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REGIONAL COOPERATION AS A FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN SPACE. "MOTOR REGIONS OF EUROPE"

1. Selected problems of regional cooperation in Europe

The process of Western Europe's integration and all its elements is one of the main and unquestionable spatial factors of changes in the economy of the countries and regions of the European Union. On one hand, the integration, by weakening the decision – making power of national capitals, given multiple opportunities and development impulses on the level of cities and regions. In the process of integration the regions, and cities in particular, have become the most effective areas for dynamizing the technological, cultural and social advancement.

Europe is an area experiencing constantly broadening autonomy of its regions, which are constant seeking said autonomy at various levels of authority and spatial organization. The more open the regions and cities become, the more they try to cooperate, the stronger and better organized they get, the greater the development opportunities they create for themselves.

The possibility for and readiness to engage in regional cooperation still vary. The regions of France, Italy, Germany and Spain have incomparably greater opportunities to make decentralized decisions than regions in such countries as Greece, Great Britain or Holland.

The regional policy, with all its problems and procedures of financial assistance provided by Brussels in various programmes, has become one of the basic instruments for building prosperity and eliminating tensions resulting from economic and socio-developmental differences between Community regions[1].

[1] In 1988 GDP per capita fluctuated in the regions of the Community from 180% (BRD) to 40% (Greece, Portugal) of the average for the twelve countries of the group. Similarly in 1990 the rates of unemployment in the regions of the European Community ranged from 1.5% (Luxemburg) to 28.9% (Extremadura, Ceuta y Melilla) (Las regiones en ... 1991).

The need to limit the peripheral character of many areas and regions appears ever clearer, especially those which have the endogenic potential to emerge from the background into the mainstream of the spatial process. Fears are being already expressed that in 10 - 15 years the European Union will emerge as an area of two spaces, with some getting poorer and others getting reacher.

The aim of this article is to discuss some aspects connected with interregional cooperation as increasingly characteristic for Europe form of relations between neighbouring or detached spatial-administrative units. The article also wants to show how the new geo-economic and social situation in Western Europe, as the result of the dynamic development of the European Community, locates the economically strong regions, how it ties them together and how it leads to the strengthening of new concrete development directions of the European economic space.

In contemporary Europe, particularly over the last 4 - 5 years, conditions have become very favourable for international regional cooperation. From the geopolitical point of view these conditions involve greater freedom of the regions in Central European countries to decide on their contacts and association ties. It is especially important with respect to border regions, which in centralized economies were treated entirely peripherally, often functioning as buffor zones. In these areas the centrifugal forces were particularly strong, depriving them above all of human resources (W. Leimgruber 1991). The European Community included in its special financial assistance the frontier regions (INTERREG Programme), as these regions, constituting about 15% of its area, are inhabited by about 10% of its population, i.e. 35 mln. These regions have become exposed to additional difficulties connected with the opening of the internal borders of the Union on January 1, 1993.

The INTERREG Programme provides financial support in the form of 800 mln ECU for adjusting the frontier regions to the new situation of the common market. The Community's internal frontier regions have better conditions for cooperation now, whereas the regions situated at the Community's borders with non-Union states will be in a more difficult situation. It can be supposed that these regions will tend to cooperate more closely within the concept of euroregions.

The "motor regions" of Europe, analysed in this paper, i.e. Baden-Württemberg (BRD), Lombardy (Italy), Rhône-Alpes (France) and Catalonia (Spain) have a particularly strong, dynamic and high level of development and resemble each other as regions leading in their countries. These regions create, as it were, excellent environments for the process of moving the weight of the Community's economic development to the South, Southeast and Southwest of the Continent.

In 1989 about 75% of spending on research and development (R&D) was concentrated only in 3 countries of the EC: Germany, France and Great Britain. Discrepancies in this area are clearer with respect to single countries, e.g. in 1982 about 72% of research and development expenditure in Italy was located in the northwestern regions of the country (in Lombardy as well), and 5% in the south (**M. Dunford, G. Kafkalas** 1992).

The example of interregional cooperation discussed in the article is not the only one well-functioning regional association in Europe. The experience of three interregional associations in the Alpine region is particularly interesting in this respect:

1) Alpe-Adria. This is an Association for the area of Eastern Alps, containing also regions outside the Union located in Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and Croatia, as well as Germany and Italy.

2) Arge Alp. This is the region of the Central Alps encompassing regions of Switzerland, Italy and Austria.

3) CONTRAO is the organization for the regions of Western Alps containing regions of France, Italy and Switzerland.

It is important that these associations include regions not only belonging to the European Community but also the EFTA countries as Switzerland and Austria, and also to the countries of the former socialist bloc. When Europe was still clearly divided into two political blocs it was already possible to create networks of regional cooperation, which are of greater importance nowadays.

Within this group the association Alpe-Adria, which has existed for 12 years and covers 17 regions, is especially active. Common activities are organized by special commissions (e.g. of agriculture, tourism, economy, transport, environment, culture and health) operating at the local regional authorities. These meet regularly to coordinate projects.

The success of this cooperation of regions comes from, among others, strong ties stemming from their historical past, and common interests and political relations within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Republic of Venice. The cementing element of the Alpe Adria association is constituted also by its excellently developed transportation network between its main urban areas. In the economic st2ucture the facilitating element lies in small and medium companies which is the similar manufacturing base for all the regions. Besides, there are other significant examples of regional cooperation such as:

– Belgian Limburgy and Dutch Limburgy and Liège and Aix-la-Chapelle in the development programme for the Mosel and Rhein,

– the Basillensis association of regions (Basle, Alsace and Baden-Württemberg).

In the practice of the realization of interregional ties contributing significantly to the strengthening of regional cooperation on the international level R. Cappellin (1992) distinguishes at least a few important elements:

1) The initial condition for setting up international regional cooperation is the spatial continuity, which may lead to the development of common cultural values, such as mutual knowledge and trust.

2) Interregional ties can be strengthened and stimulated through the exchange of information. When the will to participate in the associations of regions is greater the greater the number of participating regions will be.

3) Establishing and adhering to common environmental resources can contribute to stronger contacts (e.g. frontier regions).

4) Interregional cooperation can focus on overcoming specific barriers or may utilize common factors and scale benefits with respect to some types of services, e.g. airports, international trade fairs, universities, servicing centres for local industries, etc.

5) The cooperation of regions may be necessary in order to regulate mutual competition between various regions or in order to avoid conflicts or retaliatory measures which may stem from negotiating and bargaining with international financial institutions over allocation of funds.

6) Interregional cooperation can also ease or reduce various economic costs and in this way stimulate future integration. This can be achieved by means of diffusing necessary information, removing any artificial barriers (e.g. administrative) set up by regional or national statutory regulations.

7) Regional cooperation can help to improve the political and economic bargaining position of regions involved in difficult, often conflicting, relations with the outside world. It can also facilitate the growth of autonomy of regions cooperating or one of them in relation to central authorities.

Examples mentioned earlier are some of the most effective in this area in Europe. Such cooperation fulfills many of the conditions for positive interregional ties presented here.

Openess to the outside world, associating between regions and cities on the basis of various types of agreements, very differentiated in nature and weight, have been carried out in various countries and cities of Europe and between various regions for many years. Many such activities have faded away despite their promising beginnings (e.g. the cooperation between Bizkaia province in Spain and Poznań voivodship in Poland), but many prosper on a smaller or greater scale (e.g. cooperation between Poznań voivodship and Bretagne region).

It can be assumed that many failures in regional cooperation at the international level result from at least some basic reasons:

1) Differences in the political system to which the cooperating regions are exposed. These lead to, among others things, differences in the competence of specific regional authorities, which allow one partner to undertake activities which the other partner cannot afford.

2) Excessive differences in the economic levels of cooperating regions. One consequence of this may be disequilibrium in both the readiness for cooperation in a number of areas and the possibilities of achieving this. Cooperation may be disturbed when one partner offers too much while the other accepts a lot while giving little in return. So, there may be differences in the equivalence of the cooperation offers.

3) Interregional cooperation must be founded not only on the readiness and good will of regional leaders but also on the concrete benefits which are to result from the cooperation. These must be clearly defined by the cooperating regional economies and based on solid foundations.

4) The lack of qualified managers in charge of cooperation, either in understanding the partner's nature or in the knowledge of regulations, law, the socio-cultural sphere, especially the partner's language by most cooperating parties.

5) Also, the geographical distance between the cooperating regions can be an attractive factor at the beginning of the contacts. In practice it often turns into a disadvantage.

6) Cooperation at a serious level can be hindered by infrastructural differences, such as telecommunications, roads, banking services, legal and administrative services, transportation access, etc.

7) Cooperation can be hindered further by the improper selection of the partner region. This may surface in the form of simple conflicts of interests resulting from different characters of the economies or economic structures of the cooperating regions (e.g. heavily industralized regions and agricultural regions, regions with dominant industries in advanced technologies and regions with dominant industries with outdated technologies, declining industries, etc.).

However, the outlined limitations in regional cooperation can appear on a greater scale in the contacts between regions belonging to the states of Western Europe and Central Europe, with significantly different geopolitical and economic conditions.

Interregional cooperation on the scale existing within the presented association of the "Motor Regions of Europe" requires not only highly advanced economic, but also cultural structures and factors in all member regions of the association. The effectiveness and dynamic character of regional cooperation stem from the unquestionable willingness of the partners to cooperate, based on geographical, economic and socio-cultural similarities but also an highly developed infrastructure allowing for the consistent realization of the cooperation. The political will to cooperate on the part of regional authorities is also an essential element here.

Undoubtedly, a higher level of integration between regions is manifested in the integration of internal and external ties of companies in cooperating regions, most of all in the sphere of innovations in manufacturing processes. In the present situation, when a number of new technological possibilities have appeared allowing for or facilitating integration, consequently the authorities of many regions have become very active in promoting their endogenic possibilities, encouraging their companies to enter into cooperative relations with companies of their own and other regions. It has become imperative to create the optimal conditions for "networking", that is to develop strategies based on the need for providing companies with new forms and degrees of integration and synergy.

External relations are formed with regions operating in a similar way. The important and seemingly justified aim of this process is to spread the financial burden of innovations and exploit more effectively the collective intelligence in solving problems, mainly in areas connected with research and further techno-

logical development. Naturally, not all regions are prepared for this, not all possess the proper infrastructure and intellectual capacity for such activity, where we are dealing with flows of advanced technologies, their adaptations and creative use by companies. The kind of connections of this "collective intelligence" has been realized in the Union by the association of 4 regions named "Motor Regions of Europe", i.e. Baden-Württemberg, Lombardy, Rhône-Alpes and Catalonia.

Skillful and sensible use of favourable circumstances, including the aformentioned factors can be one of the ways leading to a federation of regions, in which there would exist regional groups with specific connections influencing their accelerated development. The association "Motor Regions of Europe" is a very characteristic example of the EU's new political and economic visions.

Two significant processes deserve recognition regarding the distant situation of a federation of regions (Datar 1992):

– the process of economic and monetary integration closely related to the fact of emerging uniform market

– the advancing process of removing the differences in interregional development, necessary for the efficient operation of the common European market.

The concept of federating the regions of Europe, although still very distant, puts the regions in a different perspective, which could be termed the integrating force of regions.

2. Characteristics of the association "Motor Regions of Europe"

Vital political changes in Europe have taken place since 1989, as well as the changes in the European Community, for instance improvement in the democratic process, loosening of the superior and centralistic role of the member states, development of the administrative sphere and space management, etc. have made the 171 European Community regions (according to Las regiones en... 1991) one of the main elements and focusses of the internal policy of the EU.

The role of the regions in fostering the advance and prosperity of the Community had already been noted in 1985, when an organization named ARE (Assemblée des Regions d'Europe) was set up by the EEC. In time 160 regions of Europe joined in.

Later, in 1988 in Maastricht a special Committee of European Community Regions (RC), consisting of local and regional representatives, was established. The need for regional cooperation as one of the most effective ways to achieve economic advance of regions also served as the groundwork for the "Euro-regions", concerning itself, mainly the cooperation of frontier regions.

As an experiment to obtain faster results connected with the support for regional development the European Commission decided in 1990 to participate in funding the system of cooperation between regional and local communities of certain member countries. With regard to the programme of financial assistance

twelve specified kinds of ties were assumed, based on either a specific feature or on a specific common problem or readiness to solve a problem of interest to the majority. Five of these kinds of ties group cities, three – regions, and four jointly concern problems of cities and regions.

Of specific interest is the example of dynamic and very deep cooperation on a firm base is the association of four regions – the "Motor Regions of Europe" (Regions motrices d'Europe) to which: Baden-Württemberg, Lombardy, Rhône--Alpes and Catalonia belong. This association was formed in 1988 in Stuttgart, when representatives of the four listed regions signed a memorandum entitled "Quatre Moteurs pour l'Europe". The document stated that the purpose of creating the association was firstly to foster cooperation in various areas, based on very strong economically and legally grounds. A further important purpose is to highlight the best possible example of such cooperation, so that it could become a model for future interregional contacts in the Community.

It must be pointed out that these regions, concentrating on their significant potential infrastructure and population with characteristically high socio--economic factors (cf Table 1), are at the economic forefront of their countries. This is one of the most promising conditions for cooperation due to which the regions of Baden-Württemberg, Lombardy, Rhône-Alpes and Catalonia can be considered as those having as essential role in driving the advancement and dynamic development of many areas of Europe located along the axes presented in fig. 1.

The aim of the association "Motor Regions of Europe" is openness and deepening cooperation with other regions, which means the freedom of these regions to enter into other regional associations.

In the concept of "motors of Europe" the notion of "regions" has been used, although in actual fact there exist various criteria that define the discussed areas as regions. While not getting into the problem of numerous criteria according to which a given area can be recognized as a region and which could be subject to other considerations, it seems relevant to concisely present the analysed regions.

Baden-Württemberg – is a territory coresponding to the German term of "land" – federal state and is one of 12 "lands" (or Ländern) of the Federal Republic. The region acquired land status in 1952 on the grounds of the BRD constitution of 1949. Baden-Württemberg is a state whose boundaries are defined by historical and geographical criteria, but not cultural. Thus, it must be stressed that Baden-Württemberg is a political construction more than cultural. The region is divided into four administrative districts, and each of them sub-divided further into three parts containing city and village councils. German Ländern play a role in shaping the federal policy, especially economic, and in carrying it out. The states prepare and adopt development programmes independently of the central government; they can implement priorities different from the central ones in accordance to their own needs and the political configuration in the region (M. Konukiewitz 1986).

Catalonia – is a region which, according to the Spanish constitution of 1978, is inhabited by one nation and as such constitutes an autonomous country of the Spanish state. The autonomy statute was adopted in Spain in 1979. In contrast to Baden-Württemberg Catalonia is an area clearly defined area nationality, language, history and culture. In this respect it is a region with the most clearcut image among the members of the association under discussion. As is the case with Baden-Württemberg Catalonia has considerable autonomy and freedom in economic decisions. It is devided into five provinces and 41 districts within which there are 942 councils.

Lombardy – The spatial definition of this region was determined by pragmatic administrative decisions. Their main purpose was to decentralize the powers of the Italian state and to dynamize the development of southern Italy. It was not distinguished by any specific ethnic, linguistic or cultural characteristics. Lombardy obtained its autonomy as a regional district in 1970 on the basis of the Italian constitution of 1948. Lombardy is a region well determined in administrative terms with a strong tradition and historical base. It is divided into 11 provinces and 1546 districts.

Rhône-Alpes – This is a region whose borders were established within the territorial division of France of 1960 and are based exclusively on the technical criteria. The region was formed primarily in order to deconcentrate the economic development of the region L'Ile-de-France. The organization and functioning procedures of the Rhône-Alpes area were determined in 1982 and 1986, although this has not been reflected in the French constitution. The region contains 8 departments, which are divided into 25 districts, 331 cantons and 2879 councils.

It should be noted that the extent of political and economic autonomy of these four regions is greatest in Baden-Württemberg and Catalonia, then in Lombardy and finally in the region of Rhône-Alpes. The cultural factor was the most relevant in the formation process of the Catalonian autonomy.

Three main motives created the grounds for the agreement between the regions under analysis:

1) similarities of an historical nature reflected in some intraregional tradition of mutual contacts,

2) similarities in their economic nature,

3) similarities in the dynamics of economic development.

The programme of cooperation involves three main areas:

– technical infrastructure, most of all transport and telecomunications,

– extended joint activities in the research and development of new technologies,

– culture and art and close contacts between universities.

It is important for the efficiency of the associated regions that joint offices be set up abroad. These represent the regions as a whole serving to promote their development and advertise their achievements, attract investors and facilitate contacts with other regions, etc.

In the association of the four "Motor Regions of Europe" the cooperating regions place most emphasis on the sphere of scientific research and development, i.e. the area that already shows and will continue to show the greatest and most permanent economic effects. It will at the same time strengthen the association through scientific achievements and advanced forms of cooperation.

In this area the model of adopted contacts and activities comes largely from Baden-Württemberg, which is a leading region among its partners and also occupies one of the leading positions in scientific research in Germany[2].

Out of the most important principles and forms of contact reinforcing activities that were adopted and implemented in the discussed regions we can list some successfully tested earlier in the region of Baden-Württemberg (K. Morgan 1992):

1) The regional authorities became more active in the pro-development activities trying to manage, to a degree much greater than before, their own resources in a new way. Particular attention was paid to the problem of separating costs and organizational problems connected with the process of innovation. According to Morgan K. (1991) companies in highly developed regions were faced with the necessity of shortening the life cycle of the product. This puts enormous pressure on enterprises to secure returns of regarding their expenses and to be effective in the sphere of research and development (R&D). This fact leads to more frequent integrated action and ties of innovation within and between companies, with the significant participation of regional authorities. This phenomenon has already extended beyond the local to the interregional and international level.

2) Effecting broader and numerous connections in collective intelligence by facilitating the formation of economically and politically strong unions at various levels in the private and public sectors.

3) Expanding and supporting the mechanism of technology transfer between the associated regions of importance here are technologies complementary in nature, allowing for the improvement in production or research in the partner's region, which in turn enables partners to cooperate in relation to third parties.

An important role in implementing innovationary ties is played by the programme STRIDE (Science and Technology for Regional Innovation and Development in Europe), set up by the European Community in 1990. The regions under analysis also participate, as leaders in the area of modern technologies. STRIDE was set up mainly in order to raise the standard of and create opportunities for development in research and applications of new

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[2] In 1985 from the Federal budget for research and development Baden-Württemberg obtained 18.3% placing the region in the third position behind Bavaria (21.4%) and Rhineland-Westphalia (19.9%). Similarly in the structure of their expenditure Baden-Württemberg assigned 18.2% of their budget to research and development, surpassed only by Rhineland-Westphalia (24.6%) (**P. Beckouche** 1991).

technologies and also to open channels for their transfer. This occurs mainly in the weaker regions, where the level of technological solutions is frecuently low or does not exist at all (e.g. some regions of Greece: Tessalia, Macedonia, Voreio Aigaio, Crète, or Portugal: Algarve, Norte).

4) Model examples of horizontal and vertical cooperation between regional companies are imitated in interregional cooperation. In the former case this cooperation is concerned with financial support for research and marketing and personnel training is a specific area. The latter may be include developing cooperation network between buyers and suppliers. In Baden-Württemberg there exist a tripartite (mutually interconnected) cooperation model between the state/regional government, industry and science, concentrated on the speedy application of innovations in production.

5) Engaging in interregional cooperation the great prestigious institutes and organizations specializing in the technology transfer, e.g. in Baden-Württemberg such institutions include the Steinbeis Stiftung, Chambers of Industry and Commerce, technology consulting firms Fraunhofer Gesellschaft and the world-known Max Planck Institute of Basic Research.

Beside the sphere of innovative processes and technology transfer there are also other areas in which the discussed regions cooperate for example:

– exchange of information between regional authorities in the areas concerning policies towards specific sectors of the economy, scientific research between universities, joint courses and training for the public sector or private enterprise clerks,

– joint funding for various undertakings in the area of telecommunications, transport, as well as giving advice on the problems of reconstructing the centres of big cities etc.

– cooperation in the area of joint representation in the institutions of the European Community, e.g. in the area of regional subsidies and coordinating various undertakings to this effect within particular regions.

– joint activities for regulating mutual competition between various regional institutions and harmonizing their operations.

3. The "Motor Regions of Europe" on the background of the main axes of the development of European space

Before briefly presenting the basic economic elements which play an important role in the effectiveness of cooperation between the analysed regions attention should be drawn to the spatial factors that led to their particularly favourable and promising situation.

In the case of Baden-Württemberg and Lombardy, and to some extent Rhône-Alpes, the influence of the location of these regions on the European map on their economic level and influence on the formation of present and future directions of the civilisational development of Europe is very complex yet clear.

Analysis of the geographical location of Baden-Württemberg, Lombardy, Rhône-Alpes and Catalonia reveals specific characteristics conducive to the economic domination of these regions when compared to other areas of the European Union (fig. 1). Factors facilitating development include: population, rich historical cultural past, many years of developing and improving the infrastructure, good geographical and climatic conditions and stability of social and national structure. However, "Motor Regions of Europe" possess one unquestionable spatial advantage – their central location in the past and favourable conditions for their growth at present (Masser J. et al 1992).

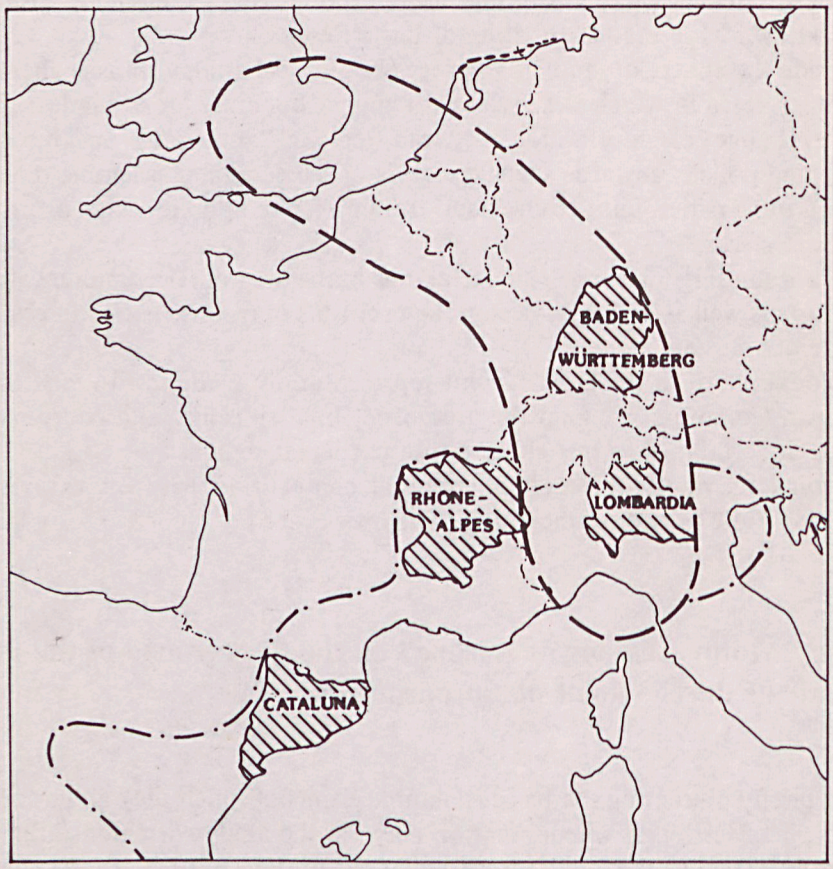


Fig. 1. Four "Motor Regions of Europe" and Europe's major development areas

The fact that their geographical location as advantageous to the development of these regions is well ilustrated in the form of curves clearly encompassing the description of the axis of most intensive development within the European Union (fig. 2).

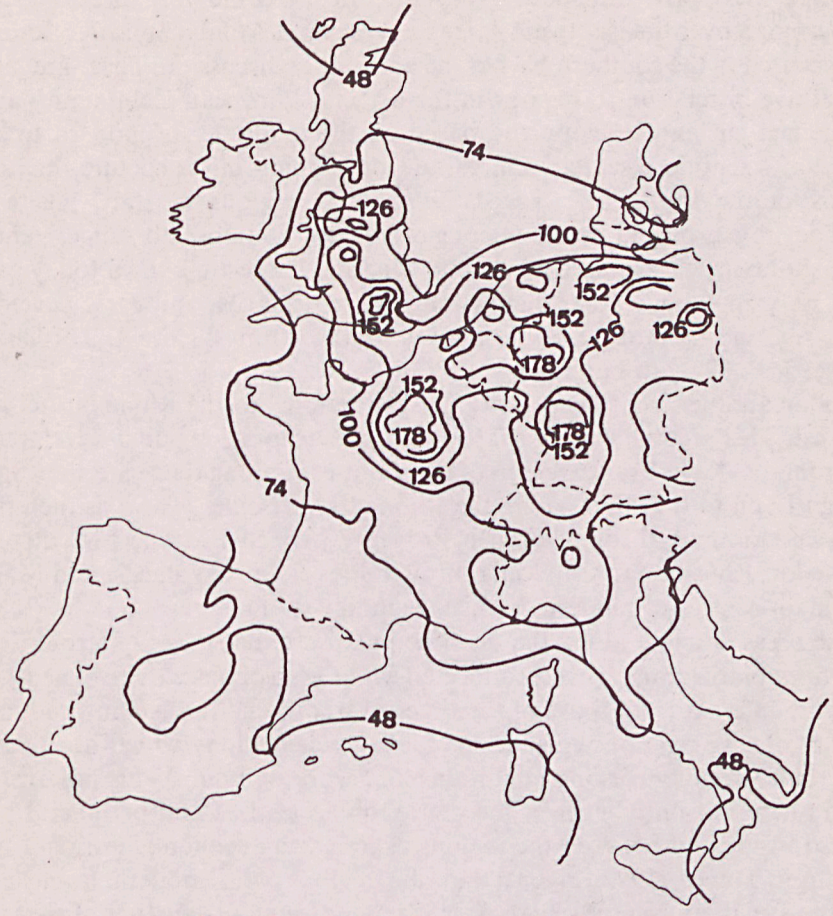


Fig. 2. Centrality index cotours in Europe
Source: J. Masser and others (1992) after J. Keeble (1986)

The regions of Baden-Württemberg and Lombardy are situated within reach of the main west European axis of economic development, based on the Rhine. This area runs from South East England across the English Channel, encompassing the regions spatially attached to the Rhine, including Belgium, Holland and Baden-Württemberg. The south part of the region referred to as the "Blue Banana" on account of its shape (Reclus 1992, Masser J. 1992) contains Switzerland and beyond the Alps covers a great area of highly industrialized northern Italy, with Piemont and Lombardy, and also partially the areas

connected to the Ligurian Coast (fig. 2). London, the largest metropolis in Europe, is located within the sphere of influence of the "Blue Banana". Many other metropolitan centres with important domestic and international functions are also convered such as Brussels, the Randstadt city area in Holland, Cologne, Frankfurt am Main, Stuttgart, Strasbourg, Basel, Zurich, Torino, Milan and Genoa. Furthermore, over the last twenty years new examples of dynamic development have occured in the southern part of the area under discussion. These are highly competitive in relation to regions in the original European Community area.

The fast current development, based on the industries of modern technologies, on scientific research centres and developing infrastructure, has been marked in the south-east towards the central regions of Italy, where the dominant role is played by the regions of Veneto, Tretino-Alto Adige, Venezia, Emilia Romana, Toscania, Umbria and Marche. These are known today as the Third Italy enabling a clear distinction between the rich and early developed Lombardy and Piemont and the poorer south of Italy (Scott A. J. 1988 and Houssel J. P. 1991) to be drawn[3].

Today another axis can be distinguished parallel to the Rhine but more to the West. This second, clearly shaped axis of European regional development runs from the Ile-de-France region to the south-east, along the Seine, then Saône through Lyon to the south along the Rhône to Marseilles. The axis then turns south-west running through French Provence (Aix en Provence, Montpelier), Languedoc, Rousillon to Catalonia through Barcelona to Valencia and Madrid – the main centres of modern Spanish economy (of fig. 3).

The areas situated along the described axes are the spaces of strong social and work polarizations. This is connected with the emergence there of new work relations, different from those of the times of traditional fordism in production relations. These relations include new job specializations which are pushing others out, variable working conditions and working hours. This polarization appears here not only between the metropolitan centres and peripheral areas but also inside and between the regions experiencing economic growth.

Margit Mayer (1992) claims that the regions with modern branches of industry, usually registering high growth rates, a high proportion of part time jobs or significant proportion of temporary employment and large-scale participation of information economy, create highly polarized social structures. The phenomena of polarization become marked in the conditions of spatial diversity of the economy at the urban as well as regional level. The areas located along the described axes are developing in such conditions.

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[3] 25.9% of industrial employment in the period of 1961 - 1971 in the regions of Third Italy as compared with the whole of Italy it was only 11.8%. Also the fact that 37.3% of workers employed in Italian industry at the beginning of the Eighties came from the above mentioned regions of the Third Italy proves the high degree of industrialization and role of the sector in the economy of the area (A. J. Scott 1988).

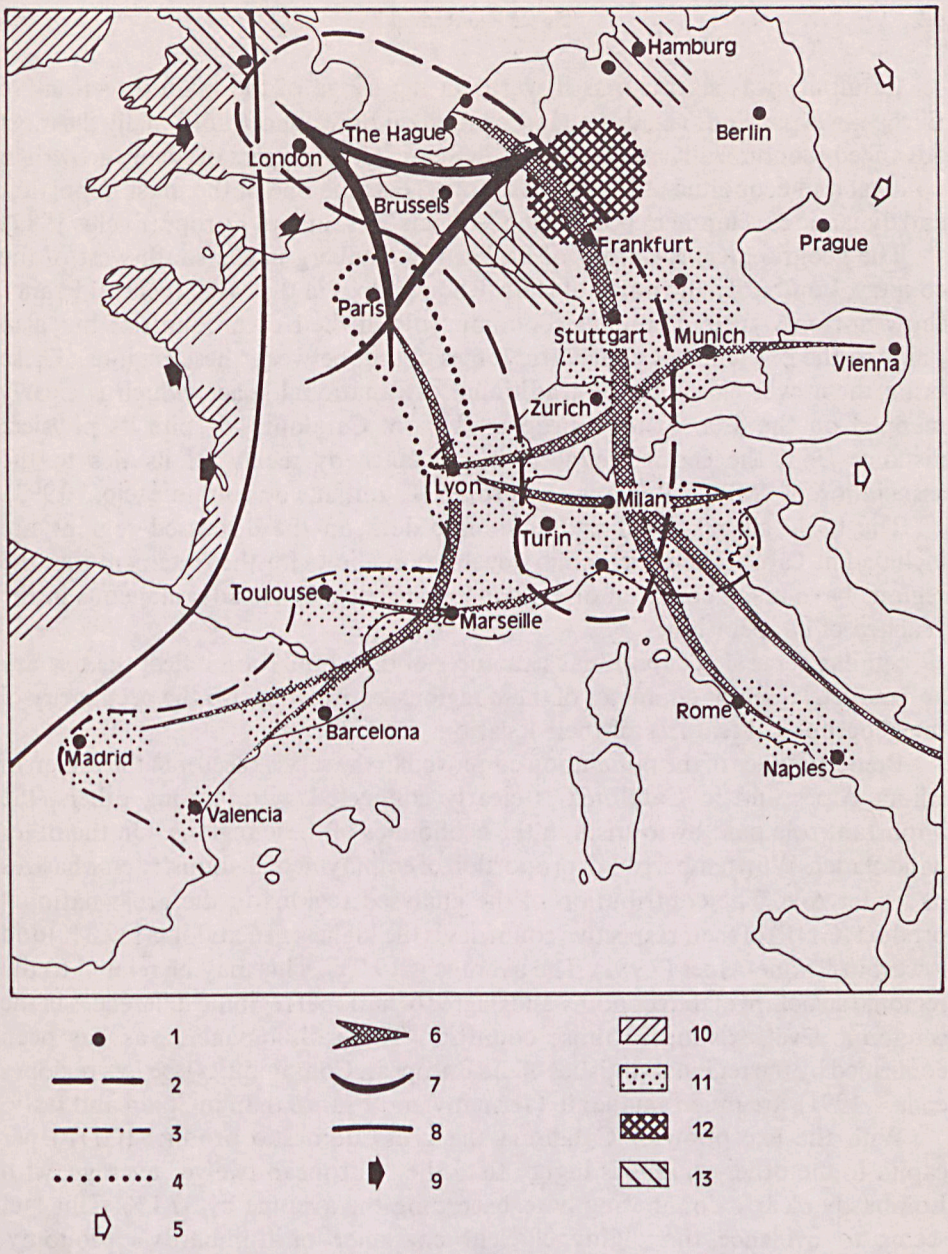


Fig. 3. Europe's major axis

1 – Europe's major cities; 2 – major Europe's vital axis; 3 and 4 – new European development axis; 5 – links with the East; 6 – major axes of the future; 7 – coherence of the English Channel/North Sea area; 8 – Atlantic arc; 9 – Atlantic gateways; 10 – finisteres; 11 – areas of development with net migration gains and new activities; 12 – areas of development and reconversion at Europe's centre of gravity; 13 – stagnant or declining areas where reconversion is difficult

Source: After DATAR (1992) and M. Dunford, G. Kafkalas (1992)

Catalonia was situated, as it were, on the fringe of the main directions of European expansion. Yet, this region, centred on Barcelona, traditionally the most advanced economically and culturally in Spain, after 15 years of steady growth in political and economic autonomy has today become one of the most important and dynamic development poles of the "sunbelt" of southern Europe (Reclus 1989).

The geographical locations of Baden-Württenberg in the south-west of the country, Lombardy-the north of Italy, Rhône-Alpes in the east of central France show not only their dominant economic role in their own countries but also point to the existence of concentric forces acting between these regions. These bring them ever closer to the traditional extranational space, which is clearly mapped on the area of the European Union. Catalonia, despite its physical distance from the centre, reduces this distance by means of its ties to the association of "Motor Regions of Europe" (El mitjans de comunicacio... 1993).

The basic geographical and economic data on the discussed regions are included in Table. Their preliminary evaluation allows for the statement that the regions have many common or similar features, which are advantageous in the practice of cooperation.

Similar general occupational structures of the population reflect the tertiary and industrial sector character of these regions, expressing also the peculiarity of the geographical features of their location.

Predominance of the population employed in the service sector in the region of Rhône-Alpes and in Catalonia is clearly connected with, among others, the important role paid by tourism in the economies of these regions. On the other hand Baden-Württemberg high proportion of employment in industry emphasizes its leader role. The contribution of the analysed regions to the gross national product (GNP) of their respective countries is the highest in Catalonia (29.3%) and lowest in Rhône-Alpes (9.9%). The average is 19.0%. This may be related to the regional structure of the economy and degree of national regional differences in the economic level existing in those countries. These discrepancies, as has been confirmed by the regional statistics of the European Communities (see Las regiones en la... 1991), are much smaller in Germany and France than in Spain and Italy.

With the exception of Catalonia the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the other regions is higher than the "European twelve" average, with Lombardy clearly dominating here, exceeding the average by 37.1%. This fact seems to evidence the highly efficient character of Lombardy's economy, positioning the region at the top of the European leage table.

The "Motor Regions of Europe", discussed in this paper, can be included in the type "innovative regions", i.e. regions where changes of a regional and then international character are initiated, changes which have global repercussions[4].

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[4] Antoni Kukliński (1993) is one of authors writing about three types of European regions in the light of the theory of creation and diffusion of innovations, distinguishing innovative, adaptative and stagnating regions.

Principal socio-economic data concerning "Motor Regions of Europe"

Regions	Surface sq km	% of the country's surface	Population in mln (1990)	% of the country's population (1990)	Population density hab/sq/km (1990)	% of active population (1990)	Labour force structure by sectors in % (1990)			Unemployment in % (1990)	% of the country's PIB (1987)	PIB per hab average EC= 14.693 EU (12EU =100) in % (1987)	Participation of main sectors in the production of the region in %			Participation in the country's foreign trade in % (1990)	
							agriculture	industry	services				agriculture	industry	services	export	import
Baden-Würtemberg Germany	35 751	10	9 433 000 (1989)	10.6	264	47.1	3.2	47.2	49.6	4.1	16.9	119.9	1.2	46.9	51.9	17.5	13.5
Catalonia Spain	32 000	6.4	5 995 638	15.8	187	42.4	5.0	40.0	55.0	12.0	29.3	84.2	3.1	39.0	57.9	22.6	32.6
Lombardy Italy	23 860	8.0	8 911 895	15.5	373	41.4	3.4	43.6	53.0	4.9	21.3	137.1	1.9	41.0	57.1	31.0	37.0
Rhône-Alpes France	43 700	7.9	5 240 000	9.3	122	45.7	4.6	34.7	60.7	7.4	9.2	109.0	2.5	37.1	60.4	10.5	8.5

Source: Portrait des Regions-EUROSTAT 1989, 90, CEE Luxemburg El mitjans de... 1993.

It can be assumed that it was this innovative character of the described regions that permitted defining them as "motors" driving progress. To a smaller extent on the international scale it applies to Catalonia, which may be characterized as an adaptative type of region, one in which the appropriate intellectual and infrastructural environment is created for adopting innovations. As a result, local economic structures are transformed and further creative diffusion takes place in the form of new national or international associations and ties.

4. Conclusions

It seems that at least two aspects of the processes directed at loosening the ties of the region with the centre and intensified tendencies of the regions to enter unions or interregional associations both at the national and international level require special attention.

Firstly, the regional cooperation concerned with contacts and economic and innovative ties, chiefly in the sphere of high technology, is of particular relevance, as it introduces into these relations a very important element of permanence and dynamic character of contacts. This character consists of a clear economically effective translation of economic ties between regions into the synergic phenomena, which, in favourable economic, social and political situations, lead to spatial dynamization of the effects of these ties and to cooperation surpassing its original spatial limitations connected with earlier agreements.

Secondly, there is a need to look upon regional cooperation as a creative element in the spatial economy, as a factor which creates favourable conditions for the development of the areas in the situation of growing competition and increasingly equal quality of this competition, especially among the industrialized regions. Many authors consider the high level of development of the regions and cities to be at present the most important plane for the diffusion of progress and innovation and prosperity leading to present and future economic growth in Europe.

In the global approach to the regional cooperation the new problem of the need for European regional strategic planning has appeared. In this planning, as one can suppose, an enormous role will be played by regions associated in groups, regions with a strongly innovative and adaptative character, as motors of development.

The example of "Motor Regions of Europe", discussed in the article, is perhaps not ideal and certainly not the only one, although it has every chance to become a model example of such association in Western Europe, deserving broader interest and closer analysis.

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SUMMARY

The continuing advances in the economic and political integration of European Community member nations, combined with the increasing decentralization of power has over the last few years opened up a number of ever – more attractive opportunities for cooperation between provinces and smaller administrative areas, both nationally and internationally. A number of associations between regions and municipalities have thus been established through bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements.

Throughout Europe, interregional cooperation has gained recognition as a crucial factor in the economic and cultural development of regions and as means of reducing differences between the regions of the European Community.

At least three considerations point to the significance of interregional cooperations:

– the atmosphere of stability which is created in interregional relations provided the cooperation is based on partnership and equality,

– the dynamic (in both its qualitative and quantitative aspects) character of interregional cooperation,

– interregional cooperation helps stimulate the economic and cultural structures of the regions involved. Thus, it may and often does unleash creativity in the field of spacial development.

The paper examines some of the problems encountered in interregional relations. It describes criteria essential in establishing mutual relations by regional administration, and factors contributing to difficulties and failures to such cooperation.

In presenting several examples of interregional cooperation in Europe, the author focuses on the Association "Motor Regions of Europe" established in 1988, one of the strongest interregional bonds ever to have been formed in Western Europe.

The member regions of this Association include: Lombardy (Italy), Baden-Württemberg (Germany), Rhône-Alpes (France) and Catalonia (Spain).

In their role as leaders of their respective countries in the areas of economic and technological progress and the overall advancement of civilization, the formentioned regions play an essential role as driving forces behind the southward and southwest expansion for Europe.