

# URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## CRT/DIST/FULL - Reframing borders: Cross-border Areas, Territorial Fragilities, and Institutional Innovations

<b>Funded By</b>	Dipartimento DIST Centro Interdipartimentale FULL FONDAZIONE CRT CASSA DI RISPARMIO DI TORINO [P.iva/CF:06655250014]
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<b>Context of the research activity</b>	<p>The research aims at investigating the role and limits of current European instruments dedicated to cross-border areas. In particular, it focuses on the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), which are new European cooperation instruments with legal personality. They represent the most advanced instrument that comes after the various experiences developed within European Territorial Cooperation programs (Interreg)—in facilitating the creation of truly operational cross-border functional areas.</p>
	<p>The research project addresses European border areas, understood as liminal spaces where structural fragilities intersect with the potential for institutional innovation. These territories, often perceived as marginal peripheries, are in fact strategic places for recomposing cohesion policies, where the complexity of economic, social, and environmental interdependencies requires new forms of cooperation among levels of government, institutions, and local communities.</p> <p>Border areas often express many of the tensions running through contemporary Europe: depopulation and population ageing, poor accessibility, economic dependence on external centers, environmental vulnerability, and crises in essential services. However, precisely in these fragile contexts, forms of political and territorial experimentation are emerging that can generate innovative models of local development and institutional integration.</p> <p>The research aims to explore the possibility of building areas of cooperation with different degrees of institutional setting —functional spaces defined by specific shared purposes (for example environmental management, mobility, cultural enhancement, or socioeconomic resilience)—that make it possible to design dedicated development policies. Born from the interaction among public, private, and civic actors, these areas can become the basis for a new way of understanding planning: flexible, adaptive, and anchored in lived</p>

## Objectives

places.

The construction of such areas builds on decades of experimentation with institutional mechanisms and cooperation tools capable of overcoming national administrative rigidities. In this sense, the research intends to analyze the role and limits of current European instruments—such as the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), European cooperation structures with legal personality, or the various experiences developed within European Territorial Cooperation programs (Interreg)—in facilitating the creation of truly operational cross-border functional areas.

Through a comparative and multi-scalar approach, the project aims to understand:

- how institutional and socioeconomic disparities influence cross-border integration processes;
- which forms of governance can ensure coherence among local, national, and European policies;
- how place-based development strategies can help transform territorial fragilities into levers for cooperation, improving the quality of life of border residents;
- how bottom-up integration can help preserve practices of European integration in the face of a growing re-nationalization of territorial policies.

The ultimate goal is to outline a theoretical and practical framework capable of linking the different dimensions—institutional, socio-spatial, cultural—of cross-border cooperation, contributing to the debate on the future forms of European territorial cohesion and on the conditions for a just territorial transition, especially in marginal areas.

### Methods and research approach

The research adopts a mixed methodology, integrating qualitative and quantitative tools, and is structured across multiple levels of analysis:

Documentary and institutional analysis: study of the evolution of the European Union's territorial policies, with particular attention to border territories; study of European territorial cooperation instruments (Interreg, EGTC, SNAI, ITI, CLLD) and of development policies affecting border territories;

Territorial and cartographic analysis: identification and representation of cross-border functional areas through demographic, economic, environmental, and infrastructural data, with particular attention to case studies in the Alpine arc (Italy–France, Italy–Slovenia, Italy–Austria);

Qualitative fieldwork: semi-structured interviews with institutional stakeholders, territorial operators, and local communities; ethnographic observations in the selected territories;

Comparison and modeling: comparison among governance models, construction of typologies of territori di scopo, and identification of indicators for assessing institutional cooperation.

Research periods abroad are planned at European centers and universities

with specific expertise on the topic (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière – MOT, CESCO, BBSR, FAU, OIR, TU Wien), aimed at methodological deepening and international comparison. A research period is also planned at the partner body CNR ISSIRFA (National Research Council – Institute for the Study of Federal, Regional, and Autonomy Systems) based in Rome.

**Skills and competencies for the development of the activity**

We are seeking a candidate with:

- A Master's degree in Geography, Spatial Planning, Architecture, Political Science, Management Engineering, or related disciplines;
- Skills in territorial analysis, institutional reading, and knowledge of European public policies;
- Familiarity with territorial cooperation, multilevel governance, and sustainable local development;
- Ability to conduct qualitative research (interviews, observations, documentary analysis) and to integrate comparative approaches;
- Good command of English (and preferably a second European language);
- An aptitude for interdisciplinary work and collaboration with institutions and research bodies.