

Introduction to *Fostering Cross-Border Cooperation* Panel
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Borders are the bane of regional planners.

As a profession, we like to think of broad swaths of territory within which we can analyze growth trends, understand the forces shaping development and propose more rational patterns of land uses efficiently interconnected by transportation. But when it comes to implementing our plans, we are stymied by the patchwork of administrative borders of independent local units of government, each of with its own view of a more desirable future and with the responsibility and powers to shape that future. The Boston metropolitan region, for example, with a total population of over 3.5 million is composed of 129 independent units of government while Boston proper has less than 20% of the total population. While they form an economically interdependent entity, each is responsible to plan its future and manage its affairs. Under the American system of fiscal local autonomy, each competes with its neighbors to attract the new development necessary to ensure a flow of revenue based primarily on the property tax. As a result, metropolitan planning is primarily advisory and metropolitan interventions are largely restricted to transportation investments made by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Drawn in a more or less distant past, when they logically delineated independent territories – a sovereign state, the realm of a local lord, the area ruled by a municipal corporation – borders provided a coherent spatial framework for the rules and regulations that governed the everyday life of people who shared a common set of political and social values and engaged in complementary economic activities. Their purpose was clear:

- To define constitutional and legislative areas;
- To provide security;
- To enforce legal and fiscal systems; and, more recently

The clarity of the system started to wane in the mid-19th century with the rapid urbanization of localities adjacent to centers of manufacturing and trade. The evolving role of government in providing public services and planning and regulating development required the definition of new “service areas” that rarely corresponded to these historical boundaries. Yet, historical boundaries have shown remarkable resilience and generally defied attempts to redraw them to reflect the realities of emerging city-regions composed of interdependent localities, often having specialized functions, but operating as one urban system.

The need to redefine them to permit the efficient delivery of services and, later, to formulate and implement coherent comprehensive plans has often led to the annexation of peripheral localities as part of an expanding city. Annexation was used extensively in Europe and the United States until World War I. Although requiring the approval of a higher authority, it provided an efficient solution to the need to plan and manage an expanding urbanizing region; it also achieved the spatial unity between the revenues collected from local taxes and the expenditures needed to finance public services and improvements.

The challenges that we face today are more complex. The spatial expansion of urban regions since the end of World War II has been extraordinary and is essentially unfettered, rising car ownership, road improvements and the willingness of workers to commute over longer distances keeps extending the boundaries urban regions. Annexation is no longer effective in the face of this continuing sprawl and superposing new regional administrative layers has often proved to be politically controversial, with few exceptions: the Greater Paris Region and the Portland, Oregon growth management process come to mind.

Most European countries, at the urging of the EU, have prepared large-scale spatial development strategies to enhance their economic competitiveness and achieve spatial development strategies that are more efficient and sensitive to environmental concerns. However, their implementation at the local level, where detailed regulatory decisions are still made, often pose difficult challenges. Moreover, localities that are part of a regional sub-system – in a future development corridor, for example – are more often than not competing with each other; and convincing them to support a regional strategic vision is no easy task, particularly if their well-being is partially or wholly on a steady growth of local tax revenue. Achieving the 1999 ESDP¹ objective of “balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union” poses daunting challenges as it presupposes cooperation among national, regional and local levels of government.

Although cooperation among local governments can be mandated, as is the case in France, it requires changes in the traditional governance structure that are often unpopular and politically difficult at a time when devolution is an accepted principle. An alternative approach that has been used with some success in the United States, is to promote *voluntary* cooperation among adjoining municipalities by demonstrating the mutual advantages, primarily fiscal, that can be achieved by sharing the delivery of public services: public transportation, the treatment of water supply and liquid and solid waste, and even agreeing on a preferred location for new economic activity. Even though financial incentives may have to be provided by a higher level of government, what I have called elsewhere *ad hoc regionalism* offers interesting opportunities for a planning approach that takes a more rational view of the dynamics of development and a less aggressive institutional stance.

Fostering inter-municipal collaboration comprises *analytical* and *negotiation* components that are often best conducted by an external party that is viewed as an impartial participant in the process. The tasks involved consist in:

¹ *European Spatial Development Perspective.*

1. Analyzing development trends affecting the municipalities and distinguishing those that are common to them;
2. Identifying the potential advantages that would result from the adoption of shared development strategies;
3. Selecting joint interventions that can range from coordinated land development regulations to economies of scale in sharing public services;
4. Quantifying the benefits of collaboration;
5. Proposing new institutional arrangements to allow sectoral cooperation.

The EU's European *Charter of Border and Cross-Border Regions* poses an even more daunting challenge. Its preamble states that "borders are scars of history." It argues that border regions have often not been able to realize their full development potential because of their peripheral location relative to the capital city and other national development poles. As a result, they are often characterized by unemployment or underemployment. Cross-border co-operation can help reduce the disadvantages of an outlying location, often the cause of their stagnation, and improve living conditions for their population. There are a growing number of successful European cross-border initiatives, some of which we have documented in the ICLRD late 2006 report *Spatial Strategies on the Island of Ireland: Development of a Framework for Collaborative Action*, prepared for InterTradeIreland.

The main challenge facing inter-municipal collaboration in cross-border regions lies in the *legal and institutional differences* that commonly occur across borders. Bringing them into harmony may require decisions at the national government level that support the interest of the local parties in coordinating their development strategies. To the five steps to inter-municipal cooperation that I listed above, must be added:

6. A review of the pertinent legal and administrative procedures on each side of the border that may hinder cooperation; and
7. Finding solutions to these institutional obstacles.

The report of the panel you are about to hear presents the work done by an interdisciplinary ICLRD team to assess the potential for cross-border collaboration on the island of Ireland. One of its important features is the effort to obtain the views of a broad spectrum of shareholders on both sides of the border. Our hope is that, once completed later this year, it may provide a model for other cross-border initiatives.