

The need for a Neighbourhoods local data platform

Draft

1. Why?

1.1. The world's regionalisation and the rising "Neighbourhoods" issue (proximity matters!)

Regionalisation, that is to say the rising integration of neighbour countries, is a complementary major pattern, along with the "globalisation" pattern, of the internationalisation of human activities and stakes since a few decades. Three factors explain the rise of the regionalisation – thus the "neighbourhood" – issue. The first factor is economic: in a knowledge economy, an increasing part of the resources are less and less *taken to* other players but rather *produced with* other players. The deeper the interaction with other players, the larger the new resources. Thus, the "neighbour" gets a new status: it less and less depicts the historical military enemy and more and more becomes the necessary economic partner – see the new East Asian policy of China, which has turned in the 1990s its regional strategy from confrontation to partnership. For decades, the international trade has more increased at the scale of large international regions than at the scale of the world.

The second factor is environmental: the rise of the climate and natural resources' concerns has of course a global dimension, but it also has a regional dimension because dissemination of air or water pollution happens in neighbouring territories. Environment is the most convincing domain that proves that proximity has not been dissolved in globalisation and matters more and more. Moreover, the perspective of costlier long distance transports because of energy cost, could promote shorter supply chains, hence growing economic interaction with neighbours.

The third factor is political: the collapse of purely national regulation since the 1980s did not give way to an alternative regulation at global scale. The recent failures of global regulation in the financial area (2008 international crisis), in the environment area (2009 Copenhagen climate change conference), and in the trade area (Doha round's successive adjournments), have shed light on a necessary international regulation at regional scale, of which the European Union gave a first instance. As a result, international institutions (the World Bank, the IMF, the OECD, regional development banks....) and think tanks increasingly figure out internationalisation through the regional pattern. The regional issue has also been targeted by rising academic publishing since the beginning of the 2000s.

1.2. The European Neighbourhood Policy shortcomings

The rise of the regional integration in America (Nafta) and Eastern Asia (Asean Plus Three), the European need for new markets since the beginning of the financial crisis, the Arab spring and the outburst of the regional crisis in Eastern Ukraine, have made this Neighbourhoods issue still more relevant. A large set of EU policies draw a favourable context for a renewal of the European territorial actions related to neighbourhoods: launched in 2007, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) for the first time gave an accurate scope to the wider world region that encompasses EU and its Neighbours; the Europe 2020 Strategy "*can offer considerable potential to candidate countries and our neighbourhood and better help anchor their own reform efforts*"; EU Cohesion Policy promotes cross-border and transnational cooperation and macro-regions including neighbouring countries.

Seen from the standpoint of the non-European countries of our common region, this regional integration is regarded as strategic. The Arab Mediterranean countries have been partners of the Barcelona process since 1995, and the Arab League is one of the stakeholders of the Union for the Mediterranean launched in 2008. Yet the Arab Spring and the subsequent political unrest have put this regional perspective into question – all the more as the actual results of the ENP showed many shortcomings. In Eastern Europe, the Ukrainian turmoil shows that the EU and its Eastern partners have not managed finding an efficient path for regional integration. There is a rising contrast between increasing agreements or discourses on the one hand, and stalling on-the-ground cross-border cooperation. One of the reasons is that the *territorial* side of the neighbourhood issue has been hardly taken into account.

1.3. Within the Neighbourhoods issue, territorial issues matter

Territorial cooperation is a way to ease functional integration between neighbours. Cross-border networks and cooperation, shared action in environmental issues (see the Unedp ECAP Ecosystem Approach), decentralised cooperation (between local authorities, hospitals, universities of both sides of the border) are useful when diplomatic inter-governmental relations are at a standstill. Moreover, a territorial approach of regionalisation is a driver to mobilise rising civil societies.

EU *Territorial Agenda 2020* states that “*cohesion at the external borders is crucial, as disparities in legal, social and political systems have important consequences especially in terms of migration and trade*” and that “*growing interdependence of regions generates demand for better connectivity*”. Nevertheless, tools for a better cooperation with neighbouring territories are to be improved. As the “Territorial State and Perspective of the EU” (2006) stated, “*the current territorial cooperation system is composed of three loosely co-ordinated blocks: territorial cooperation within the EU, territorial cooperation with neighbouring, candidate and potential candidate countries, and cooperation with other countries*”. We are still there. A comprehensive vision of our wider region is lacking. Given the potential role of territorial cooperation with the European neighbour territories, it is of utmost importance to fill the gap of territorial knowledge on the two sides of the border between neighbours.

1.4. Without local data non possible shared vision of our common region

Several European research projects have begun paving the way for local databases common to the region's countries. Dedicated to territories, the ESPON programme has recently launched projects in this perspective: ITAN (Integrated territorial analysis of the Neighbourhoods) has set up a first local (NUTS 2-3) database compliant with EU database; BSR-TeMo (Territorial monitoring for the Baltic Sea region) deepened it for the Baltic region. The ESPON M4D project is dedicated to local databases harmonisation in Europe but also in the Neighbourhoods. Several projects have gathered first elements for data on the region's common seas: ESaTDOR (European seas territorial development opportunity and risks, ESPON), ENVIROGRIDS (environmental vulnerability of the Black Sea catchment, FP7), EU4SEAS (sub-regional cooperation in Mediterranean, Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas, FP7), and PEGASO (gathered comparable local data so as to support integrated policies for the coastal and maritime realms of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea basins, FP7). The “Copernicus” Earth Observation European Programme intends to extend its scope to the Neighbourhoods.

However, three shortcomings make all these effort only starting points of a much larger need:

- (i) Low coordination between such pioneer projects – those cited here and some others as the attempts made within the Eurostat “MedStat” programme to set up local Euro-Mediterranean databases.
- (ii) Absolute need of common tools to set up NUTS and LAU local geometries for the whole region and follow up their endless delineation change.
- (iii) Incredible barriers to set up common databases: difficult access to data; changes in quality of data; insufficient data reliability (informal activity...); largely heterogeneous data (statistical, grid, networks...); hardly possible data standardisation.

1.5. The four goals of a local data platform

Hence the need of a common platform, which would:

- 1) Help coordinating the various projects dedicated to integrated geometries and databases of the whole wider region
- 2) Set up long run shared goals, methods and tools between researchers and data providers of the region's countries
- 3) As a well identified label, ease such coordinated projects' recognition by international funders (instead of scattered applications to various calls)
- 4) Organise interaction between researchers and territorial development actors.

2. How?

2.1. Collecting and updating territorial delineation at the wider region scale

Definition of spatial divisions is a major issue of any territorial study. Several solutions are available to enable comparisons among territorial divisions. The choice is namely based on the study of relevant territorial division, whether administrative (municipalities, provinces, governorates, oblasts, etc.) or functional (employment and living area, water catchments etc.). Anyhow, such choices have to be made in a coherent manner along time and research projects, so as to ensure (i) comparability between countries over time, (ii) multi-scalar analysis from very local to national and macro-regional scales, and (iii) bridges between discontinuous data to grid (continuous) data. The common platform should handle that.

2.2. Setting up metadata models and sustainable local databases

In database field, sustainability is the major stake. Too many excellent databases have died before providing all their potential, because they were not sustained – neither financially nor technically. Data have to be traceable, definitions clear, and sources identified. This is at stake for three reasons. First, because it is the condition for updating databases. Second, because it is the condition for relevant harmonisation. Third, because it is the condition for integrating data of heterogeneous nature (satellite, grid, network, statistical, including information from new providers such as social networks, mobile phones and other non-public administration data). This implies choices for selected data, for which traceability would be ensured. The platform's endeavour should lead to a small number of robust comparable data, which could progressively be enlarged, rather than to a too rapid set of numerous but insufficiently documented data.

Thus, building the metadata model would be nodal for the platform. It would give all necessary information about the way data are defined, produced, collected, and made available. International metadata standards for territorial data are available and can help a lot, such as the EU INSPIRE directive, ISO-19115 and ISO-135 norms. Nevertheless, there are no absolute standards; in other words, the Neighbourhood local data platform will have to fine-tune tailor-made metadata standards.

2.3. Harmonising data

The platform should ensure a four-fold harmonisation:

- (i) semantic harmonisation, that is to say common agreed variables' definition
- (ii) statistical harmonisation, that is to say common methods for reducing inconsistency & outliers
- (iii) spatial harmonisation, that is to say common methods for overcoming delineation heterogeneity, were it within national data or between national data
- (iv) temporal harmonisation, necessary because dates of data production and collect are many.

2.4. Building open access interfaces with territorial actors

So as to meet the fourth objective of the platform and ease researchers-actors interaction, an information system and user-friendly interactive cartographic tools should be set up by the platform. Each project placed under the platform's label would remain independent. But it would benefit from the platform services and data only if it would accept (i) adopting the platform's methods and standards, and (ii) delivering to the platform its data in open access.

2.5. Producing regular reports on Neighbourhoods territories and policy recommendations

The platform would make a regular online "Neighbourhoods territories" survey on perceptions and trends + policy monitoring report. Furthermore, it could in charge of enhancing the project of a "Neighbourhoods Territorial Agenda" ("NTA"), by which the policymakers would give the shared vision of the region's territorial perspectives.

3. How long?

Setting up a common platform will take time. Still, it has to be handled in a coherent manner, shared by the stakeholders of the process. To begin with, it could associate a reasonable number of countries of the region, and could progressively enlarge to other countries.

Two conditions are to be respected:

- the presence of both research networks and national or international bodies dedicated to data
- parity between EU and non-EU countries. Participation of EU partners (including Eurostat) is indispensable because EU has a strong know-how in the field of national data coordination and harmonisation. Participation of non-EU partners is indispensable because a process that would be designed and driven by the sole EU institutions would be inconsistent with a wider region's shared vision.

Under such conditions, the platform could play its role vis-à-vis territorial actors and vis-à-vis the various projects funders. A wide set of projects, funded by various donors and dedicated to different specific territories, would progressively contribute to integrated local databases, common cartographic tools and shared visions of our region.

Table 1. Six steps to a common platform

	step 1 <i>design, fund raising</i>	step 2 <i>consortium, methods</i>	step 3 <i>projects synthesis, DB</i>	step 4 <i>first data harmonisation</i>	step 5 <i>information system</i>	step 6 <i>dissemination, data update, NTA</i>
objectif	définition des objectifs de la NLDP, fund raising	définition des méthodes de la NLDP	capacity building; stockage de quelques données clé dans une BD commune	premières représentations comparables	analyses comparatives intégrées; feedback des décideurs du dévt territorial	diffusion large des outils et rapports. Premières propositions stratégiques ("NTA")
public concerné	identification des porteurs clé, côté chercheurs, et côté institutionnel (instituts statistiques)	mise en place du consortium NLDP (chercheurs / instituts stats), pour un nombre limité de pays volontaires + UE	groupe technique restreint; élargissement possible à d'autres pays volontaires	techniciens du développement territorial	décideurs du développement territorial	acteurs du développement territorial
BD commune: collecte des données	pas de collecte	analyse des données disponibles et des données à harmoniser	archivage de données et métadonnées, pour une année	base de données à plusieurs dates	interface requêteable et interface cartographique aidant la décision	actualisation de la base de données et du système d'information
BD commune: harmonisation des données	x	choix des méthodes	pas d'harmonisation des données	harmonisation partielle	harmonisation plus complète	harmonisation élevée
outils cartographiques	x	x	non	oui (simples)	oui (interactifs)	oui (interactifs)
outils de diffusion	x	espaces numériques de travail	portail web des projets dédiés aux données locales des Voisinages	site web propre, fonctionnalités restreintes	site web, fonctionnalités larges	site web, fonctionnalités larges
produits	x	x	Synthèse des projets dédiés aux données locales des Voisinages	Rapport d'étape "Les territoires des Voisinages"	Premier rapport "Les territoires des Voisinages"	"Neighbourhoods Territorial Agenda" ("NTA")
durée de l'étape	1/2 année	1/2 année	1 année	1,5 année	2 années	1 année