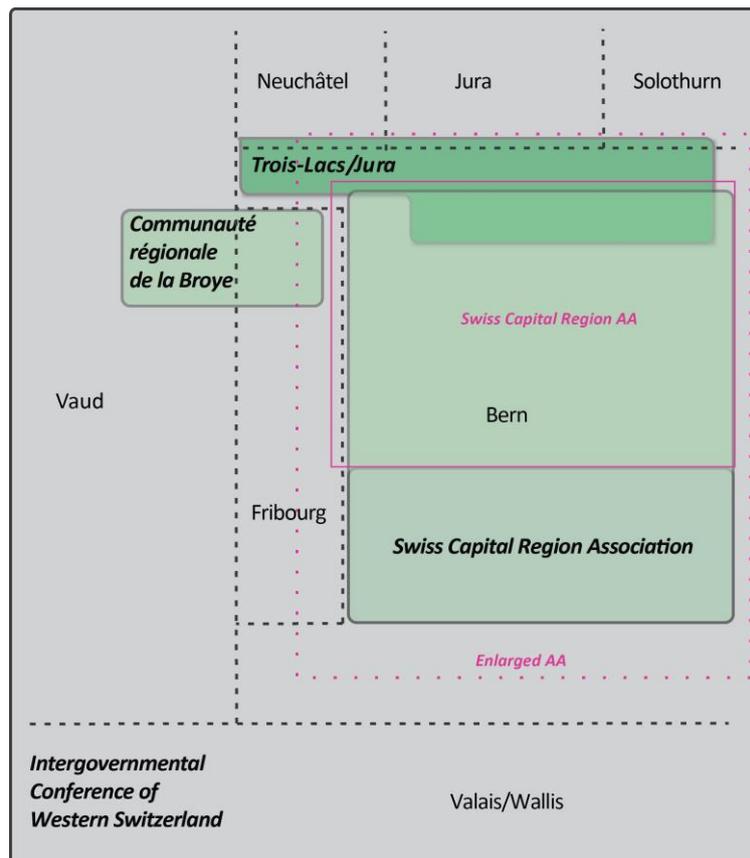
In the majority of analysed TCAs, however, questions of the democratic legitimacy seem not to play a big role, also because the involvement of private actors is limited to the project level (see section 2.9). Strategic decision making and agenda setting often takes place in an executive committee composed of elected political representatives (e.g. Metropolitan Pole 'Sillon Lorrain', Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino) where voting weights may be e.g. normalised by the number of inhabitants per sub-area or per member. Also the unanimity principle is often applied in these executive committees, meaning that all decisions must at all times be backed by all cooperation partners. This means that one partner may block decisions that are supported by the majority of partners, possibly leading to gridlock. However, given that soft TCAs are communities of intent that rely on the voluntary commitment of actors to cooperation, unanimity is an important principle to continuously restore consensus among cooperation partners. One observed way to overcome deadlock resulting from different interests is to allow for concrete cooperation activities to involve only some partners (following the idea of "flexible geographies"). However, it may also lead to tensions if the joint activity has a potential impact on the territories whose actors do not participate in the activity. Case studies revealed that there is peer pressure on cooperation partners to participate in all cooperation activities, even if they would rather stay out of some activities, and also the fear of cooperation partners of being marginalised if they don't participate.

### Box 2.3 Swiss Capital Region Action Area and Swiss Capital Region Association

The **Swiss Capital Region AA** is characterised by a network of medium-size towns. Even though Berne is the political and administrative centre of Switzerland, the economy of the AA is less dynamic and fast-growing than that of other metropolitan AAs such as Zurich, Basel and Geneva, with their high share of export-oriented sectors.

Fears to fall behind these metropolitan areas, catalysed in the course of the development of the Swiss Spatial Strategy, led to the foundation of the **Swiss Capital Region Association**. The spatial extent of the association is largely congruent with the extent of the (enlarged) AA as are the strategic objectives of the association with those listed in the SSS for the AA. The Association currently groups five cantons and includes a number of intermunicipal associations and some individual municipalities.

Figure 2.3: Cooperation map Swiss Capital Region AA



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

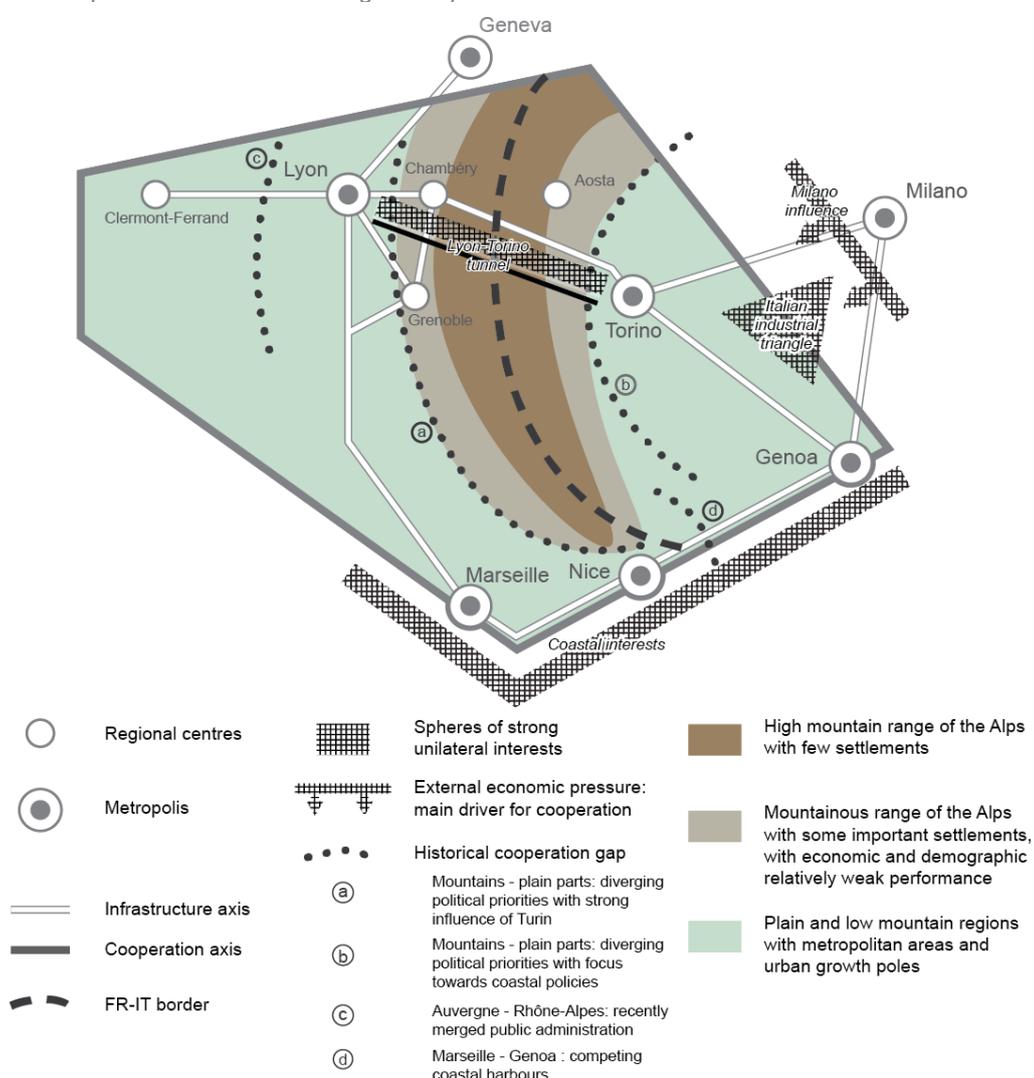
On the one hand, the involvement of politicians in TCAs enhances legitimacy and ensures that the actors that have the adequate powers of enforcement are on board. On the other hand, TCAs that are strongly dependent on a political mandate sometimes suffer from discontinuity due to frequent changes in the political staff (as was the case in the Euroregion Alps-Mediterranean – see Box 2.4). The fact that political personnel often changes quite frequently may lead to a lack of continuity in the political representation involved in a TCA. This may hamper personal and institutional capacity building (as was the case in the regional strategic planning process north of Vienna) and knowledge-transfer.

### Box 2.4 Euroregion Alps-Mediterranean

The **Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion** consists of five regions alongside the French-Italian border. The strong cooperation axis between the two regions of Piemonte and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes can be considered as one of the driving forces within the Euroregion, whereas the national border and the high Alpine range have a rather separating effect. One of the main objectives and challenges in the region today is the improvement of infrastructure. The “Tunnel de Base” along the corridor between Lyon and Turin is currently the most important project in the Euroregion, creating substantial resistance at the local level in the mountainous areas.

Cross-border cooperation in the Euroregion is an ongoing challenge, as well as the positioning of this region in the wider context of the Alpine regions. Due to the change of political majorities both on the French and the Italian side initial attempts and preparation towards institutionalisation of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation failed. In addition, the internal instability within the French region resulting from the merging of the two French regions provided a major disruption. Between 2014 and 2016 the Euroregion was not active. It recently experienced a revival in the context of the EUSALP and the post-2020 discussions. Following the fall-down of the EGTC-setup the EUSALP, and the need to lobby for the interest of the Western Alps, provided a new incentive to relaunch the cooperation.

Figure 2.4: Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion cooperation area



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

## 2.2 Bottom-up and top-down approaches are combined to fit different institutional contexts

In spite of the definition of soft TCAs as voluntary and largely bottom-up initiated collaborations, case studies revealed a whole spectrum of combinations of bottom-up and top-down initiation. The importance of combining bottom-up and top-down dynamics for the emergence of soft TCAs cannot be overestimated. The different modes of multi-level governance observed can be compared by describing the respective importance of bottom-up and top-down dynamics in the different analysed policy frameworks for territorial cooperation. These combinations of bottom-up and top-down dynamics contribute to **thematic openness** of cooperation initiatives and help them to access a **wider range of human and financial resources**.

**Policy frameworks can stimulate the development of TCAs.** An example of a top-down stimulated TCA is the Regional Development Council (RDC) of the Tokaj Wine Region (see Box 2.5), a cooperation of 27 municipalities, that has been set-up in accordance with the National Act on Regional Development and Regional Planning of 1996. RDCs offer an organisational structure to foster cooperation with a focus on territorial development aspects considered of national importance, such as tourism or motorway development. In the context of the strongly centralised system of Hungary these 'regional' or sub-regional collaboration structures, which are an important player between the municipal and the national level, have a major role to play in regional development. At the same time, the national level exerts a strong influence on the RDCs, including through national financing. Furthermore, the actors from the municipal, county and national level appointed to the Tokaj Wine Region agency are predefined. This can limit the ability of local and regional actors to pursue their own strategic objectives, although in the specific case this was not described as limitation by the cooperation actor. The stronger national setting however strongly determines the approach taken.

### Box 2.5 Hungarian Regional Development Councils (RDCs)

According to Hungarian law counties are entitled to set up Regional Development Councils (RDCs). They offer an organisational structure for territorial cooperation on territorial development aspects that are considered of national importance, such as tourism or motorway development. The main objective of the RDCs is to develop strategic long-term goals around territorial assets.

Current RDCs result from experiences in Hungary's Regional Development Policy. The 1996 Act first introduced regional development councils and regional development agencies in all regions. As part of Hungary's process of accessing the European Union, NUTS 2 regions were established to support national planning in 1998. A 1999 amendment to the 1996 Act specified that regional development councils would be established at the level of these NUTS2 regions. However, this failed to produce expected results. A 2012 reform therefore abolished these regional development councils. The municipal level took over responsibility for territorial development, with a coordinating role assigned to counties. At the same time, a fuzzier approach to cooperation across county and municipal borders was promoted. Within the framework of the existing legal basis and keeping, new Regional Development Councils were established. Their territorial dimension was strengthened, while their administrative role was toned down. They were delineated in a flexible way across county borders in order to deliver tasks for which they have been constituted. The current nine RDCs cover or overlap with 16 out of 19 Hungarian counties.

Once set up, the RDCs are however rather static. Legal status and membership composition are predefined. Each RDC is led by a president and a council with representatives from the concerned county councils, chambers of commerce, territorial government offices and the chief architect of the state. Apart from that, RDCs governance set-ups vary.

The French Territorial Poles (TP) can also be perceived as cooperation areas imposed top-down by a strong regulatory framework (see Box 2.6). Institutional structures, i.e. which may be part of the TP, decision-making procedures and the legal status of cooperation are all defined top-down. In addition, the elaboration of a territorial strategy is compulsory for each TP. However, each TP determines which actors should participate in its Development Council. Fields of actions of TPs are also defined in dialogue between participating inter-municipal cooperation bodies. The main instrument of multi-level coordination is contract-based planning, as national authorities fund TPs through agreements on the objectives they should achieve over 6-year periods (so-called 'contrats de ruralité'). In the case of French Metropolitan Poles (MPs), the legal status of cooperation and population thresholds (i.e. no MP of less than 100,000 inhabitants) are defined top-down. Beyond that, the extent and modalities of cooperation are largely defined by involved inter-municipal cooperation bodies. Funding is provided by these bodies themselves. The French system therefore establishes a separate logic of multi-level governance for metropolitan areas and for other territories. The underlying rationale is that metropolitan areas have larger resources and can therefore be presumed to promote cooperation more autonomously. However, reviewed cases suggest that there are considerably fewer cooperation initiatives in the case of MPs as compared to TPs. This can, at least partly, be ascribed to the lack of external financial incentives.

#### Box 2.6 French Territorial Poles

A **territorial pole (TP)** is a formalised cooperation of intermunicipal bodies, so-called 'Etablissements publics de coopération intercommunale' (EPCIs) as sole possible cooperation partners. The TP's main task is to draft, adopt and implement a 'territorial coherence scheme' (SCOT), which defines economic, ecologic, cultural and social conditions for harmonious spatial development, and to ensure the transfer of the SCOT into local urban planning documents. The development of the SCOT is preceded by the drafting of a broader 'territorial strategy' ("*projet de territoire*"), which puts together the territorial strengths, assets and threats to be dealt with as part of a regional development strategy for the development of a wider vision for the territory.

Another task of the territorial pole is "to federate and coordinate actions and projects related to spatial planning"; and "to operate as a contracting structure for regional, State and EU funds [...]". Also solutions for the joint provision of services of general interest may be developed.

The territorial pole is therefore at the crossroad of developing strategic territorial visions and targeted actions based on project engineering. It has limited resources, but a small dedicated, permanent coordination structure that organises the work of the territorial pole: coordination of actions, preparation of project calls, communication, etc. The major orientation and budget are defined by the Development Council, which gathers representatives of participating EPCIs.

#### **Policy frameworks can proactively promote the emergence of cooperation initiatives.**

Several of the analysed cooperation frameworks fall into that category. One example of a policy framework under which collaborations may be initiated top-down, but which relies heavily on persuasion and on the willingness of municipalities to cooperate is the regional strategic planning approach in Lower Austria. In absence of a formal administrative or political level between the municipal and provincial level regarding spatial planning, a number of "soft" planning regions and corresponding regional coordination frameworks have been established: 'main regions', 'regional strategic planning in coherent areas that are characterized by a similar problem or functional link' and 'sub-regions'. While the five "main regions" were created mainly

for the establishment of regional development agencies, the “sub-regions” are self-governed, voluntary groupings of municipalities (following different region-building logics) that implement mostly soft measures in line with jointly agreed sub-regional development concepts. By contrast, the regional strategic planning process is implemented in regions that are characterised by a specific problem or functional link and aims to achieve a more strategic and binding result.

Rather than a self-governed and bottom-up initiated cooperation, the cooperation on regional strategic planning is a facilitated process that is initiated top-down by the Regional Development Agency, the Office for Spatial Planning and Regional Policy of Lower Austria. However, the perimeter of the cooperation (or ‘planning’) region is determined by the number of municipalities that decided to take part in the process. A small financial contribution for the involved is not meant as an incentive, but rather as a compensation for the burden of participating in the process. Furthermore, the process also involves surrounding regions and municipalities via a supra-regional dialogue forum. However, it does not foresee the establishment of a new permanent level of regional cooperation (and corresponding cooperation structures), but rather responds to a specific need for regional coordination and relies largely on pre-existing structures for the implementation of the planning outcome (in particular, the sub-regions).

Similarly, the French law on the modernisation of territorial public action and metropolitan development encourages, but does not prescribe the establishment of Metropolitan Poles (MP). MPs are established to foster cooperation between cities at the level of a metropolitan region to promote “a sustainable planning and development model of the area and territorial solidarity”, dealing with issues that go beyond administrative boundaries.

**Policy frameworks may also rely entirely on initiatives from stakeholders on the ground.**

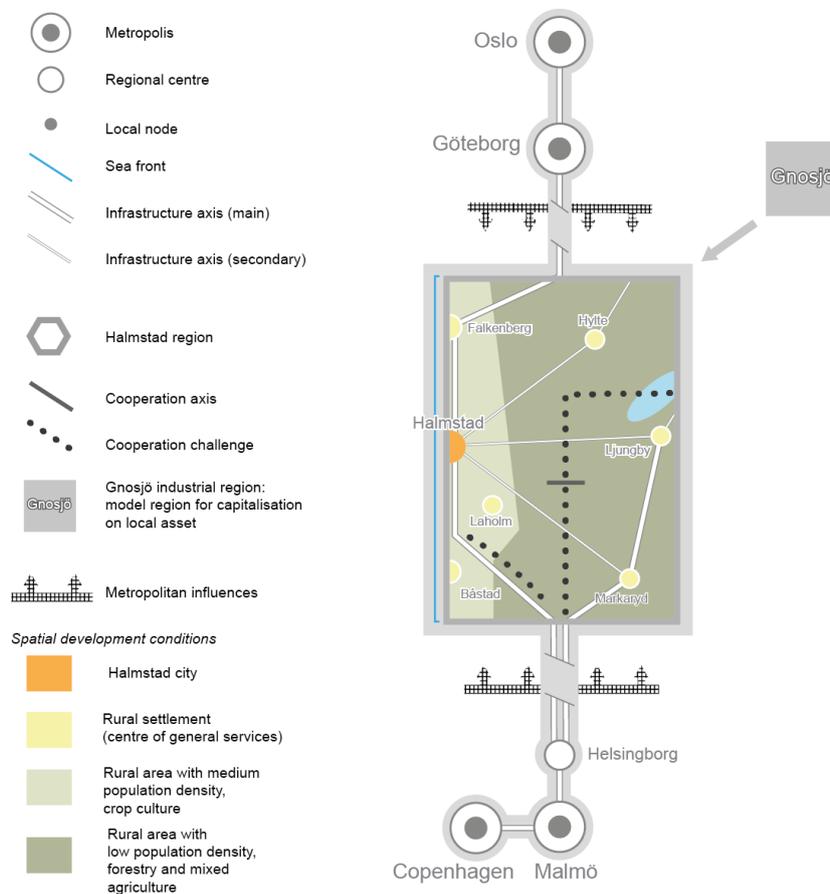
In Sweden, national policies have focused on transferring the responsibility for economic development to the regional level, and on extending labour markets both at the level of metropolitan areas and of small isolated settlements. Softer types of territorial cooperation emerge among areas that fit into neither of these types of approaches, i.e. primarily towns that can be characterised as “inner peripheries” caught between multiple metropolitan influences. One such example is the cooperation around the town of Halmstad in Sweden (see Box 2.7). National authorities encourage, support and fund cooperation initiatives that emerge in these areas, but do not proactively promote them. The resulting model can therefore be described as ‘competitive’, as it benefits local authorities with the creativity and competences needed to submit proposals for cooperation to national authorities and to implement them.

### Box 2.7 Halmstad cooperation

The town of **Halmstad and its six neighbouring municipalities** are located between Göteborg and Malmö. Travel times between the town of Halmstad to the centres of both these metropolitan areas are just over 90 minutes. Halmstad and its neighbouring municipalities are therefore in most respects beyond commuting distance to these areas and need to generate their own growth and job dynamics. With trends towards increasing metropolisation, with a concentration of economic activities around Malmö and Gothenburg, there is a fear among local stakeholders that Halmstad and its surrounding will end up in a 'growth shadow' ('*Tillväxtskugg*'). The rationale behind the cooperation is hence to position themselves strategically "in the Oslo-Öresund growth axis" so as to function as regional 'growth engine'.

The emerging 'Halmstad region', with Halmstad as the only major urban node, includes components of three regions: Skåne (Båstad municipality), Kronoberg (Ljungby and Markaryd municipalities) and Halland region. Halmstad is the capital of Halland region, the cooperation process is at an early stage. So far, while Halland region has supported the cooperation actively, Kronoberg region has expressed its support without contributing to it actively and the larger Skåne region has not answered requests. The emerging 'Halmstad region' is also contiguous to the Gnosjö region, which is renowned for its entrepreneurial spirit and dynamic manufacturing industry in a predominantly rural setting (so called 'Gnosjö spirit'). The Halmstad area shares some of the same characteristics, and would like to capitalise on them.

Figure 2.5: Halmstad cooperation area



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Another example are the Action Areas defined in the Swiss Spatial Planning Strategy, which mostly lack designated formal structures for their implementation, but instead rely entirely on bottom-up initiatives from stakeholders on the ground. A tripartite core team, including the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE), monitors the implementation of the strategy, but

leaves it to the local and regional stakeholders in the Action Areas to develop structures for their implementation or activate existing cooperation structures.

#### Box 2.8 Swiss Spatial Strategy and Action Areas

The **Swiss Spatial Concept** (*Raumkonzept / Projet de Territoire*) was collaboratively developed by the Swiss Confederation, cantons and municipalities, as the first of its kind.

The Spatial Concept identifies twelve wider regions, so-called “**Action Areas**” (*Handlungsräume / territoires d’action*). These ‘areas of territorial cooperation’ are the result of a political process rather than the outcome of spatial analysis and expert advice. Their purpose is to translate the objectives defined in the Spatial Concept into concrete actions. The definition of Action Areas acknowledges that many challenges that Swiss cities and regions are faced with (e.g., confining urban/rural sprawl, organizing transport and mobility and providing infrastructure and utilities in an efficient way, etc.) require the cooperation across different tiers of government and even across national borders. Therefore, they don’t follow the borders of existing administrative or governance structures but have deliberately fuzzy, flexible boundaries with numerous overlaps that stretch across boundaries of administrative units and even include territories beyond the national border. They also vary in size, both in terms of area and total population, and have different characteristics. Four Action Areas can be qualified as metropolitan areas (Zurich, Basel Métropole Lémanique, Capital Region), five Action Areas are characterised by a polycentric network of small and medium-size towns and surrounding areas (Lucerne, Città Ticino, Jurabogen / Arc Jurassien, Aareland, North-East Switzerland) and three Action Areas have an Alpine character (Gotthard, Western Alps, Eastern Alps). With no statutory tasks assigned and no formal institutions managing them, ‘Action Areas’ rely on voluntary cooperation of administrations and actors.

**TCAs also emerge in the absence of a specific policy framework or in the context of multiple frameworks.** The Spatial Development Commission of Lake Constance (see Box 2.13) has developed in the wake of the International Lake Constance Conference and is embedded in a region with long-standing experience in cross-border cooperation on multiple levels, however in absence of any specific policy framework. Greater Copenhagen is one of nine ‘Business Regions’ in Denmark (see Box 2.9), but incorporates the Swedish region of Skåne and all of its municipalities. It is therefore a particular adaptation of a policy framework which is otherwise designed for intra-national cooperation. By branding themselves as parts of ‘Greater Copenhagen’ (as compared to the previous ‘Öresund region’), actors of southernmost Sweden acknowledge that the central node and main driver of their development is situated across the border.

#### Box 2.9 Danish Business Regions

The **Danish Business Regions** are a policy framework that allow municipalities and regions to cooperate in a new, not predefined and soft framework. Cooperation in the Business Regions provides a framework to develop common policy priorities, strategic milestones and concrete projects to strengthen the framework conditions for growth in close collaboration between municipalities, sometimes involving the respective regions in their governance structure. By 2017, nine business regions have been formed.

Business regions developed in the wake of a territorial reorganisation, which gave more competences to the local level. In return, the need arose to provide a framework for municipalities to collaborate across administrative boundaries. Business regions’ *raison d’être* is a thorough recognition among the municipalities that one is stronger together to create growth than individually.

The organisation of the various Business Regions differs considerably, but all are initiated bottom-up. Business regions are formal collaborations with signed agreements between the involved municipalities and sometimes the regions. They are often institutionalised with an intermunicipal committee and a secretariat. This secretariat may be a cooperation in its own right or be commissioned to a member. Most Business Regions have a close link with business and industry partners. Their activities and policy actions are generally geared towards economic growth. Some business regions include planning relevant policy questions around transport or area planning.

Cross-border cooperation instances otherwise tend to position themselves at the margins of prevailing national administrative and political hierarchies. However, national authorities have traditionally been involved in cross-border agreements, also when issues addressed are primarily of a local or regional nature, insofar as measures to address identified challenges and opportunities also relate to the status of the national border. The Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine illustrates constraints linked to these national agreements, as it was established as a soft 'backing' of the formal cross-border cooperation of the Upper Rhine Conference, with its governmental commission consisting of appointed representatives of the governments of Germany, France and Switzerland. While this need for soft instruments in parallel with top-down steered cooperation structures appears obvious in cross-border contexts such as the Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine, it has been noted that cross-border cooperation may prepare and encourage new forms of intra-national cooperation. This has been particularly obvious in some Swiss AAs, e.g. Jura Massif AA and Lake Geneva Metropolitan AA, where it was noted that cross-border cooperation had given actors from different cantons and sectors opportunities to meet, intensifying inter-cantonal cooperation.

### **2.3 Rationales for cooperation are linked to involved actors' positioning in wider geographic contexts**

Even though the motives for joint action are specific to each cooperation instance, the strategic objectives of the analysed cases can be boiled down to three main cooperation rationales. They are strongly intertwined, and in most cases the strategic goal of soft territorial cooperation is a mix of two or even all three cooperation rationales:

**1.) To position the cooperation within wider geographic contexts.** Whether cooperation includes a region-building ambition, seeks to promote a network of cities or a corridor, it in all cases implies a form of positioning of its actors within wider geographic contexts. The review of cases showed that this positioning can take different forms. Depending on the motivations behind the cooperation, the scale at which the 'external context' against which cooperating persons and bodies position themselves can vary from the immediate neighbourhood to the global economy. Examples of cooperation ambitions and corresponding geographic contexts areas:

- Ambition to **prevent a tendency to become an 'inner periphery'** (in the shadow of metropolitan region/s), at different scales:
  - **Town-level** (e.g. Halmstad – see Box 2.7);
  - **Level of metropolitan regions** (e.g. the Metropolitan pole Sillon Lorrain seeks to promote its metropolitan qualities to counterbalance the external influences from the Paris region, Strasbourg and Luxembourg; the Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine aims to position itself as a metropolitan area in the context of domestic metropolitan policies) or **network of towns** (e.g. the Swiss Capital Region Association, and its network of towns around the city of Berne, was established in

recognition of the need for collaboration as a way to avoid falling behind the metropolitan areas of Zurich, Basel and Geneva;

- **National-level** (e.g. National Strategy of Ireland to target Eastern parts of the country).
- Ambition to be able to **manage metropolitan pressures** (traffic, residential and business location development) (e.g. Strategic planning region north of Vienna and Territorial Pole Pays de Retz);
- Ambition to **weigh in European and national policy processes** (e.g. the Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino and Euroregion Alps-Mediterranean aim to influence European policy processes; the Swiss Intercantonal Conferences such as the Intergovernmental Conference of Central or Western Switzerland and the Aareland Verein are more geared towards national policy processes);
- Ambition to **stand up to global competition** (e.g. Greater Copenhagen Cooperation, Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine, Ireland National Spatial Planning Strategy);
- Ambition to **create and enhance the cross-border dimension** (e.g. the Ireland National Spatial Planning Strategy and Greater Copenhagen Business Region have both a cross-border dimension, but are based on national cooperation frameworks while Euroregion Danube- Vltava, Euroregion Alps-Mediterranean, and Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino are inherently cross-border).

These observations imply that a multiplicity of scales can be considered in the design and implementation of soft cooperation instances, taking into account not only the level at which the cooperation is implemented, but also the external contexts it relates to. Relations between levels may also be further characterised, as they may be cooperative or conflictual, characterised by one- or two-way communication or by a lack of dialogue. It is on this basis that one may identify each cooperation instance's role in a multi-level territorial governance.

**2.) To achieve stronger regional integration.** Contrary to the above, here the focus is more inward looking. Even though the Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino has also an outward looking perspective, its primary goal is to deepen the integration of a region that has a long common history and tight cultural links (see Box 2.10). The region was one integrated territory until its separation after the First World War, when the Northern part of the Tyrol went to Austria and the Southern parts (Bolzano and Trentino) to Italy. The Euroregion has, thus, from the start been a political project of achieving a high level of regional integration without aiming for reunification. Another example is the Greater Copenhagen area, i.e. the Danish region of Zealand and the Swedish region of Skåne. It is less inward looking, but seeks deeper regional integration, albeit also for the purpose of performing well on the global stage.

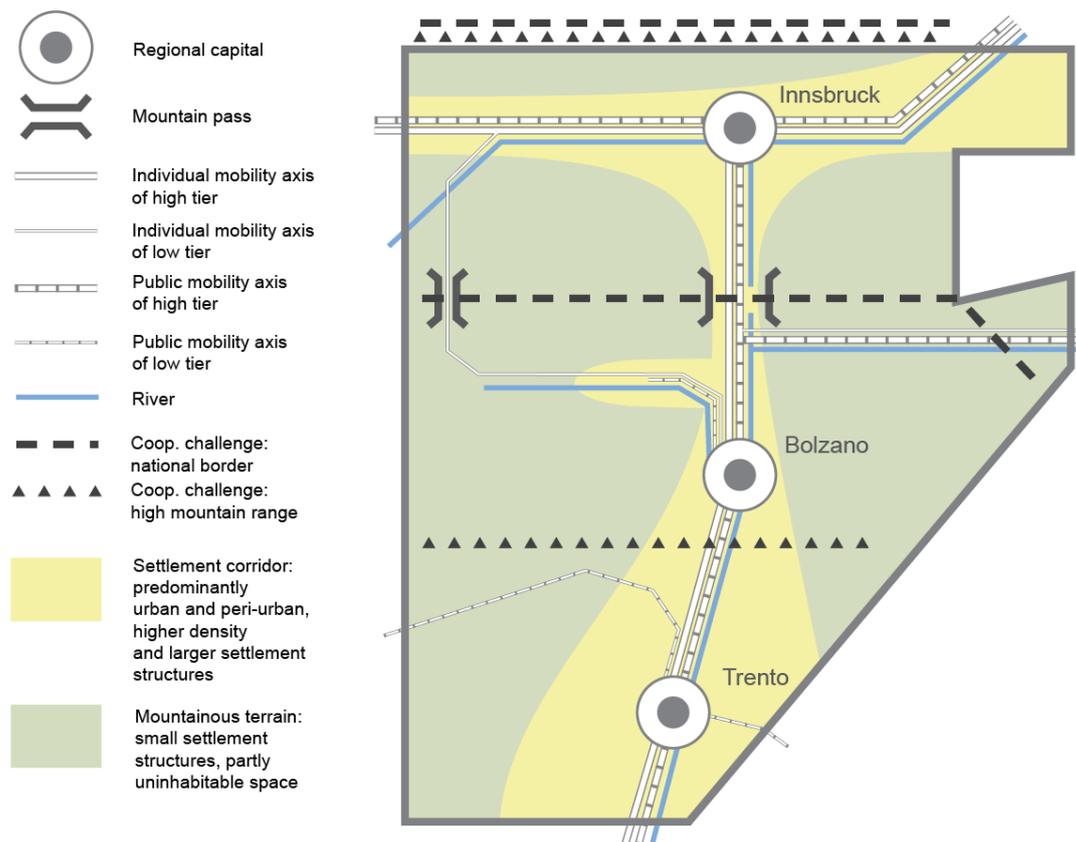
### Box 2.10 Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino

The **Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino** is composed of in the Federal State of Tyrol (AT) and the two Autonomous Provinces of Bozen-Bolzano and Trentino (IT). All three regions share the same Alpine geography with a system of mountain ranges and valleys and limited space for settlements. They therefore have similar development strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, the region shares 600 years of common history until its separation after the First World War and has tight cultural links. The Euroregion is, thus, a political project of achieving a high level of regional integration without aiming for reunification. Another strategic goal of the Euroregion is to position itself towards the European Union. In 1995, the first trans-boundary liaison office in Brussels has been established.

Beyond that, the Euroregion addresses a lot of sectoral issues in the area of culture, education, youth affairs, science and research, tourism, transport policy, health care, environmental affairs and energy policy. Countless concrete activities and collaborations are implemented on the ground by public and private sector stakeholders and the civil society. A strong cooperation axis has been established between the three capitals as the seats of the regional governments and regional administrations. The different governance structures of the three regions, with the Tyrol being a Federal State and the South Tyrol and Trentino having the status of autonomous provinces and, together, forming the Italian region of Alto Adige-Trentino, can potentially be a barrier to further integration.

Figure 2.6: Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino



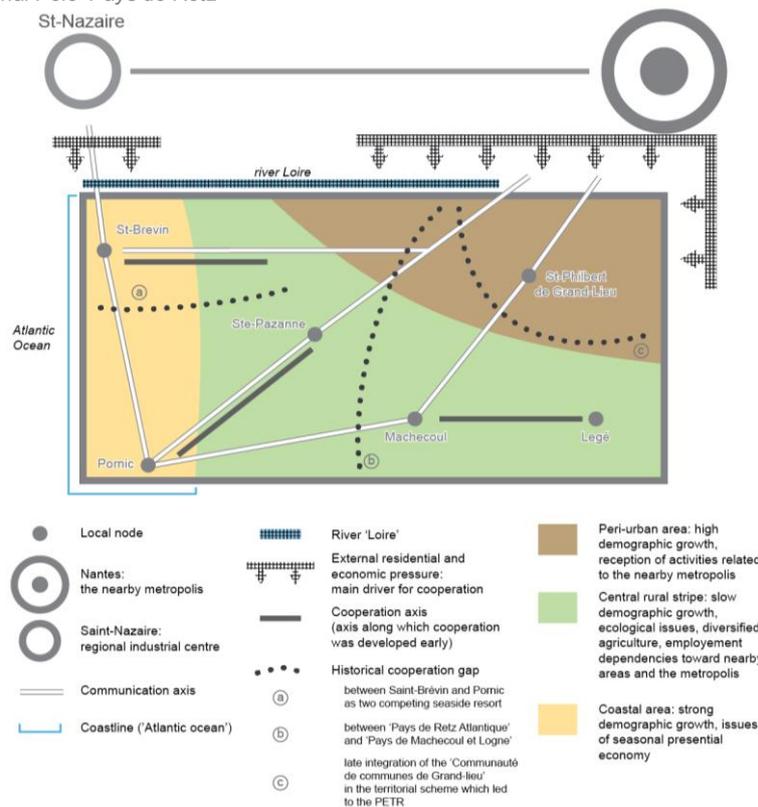
Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Also several of the analysed Swiss cooperation instances have primarily a regional integration objective. Examples are the Lake Geneva Council that aims to strengthen a 'Lake Geneva identity' in the cross-border area between Switzerland and France, or the Aareland Council that aims to create a regional identity with the Aare river as the connecting element.

### Box 2.11 Territorial Pole Pays de Retz

The Territorial Pole 'Pays de Retz' is a cooperation of four intermunicipal bodies. The perimeter established in 2014 is justified by two main geographical issues. On the one hand, the cooperation developed as an answer to the common perception of the neighbouring metropolis (Nantes-Saint-Nazaire) as a potential threat to a harmonious development. Over the last decade the area recorded a strong demographic growth while employment grew at a slower pace. This imbalance generates important commuting flows between the 'Pays de Retz' and the nearby metropolis (Nantes-Saint-Nazaire). On the other hand, the cooperation was triggered by the common interest in advocating for a new bridge over the river Loire.

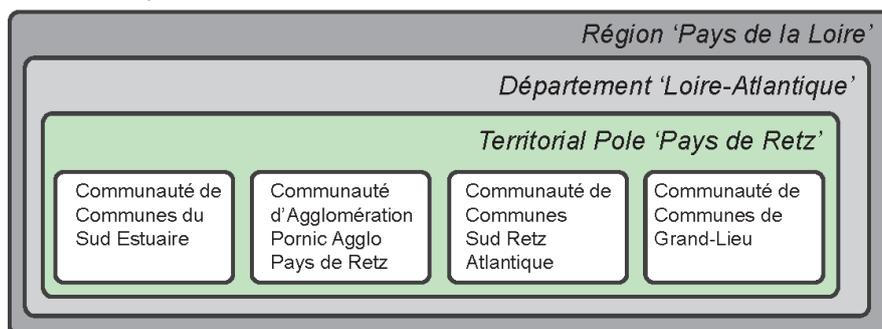
Figure 2.7: Territorial Pole 'Pays de Retz'



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Being a cooperation of intermunicipal bodies, the territorial pole is an additional level of cooperation. The current perimeter has been subject to changes during the last decade. Its current extent results from a merger of two previous cooperation structures: the SCOT union (established in 2005 and responsible for land-use planning), and two previously existing territorial poles (Federation du Pays de Retz Atlantique and Pays Grand Lieu Machecouil et Logne – see cooperation gap (b)). As a result, the 'Pays de Retz' faces cooperation challenges where relations between members used to be weaker or even tense, between the two competing sea side resorts on the west, between ancient territorial poles, or as a result of the integration of the 'Communauté de communes de Grand-Lieu' in the SCOT union in 2011.

Figure 2.8: Institutional map



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

**3.) To respond to a common set of challenges and opportunities more effectively.** Rising to common challenges, exploiting common assets, lobbying for common interests, and performing tasks jointly can increase effectiveness and often also efficiency. A number of analysed TCAs aim to achieve an economy of scale and greater weight as regards the external (re)presentation of the region. Examples are:

- The Hungarian Development Councils that aim to develop specific territorial assets of regions within the national contexts (e.g. better touristic marketing, an improved management of a heritage site, etc.);
- The Twin-cities Newry Dundalk that aim to create the perception of a broader region, which together provides a critical mass to attract investors;
- The Euroregion Alps-Mediterranean that aims to use public funding more efficiently and be more effective in raising EU funding;
- The Territorial Pole Pays de Retz that lobbies jointly for an infrastructure development;
- The Gotthard AA economic reconversion after the closure of military bases and taking into account the decline of mountain agriculture.

## **2.4 Common strategic objectives evolve over time in an iterative process**

The precise identification of strategic objectives is not necessarily trivial, as cooperation is generally an iterative and evolving process. Involved actors may have different objectives, and commonalities evolve over time as the dialogue opens new perspectives of joint action. Cooperation objectives and organisational setups are in these respects in a dialectic relation to each other. Modalities of dialogue and decision-making influence which strategic ambitions are envisaged, at the same time as operational setups may be revised to adjust to the adoption of a given objective. This dialectic relation may translate in operational terms into successive mutually reinforcing feedback loops and a 'spiral of growth in cooperation': an initial organisational setup triggers a first set of strategic actions, of which the implementation leads to adjustment in the organisational setup, which may itself generate revised ambitions for cooperative action.

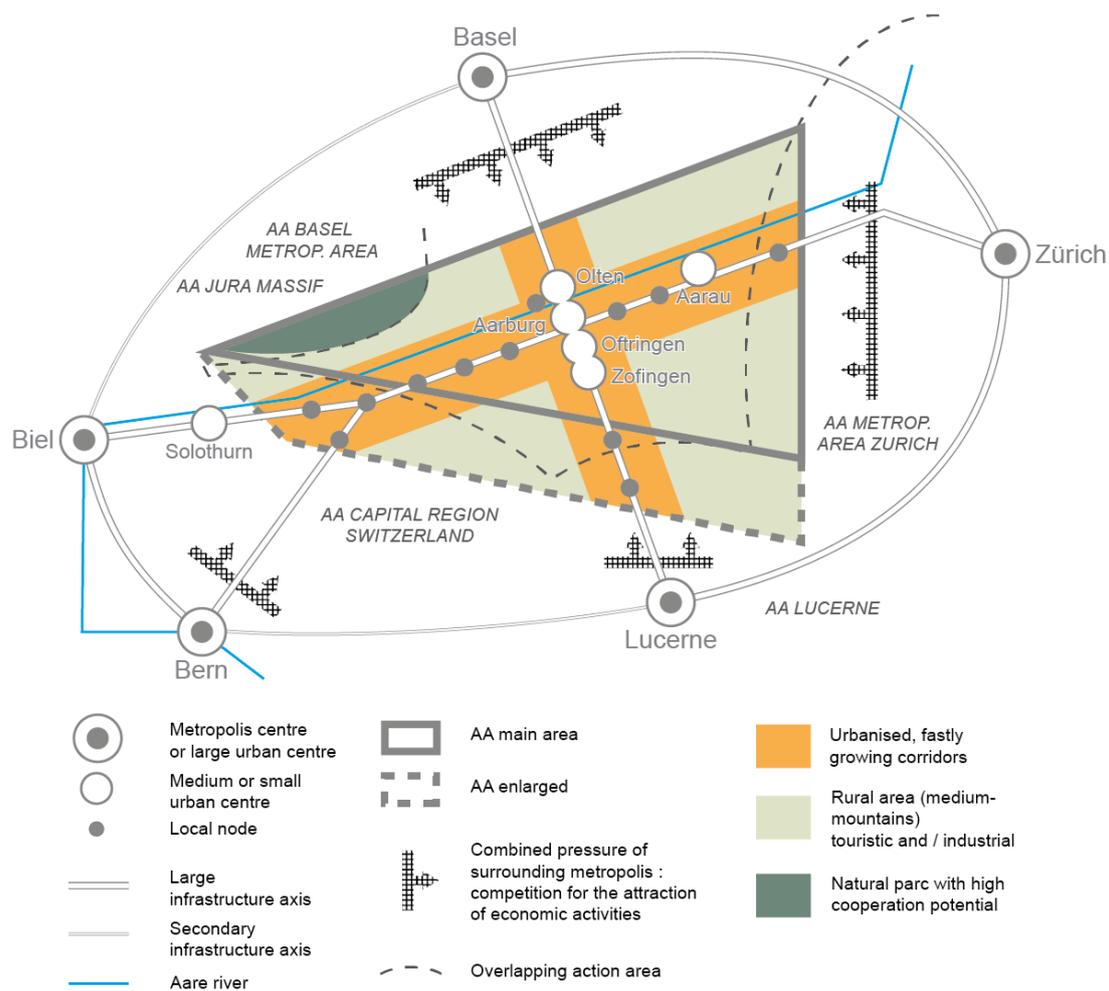
The key concern from the perspective of national and European authorities is to set up cooperation frameworks that could trigger such 'cooperation spiral'. The Aareland Association ('Verein Aareland') is one example of a cooperation that has experienced a spiral of growth. The highly institutionalised association was developed as a reaction to the agglomeration policies of the Swiss federal level, was supported by the Confederation's model projects programme, and resulted from the informal network platform 'Mittelland'. Compared to its predecessor cooperation, the Aareland Association is not only more formalised, but has also a wider scope and increased level of ambition. The Swiss Spatial Strategy has played a catalysing role in bringing political efforts together for a further step towards greater institutionalisation (see Box 2.12).

### Box 2.12 Aareland Action Area and Aareland Association

The **Aareland Action Area**, named by its dominant geographical feature of the Aare valley and its river, is an intermetropolitan area with a string of small and medium-sized cities alongside the river valley, and the North-South corridor connecting Lucerne and Basel. The Action Area is located between the metropolitan areas of Basel, Bern and Zurich, as well as the agglomeration areas of Lucerne and Jura. Thus, the AA is functionally linked to the surrounding metropolitan areas which at the same time puts pressures on its development.

The **AareLand Association** is a new cooperation that strategically aims to support cooperation between public and private stakeholders in the region for them to develop joint projects, in particular in support of new business developments (e.g. through the creation of the 'Learning Area Aare'). The cooperation is an institutionalised cooperation that was developed as a reaction to the model projects and the agglomeration policies of the federal level in Switzerland, and which resulted from the network platform "*Mittelland*". A letter of intent was initially signed in 2012 to institutionalise the formerly informal cooperation and contacts. The three cities of Aarau, Olten and Zofingen were driving forces in the cooperation. The city of Olten initially had the executive secretariat, which was later on moved to Zofingen. The particularity of the cooperation regarding their role in spatial planning coordination is that they encompass two cantons, and cover the three planning associations ("*Planungsverbände*") of Aarau, Zofingen and Olten-Gösgen-Gäu.

Figure 2.9: Aareland Action Area



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

French Metropolitan Poles (MP), i.e. collaborations of close-by towns within larger urban areas or urban corridors, provide an example of an initial organisational setup that was revised based on first experiences. From 2014, MPs were finally allowed to implement actions within any thematic field: top-down steering of fields of cooperation had not proved purposeful. One also observed that participating city authorities had been reluctant at 'transferring blocks of competence' to the MP (e.g. deciding that 'transport policy' would be managed at the level of MP). Instead a legal innovation was introduced: the notion of 'delegated action' made it possible for MP members to decide on joint actions, without any decision on 'transfers of competence' concerning the thematic field to which this action belongs. Such changes made it possible to relaunch cooperation within MPs. This process illustrates the importance of 'trial and error' in the process of setting up cooperation frameworks. It also suggests that defining strategic ambitions is not necessarily the best starting point for triggering a 'cooperation spiral', as involved actors are then not allowed to generate the positive feedback loops between organisational setups and strategy elaboration.

Cases also show that cooperation dynamics only develop when involved actors see a clear benefit from and need for cooperation. Pre-defining the strategic ambitions to be pursued through cooperation generates a risk that actors fail to see the added-value they may draw from it.

## **2.5 The role of 'soft' cooperation options in the achievement of strategic objectives**

The analysed cases present different degrees of formalisation and types of institutionalisation, from open cooperation configurations with no dedicated cooperation structure (e.g. Swiss Action Areas) or a very limited one (e.g. Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine) to highly institutionalised cooperation areas with a dedicated body having own legal personality (e.g. EGTC Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino, Tokaj Wine Region Regional Development Council). All these arrangements can be equally valid, depending on the pursued outcome. Expected concrete and 'hard' results (e.g. binding regional strategic plans in Lower Austria) require a higher degree of formalisation than soft cooperation results (e.g. the Twin Cities Newry-Dundalk pursue regional development in the broadest sense – see Box 2.14). TCAs with highly strategic ambitions, but only weak institutionalisation such as the Euroregion Alps-Mediterranean may perceive 'softness' as a challenge (see Box 2.4).

Normally, soft cooperation is in contradiction with institutionalisation. However, reviewed cases demonstrate that a limited group of dedicated coordinators with a clear mandate is essential for any successful form of cooperation. Hence, most TCAs have some sort of permanent office that takes care of day-to-day management such as the preparation of meetings, the management of the website, the contracting of external services, etc., or else at least a rotating chairmanship.

Sometimes a process of 'hardening', i.e. a tendency towards a greater degree of formalisation and institutionalisation can be observed as a TCA's strategic objectives shift towards the

achievement of concrete, tangible results. However, “hardening” is not the natural progression of any soft TCA. There are those cases that intentionally use soft, non-binding formats, and those that accept soft forms which might be regarded as a temporal compromise. By contrast, a “softening”, i.e. a deliberate reduction of formal structures, has not been observed.

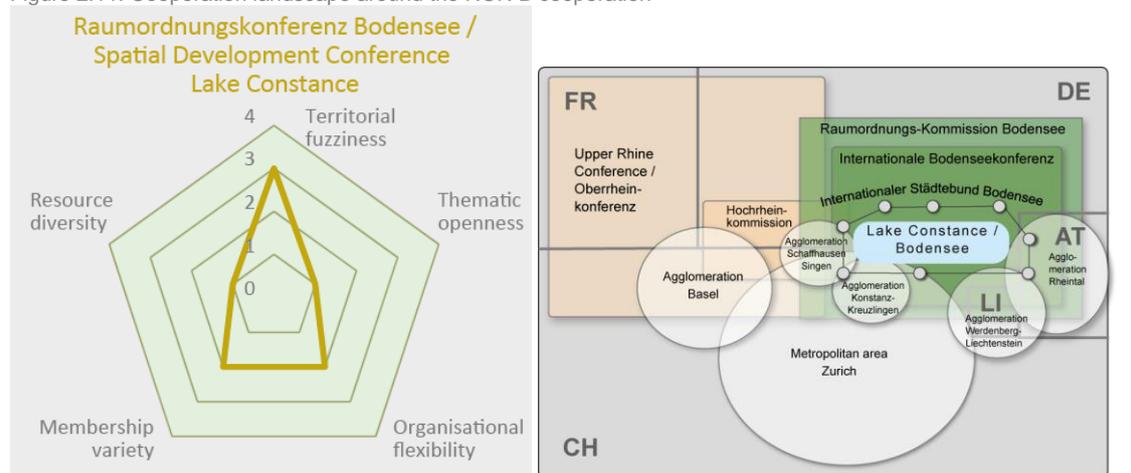
In many cases, the actors intentionally use the soft character for strategic reasons. The Upper Rhine case (TMO) has initialised soft structures ‘in the shadow’ of harder structures in order to accompany and influence other platforms. This is an example of a congruent parallelism of soft and hard(er) governance structures, similar to the case of the Spatial Development Commission of Lake Constance (ROK-B) that is linked to the International Lake Constance Conference (see Box 2.13). Contrary to TMO, ROK-B has formalised its cooperation by means of a statute, a charter and the nomination of a chair. However, the cooperation remains open and flexible. No legislative competencies have been transferred to ROK-B.

**Box 2.13 Spatial Development Conference of Lake Constance**

The **Spatial Development Commission Lake Constance (ROK-B)** was initiated in 2001. It works in close interaction with the International Lake Constance Conference (IBK), but is formally independent from the IBK. The perimeter is very similar, even if the spatial focus of the ROK-B is a bit larger on the Swiss and the German side.

The ROK-B is intentionally informal and characterised by routine: three meetings are held per year. It has strategic ambitions, argues cross-sectoral and has extensive project experience. However, its instrumental setting is weak. Currently, there is a Statute and a Charta that define the overall objectives and principles of the cooperation. An elected chair coordinates the meetings, but further institutions do not exist. The softness of the cooperation structure is frequently discussed, but has so far been regarded as the best option as it allows a flexible thematic and spatial scope.

Figure 2.10: Spider graph (1–very low to 4–very high)  
 Figure 2.11: Cooperation landscape around the ROK-B cooperation



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

The Lake Constance region has a longstanding experience in cross-border cooperation on multiple levels (see figure 2.10 cooperation map). This ‘institutional thickness’ is a good basis for soft cooperation. At the same time, it is not trivial to make a difference, to actually influence spatial development. Some of the existing cooperation platforms on the local and meso level are shown in figure 2.10: The IBK, which was already established in 1972 as intergovernmental platform, is one the pioneers of cross-border cooperation and development. The city network ‘Städtebund Bodensee’ is a platform for the exchange of those cities situated directly at the lake. In its Western parts, the ROK-B region overlaps with the Upper Rhine conference and the Trinational Metropolitan Region; moreover, all collaborations are embedded in the large-scale cooperation forms of the ARGE ALP and the macro-regional strategy EUSALP.

In Sweden, soft cooperation has not been promoted nationally, but local and regional authorities have had the possibility of opting for such solutions if they saw the need for it. In the case of Halmstad, a soft solution appears unavoidable, as establishing a cooperation of local authorities across three regions did not fit in any of the available formal structures. However, it also fits local actors' objective of progressively associating additional areas and actors. Overall, 'softness' therefore either appears as **a component of national strategy to change relations between actors or a reaction to the inadequacy of formal structures.**

While the Swiss AAs belong to the former category, the French Sillon Lorrain Metropolitan Pole is an example of the latter. In the French Sillon Lorrain case, softness was part of a strategy to organise necessary coordination and address identified challenges without creating an additional formal structure that adds to institutional complexity. Actors were aware that, given the already high level of complexity of the French system of territorial government, cooperation mechanisms must avoid excessive institutionalisation, also to avoid confusing the wider public. This also implies that Metropolitan Poles generally consider that visibility for the wider public is not an objective, as they could be misinterpreted as an additional administrative level.

The regional cooperation north and south of Vienna established in the context of the regional strategic planning processes deliberately refrained from establishing new permanent structures for very pragmatic reason. On the one hand, they did not want to establish a new layer of regional cooperation that competes and overlaps with existing collaborations, on the other hand, new cooperation structures would have meant that mayors had to attend yet another set of meetings with a similar composition of actors. 'Softness' can therefore both imply an emphasis on participation and high visibility, or an aspiration to create a supple tool for coordination between public authorities, which is not promoted to a wider audience.

'Softness' may also be a component of a communication strategy around territorial development. To mention once more the Austrian case of the strategic planning region north of Vienna, there 'softness' is part of the strategy to empower local actors, build confidence and raise the level of ambition among existing sub-regional cooperation structures, in a context of external metropolitan pressures. In the Tokaj Wine Region (Hungary), the Regional Development Council has been set up in the framework of 'soft' national guidelines to allow for a better integration between relevant actors, especially considering the high visibility provided by the UNESCO World Heritage status. Capitalising on this asset presupposes a better alignment with activities implemented under ESIF-funded programmes and requires new forms of interaction between municipalities, wine producers and other actors. Soft forms of cooperation can also help to promote new potential or emerging functional contexts, e.g. in the branding and overall development vision developed by the Newry-Dundalk twin cities cooperation. Softness in these cases makes it possible to overcome limitations linked to borders between administrative regions or sectoral interests in the promotion of a specific agenda.

Finally, some cases have ended in soft forms of cooperation without originally striving for this. The European Region Danube- Vltava cooperation (ERDV) originally intended to become an EGTC, but for political reasons chose the softer form of a 'European Region', potentially being an interim solution. Similarly, the European Region Alps-Mediterranean opted for a 'soft' approach to cooperation because of an insufficiently stable political backing for more formalised solutions such as an EGTC (see Box 2.4). 'Softness' in these cases appears as a pragmatic choice in specific framework conditions.

## **2.6 Some basic financing is essential, but dedicated funding is not vital for maintaining the cooperation**

The analysed TCAs have varying degrees of endowment with financial and human resources. In TCAs with their own budget, these funds are in most of the cases used to pay a few permanent employees (usually 2-6 people), provide a homepage, organise meetings and, in some cases, finance studies. In the majority of cases, this basic financing is raised by the cooperation partners in the form of membership contributions. Contributions are often weighted by the number of inhabitants per municipality or regions. For TCAs that primarily target soft interventions like policy coordination, joint lobbying, exchange and networking, these member contributions tend to be sufficient to maintain the cooperation. However, they are hardly ever sufficient to fund actual project activities.

In order to raise the funds needed for concrete project implementation, TCAs use two distinct approaches: they either ask cooperation partners involved in a specific project to provide the additional funding (a model often used in Switzerland), or they tap other national or European funding sources. EU funding sources and in particular Interreg funding are often tapped into in the case of transnational TCAs. In fact, several TCAs aim explicitly at a better exploitation of EU funding and list it as one of their explicit objectives (e.g. the Euroregion Danube- Vltava). National funds can be hard to obtain when funding schemes do not foresee applications from actors from different regions or countries. For example, the Swiss Capital Region Association, reported on the difficulty of obtaining cantonal funding for intercantonal projects as the project has to fit with the objectives of all the different cantonal NRP programmes concerned. One example of how national funding can be made accessible to interregional cooperation is the intercantonal implementation programme for the Swiss New Regional Policy (NRP) in the Jura Massif Action Area. The programme is both coherent with each of the four involved cantonal NRP programmes and with the objectives of the supraregional cooperation 'arcjurassien.ch'.

Only few policy frameworks come with dedicated funding for the realisation of TCAs. The Irish Spatial Strategy has a specific fund for the implementation of the strategy which is provided to specific projects. The Lower Austrian Government also supports municipalities that participate in the strategic planning process in the form of a financial compensation, but mainly in the form of manpower. More concretely, i.e. the Lower Austrian Government helps with the coordination of the process, provides necessary background data, etc. Also the Tokaj Wine Region Regional

Development Council (RDC) is financed by national funds as it is considered of national importance for territorial development (but also receives EU and UNESCO funding). The Tokaj Wine RDC may also take over statutory task, which is an exception, since most TCAs have no legal competences and task transferred. Another observation is that cooperation projects are mostly financed entirely through public funding; private sector financial contributions are the exception rather than the rule.

To conclude, it can be said that, while some basic financing seems vital to maintain the cooperation, further dedicated funding of TCA activities seems not to be a prerequisite for the development of a dynamic cooperation. On the contrary, TCAs in which cooperation activities are paid largely or entirely by the cooperation partners, thus who have 'skin in the game', may to a greater extent focus on ensuring that their 'projects' function efficiently as components of a wider process of structural change (see section 2.8 below).

## **2.7 Most TCAs take a pragmatic approach to region-building and combine different regionalisation logics**

Most cooperation instances observed by the project have a region-building ambition. This implies that they seek to construct a community of actors with a shared commitment to develop a more or less explicitly and precisely delineated area. The notion of 'region' implies that this area is continuous; as shown below, some cooperation instances rather define the space within which interactions are promoted and socio-economic impacts are sought after as 'corridors' (e.g. the Belfast–Dublin corridor) or 'networks' (e.g. the Metropolitan pole 'Sillon Lorrain' as a network of urban areas, the City Network of Jura Massif as a network of 16 municipalities across four cantons, the Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine as a region built around innovation network clusters) (see Box 2.14).

As mentioned previously, planners have recurrently emphasized the need to deal with the misfit between political/administrative regions and functional areas. In the academic literature, one traditionally differentiates between (1) regions as units that are taken as natural entities and historically or culturally given units, (2) regions resulting from collective mobilisation or public participation and (3) regions as instruments in the promotion of specific policy agendas by decision-makers (see e.g. Debarbieux, 2012). Our case studies confirm the validity of such distinctions, and show that the different categories are not exclusive of each other; each cooperation instance can combine elements of these wide categories. In practice, many cooperation areas combine different regionalisation logics in a pragmatic way: The French Territorial Pole 'Pays de Retz' (see Box 2.11), for example, is a historically inherited region, which is reactivated in response to pressures from emerging functional spaces (i.e. the influence areas of Nantes and Saint-Nazaire, and coastal tourism).

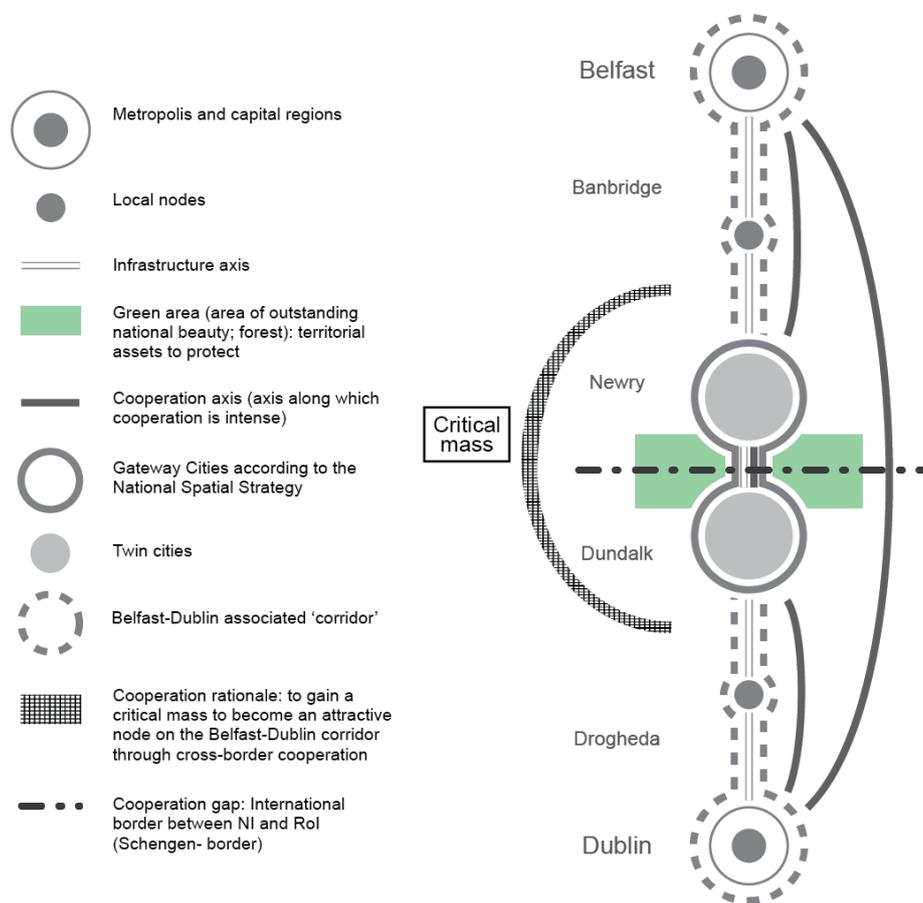
### Box 2.14 Belfast–Dublin corridor and Newry-Dundalk gateway

The **National Spatial Strategy of Ireland** developed for the period 2002-2020 identifies nine cities with gateway and nine medium-sized towns with a hub function and defines fuzzily delineated corridors and gateways. The rationale behind defining gateways and corridors is to achieve a more balanced regional development and stimulate development outside the growing Dublin area. Two of the defined gateways are cross-border, one of which is the **Newry and Dundalk gateway**. Following the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish Spatial Strategy covers also the Northern Ireland side with the intention to support development alongside the border regions.

The two cities of Newry and Dundalk are located on the corridor between the two main urban agglomerations in Ireland, that of Belfast and Dublin, along which one also finds the towns of Banbridge and Drogheda. Newry and Dundalk are only 16 km apart and are located on different sides of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. They have since 2009 identified themselves as the main nodes of a 'Twin City Region'.

The **corridor between Belfast and Dublin** is an important strategic axis. In order to strengthen the broader axis as well as support the development of other regions in Ireland against the background of the evermore increasing primacy of Dublin, the gateway concept included smaller and medium-sized cities. In order to support the development of gateways, the Gateway Innovation Fund (GIF) was set up to stimulate and reward action at gateway level.

Figure 2.12: Belfast-Dublin corridor



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Because of the great variety of observed approaches, these initial broad characteristics of cooperation would need to be enriched to arrive at an operational categorisation of cooperation instances in Europe. We have observed cooperation instances where the cooperation area is alternatively based on a natural entity (e.g. the Jura Massif in the case of the Jura Massif Action Area), cultural and historical factors (e.g. the historical region 'Tyrol' in the case of the

Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino – see Box 2.10), functional links (e.g. functional links in the Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine), common challenges or opportunities (e.g. the jointly perceived pressure from metropolitan areas and joint infrastructure development in the case of the Territorial Pole ‘Pays de Retz’), or existing administrative units (e.g. the Strategic planning region south of Vienna that is identical with the extent of the administrative district ‘Mödling’). Some cooperation instances explicitly do not ambition to constitute a region:

- The Territorial Pole ‘Sillon Lorrain’ is a network of urban areas that excludes intermediate areas.
- In the Irish case, actors think in terms of corridors: the ambition to integrate the area between Drogheda, Dundalk, Newry and Banbridge is a component of a wider strategy to enhance development along the Belfast–Dublin corridor (see Box 2.14).

Such approaches may raise issues concerning territorial cohesion in the area as a whole, i.e. the urban nodes connected in networks and their hinterlands and intermediate areas, or areas located around a growth corridor. A primary concern is that the forums for dialogue and exchange established by the cooperation instances may exclude stakeholders from some types of areas, making their issues and ambitions less visible. Some cooperation structures have taken this risk into account. For example, the City Network of the Jura Massif is embedded in and connected to the larger cooperation area of [arcjurassien.ch](http://arcjurassien.ch) (see Box 2.15).

Basing the delineation on existing cooperation structures might support the delivery of quick cooperation results (cf. the strategic planning regions north and south of Vienna). However, when pre-existing cooperation areas are pooled in a larger cooperation area, old tensions between those units might come to the surface (cf. TP Pays de Retz). Cooperating across different political-administrative systems seems to be another potential cooperation barrier (cf. Lake Geneva Action Area), which, however, it is not insurmountable if there is sufficient political will (cf. the Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino).

It also is important to differentiate between cooperation instances that ambition to generate a widely recognised new territorial entity, and those that simply create a cooperation arena for administrative regions that wish to remain the primary ‘geographic references’ of inhabitants and economic actors. Typically, while Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino would like to maximise publicity around Tyrol as an integrated territory, the Territorial Pole ‘Sillon Lorrain’ is an example of the latter that prefers to limit publicity to stakeholders directly concerned by their actions only. Depending on the approach chosen, the preconditions for generating the above-described ‘cooperation spiral’ vary significantly. In the former case, wide recognition of its cultural and social significance is important. In the latter one, one mainly needs to ensure that involved experts, senior officials and policy makers, recognise the instrumental usefulness of cooperation in relation to their own objectives or daily work.

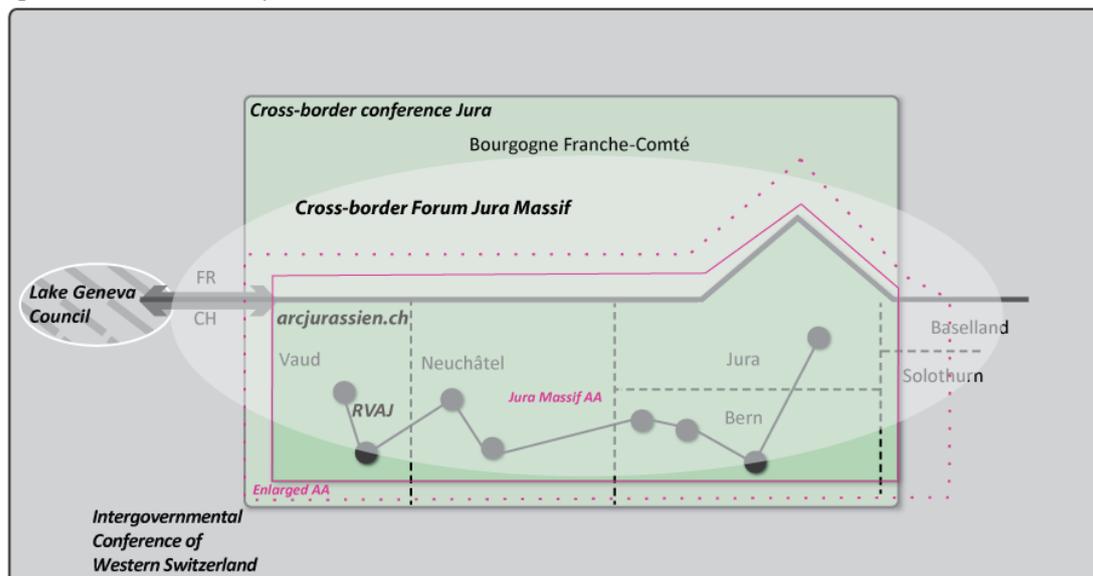
### Box 2.15 Jura Massif Action Area and the Arcjurassien Cooperation

The **Jura Massif Action Area** is a predominantly rural region, containing a network of decentralised small cities. The core of the Action Area is formed by the cantons Jura, Neuchâtel and parts of canton Berne and Vaud as well as some French municipalities along the border. The Action Area has a strong cross-border dimension, with the income and price differential generating substantial cross-border flows between the Swiss and French part of the Jura Massif. This, in turn, provides a strong rationale for cross-border cooperation.

As a result, authorities and actors have already extensive experience in collaborative work and planning. The Action Area boasts a number of mature cooperation instances. This is clearly an asset for the implementation of the Jura Massif Action Area, but might raise issues of coordination of the strategic visions of these collaborations and duplication of concrete implementation activities. However, three of the existing collaborations work in close cooperation under the umbrella of the Competence Centre *arcjurassien.ch* that aims to ensure overall coherence (see Figure 2.13):

- **Arcjurassien.ch** is an association of the cantons Berne, Jura, Neuchâtel and Vaud created in 1994. Initially called CTJ-Switzerland and aimed at dealing with cross-border issues, the association moved slowly toward intercantonal cooperation and was renamed *arcjurassien.ch* in 2008.
- The **Cross-border Conference Jura (CTJ)** is an intergovernmental cooperation that exists since 1985 between the four Swiss cantons and the French region of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté. It is the mother structure of the majority of the existing cooperation initiatives in the AA.
- The **City Network of the Jura Massif (RVAJ)** federates since 1993 the interests of 16 urban municipalities across the Jura Massif AA through intermunicipal and intercantonal collaboration.

Figure 2.13: Institutional map of Jura Massif AA



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

As a result of this cooperation between Arcjurassien, CTJ and RVAJ, the implementation programme of the City Network of the Jura Massif is in compliance with the intercantonal objectives which, in turn, fit with the cross-border strategy. In this integrated, multilevel, administrative cooperation architecture, another cooperation, the citizen initiative **Cross-border Forum Jura Massif**, offers opportunities to think and develop cooperation and knowledge on issues that don't fit well into the framework and timing of Swiss and French territorial policies. The results of its activities provide complementary information which the Competence Centre *arcjurassien.ch* and other actors in the area may use for inspiration.

## **2.8 Dynamic cooperation instances place project-type activities in the context of a wider process of change**

In some of the analysed cases the cooperation area is not static, but open for expansion (e.g. the cooperation around the town of Halmstad that is still in process of formation). However, the majority of selected TCAs are established as long-term and fairly static partnerships with an unlimited duration. The only exception is the strategic planning process in Lower Austria, which explicitly refrained from the creation of a new permanent regional cooperation structure that would supersede existing cooperation structures. In the case of the strategic planning process north of Vienna, cooperation will continue within the well-established sub-regional TCAs, which have participated in the strategic planning process. The ad-hoc cooperation structures established for the planning process are slimmed down once the planning process has finished and only the project steering group (the political board) remains and meets annually for monitoring the implementation of the plan. In the case of the strategic planning process south of Vienna, cooperation continues in the existing mayors' conference and the task of managing the joint planning outcome and ensuing cooperation has been conferred to the joint wastewater association. In both cases the rationale was to build on, strengthen and extend existing cooperation structures rather than create new ones.

TCAs whose members are strongly dependent on a political mandate from their constituencies, political changes can cause considerable disruptions in the cooperation. The Alps–Mediterranean Euroregion's ambition to further develop the institutional set-up by establishing an EGTC failed due to the change of political majorities on both the French and the Italian side, which put a considerable damper on the Euroregion (see Box 2.4). Nevertheless, common interests are strong enough to have recently revived the cooperation. Its long-term existence is, however, not guaranteed.

Even though most cooperation structures have been established to ensure continuous cooperation, in practical terms, single activities within the cooperation areas often have a project character (e.g. joint participation in an Interreg project) and, hence, are of limited duration. They may also be set up as a continuous (e.g. the management of a project fund, the continuous coordination between authorities, etc.) or recurring activities (e.g. the organisation of an annual conference, etc.). However, the more dynamic cooperation instances manage to position these punctual activities in the context of a wider process of change. They do not consider individual projects as an end in itself. In the context of European macro-regional strategies, this has been described as 'project chains'<sup>2</sup>. In general, interviews suggest that the awareness on how to link individual activities and a wider strategic agenda could be further developed.

---

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. [http://www.alpine-space.eu/news-events/events/asp/2017\\_meet\\_and\\_match/presentations/1.4\\_m-m\\_a.bergstrom.pdf](http://www.alpine-space.eu/news-events/events/asp/2017_meet_and_match/presentations/1.4_m-m_a.bergstrom.pdf)

## **2.9 Most TCAs involve public actors in a MLG structure, but few involve private stakeholders as cooperation partners**

The majority of analysed TCAs have set up a multi-level cooperation structure, involving actors on different government/ administrative levels (i.e. local, regional, national). In many cases, this follows from the underlying policy framework that aims to tackle multi-level coordination gaps and mismatches in decision-making competences between (functional) needs and coordination as well as financing. This was one of the objectives pursued by the Swiss Spatial Strategy when setting up AAs. The initial idea was to transcend usual planning levels and initiate cooperation between municipalities, regions and cantons, assuming that such a cooperation would lead to multiscalar polycentric and sustainable spatial development. Similarly, the regional spatial planning process in Lower Austria aims at establishing a mode of collaboration on equal terms between public actors in a multilevel coordination structure, i.e. in particular between the Office for Spatial Planning and Regional Policy of the Federal Province, which has the competence for regional planning, and the municipalities, which have the competence for local planning. Thus, the objective is to renew the relationship between actors on different administrative/ government levels, enhancing the understanding of each other's positions and needs. The case of Lower Austria has also shown that local actors benefit from a multi-level governance structure as they can capitalise on the expertise and resources available on the regional level.

Analysed cases of soft territorial cooperation are more or less 'soft' with regards to their openness to different stakeholders. While participation of private sector stakeholders and the general public is an important ingredient of territorial governance, we also found situations in which it makes sense to keep cooperation to the level of public actors only: a) early-stage cooperations that are still in the phase of better understanding the different positions and objectives of the public partners, where the involvement of other bodies would disturb the process (e.g. Halmstad case), and b) collaborative planning processes that aim to produce a politically endorsed result that protects general public interests, where single private stakeholder interests ought not play a role (e.g. strategic planning region north of Vienna).

In the Austrian situation, the general public and private stakeholders are not part of the process of developing a regional spatial planning programme cooperatively, but are only kept informed. This must be considered in the light of the fact that this spatial planning programme is binding. Furthermore, soft cooperation implies shifts in prerogatives between involved actors from different levels. These shifts are agreed upon insofar as they are perceived to be mutually beneficial: the Federal State limits the right to a top-down development of the Regional Spatial Planning Programme, while the municipalities limit their discretionary power regarding zoning. This makes the Austrian cooperative spatial planning process different from, for example, the French one, which produces a non-binding 'territorial strategy'.<sup>3</sup> The French framework for

---

<sup>3</sup> The binding document is the convention between regional and national authorities and the Territorial Pole that is inspired by the territorial strategy.

territorial cooperation leaves it open to each cooperation instance to decide which stakeholders to include in their Development Councils.

Private stakeholders may not always participate in the cooperation as cooperation partners, but they are often involved in specific activities and projects. In the case of the Swiss Capital Region Association, an advisory board consisting of 60 renowned personalities of the civil society provides important inputs and has more than once given a push to a specific project.

Another model of involvement of private actors is that of the Lake Geneva Council (see Box 2.16), a Swiss-French cross-border cooperation, which acts also as an umbrella for a number of other cross-border collaborations: the Lake Geneva Union of Arts & Crafts (ULAM), the Lake Geneva Union of Agriculture (ULCA) and the Lake Geneva Union Trade & Industry (ULCC). Closely linked to the Lake Geneva Council, they are rare examples of sectoral public-private cooperation at intercantonal and cross-border level.

**Box 2.16 Lake Geneva Action Area and the Lake Geneva Council**

The **Lake Geneva Metropolitan Area** is organised around two major nodes (Lausanne and Geneva) and also extends into France. The proximity to France creates specific challenges as differences in employment opportunities, purchasing power and property prices generate substantial commuter flows, tensions on housing markets and traffic congestion. To tackle these challenges, a number of cross-border cooperation initiatives have been created over time. One of them is the **Lake Geneva Council**, created in 1987 to foster joint policy implementation on issues concerning Lake Geneva. Closely linked to the Lake Geneva Council are a number of sectoral public-private collaborations at intercantonal and cross-border level: Lake Geneva Unions of Arts & Crafts, of Trade & Industry or of Agriculture. They are rare examples of the integration of private stakeholders in collaboration processes.

Apart from the Lake Geneva Council, a number of other supraregional and/or intercantonal collaboration initiatives are active in the region (see Figure 2.14):

- Regional Committee France-Geneva (RGFG), a state-to-state political agreement that has formalised cross-border collaboration since 1973;
- Lake Geneva Metropolis, a bilateral agreement between the cantons of Vaud and Geneva that formalises, since 2011, previous cooperation around the two urban centres of Lausanne & Geneva
- Greater Geneva Area has been formalised by 2013 as Local Grouping of Cross-Border Cooperation (LGCC).
- Chablais Région the collaboration was initiated in the early 1980s, driven by the need for cantons of Vaud and Valais to coordinate development in the lower part of the Rhône river valley.
- 3 Chablais can be seen as a spin-off effect of the Chablais Région working on tourism and mobility planning toward coherent development.

*Figure 2.14: Institutional map of Lake Geneva AA*

The map illustrates the institutional framework of the Lake Geneva Action Area. It shows the Lake Geneva Council as a central entity, with nested boxes representing the Regional Committee France-Geneva, Lake Geneva Metropolis, and the Greater Geneva Area. The map also identifies the Lake Geneva Metropolitan Area, Vaud, Geneva, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, 3 Chablais, Chablais Région, and Valais. A cross-border conference Jura Massif is shown extending from the Lake Geneva Council towards the north. The map is bounded by the FR/CH border.

Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

As regards the general motivation of stakeholders to cooperate, it is mainly based on the common understanding of a need to act jointly and/ or awareness of the benefit derived from cooperation. Successful cooperation initiatives therefore start with the development of a shared understanding of the need for collaboration. Even if there is strong awareness of the need to cooperate, it often still requires an external stimulus and incentive and/ or the high commitment of single (trusted and respected) personalities to get the cooperation starting, so-called cooperation promoters (see Box 2.17). That provides a strong rationale for the provision of a cooperation framework and of cooperation facilitators (cf. section **Error! Reference source not found.**).

**Box 2.17 About cooperation facilitators and cooperation promoters**

A **cooperation promotor** is understood as an individual or organisation that takes on, at least temporarily, the role of cooperation “engine” or “agenda setter”, pushing a concrete cooperation idea forward or driving the concrete (further) development of the cooperation through the policy stages.

The cooperation promotor tends to be a respected and influential individual who has a vested interest in influencing the development of the cooperation. As such, the cooperation promotor can also be described as a **‘policy entrepreneur’**, as someone who uses his power, personal and institutional resources and network to pursue his/her own political agenda. A policy entrepreneur can also be characterised as someone who is first to identify a demand and opportunity for innovation in the political landscape when a policy window opens.

Contrary to the cooperation promoter, the **cooperation facilitator** is understood as an individual who is in charge of day-to-day management of the cooperation and of moderating and supporting the cooperation process. The cooperation facilitator is thought to have a professional interest in driving the cooperation, but otherwise remains neutral and does not have a voting right in the steering group of the cooperation. In reality, however, cooperation facilitators are often the agenda setters of the cooperation as they bring up new topics, prepare input papers, launch concrete cooperation activities, etc.

Thus, the distinction between the cooperation promoter and facilitator may often be blurry and depends on the concrete arrangements made.

## **2.10 Cooperation topics and types of activities are specific to the cooperation area and change over time as the TCA evolves**

A majority of cases have a multi-sectoral, integrated focus on strategic spatial development, but only few focus explicitly on regional spatial planning (e.g. strategic planning regions in Lower Austria) or strategy development (e.g. the Territorial Pole ‘Pays de Retz’ that is involved in the development of a territorial coherence scheme (SCOT) through the elaboration of a territorial vision). However, some of the cooperation initiatives (e.g. Metropolitan pole ‘Sillon Lorrain’) are mainly implemented through individual projects within single sectors, while others have not yet really moved beyond on the level of networking activities (e.g. European Region Danube-Vltava).

It appears that detailed holistic strategy documents of ‘visions’ are not a prerequisite for soft cooperation. In many cases, relatively vague shared understanding of the purpose of cooperation and shared objectives is sufficient for the implementation of successful cooperation. However, agility to quickly absorb and react to current cooperation issues and topics is important to generate an active and dynamic cooperation environment. A good quality of dialogue between involved stakeholders making it possible to design and implement solutions to concrete issues may in this respect be more important than an elaborate strategy

document. Flexibility and adaptability regarding the thematic focus of the cooperation seems to be an asset.

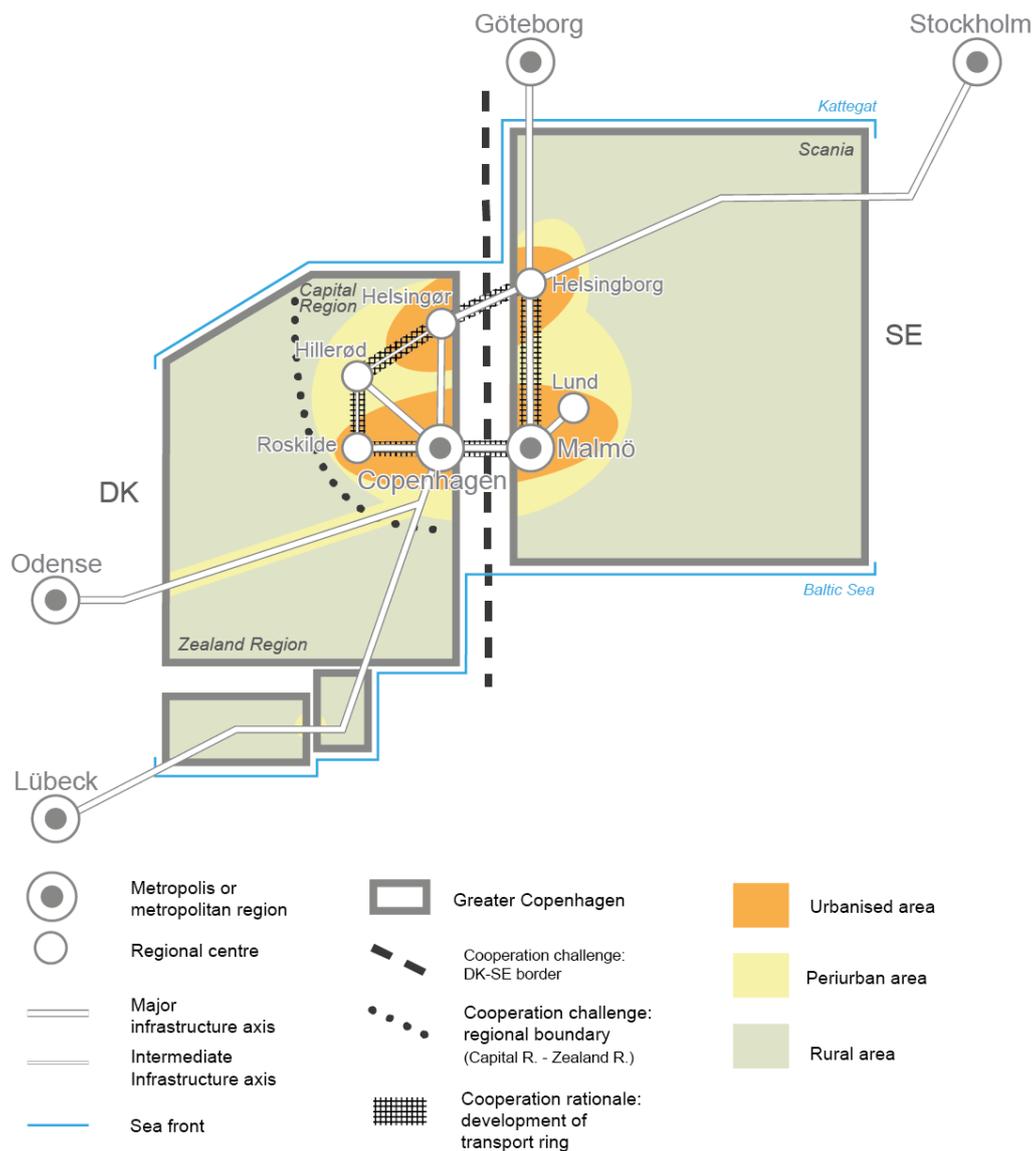
Most of the analysed TCAs have an integrative, multisectoral focus and only few are rather single-topic. Often TCAs start out with one (dominant) topic and add new cooperation topics over time, adjusting the cooperation to recent policy developments. The Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino started out in the 1990s with a focus on culture and transport, lobbying for the construction of the Brenner base tunnel. Since then, the strategic focus has both shifted and broadened. It currently addresses all important spheres of life and policy areas, and is also flexible and agile enough to react to recent issues, e.g. to the recent migration and refugee crisis. What could also be observed is that a process of deepening of the cooperation often goes hand in hand with a broadening of its thematic focus. This is, for example, the case of the Greater Copenhagen Cooperation that developed as a follow-up cooperation of the Öresund cooperation (Box 2.18), which focused mainly on taking advantage of the bridge between Malmö/Sweden and Copenhagen/Denmark over the Öresund sea strait that opened in 2000. Today's TCA has a broader thematic focus, notably on economic development in the region.

No clear patterns could be observed regarding typical types of cooperation topics, which is rather an indication that TCAs take a place-based approach and focus the collaboration on specific regional needs. Topics that come up frequently are spatial planning, transport & infrastructure, economic competitiveness & business development, tourism, cultural cooperation, environment & energy. Cooperation topics represent the common denominator of interests of all cooperation partners. This sometimes means that some important issues are not picked up by the cooperation as there is too little common ground for cooperation. A balanced representation of stakeholders from all parts of the cooperation area is therefore important to ensure that the cooperation properly reflects the needs of the entire TCA.

### Box 2.18 Greater Copenhagen Business Region

The **Greater Copenhagen Business Region** is a cooperation between municipalities and regions in Eastern Denmark (Zealand) and Southern Sweden (Skåne). The main aim is to promote business and growth in the region for example by attracting foreign companies and investments, but also by facilitating cross-border labour mobility. The cooperation has a longer history. In the 1930s the construction of a bridge between Denmark and Sweden was first proposed. However, it was only in 2000 that the bridge over the Øresund strait, connecting Malmö and Copenhagen via a rail and road was opened. Following the Øresund Cooperation, which primarily focused on the development of the Øresund bridge, Swedish and Danish politicians developed the idea to transform the existing cooperation into a new organisation, which further aims to intensify cooperation, which led to the establishment of the Business Region.

Figure 2.15: Greater Copenhagen Business Region



Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

### **3 Soft cooperation as emerging instruments of territorial governance**

The review of soft territorial cooperation frameworks and concrete instances in Switzerland and in the rest of Europe has shown that these are not alternatives, but complements to 'hard' structures. They are set up for a variety of reasons, and the initial impetus may come from national, regional or local actors. Similarly, the implementation of the strategy, renewal of the strategic objectives and networking of involved partners can be organised with different combinations of top-down steering and bottom-up processes. The choice of arrangement depends on each cooperation instance's institutional frameworks, its governance context (i.e. pre-existing relations between relevant actors) and on the objectives it pursues. Observed frameworks and initiatives are therefore very diverse, and it may be difficult to identify how 'soft cooperation' may constitute an object of European policy-making.

One of the core hypotheses of the present study (see definition of TCAs on p.2) is that soft cooperation instances could be approached as 'communities of intent'. This implies that they are essentially about identifying, structuring and promoting groups of actors that share a development vision embedded in a specific territory. The review confirms that this approach helps to identify an overall coherence and shared rationale of the variety of cooperation instances. On this basis, one may formulate proposals on how soft territorial cooperation can both help to renew the discourse on territorial governance and, on this basis, be mobilised in the pursuit of the European Union objective of 'territorial cohesion'.

#### **3.1 Background: reframing 'territorial cohesion' as an objective pursued through territorial governance**

Since the publication of the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion in 2008 (European Commission, 2008), advances in the implementation of this principle have been limited. A main reason for this is the difficulty of specifying what the 'harmonious development of all of Europe's diverse places' would entail. There is consensus in the literature and among national and European stakeholders on the inadequacy of 'master plans' that would be designed and implemented in a top-down way. However, 'harmonious territorial development' proves difficult to define in such a way that it could function as a benchmark against which one could distinguish between desirable and undesirable patterns and trends. As a result, 'territorial cohesion' tends to be approached in terms of 'efficiency' and 'equity', i.e. as a form of territorial organisation that would be best suited to promote economic growth and innovation, or to limit social disparities or environmental impacts of human activities. Within this line of argument, a proactive public territorial cohesion policy is justified insofar as it can be demonstrated that it generates alternative ways of organising settlements and activities (e.g. econometrically or based on environmental assessments). However, the territorial dimension no longer functions as an autonomous political objective.

In parallel, 'Territorial governance' emerged as a concept of European policy making during the late 2000s. It is closely connected to the objective of 'territorial cohesion'. Stead, (2013) identifies five dimensions of territorial governance in policy discourse:

- (1) the vertical or horizontal coordination of policies and/or actors
- (2) the promotion of participation and consensus-building among public and/or private actors
- (3) the devolution of powers and/or resources to lower levels of decision-making
- (4) the delivery of "territorial cohesion";
- (5) the assessment of territorial impacts and development of territorial visions.

Soft territorial cooperation instances, conceptualised as 'communities of intent', are, by order of priority, concerned with dimensions (2), (5), (1) and (4). Only dimension (3) is beyond their scope, even if the 'hardening' of soft cooperation may lead to transfers of competencies. The 2011, Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union, which is the background document for the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020, considers that "*progress towards territorial cohesion entails a permanent and cooperative process involving the various actors and stakeholders of territorial development at political, administrative and technical levels*" and states that "*this process of cooperation is called territorial governance*". It further mentions that "*territorial governance should be able to manage different functional territories and ensure the balanced and coordinated contribution of the local, regional, national, and European actors*". Soft territorial cooperation instances can largely be described as attempts to implement these principles of the *State and perspectives* report, illustrating the limitations of such cooperation within administrative units, and the complex relations between 'communities of intent' and territories.

### **3.2 Soft territorial cooperation as 'communities of intent'**

Soft forms of territorial cooperation built around the notion of 'communities of intent', help to re-establish forms of territorial organisation as political objectives in their own right. Actors collectively identify an ambition for their territory, which is not necessarily derived from an optimisation of efficiency or equity, but may be an expression of a shared understanding of 'harmonious development' (or, inversely, of patterns and trends that would be incompatible with such 'harmonious development').

Soft territorial cooperation is then part of a widened reflection on the role of institutions in territorial development, thinking of them broadly as "*a set of humanly devised behavioural rules that govern and shape the interactions of human beings, in part by helping them to form expectations of what other people will do*" (Lin and Nugent (1995: 2306-2307) cited in Rodrik, 2007:154). Their focus is on the identification of communities of perception, interest and objective that are linked to the belonging to a specific territory. This does not necessarily entail that consensus within these territories is presumed, or necessarily even promoted. The

objective is rather to carefully identify the issues and topics for which such forms of 'territorially embedded consensus' can be identified.

Soft territorial cooperation can therefore be conceptualised as initiatives bringing together actors within a fuzzily identified area, exploring their shared perceptions and opinions and identifying potential platforms for the formulation of objectives and strategies to reach these objectives. This understanding of soft territorial cooperation as a consensus-focused instrument is confirmed by our case studies, which show that they are primarily useful for the identification of win-win solutions, and when addressing shared opportunities and challenges. This implies that the foundations for 'soft territorial cooperation' are provided by theories of 'communicative action' and of 'communicative planning'. Theories of 'communicative action' stress the need for top-down action to create appropriate frameworks for dialogue between actors, as they are otherwise limited in their exchanges and thinking by hierarchies of power and a mass media-influenced public space. This constitutes the **first justification of the need for soft cooperation frameworks**: relevant actors do not necessarily possess the **skills and resources needed to organise a collaborative, consensus-oriented cooperation process**. National frameworks are needed to provide these resources. Theories of 'communicative planning' provide guidance on how the outputs of such exchanges can be transformed into concrete action.

The underlying rationale for organising such processes within 'soft territorial spaces', i.e. across institutional borders and in spaces with fuzzy boundaries, is that administrative regions do not a priori provide adequate frameworks for the emergence of such 'communities of intent'. There is a component of 'testing and trying', with a priori hypotheses on functional interdependencies, cultural identities and shared opportunities that may trigger forms of 'community'. There may also be higher level agendas concerning the spaces and scales at which a policy of 'rapprochement' may be called for. These agendas may be linked to the observation of a functional interdependence that would need to be better accounted for in concrete policies, or to a wish to promote new forms of functional integration.

The **second justification of national of European-level guidance and facilitation** of soft cooperation derives from the **complex relations between territories and communities of intent**. There is not necessarily a one-to-one relation between territories and communities. Soft cooperation units may have geographic and thematic overlaps. They may be organised at different scales and pursue different priorities. We also see examples of soft forms of cooperation that are not embedded in a 'territory', but linked to a network of places (e.g. Pôle métropolitain Sillon Lorrain) or to a corridor (Belfast-Dublin Corridor). The multiscale overlaps and interdependences of different types of cooperation spaces reflect the complexity of the European space. Frameworks for soft cooperation therefore need to be designed as instruments for the management of the relational complexity of urban and regional dynamics, taking into account "*multiplicity of the webs of relations which transect a territory and the complex intersections and disjunctions which develop among them*" (Healey, 2006: 526).

### 3.3 Promoting ‘Territorial cohesion’ through territorial governance

As such, soft territorial cooperation is a motor for the assertion of a territorial dimension in policy debates. It carries an innovative interpretation of the TFEU objective of promotion ‘territorial cohesion’, which implies that European and national actors ensure that territorially embedded perceptions, interests and objectives at different scales are identified, formulated and given a visibility in public debates. In other words, soft territorial cooperation is a principle for the promotion of territorial cohesion through territorial governance.

The outcome of such a policy is that public and private actors are enabled to collectively formulate the perceptions, interests and objectives linked to their territorial contexts, and that these may be given more visibility and weight in public debates. However, soft territorial cooperation cannot function merely as a forum for exchange and dialogue. Relevant actors will only participate actively insofar as the cooperation instance addresses concrete issues and helps to design and implement appropriate policy responses. In other words, while the objective of soft territorial cooperation frameworks is to promote new forms of governance, individual cooperation instances need to relate their definition of visions and objectives to concrete measures, integrated in a wider strategic perspective.

Adapting fuzzy soft cooperation to functional areas may seem purposeful from this perspective. However, it needs to be kept in mind that soft territorial cooperation seeks to overcome the opposition between ‘territorial governance’ and ‘functional governance’ drawn up by Blatter (2004) (see table below). Blatter posits that ‘territorial governance’ is necessarily “*rather formalized and quite stable with respect to time and space*”, while “*functional governance is characterized by networked interaction, multiple and fuzzy scales and variable geometries*”. As soft territorial cooperation seeks to embed functional governance in territories, relevant functional areas may be derived from institutional and policy implementation setups just as much as from geographical contexts. For example, in the case of cooperation focusing on the management of water resources, Graefe (2014) criticizes a “catchment area fetish”. He considers that appropriate cooperation areas rather reflect the ways in which relevant policies are organised territorially. The idea according to which ‘functional areas’ may constitute an external determinant of soft territorial cooperation boundaries therefore needs to be nuanced.

Table 3.1 Territorial governance versus functional governance

|                                      | Territorial governance<br>(spaces of place)            | Functional governance: (spaces<br>of flows)              |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Structural pattern<br>of interaction | Hierarchy: monocentricity                              | Network: polycentricity                                  |
| Sectoral differentiation             | Separation of public and<br>private/non-profit sectors | Integration of public and private/non-<br>profit sectors |
| Functional scope                     | Broad (all/many tasks)                                 | Narrow (one/few tasks)                                   |
| Geographic scale                     | Bundled/clear-cut scales:<br>congruent boundaries      | Multiple/fuzzy scales: variable<br>geometry              |
| Institutional stability              | Stable/rigid with respect to time<br>and space         | Fluid/flexible with respect to time and<br>space         |

Source: (Blatter, 2004)

Furthermore, observations made as part of the ESPON ACTAREA project suggest that soft territorial cooperation tends to emerge spontaneously in areas that identify themselves as being “in the shadow” of metropolitan areas (e.g. Halmstad, Pays de Retz, Aareland), or otherwise marginal within their respective national context (e.g. Jura Massif AA, southern Swedish participation in the Greater Copenhagen business region). They may therefore position themselves in relation to prevailing functional areas, rather than being based on them.

### **3.4 Roles of soft territorial cooperation frameworks**

The two main justifications of soft territorial cooperation frameworks have been described above: on the one hand, because relevant actors do not necessarily possess the skills and resources needed and, on the other, because complex relations between territories and communities of intent may require some ‘top-down’ coordination between cooperation initiatives.

The first justification calls for a cooperation framework that *facilitates* cooperation. This entails providing methods (‘toolboxes’) to address challenges when establishing a dialogue between actors. Soft territorial cooperation can from this perspective be conceptualised as a policy response to the absence of a public space in which territorially embedded elements of consensus would emerge spontaneously. Cooperation facilitators may identify potential win-win situations, establish contacts between relevant stakeholders, lead a dialogue with relevant actors and organisations and coordinate the production of studies and reports when additional evidence is needed. They may also organise workshop processes, in which perceptions, ideas and objectives are explored and consensual positions are elaborated. Our review has shown the critical importance of organisational and methodological support to soft cooperation initiative. Basic funding making it possible to ensure that facilitation can be stable over time, that past experiences are capitalised upon and that competence in the field of cooperation can be accumulated.

The second justification calls for a cooperation framework that *coordinates* cooperation. Coordination can be vertical, i.e. between cooperation initiatives at different geographic levels, and horizontal, i.e. between neighbouring, overlapping or otherwise interlinked cooperation initiatives at the same level. Soft cooperation initiatives may reflect, and possibly enhance, geographic asymmetries, e.g. between urban and rural areas or between prosperous and lagging territories (Bertrand et al., 2015). The Swiss approach of ‘Action Areas’, targeting cooperation territories beyond functional urban areas has specifically focused on addressing these potential pitfalls by overcoming the compartmentalisation of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ (Caffyn and Dahlström, 2005). However, it may have under-estimated the need to embed this approach in a multi-scalar strategy of cooperation. None of the reviewed cooperation frameworks fully addresses this need for an inter-scalar coordination of cooperation frameworks.

## 4 Policy recommendations

The analysis has shown that soft territorial cooperation is a well-established format throughout Europe. Soft territorial cooperation areas are important and helpful. Their particular strength is in their

- **Openness to involve different tiers of government and public and private stakeholders on equal footing.** This may lead to a renewal of relationships between various tiers of government in a multi-level governance arrangement or between different sector administrations, breaking up the ‘silo-mentality’ of traditional sectoral planning and rigid institutional systems.
- **Flexibility to choose the ‘optimal’ scale and geographic boundaries of policy design and implementation,** e.g. to address functional interlinkages beyond political-administrative territories.
- **Voluntary and participatory nature of governance,** which empowers (local/ regional) actors to take charge of their own territorial development, thus transfers ownership and, hence, increases implementation commitment.

However, soft territorial cooperation is **no panacea to all territorial governance issues.** Euphoria about soft territorial cooperation should be avoided, and a differentiated perspective is necessary, both at the regional, national and European level:

- The added value of ‘soft’ territorial cooperation emerges in its **interaction with ‘hard’ instruments and procedures.** The challenge is therefore to distribute roles and responsibilities in the appropriate way, and to manage ‘hardening’ processes that e.g. tend to occur when resources devoted to cooperation become more substantial.
- One should **not overestimate the role of private actors.** All case studies have been initiated by public authorities and mainly involve public actors. This is typical for Europe where private initiatives in explicit territorial development are rare (see Blatter (2004)).
- The **fuzziness of the geographic cooperation perimeters is generally limited.** Most cases have soft spatial foci in political action, but they are based on ‘pooled’ public perimeters. A shared understanding of the territorial focus is necessary.
- The **democratic legitimacy of processes and outcomes can be difficult to achieve.** Since membership in the cooperation is not based on principles of democratic representation and accountability, some actors or territories may be (unintentionally) systematically excluded. Tensions may arise if cooperation activities have a potential impact on the territories or actors not involved in the cooperation.
- The importance of the voluntary nature of cooperation on which soft TCAs are based implies that **soft territorial cooperation can only be encouraged, but not prescribed.** At the same time, it also means that policy makers must accept that soft cooperation cannot be ‘enforced’ where attempts to initiate cooperation prove futile. Nevertheless, case studies have shown that it is possible to stimulate top-down the emergence of territorial cooperation and that cooperation frameworks have a catalytic

effect on the emergence of soft TCAs. However, for a positive bottom-up cooperation dynamic to develop, cooperation partners must be given sufficient freedom to shape the cooperation so that it is meaningful from their point of view. This concerns in particular the content and partnership, respectively perimeter of the cooperation. In all analysed cases, content and perimeter had either been left undefined or are open to modifications and concretisations.

The present section presents more detailed **policy recommendations** focusing on

- **how soft territorial cooperation may be promoted on the regional, national and European levels.** We make an argument for the development of policy frameworks for stimulating the emergence of soft territorial cooperation through the provision of platforms for exchange and dialogue between actors of territorial development.
- **how soft territorial cooperation can be shaped in concrete terms.** Recommendations call for a context-sensitive approach that aims at stimulating a positive feedback loop between cooperation objectives, partnership, perimeter and governance structure.

Recommendations are based on the review of all 24 cases that were studied: the 12 examples of soft cooperation areas across Europe and the 12 Swiss Action Areas. Described examples of good practice may provide guidance for local and regional actors. However, case studies have demonstrated that the adoption of soft territorial cooperation solutions by local and regional actors depends entirely on their respective governance environment, regulatory frameworks and geographic context. The providing of general principles for the concrete implementation of soft territorial cooperation should therefore be envisaged with great caution. Nevertheless, an attempt is made to distil some general principles from the reviewed cases that are valid independent from the concrete context in which they are applied.

The recommendations first insist on the importance providing platforms of dialogue for a positive bottom-up cooperation dynamic to develop and the ways in which the dialogue process is organised (section 4.1) and focused (section 4.2) as well as the flexibility given to actors to shape and define bottom-up the scope and objectives of cooperation (section 4.3). Promoters of territorial cooperation ought to aim at creating framework conditions in which cooperation can continuously develop and adapt to changing conditions to remain relevant over time. Their role is further in providing support with managing this spiral of growth (section 4.4), with coordination (section 4.5), providing basic funding for setting up a stable group of facilitators that can ensure the continuity of the process (section 4.6), and providing territorial evidence that may feed into debates that reflect perceptions, interests and objectives that prevail in different types of cooperation areas and at different geographic levels (section 4.7). On this basis, the roles of cooperation frameworks may be further specified (section 4.8). Based on the work carried out in ACTAREA, section 4.9 specifies further research needs.

#### **4.1 Public and private actors at different levels can benefit from capacity building in the field of collaborative planning know-how**

The review has shown that soft territorial cooperation is, essentially, a process of dialogue involving public and private actors from different levels. We have observed that successful soft cooperation processes are those that manage to build on shared perceptions, interests and objectives among actors that identify with a specific area. Competencies regarding collaborative processes are not necessarily well-developed within local and regional authorities involved in soft cooperation: how to organise a visioning exercise, to prepare and host consensus-oriented workshop series, to jointly formulate objectives, targets and concrete measures. Providing external expertise and support to the organisation of such processes can therefore make a major difference.

#### **4.2 A result-oriented dialogue process can help to enrich and widen the scope of soft territorial cooperation progressively**

Dialogue processes need to combine a concern for short- to medium-term advantages for involved actors, justifying the time and resources allocated to the cooperation process, and a medium- to long-term ambition with regards to building more tightly knit communities of actors, establishing holistic territorial development perspectives and improving sustainable urban development perspectives. This typically implies that cooperation projects have multiple purposes: producing concrete outputs that are of concrete use for involved actors, progressively changing the attitudes of stakeholders by demonstrating the benefits of cooperation and generating a sense of community and shared achievement among involved actors.

In the face of complex and multi-faceted challenges, starting with the elaboration of a holistic strategy may not be the best way forward. It may be more efficient to first focus on aspects that are easiest to address and progressively expand the scope of actions to relate by following a 'path of least resistance'. Strategies and objectives of cooperative actions are then progressively elaborated and enriched in the making.

#### **4.3 Elements of 'softness' can be essential for the achievement of cooperation objectives**

Analysed cases have shown that elements of 'softness', i.e. the flexibility to shape and define bottom-up the scope and objectives of cooperation, are essential for a positive bottom-up cooperation dynamic to develop. This dynamic is, in turn, essential for the development of a strategic partnership of actors that voluntarily cooperate across institutional levels and administrative boundaries on long-term territorial development objectives, i.e. form a 'community of intent'.

As stated, this concerns in particular the content and partner composition, respectively perimeter of the cooperation, but also the governance arrangement.

Findings show that top-down steering of **topics of cooperation** is not purposeful. Actors must be allowed to go through the dialogue process of finding common ground for cooperation based on specific territorial needs. Furthermore, cooperation objectives must be open to evolve and

cooperation topics to shift over time for the cooperation to remain relevant. Cooperation activities should be in support of the implementation of cooperation objectives with project-type of interventions not being an end in itself, but be embedded in a wider process of change. The awareness of cooperation stakeholders on how to link individual project activities and a wider strategic agenda is something that could be further developed. No generalizable recommendations can be given as to which topics or types of interventions are particularly suitable in soft territorial cooperation, but rather that a place-based, context-sensitive approach to defining cooperation topics and activities is needed.

By the same token, **cooperation partnership and area** ought not be predefined, but be the outcome of a community and consensus-building process. That process may result in soft territorial cooperation areas that are more or less 'soft' with regards to their openness to different (public and private) stakeholders. Case studies show that there are also situations in which it makes sense to keep cooperation to the level of public actors only. Hence, 'soft' cooperation areas are not necessarily those that keep the geographic cooperation perimeter fuzzy and flexible, but those that take an open, process-oriented approach to regionalisation. Findings suggest that the development of a cooperation culture, i.e. a 'habit' of cooperation, requires continuity and, hence, a degree of stability in the cooperation partnership and area, which is rather in contradiction to flexible cooperation geographies.

Analysed cases present different degrees of **formalisation and types of institutionalisation**, from open cooperation configurations with no dedicated cooperation structure or a very limited one to highly institutionalised collaborations with a dedicated body having own legal personality. All these arrangements can be equally valid, depending on the pursued outcome. Actors may intentionally use the soft character for strategic reasons, e.g. because they want to organise coordination without creating an additional formal structure that adds to institutional complexity, or because they see themselves as complementary to other existing and more institutionalised collaborations. Expected concrete and 'hard' results seem to require a higher degree of formalisation than soft cooperation results.

To conclude, the design of the soft territorial cooperation must be allowed to follow a context-sensitive approach. Cooperation frameworks should therefore leave the elements "cooperation objectives, topics, partnership, area and governance structure" largely undefined or at least open to modifications and concretisations and rather seek to trigger a positive spiral of growth between them (see 4.4).

#### **4.4 Public actors can initiate a 'spiral of growth in cooperation'**

Our case studies are in different phases of development. Some are just starting up, while others build on a series of previous cooperation endeavours. It recurrently appears that soft territorial cooperation needs to be encouraged continuously, even if one may succeed in establishing a territorial 'brand' or 'shared identity', and in changing working habits so that cooperative initiatives become easier to implement. With respect to the perceived dynamism of territorial

cooperation, it may be important to emphasize that soft territorial cooperation goes through phases of:

- Intense dialogue, identification of relevant actors, networking, exploration ('getting to know each other'), consensus-building, definition of joint objectives...
- Implementation
- Collection and processing of experiences
- Renewal of cooperation based on accumulated experiences and evolution of framework conditions

This implies that a less intense exchange between actors does not necessarily imply that soft territorial cooperation is weaker. For soft territorial cooperation to remain relevant over time, it has to continuously develop, adapt to changing conditions, and create new cooperation momenta. Cooperation objectives and organisational setups are in these respects in a dialectic relation to each other. This dialectic relation may translate in operational terms into successive mutually reinforcing feedback loops and a 'spiral of growth in cooperation': an initial organisational setup triggers a first set of strategic actions, of which the implementation leads to adjustment in the organisational setup, which may itself generate revised ambitions for cooperative action. For this 'spiral of growth in cooperation' to happen, soft territorial cooperation requires continuous encouragement, even if one may succeed in establishing a territorial 'brand' or 'shared identity', and in changing working habits so that cooperative initiatives become easier to implement. The understanding of the cycle is important for the assessment of soft territorial cooperation dynamics and can guide its implementation.

#### **4.5 Bottom-up cooperation processes do not lead to consistent multi-level governance**

Most of European case studies described in the present report do not seek to integrate urban and rural territories at a supra-regional scale as is the case for the Swiss Action Areas. We rather observe groupings within inner peripheries, along corridors, within network of urban nodes or metropolitan areas, around specific resources (e.g. vineyards, natural parks, tourism areas). There is no *a priori* reason for which strategic options developed within these different spaces would be compatible or consistent.

The promotion of soft territorial cooperation is a way of encouraging actors to bring the perceptions, interests and objectives linked to the territories they belong to the forefront in public debates, as described in section 3.4. One is therefore constructing the basis for a multi-level governance that is not about the ways in which power and competencies are distributed between administrative levels, but about ensuring that variations in perceptions, interests and objectives in different types of territories and at different geographic levels are given stronger visibility. This in turn makes the need for coordination and arbitrage more obvious; we have previously observed that this needs to be addressed within established institutional frameworks.

#### **4.6 Facilitators play an important role in ensuring continuity of the cooperation**

Reviewed cases demonstrate the critical importance of organisational and methodological support to soft cooperation initiatives. Our case studies demonstrate that successful TCAs are all based on a stable team of facilitators. Facilitators are individuals in charge of day-to-day management of the cooperation and of moderating and supporting the cooperation process. Depending on the concrete set up of the cooperation structure, cooperation facilitators may also be the agenda setters and 'drivers' of the cooperation in that they bring up new topics, prepare input papers, launch concrete cooperation activities, etc. While an in-depth understanding of the roles of facilitators in these processes would have required enquiries beyond the scope of the present analysis, we can observe the essential importance of setting up a stable funding mechanism for facilitators to ensure that basic tasks are carried out, that there is continuity in the cooperation and that positive and negative experiences can be capitalised upon. Challenges for these facilitators relate to the structure and implementation of the cooperation, combining the formal types of competencies described in section 4.1 above, and an understanding of local actors' needs and aspirations which could be described as a form of local or regional '*Fingerspitzengefühl*'.

#### **4.7 Soft territorial cooperation areas benefit from the provision of territorial evidence**

The importance of focusing on functional areas has repeatedly been emphasized in discussions on European territorial policies. However, our analyses demonstrate that functional spatial integration is primarily a policy project, rather than an external constraint to which TCAs adapt. TCAs therefore need evidence on opportunities and challenges to be addressed when seeking to achieve desired forms of territorial integration, or certain types of polycentric development, taking into account observed spatial patterns and trends. This non-deterministic way of relating to evidence presupposes a dialogue between experts and stakeholders.

Mapshots and institutional mappings can be components of this dialogue. They make it possible to construct an image of the cooperation area in its geographic context and as a component of a territorial governance landscape on the basis of dialogues between experts and stakeholders. They also make it possible to combine different types of evidence, e.g. stakeholder knowledge of opportunities and emerging trends and statistical data.

#### **4.8 Cooperation frameworks have a catalytic effect on the emergence of soft territorial cooperation**

Basic funding is a vital part of it as it ensures that facilitation can be stable over time, that past experiences are capitalised upon and that competence in the field of cooperation can be accumulated. Findings also indicate that dedicated funding of soft territorial cooperation activities is not a prerequisite for the development of a dynamic cooperation, in particular when there are other (national or European) funds available that can be tapped into. However, policy makers ought to scrutinise whether eligibility rules of existing funding schemes promote or

hinder cooperation project applications and consider introducing greater geographical or thematic flexibility in eligibility and selection criteria.

Apart from providing basic funding, methodological and coordination support and territorial evidence, cooperation frameworks ought to also provide platforms for dialogue that make it possible for TCA proponents to interact with relevant sectoral actors and authorities when necessary to bring their cooperation forward. The role of national and European authorities is therefore essential in a number of different respects:

- Providing support and necessary expertise to cooperation processed;
- Coordinating different cooperation initiatives;
- Providing legitimacy to the territorial cooperation approach;
- Proposing a policy narrative on the role of territorial cooperation in the promotion of a more sustainable and cohesive development;
- Providing a regulatory framework;
- Helping disseminate good practices;
- Providing essential basic funding to ensure continuity in the processes.

#### **4.9 Needs for further research and work**

The project has demonstrated the benefits added value of soft territorial cooperation, and explored its complementarity in relation to 'hard' structures. However, its potential usefulness for the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy has not been explored. Soft forms of territorial cooperation may be instrumental in the design and implementation of community led local development (CLLD) and integrated territorial investments (ITI). However, this would require further reflections on how regulatory frameworks for ESIF could be adapted in the next programming period, so as to capitalise on existing soft territorial cooperation dynamics and to promote in areas and for issues for which it is relevant.

In many situations, the emergence of soft territorial cooperation may be hindered by established administrative and policy-making cultures. Soft territorial cooperation presupposes that the limitations of public policies implemented through 'hard' structures are acknowledged. While there is not necessarily a formal transfer of competence to soft territorial cooperation bodies, public institutions and elected officials must be in a position to incorporate objectives and methods that may emerge from such cooperation initiatives into their own policies. This calls for a systematic enquiry into the capacity of different administrative cultures and policy-making cultures across Europe to engage and promote such dialogues and make them durable. Such an enquiry could more generally explore the variable capacity of European public authorities and elected bodies to engage in participate approaches to territorial development.

## References

- Albrechts L (2006) Bridge the Gap: From Spatial Planning to Strategic Projects. *European Planning Studies* 14(10): 1487–1500.
- Allmendinger P and Haughton G (2009) Soft Spaces, Fuzzy Boundaries, and Metagovernance: The New Spatial Planning in the Thames Gateway. *Environment and Planning A* 41(3): 617–633.
- Allmendinger P, Chilla T and Sielker F (2014) Europeanizing territoriality – towards soft spaces? In: .
- Barca F (2009) *An Agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy. A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations.* Available from: [ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/archive/policy/future/pdf/report\\_barca\\_v0306.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/policy/future/pdf/report_barca_v0306.pdf) (accessed 25 January 2012).
- Bertrand N, Cremer-Schulte D and Perrin M (2015) Strategic Spatial Planning and Territorial Asymmetries. Grenoble and Greater Geneva: Two Alpine City Regions Put to the Challenge of Coherence. *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* (103–3). Available from: <https://rga.revues.org/3126>.
- Blatter J (2004) From ‘spaces of place’ to ‘spaces of flows’? Territorial and functional governance in cross-border regions in Europe and North America. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28(3): 530–548.
- Brunet R (1986) La carte-modèle et les chorèmes. *Mappemonde* 1986/4: 2–6.
- Caffyn A and Dahlström M (2005) Urban–rural interdependencies: Joining up policy in practice. *Regional Studies* 39(3): 283–296.
- Camagini R and Capello R (2013) Regional competitiveness and territorial capital: A conceptual approach and empirical evidence from the European Union. *Regional Studies* 47(9): 1383–1402.
- Casanova Enault L and Chatel C (2015a) La modélisation graphique de phénomènes émergents pour répondre aux besoins de la prospective – M@ppemonde. *Mappemonde* 2015/4(120). Available from: <http://mappemonde.mgm.fr/119as4/> (accessed 30 April 2017).
- Casanova Enault L and Chatel C (2015b) Une grille chorématique des dynamiques spatiales pour expliquer l'évolution des territoires – M@ppemonde. *Mappemonde* 2015/4(120). Available from: <http://mappemonde.mgm.fr/119as3/> (accessed 30 April 2017).
- Davoudi S (2015) Planning as practice of knowing. *Planning Theory* 14(3): 316–331.
- Debarbieux B (2012) How Regional Is Regional Environmental Governance? *Global Environmental Politics* 12(3): 119–126.
- ESPON (2006) *ESPON project 2.3.2. Governance of Territorial and Urban Policies from EU to Local Level. Summary.* Available from: [https://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/ESPON2006Projects/PolicyImpactProjects/Governance/fr-2.3.2\\_final\\_feb2007.pdf](https://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/ESPON2006Projects/PolicyImpactProjects/Governance/fr-2.3.2_final_feb2007.pdf) (accessed 28 April 2017).
- European Commission (2008) Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion - Turning territorial diversity into strength. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, Brussels.

- European Commission (2015) *Local and Regional Partners Contributing to Europe 2020: Multi-level governance in support of Europe 2020*. Brussels.
- European Commission DG REGIO (1997) *The EU compendium of spatial planning systems and policies*. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Graefe O (2014) Le fétichisme du bassin versant. *Lettre aqueduc.info* n° 100 (September 2014-28). Available from: [http://aqueduc.info/IMG/pdf/aqueduc-info\\_-\\_O-Graefe\\_-\\_Fetichisme\\_bassin\\_versant.pdf](http://aqueduc.info/IMG/pdf/aqueduc-info_-_O-Graefe_-_Fetichisme_bassin_versant.pdf) (accessed 29 January 2017).
- Healey P (2006) Relational complexity and the imaginative power of strategic spatial planning. *European Planning Studies* 14(4): 525–546.
- Knieling J and Othengrafen F (2015) Planning Culture—A Concept to Explain the Evolution of Planning Policies and Processes in Europe? *European Planning Studies* 23(11): 2133–2147.
- Leber N and Kunzmann KR (2006) Entwicklungsperspektiven ländlicher Räume in Zeiten des Metropolenfiebers. *disP - The Planning Review* 42(166): 58–70.
- McCann P and Ortega-Argilés R (2015) Smart Specialization, Regional Growth and Applications to European Union Cohesion Policy. *Regional Studies* 49(8): 1291–1302.
- Nadin V and Stead D (2008) European Spatial Planning Systems, Social Models and Learning. *disP - The Planning Review* 44(172): 35–47.
- Nordregio (2014) *ESPON ET2050. Territorial Scenarios and Visions for Europe (Final Report) Volume 12 - Territorial Governance approaches for delivering the Territorial Vision*. Luxembourg: ESPON. Available from: [http://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/AppliedResearch/ET2050/FR/ET2050\\_FR-02\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](http://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/AppliedResearch/ET2050/FR/ET2050_FR-02_Main_Report.pdf).
- Rodrik D (2007) *One Economics - Many Recipes - Globalization, Institutions and Economic Growth*. New Jersey & Woodstock: Princeton University Press.
- Stead D (2013) Dimensions of territorial governance. *Planning Theory & Practice* 14(1): 142–147.
- Stead D and Nadin V (2009) Planning Cultures between Models of Society and Planning Systems. In: Knieling J and Othengrafen F (eds), *Planning cultures in Europe: decoding cultural phenomena in urban and regional planning*, Farnham England ; Burlington VT: Ashgate Pub. Company, pp. 283–300.
- Stead D, de Vries J and Tasan-Kok T (2015) Planning Cultures and Histories: Influences on the Evolution of Planning Systems and Spatial Development Patterns. *European Planning Studies* 23(11): 2127–2132.
- Waterhout B (2010) Soft spaces and governance: The transformation of planning. In: Helsinki, Finland: Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP). Available from: [uid:247daffa-2240-492f-a091-f979fab1dd9c](http://www.aesop.eu/uid:247daffa-2240-492f-a091-f979fab1dd9c) (accessed 28 July 2016).
- Yifu Lin J and Nugent JB (1995) Chapter 38 Institutions and economic development. *Handbook of Development Economics* 3: 2301–2370.
- Zonneveld W, De Vries J and Janssen-Jansen L (eds) (2012) *European Territorial Governance. Housing and Urban Policy Studies*, Amsterdam: IOS Press.

## **List of Annexes**

Annex 1: Overview table of European cases

Annex 2: Methodology

Annex 3: Tools for enhanced dialogue: mapshots, institutional mapping and spider graphs

## Annex 1: Overview table of case studies

|    | Case study area                                    | Regional, National or European framework             | Description & Focus   | Scale and Size  | Historicity, context & stakeholders   | Why interesting for case studies?<br>Specificities of cooperation framework?   | What are arguments against the selection of case study? |
|----|--|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| 1. | Across Switzerland                                 | Action Areas<br>Switzerland                          | Action Areas are developed under the Swiss Territorial Development Strategy, which provides a policy framework. This framework aims at initiating/ activating new forms of cooperation, often linked to functional spaces | Action Areas vary in their size, and are e.g. based on networks of cities | The concept of Action Areas is a relatively new strategy in the Swiss context targeting territorial specificities of metropolitan areas, polycentric networks or Alpine and rural contexts. ARE as central player                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New cooperation framework with specific focus on functional needs, bottom-up</li> <li>- Overall policy framework with different applications</li> <li>- Fuzzy approach</li> </ul> |   |
| 2. | Nordraum Wien                                      | Regionale Leitplanung<br>Niederösterreich<br>Austria | A new strategic regional planning instrument to manage growth and development on a regional level based on an existing or anticipated external pressure.  | Multi-level, from municipalities to regions                               | Builds on two existing spatial planning instruments.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexible and open spatial planning instrument linking bottom-up with top-down planning</li> <li>- Example of voluntary inter-municipal cooperation</li> </ul>                     | No involvement of citizens or private actors foreseen   |
| 3. | Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine | Metropol-regionen<br>Germany                         | 11 Regional cooperation areas supported from the Federal level as metropolitan regions with the goal to develop competitive regions + 4 cross-border metropolitan regions (so called IMeG)                                | Cityregions including regional and local administrations,                 | Concept of metropolitan regions are part of the national 'Leitbilder' or visions of the regional development since 1995. The aim is to connect different regional and local stakeholders in themes and actions groups of regional interest. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Politically active cooperation areas</li> <li>- Are in their delineation fuzzy and not bound by national input</li> <li>- Some are cross-border</li> </ul>                        |   |

|    | Case study area                             | Regional, National or European framework  | Description & Focus  | Scale and Size   | Historicity, context & stakeholders   | Why interesting for case studies?<br>Specificities of cooperation framework?   | What are arguments against the selection of case study?  |
|----|---|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| 4. | <b>'Tokaj Borvidék' (Tokaj Wine Region)</b> | <b>Regional Development Councils</b><br>Hungary   | The 9 RDCs of the counties are set up for delivering certain tasks related to the centrally assigned territorial development capacities of the counties. Since these tasks may expand beyond county borders, RDCs can be created in a way to extend administrative borders in connection with the territorial characteristics, challenges and objectives that they individually represent. | Cooperation by counties                                | Explicit legal basis in national law. RDCs are financed by counties and are used to contribute to the National Development and Territorial Development Concept (2014) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- new territorial areas that do not relate to any former bodies</li> <li>- Wide area of topics addressed, but different in each region (e.g. Wine Region)</li> <li>- No enforced cooperation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Activities are diverse</li> <li>- Still a relatively strong focus on funding</li> </ul> |
| 5. | <b>Halmstad intermunicipal cooperation</b>  | <b>Rethinking of territorial cooperation in Sweden</b><br>(not an actual policy framework, but rather a multifaceted, on-going process) | Swedish authorities are running parallel processes to trigger new modes of territorial cooperation. In parallel, a national commission investigates the capacity of municipalities to face societal challenges.  | Regional (national framework targets different scales) | Open and exploratory process  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thinking "out of the box" is encouraged</li> <li>- New geographies emerge</li> <li>- Intersectoral cooperation is encouraged</li> </ul>   | Not yet a real national framework, just an invitation to explore new solutions, with associated funding of pilot projects.       |

|    | Case study area  | Regional, National or European framework   | Description & Focus   | Scale and Size  | Historicity, context & stakeholders  | Why interesting for case studies?<br>Specificities of cooperation framework?   | What are arguments against the selection of case study?  |
|----|--|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| 6. | <b>Greater Copenhagen Business Region</b>  | <b>Business Regions</b><br>Denmark   | The business regions or urban regions are self-grown regional units that function as policy-making and strategic units across municipal borders.  | Cooperation by municipalities, sometimes involving the regional level | The context for this cooperation was provided after the government reform in 2007 where the formal regional level changed and legal capacity moved to the city level. 9 Business regions have developed covering whole of Demark. They are fuzzy and have developed without any existing legislations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overlapping business regions</li> <li>- Strong involvement of regional and private stakeholders possible depending on their engagement</li> <li>- New territorial units targeting specific development tasks of regions</li> </ul>  |  |
| 7. | <b>Sillon Lorrain (metro-politan)</b><br><br><b>Pays de Retz (territorial/rural)</b> | <b>Pôles d'équilibre territoriaux et ruraux</b><br><br><b>Pôles métropolitains</b><br>France | The rural and territorial poles of balance are cooperations in which administrative entities enhance territorial cooperation through the implementation of a previously elaborated project. | Cooperation between local authorities and administrative units        |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each pole elaborates a "territorial project"</li> <li>- Linked to the notions of 'pays' and 'Contrats de Développement Rhône-Alpes" (CDRA). However, since 2010, one new 'pays' (see <a href="http://anpp.fr/payspetr/definition-pays-petr/">http://anpp.fr/payspetr/definition-pays-petr/</a>)</li> <li>- Built as a bridge between EPCIs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not geographically fuzzy</li> <li>- Can be responsible for physical planning if the delineation corresponds to that of a SCOT</li> <li>- Can in some cases have a joint administration with EPCIs</li> <li>- Plan drafted after the PETR has been delineated</li> </ul> |

|    | Case study area  | Regional, National or European framework       | Description & Focus   | Scale and Size                               | Historicity, context & stakeholders   | Why interesting for case studies?<br>Specificities of cooperation framework?   | What are arguments against the selection of case study?  |
|----|--|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| 8. | <b>Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol Trentino</b>   | -  | The EGTC Tyrol-South Tyrol Trentino is the common representation of the Euroregion and embodies the two mountain states of Italy and Tyrol (AT). The EGTC now acts as a platform for exchange between the three states and supports a large number of cooperation activities. Strong cultural axis. | Provinces of Tyrol, South Tyrol, Trentino    | Following the specific Italian history, the German speaking and Alpine parts of Italy have sought for a joint organization with a cross-border dimension. Notwithstanding the initial doubts of the Italian Government in Rome, the office of the European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol - Trentino has been strengthened. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Areas of intervention related to national and EU developments</li> <li>- The presidencies of the three states are quite active.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not geographically fuzzy</li> <li>- Strongly institutionalization of the cooperation</li> </ul> |
| 9. | <b>Internationale Raumordnungskonferenz Bodensee</b><br><br>Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland | <b>Inter-governmental mesoregional setting</b> | The IBK is a cooperation of German "Länder", Swiss cantons, Liechtenstein and Austrian Regions aiming to develop the region as an attractive economic region with quality of life and regional common bond.   | Federal States, Swiss Cantons, Liechtenstein | Founded in 1972 following coordination needs for environmental and water protection issues;<br><br>Today broad focus to develop a competitive region, and relatively new funds for projects   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Active cross-border cooperation with historic development focusing on specific issues</li> <li>- IBK is one of the ACTAREA stakeholders</li> <li>- Long-term history of cooperation and recent update of the common strategy: a forerunner of today's mesoregional, tailor-made strategies</li> </ul> |  |

|     | Case study area       | Regional, National or European framework         | Description & Focus   | Scale and Size   | Historicity, context & stakeholders  | Why interesting for case studies?<br>Specificities of cooperation framework?   | What are arguments against the selection of case study?  |
|-----|-----------------------|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| 10. | Newry-Dundalk Gateway | Irish Spatial Planning Strategy (NSS)<br>Ireland | The NSS aims to achieve a more balanced regional development. 9 cities with gateway and 9 medium-size towns with a hub function are targeted. The Gateway Innovation Fund (GIF) was set up to stimulate and reward action at Gateway level. The Fund is designed to stimulate a collaborative and co-operative approach at local and regional level in the pursuit of gateway development objectives and to encourage strong private sector participation in the achievement of those objectives. | National level and focusing on different regions (gateways and hubs) | The NSS is a further development of the National Development Plan and the Government's approach to achieving more balanced regional development, including the identification of a limited number of additional gateways (in addition to those identified in the NDP). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The NSS also has a cross-border dimension in that it aspires to coordinate with the Northern Irish Spatial Planning Strategy</li> <li>- The NSS is similar to the Swiss AAs in that it provides a national level a framework for bottom-up cooperation to emerge</li> <li>- Perimeters of the cooperation areas are not fixed</li> <li>- Encourages private stakeholder participation</li> <li>- Long-term perspective 2002 – 2020</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong focus on planning (development of regional planning guidelines)</li> </ul> |

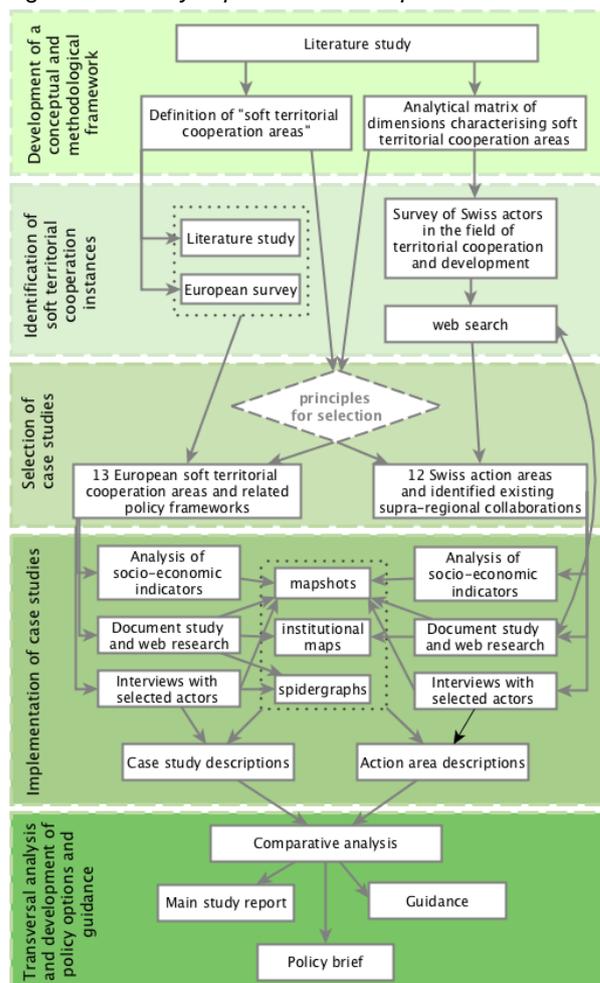
|    | Case study area                      | Regional, National or European framework   | Description & Focus   | Scale and Size                       | Historicity, context & stakeholders  | Why interesting for case studies?<br>Specificities of cooperation framework?  | What are arguments against the selection of case study?                       |
|----|--------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 11 | <b>Eurorégion Alpes-Méditerranée</b> |  | <p>The creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Euroregion aims to respond to the wishes of the partnership regions to assert their role in the European area, to influence the main policies of the Member States and the European Union and to defend their common interests.</p> <p>Based on the strategic document “L'Eurorégion Alpes-Méditerranée” the cooperation aims to implement their strategic goals within the cohesion framework.</p> | Regional authorities:<br>5 Provinces | The Euroregion was established in 2006 as an EGTC and is relatively big. With the French administrative reform, the Euroregion has changed and has since the EUSALP new influences on their role. The Eurorégion Alpes-Méditerranée was created in 2006. The regions organises their activities within 6 priority themes and on a rotating presidency basis. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- currently dynamic development</li> <li>- Political focus with Brussels representation as well as focus on projects and 7 priority themes.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- focus on EU funds</li> </ul>         |
| 12 | <b>Euroregion Donau - Moldau</b>     | <b>Intergovernmental and interregional elements; ongoing attempts towards EGTC</b> | Cooperation of regional authorities from AT, DE, CZ beyond metropolises, The cooperation focuses on different cross-border topics and offers thematic platforms (e.g. transport).   | Regional authorities                 | Activities since ca. 8 years, founding event 2012; political gatekeepers and thematic pillars  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bottom-up, thematic diversity, anti-metropolitan impetus</li> <li>- Political discussion upon institutionalisation</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No clear policy framework</li> </ul> |

## Annex 2: Methodology

The present study has analysed European examples of soft territorial cooperation areas, taking as a starting point the Swiss experience with promoting cooperation in so-called ‘Action Areas’ (AA). AAs are conceived as spaces within which one seeks to establish ‘communities of intent’, where cooperation emerges bottom-up within a flexible governance framework and across both administrative and political boundaries.

Building on a large number of case studies and taking a comparative approach, the study has drawn generalizable lessons on what conditions and policy frameworks foster the voluntary cooperation of actors on territorial development. Case studies were conducted on the 12 Swiss Action Areas and on 12 additional European soft cooperation spaces, leading to several project outputs: a main study report presenting the overall conclusions and recommendations derived from the study, a practical handbook for policy-makers and planning practitioners providing more practical guidelines on how to foster and initiate cooperation in soft territorial cooperation area, and a policy brief synthesising the main policy-relevant conclusions drawn from the study.

Figure A2. 1: Key implementation steps



Source: ESPON ACTAREA, 2017

In pursuit of these final results, a rigorous methodological approach was required to ensure comparability of all case studies, which will be described in the following. Figure A2. 1 presents the workflow graphically. After step 1, the development of a methodological basis and conceptual framework of the study, the study branches off into two separate work streams, i.e. one on the Swiss AA and one on soft territorial cooperation areas outside Switzerland, which are brought again together in step 4, the transversal analysis. A more detailed account of the method can be found in the inception report.

## **Step 1: Development of a conceptual and methodological framework**

Soft territorial cooperation areas/ Action Areas are both complex and abstract objects of study, which are difficult to pinpoint. At the same time, there is growing literature and debate about soft planning, flexible geographies and networked forms of territorial governance, functional regions and place-based policy-making. For the study to build on sound conceptual and methodological underpinnings, it commenced with a thorough review of recent literature and policy developments in the field of territorial governance and territorial cooperation.

The **aim of this first key implementation step** was to

- Narrow down and operationalise the study object “soft territorial cooperation areas/ Action Areas”
- Develop a methodological framework for the classification and, later, selection of case studies of soft territorial cooperation areas.

Desk research included the review of academic literature as well as policy documents; in particular policy-documents and previous studies related to the Swiss Spatial Strategy and Action Area strategy were thoroughly studied. In addition to desk research, the project team entered into a dialogue with the stakeholders and the ESPON EGTC to better pinpoint what makes a territorial cooperation instance a soft territorial cooperation instance. Exchange with the Swiss stakeholders was used to clarify the context within which Swiss AAs may be understood and analysed, e.g. the relation between the ‘regional’ and ‘supra-regional’ scale, and to shape the focus of the empirical work.

This step led to the development of a working definition of “soft territorial cooperation areas” (see page 2) and to the operationalisation of the study object “soft territorial cooperation areas” by means of eight dimensions characterising soft territorial cooperation instances and their possible manifestations (see Table A2. 1). Serving as the project’s shared analytical matrix and framing the entire study, these dimensions were used for the selection of case studies, the development of the survey questions and case study guidance, the comparative analysis and the presentation of both case study as well as overall study results. The analytical matrix was also applied to identifying existing Swiss supra-regional cooperation initiatives that could take forward the implementation of the Action Areas defined in the Swiss Spatial Strategy.

Table A2. 1: Dimensions and characteristics of soft territorial cooperation instances

|                          | Dimension  | Potential characteristics   | ACTAREA Definition   |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| Policy context           | <b>Strategic ambition</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strategic long-term goals</li> <li>- Concrete implementation tasks</li> <li>- New opportunities for influence ('opening up')</li> <li>- Open-ended process vs. process with pre-defined objectives</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- predominance of <b>strategic</b> integrated goals</li> <li>- not limited to implementation of particular projects</li> <li>- <b>'open-up'</b> the elaboration of strategies and plans</li> <li>- actor constellation allows involved players to enhance their capacities ('empowerment')</li> </ul>   |
|                          | Degree and type of <b>formalisation</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- informal vs. formal</li> <li>- own executive committee vs. no own institutionalization</li> <li>- relevance of ad-hoc activities</li> <li>- governance arrangements</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>given framework for bottom-up concretisation</b></li> <li>- <b>predominance of informal, semi-formal non-statutory forms of organization</b></li> <li>- different governance settings possible</li> </ul>  |
|                          | <b>Resources</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- juridical mandates</li> <li>- financial resources, incentives, human resources</li> <li>- discursive tools (agenda-setting, marketing...)</li> <li>- Concrete missions vs. open framework</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Predominance of non-juridical instruments</b></li> <li>- no precondition as regards to budget</li> </ul>   |
| Geographical logic       | <b>Territorial coverage / geographical scale</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- amendable vs. static</li> <li>- fuzzy boundaries</li> <li>- domestic or cross-border</li> <li>- size: small – large (sub-local, local, urban, metropolitan, regional, national, macro-regional,...)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>flexible perimeter</b> (bottom-up)</li> <li>- not limited to but linked with administrative spaces</li> <li>- <b>crossing borders</b> of domestic and in most cases national borders</li> <li>- ideally, the geographical scale should be <b>regional, i.e. encompassing multiple urban nodes (towns/cities) and their surrounding influence areas / commuting areas, and in some cases also other rural areas.</b></li> </ul> |
| Timeframe                | <b>Timeframe / Historicity / Continuity</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- duration, open-ended vs. fixed timeframe</li> <li>- short, medium, long-term</li> <li>- defined vs. undefined</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- medium to long-term perspective</li> <li>- no precondition as regards to fixed vs. open timeframe</li> </ul>  |
| Levels & actors          | <b>Levels and actors</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public Stakeholder (administration, ministries)</li> <li>- NGOs or GOs</li> <li>- Private stakeholders</li> <li>- Regional to EU level</li> <li>- No. of stakeholders</li> <li>- Amendable vs. static</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>more than two (types of) stakeholders</b> (public/private, regional/local level, ...)</li> <li>- <b>open</b> for new membership and for exits</li> </ul>   |
| Patterns of intervention | <b>Areas of intervention</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sectoral policies</li> <li>- spatial planning</li> <li>- integrative vs. sectoral approach</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>more than sectoral policies</b></li> <li>- however, often start with sectoral needs</li> </ul>   |
|                          | <b>Kind of activities</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategy development</li> <li>- Projects</li> <li>- Roundtables</li> <li>- ...</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>diversity</b> of activities possible</li> <li>- not limited to a single project implementation</li> </ul>  |

Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017).

## **Step 2: Identification of soft territorial cooperation areas**

The actual empirical work started in step 2. Here the research activity branched off into two parallel work streams: European case studies, outside Switzerland, were identified by means of literature review and a survey of experts that involved (nearly) all ESPON programme countries. In parallel, a Switzerland-wide survey was developed to identify existing Swiss supra-regional cooperation initiatives that (could) take forward the implementation of the Action Areas.

The **aim of this second key implementation step** was to

- Identify examples of soft territorial cooperation areas and their related policy frameworks across Europe as a basis for the selection of case studies for in-depth study
- Identify examples of supra-regional cooperation instances in Switzerland that are or could become 'implementation vehicles' of strategy 1 "Action Areas" of the Swiss Spatial Strategy

### **Work stream 1: Soft territorial cooperation areas outside Switzerland**

A survey was carried out by email and, following up on the first email exchange, also often by phone, covering (nearly) all ESPON programme countries. Altogether, 71 ESPON Contact Points and additional national experts were contacted. In some cases, the initially contacted expert established contact with additional territorial cooperation experts or experts on specific examples of cooperation areas (e.g. administration personal in national ministries or regional authorities, academics, etc.), which were followed up. Experts were asked to name (national as well as cross-border) cooperation initiatives they are aware of and that meet the definition of "soft territorial cooperation areas". Based on the table introduced above, a fact sheet template was developed for the systematic collection of information on the cooperation instances and underlying policy frameworks from interviews (for the full survey guidance, see Annex 2 of the inception report). It contained the following elements:

- Name of the cooperation
- Historicity/ reason for foundation
- Policy framework or individual cooperation
- Territorial extent
- Involved partners (countries, governance levels) and their motivation to cooperate
- Thematic focus and types of activities of the cooperation
- Resources and instruments
- Cross-border dimension

Each cooperation instance mentioned was entered into the fact sheet template. In order to complete the above listed information as far as possible, expert interviews were accompanied by desktop research.

The European survey was carried out over a period of 2.5 months and led to the identification of around 100 single cooperation initiatives across the ESPON space. In spite of the large repository of soft territorial cooperation instances compiled, it is important to note that the survey neither had the ambition to be comprehensive nor representative in quantitative terms. The objective was to get a good overview of recent developments in different parts of Europe and to be able to select from a large collection of cooperation instances those that fit the definition of “soft territorial cooperation areas” best.

Survey results primarily served for the selection of examples to be deepened in the course of the zoom-in case studies, but the results of the survey were also analysed as such by turning, where possible, the collected (qualitative) data into quantitative data. This was done by classifying the information using an ordinal scale (e.g. degree of institutionalisation was turned into a scale from ‘1’ for ‘very soft’ to ‘4’ for ‘hard’; the size of the cooperation areas <7.500 km<sup>2</sup> = ‘small’ = ‘1’, etc.). The process of classifying information was iterative as new categories were added or changed in the process of classification. Four categories (strategic ambitions of the cooperation, role of planning cultures, territorial size and the year of initialisation) were finally cross-analysed and represented in the form of so-called institutional mappings (see Annex 3) in order to show overall patterns.

## **Work stream 2: Swiss Action Areas and supra-regional cooperation instances**

A written survey of actors active in the AAs was carried out, following a preparatory meeting with the Swiss stakeholder that helped shaping the scope of the survey and provided additional relevant background information. On that basis, an email survey was prepared (FR and DE version), developed in close alignment with the European survey to ensure comparability.

The survey aimed at identifying relevant processes that currently take place in Switzerland regarding the implementation of the Action Areas, in particular as regards concrete cooperation initiatives that commit to implementing the objectives of the SSS (for the full transcript of survey questions see Annex 4 of the inception report). The survey addressed the following topics:

- Main characteristics of the cooperation instance (name, historicity, main purpose)
- Geographical extent and regionalisation logic
- Cooperation partners and their motivation to cooperation (including contact details of the main contact person)
- Thematic scope of cooperation and/ or governance gap addressed
- Link to Action Areas

The survey was sent to 33 actors from public authorities and academia concerned with the implementation of the SSS or active in one of the 12 Action Areas, most of which were proposed by the Swiss lead stakeholder. Actors were from municipal, cantonal and federal authorities, from institutions that seek to promote multi-level governance and capacity building of relevance for Action Areas and from research institutions dealing with spatial development. Some of the

actors are active at inter-cantonal level, some at the metropolitan and regional levels, while others deal with cross-border dimensions.

Observations from the survey were further complemented with desk research (document and website review) and additional interviews in order to take stock of existing (national and cross-border) cooperation areas. Participation at the regiosuisse workshop entitled “Coherent territorial development: from vision to practice” served as an additional input.

### **Step 3: Selection of case studies**

The surveys led to the identification of a large number of territorial cooperation initiatives across the ESPON countries and revealed a great diversity of initiatives, from well-known mature examples to very recent developments. Emphasis was therefore placed on selecting the most relevant and representative cases out of the multitude of examples identified.

The **aim of this third key implementation step** was to

- present the full array of European soft territorial cooperation areas, without any claim on representativeness nor comprehensiveness;
- select the most relevant and representative cases out of the multitude of examples with a view on meeting as many of the defined dimensions of soft territorial cooperation areas as possible;
- ensure a balanced mix of (national and cross-border) soft cooperation initiatives and geographical spread;
- for Switzerland, to select supra-regional cooperation instances in Switzerland that can be directly linked with the implementation of the AA as referred to in the SSS or that can function as levers for the promotion of AAs.

### **Work stream 1: Soft territorial cooperation areas outside Switzerland**

The European survey led to the identification of 100 territorial cooperation instances and showed that a large number of initiatives have emerged over the last years that share one or several characteristics of the Swiss Action Areas. They varied strongly in geographical reach (from macro-regional to local), scope and stakeholder composition. The main rationale for the selection process was to identify examples of soft territorial cooperation areas that provide instructive cases for comparison, that fit into the ACTAREA definition of soft territorial cooperation instances (cf. section 1.1) and that, at the same time, are able to depict the diversity of soft territorial cooperation initiatives in Europe. Given that the Swiss Action Areas are very heterogeneous with respect to their size, underlying concepts of regionalisation, but also in terms of pre-existing long-term cooperation structures (such as inter-cantonal ‘governmental conferences’, metropolitan conferences, international conferences as well as cross-border

cooperation programmes), the selection of case studies will *per se* have to consider a number of criteria.

The final selection of cases was meant to showcase examples of

- A good balance between a ‘top-down’ supportive framework and a ‘bottom-up’ driven process that is based on local needs;
- open cooperation frameworks that allow for a wide and flexible participation of actors, including civil society, that involves multiple levels of governance and extends across national and/or administrative boundaries;
- flexible perimeters that are not defined by existing institutionalised hard spaces, and that can be dynamically adapted to different policy fields;
- cooperation areas that span across administrative and/ or national borders
- collaborations based on jointly developed integrative strategic frameworks (e.g. strategy or vision) that form the basis for concrete joint actions in specific policy fields, embedded in the territorial context;
- cooperation frameworks that have been established with a medium to long-term perspective in mind;
- different governance set-ups and forms of institutionalisation, however, with preference given to informal or semi-formal non-statutory forms of organisation;
- cooperation instances that are potentially open to different areas of intervention.

In order to make a meaningful selection out of the broad variety of cases, all collected examples were scrutinised and classified considering the eight dimensions presented in section 0. The focus was not exclusively on recent examples that have not yet been described in literature. Looking into mature cooperation initiatives allowed making observations regarding possible evolutions of territorial cooperation over time. At the same time, the selection was balanced against principles of geographical spread in order to have different parts of Europe represented in the study. Nevertheless, preference was given to examples from Austria and Germany as well as other countries of the Alpine region to have the countries of the project stakeholders sufficiently covered.

In the end, 12 cases were selected that cover different configurations of the above listed criteria. The full list of selected case studies, as well as justifications for their selection can be found in Annex 1.

## **Work stream 2: Swiss Action Areas and supra-regional cooperation instances**

The mail survey to Swiss actors produced only few replies as only 9 out of the 33 actors contacted actually replied. Those actors that did answer confirmed findings of preceding desk research that found that there are few realisations of the AAs and, with the exception of cross-border collaborations and metropolitan conferences, also very few examples of supra-regional cooperation in Switzerland.

Since the survey did not reveal the expected number of concrete cooperation instances, the analysis of Action Areas was slightly reframed (see 0). It was decided to produce an inventory based on additional desk research, in particular web-based research, to identify examples of supra-regional, inter-cantonal and cross-border cooperation instances in each Action Area. The focus was on those collaborations that are linked to the implementation of the SSS or that can function as levers for the promotion of AAs. As a second step, these supra-regional initiatives would then be analysed in conjunction with an assessment of the geographical setting, potentials and obstacles to collaboration and strategic ambitions assigned to the AAs by the SSS.

Main principles for selecting relevant territorial cooperation instances were:

- The cooperation has to be “supra-regional” in nature, i.e. larger than functional areas, except if the functional scale overlaps a cantonal, national or cultural boundary.
- The cooperation has to be designed to constitute a ‘community of intent’, i.e. aim at bottom-up and voluntary cooperation.
- The cooperation has to have a long-term perspective, thus project-type of collaborations such as the model projects funded by the federal level were excluded.
- The cooperation may be composed of public or private actors, but should ideally foresee the participation of both.

In agreement with the Swiss stakeholders, out of this inventory of Swiss cooperation initiatives, only the most interesting and relevant cooperation initiatives were analysed in depth, applying a similar, but adapted approach to the case study methodology applied for the European cases. 17 cooperation instances were further analysed in 7 Action Areas.

#### **Step 4: Implementation of case studies**

Swiss Action Areas and European examples have been described in detail looking into existing documents, talking to selected actors, and analysing socio-economic indicators.

The **aim of this fourth key implementation step** was to

- Gain in-depth understanding of the selected soft territorial cooperation instances regarding their strategic ambition, degree and type of formalisation, available resources, territorial coverage, timeframes, type of involved actors, kind of activities and areas of intervention;
- Gain in-depth understanding of the policy that provides the framework for the implementation of the selected cooperation instances (where applicable).

Case studies were based on literature research, interviews, and the analysis of geographical and socio-economic data.

### **Work stream 1: Soft territorial cooperation areas outside Switzerland**

The 12 European case studies built on desk research (literature review, web search and analysis of socio-economic and geographical data) and 1-4 interviews per case study in order to cover both the policy that provides the framework for the implementation of the cooperation instance (where applicable) as well as the concrete cooperation area.

The purpose of the interviews was to complement and complete findings from desk research and provide a better understanding of the underlying rationale and mechanisms of cooperating in the specific a soft TCA. Case study guidance and reporting templates were developed both for interviews with policy-makers on policy frameworks that foster the emergence of soft TCAs and for interviews with actors involved in territorial cooperation to ensure a harmonised approach (and translated into DE and FR). The set of questions revolved around the following topics

- Cooperation framework: Purpose of cooperation framework; territorial, sectoral or governance-related issues/ gaps addressed by it, legal basis on which it was implemented, time horizon of the cooperation framework, types of activities that are carried out under the framework, number of concrete cooperation areas that have materialised under the framework and future outlook, targeted/ involved actors, resource provision, etc.
- Territorial cooperation area:
  - Main strategic ambitions and territorial/ sectoral/ governance issues addressed;
  - time horizon of the cooperation;
  - regionalisation logic and territorial flexibility;
  - targeted/ involved actors and their motivations to cooperate, and openness of membership;
  - cooperation topics, activities;
  - degree and type of formalisation of the cooperation and available resources;
  - perceived pros and cons of thinking and acting in areas of territorial cooperation and impact on actor's behaviour.

Altogether, 26 interviews were carried out. In addition to the textual description, each case study was presented graphically in the form of a so-called 'mapshot', collaboration maps and spider charts, summarising the essence of each case. 'Mapshots' are strongly abstracted maps that show the essence of the geographical and socio-economic context of the cooperation area and the cooperation logic (cf. Annex 3). Cooperation maps are representations of the cooperation landscape in which the specific cooperation instance is embedded (cf. Annex 3). Spider graphs are representations of the degree of softness of the TCA with respect to territorial fuzziness, thematic openness, organisational flexibility, membership variety and resource diversity. These visualisations were aimed to facilitate the cross-analysis as well as the communication of case study results.

## **Work stream 2: Swiss Action Areas and supra-regional cooperation instances**

Taking account of the fact that the mail survey did not lead to the identification of supra-regional cooperation instances that can be directly related to the 12 Swiss AAs, the original analytical framework applied to the analysis of the Swiss Action Areas was amended to include desk research on existing Swiss supra-regional cooperation instances.

Each AA case study started with an analysis of the socio-economic and geographical characteristics of the (enlarged) Action Area, identifying the main territorial structures in the AA (e.g. settlement patterns, development axis, transport corridors) and those characteristics that either constitute a barrier or opportunity for territorial cooperation (e.g. linguistic divides, metropolitan pressures, economic structure and disparities or joint assets). Barriers and opportunities can be natural, cultural or administrative and those identified in the SSS for each of the AA were taken as a starting point. The idea behind this first analytical step was that those would provide a good rationale for cooperation in the Action Area.

Identified elements of relevance were represented in so-called 'mapshots'. Mapshots synthesise the geographical settings that are most relevant to understand development patterns and related collaboration issues in the AAs. This was complemented with a textual description as well as a summary table of strategic ambitions and areas of intervention listed in the SSS for each AA, distinguishing between the core and the enlarged Action Areas.

In a second step, identified territorial collaboration instances were described in a table, synthesizing their main dimensions in term of organisation of the collaboration (formalisation, territorial coverage, levels & actors, historicity and resources) and intervention logic (strategic ambition, kind of activities and areas of intervention). The dimensions were chosen to allow easy comparisons of Swiss collaboration initiatives with the European case studies.

In a third step, each AA was positioned in relation to identified cooperation challenges and opportunities, based on the geographical analysis and on the assessment of existing cooperation instances, pointing at areas in which (additional) supra-regional cooperation would make sense and provide an added value. More concretely, opportunities and challenges present in the AA were contrasted with the identified existing supra-regional collaborations to see whether these were already addressed by any of the existing cooperation within the perimeter of the Action Area or whether they would fit into the strategic scope of any of them.

In a fourth step, a set of Action Areas was chosen for in-depth analysis. Priority was given to Action Areas in which a dedicated cooperation structure was implemented within the framework of the SSS or that have supra-regional collaborations overlapping with the AA. The choice was also guided by the strive for balance between the AAs that can be qualified as metropolitan areas, those characterised by a polycentric network of small and medium-size towns and surrounding areas and those that have an Alpine character. For most of the identified supra-regional collaborations, phone or face-to-face interviews were carried out to find out:

- How the cooperation positions itself with regard to the SSS

- Whether and how SSS objectives have been integrated
- Whether the cooperation collaborates with other cooperation instances
- Additional information to fill information gaps regarding the eight dimensions

For those AAs chosen for in-depth analysis, cooperation maps were prepared.

## **Step 5: Transversal analysis and development of policy options and guidance**

Step 5 brought together findings from all 25 case studies for a comparative analysis in order to develop practical guidance and policy recommendations for ESPON stakeholders.

The **aim of this fifth key implementation step** was to

- Draw general conclusions from the case studies on cooperation and regionalisation rationales, organisation and governance structures, cooperative planning methods used, areas of intervention, embeddedness in the existing multi-level governance system and links to statutory planning system, impact on territorial development and actor's behaviour;
- Translate these into guidelines and policy options.

The comparative analysis was guided by the set of eight dimensions that characterise soft territorial cooperation areas (cf. section 0). Tables summarising the main characteristics of each case study with respect to these eight dimensions were used as a starting point to identify patterns and typologies.

The analysis included comparing cooperation rationales, the role of strategy development, regionalisation logics, forms of institutionalisation and formalisation, availability of financial and personnel resources, types of cooperation activities and topics pursued. Furthermore, the embeddedness in the existing multi-level governance system and links to statutory planning system and the importance of top-down stimulation versus bottom-up emergence were looked into. Strengths of thinking and planning in soft territorial cooperation area as compared to 'hard' administrative regions were carved out and lessons drawn on drivers but also barriers to soft forms of cooperation.

## **Annex 3: Tools for enhanced dialogue: mapshots, institutional mapping and spider graphs**

As reflected in the case studies, organising soft cooperation is a challenging task. Challenges result from limited capacities of organising institutions, the large variety of potentially relevant actors, difficulties of coordinating the evolving fields of intervention when the cooperation is characterised by thematic openness. In such a context, territorial evidence is essential. It is first crucial to get a picture of possible cooperation areas. Second, measurable patterns and trends and qualitative assessments of potentials for enhanced exchanges and integration help stakeholders involved in cooperation processes to develop shared common perspectives on territorial structures and organisations.

However, this knowledge is often disparate and can hardly be synthesised and conveyed using traditional maps and graphs. Therefore, the ACTAREA project has developed 'soft cooperation planning tools' to bridge the gap between territorial evidence and the implementation of soft cooperation, and to support the inclusion of evidence into participatory processes: mapshots and institutional mappings and spider graphs. Each of these tools help to analyse, represent and debate links between policies and territorial development processes. As such, they can contribute to the design and implementation of soft cooperation instances.

### **Introduction to institutional mapping**

**Institutional mappings synthesise geographic overlaps of administrative units and cooperation areas of relevance for the targeted cooperation instance.** They are an important element of the case study analysis and a tool for stakeholders to capitalize on existing cooperation. They help to understand the institutional context and cooperation setting that has been established so far and synthesises how cooperation instances may overlap (in geographic terms), are implemented in parallel in adjacent areas or are embedded in each other at different scales.

Cooperation mapping considers the following aspects:

- The selection of cooperation instances is based on information from interviews, document analyses and desk research. Criteria to include cooperation areas is their spatial proximity to the case study and the similarities in terms of targeted issues.
- The representation of each cooperation instance focuses on the size of its perimeter. It is not important to show the precise site location, but the scale and the general positioning.
- The mapping shows cooperation perimeters. In a few cases, this is not identical with the perimeter of the cooperation partner. For example, in the case of the Spatial Development Commission Lake Constance, the '*Planungsregion Allgäu*' is the partner,

but only some of its districts are part of the cooperation perimeter; in the case of the Upper Rhine Region, the federal state of Baden Württemberg is the institutional partner, but only some of its sub-regions (*'Regierungsbezirke'*) are within the perimeter.

The outcome of the cooperation perimeter helps to identify the overall structure.

- The mappings can indicate the degree of the 'Institutional thickness', i.e. the number of the respective cooperation initiatives.
- The mappings visualise multi-level governance. Some cooperation instances are operate in a context with multiple relevant bodies at the same level, while others relate to systems of administrative units and cooperation instances embedded in each other which are thus of multi-level character.
- In some cases, adjacent perimeters cover a cooperation region, in other cases, overlapping perimeters cover a certain area. Irrespective of the situation, institutional mappings help to compare the spatial *foci* of cooperation initiatives within a given area.
- Moreover, in some cases, a spatial concentration of cooperation instances can be observed, for example in metropolitan core areas or around a specific geographical features.
- The institutional mappings produced by the ACTAREA project do not represent the political priorities or project activities in the regions, nor do they display concrete measures taken. They rather show in which perimeters and through which cooperation platforms activities take place.
- Institutional mappings make it possible to take stock of existing cooperation instances which are relevant for the promotion of the soft cooperation area.

## Introduction to mapshots

**A mapshot is a conceptual representation of a cooperation area that includes geographic features, patterns and trends of relevance for observed or potential cooperation dynamics.** These individual features are referred to in the literature as 'chorèmes' (Brunet, 1986). These mapping techniques were initially developed in the 1980s and were used from then as a tool for spatial applied research (Casanova Enault and Chatel, 2015a, 2015b). The ACTAREA project has drawn on them in communicative planning perspective: while these techniques have traditionally promoted as heuristic tools (i.e. demonstrations using graphic elements), 'mapshots' are rather designed as instruments to inform, enrich and facilitate discussions in participative planning processes.

Mapshots are also part of a strategy to overcome the limited availability of updated data at the appropriate scale, which have been a major obstacle in the ESPON programme. In many cases, data exists but is not sufficiently homogenous to be displayed in traditional maps. Qualitative information on territorial trends may also be compiled (e.g. interviews with local stakeholder). Mapshots make it possible to graphically represent an expert-based synthesis of

relevant territorial patterns and trends, based on the combined analysis of diverse data coming from a broad range of source. Geographic processes such as polarising trends, gradients and discontinuities are made immediately visible to the recipient, while they may require more advanced map-reading skills if displayed using a traditional choropleth map.

However, a mapshot is not designed to be immediately readable without an accompanying text. Its purpose is to allow stakeholders and decision-makers to reflect on how social, economic and natural patterns and trends are organised geographically, and on the opportunities and challenges deriving from this organisation. They therefore require that readers dwell on the symbols used and on the general logic of the representation.

Mapshots can serve several purposes when planners, policy-makers (including facilitators of the cooperation initiative) and local stakeholders collectively explore territorial cooperation options.

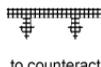
- For planners and policy makers, mapshots are an analytical tool that helps to understand and synthesise the spatial configurations of a given cooperation area.
- For stakeholders, mapshots suggest an interpretation of economic, demographic and political forces that drive the territorial cooperation process. It may help to trigger a dialogue between stakeholders, policy makers and planners
- For external observers, a mapshot provides an overview of the territory, as well as guidance throughout a case study.

## **Methodology**

Each set of mapshots is based on a specific language with its vocabulary (a thematic dictionary) and grammar (overlying rules). The project team developed a language adapted to the issues of inter-territorial cooperation. The thematic dictionary (see Figure A3. 1) presents basic signifiers. Three core dimensions of territorial cooperation are represented: geographic features, cooperation issues and socio-economic structures (or dynamics). The identification and joint representation of these three dimensions in a given cooperation area is an **analytical process**, of which the resulting mapshot provides a synthesis. The mapping process involves a variety of identified sources: national or regional statistics, legal documents, grey literature and interviews. As such, the mapshot synthesises an expert interpretation of main patterns in thematic maps, but also incorporates other, more qualitative types of evidence. It makes it possible to gather inputs from disparate sources, focusing on the production of policy-relevant analytical outputs rather than on resource-intensive processes of data homogenisation. In many cases, the different components of the mapshot may be represented separately, and then joined together in a combined map. This improves readability and makes it possible to graphically represent a 'cooperation storyline'.

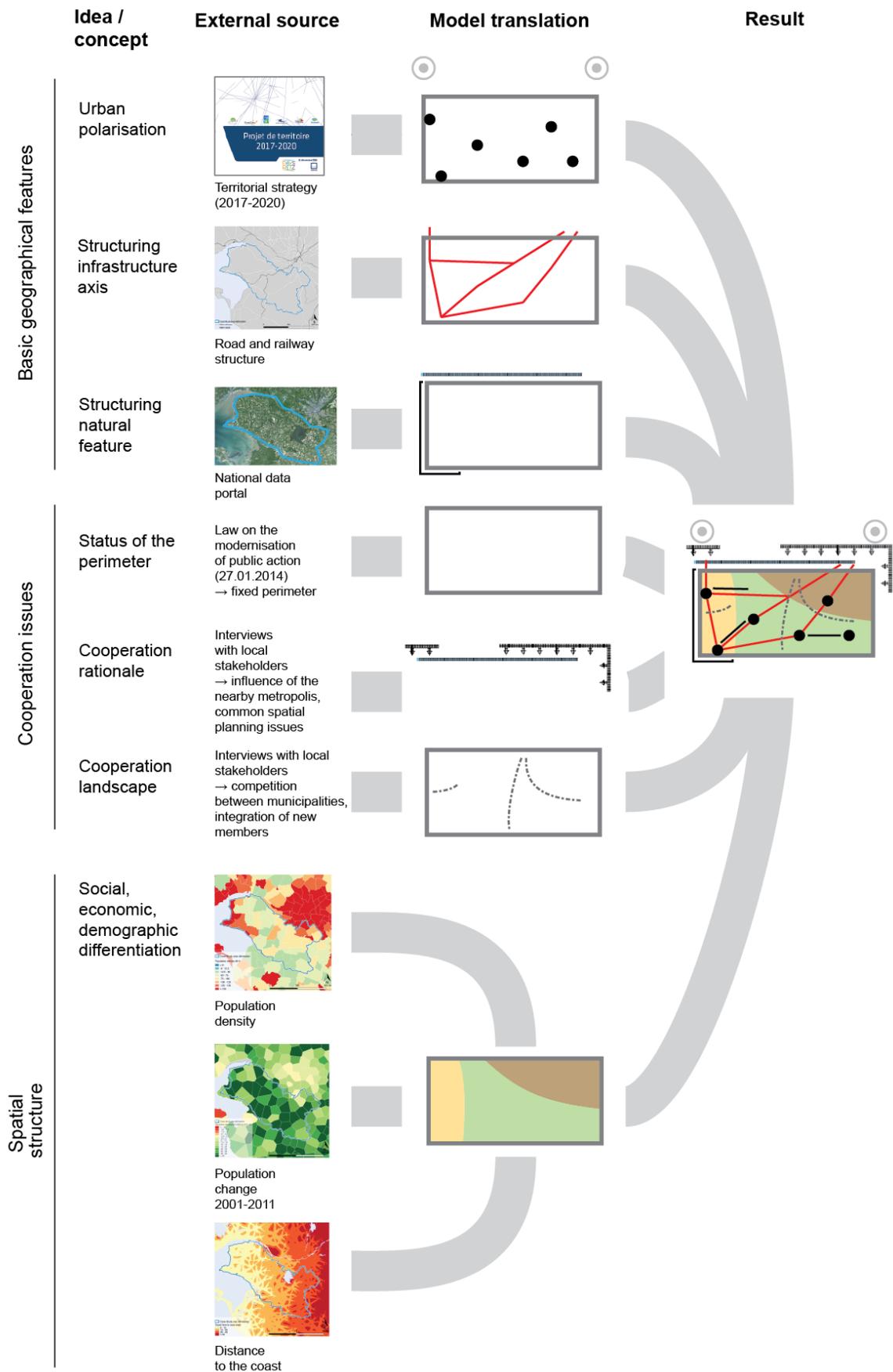
Figure A3. 1 presents the main symbols used. The category ‘**Basic geographic features**’ includes poles and axes around which territorial development is organised. The shape of the cooperation area is simplified to remove all unnecessary noise. Only shape components that are necessary to understand its spatial configuration are kept. Similarly, shown metropolitan areas and cities are structuring elements of the urban hierarchy around which the rest of the territory is organised, ‘structuring infrastructure axis’ is a set of road and/or railway lines which orients flows of people, goods and information in space, and ‘structuring natural features’ are linear feature that significantly influence the cooperation area’s spatial configuration.

Figure A3. 1: Dictionary of ideas/concepts and symbols for mapshots

| Dimension                   | Idea / concept  | Basic sign  | Potential declination   | Comments              |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|-----------------------|
| Basic geographical features | Simplified shape of the cooperation instance  | <br>geometric shape              |  square  hexagon  circle  triangle  other  |                       |
|                             | Urban hierarchy   | <br>a circle                     |  metropolis  regional centre  local node   |                       |
|                             | Structuring infrastructure axis   | <br>white line with grey outline |  major infrastructure axis  intermediate infrastructure axis  | non deterministic use |
|                             | Structuring natural feature   | <br>line                       |  river  coastline   | non deterministic use |
| Cooperation issues          | Status of the perimeter   | <br>Line (grey 50%, 3 pts)     |  Hard (or core area)  Flexible (or associated territories)  |                       |
|                             | Cooperation rationale   | <br>Thin grid                  |  to counteract an external pressure (e.g. from a metropolis)  to manage a physical object or a resource  to foster a specific relation  | non-exhaustive list   |
|                             | Cooperation landscape   | <br>curved line                |  cooperation challenge: mountain  cooperation challenge: border  cooperation challenge: language  cooperation axis  overlapping instance of cooperation |                       |
| Spatial structure           | <br>background color |                                |   |                       |

Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Figure A3. 2: Sources and elaboration of mapshots (based on the example of Pays de Retz)



Three types of **cooperation issues** are represented: first, the hardness/flexibility of the perimeter (which help the reader to distinguish between hard and soft cooperation, and/or between main and enlarged area); second, the cooperation rationale, e.g. a geographic feature such as a lake or a mountain range around which cooperation efforts are organised or a border to an external area against which actors of the cooperation area position themselves; third, the cooperation landscape. This 'landscape' includes three kinds of components: cooperation gaps or challenges (e.g. a natural feature such as a river), cooperation axes and overlapping cooperation instances that may require enhanced cooperation.

Finally, choropleth symbols (i.e. hue and value) are used to represent **structuring social, demographic and economic patterns** between sub-units of the cooperation area. Each concept is translated into a set of symbols which are then overlaid and result in the mapshot. As such, the mapshot is an expert interpretation of main patterns in thematic maps. It makes it possible to synthesise inputs from disparate sources, focusing on the production of policy-relevant analytical outputs rather than on resource-intensive processes of data homogenisation. Underlying data and maps can be provided in parallel, as background information to the mapshot. Figure A3. 2 gives an overview of the process, based on the example of the Pays de Retz. The representation does not imply a deterministic relation between geographical features, spatial structures and cooperation issues. The integration of a physical axis or a cooperation challenge in the diagram should not be interpreted as an objective hierarchy (e.g. reflecting 'most important' roads or rivers) or as an automatic relation (e.g. 'administrative borders imply cooperation challenge'). Elements are included based on tangible influences on cooperation itself, as they are perceived by stakeholders. In most cases, this implies that they have been explicitly mentioned in strategic documents or during interviews with stakeholders. By way of consequence, mapshots can only be elaborated upon a thorough analysis of local and regional development issues and a compilation of insights from policy makers and stakeholders.

### **A differentiated approach to mapshots and their contextualised uses**

As an 'expert interpretation' of different types of evidence, mapshots rely on editorial decisions: what is relevant to be represented and what is not? Depending on the development stage of the soft cooperation initiative, mapshots may display different types of elements and mobilize various information providers. In this respect, in the ACTAREA project, Swiss 'Action Areas' differ from most of the 'non-Swiss' case studies for practical reasons.

**Swiss 'Action Areas'** are at an early stage of development. Only few concrete actions have yet been launched under this banner. Mapshots may therefore function as tools for dialogue with local stakeholders, in order to better identify measures that could be implemented at the scale of AAs. As highlighted in Table A3. 1 below, mapshots can be useful here as a transcription of the open framework provided by the SSS. It is composed of core elements mentioned in the SSS, as well as other elements from desk research. This results in a series

of mapshots (12 – one for each AA) which all have a similar look with almost standardised legends. The main inputs originate from the soft cooperation framework (the Swiss Spatial Strategy). The 12 mapshots are presented in Annex 5.

*Table A3. 1: Mapshot sources for 'Swiss Action Areas'*

| Viewpoint provider                   | Element  | Source  | relative contribution to the definition of what is 'relevant' |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| the soft cooperation authority (ARE) | -main infrastructure corridors, the shape of the cooperation instance<br>-cooperation potentials,<br>-cooperation rationale,<br>-cooperation landscape: overlapping Action Areas | Swiss spatial strategy (2012)   | high  |
| local stakeholders                   | -cooperation gaps (obstacles)  | interviews  | low   |
| the planner                          | -relevant spatial structures,<br>-cooperation landscape: other overlapping cooperation initiatives   | -statistical and land use data (classification at LAU2 level by the SSO), OpenStreetMap<br>-desk research | medium  |

Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

Other **European cooperation instances** that were selected by the project (12 case studies) were generally at a more advanced implementation stage. Mapshots were used then to synthesise an ongoing cooperation process. They can help to synthesise large arrays of decentralised initiatives, competing views on the orientation to be given to the cooperation, as well as potentials to be capitalised upon or obstacles to be addressed. In other words, mapshots are initially an expert proposed visualisation of different types of evidence, including inputs collected during interviews and document reviews. It can then be amended based on exchanges with actors of the cooperation instance. The mapshot is a visual interpretation to be discussed and challenged by the soft cooperation body and by local stakeholders. As a consequence, the planners' input is stronger in the representation of European cases (compared to Swiss cases) as it requires to select core issues and synthesize a wide variety of information.

The following mapshots illustrate different types of soft cooperation contexts and objectives:

- metropolitan pole 'Sillon lorrain' where inner territorial disparities were highlighted as key aspect for the future of cooperation.
- regional strategic planning Lower Austria – Region north of Vienna or territorial pole 'Pays de Retz' where the positioning towards the neighbouring metropolis is represented as a key aspect.
- Trinational Metropolitan Region Upper Rhine which mostly focuses on the regional development of technological and industrial clusters

Table A3. 2: Mapshot sources for European case studies

| Viewpoint provider              | Element   | Source   | relative contribution to the definition of what is 'relevant' |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|
| the soft cooperation initiative | -cooperation rationale (1/2),<br>-cooperation landscape (1/2),<br>-spatial structures (deemed relevant)   | -strategic documents produced by the cooperation instance<br><b>-interviews</b>  | medium  |
| local stakeholders              | -cooperation landscape (2/2)  | -grey literature from local stakeholders (reports stating the conditions of the involvement of the stakeholder in the soft cooperation initiative) | low   |
| the planner                     | -the stylized shape of the cooperation instance (area, corridor, network)<br>-urban hierarchy,<br>-structuring infrastructure axis<br>-structuring natural features<br>-cooperation rationale (2/2)<br>-cooperation landscape | -statistical data (from national and regional sources),<br>land use data, OpenStreetMap,<br>-desk research   | high  |

Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)

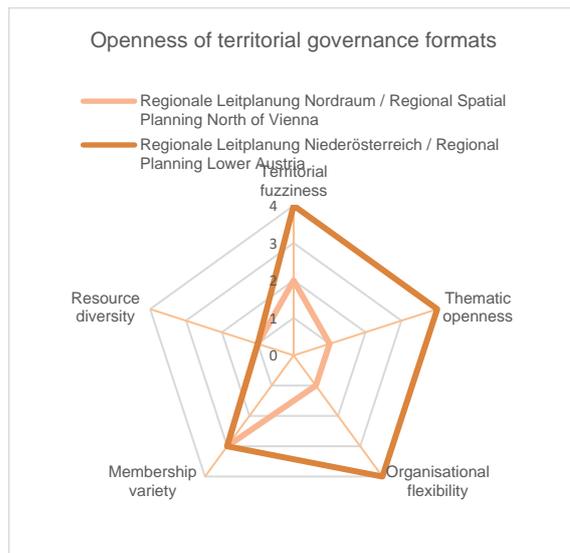
**Some cooperation instances constitute a 'network' or a 'corridor' rather than an 'area'. This leads to a specific type of graphic representation, which in the context of this project has been applied to the 'Sillon Lorrain' and the 'Newry-Dundalk Gateway' cases.**

Even if they are based on the same set of symbols and methodology, Swiss and non-Swiss mapshots differ significantly. This is because their respective cooperation processes are at different stages of development and because the scales at which cooperation is promoted diverge. Furthermore, geographic objects and cooperation issues of relevance for the comprehension of the cooperation dynamic are diverse. Caution must therefore be exerted when making comparisons between mapshots: a given symbol may represent geographic features of different magnitude. Furthermore, a specific colour may be used to convey different messages from one mapshot to another.

### Introduction to spider graphs

**'Spider Graphs' are visualisations of political geographies, i.e. the relationship between political action and its territorial dimension, by presenting aspects of each cooperation instance in a quantified and standardised way.** As such they are not only communication tools, but also provide a comparative perspective as different instances of soft territorial cooperation can be compared regarding their softness. In the project they were also used to compare the softness of the policy framework to that of the concrete cooperation areas that have emerge under the framework.

Figure A3. 1: Example of a spider graph



Already in the interim report, spider graphs were used as a form of representation of the multi-dimensional character of territorial cooperation, taking as a starting point the eight dimensions of (see Table 1.1). For the final report, in order to densify the visual representation and to give the values a 'direction', the number of dimensions was reduced from eight to five by merging selected categories (see Table A3. 1). This densification does not change the analytical steps, but only the visual representation.

For the purpose of comparison and communication, each soft territorial cooperation instance was classified regarding each of the five dimensions on a scale from 'very low' (1) to 'very high' (4). In those cases where a policy framework for the concrete cooperation instance was identified, both the framework and the concrete cooperation instance are described using spider graphs. In quantifying and standardising the cooperation, they provide a comparative perspective on the cases. The values are assigned on the basis of the criteria listed in

Table A3. 2.

*Table A3. 1 Visualisation of analytical dimensions in spider graphs*

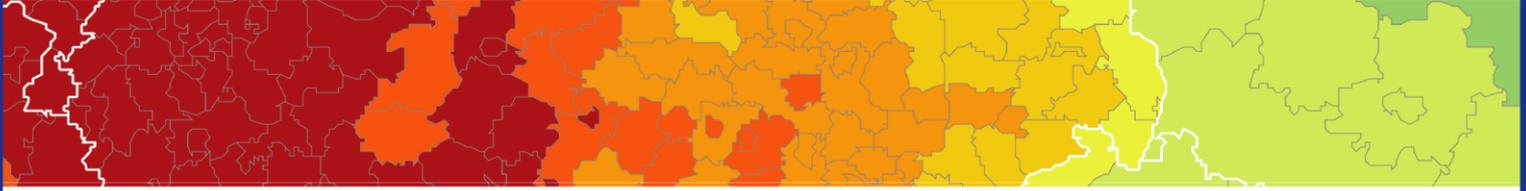
| <b>Analytical Dimensions</b>               | <b>Spider Graph visualisation</b> |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Territorial coverage & geographical scale  | Territorial fuzziness             |
| Areas of intervention & Kind of activities | Thematic openness                 |
| Degree and type of institutionalisation    | Organisational flexibility        |
| Levels and actors                          | Membership variety                |
| Resources                                  | Resource diversity                |

*Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)*

Table A3. 2 Assignment of spider graph values based on cooperation instance characteristics

|                                   | <b>1 very low</b>                                    | <b>2 low</b>  | <b>3 high</b>                             | <b>4 very high</b>                                 |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Territorial fuzziness</b>      | not open for modification                            | open for modification after institutional amendment           | open for modifications                    | territorial flexibility important characteristic   |
| <b>Thematic openness</b>          | very strong orientation on a specific topic          | focus on one topic, but open in principle                     | more than one topic and / flexible agenda | no thematic limitations                            |
| <b>Organisational flexibility</b> | fixed and stable institutionalisation                | institutionalised with easy options for amendments            | only light forms of institutionalisation  | informal, not institutionalised setting            |
| <b>Membership variety</b>         | one actor group is dominant (level; public/ private) | one group is dominant, but others play a minor role           | more than one group with equal rights     | multi-level setting with public and private actors |
| <b>Resource diversity</b>         | limited to one type of resources                     | one instrument is dominant, but others are sometimes combined | several instruments are combined          | very broad variety of resources                    |

Source: ESPON ACTAREA (2017)



### **ESPON 2020 – More information**

ESPON EGTC

4 rue Erasme, L-1468 Luxembourg - Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Phone: +352 20 600 280

Email: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)

[www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#)

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.