

## **Eutropolis: shifting borders? From nation-state to regional identity**

### *The Past: the establishment of borders*

Nothing exemplifies cross-border complexities more than public transport. The journey time from Herzogenrath, located in the German part of the Euregion Meuse-Rhine – hereafter called Eutropolis – to Maastricht, located in the Dutch part of it, takes one hour and fifty minutes for a mere 40-kilometre journey. You have to take a train, a bus, another train and again another bus. And yet, there is no rational reason whatsoever why cross-border bus and rail services cannot be coordinated. No national nor European law is interfering or complicating the cooperation; it's a man-made irrationality.

The same counts for another undisputed artificial reality: the political boundaries of Europe and its nation-states. The origins of the present-day borders can be traced back to the Congress of Vienna of 1815. All European heads of state and diplomats had gathered in Vienna: the map of Europe needed to be re-drawn. Napoleon had suffered his final defeat at Waterloo, the French Revolution signalled the abolition of feudalism, and the age of industrialization was upon us. The Congress of Vienna attracted heads of state, aristocrats and diplomats from Austria, France, Russia, Poland, England, Belgium, Saxony, Württemberg, Hannover, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Switzerland, Bavaria, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Spain and Portugal. The primary goal was to redefine national, sovereign borders and to restore governments to power within the traditional privileged classes of society. Differences in traditions, culture, values and beliefs were subordinated, as were similarities and differences between languages or religions. In a modern-day 'managerial' style, the map of Europe was drastically altered. In principle, each new territory should accommodate enough subjects to generate sufficient tax revenue for the state: the citizen as a financial resource for the state. The main goal was to devise a viable solution, which offered sufficient scope for survival within the new pan-European political order. Consequently, various regions and countries were re-arranged in a rather arbitrary fashion to achieve that goal.

Of course, the map of Europe was redrawn time and time again since then. Germany was created, along with Poland, Italy, and many more during the nineteenth century. The United Kingdom of the Netherlands collapsed in 1830 when the southern Netherlands seceded from the Kingdom to form the independent state of Belgium. This created a new border, establishing the provinces of Belgian and Dutch Limburg. In an effort to overcome internal territorial splits, the newly established states looked for ways to foster a sense of unity within their own territories. That solution lay in the notion of the 'nation state': a reference to a shared culture, history, language and traditions of populations living within its territory. Hence the creation of 'the Belgian', 'the German' and 'the Dutchman'. As well as national and geo-political division, there were now also cultural divisions. States became 'nation states', nationalism reigned supreme, and 'national identities' were invented to instil a belief in the superiority of one's language and culture over others. As we know, the rise of 'nationalism' in Europe resulted in a series of wars, death and destruction. The history of modern 'nationalist' Europe is characterized by mustard gas, Zyklon B and ethnic cleansing. The battlefields of the First World War left 9 million dead, while the estimated death toll in the Second World War is 45 to 50 million. In Eutropolis, from the nineteenth Century onwards, all eyes were turned towards the national powerhouses; all backs were turned on each other.

### *Hard and soft boundaries*

The borders of Eutropolis appear firmly established. Different governments, different identities, different cultures, different languages and dialects and different public transport systems. The borders have a physical presence. One need only look at the houses on the left and right of the Nieuwstraat (the Netherlands) or Neustrasse (Germany) in Kerkrade, or the Diependaalweg (the Netherlands) or Diependaelweg (Belgium) in Maastricht: different construction styles, according to national traditions and construction techniques. Walking along the Dutch-German border at

Kerkrade, one is struck by the almost complete absence of spontaneous paths, as one so often encounters along grassy fields surrounding high-rise buildings - evidence of human interaction, and the desire to find the shortest route to physical contact.

*Development of population in Eutropolis*

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2007	2010	2015	2020
Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens	67,007	68,961	70,831	72,512	73,675	75,831	79,439	82,274
Province de Liège (sans DG Belgiens)	931,206	946,046	948,611	961,512	973,739	983,634	998,094	1,014,295
Provincie Limburg (B)	745,034	771,613	791,178	809,942	820,272	826,401	836,470	843,989
Provincie Limburg (NL)	622,704	634,450	635,801	623,929	614,842	606,876	590,563	571,829
Region of Aachen	1,151,127	1,220,463	1,252,029	1,291,055	1,290,253	1,288,095	1,284,979	1,283,931
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,517,078</b>	<b>3,641,533</b>	<b>3,698,450</b>	<b>3,758,950</b>	<b>3,772,781</b>	<b>3,780,837</b>	<b>3,789,545</b>	<b>3,796,318</b>

Even demographically, the population groups in Eutropolis underwent different stages of transition: the political border of the Dutch section also marks the point of demographic shrinkage. Whereas populations in the German and Belgian part of Eutropolis continue to grow, the population in the Dutch cross-border region is in decline. There are indeed borders and limits, as sociologist Coby van Beek postulated in her 1990s study into the Euregion Meuse-Rhine.

*The future: old borders are destined to disappear*

Nation states are seeing their power and authority wane under the dual pressures of globalization and localization. Politically and economically, they are gradually being overtaken by supranational bodies (European Union, World Bank). At the other end of the spectrum, they are being superseded by a new, heightened sense of regional awareness and identity. The Europe of 27 member states is gradually turning into a Europe of the Regions. The old borders are disappearing. New borders are emerging, which will differ radically from the old demarcations. Physical borders and territories are destined to be replaced by real-life and virtual networks of human-to-human interactions. The walled city is turning into the 'network city' or 'network region'.

The future of Eutropolis is premised on two dimensions. The first is the manner in which society is constructed, and its corresponding identity. The second is the type of citizen that fits into this society. In general, we can identify three types of regions, in which societies can be constructed and from which a sense of identity and (self)awareness can be derived: the ethno-region, the modern region and the civil region. Ethno-regions are characterized by a desire to identify with the past, to draw clear distinctions between 'us' and 'them', and to obtain greater political autonomy based on cultural heritage – resulting in the notion of 'no nation without a state'. History, traditions, myths, language and dialect, often encapsulated in the term 'own culture', are the key ingredients to forming a regional identity, where the past shapes and gives explicit meaning to our everyday thoughts, feelings and actions.

In the modern region, reality is a future-inspired project, in which the past and the present are placed squarely in the service of that new reality. It is a quest for meaning and purpose, projected into the future. Growth, change, innovation and creativity are the yardstick by which we legitimize our day-to-day actions. History and tradition, at most, serve as a platform for generating ideas; they are not guiding principles. The civil region, lastly, is characterized by the creation of public spaces, where people converge, are activated to partake in communal activities and where new initiatives are endowed in perpetuity through the involvement of institutions. Civil regionalism is an urban

construct, which stimulates and vitalizes the fostering of real-life interaction and plural identities: interaction is inherently meaningful, and networking is a goal in itself.

A strength-weaknesses analysis of the aforementioned three scenarios produces the following picture. The strength of ethno-region lies primarily in its ability to emphasize the importance of language, tradition and cultural heritage. The weakness of ethno-regions is exposed in its tendency to exclusion, demarcation, social controls, homogenization and resistance to change. Modern regions are strong in terms of their economic dynamism, entrepreneurial spirit and ability to empower and utilize individual talents, but weak in terms of their ability to generate a sense of social responsibility and solidarity. Civil regions, lastly, cherish the public open space, in which tolerance, diversity, heterogeneity and mutual respect thrive. However, they are less adept at formalizing relations and pursuing effective economic policies.

What are the implications of this typology for Eutropolis? The Eutropolis is in the middle of the transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based, service-driven or creative industry. In that sense, it is evolving into a modern region. Although each urban centre is primarily focused on its own national territories - Aachen on Nordrhein-Westfalen, Heerlen and Maastricht on the Netherlands and Hasselt and Liège on Belgium - cross-border mobility is gradually becoming a reality within medium-sized and small businesses, healthcare, education, the service sector and call centres. These tentative cross-border collaborative initiatives will eventually lay the foundation for a regional future, which is Euregional in outlook rather than national.

An ethos of dynamics or *vitality*, however, should be fostered through Eutropolis as a civil region. In essence, Eutropolis is an urbanized region. It may not have a *bona fide* urban heart in the classical sense, yet a clear civil network does exist between the urban node of Aachen, Heerlen, Liège, Hasselt and Maastricht. As a civil region, Eutropolis is capable of harnessing the huge potential of individuals and creating a dynamic population, who identify with their regional public spaces. In that sense, urbanity, rather than the variety of dialects or traditions, is the unifying force. This should set the wheels in motion for vitalizing public spaces. Whereas in the past differences drove us to turn our backs on each other, they are now a source of curiosity and civil society building. Eutropolis has almost 4 million inhabitants and encompasses three languages - French, German and Dutch, five cities - Aachen, Heerlen, Maastricht, Liège and Hasselt and three cultures - the Rhineland, Latin and Anglo-Saxon. Furthermore, Eutropolis has 8 institutes of higher education offering every conceivable degree course. And finally, it also has a green heart: Eutropolis as an urbanized region has green and natural spots, too. Thus, Eutropolis can indeed evolve into an urban 'network city', where differences and diversity are both engine and fuel for a dynamic development.

What type of citizen does fit in Eutropolis? As a 'network city', Eutropolis is not held together by a political structure or by a shared economy. Neither is it held together by a collective identity. Eutropolis is held together by social-cultural differences, exemplified by diversity and heterogeneity. Eutropolis is therefore characterized by the concept of modern citizenship. Modern citizenship is typically pluriform in nature. That pluriformity is expressed in diverse role behaviour, cultural pluriformity and pluriform citizenship.

One of the most remarkable outcomes of the Industrial Revolution might well be the diversity in social roles, a by-product of the radicalization in the division of labour, the emergence of the leisure industry and separation of the private and public sphere. The artisan became the factory worker, the factory worker became the home worker. After a long day at work, people would return home, close the door behind them and wrap themselves in the warmth and comfort of the private sphere. By way of relaxation, they began to immerse themselves in a variety of leisure activities. They would go to work, to school, to the shops, to the sports club, and home again. The roles they assumed were increasingly set in a *social reality*, in which their 'performances' became more diverse and less

cohesive. For the first time in human history, people had to 'manage' their behaviour and be mindful of the contradictions and incongruities lurking around the corner. Dealing with this diversity in social roles, and its contradictions and paradoxes, is part and parcel of an industrialized and post-industrialised society - Eutropolis was and is such a society.

The plurality of roles is also reflected in cultural diversity. This refers not only to multiculturalism, but also to the rich diversity of European cultural expressions, which is many times more potent than when expressed through the nation state. Europe is made up of 47 countries, 27 of which are organized into the European Union. Those 27 countries represent almost 500 million people, more than 80 ethnic groups and over 275 EU regions. Within the nation states, the relationship between political borders on the one hand and cultural borders on the other is anything but self-evident. The history and aspirations of Scotland, Catalonia and Flanders are universally known. These examples demonstrate that the unity of state and of culture, encapsulated in the concept of the nation state, is a political construct rather than a social reality. Remarkably, once they accept their regional aspirations in terms of the economy, politics and civil society, citizens develop plural identities. In a democratic country such as Spain, 70% of Catalans identify with Catalonia as well as with Spain and Europe: a triple identity. In Eutropolis, the development of plural identities is self-evident, because of the various orientation possibilities citizens have around them.

Cross-border mobility has become a fact of life. This applies across the board, from foreign labourers to professional sportsmen and women. Many foreign-born ballet dancers, musicians and architects have been drawn to the Netherlands; some have even become Dutch celebrities. Knowledge-sharing among the scientific and academic community has become commonplace, and attracting talent from around the world is seen as vital to secure the longevity of the university or university of applied science. These citizens embody the concept of "plural citizenship": they have two or more passports. A passport gives the bearer the privilege of passage, as well as rights and obligations. In the Netherlands alone, more than a million foreign-born people have acquired a Dutch passport. This enables them to participate normally and legally in social initiatives, economic activities (start a company) and in the political process: they have the right to vote, to stand for election or opposition, to take governmental responsibility. The passport makes them full-fledged citizens of a country, identical to other passport holders: they are equal before the law. And that is possible in two or more countries. In this context, it would be desirable to issue three passports to residents of the German, Dutch and Belgian regions.

Multiple roles, multiple identities and dual or triple nationality. That is the outcome of an ever shrinking, increasingly interdependent world. Those citizens who represent diversity, have multiple identities and may have two or even more passports, are the new citizens and form the 'avant garde' for a new reality. They built the bridges in an urbanised civil environment. As such, they can become the future citizens of Eutropolis.

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