

Cross-border regionalization, the INTERREG III A initiative, and local cooperation at the Finnish–Swedish border

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Abstract. Whereas most studies to date have viewed cross-border regionalization and cooperation from ‘top-down’ regional and institutional perspectives, and within the context of urban regions, I am concerned with the implementation of cross-border initiatives in the rural Finnish–Swedish border area. The focus is firstly on the implementation of cross-border projects in the European Union’s INTERREG III A North programme (2000–06), and secondly on grassroots cooperation and local actors’ experiences of cross-border initiatives. The findings indicate that cooperation is not a straightforward process of ‘ignoring’ state borders and creating new regional spaces across borders. The INTERREG programme documents emphasize the development of a functional, harmonious cross-border region. When the examination is moved to the local level and everyday institutional practices are considered, cooperation and the implementation of initiatives appear in a rather different light. Practices of cooperation are intertwined with different governmental and nongovernmental structures across multiple scales, but it is the state border which determines the norms and spatial organization of this cooperation and cross-border networks are still sparse compared with their national counterparts. What this paper suggests is that we should include the national as a significant scalar dimension more profoundly in our analysis of cross-border regionalization and cooperation.

Introduction

Over the last two decades increasing attention has been paid to globalization, Europeanization, and ‘new regionalization’, and how these processes create new flows and spaces across state borders, where the old model of governmental regulation is no longer a determining factor (Blatter, 2004; Jessop, 2000; 2002; Le Galès, 1998; Perkmann, 2007; Perkmann and Sum, 2002). Of particular interest has been the area of the European Union (EU) in which cross-border cooperation and regionalization have been manifested in the introduction of new institutional structures and processes such as cross-border programmes. There is a political vision in which Europe should be held together by a network of functional and harmonious border regions and that the competitiveness of the regions should be improved at both the macro and micro levels. Apart from economic and political cross-border cooperation and networks, the process should strengthen the social and cultural dimensions of cross-border practices and at the same time enable new identity narratives to be adopted by the border regions. The regionalization process can be understood as a political project in which the goal is to bring enterprise and decision making to the regional level (at least idealistically) and by this means to promote cooperation and regional competitiveness (Jessop, 1995; Keating, 1998), and in which various institutional and cultural practices become a part of everyday life, consciousness, and identity (Paasi, 2002).

These changes in border discourse are manifesting themselves in a new vocabulary of borders, too. They are no longer understood merely as barriers, but also as resources, bridges, and points of contact (Anderson et al, 2003; Newman, 2006; O’Dowd, 2003; van Houtum and Strüver, 2002). On the other hand, it would be oversimplifying the argument to claim that state borders are abolished when the customs controls and barriers are removed from the border landscape and cooperation develops

between the regions on the two sides. Similarly, arguments suggesting that political and economic power have been rescaled from national to multiple regional levels and that the national is no longer so important are problematic when they result in fully excluding national and state borders from the analysis (Mansfield, 2005). State borders are not located merely on the actual physical borderline, but they extend much further into wider political, economic, and sociocultural processes and practices, and can be executed both outside and within the state territory (Newman and Paasi, 1998). Furthermore, the order created by state borders is embedded in various institutional processes as well as in people's everyday practices. These processes and practices can occur simultaneously at different scales, ranging from the global and supranational to the regional and local (Paasi and Prokkola, 2008; Prokkola, 2008).

The aim of this paper is to examine cross-border regionalization and scalar dimensions of local cooperation in the Finnish–Swedish border area, where cooperation has become intensified during the last few decades—especially since both Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995. Alongside national and Nordic sources of finance, the EU's programmes, and particularly its INTERREG projects, have provided new sources of funding for cross-border border activities and regional development. Cross-border cooperation within the INTERREG framework is often considered to be a concrete manifestation of cross-border regionalization in the EU area. Although the Finnish–Swedish border (1809) represents a particular empirical and contextual case, this study is contextualized in relation to the transitions taking place in many EU border regions as a similar 'lowering' of barriers has been taking place in many other European internal border regions, too. Perkmann (2002, page 103) calculated that the political map of Europe contains more than seventy cross-border regions. As a consequence, cross-border cooperation—particularly in the so-called 'Euroregions'—has become one of the most popular subjects in border research today. A considerable amount of research into cross-border institution-building and multiscale modes of governance (Heddebaut, 2004; Kramsch, 2001; Kramsch and Dimitrova, 2008; Krätke, 2002; Perkmann, 2007; Perkmann and Sum, 2002; Popescu, 2008; Scott, 2000), and their differences in the EU and North America situations (Blatter, 2003; 2004; Scott, 1999), as well as on cross-border cooperation and identity, has already been carried out (Bucken-Knapp, 2002; 2003; Busch, 2003; Häkli, 2002; Lundén and Zalamans, 2001). In the Finnish–Swedish border context, previous studies have mainly been focused on cooperation between the 'twin towns' of Tornio and Haparanda (Häkli, 2009; Lundén and Zalamans, 2001; Pikner, 2008; Zalamans, 2001). Lundén and Zalamans (2001) discuss local cooperation in Tornio and Haparanda and people's attitudes towards the border and cooperation in general. Häkli's (2009) analysis of the official documents concerning cross-border cooperation and of the building of the 'twin towns' suggests that 'networks of trust' have strengthened between local authors. In comparison with previous studies, which have mainly focused on urban areas, like the 'twin towns' of Tornio and Haparanda, this paper focuses especially on the rural border municipalities, which can be seen as representative of the whole sparsely populated northern border area.

However, it is worthy of note in the studies of regionalization and cross-border cooperation, particularly within the INTERREG framework, that there is an absence of grassroots-level examination (Harguindeguy and Bray, 2009) and what van Houtum (2000) calls the 'people approach'. The meaning of borders in people's lives and the obstacles that borders still create for interaction and cooperation are often discussed, but there is very little research into how cross-border cooperation is carried out as everyday practice. There are a few exceptions, however, such as Sidaway's (2001) study of an INTERREG-funded initiative which aimed at the reconstruction of a ruined

bridge across the Portuguese–Spanish border, pointing out how cross-border cooperation has sometimes proved to be a story of noncooperation. However, to understand the relationship between cooperation and cross-border regionalization, the examination should not be restricted merely to the institutional discourses and people's general attitudes towards the border, but should focus on the everyday practices of the local people who participate in regional development projects. When the examination moves to the grassroots level, and into the actual practice of collaboration, it becomes possible to extend the understanding of such cooperative work beyond political and institutional discourses. Such an approach enables us to avoid an either/or situation in which the focus is merely on global flows, cross-border regionalization, or nationalized everyday lives of people (Anderson et al, 2003; van Houtum, 2000).

I first provide a review of discussions concerning state borders, cross-border cooperation, and regionalization, pointing out the significance of geographical scale and methodology (Brenner, 2001; Mansfield, 2005; van Houtum, 2000). Second, the development of cross-border institutions is scrutinized, particularly within the current of INTERREG III A North (2000–2006). Third, following Mansfield's (2005, page 469) conceptualization of 'scales as dimensions', I examine the multidimensional scalar relations of local cross-border cooperation. Scalar relations and local actors' experiences of cooperation are examined by using three cross-border enterprises—the Arctic Circle Network AB, the School of Language and Culture in Pello, and the *Smuggling Opera* project—as contextual examples. Various bodies of material which have been produced in these cooperation initiatives were collected together and examined, including project reports and internet homepages. Moreover, twenty-four people who participated in the INTERREG initiatives were interviewed during 2005 and 2006—equal numbers from Finland (Pello and Ylitornio) and Sweden (Övertorneå).⁽¹⁾ The examination shows that cooperation as everyday practice is interlinked with different governmental and non-governmental structures at multiple scales, but the national scale appears rather dominant in the matter of organizing and conceptualizing cooperation. National infrastructures, ambitions, and norms have been rescaled to conform with the practices of cooperation, pointing out the importance of national *territorial logic* (Keating, 1998) for local cooperation in this rural area.

State borders, regionalization, cooperation, and people

In many parts of the world the power of state governments to fully control their territories and mobility and flow across their borders, and/or their interest in doing so, have somewhat diminished. It has even been suggested that we are moving into a 'borderless' world and that 'region states' are displacing nation-states as the anchors of politicoeconomic power (Ohmae, 1993). Some authors have argued that politics is no longer territorially bound, but merely characterized by extended spatial flows, global networks, and relations (Amin, 2004; Castells, 1996). As the study of borders and border regions is bound up with wider questions of space and place, the relative and nonterritorial understanding of space has raised questions and critical counter-arguments regarding the significance of territoriality and borders in today's mobile societies (Newman, 2006). The idea of a nonterritorial, unbound space—the space of flows—has been criticized by many who study political borders for ignoring the facts

⁽¹⁾ The method can be described as 'open-ended interview'. As the intention was to collect personal narratives from different cross-border contexts, the questions in the interview were loosely formulated, focusing on concrete events and practices in cross-border cooperation. All the interviews, which lasted approximately one and a half hours each, were taperecorded with the exception of two, who refused taperecording. The fieldwork also included participant observation at local seminars and events organized as part of the cooperation.

that tax collection still stops at international borders, and that states retain control over the law, public services, and overall infrastructural maintenance (Anderson, 1996, page 135; Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999, page 601).

On the other hand, the nation-state and its borders are not contested only by global economic institutions and flows of capital, but also by the discourse of regionalization/regionalism (Anderson, 1996; Keating, 1998; Scott, 1996). It has been argued that regions are contesting the role of states as the principal political anchors of power, or that the functioning of the present politicoeconomic system is characterized by cross-border networks and partnerships in which national institutions can compete equally for resources and capital with other political and nonpolitical institutions and organizations (Jessop, 2002; see also Perkmann, 1999). Alongside the national space of regionalism there are multiple new 'spaces of regionalism', such as city regions, cross-border regions, and other transnational regions which become manifest not only in the implementation of new political and economic activities, but also in unfixed identities (Jones and MacLeod, 2004, page 435). Cross-border cooperation and regionalization can be understood as readaptation to 'border-free rationality': that is, the increasing extent and strength of global processes, international corporations, and the flow of capital (Keating, 1998, page 16). On the other hand, regionalization has its own territorial logic, in which regional activism and identity building have gained new strength. Regions in the Europe of today are political arenas for various political, economic, and sociocultural encounters and political decision making, and they are also strategic actors in the national and transnational political arenas through which they pursue their interests (Keating, 1998, pages 15–18). Although the hegemonic power of nation-state borders is often called into question in this literature of the 'new regionalism', the continuing significance of politicoterritorial organization and identity building is considered important. It is acknowledged that the spatial organization and structuring of the world's political, economic, and sociocultural map can be understood through the coexistence of geographies of territoriality and mobility. The emphasis is merely on the processes through which political and economic power is rescaled from national to regional and supranational institutions and organizations.

As numerous previous studies have pointed out, we should not think of geographical scale as a pre-given, fixed, and bounded unit for sociospatial processes. Instead of thinking of spatial scales as ontologically given, scale can be thought of as a relational and evolving process (Brenner, 2001; Marston, 2000). When scale is understood in relational terms, it is possible to analyze how different scalar processes exist simultaneously and overlap. In this respect it is interesting that much geographical research has turned away from the national as a significant scale in the present-day world and as the proper way of conceptualizing political power. According to Mansfield (2005, page 459), this has created an either/or situation, as much empirical research is focused exclusively on either the national scale or the global/local scale. Moreover, it is often taken as the point of departure in research that a changeover is taking place from the national scale to regional and supranational scales. It remains sometimes unnoticed in the discourses of globalization and Europeanization that the reproduction of a nation and national borders does not occur only on a national scale, but is bound up with everyday practices on a range of scales. Nations and national practices of bordering are not unchanging and static political and cultural forms, but dynamic processes which work differently in different political, economic, technological, and sociocultural environments and on different spatial scales (Brenner, 1999; Jones and Fowler, 2007). The 'national scale' is not the only appropriate one on which the national can be studied. National features can be reproduced in various contexts of global networking, regional activation, and local place-making too (Jones and Fowler, 2007, page 333;

see also Sahlins, 1989). A similar observation has been made by Deas and Lord (2006, page 1863), who note that it is often supposed in the literature of the 'new regionalism' that the creation of intermediate political spaces, such as cross-border regions, is in conflict with the nation-state, although the situation is actually quite the contrary as nation-states often actively encourage the creation of new transnational political spaces as this can support the national economy and assist subnational entities in obtaining larger shares of EU resources, for example. Similarly, actors working at grassroots level may approach and utilize different scales, different 'political opportunity structures', for mobilization and for achieving their goals. If one scale is relatively closed and does not provide support, local actors may mobilize their activities in relation to more open scales (Miller, 1997).

This rescaling has been taking place in many aspects of geographical border research, and European internal borders are increasingly being examined within the context of 'the Europe with regions', and not within that of the nation-state. The scales of border studies come into focus when we compare the dominant topics in border research on the basis of the grouping proposed by van Houtum (2000), who identifies three dominant approaches: 'flows', 'cross-border cooperation', and 'people'. Studies of flows, cross-border regions, and cooperation often measure the permeability of borders in economic and politico-administrative terms, whereas the 'people' approach aims to develop an understanding of the meaning of borders in people's lives and the everyday construction of borders. Cross-border cooperation can be examined in terms of frequency, hindrances, and motives in collaboration, in which a 'high frequency' is understood as a prediction of cross-border integration and identification (see Bufon, 2003). When viewed from the 'people' approach, high border permeability and cross-border collaboration are not direct catalysts for cross-border integration and identification (see van Houtum, 2000). In their examination of cross-border labour mobility in the EU countries, van Houtum and van der Velde (2004) found that the removal of border restrictions has not led to outstandingly increased border crossing or migration. They suggest that this immobility is tied up with people's habitual and emotional indifference towards the societies and people on the other side of the border. Hence, the study of people's everyday experiences and narratives may provide a somewhat different view of the meaning of national borders in today's mobile societies than that from the 'flow' and cross-border approaches in which the political and territorial dimensions of human life and the reproduction of the national scale are often ignored. It has been argued that the cross-border cooperation and 'people' approaches do not overlap or form any coherent dialogue when referring to the distance between the policy of collaboration and the consciousness of or interest in such initiatives and their objectives observable among the inhabitants of border regions (Paasi, 2001; van Houtum and Strüver, 2002, page 144). There are few studies which strive to combine cross-border cooperation and people approaches, however. Häkli (2001, page 201; see also Sidaway, 2001), for example, discusses the construction of a new scale on the Catalan border area, pointing out that although in general borderland people's attitudes toward cross-border cooperation are positive, they do not have much knowledge of actual cross-border cooperation and observe that the Franco-Spanish border still functions as a dividing line.

So, although the question of different scales of cross-border cooperation and interaction are often discussed, empirical research often focuses either on political and institutional cooperation and cross-border regionalization processes in a supra-national EU context or on people's habitual practices in local and national contexts. To avoid either/or juxtapositions in border research, the different scales (local/regional/national/European/global) should be understood as dimensions of particular bordering/ debordering events and processes (Mansfield, 2005, page 468), which all

materialize in a border landscape simultaneously and influence the people's everyday lives and identities. Borders and state territoriality are maintained in and through everyday practices and, in the materialization of these perpetuating or dissolving practices, territories or regions can become institutionalized and deinstitutionalized in certain historical periods (Paasi, 1991).⁽²⁾ Institutionalization of regions—of which nation-states represent a case in point—does not mean that the boundaries of a region are fixed and that no overlapping spatial units exist simultaneously (Brenner, 2001, page 600): regional structures and processes overlap and coexist at different scales. Many cross-border regions in the EU have become strongly institutionalized (Blatter, 2004): their territorial shape, institutional role, and symbols can be found on official documents and maps, and they have a well-established role as part of a system of regions (Paasi, 1986; 1991). On the other hand, there are significant geographical differences between cross-border regions in Europe and North America in the types of cross-border political institution-building. In Europe cross-border institutions are dominated by the public sectors and they are more temporally stable and geographically fixed (or they have a clear-cut geographical scale) than respective institutions in North America (Blatter, 2004, page 545). In practice, different scalar processes (cultural, economic, political) and their boundaries are *incongruous*, and fully institutionalized regions which would enclose all dimensions of sociospatial processes hardly ever exist (Painter, 2008). The building of cross-border political institutions and the actual practices of cooperation are intertwined to multiple geographical scales. What this all suggests is that we should not replace one spatial conceptualization with another but, instead, examine how territoriality and territorial forms of governance converge with flows, increasing transnational cooperation, and networking, and how these opposing forces materialize in different geographical contexts.

Cooperation and regional mobilization in the Finnish–Swedish border area

Institutionalizing cross-border cooperation

The importance of regions in the modernization of the state was acknowledged in many European countries after the Second World War. The establishment of cross-border organizations, and particularly the 'Euroregions', is bound up with the EU, which was established to prevent violent conflict between Western European states. Alongside supranational organizations, the first regional multilateral institutions devoted to cooperation were founded in response to regulations in certain Central European border areas (see Eder and Sandtner, 2002; O'Dowd, 2003). In this respect, the establishment of the North Calotte Region in 1957 is a good example of cross-border regionalism in the Nordic countries. The political and economic contribution of regionalism from above is not just a supranational-scale phenomenon, however, but was also implemented via state policies. The economic crisis and the breakdown in state-centric regulation in the 1970s changed the role of the regions in relation to the states of Europe and, accordingly, economic restructuring, reform of the state, European integration, and globalization provided new impetus for regionalism (Keating, 1998, pages 12–13). Regions are in a way understood as more natural and advantageous economic entities than states in terms of competitiveness, governance, sustainability, and identity

⁽²⁾ Paasi's (1991) theory of the institutionalization of regions represents a general theory of the construction of regions and of regional transformation. 'New regionalization' points to a specific historical regional transformation (beginning in the 1980s), in which political and economic power is (at least to some degree) shifting from national to global, supranational, and regional levels (Jessop, 1995; Keating, 1998).

(Lagendijk, 2005), and cross-border collaboration is understood as a means of increasing 'development factors' in a region.

The Finnish–Swedish border region is an old Nordic border region—more than 200 years old—and a peripheral one. The restructuring of the economies and regional policies of states is one of the factors behind the increased interest shown in cooperation in this rural border area, where municipalities are suffering from high unemployment and declining populations (Prokkola, 2008). Early regional mobilization and cross-border regionalism in the Finnish and Swedish border area began in the late 1950s, when Nordic cooperation institutions were set up. Nordic cooperation has been supported politically and economically by various state institutions and by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The scale of Nordic cooperation has been both supra-regional and regional, which differentiates it from the local mobilization which took place in the river valley in the 1980s. This second (1980s) stage of regional mobilization and cooperation involved the establishment of local cross-border organizations. An agreement signed between the Nordic countries in 1979 provided for official cooperation between border municipalities, and this has served as a means of meeting local needs and minimizing the problems caused by the border. Since then, regional cross-border cooperation has become institutionalized and cooperative organizations have been established on the initiative both of the Finnish and of the Swedish border municipalities. The bilateral cross-border organization uniting the cities of Tornio and Haparanda, Provincia Bothniensis, and the Council of the Tornio River Valley were established in 1987. This second stage of cooperation and regionalization also involved cultural and linguistic mobilization in the region, as the Finnish-speaking minority in the Swedish Tornio River Valley had become politically active. The third stage of cooperation and regionalization in the Tornio River Valley can be traced to the act of joining the EU in 1995. When Finland and Sweden joined the EU, the objectives of the cooperation were redefined and harmonized with the EU's own perspectives, implying a shift in the scale of cooperation and regionalization (Perkmann, 2007, page 263). The establishment of INTERREG regions on various scales has altered the course of Nordic cooperation from internal questions towards more external, regional matters, and particularly the EU dimension (Christiansen and Joenniemi, 1999). Regionalization and the shift from state-centric governmental regulation to multiscale governance offers new opportunities for regional developers, politicians, and entrepreneurs, but it also poses new challenges in the peripheral North Calotte region, which is not as competitive as the southern urban centres (Bufon, 2003).

Cooperation in the context of INTERREG North

The increased border permeability that ensued following membership of the EU, together with new politico-administrative instruments providing financial backing for cross-border projects, has increased the number of cross-border cooperation organizations and intensified networking in this Finnish–Swedish border region. Cooperation has been promoted by the INTERREG programme, which is aimed at lowering institutional and cultural hindrances to local cross-border interaction and developing interregional networks (EC, 2003, page 5). The implementation and governance of INTERREG initiatives is based on a multiscale model of implementation, in which economic responsibilities are distributed among different actors. Local actors' project implementation is steered and regulated by respective national authorities who, for their part, are accountable to the European Commission (Perkmann, 1999, page 660).

In recent times the Finnish and Swedish border municipalities and other public organizations, associations, and entrepreneurs received funding for cross-border initiatives from the INTERREG A North and North Calotte subprogramme.⁽³⁾ The programme covers a land area of 320 000 km². The population of the programme area was 900 000 in 2006 (916 000 in 2000). The organizations responsible for the administration and financing in the programme area are the Regional Council in Lapland (Finland), and the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten (Sweden). The development objectives of the North Calotte subprogramme may be summarized as economic collaboration, infrastructural development, regional specialization, and the reinforcement of regional identity (INTERREG III A North, 2004). The vision for the North Calotte is:

“Through cross-border co-operation, to turn the programme area into a functional region that offers its inhabitants the possibility to lead a good life and that also attracts people and companies from outside the area” (INTERREG III A North, 2005, page 6).

There were more than fifty cross-border projects during the period 1995–99, and a total of 128 in 2000–06 (with funding continuing until 2007), the total finance received during this last period amounted to more than €37 million. The main applicants for project finance have to come from EU member states, and thus 60% of the project applicants who gained cofunding in the North Calotte programme are located in Sweden and 40% in Finland.

The cooperation ‘keywords’ identified from the project descriptions are ‘networking’, ‘products’, ‘marketing’, ‘logistics’, ‘knowledge’, ‘environmental sustainability’, ‘education’, and ‘regional images’.⁽⁴⁾ An examination of the project objectives and descriptions during the North Calotte programme period shows that more than half of the projects involve the production of new knowledge in the form of surveys, research, investigation, and the development of new working models. Many of these are pilot projects, aimed at preparing for and applying for wider cooperation projects in the specified areas of interest. The knowledge production is often bound with environmental research or educational activities, courses, and seminars. Regional marketing and branding are the most common objectives in the development of theme-based, culture-based, and experience-based tourism. In these projects the building of a regional image is a calculated goal, with an orientation towards nonlocal audiences and tourists, and towards the creation of various touristic products and services (see also Prokkola, 2007). One of the most important objectives of this cooperation is networking and partnership in business and industrial activities, which are normally understood as prerequisites for regional competitiveness (see INTERREG III A North, 2005, page 12). The projects which are aimed most intensively at developing joint local infrastructures and resources often strive to establish and strengthen legal and politico-administrative coherence between the national systems. However, the project descriptions rarely include any analysis of the actual success of the project, but in a few cases (in five out of the 128 descriptions) it is mentioned that it is possible to achieve some of the objectives because of legal incompetence or inadequate implementation.

⁽³⁾ The first programme, INTERREG I, was set up in 1989 (it ran from 1989 to 1993) and has been followed by three further programme periods: 1994–1999, 2000–2006, and 2007–2013. The programme and initiatives are financed by the European Regional Development Fund, but national funding is also required. In addition, to gain finance from the programme, initiatives must involve actors from at least two countries.

⁽⁴⁾ Content analysis was employed as a method for analyzing the reports and descriptions of the Interreg North III North Calotte subprogramme’s cofinanced projects (period 2000–07). The objectives were identified by focusing on the occurrence of specified keywords and synonymous expressions in the project descriptions (approximately a hundred such words), and which were then classified (for a more detailed analysis, see Prokkola, 2011).

In politicoadministrative discourse, cross-border cooperation is evaluated in terms of the frequency of interaction across the border, the number of projects established, jobs, and other measurable factors. According to the programme evaluation, the results of the INTERREG III A North cooperation surpass expectations. The programme complements (INTERREG III A North, 2005; see also INTERREG VI North, 2009) indicate that the projects have brought more than 500 jobs to the area, more than 200 companies have participated in training events, and more than 200 companies have launched cooperation within the INTERREG framework. However, the INTERREG documents and reports may provide biased understandings of the impacts of cross-border cooperation and partnership, particularly as regards their long-term influence (Harguindéguy and Bray, 2009). In a way, these programme complements are part of the extrovert image building directed towards the Steering Committee and the European Commission. Such institutional discourses of cooperation do not tell us much about the engagement among different actors, nor about the actual practices of cooperation, however; that is, those which are bound up with everyday working methods and procedures (Paasi and Prokkola, 2008). To understand how cross-border initiatives and cooperation are actually carried out and what meaning they can have for the local actors, we have to examine the implementation of cooperation at the local level.

Scalar dimensions of local cross-border cooperation

Setting up cross-border enterprises

Because of the geographical and environmental circumstances in the Finnish and Swedish Tornio River Valley,⁽⁵⁾ the central villages, populations, and services in the border municipalities are closer to those of their neighbours across the border than they are to their nearest neighbour within their own country. Border crossing has been unrestricted for decades, but until EU membership it occurred via official border crossing points. Since EU membership, it has become possible to establish new local roads across the border and intensify cooperation. Demand for interregional collaboration is increasing in the region, and its municipalities are facing problems in sustaining the basic infrastructure and services because the population is decreasing and its age structure is distorted. The synergic motives for cooperation are, of course, grounded in the geographical environment, mutual concerns, and the possibilities for exploiting the border river (see Häkli, 2009), but also in the importance of cross-border trade and commuting generally. Commuting and immigration have historically been directed from Finland to Sweden, with more than half a million Finnish citizens moving to Sweden between 1945 and 1999 (Korkiasaari and Tarkiainen, 2000, page 156). However, although Nordic countries have had joint labour markets for fifty years (the agreement concerning the Nordic labour market came into operation in 1954), the number of daily commuters in the border municipalities in the Tornio River Valley is still relatively low, with approximately 600 people commuting from Finland to Sweden and 300 from Sweden to Finland. Obstacles to employment include, among others, language skills, taxation, and high unemployment in general (EC, 2001; Nordisk Pendlingskarta, 2009). On the other hand, the long path of institutional cross-border collaboration and traditional border-crossing activities (shopping, cross-border marriage, visiting relatives, etc) have provided a versatile ground for cross-border cooperation in the Finnish–Swedish border area. Present cross-border cooperation differs from the various forms of habitual interaction across the border—shopping, or visiting relatives and friends—in that it represents a conscious means of working in tandem with the

⁽⁵⁾ Historically, the area referred to here as the 'Tornio River Valley' was part of Western Bothnia (Västerbotten).

Table 1. Local cross-border enterprises and cooperation projects.

Case projects					
Kulle					
	Quality in a package and packages in the web	Same river, same people	Strange men and nylon women; folk opera about smuggling	Harmonization of curricula in border area between Sweden and Finland	
Measure	Measure 1.1	Measure 1.3	Measure 2.1	Measure 2.2	Measure 2.2
Main applicant of the project	Arctic Circle Network AB	Arctic Circle Network AB	Övertorneå municipality	Pello municipality	Övertorneå municipality
Regions (<i>main applicant</i>)	<i>Norrbottnen</i> – Lapland	<i>Norrbottnen</i> – Lapland	<i>Norrbottnen</i> – Lapland	<i>Lapland</i> – <i>Norrbottnen</i>	<i>Norrbottnen</i> – Lapland
Partners	Övertorneå entrepreneurs association, Ylitornio entrepreneurs association	Övertorneå municipality, Ylitornio municipality	Pello municipality	Övertorneå municipality	Pello municipality
Parties	VINN, Fabricom AS				
Project objectives and descriptives	Investigation (knowledge) of cross-border business cooperation In Ylitornio and Övertorneå	Joint marketing activities to promote the area as an attractive destination (regional image), tourism products, entrepreneur network	A joint school (infrastructure), new educational cooperation model	Folk opera performance (product) and its marketing. The project increased people's awareness of the region and its culture (regional image)	A document of a joint curriculum (knowledge), entrepreneurship education
Finance (€)	75 191	269 718	385 534	367 737	247 936

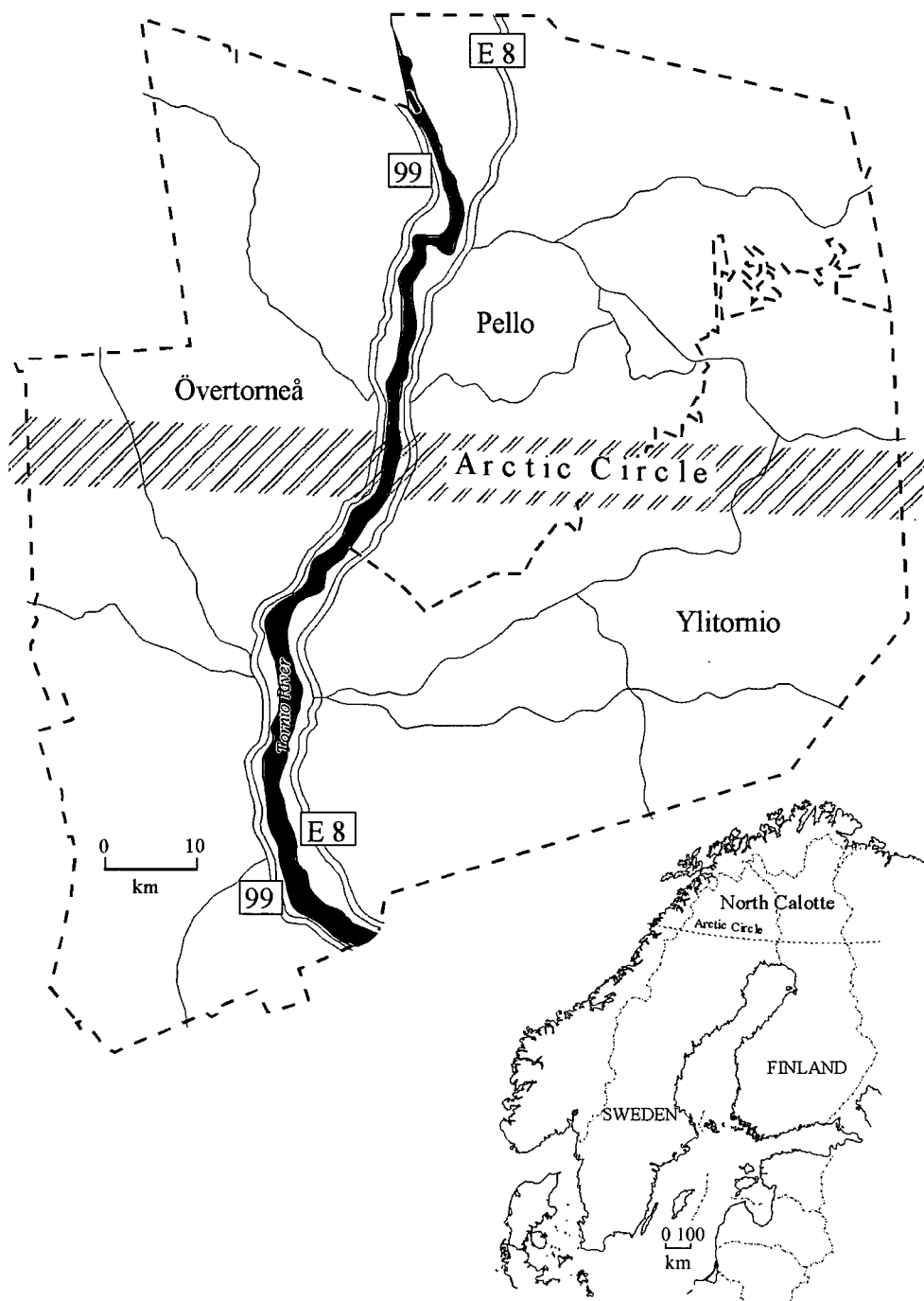


Figure 1. The Finnish–Swedish border runs along the Tornio River.

community across the border: Instead of just living side by side, people have to actively negotiate common rules and objectives for their activities.

In this study, three cross-border enterprises were selected as case studies representing the local implementation of cross-border cooperation. Altogether, five INTERREG cofinanced cross-border projects have been implemented by these enterprises during the

programme period 2000–06 (table 1). Two of these enterprises, a joint cooperation called the Arctic Circle Network AB, which focused on tourism development, and a cultural initiative entitled the *Smuggling Opera*, were set up with the specific aim of applying for funding from the INTERREG programme. The third case initiative, the School of Language and Culture in Pello, was established alongside the elementary school in Pello (Övertorneå municipality). The selection of the projects was based on their geographical location in the area concerned, the rural municipalities of Pello (Finland), Övertorneå (Sweden), and Ylitornio (Finland) (figure 1), and in their long-standing development and significance for the transition observed in the border environment. It was also considered important that these projects should include several actors so that it was possible to interview several people who had personal experience of cross-border cooperation. The interview narratives of individual actors provide an understanding of the practices and meanings of cross-border cooperation and, most importantly, of people's own conceptions of these habitual routines and actions in the context of cooperative work.

Local actors' experiences—national equivalence as the norm

Motivation for collaboration in the border communities of Ylitornio, Övertorneå, and Pello can be found in the fact that the Finnish and Swedish municipalities in the region are facing similar problems, such as a declining population density and unemployment. It can be argued that cross-border cooperation has become one of the 'last resorts' in regional development. The story of the school in Pello is a good example of the meaning of cooperation in this rural northern area. The school in Pello strove to develop a model by which the opportunities of pupils in this low population density area can be enhanced and diversified by combining the resources available on both sides of the border. Some of the practical achievements were that teachers working in the school produced a package of material for use in implementing the regional curriculum for the Tornio River Valley, and experts in local culture and traditions visited the school. However, one of the motivating factors behind the establishment of the Pello School was the maintenance of basic communal infrastructures and services. The municipality of Övertorneå had previously planned to close down the school because the number of pupils was decreasing in the area. By setting up the cross-border initiative it became possible to maintain a school in the village. Although this motivation was often mentioned by local actors, it was not written into the official project description. Without financial backing from the EU programme the municipalities would not have supported such a school initiative and cooperation, which created some contradictions between local actors and the representatives of the municipality. This is how one of the participants described the meaning of the initiative and the challenges it had posed:

"I have noticed that it is not only this school which has been developing here. There are many things, and of course attitudes, and I believe this is one reason why the population of the Swedish village of Pello has been increasing We did not get any support from politicians at all. In fact we had to show them that this (initiative) would not entail any additional costs for the municipalities" (Pello School, participant 7).⁽⁶⁾

The story of the development of the Pello School indicates how the diminishing of the state support for peripheral regions motivated local actors to approach and take

⁽⁶⁾ The quotes here are author's transcriptions. It is not possible to identify the interviewed people from the quotes, because several people were interviewed from each cross-border enterprise and quotes are represented here anonymously. In the interview situations it was promised that only the interviewer would have access to the interview tapes, they would be represented anonymously, and their words used in scientific articles only.

advantage of opportunity structures at different political scales. To compensate for the weakening of state-centric regional policy, the peripheral border regions have been compelled to seek funding for their development projects from other sources, particularly from EU programmes (Miller, 1997). On the other hand, although the local actors approached the EU scale in order to promote their very local interest, the implementation of the initiative, and actors' experiences of it, demonstrate how multiple scales become intertwined in the cooperation process. EU and regional authors create the guidelines for the implementation of the INTERREG North. Cooperation in the Pello School project was also supported by the European Languages and Borders network. Among others within this framework, Pello School received several visiting groups from abroad. However, in the actual organization of cooperation, national distinctions and decrees prevail. The curriculum of the Pello School respects both the Finnish and Swedish national requirements, which appropriately indicates how cross-border cooperation is organized in relation to national objectives. Whereas all-round education is given in 'mixed' groups, the most important subjects—the native language and mathematics—are taught in national groups.

The Pello School initiative is an example of a government-led project in which actors and cooperation partners come from different educational institutions. In contrast, the Arctic Circle Network AB, founded in 1998 by the municipalities of Ylitornio and Övertorneå, represents a public enterprise with close connections to the private tourism sector. The management has completed two INTERREG projects during the programme period. A regional booking system and network in which both Swedish and Finnish entrepreneurs can communicate and interact was established. Moreover, the objectives of the projects were to instigate cross-border business cooperation in the municipalities and to create networks between regional entrepreneurs and to design regional products, that is, commercialization of the region's culture. The creation of a cross-border 'Arctic Circle' destination exemplifies how regionalization through cooperation promoted 'imaginary' cross-border spaces, opening up a new scalar dimension for tourism development (Deas and Lord, 2006). The activities which were included in the project were not only fixed into local and regional scales. Tourism marketing, for example, was directed towards Sweden, Finland, and the Central European markets, exemplifying how local cooperation becomes intertwined with multiple spatial scales in noninstitutional sectors, too. Although project implementation is steered by regional actors and Commission guidelines, the project members and their everyday practices in cooperation projects did not have much to do with such institutional actors. Instead, cooperation was networked at different scales within the tourism sector.

The success of the projects implemented by the Arctic Circle Network AB is more convincing when evaluated in terms of joint marketing activities than if evaluated in terms of local everyday cooperation and networking activities. In practice, cooperation was often implemented so that it followed the national scale. The Swedish workers take responsibility for the Swedish side and the Finnish workers for the Finnish side:

"It was natural that the one from Finland should have responsibility for the Finnish contacts at first and the one from the Swedish side should manage the Swedes. Then we tried to familiarize ourselves with the Finnish system and a person from Finland observed how the tourist industry operates in Sweden, for example. Then we on the Swedish side, became curious and tried to understand what the Finns were doing better than us" (Arctic Circle Network AB, participant 13).

Local actors' stories of everyday cooperation practices point out that cooperation between the Finnish and Swedish project actors is to a great extent organized in a manner which follows national distinctions. National scale is particularly important in the organization of knowledge and working methods: for example, it was considered

important that common activities were organized frequently and in such a way that there were equal numbers of participants from each country so that groups were nationally balanced. Similarly, the benefits are calculated with respect to the administrative border—both nationally and transnationally. The following description of work in the school initiative and in the joint Finnish–Swedish tourist information centre (which was established in the old customs building on the border immediately after the foundation of the Arctic Circle Network AB) exemplify such national dimensions in cooperation:

“You have to keep a balance, forming groups that are of equal size. Otherwise the other side will take the lead. Things have to be equal, and it is also a matter of expense. If there are thirty Finns and eight Swedes, it is obvious that the Swedes will just acquiesce” (Pello School, participant 3).

“I believe that we here inform the Swedish (tourists) about the Finnish side and Finnish ones about the Swedish side in an even-handed way, but the Finnish [entrepreneurs] think that we guide them to Sweden and vice versa. ... When people ask for accommodation we tell them about all the alternatives on both sides of the border, not only on the Finnish side” (Arctic Circle Network AB, participant 9).

The local actors' stories indicate how equality and reciprocity in terms of national benefits are norms in such cooperation, pointing to a general mistrust between Finnish and Swedish partners (see also Häkli, 2009). Mistrust arises when economic benefits are considered. Cross-border cooperation in tourism is challenging because there are similar attractions in, and thus competition between, tourists centres in Finland and Sweden (Ioannides et al, 2006). Moreover, there were remarkable national differences between entrepreneurs' commitments to cross-border cooperation: in the case of the Arctic Circle Network AB, the Finnish entrepreneurs were more actively participating in joint development than their Swedish counterparts who, for their part, had a strong internal network. Where the depth of actors' engagement or economic benefit is concerned, the national scale matters. It was often considered that knowledge concerning the projects and the utilization of funds was better on 'the other side of the border':

“The financing was quite problematic because it came from the Swedish side, this EU money. And then it was never there—we got the money afterwards. The Swedes knew how to use this money, we did not” (Pello School, participant 2).

Similar national comparisons were found in the context of the third case initiative, the *Smuggling Opera*, which focused on cultural cooperation. The opera performance brought together approximately 130 volunteers, mainly amateurs, from both the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Tornio River Valley. The opera was performed seven times during the summers of 2005 and 2006, to a full house every time in the first year in Pello (with a total audience of 5600 people) and with good success in the second season in Övertorneå (seen by 3400 people). The implementation of the initiative was followed closely by the local media and, during the second season, the Swedish media became more interested in this cross-border enterprise, and it was also reported on national television. The extensive local interest in the opera and its implementation as a cross-border initiative was declared by its producers to have been the most important achievement of the project. Nevertheless, the people interviewed mentioned that it was often difficult to understand many of the day-to-day working methods or decision-making processes in their neighbouring country.

An examination of local cooperation shows that, although the official documents emphasize the objective of cooperation as being to develop the border area as a single entity, it is national benefits and aims that are dominant in the actual manner of

organizing and evaluating the cooperation (see also Paasi and Prokkola, 2008, page 24). Nationally defined organizational norms can be found at all levels of cooperation on the Finnish–Swedish border, and are clearly visible in the governance of cross-border organizations such as the Council of the Tornio River Valley and Provincia Bothniensis, in which there is normally equal representation from Sweden and Finland in all decision-making organs. On the other hand, when making generalizations about cross-border cooperation initiatives and their ‘border lowering’ effects, it should be acknowledged that there can be huge differences in success when evaluated in terms of local activation or coherence. Despite some national dissonance, the *Smuggling Opera* project succeeded in activating the local people, whereas the Arctic Circle Network AB project has been only partially successful in its efforts to increase cross-border networking. Concerning the achievements of the INTERREG-funded project På Gränsen—Rajalle in Tornio and Haparanda, in which the objective was to construct cross-border infrastructures and a common centre for the two towns, Häkli (2009) concludes that official cooperation was successful and created social trust among the officials and professionals involved in the initiative. In contrast, the school project suggests that sometimes there may be trust and goodwill among the local people, but little support from politicians in the respective countries. When the first move for a project is taken at grassroots level, backing from and involvement of local actors will probably be much deeper than in the case of ‘top-down’-driven initiatives:

“At least on our side [of the border river] the parents had very positive attitudes.

Somehow they thought that it was or they had such an understanding that in the old days this formed one land ... this project work was easy because the parents supported our work” (Pello School, participant 18).

The INTERREG initiatives do not concern merely those few people who manage projects or are directly employed in those projects. Hence, although I have mainly discussed how the INTERREG initiatives are experienced by local actors who are directly involved in the implementation process, all case projects had some wider influence within and beyond the local—even if local people may not even think or be aware that cooperation has something to do with INTERREG and European integration. Relations between different scales are diverging, however, and in one project there is cooperation between different scales and yet, in another, cooperation can in practice turn into competition over working methods and resources. Cross-border cooperation is not a straightforward process of ‘ignoring’ state borders and institutionalizing new regional spaces across borders. Instead, it tends to be implemented as a set of everyday institutional practices which both challenge and reproduce the functions and meanings of the border as a line of differentiation.

Conclusions

We have been concerned here with how different scalar dimensions manifest themselves in the development of cross-border institutions and in the practices of cross-border cooperation. Although it is often emphasized that both the Nordic cross-border institutions and the Central European Euroregions were established for the purpose of promoting the interests of border-region inhabitants, their construction is bound up with various other organizations on different scales. A cross-border region or Euro-region normally gains its support and legitimization from supranational, national, and regional institutions. The Council of Europe (2008) emphasizes that Euroregions do not create a new type of government at the transfrontier level, neither do they have any political powers. The work of cross-border organizations is often limited to the competences of the regional and local authorities which constitute them, and the Finnish–Swedish cross-border organizations are no exception in this regard.

The representatives of the border region, such as the Council of the Tornio River Valley, or local cross-border enterprises, such as the Pello School, can operate only within the frameworks set up by state institutions. Although it has been argued that the establishment of institutionalized links between subnational actors across borders challenges the 'gatekeeper' role of national actors (Blatter, 2004, page 545), this study of Finnish–Swedish cross-border cooperation suggests that national regulations and established practices are extremely difficult to bypass.

The processes of European identity building and the choices that are made at the local level are diverse and overlapping, since regional actors are simultaneously pursuing national and local interests (see also Bucken-Knapp, 2003; Jensen and Richardsen, 2004). The rhetoric and discourses of institutional cooperation, emphasizing the development of a functional region across state borders, are optimistic and may exaggerate the achievements of cross-border cooperation—not least because their reports are often directed towards external evaluators such as the INTERREG Steering Committees. The objectives and descriptions of interregional cooperation in the official documents and project reports emphasize the development of a harmonious cross-border region. There are no references to nationally specified interests and motives, or to national competition. In the 'people' approach (van Houtum, 2000), where the examination is moved to the local scale and people's experiences are considered, cross-border cooperation appears in a rather different light. Cross-border cooperation as everyday practice is intertwined with different governmental and nongovernmental structures on multiple scales. Yet, the accounts of people's day-to-day practices and narratives of cooperation and cross-border initiatives implemented in the border region show that cooperation as everyday practice is often organized in a manner which actually follows the border, and people's normative understanding of it; that is to say, it follows the national territorial logic. State organizations and institutions, together with national ambitions and norms, are rescaled to conduct transnational cooperation on the local and regional scale. Although it is not possible to draw wide-ranging conclusions concerning the prevailing practices and implementation of cross-border cooperation programmes on the grounds of local actors' experiences and narratives, this examination of the implementation of grassroots projects suggests that cooperation has more breadth than depth.

This examination of the Finnish–Swedish border, an internal EU border, supports previous arguments that the emergence of regional cross-border institutions and cooperation cannot be directly regarded as a manifestation of the weakening of the state or of national borders, or vice versa (Häkli, 2002; Popescu, 2008). National working methods together with legal impotence and economic dependence on state institutions and cofunding from EU programmes create various hindrances to more extensive cross-border cooperation and regionalization in this rural Finnish–Swedish region. The scenarios for future development are interesting for, on the one hand, official cooperation motivated by material considerations is increasing, while on the other, linguistic coherence and many traditional border-crossing activities are decreasing (see Prokkola, 2008). In consequence, institutionally driven cross-border regionalization will probably continue to increase in the future, whereas regionalism driven by the civil society and grounded in a shared border culture may diminish. Such developments may even strengthen the national as a scalar dimension for cooperation at the local level.

What this suggests is that the complexity of region-building processes should be taken into consideration, and that national concerns as an important scalar dimension should be integrated more profoundly into our efforts to conceptualize cross-border cooperation and regional development. Instead of studying cross-border cooperation

as a one-way process, resulting in border removal, we should approach cooperation as a set of institutional and noninstitutional practices which simultaneously remove and reconstruct political borders and which are constructed on multiple scales. By this means it should be possible to gain an understanding of how the production of national institutions and borders is intertwined with the practices of cross-border cooperation on different geographical scales.

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