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► **To cite this version:**

Frédéric Santamaria. Partnership for local development : the case of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt urban area in the North-East of France. Partnership for local development, 2004, Istanbul, Turkey. pp.133-138. halshs-00174234

HAL Id: halshs-00174234

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00174234v1>

Submitted on 21 Sep 2007

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“PARTNERSHIP FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE BELFORT-MONTBÉLIARD-HÉRICOURT URBAN AREA IN THE NORTH-EAST OF FRANCE”

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[Title 1] AN APPROACH IN TERMS OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT.

We propose here a frame of analysis which allows to present a case study, that of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area in the North-East of France¹, in a more general perspective: that of the local development.

The approach in terms of local development rests on the identification of a territory considered as a space of active solidarity within which partners are called to mobilize and to coordinate the local resources in a prospect of diversification and enrichment of the economic and social activities. So, in the foundation of the approach in terms of local development, there is this concern to identify concrete socio-economic relations and potential partnerships transcending, if necessary, the borders of the institutional territories considered here in the sense of territories inherited from the political and administrative organization.

Consequently, dealing with the case of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area in a perspective of local development, it is to know to which extent this precise case informs us about the types of relations between different actors and institutions.

In that case, the local projects are developed on a territory based on a political action. This political action leans on a certain socio-economic reality, which attends then to an operational and institutional recognition of this territory, notably by the central government.

Finally, this example shows how local initiatives can anticipate state initiatives particularly in the field of local partnership. In that case, partnership can be identified in between different local or extra-local authorities, in different fields, between different economic and social organisations.

[Title 2] A SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALITY

Neither the physical characteristics of the considered area, nor the politico-administrative divisions inherited from history allow us to justify, nor to explain the limits of a territorial

¹ Appendix 1

entity called the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area². It is thus to the organization of the space that it is here necessary to make reference.

The space of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area which represents, in the census of 1999, 297 438 inhabitants, is polarized by two medium-size towns, Belfort (81 524 inhabitants in 1999) and Montbéliard (113 059 inhabitants in 1999). According to the French geographer Paul CLAVAL, even if it differs from a classic hierarchical structure, the structure in place is functional and is rather similar to a polycentric organization (CLAVAL, 1978).

Nevertheless, the complexion of local labour market areas do not matches with the limits of the so-called Urban Area. It is nevertheless interesting to observe the relations inside the urban Area Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt by studying the migrations place of residence - work between the local labour market areas. In fact, two main poles of employment are at stake: the ones of the towns of Belfort and Montbéliard in reason, notably, of the presence of important industrial plants: the *ALSTOM* company (“TGV” – high speed train – builder) in Belfort and the car builder *Peugeot* near Montbéliard. So, in 1990, while 3 657 inhabitants went of the local labour market area of Montbéliard towards that of Belfort, 6 623 persons went of the local labour market area of Belfort towards that of Montbéliard. These figures exceed very widely those who reflect the relations with the other surroundings areas for which the noticed migrations exceed hardly 500 persons except, for instance, in the case of the migrations towards the South of the Alsace region (about 1 400). This situation is not contradicted by the observation of more recent data: between 1990 and 1999, the intensity of the exchanges in employment between the zones of Montbéliard and Belfort increased. What is more, as the area benefits from a good level of public and private services most of the other type of relations take place within the very area (SERVICE PUBLIC D’AMÉNAGEMENT DE L’AIRE URBAINE BELFORT-MONTBÉLIARD-HÉRICOURT, 2003).

Finally, the industry has a great impact on the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area with about 50 % of the working population employed in this sector. Besides, the Urban Area distinguishes itself within its region, by more qualified jobs, what can explain by the presence of big industrial units implementing high technologies. The Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area also benefits from a stronger proportion of executives of companies and technicians, foremen or supervisors. However, the workers form some more of the third and the skilled workers near the quarter of the workforce of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area (SERVICE PUBLIC D’AMÉNAGEMENT DE L’AIRE URBAINE BELFORT-MONTBÉLIARD-HÉRICOURT, 2003).

It is in the relationship between a certain socio-economic reality and the mobilization of the local political actors that the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area appears as an acceptable example of local development (TEISSERENC, 2002).

[Title 3] A TERRITORY CLAIMS POLITICALLY.

The territory of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area appears as a political construction piloted by local elected members. It constitutes a territory of action which

² Appendix 2

transcends the political and administrative borders (three “départements”³ - are concerned, two partly and one as a whole).

The Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area, strongly influenced by the industry, was very affected by the economic crisis of the beginning of 1980s. It is to try to counterbalance the effects of this crisis that is created in 1984 the association “Aire urbaine 2000” which gather then the elected members of different local authorities. The aim was also to deals with the increasing competition between cities in Europe and to constitute an urban area of approximately 300 000 inhabitants. What is more, the decentralisation process, which starts at the beginning of the eighties in France, implies for local authorities to better their capacity to influence central state decisions. In that perspective, the establishment of the association was also a way to act as a lobby.

From 1984, members start working on common projects to give this area a new prospect of development. Taking advantage of the dynamics of the State policy in favour of universities, the domain of the higher education and research were the object of important investments. The association appears then as a place of mobilization and dialogue. A polytechnic institute is created in 1985, transformed since (1999) into university. In the cultural domain, local authorities financed collectively certain number of new structures (a scientific museum, an international centre of video creation). Joint operations to attract foreign companies were led by local agencies of economic development, cooperation in tourist subject was promoted between the tourist offices. It is also in the framework of the association that was negotiated the merger of the hospitals of Belfort and Montbéliard. The association was also used to promote the local interests at national and European level. The Urban Area obtained support from the European Fund for Regional Economic Development Objective 2, but also special State funds to help new firms to settle in the area.

We can thus notice that the constitution of a territorial entity breaking the politico-administrative borders is oriented towards a project of development based on a strong political voluntarism.

Meanwhile, the territory of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area tends to be legitimised in different ways. From 1999, the law on spatial planning and sustainable development come to meet the initiatives taken for a long time in that part of France.

[Title 4] A LEGITIMIZED TERRITORY.

From the beginning of 1980s, the administration of the State organizes some of its services on the scale of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area. The State administration dealing with industry, research and environment has created a local subdivision which operates at the scale of the Urban Area. It is also the case for other administrations as the ones dealing with employment, vocational training or market regulations.

Besides, the organization of institutions on the scale of the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area also concerns public companies as gas and electricity suppliers, associations of citizens (association for the promotion of local public transports, association of environmental protection) and the local association of entrepreneurs.

³The Turkish equivalent would be a province.

Then, when in 1999, the Government proposed a new framework for local development, the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area was in the first line. The proposal was to deliver funds to local areas as far as :

- a coherent territory for action was identified,
- a local forum involving the civil society was settled,
- a specific local administration to elaborate a project and to put it in practice was created.

Already from 1998, the association "Aire urbaine 2000" representing the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area had started the drafting of a project of development for the area. Its elaboration implied the organization of working groups composed by local partners from different backgrounds. These groups were dealing with the following topics: higher education and research, economy, tourism, transport, image and communication... This operation led to a local scheme of development voted by local authorities. In parallel, a local public administration was created in 2001. It involves 10 different local authorities at different scales (from municipalities to "départements"⁴).

At this stage, we can consider the example given above has an experience which has anticipates on the national policy. It can also be noticed that the French national policy of spatial planning incorporates, in an increasing way, an approach in terms of local development based on the identification of a " coherent territory " and the mobilization of the local partners for the elaboration and the follow-up of the project. At the same time, this evolution allows to ask the question of the relationship between the territory, the citizens and their representatives. In that respect, the Belfort-Montbéliard-Héricourt Urban Area experience remains an elected members' business, which not really match with the local development approach.

Nevertheless, if we can be cautious on the capacity of local forum (250 persons gathered one or twice a year) to really influence the local development project in the future, we can also consider that it is an opportunity to find new modes of regulations of policies, where the representative are judged on their ability to forge common projects involving different partners and articulating socio-economic realities and institutional territories.

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⁴ i.e 3

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APPENDIX 1

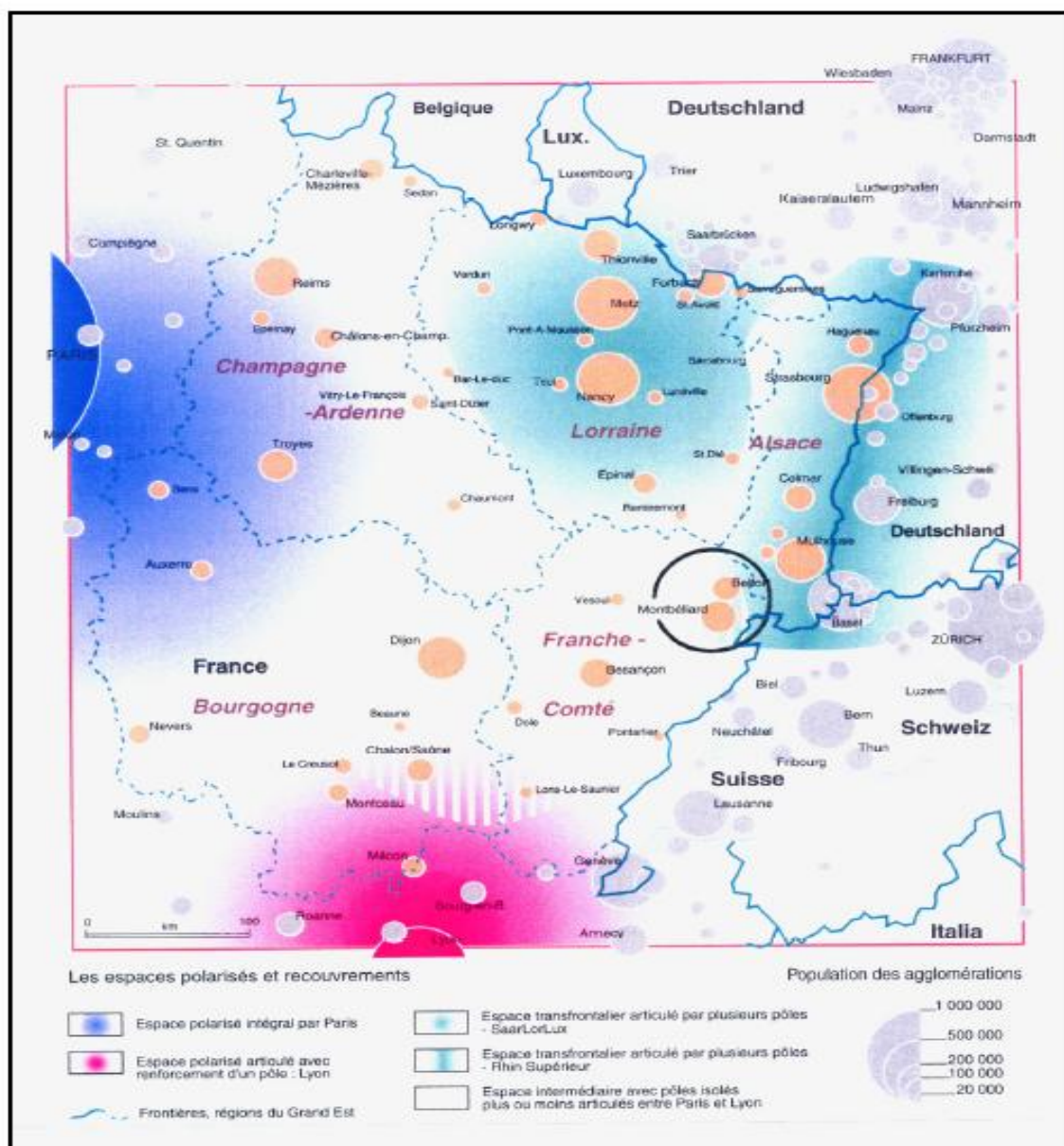


Figure 1 : le Pays de l'Aire Urbaine dans le Grand Est (DATAR)
DRE Franche-Comté, 2003

APPENDIX 2

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