



SOFT, MOBILE OR NETWORKED? CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AND THE TOPOLOGY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL FRONTIER

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to evaluate the rationale of cross-border cooperation initiatives between EU member countries and their non-EU neighbouring countries, in light of recent research about the European Neighbourhood Policy and about the changing spatiality of contemporary borders. To this end, we will review the main theoretical approaches for the analysis of contemporary rebordering processes, distinguishing between geopolitical, institutional, topological and constructivist perspectives, to see how these perspectives have been applied to the specific case of the EU external frontier. We will present, moreover, a critical evaluation of cross-border cooperation initiatives implemented within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Along the EU's external border, it is argued, cross-border cooperation is a policy transfer of previous initiatives conducted within the EU, but differs in many respects: the role of sub-national authorities is merely complementary and the attempt is to discriminate between the negative function of borders as obstacles to cooperation, and their positive function in keeping Europe secure. The imaginary of cross-border cooperation, on the one hand, give visibility to the EU's commitment toward softening its external frontier while at the same time, on the other hand, participate in the construction of a peculiar kind of border that is simultaneously mobile, fragmented and networked.

Classification JEL: F42, F53, F54, F55, N44

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