

GOOD PLANS MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS

COOPERATION IN PLANNING BORDER REGIONS

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*In Israel, we look with admiration at the ability of Europe to overcome the problems of the past and to establish cross-border collaboration. This study examined whether these processes could exist between Israel and its neighbors. Can we learn from the European experience of past decades and with its help learn how to create successful collaborations? Is it possible to plan today so that in the future we will enjoy cross-border collaboration? Will ‘**optimistic planning**’ facilitate future collaboration?*

Key words: *Border areas, Cross border collaboration, Bordering, Bridging borders, Optimistic planning.*

Methodological base of the research

Since this is a cross-disciplinary study, two taxonomies were used: Environmental Planning and Political Geography. The research provides an integrative review of the various topics, while taking into account each of the fields of knowledge of geography.

This research is based on case studies of planning and development collaboration since the end of World War II on the European continent. The cases were chosen because of the diversity of the geographic regions, types of borders, and the progress of cooperation.

The examination of Israel’s planning was carried out through outline plans and national master plans of border zones, examining both written intents and blueprints. Planners express their conceptions of collaboration in the planning of border areas.

Research subject

Border regions have always been a part of countries. Many of these regions, which for the most part have experienced considerable suffering, bloodshed, and neglect, have become in recent years areas in which there are processes of development and cooperation between the neighboring countries.

In other places, open borders are becoming closed and subject to inspection: This has happened since September 2001 along the borders of the United States of America, and it has become more intensive in the last two years at the "edges" of the EU as well as between the members themselves. The same thing has been happening in the region surrounding Israel. Borders around the world have changed their character dramatically in the last decade.

Cross-border collaborations were intended to promote the resolution of regional conflicts, to promote regional development through thoughtful planning, and to ease regional troubles: human, ecological, economic. Cooperation in border regions can have an impact on many of them: land use, settlement, economic activity, transportation, ecological systems, and so on. During the second half of the 20th century and even more so in the 21st century, the number of cases in which such cooperation has been planned and implemented is increasing.

Terms that express the uniqueness of the border regions, such as frontier zone or borderland, have become accepted in the scientific literature. Recently the term '**bordering**' was employed to clarify the geopolitical meaning of regional development and the European Union's policy of cross-border cooperation. A recently published study defines cross-border cooperation as '**bridging borders**', thus expressing the 'new spirit' in the research of bordersⁱ.

Objective

The main goal of this study is to learn from existing processes of cross-border cooperation in Europe in the planning and development of border regions. The conclusions it draws from these processes may propose possibilities for cross-border collaboration in the planning and development of Israel's border regions.

This research examines feasibility of cooperation in the planning and development of border regions, both open borders that were closed in the past, and closed borders that might (hopefully) be opened in the future.

Presentation of key findings

The study proves that the solving of shared problems is a catalyst for cross-border collaboration. Planning based on problem solving is the 'engine' that motivates it.

Environmental / ecological problems are cross-border by nature and necessitate collaborative solutions, including transport solutions that facilitate economic development and increase the standard of living in the border regions. The development of cross-border transport would make it possible to locate and make use of relative advantages on both sides of the border, leading to the implementation of environmental plans. This study presents different models of shared planning aimed at this goal.

The 'Green document' issued by the European Union 2008 determined that there is a need for '*harmonious development*' based on an integrative approach and cooperation, and therefore enhanced cross-border governance is needed. In this spirit, insights were collected from a variety of cross-border collaborations in Europe, as elaborated in this research study. The starting point is to realize that the goal of environmental planning is to facilitate and even accelerate an optimistic view of cross-border collaboration.

Cross-border collaborations do not come 'naturally' but require initiative and desire. The cases studied illustrate the difficulties that arise, deriving from the many differences between the populations on each side of the border, their institutions, and their budgetary and technological constraints. In all the cases discussed, it was proved that the local solutions led the collaborations, as did a degree of optimism and the belief that collaboration in the planning and development of border regions is essential and benefits all the partners in a 'win-win situation'.

Economic interests bypassed or reduced the prejudices resulting from past history and made possible a deeper relationship and shared development. Planning was motivated by the economic potential of development and thus made it possible to reduce tensions between the countries. We can further learn from the European experience

that bottom-up systems that include research institutions, universities, economic organizations, and NGOs, rather than top-down systems, lead these collaborations.

Another thing that can be learned from the European experience is the need to demonstrate the necessity of these collaborations, first as a possibility of accumulating capital in the global era, and as an opportunity for regional politics free from the major decision makers. There is a reduction of the sovereignty of the state, and the growth of local government systems based on cross-border collaborations. A significant insight is that effort must be exerted to find a homogenous expression of the border region, although in actuality the border still exists. In the research we learned that it is necessary to accept that non-realization of expectations does not always mean a failure to bridge the border regions. Sometimes we must take a step back and set more modest and proportional goals that pertain to the everyday life of the residents of the region.

These insights from the European cases led me to examine the planning of a number of different regions along Israel borders. My study found that the different planning systems in Israel, ranging from the local level to governmental planning organizations, frequently think optimistically: they set collaborative objectives and declare they are planning for when peace comes. Sometimes this optimistic spirit reaches the local level and there are plans that leave “*an empty space for future planning when the border will be open*”ⁱⁱ. Other plans remain optimistic only at the level of goals, but in the field there are no apparent indications of collaboration. The European experience teaches that local factors are what motivates collaboration, not necessarily overall regional plans. Indications of such local initiatives can be seen at a number of points along the borders of Israel. The most famous is the Good Fence – the gate at the Israel-Lebanon border located in the northern town of Metullah, which for some twenty years permitted the passage of workers and merchandise but today stands closed. The Outline Plan of Metullah reveals optimism as regards the day when the gate will be again openedⁱⁱⁱ:

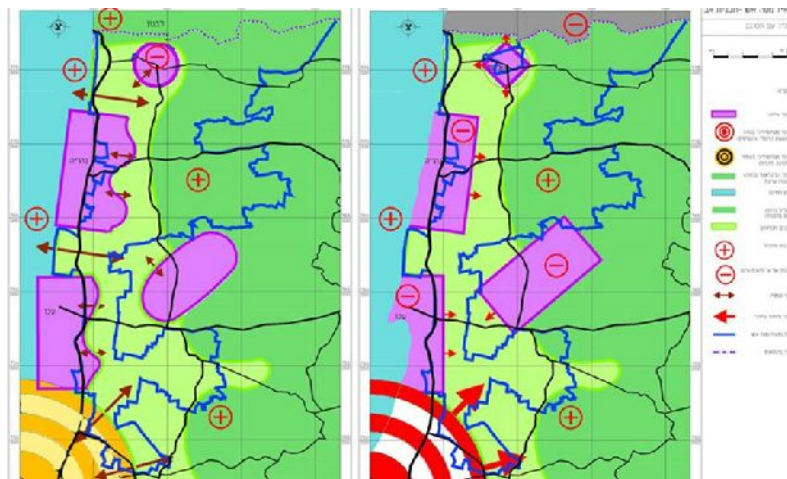
“Allocation of areas to the border crossing adjacent to the Egel gate, which will be operated in a time of peace and will include mixed uses – commerce, road services, public institutions, tourism, and so on, and the supply of a

transportation solution for convenient and direct access to those coming from the Egel gate ... and to contribute to the development of Metullah as a community for tourism and leisure and to enable growth and prosperity in a time of peace."

Sometimes, local planners are precisely those with vision. They see planning as a tool that will lead to future cooperation in an era of peace. This is evidenced in the planning of the northwestern border area of Israel with Lebanon at the 'Maté Asher' Regional Council. A master plan was prepared by the Council in 1997. The planner of the program, Doron Rohatyn, from Ya'ad Architects and Planners, described it as the transition from a situation of 'primarily threats' to a situation of 'primarily opportunities'. Council members expressed a sense of threat, which included the threat from the adjacent authorities as well as the threat from the northern border with Lebanon.

Figure No. 1:

"Threats versus Opportunities" 'Maté Asher' Regional Council, West Galilee



The definition of the planned space is described in its international context as follows:

"The planning region touches the northern border of the State of Israel and therefore the planning team believes the international

reference to the region to be important. The assumption is that the expected peace will make international development possible, and thus the location of the region will become a relative advantage that can be utilized. The reference to the international author [unclear] will define the role of the region in its system and will recommend projects for international cooperation."

Similar findings were expressed by the 'Eshkol' Regional Council, which borders on Egypt and the Gaza Strip, in its master plan, which expresses a desire for peace with the vision of a joint maternity hospital. There is no continuity of expression in the statutory outline plan^{iv}. A private investment site includes the following^v:

"It should be remembered that this region sits at the mouth of Sinai, the Kerem Shalom crossing - the border crossing with Egypt, and we can assume that one day peace will come (with God's help). When the day comes, and we believe it is not far away, this area will not be an endpoint, but the axis of strategic and international motion, for the future welfare of the residents of the region. Indeed, long-term investment (but not too long), is a very reasonable investment..."

This study shows that, first and foremost, we must learn from the European experience that getting to know one another and holding face-to-face meetings among the residents of the border region are the key to creating trust, eliminating prejudices, and forming a stable basis for cross-border collaborations. Israel's experience at the Metullah border crossing proved this for a long period of time.

Transportation planning has motivated cross-border collaborations in Europe since the end of World War II. Twenty two years ago (in 1994) the Israel Ministry of Transport decided to adopt cross-border planning^{vi}. The head of the Ports and Railways Authority proposed initial plans for a railway that would connect Israel with Syria and Jordan. Today a railway is being laid along the lines of the historical Jezreel Valley railway to Haifa's port, which until the 1940's, ran from Iraq and Syria to Haifa. The same applies to the planning of a road that would continue north from the western border crossing planned between Israel and Lebanon.

Conclusions

This study proposes an optimistic look at planning tools as a means of achieving future cross-border cooperation. My research shows that it is possible to learn from the European experience that the goodwill and good intentions that begin with the process of building trust, building shared goals and agendas, and local cross-border interests, can lead in the not too distant future to collaboration on different levels – local, regional, and even on a larger scale. The European influence is evident in the tourism plan of a cross-border point at Gilboa – at the northern part of the border^{vii} between the Jezreel valley and the Palestinian authority in Samaria, a plan that includes a cross-border "European fair," although today no such thing exists.

This study teaches that even border regions that differ from one another in their standard of living, allocation of resources, levels of management, and so on, have local interests that lead to collaboration, despite obstacles such as governmental bureaucracy. These are some of the difficulties that today affect collaborations on the border of Israel and Jordan. I have presented cases where 'cross-border' thinking influenced planning, even when the border was closed and no treaties exist between the countries, let alone peace treaties. In the literature such planning is known as 'optimistic *planning*'; since it sees a future of open borders and understands *the importance of planning today for fulfillment in the future. The 'optimistic' planning proposed by this study can lay the foundation for cross-border collaborations in the future.*

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^{iv} Outline plan of 'Mate Asher' regional council, West Galilee.

^v <http://www.hevelshalom.co.il>

^{vi} Israel roads Plan program: National Outline Plan for the Absorption of Immigration – TAMA 31, Appendix 31 A – Roads (May 2000) and National Outline Plan for the Roads – TAMA 3, including change 11 D – North District (May 2007).

^{vii} This border is known as the 'Green Line' that was the former border between Israel and Jordan until 1967.