

Cross-Border Transport and Mobility in the EU
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A SUMP Perspective for Cross-Border Mobility Planning

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1 Introduction

Transport plays a key role in achieving the objectives of cohesion and socio-economic equality of EU territories. Cross-border mobility, in particular, is a key element of such framework and in the broader context of territorial cohesion.

In light of the progress made by European policies in improving the quality and intensity of cross-border transport, this chapter proposes a reflection on a possible new paradigmatic vision with both conceptual and practical implications. This vision would have as its ideal point of arrival the adoption of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) approach to the entire European territory, integrating urban and functional areas according to the needs expressed by

local realities regardless of the nationality of reference. In essence, this means overcoming the concept of cross-border mobility as ‘trans-national’ and thinking of it, instead, as integration of administratively divided territorial units (cross-regional). Such a goal, distant but not utopian, would represent an objective of territorial integration without precedent in the European community.

2 The Rationale for Local Cross-Border Governance

Mobility and territorial cohesion are fundamental factors for the possibility of fully exploiting the strengths of each territory, for managing the relationship between urbanization and equitable economic development, and for developing interregional cooperation. For some time now, the EU has been pursuing a virtuous path for the development of territorial cohesion (EU COM 2008), including numerous funding programs in support of interregional strategies.

However, the experience of the COVID pandemic has also shown on several fronts that the process of cohesion between the countries of the Union can suffer abrupt interruptions and even be called into question. In the case of transport, even before the COVID pandemic, the EU countries on numerous occasions invoked the Schengen Borders Code to reintroduce controls and restrictions on international traffic. The COVID experience is emblematic, because of all the possible measures to contain a virus, restricting movement is a relevant issue regardless of administrative borders. Closing a border between states performs the same function as closing borders between regions or between provinces, but the state border is considered a priority regardless of the actual dynamics of the pandemic. Above all, this shows that the national border still represents a political and cultural barrier to the achievement of the principle of freedom of movement laid down in Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

In this chapter we address a conceptual issue that concerns cross-border transport networks: that is, the systems for planning, harmonization and management of international transport (with the exception of simple roads, which theoretically can be managed on both sides of the border without a necessary integration process). The goals of cross-border European strategy concern primarily the cohesion between populations separated by language barriers, and the harmonization of procedures, technologies and operational aspects that allow international mobility to be as easy as it is (or should be) for interurban mobility and between urban centres and functional areas. This strategy applies to both long-distance connections (e.g. TEN-T corridors) and local transport. It is precisely the latter, however, that has the greatest impact on local socio-economic mechanisms in terms of harmonisation and co-

hesion, as it opens up opportunities for commuting for work and leisure, thus creating much less sporadic and more intense accessibility to neighbouring countries than long-distance infrastructure.

In the long process of European integration, a significant progress has been made in this sense (Noferini et al. 2020). Currently, cross-border transport in the EU is a very diverse reality, with areas where integration is almost complete (as, for example, on the German-Dutch border in the Aachen and Maastricht area), and others where significant barriers to integration still remain. These barriers may derive, first of all, from governance, language, planning, tariff and document integration problems. In some cases, barriers could also be represented by technological issues, such as in the case of railways adopting different technological standards. However, on the whole, the different experiences over time seem to show that the main factor of complexity is the definition of the governance system and the related coordination and planning mechanisms.

At the same time, the key requirement for the solution of these problems is the definition of a clear strategic vision, as demonstrated by virtuous situations, such as, for example, the transport system in the previously mentioned functional areas of Aachen and Maastricht, but also the area between Sweden and Denmark or, last but not least, the Trieste-Ljubljana area with the train connection implemented in the framework of the CROSSMOBY project.

It may seem paradoxical that in the document that sets out the EU vision for the future of transport (EU COM 2011), no specific attention is paid to the integration of cross-border mobility and transport. On the other hand, this theme is strongly present in macro-regional strategies, characterized by the fact of addressing common challenges related to specific geographical areas. In fact, regional characterizations (economic, socio-demographic, administrative, cultural, etc.) are the main variables to be considered in territorial transport planning. The principle of local characterization of transport systems is also at the basis of the logic of SUMPs.

In our opinion, looking at the issue of cross-border transport as a problem of international connections might entail the risk of adopting a position that is intrinsically inconsistent with what is currently the reference framework for the transition to sustainable mobility, i.e. the SUMP framework. In other words, it is a typical cultural barrier countering the process of debordering (Ulrich 2016). Instead, it is a consistent direction to think of a cross-border reality as a particular reality, characterized by different administrative boundaries, regardless of nationality (Dörny, Decoville 2016). Of course, this does not eliminate the barriers and complexity of transport integration. However, one might speculate that territories that share not only technological standards, but also linguistic and cultural frameworks are likely to be easier to connect with one single system. Indeed, based on the

DG REGIO's public consultation on persisting 'border obstacles' to cross border mobility, social/cultural barriers rank second (after institutional/administrative), outperforming economic, technological and accessibility-related issues (EC 2016).

As long as mobility is intended as a service to a community (e.g., citizens, commuters, etc.), the more homogeneous the needs and behavioural patterns of users, the easier the planning and implementation of a transport system that is tailored to the specific expectations of the community to be served. While language represents the most evident aspect, it can be viewed indeed as the tip of the iceberg of a much larger issue. For instance, a railway system connecting territories with different degrees of bike use might face a dilemma when it comes to decide the amount of space on trains devoted to bike storage, which could be used instead as a luggage storage, a bar carriage, and so on. In the traditional logic of cross-border mobility, how much space to dedicate to bicycles (to stay with our example) would be decided on the basis of a sort of average, negotiated between the two countries. But if the same issue were to be addressed for a regional, non-transnational train, local authorities would probably decide on the basis of a sustainable mobility development logic and therefore decide on the basis of a plan integrating bike lanes, mobility development, etc. In a nutshell, they would decide on the basis of a sustainable mobility plan. In this, we see the opportunity of a conceptual step towards a new vision and a new strategic objective, that is: to assimilate, with the necessary adaptations, cross-border transport to the logic of SUMP.

Until now, EU policies have in various ways limited not only the application, but the very concept behind the implementation of SUMP, to urban and functional areas. But if one looks at the benefits that SUMP practices have brought to citizens over time, one wonders what is preventing the application of SUMP's heritage of values, tools and guidelines to broader contexts.

Of course, we are aware that the decision-making context involving two different States is such that we cannot immediately think of processes as pervasive and complex as those involved by the development of a SUMP. Just as a nervous system branches off from the main backbones to the peripheral endings, it is logical that the process of international networking should follow a similar principle, starting with the long-distance networks and gradually strengthening the local nodes and peripheral networks. In European areas where there is already a significant international integration, this process would be a natural evolution of the former. In other areas, where barriers remain, it would be a matter of adopting planning process more ambitious but that are, however, to some extent already codified and that can capitalise on the extensive previous SUMP experience.

Such a strategic objective is distant in time and difficult to achieve, but it is conceivable that its formulation is already capable of conditioning, in cascade, specific objectives, development programs and the adoption of best practices. It would in fact be a matter of starting by introducing a vision, a mindset. If it's true that at the basis of every cultural development there is a conceptual position, such a conceptual step would be a prerequisite for a cross-border capitalization of the wealth of knowledge developed in the context of the implementation and coordination of SUMP, first and foremost the knowledge related to the organization of the governance of complex systems.

This chapter starts from this reflection and synthetically explores some of the key points to be taken into consideration in order to start a possible dialogue on the subject. In particular, the following points are addressed: a) what would be the most critical aspects and/or the main obstacles that the cross-border context poses to the adoption of a SUMP process?; b) what actions would be prioritized in this process?

3 Addressing Cross-Border Issues with SUMP for the Functional Urban Region

In our view the adaptation of the SUMP logic to the cross-border level is conceptually equivalent to overcoming the concept of 'cross-border', assimilating it to the cross-regional one, which considers the integration of transport within different administrative boundaries, regardless of nationality. Of course, behind such words there is a process of adaptation of a number of procedures which, although they have been successfully tested in the field for some time, originated in an environment with very different assumptions from those of cross-border mobility. The challenge is to solve crucial points without distorting the logic of SUMP, with particular regard to the participatory nature of the planning process.

The SUMP guidelines foresee a 4-step process, with milestones at intervals, each divided into steps and each step into activities [tab. 1].

Table 1 The activities of the SUMP process according to Eltis Guidelines

Phase 1 Preparation and analysis
Step 1: Set up working structures
Activity 1.1: Evaluate capacities and resources
Activity 1.2: Create inter-departmental core team
Activity 1.3: Ensure political and institutional ownership
Activity 1.4: Plan stakeholder and citizen involvement
Step 2: Determine planning framework
Activity 2.1: Assess planning requirements and define geographic scope
Activity 2.2: Link with other planning processes
Activity 2.3: Agree timeline and work plan
Activity 2.4: Consider getting external support
Step 3: Analyse mobility situation
Activity 3.1: Identify information sources and cooperate with data owners
Activity 3.2: Analyse problems and opportunities (all modes)
Phase 2 Strategy development
Step 4: Build and jointly assess scenarios
Activity 4.1: Develop scenarios of potential futures
Activity 4.2: Discuss scenarios with citizens and stakeholders
Step 5: Develop vision and objectives with stakeholders
Activity 5.1: Co-create common vision with citizens and stakeholders
Activity 5.2: Agree objectives addressing key problems and all modes
Step 6: Set indicators and targets
Activity 6.1: Identify indicators for all objectives
Activity 6.2: Agree measurable targets
Phase 3 Measure planning
Step 7: Select measure packages with stakeholders
Activity 7.1: Create and assess long list of measures with stakeholders
Activity 7.2: Define integrated measure packages
Activity 7.3: Plan measure monitoring and evaluation
Step 8: Agree actions and responsibilities
Activity 8.1: Describe all actions
Activity 8.2: Identify funding sources and assess financial capacities
Activity 8.3: Agree priorities, responsibilities and timeline
Activity 8.4: Ensure wide political and public support
Step 9: Prepare for adoption and financing
Activity 9.1: Develop financial plans and agree cost sharing
Activity 9.2: Finalise and assure quality of 'Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan' document

Phase 4 Implementation and monitoring

Step 10: Manage implementation

Activity 10.1: Coordinate implementation of actions

Activity 10.2: Procure goods and services

Step 11: Monitor, adapt and communicate

Activity 11.1: Monitor progress and adapt

Activity 11.2: Inform and engage citizens and stakeholders

Step 12: Review and learn lessons

Activity 12.1: Analyse successes and failures

Activity 12.2: Share results and lessons learned

Activity 12.3: Consider new challenges and solutions

Source: Rupprecht Consult 2019

The process summarised in table 1, with its guidelines, is a fundamental reference point in the dissemination of sustainable mobility principles in Europe. It is reasonable to assume that it can be adapted, reformulated and made compatible with the constraints and opportunities posed by the challenge of making state borders irrelevant for mobility.

Looking at the activities in table 1, we can see that the majority of the activities foreseen in the SUMP phases are already carried out also in transport projects within international co-operation programmes. Some of those activities, however, might present problems and complexities when carried out in a transnational context. These transnational challenges are in a sense the problems ‘writ-large’ of any SUMP that tries to plan and implement measures across administrative boundaries for a ‘functional urban region’ such as the metropolitan Ljubljana area, for example. There are sound intuitive and intellectual arguments for planning for this reason, primarily based around the premise that travel does not stop at administrative borders, and different municipalities have travel between them that needs to be managed to achieve the objectives of the SUMP in the same way that trips within a municipality need to be managed. However, in working to integrate SUM planning across a region, and particularly an international region, the following points should be considered:

- For many of the stages in the SUMP cycle, working across borders adds complexity simply because of the greater number of people, departments and opinions that need to be brought together to, for example, marshal data, or develop a common vision for mobility in the cross-border region. This is a problem of scale that affects SUM planning *within* a country but is amplified if working across borders.
- An example of the general problem mentioned above can be seen specifically in Step 1 of the cycle. Here, ideally, an inte-

grated collaborative working structure needs to be created, in effect so there is just one organisation that is working to create and deliver the SUMP. This is challenging within one country, given the fragmentation of responsibilities for different aspects of transport planning across and within different levels of government, but it becomes doubly difficult internationally as the border multiplies the number of different actors by two (and in many such situations of course the lack of a common language becomes an added barrier to collaboration).

- Framework conditions can vary significantly across borders. For example, the bases of local transport financing in Slovenia and in Croatia differ greatly in the role of national government in providing that funding, even though they are neighbours and previously part of the same country. This is typical of the kind of amplified challenge presented by international cooperation to Step 2 of the SUM planning cycle.
- Political and cultural differences across borders – for example, levels of environmental awareness (Szagun, Pavlov 1995) – vary. Therefore, developing a common vision for the SUMP can be extremely challenging even if the politics of the administrations in the cross-border region are broadly aligned.
- A final significant barrier relates to funding and then coordinating the implementation of cross-border measures (for example, a cross-border bike route), or measures on each side of the border that are intended to complement each other (for example, parking management measures). Levels of funding available for the measures may be different in each country, as noted above (making it more challenging to assemble the funding in one country compared to the other); but also, even if levels of funding are similar, its timing may be different. Similarly, variations in planning processes (for example, requirements for public consultation or environmental assessment) may mean that the measure on one side of the border is delivered more quickly than it is on the other side. Finally, differing design standards may make it impossible to deliver the measure to a consistent standard in the two countries.

These challenges are not insurmountable, as the examples of cross-border SUM planning presented in this chapter demonstrate. However, they require more time to develop cross-border working relationships at both the local and national levels in order to improve trust and collaboration and ultimately also to better align framework conditions. This additional effort required in cross-border SUM planning should be highlighted in a further revision of the SUMP Guidelines.

4 The Priority of Actions in the Implementation of Cross-Border Transport Systems

An aspect that is closely related to the shift towards a new cultural approach to cross-border mobility concerns the priority of actions in the implementation of transport systems. In general, the typology of cross-border situations is broad and the interactions taking place in the various patterns of cross-border relations have specific factors of complexity (Wróblewski 2020). The main obstacle to transport integration, however, is the need to achieve unified governance in a context characterized by territorial sovereignties that are significantly more pronounced than those usually present within a single state. In other words (and with the sole exception of roads), the integration of transport networks. This complexity factor, in cascade, determines others which, however, would be easier to solve than the establishment of a governance mechanism because they are linked to operational aspects.

Broadly speaking, the main actions to be carried out for transport integration can be summarized as follows: a) definition of a common investment program and allocation of resources among the countries involved; b) constitution of one or more multinational bodies for planning, with relative assignment of competences; c) implementation of a (non-binding, advisory) regional spatial plan and contextual involvement of stakeholders; d) implementation of support infrastructures with shared standards; e) construction of permanent networks of connection; f) Adoption of common planning tools for transport providers operating in the region; g) development of a common communication, with adoption of shared and multilingual signage and information systems; h) implementation of timetables, single ticketing and integrated pricing.

The above sequence also mirrors the typical process that is carried out in interregional cooperation programs and applies, ideally, to any type of mobility system, be it railways, bus lines, bicycle paths, bike sharing, etc. In this sequence, institutional integration (“organization of cross-border cooperation and the networking of actors”) precedes and is the premise for functional integration (interactions which occur across borders, sum of each cross-border individual’s actions; Decoville, Durand 2016, 1828-9). The top-down approach in the above sequence is dictated by the need to agree on actions between different territorial sovereignties. However, in such a way, measures with different coordination complexity and/or higher investment intensity would be undertaken regardless of the effort they require. This is represented in figure 1, a conceptual map that classifies the different (ideal) steps of the integration process reported above according to coordination complexity and investment effort (Stocchetti 2012).

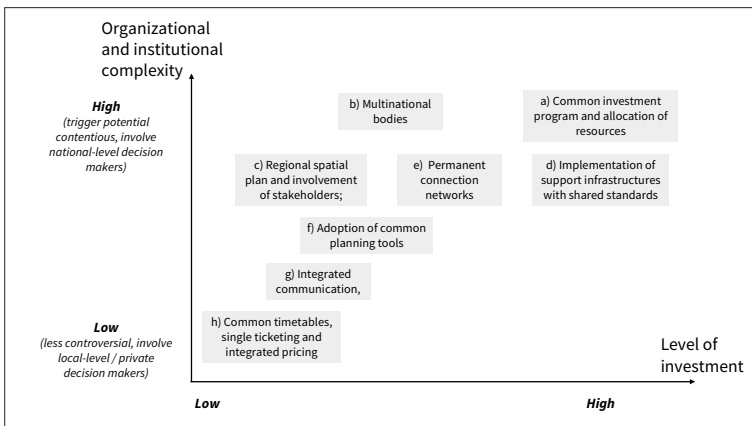


Figure 1 Complexity of cross-border transport integration in terms of organizational and investment effort

Actions near to the origin of the axes are characterized by (relatively) low investment and coordination effort, so they would be candidates to be implemented first compared to those at the upper right corner. The latter, in cross-border transportation planning, are considered the preconditions for the others. The challenge then becomes to move from a top-down to a bottom-up approach, leveraging local interests, relationships and distinctiveness, as well as creating local opportunities by developing the attractors that can provide incentives for spontaneous cross-border mobility (such as, for example, tourist attractions, employment, business and training/education opportunities). Of course, it is not a question of replacing or bypassing the higher institutional level. Rather, it is about speeding up the process by bringing out local opportunities, activating those actions requiring the least overall effort and thus providing an incentive for citizens to move across borders. All this, in the logic that the willingness of citizens to move across borders is the fundamental premise for territorial cohesion but also a factor that facilitates institutional processes. This is, in fact, what emerged from the experience of the CROSSMOBY project, which taught us that local authorities perceived the emergence of a need for local cross-border mobility before national authorities did.

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