

Cross-border Cooperation between Geneva and neighbouring France: From sectoral to global

Dr François Saint-Ouen
(European Institute, University of Geneva)

Euroregions and decentralized experiences of cross-border cooperation are multiple in Europe. Based on concrete relations between neighbours from two countries or more, they are contributing, inside the EU and outside, to major goals of the European integration by diminishing the negative impact of State borders on exchanges and relations between the populations. Hungary has its own experiences, and Pécs for instance has long been committed in the Euroregion Danube-Drava-Sava created in November 1998 with Croatia (Osijek) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tuzla), which constitutes an important element of the planned European “Corridor V c” linking the Baltic and the Adriatic Seas.

In Switzerland, institutionalised forms of regional cross-border cooperation started very early, in the 1960s and 1970s in Basle (with neighbouring Germany and neighbouring France) and Geneva (with neighbouring France). The subject of this contribution is to present the main characteristics of the Geneva-neighbouring France regional cross-border cooperation, the difficulties that have been faced, the solutions that have been found and their evolution over four decades.

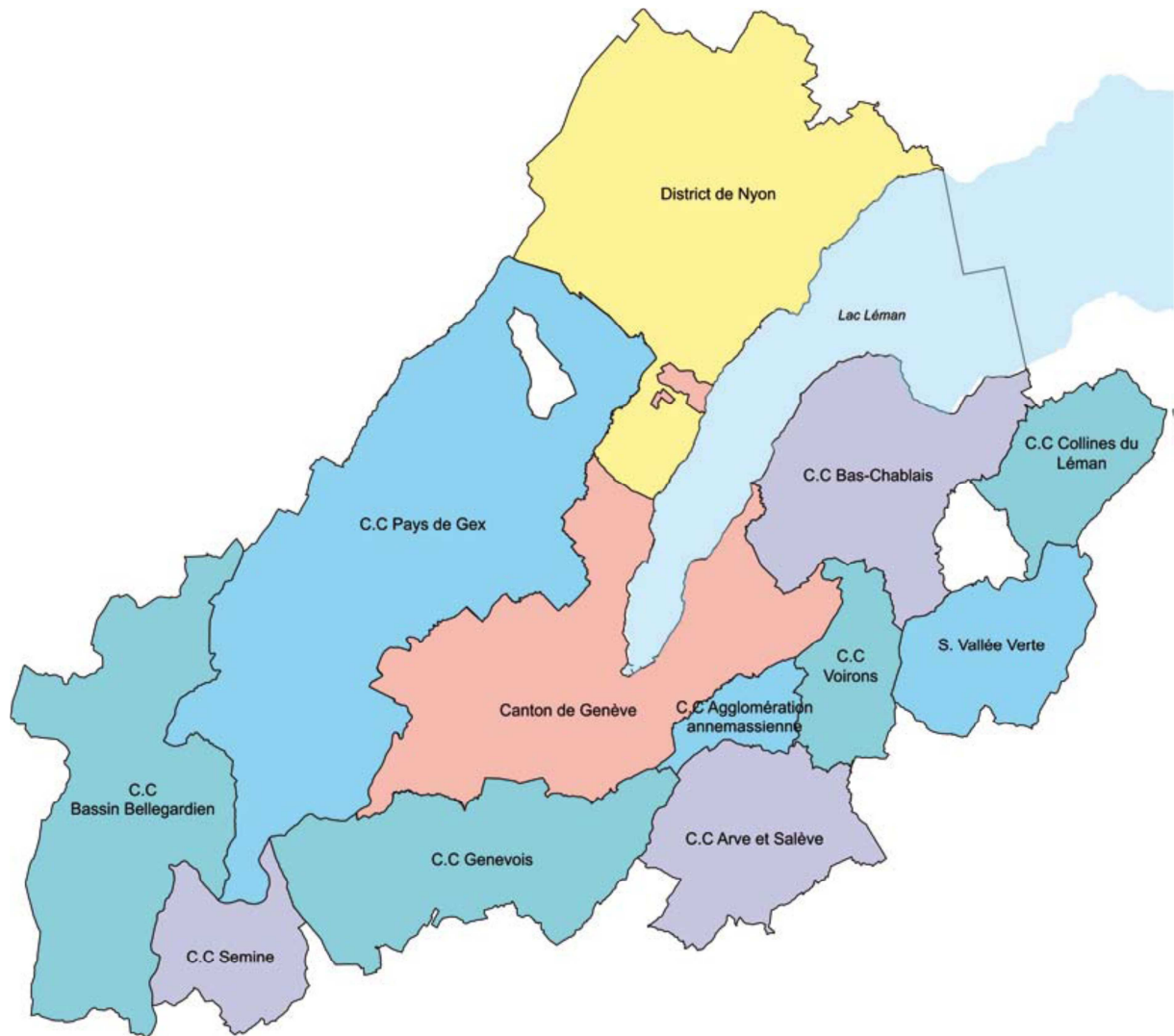
1. Main Features of the Geneva – neighbouring France cross-border cooperation

In an attempt to analyse the dynamics and obstacles characterizing this cross-border experience, we propose to identify two sets of factors. The first one is based on the internal-external dimension. What is **internal** comes from the cross-border region itself, what is **external** comes from the environment, mainly the two nation-states involved (France and Switzerland) with their own characteristics and the European background (EU- non EU). The second set of factors, more qualitative in essence, is aligned on a “**facilitating**”-“**complicating**” dimension, i.e. on one hand, what makes the cross-border cooperation easier or at least pushes in this direction, and on the other, the main obstacles that the cooperation is facing and trying – with more or less success – to overcome.

If we cross the two basic lines that we propose, we can rank the factors under four categories:

- **Internal facilitating factors:** the endogenous features of the cross-border region which fuel the cooperation and explain its major achievements.
- **Internal complicating factors:** the endogenous features of the cross-border region which hinder the cooperation and explain its major difficulties, failures or delays.
- **External facilitating factors:** the outside factors (mainly national and European) which favour the cooperation and accelerate its positive evolution.
- **External complicating factors:** national (Swiss and French respectively) and European factors which create problems and erect obstacles.

Let us see now what kind of concrete elements we can find in this framework.



The Transfrontier Region: Canton of Geneva, District of Nyon (Canton of Vaud), inter-municipal Groupings in neighbouring France (“Communities of Communes”).

1.1. Inner factors which make the cooperation easier

- **Cultural homogeneity**

Even though there is a State border in the middle, the Geneva cross-border region is a reality from a cultural perspective. The language is the same, the way the population lives on the territory has for decades or even more been really “transfrontier”. One example: the mountain we see close to Geneva (Mount-Salève: 5 km from the Town Centre) is in France – but that is no matter, it is a traditional destination for families in week-ends who go usually there to have picnics and promenades. Conversely, the French neighbours have long got the habit to go to Geneva for entertainment, cinema, cultural events which are numerous and diversified in this City with a strong international touch.

In fact, the border between Geneva (until 1815 an independent Republic) and neighbouring France has been drawn according to the only cultural component which could significantly oppose the two populations: religion (protestant on one side, catholic on the other). But it has faded away in the course of the last two centuries and now does not represent any serious divide anymore (the population of the Geneva Canton itself is today half-half). The Canton of Geneva, located at the very periphery of Switzerland, has only 4 km of common border with the neighbouring Swiss Canton (Canton of Vaud), but not less than 110 km with neighbouring France.

- **Territorial complementarity**

The cross-border region is deeply structured by relations of a Centre-Periphery nature, the City of Geneva being the Centre and the neighbouring France, together with the rest of the Geneva Canton and the district of Nyon in the Swiss Canton of Vaud forming its “hinterland”. It has long been the case and it is still obvious to-day. Nodal economy models are here very relevant to show the type of structuring of this cross-border space into a genuine territorial entity with its centre, its urban poles of second or third level and its rural areas forming a dense network ignoring to a large extent the political and administrative divisions symbolised by the State border.

Over the years, the populations have acquired the habit to live together, to mix into one another. And this process has ever been facilitated by the absence of physical barrier in the region: the mountains (all in France) are not very high and a bit far away from the border which is barely noticeable in the flat landscape. The middle of the lake, it is true, is the border between France and Switzerland, but not significantly in Geneva which is at the very end of the lake.

Economically, the Geneva Canton is prosperous and creates jobs. But on the other hand, it is too small (only 280 sq km) to accommodate all the labour forces that its economy needs (area of attraction estimated: around 2'000 sq km). Moreover, a large part of the cantonal territory is, because of cantonal laws protecting natural and architectural heritage, not constructible. So, the economic centre located in Geneva requires, precisely because of its dynamism, a cross-border region extended to neighbouring France and neighbouring part of the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland. And, reciprocally, the “periphery” of neighbouring Vaud and France needs the job creation from the “centre” for its own prosperity. Extending beyond the administrative limits (Canton of Vaud) and State borders (France), the economic region has over the years acquired a relevancy – and even a necessity – which is not, broadly speaking, questioned. To a certain extent, one might say that the

development, from 1973 on, of regional cross-border institutions corresponds to a still ongoing process of answers to the discrepancy between socio-economic dynamics (main cohesive factor) and legal-political structures and boundaries which – of course – cannot be ignored.

1.2. Inner factors which make things more complicated

But, of course, it is not that simple. Inside the cross-border region, we find also immaterial obstacles and material barriers limiting its integrative potential.

- **Elite-driven process under populist pressure**

All what has been said before was first perceived by some political and economical elites (the political ones being the driving force)¹. The subjects dealt with in the framework of the cross-border cooperation have long been technical: labour permits for the workers coming from neighbouring France, “corporatist” issues linked to them (social protection, constitution of an association defending their specific interests, etc...), and fiscal retrocession by the Canton of Geneva of a part of the taxes on their salaries to the municipalities where they live in France. In fact, the origin of the process was the growing demand of qualified labour force by the Geneva economy in the 1950s and 1960s. Because of the relatively high level of wages offered in Geneva, more and more qualified manpower went from various parts of France to settle down in the vicinity of the border. But it implied more and more expenses for the French Municipalities in terms of infrastructures, housing, services (schools for the children of the cross-border workers, etc...)... So, the first stage of the crossborder region was shaped by a deal between the Geneva economy (needing more qualified people) and the local authorities of the French neighbourhood (needing a financial support to accommodate the flow of cross-border workers and their families). Liberalisation of labour permits for crossborder manpower on one hand, and fiscal retrocession from Geneva to their places of living on the other, were thus the two axes of the Swiss-French Agreement signed in 1973 which created the bipartite institutions of the cross-border region under the name of “French-Geneva Regional Committee” (CRFG)², one of the very first ones in Western Europe.

These institutions have been run by local and cantonal officials on the Geneva side, local-regional officials and territorial representatives of the State administration (Prefects) on the French side, in association with the socio-economic interests involved (enterprises, trade unions, lobby representing the cross-border workers through their own association). The main consequence is that the cross-border institutions have been functioning for years largely outside the public space. And logically, the sectoral-economical component (labour force and fiscal retrocession in the beginning) have been prevalent against the territorial-political aspects of the cooperation. The process remained largely confined to the particular interests it involved, and the average citizen, not directly affected by the problems discussed in this rather confined arena, was globally left aside. This “technocratic” way of pushing things might recall the early years of the European integration under the ECSC and the Monnet “neo-functionalist” approach. But in Switzerland, where practically all the subjects can be one day submitted to referenda, it is risky because the citizens occupy a central position in public affairs that cannot be bypassed easily. To cut a long story short, when everything is alright, very few people take care (except the specialists) of what is going on in the cross-border

¹ In Basle, it has been the contrary in the early 1960s, and it has shaped the cross-border region quite differently from the one in Geneva.

² Comité Régional Franco-Genevois.

cooperation. But the situation often changes when there are visible problems on which political parties or opinion leaders might focus, propelling in a sort of “crisis” background the transfrontier issue into the public sphere, triggering negative impulses. This is the case to-day when, although still dynamic and prosperous, Geneva records the highest unemployment rate (5.5%) in Switzerland, due to a structural imperfect adequacy between the type of jobs created (namely in the financial sector) and the skills of some segments of the labour force. Some can easily pretend that the cross-border workers are “robbing” some jobs to the local people and that (following a very simple and rather populist argument) diminishing their number would solve part of the unemployment in Geneva. In the same way, there is now a feeling of more and more “imported” insecurity in Geneva, facilitated by the declining of the controls at the border after the joining of Switzerland to Schengen. Even if it is not connected with labour force but to criminality, it has some negative impact on the way people see the new developments of cross-border cooperation in a type of democracy structurally very sensitive to the opinions of the citizens as potential decision-makers. One political party, born in Geneva, has capitalized over the last 5 years on the rejection of too many cross-border commuters. This is the Geneva Citizens Movement (Mouvement des Citoyens Genevois, or MCG). In the last Cantonal election in 2009, they received 15% of votes and represent the second political group in the Cantonal Parliament.

In neighbouring France, there are also difficulties, like the rising of prices consecutive to the high salaries of the cross-border manpower (prices that the rest of the population with “local french” salaries can less and less afford to pay), but they do not have the same direct political impact (since the country is a purely representative democracy).

- **Unbalanced system of actors and relations**

This is the other side of the centre-periphery mode of structuring relations inside the cross-border region. There are certainly complementarities inside it, but they are functioning under unbalanced relations between the Centre (Geneva) and the rest of the region (neighbouring France, neighbouring Vaud). Interests and expectations are often different for this very reason between Geneva and the other partners, and it is often hard and time consuming to find a satisfying consensus for everyone.

Basically, the cross-border region is often perceived from Geneva mainly as an extra-territory minimizing the costs of accommodating some workers indispensable for its prosperity. In this vision, the centre (Geneva) concentrates the economic activities and the jobs, while the periphery takes care of the infrastructure where these workers have their apartment and family life, as it is the case in suburbs around a big town. But such a “suburb” model does not correspond to the expectations of the periphery in the Geneva region. Their expectations are to growingly share the benefits of Geneva economic dynamism with more and more dissemination of job creation throughout the territory of the region. In this vision, the initial centre-periphery model, far from acquiring the traits of a town-suburb model, would evolve towards a more balanced economic polarisation inside the region (model of a polarised region, replacing the traditional centre-periphery system of relations). Simply speaking, the whole region is expected to look differently from an asymmetric “Greater Geneva”.

1.3. Outside factors which facilitate the cooperation

- **Bilateral Agreements between EU and Switzerland**

As we will see, one of the difficulties of the Geneva cross-border region is to be on an external border of the EU with a non-member country. This is why every progress made on improving the bilateral relations between Switzerland and the European Union affects positively the cross-border cooperation between Geneva and neighbouring France. In the last fifteen years, a set of Bilateral Agreements have been concluded between Switzerland and the EU in various sectors, and some more are currently negotiated following a bilateral way which is the trademark of Swiss relations with the EU, after the failure of a multilateral formula through the European Economic Area rejected by the Swiss citizens in December 1992. Of a special interest for the Geneva cross-border region has been the conclusion with the EU of an agreement on free movement of persons, and specially workers, which has produces more and more tangible effects particularly since June 2007.

It makes easier the settlement of EU citizens in Switzerland and vice-versa. Concretely, it has thus extended the free movement of persons far beyond the traditional limits of the Geneva cross-border region. The Swiss who live in Geneva have access to the entire EU labour market, while a “cross-border” worker is now not necessarily a person living in the neighbouring part of France, but can be somebody living far away and working nevertheless in Geneva or in the district of Nyon (Canton of Vaud). But this does not affect the territory of fiscal retrocession to the French municipalities of residence of the cross-border workers, which remains unchanged.

1.4. External factors with a negative impact on the cross-border region

- **Asymmetry between Unitary State (France) and Federal State (Switzerland)**

France is a unitary state with a strong unitary tradition, while Switzerland is a federal state with a strong federal tradition. The confrontation of these two opposite models at the border has always been a source of complication for the functioning of the cross-border institutions.

The Swiss Federal Constitution (1999) stipulates (art. 3) that the Cantons are sovereign to the extent that their sovereignty is not limited by the Federal Constitution. They namely retain exclusive competence in neighbourhood relations. This provision is completed by the art. 56 stipulating that, in the field international relations, the Cantons can sign Treaties in their sphere of competences with sub-state entities, while with states and international organizations, the Swiss Confederation (Federal State) signs on their behalf. In France, regions and counties (“départments”) do not have any international competence: this field is entirely in the hands of the central state (this is the same in any unitary state in principle, like Hungary). The asymmetry is reflected by the exchange of letters between France and Switzerland creating in July 1973 the institutions of the France-Geneva cross-border region. According to the federal Constitution, Berne had to represent the Geneva Canton to sign with France, since there was no possibility for Geneva to sign directly with the neighbouring two counties of Ain and Haute-Savoie because of their total lack of international competences. The asymmetry is also reflected in the composition of the Board of the new cross-border entity, characterized by the presence of Prefects representing Paris on the French side (together with local authorities), and no one representing Berne (only Geneva officials) on the Swiss side.

Moreover, both the competences and the financial resources of a Swiss federate State, even small, like the Geneva Canton, are much stronger than in French counties like Ain and Haute-

Savoie. To take one telling example: the budget of the Geneva Canton is approximately 6 times bigger than the two budgets of Ain and Haute-Savoie while these two counties have 3 times more population on a territory 35 times larger...

But the most complicated in such a situation to get cross-border relations work is to identify on the French side the right partner, depending on the topic. In Geneva, it is obvious: there is a Constitution with a Parliament and a Government and the responsibilities are clearly allocated. But in France, this is not the same, since we can number not less than 5 levels of territorial administration: the Central State and its administration represented by the Prefect, the Region (Rhône-Alpes), the two counties (Ain and Haute-Savoie) involved inside the Region which have different competences, groupings of Municipalities, and finally Municipalities. Consecutively, each topic has to be addressed by a specific set of actors depending on the competency level required to solve the problem. This is the “ransom” of the institutional asymmetry on both sides of the State border.

If, broadly speaking, as we said the “culture” is the same, administrative traditions are quite different. It is thus important for a Swiss official to understand how the French administration, with its various levels, functions. This is the same the other way round for a French official who has to understand both Swiss federalism and the functioning of a Swiss Canton as a small State. Over the years, this obstacle has been reduced by a growing mutual knowledge on both sides, at least in the circle of the “insiders” of the cross-border relations. But there are still sources of misunderstandings outside this circle: in the media, in the public opinion, in some French administrations which are not directly based in the region, etc...

- **EU/non EU, Euro/non Euro**

This is not only a border confronting two very different political and administrative systems, but also an external border of the European Union and of the euro currency zone. As we have already seen, the bilateral agreements between the EU and Switzerland have gradually improved the situation, namely by extending the free movement of persons and workers to the Confederation. But, by the same token, the region becomes more exposed inside Switzerland to some anti-EU groups, especially those who criticize free movement at the border as being source of more and more insecurity. The Geneva branch of the most anti-EU Swiss Party, the UDC/SVP is adding its forces (9% in the last Cantonal elections) to the Geneva based populist MCG to stigmatize the bad effects of the free movement of persons at the border deriving from the acceptance by Switzerland of the Schengen agreements.

The cross-border region around Geneva suffers also to have two different currencies, euro and swiss franc, with exchange rates varying substantially over the last years, from 1.55 CHF for 1 € four-five years ago, to only 1.20 today (22% of variation). For a region aimed at becoming a single economic and labour market, it affects the comparative level of revenues and prices on both sides of the border in a negative way.

The fact to be at an external border of the EU has always limited also the possibilities of access to EU funds which remain relatively modest (let us mention INTERREG)³. The main sources of financing remain by far France, Switzerland and the Canton of Geneva by its own budget.

³ See on this topic our other contribution to this handbook “EU and Swiss Territorial Development Policy: the Linkage”.

- **Partially inefficient national administrative divisions**

Apart from the State border itself, the administrative and political divisions of national territories on both sides have proved to be partially inadequate for the purpose. On Swiss side, the limits of the Geneva Canton are too small compared with the extension of the urbanisation along the Lake to the western part of the neighbouring Canton of Vaud. Finally, as we will see, it was decided to associate not the whole Canton de Vaud itself, but one of its subdivisions, the District of Nyon (chief town), in the greater Geneva conurbation. On French side, it proved even more difficult, since the territory of the cross-border labour market affected two counties (Ain in the north and Haute-Savoie in the south), but only partially. Furthermore, this territory did not correspond to any administrative subdivision inside these counties. This is the reason why the solution was gradually found through the creation in 2003 of an “ad hoc” structure, consisting of an association of municipalities called “ARC” (Association Régionale de Coopération – Regional Association of Cooperation). Finally, the main actors of the current project of Greater Geneva Agglomeration are quite diverse. On Swiss side, a federate State (Canton of Geneva), a small part of another one (District of Nyon of the Canton of Vaud); on French side, an intermunicipal grouping specially designed for this purpose.

1.5. Summarizing of the Geneva cross-border dynamics and obstacles

The following diagram summarizes the main characteristics of the cross-border region around Geneva:

| | Internal | External |
|--------------|---|--|
| Facilitating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural homogeneity • Territorial complementarity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU-Switzerland bilateral agreements |
| Complicating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elite-driven process under populist pressure • Unbalanced system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unitary/Federal State • EU/non-EU, euro/non-euro • Inadequate administrative divisions (French side) |

2. The three main stages of the cross-border relations around Geneva

The basis for institutionalized cross-border relations around Geneva was the creation of a French-Geneva Regional Committee (CRFG) in 1973 focused on labour market and fiscal retrocession to the municipalities where the cross-border workers live in neighbouring France. Then there has been, from the 1980s on, a multiplication of various cross-border entities on various territories for different objectives, proposing some kind of multi-level regional policy

around Geneva. Finally, the last years have recorded a concentration of efforts to create a new global cross-border Agglomeration, a process which is still developing today.

2.1. The first sectoral approach (1973): labour market and fiscal retrocession through the CRFG

During the 1960s, Geneva used more and more cross-border workers to fuel its booming economy, but without taking care for housing and infrastructure. This led to a crisis, because of the growing difficulties encountered by the French municipalities where these workers used to live.

The solution was to give back to these Municipalities a percentage (3.5%) of the taxes levied in Geneva on the salaries earned by these workers. It was done by an exchange of letters between the Swiss Government, acting on behalf of the Canton of Geneva according to the Federal Constitution, and the French Ambassador in Bern on 29 January 1973. As a consequence, the first cross-border institution (CRFG, French-Geneva Regional Committee) was created by another exchange of letter between Bern and France on 12 July 1973.

The CRFG is an organization of a sectoral and very practical nature, focused on housing and cross-border commuters, along with other concerns like transports and communications, territorial planning, energy, environment, education, culture and sport. It functions as a bilateral joint-body, under the double Presidency of the Geneva Cantonal Minister in charge of the external affairs and a Representative of the French State territorial administration (currently the Prefect of the region Rhône-Alpes, based in Lyon which is located outside the territory directly concerned by the cross-border relations). On the French side, this territory does not correspond to any territorial administrative division: it is part of the two counties of Ain and Haute-Savoie (themselves geographically parts of the broader region Rhône-Alpes, but with specific competences)⁴.

The CRFG is currently divided into seven Commissions and thematic working groups: Economy and Employment, Housing, Mobility, Security, Environment, Health, Culture and Education. Each of these Commissions is co-chaired by a Cantonal Minister on one hand, and a Representative of the French State (Prefect) or (depending on the topic) an elected representative of the Region Rhône-Alpes or of the counties of Ain and Haute-Savoie.

But gradually, the cross-border relations around Geneva developed through other institutions covering other domains and territories, even though the CRFG has remained the focal point of cross-border relations becoming more and more diverse and multi-organisational.

2.2. Towards multi-directional regional cooperation around Geneva

- **Cross-border cooperation covering the entire Lake of Geneva**

In 1987 was created a cross-border institution covering all the regions – French and Swiss – bordering the Lake of Geneva (Lac Léman in French): the Council of Léman (Conseil du Léman). It corresponds to a second generation of cross-border agreements, since it refers

⁴ According to the French Decentralization, dating back from 1981, there is no hierarchy between the bigger regions and the smaller counties (“departments”), since the competences they have respectively received are not the same (this creating a rather intricate model). This absence of hierarchy between territorial entities in France is stipulated in the Constitution (Art. 72).

explicitly to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities signed in Madrid on 21 May 1980 by the Member States of the Council of Europe, and ratified by Switzerland in 1982 and France in 1984.

This Convention opened the door to a new era of decentralized cross-border agreements by stipulating, in its art. 1, that: “Each Contracting Party undertakes to facilitate and foster transfrontier co-operation between territorial communities or authorities within its jurisdiction and territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of other Contracting Parties. It shall endeavour to promote the conclusion of any agreements and arrangements that may prove necessary for this purpose with due regard to the different constitutional provisions of each Party”.

The contracting parties to the agreement creating the Council of Léman are the three Swiss Cantons (Geneva, Vaud, Valais) and the two French counties (Ain and Haute-Savoie) surrounding the Lake. Both French and Swiss central Governments are only observers. There is a system of 2 year rotating presidency among the members (it is now the turn of the county of Ain). The Governing Body is a Committee composed of 15 delegates (3 delegates per member, for a total of 9 Swiss and 6 French) meeting twice a year. The mandate is performed through 5 technical and functional working groups of 15 members each (3 per member): Economy and Tourism, Transport and Communication, Cross-border population and social issues, Education and Culture, Environment and Territorial Planning. In 2011, the budget (coming from the members) was a bit less than 400'000 €.

Broadly speaking, the Council of Léman, acting on a relatively vast territory not directly perceived as an entity by the population living on it, has constantly suffered of a chronic lack of visibility. It is typically a technical structure, only known by a handful of political and administrative insiders. But on the other hand, it has been able to remain almost completely immune from media exposure and populist pressure.

- **New instruments of regional cooperation inside Switzerland**

In parallel, new instruments of regional policy have developed in Switzerland, and the Geneva Canton is taking an active part in some of them, namely the intercantonal Conference of Western Switzerland (1993), the Great Geneva Berne Area (2009) and the Lemanic Metropolis (2011).

The Conference of Western Switzerland is a platform of coordination and exchange of information between the Governments of the seven Cantons of Geneva, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Berne, Fribourg, Jura, Valais. It is part of the movement initiated in the 1990s towards a better regional coordination overcoming the obstacle of the too limited size of the Cantons, small States inherited from the past with a long tradition of autonomy, to meet the challenges of the new century. The Great Geneva Berne Area unites the efforts of the economic development agencies of six Cantons (the same as in the Conference of Western Switzerland, except Jura). It is business-oriented and the objective is to attract foreign-based companies in this multi-cantonal area by offering them various services and advices, assistance in finding suitable premises, in negotiating specific tax conditions, in hiring staff and providing residence and labour permits, etc... It has also representatives in eight countries in the world responsible for its economic promotion.

- **Towards a “Lemantic Metropolis” in western Switzerland?**

In November 2011 (so, very recently) the two Cantons of Geneva and Vaud (capital: Lausanne) signed an agreement aiming at strengthening their collaboration to develop in the region, under the name of Lemanic Metropolis, the required synergies for creating an attractive and dynamic economic pole. The focus is put on mobility (including railways), top-level research units, high schools and health institutions (hospitals, clinics, medical research & development), hosting of international organizations and NGOs. There is also a joint lobbying in Berne to influence federal decisions affecting the interests of the region (for instance on railways and motorways, on credit for development).

By the end of 2012, an evaluation of the first phase will be made and, on this basis, the creation of a new institution is envisaged, probably under the legal form of an association.

2.3. From commuters to cross-border Governance: the current concept of Geneva “Agglomeration”

- **Origins**

After the one of the 1960s which gave birth to the first cross-border agreements in 1973, there was another crisis in the 1990s resulting in the explosion of the number of cross-border commuters from 25-30'000 to more than 70'000 now. For the peripheral French communes, it was not perceived as a mere question of financial resources anymore (this having been settled by the fiscal retrocession system in 1973): their expectations became more and more global and their demand concentrated on a general peri-urban model. They took various initiatives in this direction.

The surplus of population attracted by the jobs created in Geneva could not be accommodated in the Geneva Canton because of the structural lack of housing and the limited possibility to build more, and thus accumulated in neighbouring Vaud and neighbouring France where the prices (because of the high salaries earned in Geneva) increased dramatically, beyond the needs of the rest of the population working in France with French salaries. There was also many other problems connected with this attractiveness of the Geneva economy in the neighbouring territories. Let us mention an anarchic urbanisation reducing the surface of the agricultural lands (80% of the region)... This is why a new approach of the phenomenon, less sectoral and more global, gradually emerged and gave birth to the idea to create a cross-border “Agglomeration”, popularised under the familiar term of “Agglo”, as a result of a compromise between the demand of the periphery for a better management of the mobility, a better repartition of the housing, a better control on the extension of the urbanization to safeguard the agricultural areas and protect the environment, and the traditional demand of the centre for more efficient transport system for commuters in a sustainable urban planning concept.

- **Agglomerations become a focus both for Swiss and French Governments**

The reaching of a compromise was accelerated by the convergent wills of the French and the Swiss authorities to develop in their respective countries territorial policies favouring the strengthening of a certain number of urban agglomerations for a better balanced economic development. From the early 2000s, there was thus money from Berne and from Paris available, on the condition that the various partners around Geneva could find a way to go together in this direction. On the French side, the Region Rhône-Alpes recognised the

territory around Geneva as one of its agglomerations and signed in 2009 with the French municipalities grouped in the new structure called “ARC” (see below) a contract of 11.7 million € to promote employment, social solidarity and economic development in the vicinity of Geneva over the years 2010-2014. On the Swiss side, Berne allocated 750 million € to develop an ambitious interconnection of the railways between Geneva main railway station and Annemasse in France, a missing link between French and Swiss railway networks. This project, called “CEVA” has been finally confirmed by a vote of the Geneva population in 2009 (61% in favour), and is currently under realisation with a co-financing from France (including the Region Rhône-Alpes). The objective is one train every 10 minutes carrying 50’000 people per day. This costly infrastructure draws all attention and symbolizes the whole project, but it is only one part of a broader strategy, recalled the Cantonal Minister in charge of mobility, Michèle Künzler, in a conference organised by the European Institute of the University of Geneva on 15th May 2012.

- **New structuring on the French side (“ARC”)**

As we have seen before, the French side did not correspond to any administrative subdivision. It had been so far represented by territorial entities only partially involved, and not having their decision-making centres in the cross-border area. In order to find a remedy to this shortcoming, the neighbouring French municipalities promoted a new form of association between them to defend their common views and interests vis-à-vis Geneva.

The EPCIs (for Etablissements Publics de Coopération Intercommunale) represent the first level of intermunicipal groupings. 10 EPCIs are involved in the cross border cooperation, gathering a total of 211 communes for a population of some 900’000 inhabitants. In 2003, these 10 EPCIs grouped together in an association named “ARC” (acronym of Regional Association of Cooperation), which has been so far the French direct partner of the cross-border planned Agglomeration: this is the second level. There is a rotating Presidency changing each year and a Board composed of the President of the 4 EPCIs touching directly the State border. The delegates of the 10 EPCIs are grouped in an Assembly called “Community Council”. About 10 employees compose the administrative staff of ARC.

- **2007: launching of a project of a cross-border “Agglomeration” (1st phase)**

Finally, all the dynamics mentioned above converged into a project of cross-border Agglomeration which was signed on a boat on the Geneva Lake on 5 December 2007. In its initial phase, the project has developed in synergy with the work of the Commissions of the CRFG as the most relevant cross-border institution (for instance on labour force, social issues, vocational training, health, environment). It adds some specific concerns on urbanism, balanced economic development, transport and housing, under the general objective to promote multipolarity and complementarity between rural and urban areas (especially in suburbs and “mixed areas”).

Today, the region counts 900’000 inhabitants and represents 400’000 jobs. The objective is to create sustainable and balanced conditions for 200’000 more inhabitants and 100’000 more jobs in 2030 which is the target year (baseline: year 2000), with 50% of this new population living in the Canton of Geneva and 30% of the new jobs to be created in neighbouring France in an attempt to re-equilibrate the development of the region. Over the same period (2007-2030), another objective is to reduce the surface of agricultural land which disappears, from 5’000 ha per year to 2’500.

- **Attempts to fill the gap with the population**

As we have seen before, the cross-border cooperation has been from the beginning largely driven by some elites on both sides. The new approach, which wants to be more global with the concept of “Agglomeration”, tries to fill the gap with the population by associating much more the citizens and various NGOs active in the region to the definition of new objectives. Several initiatives were taken to give answers to this concern.

The second phase of the Agglomeration, starting in the end of 2012, is being prepared inside several pilot cross-border perimeters called PACAs (for Programmes d’Aménagement Concerté d’Agglomération). In each of them, some priorities are discussed and elaborated by groups of experts, political representatives, members of NGOs and interest groups. Then, a synthesis on the level of the whole Agglomeration is made among the priorities which have emerged from the work of the various PACAs. Forums with citizens are also organised to exchange the first results of this “work in progress” with the population. But few people come to these meetings, and they are generally more or less always the same. So, even though this concern is much clearer than before, cross-border issues are still perceived as technical, and we are still far from a broad civic commitment changing its nature from an elite-driven to a genuine bottom-up process.

To acquire more visibility, it was important also to find a name for the new Agglomeration because it had none. A consultation of the population through Internet has been organized for that purpose. People have been offered to vote by Internet for one of those three appellations until 1st May 2012: “Grand Genève” (Greater Geneva), “GenevAgglo” (a contraction of Geneva and Agglomeration), “Le Genevois” (geographic name of the Geneva region). The results have been published on 4th May. The name which was adopted is “Grand Genève” (Greater Geneva) which received 44% of the votes (38% for “Le Genevois”, 18% for “GenevAgglo”)... But there is still a long way to go if the objective is to get the “Agglo” closer to the average citizen, because only 5031 people voted (that is to say, 0.5% of the population). And the name, the very day the results were published, was judged too “Geneva-oriented” in neighbouring France and neighbouring Vaud, reactivating the traditional Centre-Periphery controversy!

- **New institutional challenges: in search of European formulas**

We have seen that the Outline Convention for Transfrontier Cooperation of the Council of Europe had been a reference for the initiatives born around Geneva during the 1980s (for instance the Council of Léman). Another juridical tool appeared in 1996: the Karlsruhe Agreement signed by France, Switzerland, Germany and Luxembourg, which created (art. 11) the notion of “Local Transfrontier Cooperation Groupings” (known under the French acronym “GLCT”). They are public legal entity with budgetary autonomy created by local and territorial authorities to pursue some goals of common interest on both sides of a State border. Legal provisions regarding inter-municipal cooperation organisms of the country in which it is registered apply to a GLCT. The bodies (art. 13 of the Karlsruhe Agreement) are the President (in principle coming from the country of domiciliation) and Vice-Presidents, and a General Assembly in which all the participating territorial entities should be represented with right of vote.

Over the years, this GLCT formula has been used in the Geneva region for the joint-management of three equipments or facilities: a cross-border cable car on the Mount-Salève near Geneva; a cross-border sewage system; a tariff community for the regional public transports “Unireso” created in 2001. The last one is probably the most significant since it covers all the public transports of the region (buses, trams, railways, even boats on the Lake) with tickets valid on the whole transfrontier network, a key-element for a region with a lot of commuters and wishing to limit the nuisance created by the augmentation of the traffic of private cars.

So, the Geneva region has already known some limited experiences of Local Transfrontier Cooperation Groupings. Now, the objective is to use this tool for the global management of the Agglomeration in the future and to create under the Swiss law a joint GLCT with its own budget chaired by the Minister in charge of external affairs of the Canton of Geneva. On 28 June 2012, while the Project of “Agglomeration” enters its second phase (signed on the top of the Mount-Salève at the French border), it has been institutionalized under the legal entity of a GLCT which will start functioning in the first quarter of 2013. In parallel, on the basis of the experience developed inside the various PACAs during the first phase, a consultative body called “Forum of the Agglomeration” will regularly meet to allow the population, the socio-economic partners and the associations and NGOs representing the “civil society” to be active in the process. In longer term, the GLCT will be transformed into a “Euroregional Cooperation Grouping” (ECG), a new institutional formula created in 2009 by the Protocol 3 of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation. It is planned to be done as soon as this Protocol acquires legal force in France and Switzerland.

Conclusion: a “bottom-up Europe” laboratory?

If we consider the Geneva cross-border region as forming a system (of course open on the outside), we can see that the two main driving forces have been – and continue to be – the regional economy, polarized on the City of Geneva, and the common culture on both sides of the border. On the contrary, we can see two other sub-systems playing clearly the role of limiting elements: norms and decision-making (or in other terms, law and politics), which are different in France and in federal Switzerland (with, for the latter, two levels of norms and decision-making: cantonal and federal). Both the will to enhance the cooperation through transfrontier institutions and the political and normative limits were clearly stated in the ongoing works to give Geneva a new Cantonal Constitution. In a preliminary report of 2009⁵, the Commission for external relations of the Constituent Assembly stated clearly that, if we would like to show in the new Constitution a long-term vision in favour of a transfrontier region, we have to leave the details open, since we (Geneva) cannot impose them to others (i.e. the other side of the border). They insisted also for a better participation of the citizens, with a due recording of their complaints. In the project of Constitution to be submitted to the population by referendum in the end of 2012, there is an art. 152 stating the objective of sustainable, balanced and solidary development through a “permanent, coherent and democratic institutional cross-border cooperation”.

To summarize, the Geneva cross-border region, covering also a part of the neighbouring Canton of Vaud, is animated by an expanding centre-periphery dynamic, but affected by the presence of a State (and to a lesser extent, cantonal with Vaud) border. From the 1960s on, the main objective has been to reduce the negative interference of the border and reach a

⁵ Assemblée constituante, Commission des relations extérieures et des rapports avec la région, « Rapport préliminaire », 17 Nov. 2009.

satisfactory equilibrium in the centre-periphery relations characterizing the territory. In this process, two historical phases appear: the first one, leading to the 1973 agreements creating cross-border institutions (the CRFG), was an attempt to create a sufficient territorial basis for the needs of Geneva economy in terms of labour market, and to by-pass the problem of the exiguity of the Geneva Canton territory, almost entirely surrounded by France (the solution was thus in neighbouring France). The 1973 agreement proved too be satisfying for two decades, before it was overtaken by a remaining “perverse” effect of the State border: because of the restrictive cantonal law on construction and the absence of real political will to change it in Geneva, there was a growing effect of “exporting” the labour force in neighbouring France, a situation that the French Municipalities could not face anymore. More global views of the phenomenon then arouse, with more concerns on controlled urbanisation, balanced development safeguarding agricultural areas, etc... The cooperation, pushed also in this direction by new policies both in France and Switzerland favouring urban agglomerations, entered a new phase in the mid-2000s with common objectives for the year 2030.

Denis de Rougemont, one of the precursors of federalism and multi-level approach in Europe, used to see cross-border experiences leading to genuine transfrontier regions as concrete laboratories of bottom-up European integration. We can draw, indeed, a parallel with the functional methodology inspired by Jean Monnet in the early years of the European integration. A functional approach was also adopted in the Geneva region, focusing on the reduction of the barriers and negative effects of the State border. In both cases, it has started from a limited and sectoral perspective, to expand gradually and become more global, nevertheless with some still existing limitations. But we can see differences between the two experiences, because in the case of the European integration, the driving forces have been the economy and the norms, while the limiting factors were political and cultural. In Geneva, we find also the economy at the core, but associated with culture; and the main limits are both political and normative.

We can make the hypothesis that, like the European integration process itself, cross-border regions in Europe are mostly functional in essence, trying to solve concrete problems by dismantling obstacles created by borders. When they prove successful, they eventually, if needed as in Geneva, have the aspiration to become more global. But each of these experiences keeps very specific features deriving from the very context in which it develops, making all of them very diverse. In the case of Geneva, the major feature remains the area of attraction of an urban centre surrounded by political borders, evolving into a model of agglomeration which is now under way.

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District of Nyon www.nyon.ch (see "Nyon en bref")

Geneva State Exterior Affairs www.ge.ch/dares

Greater Geneva Berne Area www.ggba-switzerland.ch

Projet d'Agglomération franco-valdo-genevoise www.projet-agglo.org

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