
Introduction to the dossier “Cross-border connections within a united Europe: from infrastructure networks to human relations”

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Cross-border spaces play a huge stake in Europe’s future, although this is paradoxical given their peripheral location. However, the disappearance of borders within the European Union is precisely what enables it to ensure a common area that is large enough to survive in a globalised world. This monograph grapples with the challenge of presenting the issue within this European—and, in particular, pro-European—horizon precisely when the project of a united, cohesive Europe is seemingly endangered by the renationalisation of the thinking of some of its leaders and the selfishness of some of the societies the continent is home to.

The articles in this monograph share a set of common points. The first is their European vision: cross-border spaces cannot be debated without understanding Europe’s concern with cross-border cooperation and the efforts to physically resolve cross-border bottlenecks. Secondly, the articles also seem to concur in highlighting the importance of functional spaces when talking about the actions to be carried out in these territories, and all three stress the need to create cohesive spaces that improve their residents’ quality of life. Thirdly, it seems essential to overcome the negative consequences of the border effect, which can be felt by the societies on either side in many dimensions of everyday life. Fourthly, perhaps due to the authors’ professional background—most of them are geographers—they all consider it necessary to rethink the territories by looking at the connections at different scales of action, including transport,

communication and cooperation, in a coherent scheme that encompasses land and road planning. Finally, they also offer a critical view of the processes pursued thus far by the policies of the states involved.

In the first article, Martín Guillermo Ramírez and Juan Manuel Trillo review the process of constructing cross-border cooperation in Europe as a general framework for this monograph by evoking the spirit of reconstruction in the years following the Second World War, yet without ignoring more recent episodes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. At the same time, they outline the specific cooperation measures adopted by the EU since 2017 and take stock of their strengths and weaknesses in view of the current situation.

In the second article, Josep Vicent Boira, Matteo Berzi and Antoni Durà analyse the importance of the transportation system in overcoming the border effect, and especially the role that rail can play in achieving this. The authors stress the revalorisation of border spaces through different European Union programmes, as well as the maturity of the Trans-European Transport Network, which may offer encouraging prospects for the territories if it is employed in conjunction with a more local network. Finally, the authors also review the current state of rail connections between Catalonia and southern France within the European perspective and new developments related to the business plans of companies like Renfe and SNCF, along with the initiatives of institutions such as the Government of Catalonia to promote rail transport between cities and territories.

Finally, Jaume Feliu, Javier Martín, Rafael Giménez Capdevila and Margarita Castañer analyse the specific case of the Catalan Cross-Border Space, with a study of the projects that have received European aid via the Interreg programme between 1991 and 2021. They review themes and financing and focus on the actors that have participated in and led these projects. They also criticise the French government's closure of secondary border crossings and offer proof of the locals' concern with this move.

In summary, this monograph aims to provide an opportunity to reflect on cross-border spaces, particularly those created around the state borders that divide the Catalan linguistic community in two—an update of a topic that has already appeared in this journal—at a time of both uncertainty and opportunity. The maturation of cooperation policy and the construction of a true Trans-European Transport Network could produce tailwinds that help better foster the integration of cross-border territories. This would work to the European Union's favour and contribute to the weakening, if not disappearance, of the border effect, which even today continues to penalise citizens in general and those in border areas in particular.