

BEYOND ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES. EUROPEAN TENDENCIES IN INTER-MUNICIPAL CO-OPERATION.

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1. The reasons for municipal cooperation.

In a context of crossed competences and shared responsibilities between layers of governments, where population demands and necessities are not homogeneous due to the diversity of social situations and social groups and require differentiated answers, governing means the capacity to bring together commitments to define social and political problems through horizontal networks.

Main challenges are overcoming the administrative and subordinate perspective of local governments widening the political agenda and implementing new initiatives with other political institutions and social and economic actors.

In the last twenty years in Europe the institutional weight of local governments has been strengthened in the territorial and well-being agendas. This phenomenon has fostered the setting-up of new forms of municipal articulation and new ways of multi-level collaboration. It is obvious that local government size is an important variable to be taken into account that limits local self-government, but the new relevant role of local governments has been possible thanks to an approach that considers the territory not only as a physical reality but as a relational space linking cities, towns and wider territories independently of their physical distances between them.

This territorial configuration, likeable to networks demands new ways of governing. We have left behind forms of governing centred in hierarchies and based on strictly normative and functional approaches and start to consider the advantages of interactions with groups which are representatives of interest and new visions. Governing cities cannot be understood as a problem of mayors and aldermen. Instead it is seen as a collective problem where hierarchies are useless and new coordination tools with social actors are necessary.

From the decade of the 80s there have been two factors that have had important consequences on local authorities: on one hand, local governments have faced more social problems that transcend their physical dimension; and on the other these problems require policies and initiatives that local governments are unable to make on their own. In most cases lonely efforts do not bring enough resources and working together is a necessity to get scale economies and synergetic surpluses.

Another reason to cooperate is the development of metropolitan spaces that poses the problem of the divorce between the functional area and the current political and administrative boundaries. A metropolitan perspective overcomes the physical limits and gives coherence and efficiency to some territorial policies (water supply, public transport, sewer system, urban planning). Sometimes this is only possible through the

implementation of horizontal and vertical ways of cooperation especially in decentralized States.

But this logic of cooperation is not limited to the public field. Nowadays public administrations resort to collaboration with private sector when designing or implementing their policies to get more funding, foster the creation of social capital or to improve innovation in service provision. Besides, the European Union has promoted the setting-up of public-private partnerships. For instance, the program LEADER, aimed to rural development, has fostered the creation of cooperation initiatives between administrations and economic and social agents.

2. The emergence of cooperative municipal networks.

The cooperative municipal networks are not a cooperative formula based on public law, but an informal and voluntary way of inter-municipal cooperation based on mutual trust. Nevertheless, some of these cooperative structures have developed formal boards of organization. These cooperative networks are created on the basis of interaction between political and administrative actors belonging to different municipalities. These actors have the joint will to make common actions because in most cases they would not be able to implement them by themselves. These common policies are beneficial for all the members of the network and furnish information exchanges, experiences, human and material resources and knowledge to design and implement common projects. In this sense, neighbour cities that use to compete to consolidate themselves as a pole of economic, cultural or political attraction in a geographical area, decide to work together to develop a mutually beneficial project.

According to Castells and Borja (1998: 331), main aims of cooperative networks are:

- Consolidating a minimal territorial, economic, political or demographic area to make profit of functional complementarities between cities; creating and using scale economies; generating synergetic surpluses; and developing infrastructures.
- Structuring a system of lobby;
- Getting functions of leadership

If we make a comparative exercise of cooperative networks in Europe, their main organizational characteristics are:

- The voluntary character of networks;
- The horizontal and non hierarchical ways of working;
- The respect to the autonomy of the individual members;
- The flexible and opened nature of the network with regard to its tasks and the number of members;
- The informal organization at least at the beginning of the collaboration;
- The setting-up of two operative levels in the network: one political level (mayor, aldermen, board) and a technical one (working groups of civil servants, commissions, etc.)

In relation to the geographical area of the cooperative structures, we can distinguish between international networks (where cities can belong to different countries or even to different continents); inter-regional networks (where cities belong to different regional layers) and intra-regional networks (with cities belonging to the same region). And finally, with regard to the functions of the networks, we can find multi-issue networks, usually formed by neighbour cities sharing the same metropolitan space and trying to implement common actions to develop their “urban region”; and single-issue networks where members, physically distant, work on a common subject of interest.

As a preliminary conclusion, we can say municipal collaboration through networks is a process to achieve shared and mutually beneficial objectives. These networks have the potential to improve strategic decision-making and to maximize the impact of municipal policies, indirectly increasing efficiency.

Service delivery has long ceased to correlate with political and administrative boundaries, with people often living in one local authority and working in another. Large cities furnish a substantial body of evidence suggesting that there is a positive correlation between city size and higher productivity in service provision and economic performance (Ruano: 2000). What this suggests is that cooperative networks are an effective way to coordinate over issues (such as transport, territorial management, etc.) that cut across traditional political boundaries and affect economic growth. Cooperation offers the chance to reflect about how service provision works in practice for sharing information and avoiding duplications and inefficiencies. Municipal cooperation also offers support for the development of city regions because there are already relationships between urban areas and neighbouring authorities where people work or prefer to live. So, working together in a formal or an informal way makes sense for most places as a response to the new exigencies of social demands.

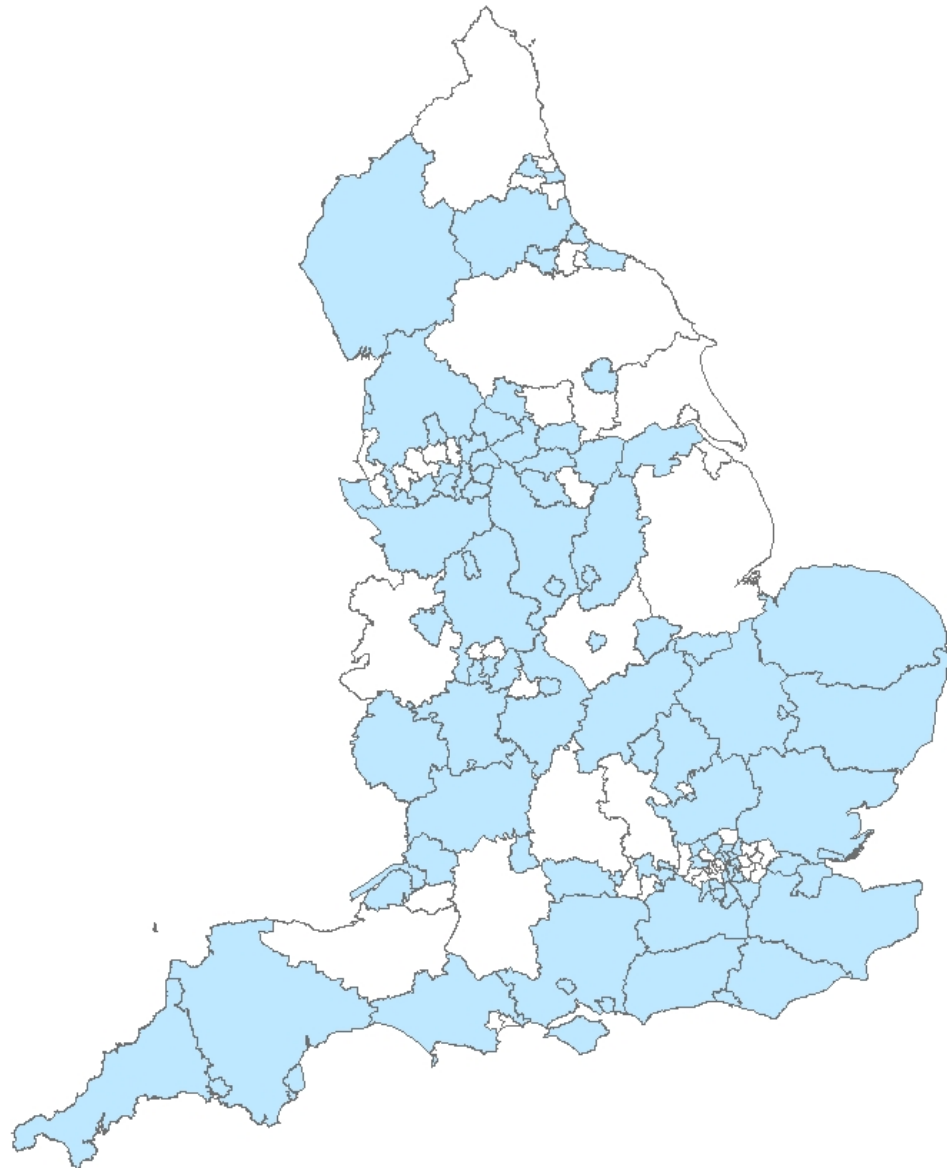
Although the emergence of cooperative networks is a common phenomenon in most of the European states, this fact adopts different ways and has different consequences depending on the territorial structure and the singular institutional characteristics of the countries analyzed. Now, we are going to compare these municipal networks in the context of the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Spain.

2.1. The case of the United Kingdom

In this case, the national government has clearly recognised the potential that collaboration has to support economic development and regeneration strategies and has designed several policy initiatives to support municipal cooperation under different forms. In 2006, the Local Government White Paper has passed from assessing local authorities as individual institutions to evaluate “comprehensive areas”, what means that local governments will be judged from 2009 by their ability to work in partnership to deliver the priorities set out in “local area agreements”. These local area agreements (LAAs) are three year agreements between the central government and the local area, where are included the local authority and other key partners at the local level (public, private or voluntary sector). The LAA sets out the priority for the local area and includes specific local indicators and mandatory indicators set by the central

government. The aim is to devolve decision making to a more appropriate level, rationalise funding streams and clarify priorities and outcomes between partners.

Map 1b
Local Area Agreement proposals
Climate Change Mitigation NI 186



NI 186 Per capita CO2 emissions

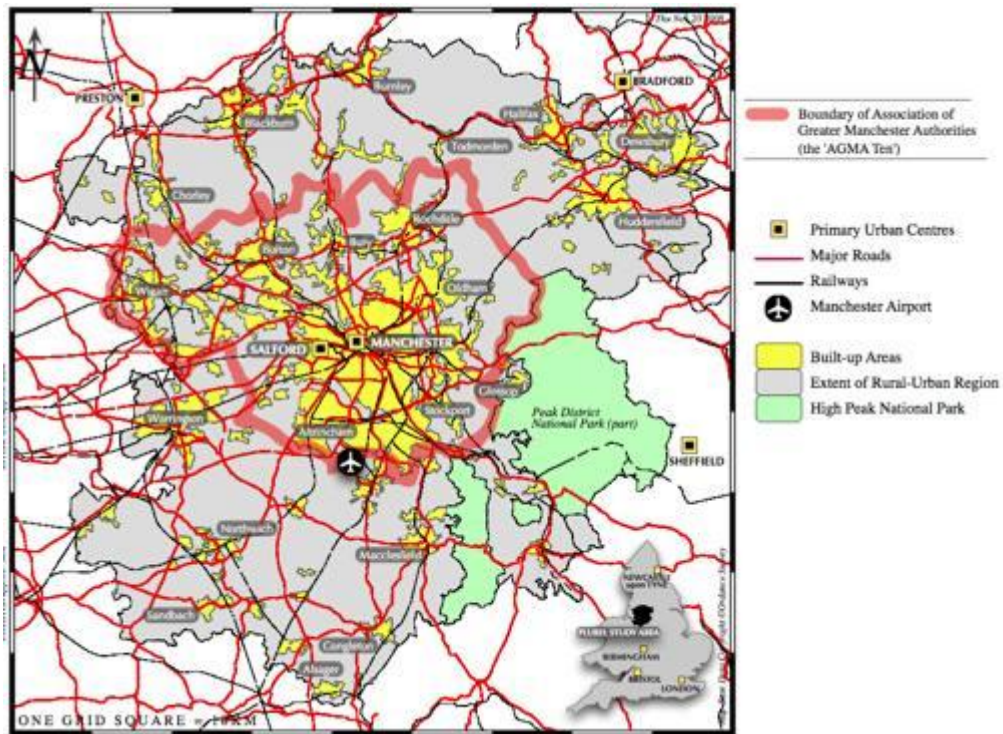
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A Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is a non-statutory, multi-agency partnership which matches local authority boundaries. Each of them is tasked with drawing up a community strategy that sets out both the community's needs and the actions required to meet them. So, in these cases we have agreements between localities and central government to improve joint working at local level.

Besides, neighbouring local authorities in a wide range of places are already working together for economic development and regeneration purposes. In Great Manchester and the Tees Valley these partnerships are more than a decade old. What is new is that national government tries to encourage these partnerships through “multi-area agreements” that support cross-boundary collaboration. Multi-area agreements (MAA) are defined as involving groups of top-tier and local authorities and their partners coming together on a voluntary basis to achieve collective aims for economic development.





Other cities have recognised the potential of collaboration on a wider scale and, with the support of regional development bodies, have initiated collaboration projects with other cities. Examples are Glasgow-Edinburgh collaboration to improve rail links between the two cities by increasing the number of services, reducing journey times and extending the hours of service; the Regional Cities East (RCE) to cooperate on joint ventures and Liverpool and Manchester working on tourism. Regional Cities East is an alliance between different cities supported by the England Regional Development Agency and the Government Office for the East of England to share best practices, collaborate on joint ventures and setting priorities. There are cross-sectoral collaborations that focus on cities that work in a similar way to LSP but on a focused issue.

Collaborations across the UK tend to be multi-issue and have very different objectives. Anyway, we can find collaborations focused on a single issue, usually in response to the availability of funding for sub-regional working on that specific issue from the central government. An example is the cities of Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, and the counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire that came together as New Growth Point to receive government funding and support to improve connectivity and public transport within the sub-region. This approach is however quite unusual. Most of the sub-regional collaborations work together on more than one issue, with worklessness, low skills, housing and transport being the most common areas for joint together.



We have to recognise the complexity of collaboration, understood not as an outcome in itself, but as a process that can achieve a range of outcomes in the short or the long term. The benefits can be mutual, but are not necessary identical for all the members of the network.

Some benefits of collaboration in the UK case are:

- Collaboration allows cities to benefit from greater scale through strategic coordination and more efficiency;
- It allows cities to access funding that might otherwise be available;
- It can increase capacity through other's ideas, experience and resources;
- It can increase the voice of the local authorities involved in terms of influence and policy-making.

These direct benefits of collaboration can apply to cross-sector partnerships as well as local authorities partnerships and can be sufficient reason to cooperate.

2.2. The case of Germany

The first experiences of cooperative networks in Germany start in the 80s. The creation of cooperative networks increased thanks to the support of the federal State and the Länder in the framework of the territorial management policies.

Most of the networks are mixed, that is, they are formed by big and medium-sized cities or medium and small-sized ones. Not all of them have a formal structure, but all have boards of directors or meetings of mayors to take the most relevant decisions, and commissions or task groups for the technical work.

Collaborations under the form of public-private alliances are frequent and the Institute “Raum und Energie” monitors and consolidates most of the cooperative structures to guarantee their efficiency and transparency of the outcomes. A good number of the collaborations in Germany are instruments of territorial management. The role of the Länder and its economic support is also important to facilitate the decision about the constitution of the network. This is the case of some networks in Brandenburg (Bergisches Städte-Dreieck; ARGE-REZ and Prignitz) supported by the Ministry of Urbanism, Housing and Transport.

Other examples where these networks are created in the framework of policies of territorial management can be found in the Länder of Thuringia (Städteverbund Hermsdorf-Kosterlausnitz-Stadtroda) and Saxony (Städtebund Silberberg). In these cases small and medium-sized municipalities win larger scale to achieve outcomes in territorial development planning.



2.3. The case of France.

Compared to Germany, cooperative networks in France start later, in the decade of the 90s and most of the collaboration initiatives are taken by medium-sized municipalities and supervised by the central government. The earliest form of cooperation was a form of “management cooperation for managing waste, infrastructures, streetlights, etc. This kind of cooperation continues today, but at the

same time more in depth cooperation has developed called “project cooperation” to elaborate plans of action covering several municipalities to deal with economic, social and environmental issues. However, the expansion of cooperation between local authorities has come into some obstacles. There are many complex intercommunal structures and their development has been uneven. They are more common in rural areas and more common in Western and Northern France than in Central and Southern France. The Act of 13 August 2004 simplified the legal framework for cooperation between municipalities to foster more harmonious development of such cooperation.

The legal structures for cooperation are called “public corporation for cooperation between municipalities” (EPCI). We can distinguish:

a)Public corporations for cooperation between municipalities financed by contributions from the members. These structures are primarily single-purpose or multi-purpose intercommunal syndicates, although there are also mixed forms syndicates that provide broader possibilities for partnerships: closed mixed syndicates, where the partners are the municipalities and their groups (EPCI); and open mixed syndicates, where the partners are the municipalities, their groups, other levels of government and other public bodies (mainly chambers of commerce, agriculture, industry, etc.). The mixed syndicate structure is most frequently used for large-scale projects, such as tourism development, building and managing major infrastructures, implementing land-use policies or drafting planning documents.

b)Public corporations for cooperation between municipalities with their own tax revenues, which receive some of the local taxes paid by residents and businesses. These structures are called communities and depending on the size of their population such communities are subject to very different legal rules. These communities are the intercommunal links for the projects and play an important role. There are for types of EPCI with their own tax revenues:

- Communities of municipalities (Communautés de communes): they are the simplest and most flexible form of EPCI. They are especially common in rural areas. Municipalities form a partnership for a joint project that should address economic development and land use. In addition to these two obligatory areas of competence, a community must choose at least one of the following areas of competence: the environment, roads, housing and living conditions infrastructures for sport, social services culture and education.
- Conurbation communities (Communautés d’agglomération). They were created specifically for urban areas. Such structures cover several municipalities that form a contiguous zone with a population of more than 50.000 around one or more central municipalities with a population of more than 15.000 or around a departmental capital to ensure a certain population density. Through this partnership, the municipalities undertake to put together a joint urban development project that can be supported by the central government and set out in a contract. A conurbation community must have competence for economic development, land use, housing and urban development policies. It must choose at least three of the following areas: roads,

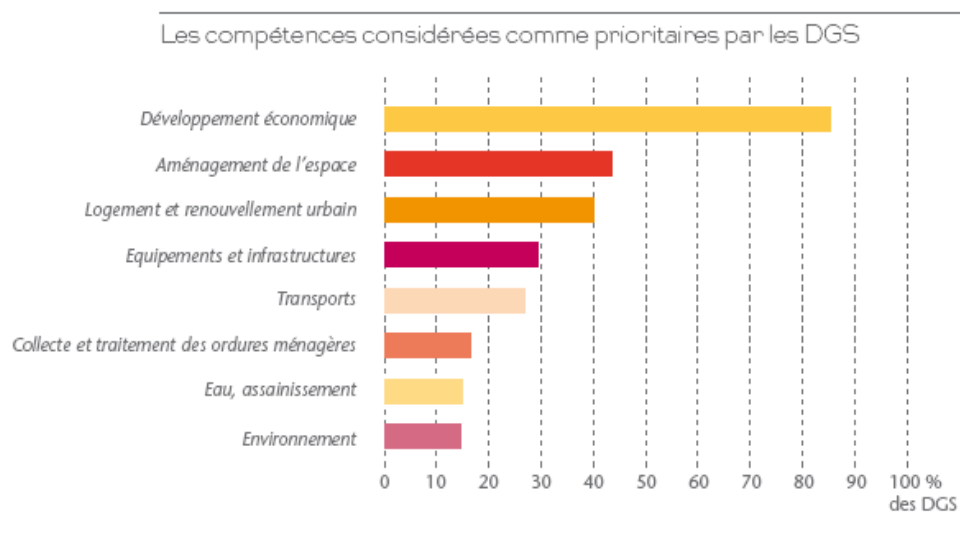
sanitation, water, environmental and living conditions, and cultural and sports facilities.

- Urban communities (Communautés urbaines). Such entities cover several municipalities in neighbouring cities with a population of more than 500.000. The obligatory areas are broader and go beyond economic development, land use planning, social cohesion, housing and urban policies to include social welfare, culture, managing of public services and the environment.
- New conurbation syndicates (Syndicat d'agglomération nouvelle). These EPCI manage the new towns that the central government created in the 70s to cope with soaring population growth in the Paris area and around some of the regional capitals. They were instituted in 1983 and there are six of them.

The Act of 2004 on local rights and responsibilities strengthened the role of the EPCI with their own tax revenues, allowing them to contract to perform some of the tasks incumbent on Departments and Regions. Their role in housing policy was also expanded. They are now able to manage some of the funds for promoting building and renovation of housing stock on behalf of the central government. Besides, the internal structures of the communities and their financial relationships with the member municipalities are substantially more flexible than in the past.

Practically all of France is covered by public corporations for cooperation between municipalities with their own tax revenues. The Act of 2004 was to ensure that their membership structure is more relevant in order to give more impetus to intermunicipal projects.

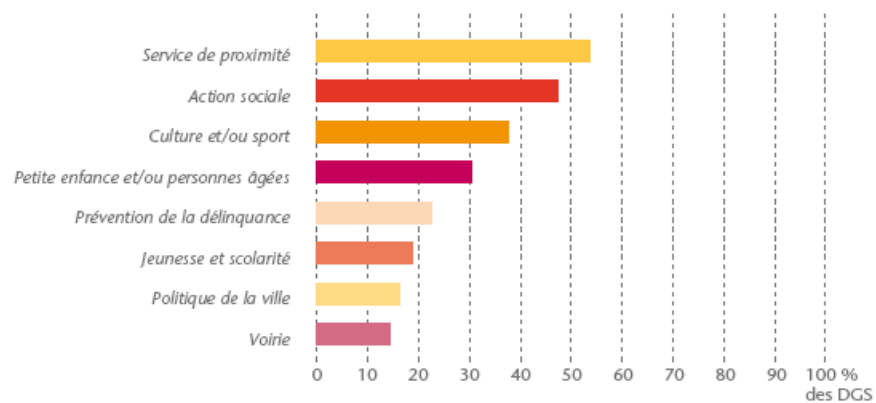
The experience of the directors of communities in France reveals the benefits and problems of these cooperation structures (ADGCF: 2007). For most of them (69.1%), the territory of the community allows a better implementation of territorial policies and allows to get more funds and skilled workers. They place economic development on the top of the most legitimate functions of the communities (85.5%), following space planning, housing and urban reform.



On the contrary, the competences traditionally linked to the municipalities are seen as less legitimate for the intermunicipal action. It means that perhaps it is not worth working together if it does not create added value. Many local authorities do not collaborate on issues best delivered at a lower level. For instance, delivery of neighbourhood projects is best performed by those who know the area well; decisions about social services are perhaps most appropriately made at a local level. Collaboration can be regarded as something that should only happen on issues that are shared and which can be made “more than the sum of the parts”.

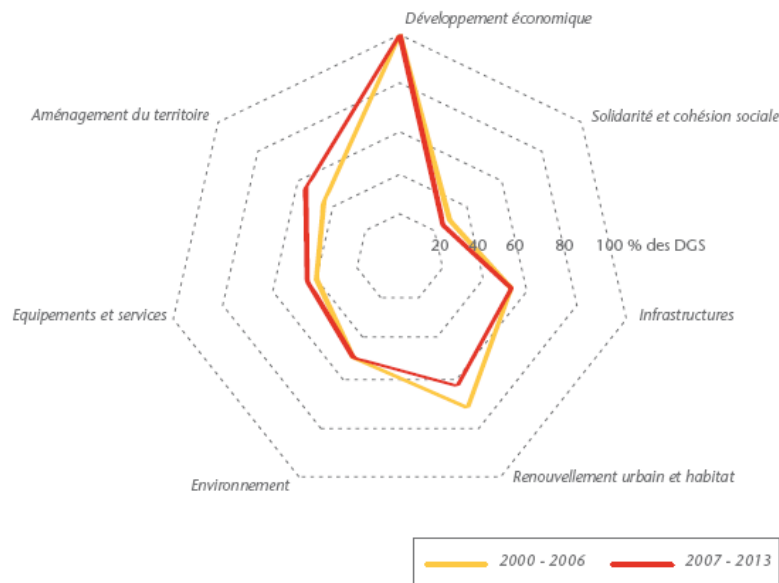
Action sociale et compétences de proximité peu légitimes

Les compétences considérées comme « peu légitimes » par les DGS



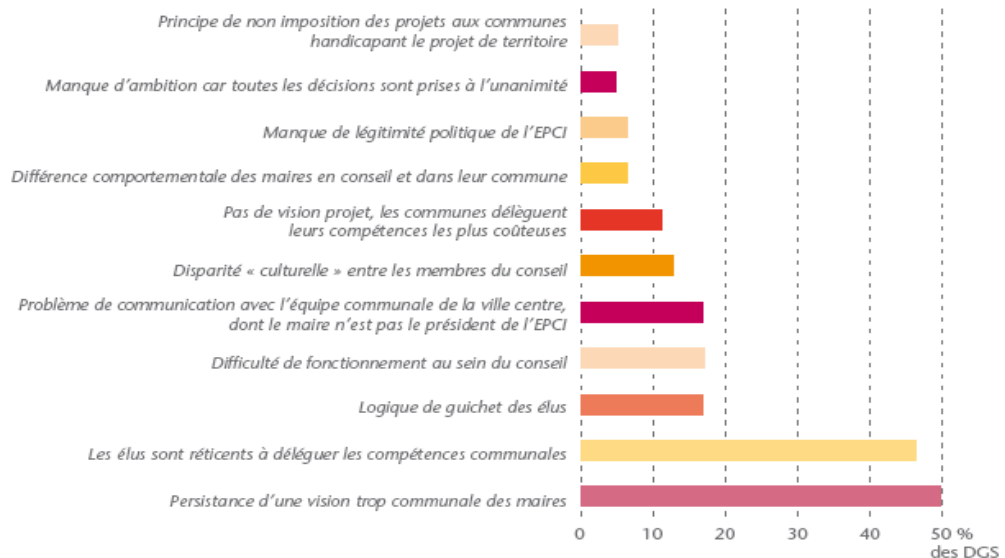
We can see how the order of priorities has hardly changed. The communities' efforts are concentrated on the economic development, urban reforms and housing. However three out of four directors think communities have the vocation to integrate more and more functions, and some other competences start to be of interest of them, like innovation, research, territorial marketing, investment in economic poles, etc.

Evolution des priorités politiques



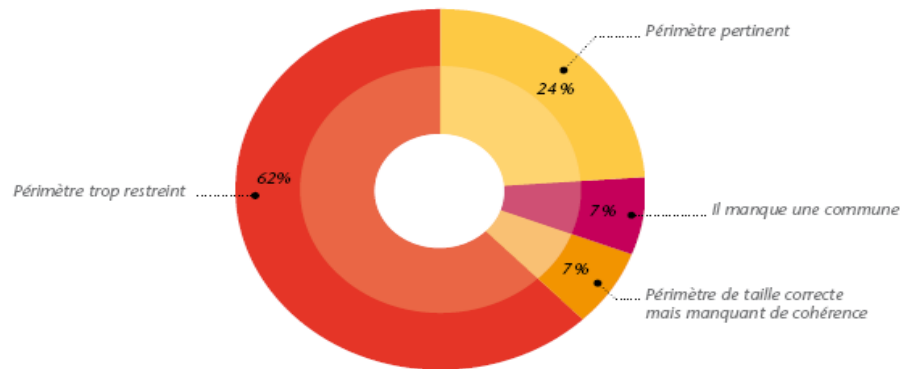
Among the problems, some of them have to do with the absence of clear and common rules on the organisation of the government of the community, the issue of the territorial limits to get coherence in public action and the way councillors are designated. But most of the problems perceived have to do with the relationships between the municipalities and the communities. Usually, the directors regret about the vision too “municipal” of mayors (50%) , reluctant to delegate competences to the communities.

Les difficultés relatives aux relations communauté / communes



Finally, most of the directors (62%) say the limits of the community are too restricted. This can be coherent with the fact that the main task is economic development.

Des périmètres majoritairement insatisfaisants



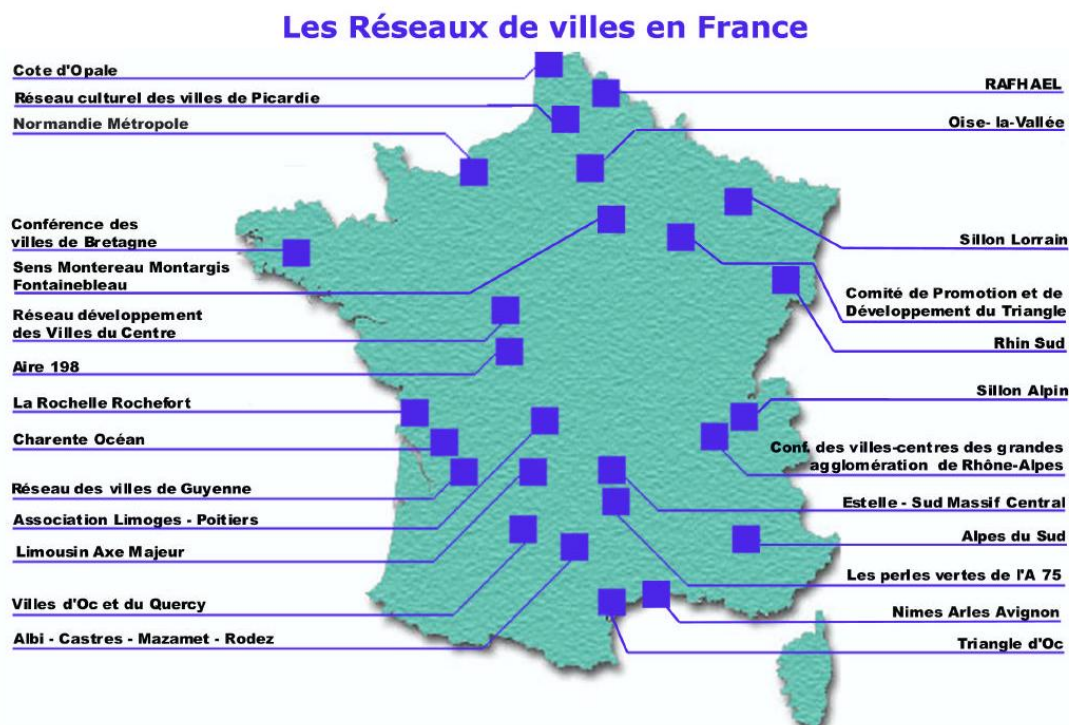
Inter-municipal cooperation in France is a fact that is not put into question. The communities have created added value in some issues:

- They allow a more coherent vision of the territory to implement territorial policies;
- They are capable of attracting more funding to implement some projects that municipalities could not afford on their own;
- They allow to deliver new services;
- They attract more skilled personnel;
- They allow to formulate strategic projects that go beyond the restricted limits of the municipality.

Anyway, there are some problems that have not been solved. There is a great heterogeneity depending on the characteristics of the territory and the degree of maturity of the community. We can distinguish:

- The old communities structured around a strong urban pole get easily benefits from the legal framework and the financial advantages of the cooperation.
- The communities of municipalities, located in rural areas have difficulties to get a sufficient size on a big territory and have problems of centrality to organise it around structuring poles;
- The communities in Île de France, where municipalities have a big density and are strong poles, and the departments are influent actors.

Finally, we have to mention the city networks as a more informal and flexible alternative of cooperation to the formalised EPCI:



2.3 The case of Spain¹

Municipal fragmentation and economy of scale requirements have led to a proliferation of *mancomunidades* in Spain. *Mancomunidades* are created through the voluntary association of municipalities, which determine, through a set of commonly agreed statutes, the services that fall under each association's remit, as well as its governing bodies, functions and finance structure.

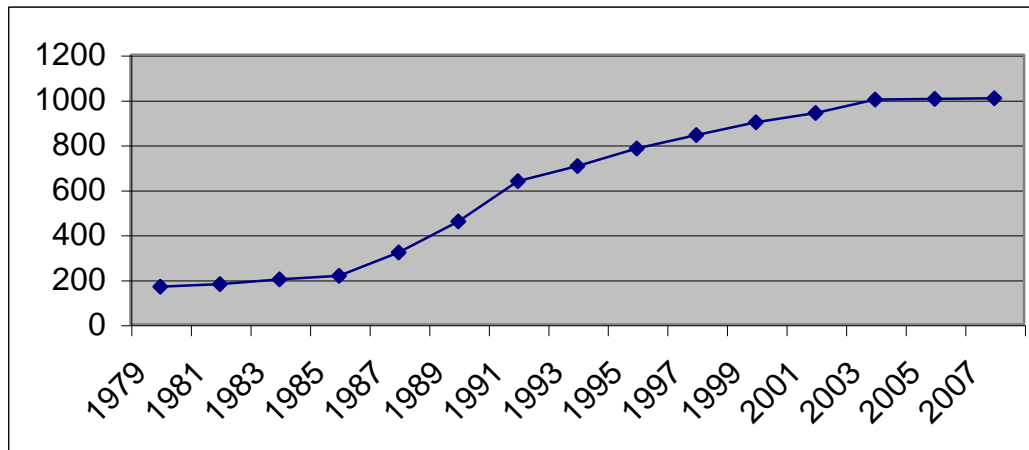
This increase in the number of *mancomunidades* does not correspond to any systematic policies or planning. There is no policy in place to promote municipal associationism at a national level – unlike in France, for example, with its complex and coherent policy on inter-municipality – or at a regional level, where there is no particular interest in promoting 'municipalism'.

Similarly, the second layer of local government in Spain, the provinces, have also shown no interest in promoting municipal associationism, since in practice, provincial government is limited to be an entity designed to create and foster economic, technical and legal cooperation between the municipalities that make up each province, and therefore these bodies tend to view *mancomunidades* as potential rivals.

¹ This part is a selection of a chapter that analyses in depth the phenomenon of inter-municipal cooperation in Spain: Rodríguez Álvarez, José Manuel and Ruano, José M (2009): *Municipal Associationism in Spain: facts, trends and troubles*, in Schaap, Linze et al. (eds.): *Renewal in European Local Democracies* (forthcoming).

The *mancomunidades* movement came about purely as the result of the associative disposition of the municipalities, owing to their objective need to pool their resources and means in order to achieve the economies of scale required for the effective and efficient provision of certain services.

Evolution of the number of *mancomunidades* (1979-2007)



Source: own elaboration on the basis of official data (Directorate for Local Administration, Ministry for Public Administrations, 2007)

The associative movement has some fairly anarchical features. Many municipalities are affiliated to two or more *mancomunidades*. This is due to the fact that although initially municipalities mainly joined forces for a single purpose, over time they have started to come together for a range of purposes, so that there are now about as many single-purpose *mancomunidades* (508) as there are multi-purpose ones (498). It could be said that the nature of the associative movement has evolved. Furthermore, *mancomunidades* are extremely diverse in terms of size and population.

3. Conclusions

The existence of a cooperative culture has fostered the creation of municipal networks, but the support, in UK, France and Germany, of the central government or the regional ones, specifically in the German case, has been a key factor that has consolidated these experiences.

In most of the collaborations, public-private partnerships have played a major role. Main examples are the British cases, but also some German networks (MAI, KERN) and French ones (Rhône-Alpes).

In Germany, the Länder have not only encouraged the creation of municipal networks, but have fostered the creation of metropolitan entities (region of Stuttgart in Baden-Württemberg; the metropolitan space of Frankfurt in Hessen; and the region of Hanover in Lower Saxony).

Not all the networks work properly. There are probably some factors that could partially at least explain the success or failure of these collaborations:

- There should be a coherent territory, a leadership and a common project capable of generating consensus.
- The network must create added value. Not always it is necessary to work together.
- There should be strong and engaged actors.
- It is important the political support of the top layers of government. Without it, as the Spanish experience shows, these associations are extremely weak and have fragile structures.
- All the networks have a deficit of democratic legitimacy and control. Legitimacy can only be indirectly guaranteed through the approval by the municipal assemblies of the decisions taken.

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