

The Regional Development of Borderlands : an Explorative Study in the Franco-Italian Alps

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Article abstract

Despite the important influence borders have on the development of borderlands, regional geography does not have a theory on this influence. In this paper, the authors implement Fischer's theory on regional development in the framework of a study of four municipalities in the Franco-Italian Alps. The authors point out that the effect of the border depends on the capability of regional Systems to cross the border. This capability in itself depends on the characteristics of the border. Furthermore the authors point at the importance of the way local actors adapt to external stimuli.

After a brief overview of the development of the French municipalities of Briançon and Modane and the Italian municipalities of Susa and Bardonnèchia, the hypotheses are tested.

Recognizing the necessity of more refined studies on the subject the authors conclude that Fischer's theory is a very valuable one in the study of borderlands.

The Regional Development of Borderlands: an Explorative Study in the Franco-Italian Alps¹

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Résumé

Malgré l'influence importante de la frontière sur le développement des régions frontalières, la géographie régionale n'a pas de théorie sur cette influence. Dans cet article, les auteurs implantent la théorie sur le développement régional de Fischer dans le cadre d'une étude de quatre communes dans les Alpes franco-italiennes. Les auteurs estiment que l'effet frontière dépend du pouvoir des systèmes régionaux de passer la frontière. Un pouvoir qui lui-même dépend de la nature de la frontière. En plus, les auteurs soulignent l'importance de l'adaptation aux stimulants externes des acteurs locaux.

Après un bref aperçu du développement des communes françaises de Briançon et Modane et des communes italiennes de Suse et Bardonnèche, les hypothèses sont testées.

En reconnaissant la nécessité des recherches plus approfondies sur la matière, les auteurs concluent que la théorie de Fischer est très valable dans l'étude de la région frontalière.

Mots-clés: Géographie régionale, régions frontalières, développement régional, système régional, nature de la frontière, adaptation locale aux stimulants externes, circulation.

Abstract

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Despite the important influence borders have on the development of borderlands, regional geography does not have a theory on this influence. In this paper, the authors implement Fischer's theory on regional development in the framework of a study of four municipalities in the Franco-Italian Alps. The authors point out that the effect of the border depends on the capability of regional systems to cross the border. This capability in itself depends on the characteristics of the border. Furthermore the authors point at the importance of the way local actors adapt to external stimuli.

After a brief overview of the development of the French municipalities of Briançon and Modane and the Italian municipalities of Susa and Bardonnèche, the hypotheses are tested.

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Key Words: Regional Geography, Regional Development, Borderlands, Regional System, Border Characteristics, Local Adaptation to External Stimuli, Interaction.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we intend to interpret the regional geographical significance of the Franco-Italian border that runs through the southwestern Alps at a latitude of about 45° north. The study region can be divided into three distinctive areas: the Maurienne in the northwest, the Briançonnais in the southwest and the Valle Susa in the east. The last-mentioned area lies in Italy, the other two are parts of France.

The areas share a partly common history. The Maurienne and the Valle Susa, for example, were part of the kingdoms of Savoie, Sardinia and Piemonte up until 1860, the year of Italian unification (House, 1969). The Briançonnais, too, used to be part of these kingdoms, but joined the French state at an earlier stage. Cultural resemblances lingered on until well into this century but have faded during the last decades. The Franco-Provençal dialect spoken before the Second World War was gradually replaced by the national language on the Italian side of the border. Interaction between the two sides of the border had always been quite easy due to the presence of relatively low mountain passes. The process of cultural separation took place at the same time that interaction was further eased by the construction of several important infrastructural works.

Boundaries are of a political nature and this means that regional systems in borderlands will be impeded or stimulated by political institutionalization and actions. We will not concentrate on the political-geographical aspects, however, for the sake of brevity, and because of the fact that the influence of the political geography is primarily of an historical nature. This is because nowadays there are many possibilities to overcome the consequences of the different political structures at both sides of the Franco-Italian border by trans-border cooperation.

Our study was conducted at a local scale in the French communities of Modane and Briançon and in the Italian communities of Susa and Bardonnèchia, the four major settlements in the region.

In this article we will present a brief overview of our theoretical point of view and the ensuing hypotheses. We will briefly describe the characteristics of the municipalities studied. Then we will delimit the regional systems to which these municipalities belong. In doing so, we will hopefully elucidate the nature and significance of the border. Finally we will test the hypotheses for our case and draw some conclusions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND POINT OF VIEW

Borders are of major relevance to many different fields of geography. As political phenomena that often have a great cultural and economic impact, they may be studied by political, social and economic geographers. The relevance of borders to regional geography is due to the fact that borders are supposed to influence their adjacent regions. Borders structure these regions by imposing

specific forms of regional development, giving them certain "borderland characteristics".

Given the relevance of borders, it is remarkable that geographers still lack a suitable theory or elaborate spatial model of borderlands, notwithstanding important pioneering work by Gottmann (1980), Minghi (1969) and Strassoldo & Delli Zotti (1982). Geographers are obliged to describe borderlands with no other help than that of their basic geographical tools: e.g., the concepts of regional systems and distance (decay).

In their well known study, Guichonnet and Raffestin (1974, p. 62) try to evade this problem by presenting a classification of borderlands based on the existence of cross-border relations and the reciprocity of these relations.

It is our conviction, however, that regional geographers should not study borderlands in terms of border centrality but from the perspective of regional development. Regional geographers should focus on the explanatory dimension of the (un)changing characteristics of regional systems. The border, then, should only be considered if its presence explains (parts or aspects of) regional development. This perspective implies the need to elaborate both regional development theories and the concept of regional systems. In the context of this article, this will be done in only the most cursory way.

Fischer (1974, p. 62) concludes an extensive review of theories on regional development by pointing at their predominantly economic character. Both political and socio-cultural factors were neglected in these theories, as was the influence of existing structures such as the settlement system and the material and organizational infrastructure. According to Fischer, any theory on regional development should encompass these factors as well as economic ones.

Furthermore he argues that, since regional systems tend to be web-like, they are subject to "external" stimuli or influences that should be treated as independent variables. These external stimuli originate in the encompassing systems of which the studied regions form a part (the so-called external context). Regional development is explained by the presence (or absence) of these external stimuli or influences on the one hand, and the adaptability of the region on the other hand. The region's adaptability is a matter of the ability to pay for the costs of transforming the material infrastructure of the regional settlement system by "a new round of investments" (Massey, 1982). But it also entails sociological, political and organizational transformations. Fischer accentuates the importance of the presence of actors both willing and able to meet the challenge of carrying out such transformations.

Fischer's ideas are now shared by a growing number of geographers, among them Johnston (1984, p. 452), Martin (1989, p. 199), and several authors of locality studies, such as Cooke (1989), Wharf (1988) and Urry (1988).

Two implications derive from Fischer's views. Firstly, a study of regional development should relate external stimuli to regional systems. Secondly, such a study has to be conducted both at the level of individual actors and at the level of regional systems. The first implication means that, in the case of borderland studies, cross-border relations should not be studied primarily according to their quantity but according to their nature. These external stimuli are of two kinds. One kind is the societal context. In our case there are two societal contexts respectively the French and Italian societies with their nation-states. These contexts do not vary for the regions at the same side of the border, and differ for regions at different sides of the border. The other kind is the spatial context, the regions with which a particular region maintains external relationships. These spatial contexts are different for each region, because they are defined on the basis of the relations with that particular region. In this paper we will not study the consequences of these different spatial contexts, but only the spatial contexts, which actually define the relevant regional systems. International flows traversing a region do not necessarily affect that region; rather, their importance depends on the nature of the regional systems they connect.

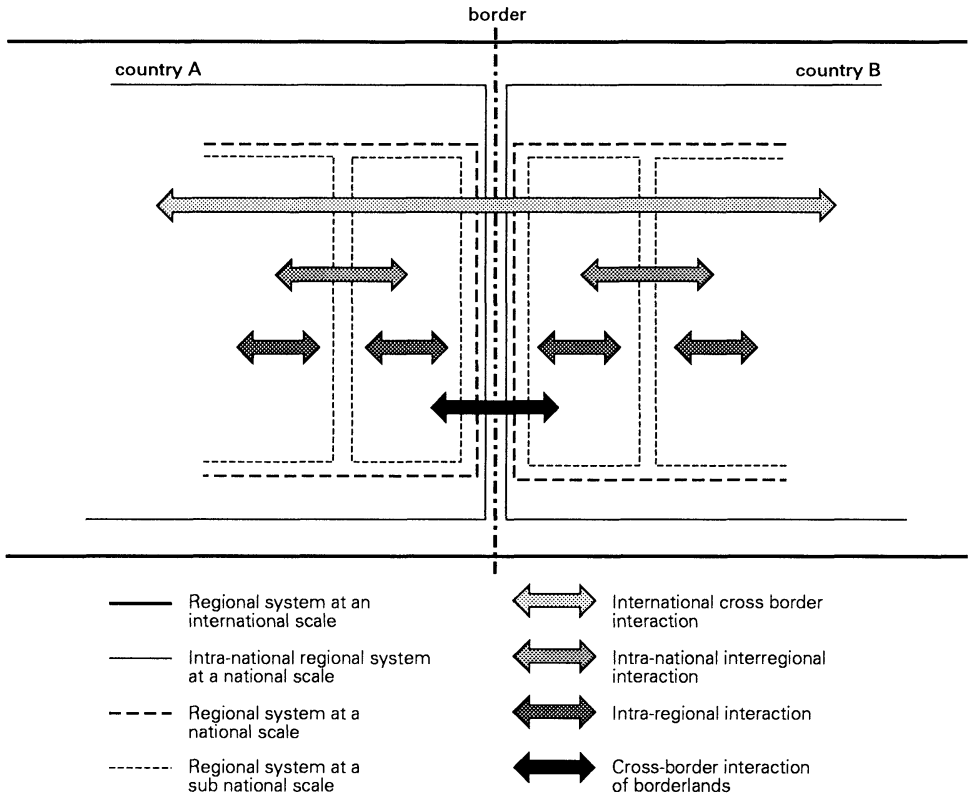
Regional systems should not be seen as massive quantities but as multi-layered structures in which every layer has its own scale and is part of a more extensive layer. The layers are products of the areal division of labour. At the European scale divisions exist between the large core area of the "European dorsal" and the rest of Europe; divisions also exist within the different production complexes of the core itself. The division of labour includes a seasonal trek of holiday-makers from the metropolises, flooding specific, often very far-away regions during some months and leaving them to themselves again during the rest of the year. Another layer is that of the city-hinterland web system, condensing into an "urban field" (Friedmann, 1978; Coppack, 1988) around large metropolises. Finally, there is a layer of a regional system that is based on resources exploited on behalf of national or international markets, while integrated by daily local interactions. The scale of the chosen areal units of analysis determines the relevance of the various external stimuli. At all levels, regional systems may cross the border, thereby generating cross-border interactions. Systems at levels lower than that of the inter-European system, however, are supposed to occur within the national state. For this reason, in our model (figure 1) cross-border interaction at these levels is indicated by dashed lines only.

The following hypotheses are derived from the foregoing: (see figure 2)

- 1) the regional development of the borderland is dependent on the cross-border extension of regional systems at different levels;
- 2) the characteristics of the border determine the extension of regional systems across the border;

Figure 1

**A MODEL OF REGIONAL SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL
AND INTRANATIONAL INTERACTIONS**

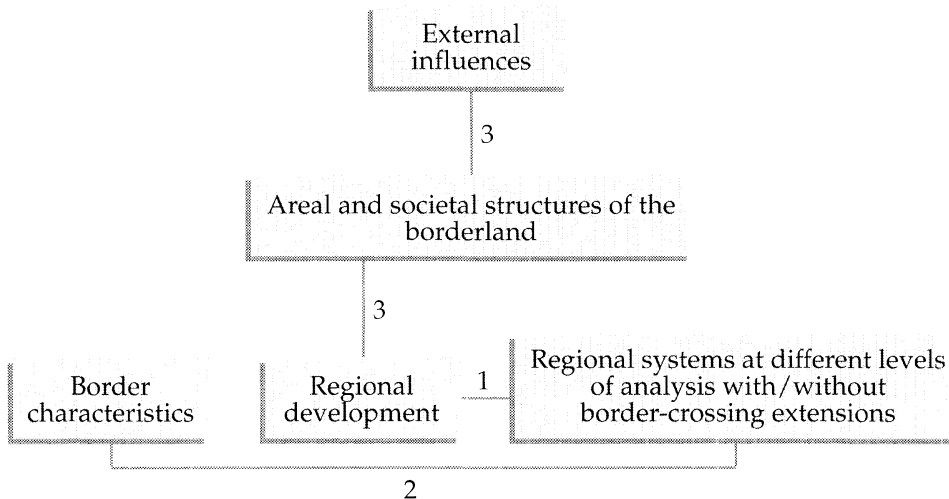


- 3) the regional development of the borderland is dependent on the way the actors in the daily regional and regional city-hinterland systems adapt to external stimuli from other regional systems.

Figure 2 portrays the relationship between these hypotheses and our theoretical framework.

Figure 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES



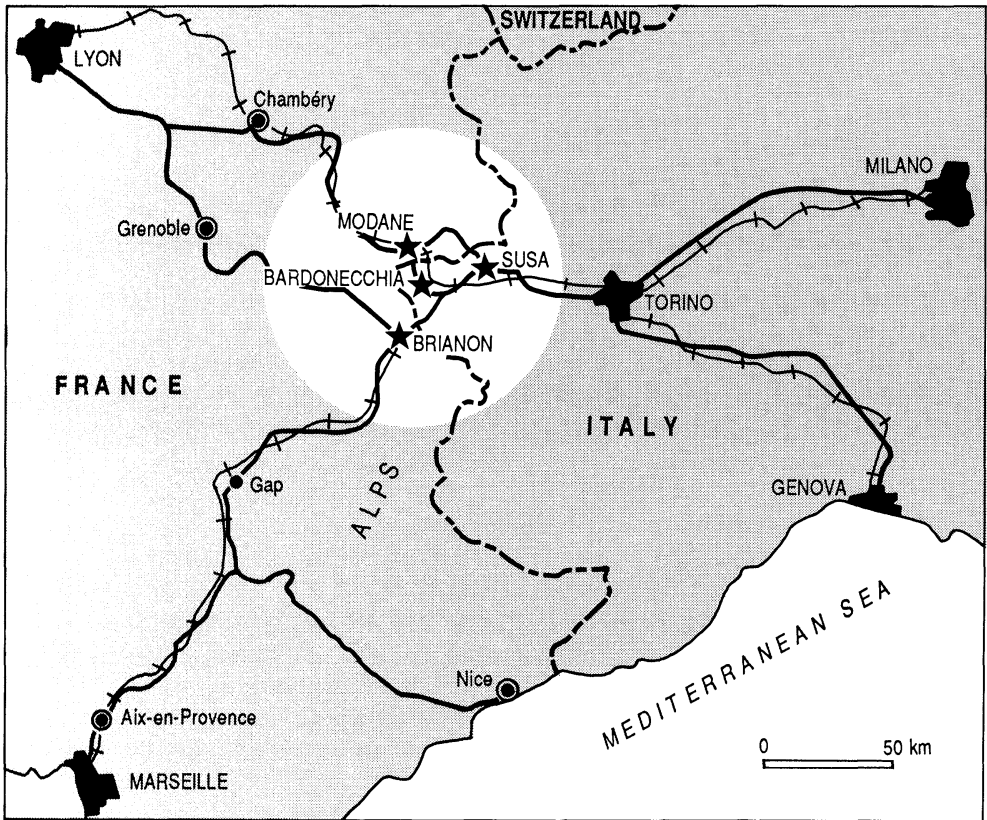
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNITIES STUDIED

Modane

Modane is the first of the four communities to be described here. Situated in the northwestern, French part of our region (figure 3), it is the largest community in the eastern Maurienne, with about 4,900 inhabitants in 1986. The central part of

Figure 3

THE AREA OF STUDY AND ITS GEOGRAPHICAL



- | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|---|
| --- | International border | ■ | Very large city (over 10,000,000 inhabitants) |
| Major connections with surrounding area: | | | |
| + + | Railroad | ● | Large city (over 100,000 inhabitants) |
| — | Highway and main road | ● | Smaller city (under 100,000 inhabitants) |
| | | ★ | Studied community |

the town lies in the narrow valley of the Arc, at an altitude of 1,057 metres (3,468 feet), but the communal territory includes lands at much higher elevations. The town has an industrial history of both textile and paper mills. The mills were attracted by, among other things, the central location of the town, which lies about halfway between the cities of Lyon and Turin on one of the first transalpine railroads (completed in 1871). Local industry steadily declined after the Second World War, mainly due to growing competition from cheap-labour countries (Datar, 1988).

Modane was given a new *raison d'être* in 1965 with the inauguration of the railroad tunnel to Italy that put the town right next to the border (the old railroad crossed the border close to Mont-Cenis, about 50 kilometres, or 30 miles, east of Modane). Thanks to an agreement between the French and Italian governments, all customs and train personnel were based in Modane.

Largely because of this agreement, Modane now has a highly international flavour: Italians and people of Italian descent make up some 30 % of the population. Many other Italians commute to Modane on a daily basis from their homes in the Valle Susa. A road tunnel between Modane and Italy was completed in 1980. Apart from bringing new employment (more customs and transport-related business), the second tunnel also became an important source of income to the town, as the community gets a large share of the toll money. Another recent push to the development of Modane is the construction of a wintersports village, Val-Fréjus, which is situated within the community limits, some 5 kilometres (3 miles) south of Modane proper, at an altitude of about 1,500 metres (4,922 feet).

In less than three decades, then, Modane has changed from a manufacturing town into a town that is heavily dependent on the service industries. In this change, the border plays an important role, as over 50 % of the town's workforce is employed in border-related jobs. Worried by the prospects of 1993, the year in which almost all of the border-related jobs will disappear, the local council is now seeking new possibilities. A rapid further development of still rather small Val-Fréjus and more cooperation with other wintersports communities in the area (among them the Italian neighbour Bardonnècchia) are considered to be the best solutions to the town's foreseeable problems in the near future.

Bardonnècchia

Bardonnècchia is the Italian community on the other side of the 13-kilometre (8-mile) long tunnels from Modane. The community consists of several villages, of which Bardonnècchia proper is by far the largest. The village of Bardonnècchia is situated at an altitude of 1,312 metres (4,305 feet), in a valley surrounded by Alpine uplands. The community as a whole has a population of about 3,300 (1986).

The once agricultural community quickly turned into a cluster of wintersports villages in the postwar era (Dezzari, 1988). The new opportunities attracted numerous migrants from Southern Italy, who now make up at least 20 %

of the population. Due to these newcomers, and to the fact that over 80 % of the visiting tourists come from Turin, the old Franco-Provençal dialect has now been replaced by Italian as the *lingua franca*.

The opening of the tunnels to France turned Bardonecchia, just as it did Modane, into a bordertown. Yet there is little evidence that either the border itself or the proximity of France has had a major impact on the development of the community. Apart from the 30 or so inhabitants who work in Modane, Bardonecchia might just as well be a mountain village somewhere in Central Italy.

One might argue, however, that the surprisingly low number of French tourists in the community should be attributed to the existence of the border, since skiing here is much more expensive than it is in France². Anticipating a lowering of prices after 1992, the local council is rapidly intensifying its contacts with Modane and other neighbouring French communities.

Susa

The community of Susa, an old Roman town with a population of 6,900 in 1986, lies approximately 36 kilometres (23 miles) east of Bardonecchia, at an altitude of only 503 metres (1,650 feet). Much like Modane, Susa had an important industrial character until quite recently. Textile and steel factories dominated the local economy until the 60s, when industrial decline set in, due to much the same factors that caused a similar decline in Modane.

Local and provincial authorities reacted by transferring several important institutions (e.g., a regional hospital) to the town. Commercial development was important, too. In this respect the phenomenon of border-related shops stands out. Due to increasing tourism in the 60s and 70s, a score of these shops, where liquor and jewellery are sold tax-free to an almost exclusively French public at prices unbeatable in France, sprung up throughout the town. Susa is the first Italian town one encounters when crossing the border on the Mont-Cenis road from France. This road, though, lost a lot of traffic with the opening of the tunnel between Modane and Bardonecchia, and far fewer tourists now visit Susa. This decline has affected commerce.

The sudden decline of the border-related shops, the continuing industrial decline, and the fact that institutions have long ceased to settle in Susa explain the bad economic and demographic shape the town finds itself in at present. The border has had a relatively large effect on the town's development, but its importance is weakening and might even disappear altogether with the completion of the Turin-Bardonecchia-France expressway, which is planned for 1994.

Though the local authorities share this pessimistic view, little is being done to prevent the town's relative situation from worsening.

Briançon

Briançon is the largest of the four communities studied, with a population of approximately 12,500 in 1988. Situated on the leeward side of one of the highest Alpine mountain chains, the town is famous for its climate: healthy, dry and sunny, though rather cool (as it lies at an altitude of 1,321 metres, or 4,334 feet). Thanks to this amenity, a special form of tourism called "climatism" developed as early as the 19th century. Climatism still forms an important part of the local economy, as hospitals and other health-related institutions (e.g., schools for children suffering from bronchitis and other diseases) employ about one-third of the total workforce.

Meanwhile, Briançon's economic basis has become broader in the postwar years (Avocat, 1979). Tourism other than climatism developed quickly. The location of Briançon in the heart of a beautiful and relatively unspoiled mountainous region, and the charm of its old city, make the town highly attractive in both summer and winter. This attractiveness has been enhanced even further by the recent introduction of ski-lifts that allow for a combination of wintersports and the amenities of a "city", a combination claimed to be unique by the local authorities. Apart from its climatism and tourism, Briançon is also relatively important as a regional centre. "Close to nowhere", it hosts the only hospitals, secondary schools and shopping centres in a large area. Appointed a *sous-préfecture*, the town is also home to several governmental institutions. As the economy has flourished since the Second World War, the town has boomed: its present population of 12,500 is more than twice the 1944 figure of about 6,000.

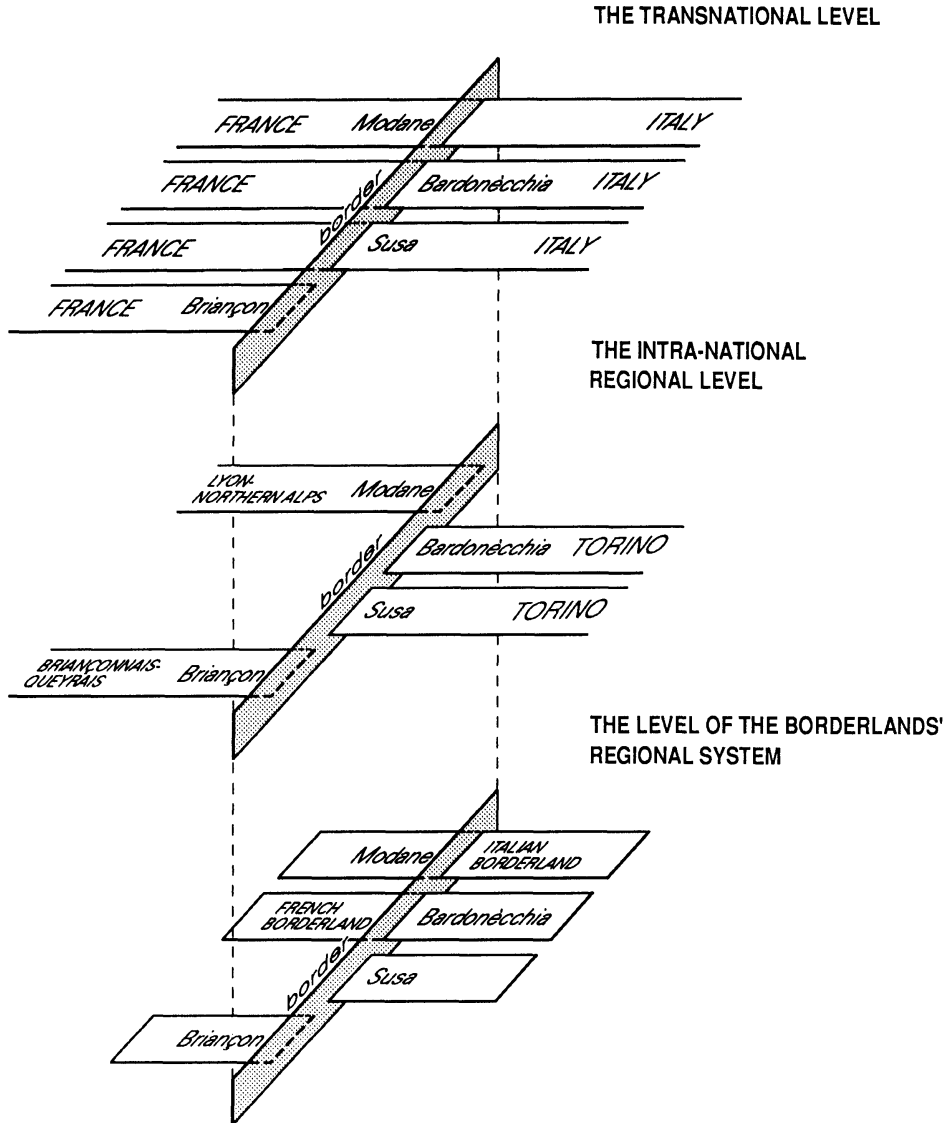
Despite the proximity of Italy, the town has little contact with that country. The only direct link of some quality consists of the road that passes by the Col de Montgenèvre, on the way to Oulx, a small town halfway between Susa and Bardonecchia. Since much slow traffic goes up and down the hairpin curves, this road is not a very fast route. Some Italians, however, do take this road in order to go shopping in Briançon, where prices generally are a good deal lower than in Italy. But, due to the rather mediocre connection, to the fact that the Italian area directly bordering the Briançonnais is very sparsely populated, and to the fact that the number of Italians residing in Briançon is very small, only few interactions take place between the town and Italy. Briançon, then, should be defined as a town close to the border rather than as a functional bordertown.

THE REGIONAL SYSTEMS

As mentioned in the introduction, the effects of the border on the adjacent communities can be understood by tracing the regional systems to which these communities belong. In order to trace and delimit regional systems, one should take into consideration both economic, cultural and political aspects. In a regional system, interaction flows may be biased in all these aspects. By definition, interaction will be much more intense between places within a given regional system than between places belonging to different regional systems. We will now

Figure 4

THE FOUR STUDIED MUNICIPALITIES
THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF CROSS-BORDER RELATIONS
WITH REGIONAL SYSTEMS AT THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS



trace the regional systems to which the studied communities belong. This will be done at several levels of analysis, as regional systems are to be understood as multi-layered. In figure 4 the four studied municipalities are depicted according to their cross-border interactional relations. Three levels of analysis are presented in this figure, the transnational, the intra-regional and the level of the neighbouring borderlands.

Modane

In the case of Modane, everything points at the incorporation of the town in a regional system at the level of the regional city-hinterland system. The center of this system is based in Lyon and, to a lesser extent, Grenoble. This regional system, that we will call "Lyon-Northern Alps", has a population of about 5,500,000 and covers an area of some 55,000 square kilometres (21,000 square miles).

The incorporation of Modane in this system is most obvious from a political point of view. Especially since 1982, when president Mitterand endowed the French planning regions with much more political power than they ever enjoyed before, the overwhelming majority of decisions involving Modane are taken in either Lyon (chief town of the Rhône-Alpes region), Chambéry (chief town of the department to which Modane belongs, Savoie) or Modane itself. From a cultural point of view, ties with the regional system are very strong too, despite the large number of people of Italian descent in the town. The Grenoble-based daily *Dauphiné Libéré*, for example, accounts for over 80 % of all newspaper sales in the town, while the only receivable regional television station is the Lyon-based France 3 — Rhône-Alpes. Considering economic interactions, the incorporation of Modane in the Lyon-Northern Alps regional system is evident, too (Meyzenq, 1984). Almost all of the local companies have their headquarters in Chambéry, Grenoble or Lyon, cities that are also home to the vast majority of tourists visiting Val-Fréjus.

Though the incorporation of Modane into a regional system at the regional city-hinterland level is clear, things are rather different at other levels of analysis. The daily regional system, or the system in which most of the daily interactions take place, is a system to which a part of the Italian Valle Susa belongs. This is confirmed by the flow into town of Italian commuters, who are much more numerous than the commuters from surrounding French communities. At the highest level of analysis, too, Modane clearly belongs to a regional system that crosses the border. As we have seen, agreements on an international level have led shaped the town's specific economic structure. Modane, then, clearly belongs to differently directed regional systems at different levels. The regional systems even seem to be opposite to each other. We will return to this below in the discussion of the value of our hypotheses.

Bardonnècchia

Things are much more simple in the case of Bardonnècchia. This community is heavily dependent on the Turin area in almost every respect. Thus, it has to be incorporated in a Turin-based regional system at most levels of analysis, including that of the daily regional system. A sizeable number of Bardonnècchians travel to Turin almost daily for education, shopping or, in fewer cases, work. The community, in return, is host to hordes of Turinese every weekend, especially during the cold season. Politically and culturally, too, the dependence on Turin is complete, now that the Franco-Provençal dialect no longer plays a role. Only two facts seem contradictory to a resolute incorporation of Bardonnècchia in Turin-based regional systems. Firstly, some inhabitants do commute to Modane every day. Their number is small, however, and they constitute only about two per cent of the local workforce. Secondly, there is increasing interaction on the part of the authorities with Modane and other communities on the French side of the border. But, though increasing, this type of interaction is still relatively rare compared to interaction with Italian communities, especially Turin.

Susa

The case of Susa seems just as clear as that of Bardonnècchia. The town belongs to the urban field of Turin. Many people commute to that big city, and all major local companies have their headquarters there. Politically and culturally, the dependence is almost complete. Visiting tourists, however, tend to come from France rather than from Turin. Tourism accounts for most of the cross-border interaction. Tourism is not nearly as important to Susa as it is to either Bardonnècchia or Briançon, and therefore cross-border interaction is of only minor relevance to Susa. Accordingly, this interaction does not fit into the above-mentioned incorporation in Turin-dominated regional systems. Yet there is a slightly marginal opposite trend on the highest level of analysis. We may conclude that Susa is part of Turin-based regional systems at all levels of analysis, though its incorporation is rather weak at the highest level.

Briançon

Of the four communities, Briançon forms a special case. Larger than the other three, it is also farther away and more difficult to reach from the large metropolises in this part of Europe. Due to the town's size and, especially, the element of distance, Briançon's development has been relatively independent, as compared to the other communities studied.

The town has several administrative institutions as well as a local edition of the *Dauphiné Libéré*. It also functions as an educational and commercial centre for an area of well over a thousand square kilometres (390 square miles). The tourist trade, main pillar of the local economy, is not dependent on visitors from one particular city or region, as is the case in Bardonnècchia. Parisians, Provençals,

inhabitants of the Rhône-Alpes region, people from other parts of France and foreigners combined each make up about 20 % of the tourists in Briançon. Finally, local companies have their headquarters in such different cities as Paris, Gap, Marseille, Lyon, Grenoble and... Briançon itself.

Briançon, then, does not belong to a regional system the way the other two communities do. Rather, it is the centre of its own small regional system, a regional city-hinterland system. It will be clear, however, that at a higher level of analysis the town does form part of another regional system. After all, this is France (still rather centralized), and both Paris and Marseille, the regional chief town, play a large political and cultural role. Finally, the existence of a transnational inter-European system is hardly evident here. It remains a bordertown in which the roles of both Turin and of Italy as a whole are negligible.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES: CONCLUSIONS

Our first hypothesis assumed that regional development of the borderlands depends on the cross-border extension of regional systems. In our study, the clearest example of regional systems crossing the border is found in the case of Modane. The town belongs to border-crossing regional systems on both a daily and a national scale. Because of the town's incorporation into these systems, the borderland in and around Modane is highly dependent, both on the border itself and on the region on the other side of the border. In the other communities studied, local development is much less dependent on the border. In line with our hypothesis, regional systems there do not cross the border the way they do in Modane. Certainly, the communities are part of a transnational regional system at the highest level of analysis, but this does not have many repercussions at lower levels. Hence, the influence of the border is relatively weak. Yet, local differences do exist. The border seems to generate more and more interaction between Bardonnèchia and France, thereby enhancing its influence on Bardonnèchia's development. The opening of the borders between the member states of the EC will probably further strengthen Bardonnèchia's international contacts.

Nothing of the kind is to be expected in either Susa or Briançon. In fact, contacts between Susa and France are decreasing in number and importance. They might even cease to exist in the near future. In Briançon, no significant change in international contacts is anticipated. The differences between the towns of Susa and Briançon on the one hand, and Bardonnèchia on the other hand, are related to the reasons for the incorporation of each of the towns into nationally orientated regional systems.

Susa is much closer to, and more accessible from, Turin than France, while Briançon is hard to reach from everywhere but the Briançonnais. Bardonnèchia, on the other hand, is only a 15-minute drive or 10-minute train ride from Modane. The fact that it is not incorporated into transnational regional

systems at all levels may be attributed to the characteristics of the border dividing the town from France.

It seems safe to conclude that, just as first hypothesis suggests, there is a high correlation between the borderland's regional development and the cross-border extension of regional systems.

Now that the importance of the border-crossing ability of regional systems has been established, the question arises as to what determines this ability. Our second hypothesis suggests that the answer can be found in studying the characteristics of borders. Even in an area as small as that of our study, the differences between borders are huge. Without referring to any formal classification of borders, we can discern at least three different types of borders in our study area.

In the case of Modane, the border generates interaction, employment and development. The regional system at a daily scale crosses the border because of the border's interaction-generating capacity. Of course, things will change from 1993 onward; we will return to this in the discussion of our third hypothesis.

In the case of Bardonnèchia, the nature of the border is exactly opposite to that observed for Modane. The border seems to hinder interaction by its fence-like effect; functioning as a socio-economic barrier, regional systems at most levels evidently do not cross it. Yet chances are the regional systems will tend to cross when the border opens up.

The third type of border is found in the case of Briançon. Its importance is only minor, as it neither generates nor hinders interaction. In fact, the border between Italy and the Briançonnais resembles the classic "natural border". In a case like this, regional systems at all levels lower than the national one do not cross the border. Nor will they cross after the opening of the borders.

Finally, we find a combination of two of the above types of borders in the case of the border between Susa and France. During the 60s and 70s, this border functioned as a generator of interaction; a sizeable number of Susa shops depended on French customers. During the 80s, however, the nature of the border gradually changed to become more and more like the one dividing the Briançonnais from Italy. With "the Briançon model" dominating now, regional systems no longer cross the border in any significant way. The border-crossing ability of regional systems might even cease to exist for Susa altogether. Theoretically, we would expect this to occur. That part of the Susa-France border that remains functioning according to "the Modane model" (that is, the border as a generator) will suffer a severe blow from the opening of the border.

Reviewing our discussion of the second hypothesis, we think we have shown it to be relevant, though endless elaboration and refinement is certainly both possible and necessary. Yet at this stage it is clear that border characteristics are of major relevance to the border-crossing capacity of regional systems.

Our third and final hypothesis states that the regional development of borderlands is dependent on the way the actors in the daily regional and regional city-hinterland systems adapt to external stimuli from other regional systems. In other words, identical structures can lead to different outcomes because local actors can make a difference. This difference is shown quite clearly in our study.

In Modane, the perspective is not too bright. With the local economy heavily dependent on the border, "1993" could be regarded as a threat to the town's development. But in fact it is not, and should not be, regarded as such. The town is rapidly changing into a wintersports community, closely cooperating with other such communities in both France and Italy. It is undeniable that the opening of the border will create problems in Modane, but the local government expects these to be resolved within a few years.

Things look much worse for Susa. Not only because of the structure of the local economy, but because of the surprising lack of local initiative as well. True, it is impossible to turn low-lying Susa into a wintersports town, but there seem to be other possibilities to halt local decline. Within a few years, the autostrada between Turin and France will pass right next to Susa. If the town gets an exit from and entrance to it, opportunities to attract new enterprises will abound. After all, Susa is a pretty town, much prettier than rather gloomy Modane, for example. Furthermore, it is situated in the midst of a beautiful countryside. It could provide a welcome relief to companies settled in the overcrowded and heavily polluted Turin area. The local council, however, seems to believe Susa has already been defeated.

Quite the opposite holds for Bardonnèchia. Not only the mayor and his council, but also local and Turinese entrepreneurs are actively seeking new possibilities for the town. More than in the other communities we studied, international cooperation is sought after and stimulated in Bardonnèchia. This is not surprising, for such cooperation could be worthwhile. Still, the eager reaction of local actors to external stimuli is noteworthy, and seems to influence further action. For example, talks about Winter Olympics to be centred in and around Bardonnèchia in 1996 or 2000, initiated by Bardonnèchia's mayor, are becoming more serious, now that local authorities have gained French cooperation in turning several skiing areas into a huge one.

Finally, in the case of Briançon too, local actors are important. The town's growing economy is heavily supported by its energetic local council. A complete scheme to renovate the old town is almost finished. Space has been provided and roads have been constructed for a large and very successful commercial centre. This is but one of many local initiatives.

Of course, local actors have only limited (financial) means and are subject to social, economic, political and geographical constraints. It seems, however, that innovative thinking in combination with pressure on higher authorities in order to obtain funding, does make a difference. Having said this, we consider our third hypothesis, though it is not thoroughly tested, to be valid.

Although our study has not been elaborated enough, its outcomes suggest some conclusions that might be of value to the study of regional development and borderlands. Firstly, it is clear that everyone, policy-makers included, should be cautious not to equate borderlands with peripheral areas. Some borderlands are peripheral and some are not. Among the many factors influencing the peripheral character of a given borderland, two are of major importance: the border-crossing capacity of the regional systems in the area, and the nature of its borders. Secondly, our study lends support to Fischer's idea that it is important to analyze both the aggregate and the individual level. Yet as our study is only a first step towards a geographical theory on the regional development of borderlands, we cannot prove Fischer's theory to be right. In fact, while carrying out the fieldwork, it became clear that we had done too little preliminary analysis of existing networks. Further analysis of the relations between individual actors and the systems they live in is certainly needed. But so far, Fischer's theory has not been falsified and seems to be a valuable one.

All in all, more detailed and more refined studies are necessary on the subject of regional development of borderlands. As huge sums of money are being invested in the development of the borderlands in the European Community at this very moment, further study could help target these funds for greatest benefits. In this paper, we have indicated some directions in which these studies should go.

NOTES

- 1 This paper is based on fieldwork conducted by M. Jon Ming and B. van der Schelde. This fieldwork consisted of both statistical analysis of the studied communities and comprehensive interviews with a number of local and regional "key figures". Its results reported in Jon Ming and van der Schelde, 1989 (see list of references).
- 2 And vice versa, the existence of the border as a psychological barrier might be the reason for the equally surprising large number of Italians willing to pay more in their own country. While it is clear that the significance of the border for Bardonnèchia is not nearly as large as it is in the case of Modane, its exact magnitude is hard to define. More than anywhere in our area of study, the border here has a fence-like effect, a situation that has both positive and negative repercussions for the development of the community.

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