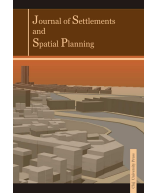




Centre for Research on Settlements and Urbanism

**Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning**

Journal homepage: <http://jssp.reviste.ubbcluj.ro>



# The Role of Micro-Regional Cooperation in Spatial Planning. The Case of France

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**Keywords:** France, inter-communal cooperation, micro-region, regional development, spatial planning

## ABSTRACT

Since the 1950s urban and rural areas have significantly changed in France. This trend made it clear that a new planning policy needed to be created, one that would be more flexible, less centralised and would be able to consider local characteristics to a greater extent. In this new policy various forms of cooperation between communes (municipalities) played a key role. The present study aims at analysing the relevant legislation and scientific literature in the field to argue for the integration of the forms, frameworks and role of cooperation in the planning process at the local level. We presented the beginnings of micro-regional cooperation, the reasons that led to starting these cooperation relationships and the three law packages that intended to simplify and standardise the established and rather complicated networks. As part of this process and in accordance with their main objectives we elaborated the competences they specified and highlighted their influence on micro-regional cooperation. Micro-regional cooperation had to cope with many difficulties in France too, but at the same time it also facilitated the establishment of a more coordinated and integrated development policy, decisive elements of which are the legislative background that strengthens the endogenous processes, the solidarity of communes to one another and their willingness to cooperate.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Great changes were implemented in urban and rural areas as part of the urbanisation process after the World War II. The rebuilding, the restructuring of production, the baby boom, the migration from rural areas to cities and the influx of migrants from former colonies caused visible problems, primarily in urban areas, in the fields of education, healthcare and social services. At the beginning, municipalities were unable to manage these efficiently [1], [2]. Major changes occurred in rural areas, as well, with the restructuring of the agricultural system and because of the migration it triggered. Much more, this was also the time when the aging of the rural population and the degradation of services were triggered. According to Diry (1999) in the 1970s another wave of changes came: urban areas kept expanding and this process put great pressure on the

natural and agricultural environment [3]. At the same time the process of population loss in many rural communes has stopped and people turned back. People leaving the city returned to the rural areas and after a while this entailed the appearance of certain functions characteristic to the city. New demands emerged from the growing popularity and the newly settled enterprises; however, this also led to conflicts between the newcomers and the old local population. These changes did not take place everywhere in rural areas. There were still communities struggling with population loss and lagging behind economically. The complexity of both urban and rural society has triggered multi-faceted issues.

Finding the right answers to the changing needs and reducing regional disparities have constituted a great challenge for the state, which also had to create the necessary institutional and legislative

background for performing this difficult task. One of the most obvious problems was the fragmentation of the commune network that further increased the expenses of the state budget and made it difficult to provide services at the adequate level. There have been several efforts to eliminate or diminish the fragmentation of the commune system but due to the resistance of municipalities all of these attempts failed. Despite this, the majority of communes were aware of the fact that they were unable to perform their duties, thus even from the 1890s, starting with the passing of the first law of association towns and villages, the first associations of communes were formed. These gained momentum in the 1960s. The economic upturn after World War II laid the groundwork and created the financial background for developing a new type of spatial development and planning system, together with its the institutional, professional and methodological background. Consequently, from the second half of the 1960s micro-regional cooperation started to play a key role in spatial planning and they evolved into a complex spatial network until now [1], [4], [5].

We aimed to analyse the relevant French legislation on cooperation in spatial planning and development in order to present the forms, framework and roles of cooperation in spatial planning at local level and which are important from the perspective of strategy formation.

## 2. THE BEGINNING OF MICRO-REGIONAL COOPERATION IN FRANCE

Micro-regions represent a level of organization between communes and departments, local areas where actors know one another and there is a willingness to join forces for the interests of the community (*intérêt communautaire*). The forms of cooperation appearing at micro-region level can most simply be described by the tasks they perform and their component participants. These two basically define the organisational framework of cooperation. Based on the tasks performed, there are two types of cooperation:

- economic cooperation - performing public service tasks (*intercommunalité de gestion*);
- project-type cooperation between communes (*intercommunalité de projet*).

These organisational structures belong to the first group and they were established by the communes to implement tasks delegated to the association level. In addition to performing obligatory tasks, the organisational structures of the second type also provide a framework for the accomplishment of development goals specified by the participants collectively. There is an evolutionary connection between the two types: after a while the association may become capable of implementing projects beyond the scope of public service tasks [6], [7].

Based on the component participants we can also differentiate them into two types [6], [7], [8]:

- cooperation between communes, associations (interest groups) in which only the municipalities of cities, towns and villages participate;
- interregional cooperation or inter-communal cooperation, interest groups in which not only the municipalities but also other local authorities, trade groups (chambers), and the representatives of the civic and private sphere can also take part in.

In the first type of cooperation exclusively the communes can be included. The development of this cooperation type goes a long way back and the related organisational structures are really diverse. Cooperation belonging to the second group allows for a greater, more comprehensive regional cooperation, with a wider spectrum of participants. Their formation is initiated by the demand for project-type operation and basically this is the connection point between the former and the latter grouping. Obviously there are transitional forms of cooperation (e.g.: *syndicat mixte*), and in the history of development it can be seen that legislators have supported the establishing of more efficient cooperation acts with increasingly flexible forms. The first cooperation relationships were established to elaborate and implement specific projects but after a while their aims extended and they became more complex. This is how after single-purpose associations of communes (*SIVU*) multi-purpose associations (*SIVOM*, *syndicat mixte*, *syndicat à la carte*) were established; the next stage involved optional tasks that were added to the obligatory ones, which was a step that extended the playing field for associations. The obligatory and optional tasks of the new form of association, called community of communes (*CC*, *CU*, *CA*), were determined by the size of the community's population. Its institutional form is the Public Entity for Inter-communal Cooperation (*Établissement Public de Coopération Intercommunale*, later called *EPCI*). Originally, the financial-type associations organically developed into project-type cooperation [7]. As a result of respecting the autonomy of municipalities and because of municipalities' firm interest representation, these forms of structural organisation kept overlapping one another, creating a complex network of inter-communal cooperation that after a while was not transparent and cost-efficient enough. By the end of the 1990s three law packages were drafted and these reformed and simplified the system of cooperation at micro-region level [1].

## 3. LAWS SIMPLIFYING COOPERATION AT MICRO-REGION LEVEL

By the end of the 1990s three legislation packages were passed and they fundamentally reformed the system of cooperation between communes and

regions. These legislation packages aimed at establishing the framework for the coordinated practising of competences by reforming the legislative and financial background. The 'framework law on spatial planning and sustainable spatial development' primarily targeted the modernisation of the system of establishing contracts of spatial planning and development by involving local actors [15].

The 'law on strengthening and simplifying inter-communal cooperation' settled the forms of association, strongly emphasising on the importance of supporting project-type inter-communal cooperation [16]. For this purpose the law designated EPCIs as the standard organisational framework, which can be maintained from the contributions of members and/or can have their own revenue from imposing taxes.

The 'law on the solidarity and reforming of cities' (later SRU) regulated the means and documents of planning, clearly stressing the logic of regionality as opposed to that of sectorality [17].

The three legislation packages are closely connected and their major objectives include [9]:

- redefining regional levels of state action;
- introducing the principle of sustainable development;
- improving the coherence of public policies by substituting sectoral logic with territorial logic, and reinforcing the dialogue by entering into contracts between the various regional levels;
- harmonising endogenous process-based, bottom-up efforts with state initiatives and tasks;
- strengthening solidarity through inter-communal cooperation;
- democratising local politics by supporting participation and consultation;
- synchronised development of urban and rural spaces with local interests in mind, and also taking into consideration the need to adapt to global changes.

Thanks to the three laws the reorganisation of inter-communal cooperation has started in compliance with the new legislative framework. The leading forms were the communities of communes and the organisational structures of geographical units (*pays*) that were already existing (fig. 1 and fig. 2).

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 out of the 36,664 communes in France 36,614 belonged to communities of communes. Currently 2,145 such communities exist, covering 99% of communes in France and 94% of the population. On average, about 17 communes and 29,000 people constitute one community of communes. However, there is great variation among communities of communes: among the smallest ones we find a community consisting of only 2 communes with barely 200 inhabitants together, whilst the largest is made up of 85 cities, towns and villages where more than 1.3 million people live. On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 there were 14

communes that were not part of any kind of cooperation [10].

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, there were 370 *pays*, with 29,982 communes representing 80% of France's territory and 47% of its population. The average size of these *pays*-based form is of 1,183km<sup>2</sup> and contains 79-80 communes and about 77,000 people. Hardly more than 6,000 inhabitants characterise the smallest *pays*, whereas almost 500,000 people live in the largest ones. Similar to this, the distribution of communes participating in these is rather extreme: in the larger ones we find more than 350 communes, while in the smaller *pays* there are fewer than a dozen.

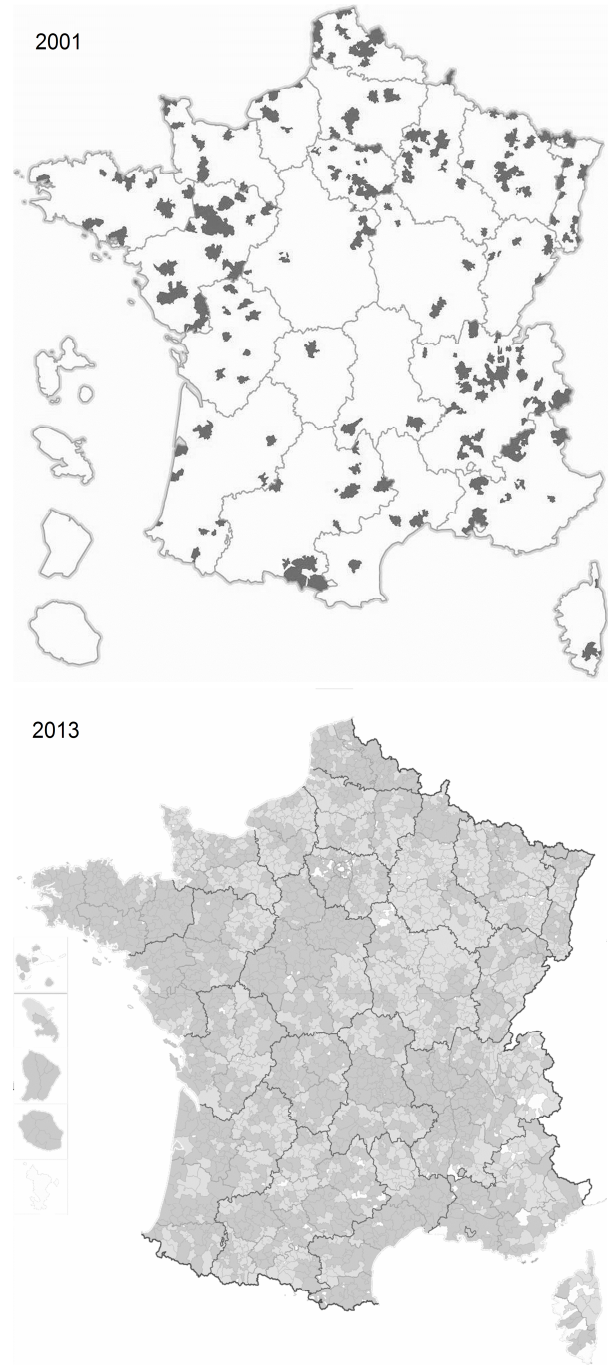


Fig. 1. Spatial coverage of municipal cooperation in 2001 and in 2013.

On the other hand, the earlier forms of inter-communal cooperation (syndicates or interest groups) have not disappeared either, but their number reduced considerably: on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 there were 13,400 of them [10]. Since 1999 the number of syndicates has been decreasing by 1.7% per year on average, one commune is member of 4 syndicates on average but there are extremities in this case as well: some communes are not members of any syndicate and there is one that belongs to 15 organisations [11].

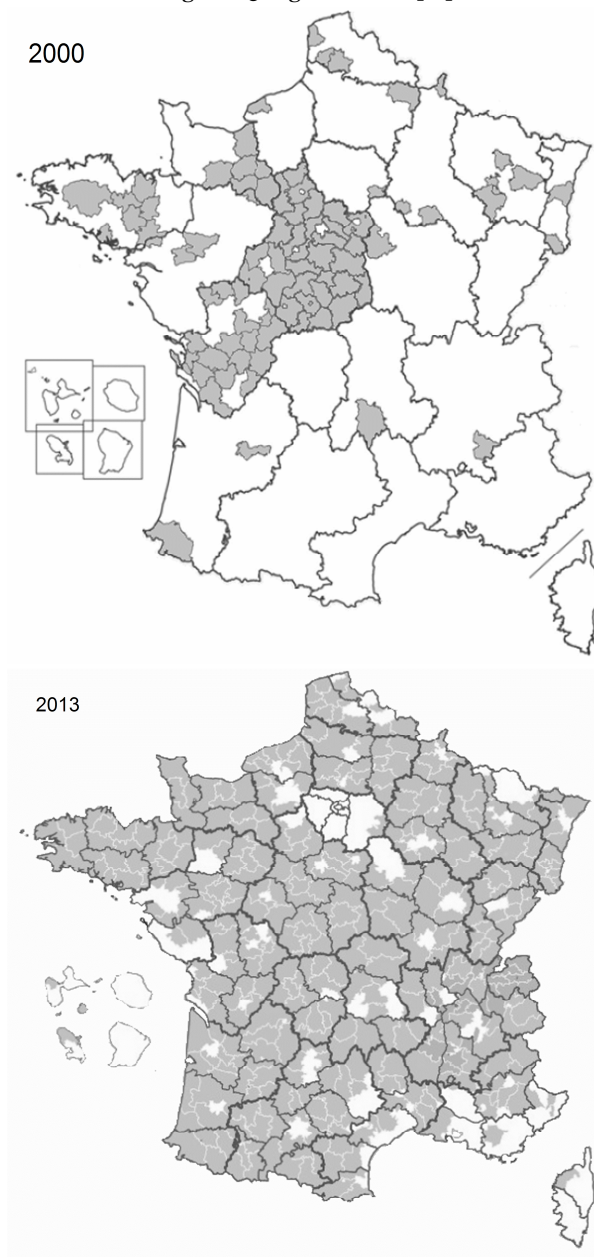


Fig. 2. Spatial coverage of "pays" in 2000 and in 2013.

The objective of the amendment act on municipalities that entered into force on December 16<sup>th</sup> 2010 was to abolish other forms of association by integrating them into the already existing communities (CC, CU, CA) or by transforming them [18]. This reform was supposed to be fully completed by the end of 2014.

#### 4. THE SYSTEM OF MICRO-REGION LEVEL COOPERATION AND SPATIAL PLANNING

In France, communities of communes and *pays* play a decisive role in spatial planning. From an organisational structure perspective French communities of communes are the organisations that share the most similarities with multi-purpose associations of communes in Hungary. Their obligatory and optional tasks depend on which category they belong to. A community of small and medium-sized towns (CC) is an EPCI that covers an uninterrupted urbanised area which is fully built-up and has a population between 500 and 50,000 people. It has two main tasks: to work out spatial planning and economic development plans. They also have to undertake at least one of the following competences: environmental protection, housing policy, road network maintenance and development, operating, maintaining and developing basic level educational, sport and cultural institutions. A community of agglomerations (CA) is an uninterrupted urbanised collective of communes where at least 50,000 people live and which is located nearby one or more communes with a population of over 15,000 people. Its tasks are the following: economic development, spatial planning in accordance with sectoral plans, and developing a local (regional) housing and urban development policy. In addition, they also have to take care of at least three of the following issues: maintaining and developing of the road network and parking facilities of the area, communal waste management, supplying drinking water, residential areas and environmental protection, operating, maintaining and developing the basic level of educational, sport and cultural institutions.

An urban community (CU) is an uninterrupted urbanised collective of communes with a population of over 500,000 people. Its sphere of competence is wider: drafting economic, cultural and social development plans, spatial planning and development, housing and urban development policy, public utility services, environmental protection and improving the quality of life. It is also possible for them to take over managing social affairs from the department. For the performing of these tasks the state also provides funding, the framework and sum of which is guaranteed by the so-called plan agreements. Communities of communes can also allocate sums from their own budget (membership fee and/or taxes) to this end and they can also apply for funding for the implementation of various development programmes. It is a more difficult task to interpret – to discuss it in a Hungarian context – the concept of *pays* (geographical units). It is a form of territorial cooperation that does not represent a new administrative level but which is still an important element in spatial planning. When specifying its area one has to take into consideration the factors of regional cohesion, e.g. historical geographical, economic, social



and cultural factors and the traditions of cooperation. Administrative borders do not have to be considered when they are formed, but commuting zones and the borders of adjacent urbanised areas and protected natural areas have to be considered. We can say that the *pays* can also be interpreted as the back area of agglomerations, which can expand to several departments and regions.

The formation of a *pays* can be initiated by civilian, political and economic stakeholders. They can form a development council that serves as a consultation forum and recommendation making body. Its main task is to establish the sustainable development charter of the *pays*, which means the development of long-term policy goals that comply with

the local conditions and the harmonisation of spatial planning and development initiatives. The charter forms the basis of entering into agreements with the region and/or the state, and in certain cases concluding agreements with adjacent protected natural parks in the region (fig. 3).

Pays are similar to LEADER-type cooperation actions, to the extent that they provide the institutional framework for almost 70% of local action groups for LEADER in France. Pays can join existing EPCIs or create their own EPCIs. Pays are project-type cooperation processes, which means actual projects related to the priorities specified in their development charter and implemented following the given grant opportunities.

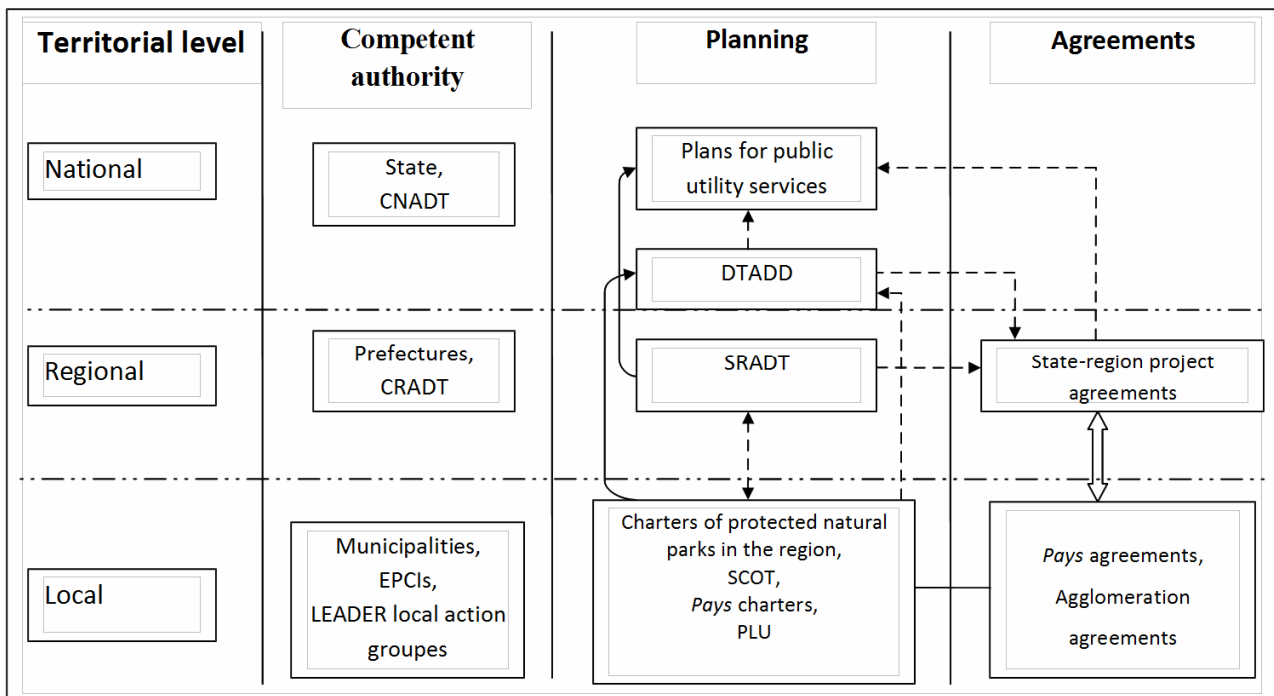


Fig. 3. The French system of territorial cooperation in spatial planning. *Explanation of symbols: compatibility (continuous arrow); correspondence (dotter arrow); financial connection (two way arrow) (Own compilation, source: [12].*

### 5. MAIN DOCUMENTS IN PLANNING

In the course of creating the organisational framework for spatial and rural development in France top-down and bottom-up approaches can be used at the same time. We tried to illustrate this in Figure 3. The main strategic guidelines defined by the state and plans for public utility services (SSC - Schémas de Services Collectifs) specified by these form the basis of spatial planning, which affect 9 main domains: higher education and research, culture, healthcare services, information and communication, passenger transport, goods transport, energy, sport, natural and rural areas.

The regional council initiates the drafting of the 'Regional Plan for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development' (SRADDT - Schéma régional d'aménagement et de développement durable du territoire), which has to be in compliance with the

public utility services plans and has to take into consideration the objectives of municipalities. If a region has a SRADDT, it also affects project agreements between the state and the region.

Both the state and the region can propose making the planning document containing the 'regional directives of spatial planning and sustainable development' (DTADD - Directive Territoriale d'Aménagement et de Développement Durable). It defines the goals and directives for a geographically uninterrupted territory that is considered sensitive for one reason or another, e.g. maritime areas, mountain areas, areas under severe demographic pressure (e.g. agglomerations). What it is stipulated in the DTADD has to be taken into account by the local planning documents, too. Because of the reasons mentioned above there is only a limited number of territories that have such a document.

At the local level, the key actors are the communities of communes, *pays* and protected natural parks in the region. The development documents are elaborated in conformity with legislation, national guidelines, and the objectives of departments and regions and they are guaranteed by the prefects of departments and regions.

Spatial planning and development work are assisted by various professional organisations, authorities and forums such as: the National Commission for Spatial Planning and Development (CNADT - Conseil National d'Aménagement et de Développement du Territoire) and the Regional Conference for Spatial Planning and Development (CRADT - Conférence Régionale d'Aménagement et de Développement du Territoire).

The '*Territorial cohesion scheme*' (SCOT - Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale) is the particular development document of a community of communes in a territory that can be considered coherent from many perspectives (geographical, economic, social, demographic, etc.). It facilitates the harmonisation of spatial planning in the urban, suburban and rural areas, maintaining the balance between natural, agricultural, forest and urbanised territories.

SCOT also has to be in accordance with the spatial planning documents of the communes, namely with the *Local Spatial Planning Plan* (PLU – Plan Local d'Urbanisme) and with the so-called municipality map (carte communale), the official plan of communes that regulates building and construction works.

SCOT helps in organising and developing of urban areas, while the *pays* development charter does the same for rural areas – but both of them have to harmonise with each other. If the territory of the *pays* is completely or in part the same as the territory of an approved SCOT, the charter has to take into consideration the SCOT's chapter of 'spatial planning and sustainable development plan' (PADD - Projet d'aménagement et de développement durable).

This is also true the other way round, if the charter is approved first then it is the PADD that has to take into account the relevant parts of the charter. In many cases the territory of the *pays* and the SCOT are the same, therefore the same organisation (EPCI) drafts both documents. The *pays* charter and the SCOT are revised every 10 years.

These spatial planning and development documents serve as the basis of agglomeration and *pays* agreements, which constitute the territorial components of plan agreements between state and region.

Plan agreements between state and region are what state funding is based on and they guarantee that planning is harmonised and state guidelines prevail. They also allow for a more balanced and integrated development of urban and rural areas.

## 6. FACTORS FACILITATING AND HINDERING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTER-COMMUNAL COOPERATIONS AND SPATIAL PLANING

There has been a comprehensive debate about the three law packages. Communes were of the opinion that they represented another attempt at reducing the number of communes by creating an administrative system superior to the level of communes that would rely on the existing cooperation. Their fear proved to be unfounded, which was constantly emphasised by the legislators. However, the state efforts to strengthen the inter-communal associations and their results still generate debates. We attempted to give an overview of the stakeholders' (state, municipalities, citizens) needs and fears based on studies of Bernard-Gélabert (2000), Desjardins (2006), Brinbaum et al (2002), Gaxie (1997) which are synthesized in Table 1.

Inter-communal and inter-regional cooperation relationships are principally motivated by economic interests: efficiency in providing public utility services and access to state and EU funding. At the same time, through cooperation, the level of performing tasks and providing services improves, along with the professional standards. The inter-communal cooperation is not only supported (or obstructed) by objective factors, but also by characteristics such as: the personality of local officials at municipal level, the level of attachment of the locals to where they live or the historical traditions and relationships.

## 7. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion we can say that, when attempting to shape various forms of spatial development, the policy for spatial development in France attempts mainly to reorganise and employ the already existing and spontaneously formed economic and social processes. The legislation passed in 1999 and subsequently the strengthened associations have tried to simplify their complicated networks and to standardise them in order to make planning and funding allocation much easier.

Inter-communal cooperation offers a wide range of opportunities not only to cities, but also to towns and villages in the rural areas. Just like in Hungary's western regions, the culture of inter-communal cooperation created new opportunities in the rural areas that are characterised by a fragmented network of communes. Communes that are not so strong on their own can launch larger projects together, thus the financial resources being more concentrated. At the same time, development areas with particular characteristics can be established, so that the individual character and features of the communes can also be more easily preserved.

The forms of inter-communal cooperation encouraged by the state do not mean loss of

independence, but they contribute to its preservation. Although certain communes give up some of their rights for the sake of cooperation, in exchange they get extra funding.

However, others say that the setting up of communities of communes only delays the inevitable task of reducing the number of municipalities and deepens the conflict on the distribution of funding between municipalities and the state.

Despite all contradictions and difficulties it can be seen that a more uniform, harmonised development policy can be implemented at regional level, its key elements being the legislative background that reinforces endogenous processes, the solidarity of

communes with one another and their willingness to cooperate. The planning system and the fact that planning documents build on each other indicate that France has managed to achieve the goal of integrated spatial planning and development.

Hungary's spatial and rural development could take advantage from a detailed examination of the micro-regional cooperation in France, with its coherent, bottom-up approach and excellent use of international funding opportunities. It would be useful to examine to what extent can their designation methods, general approach and experience in managing conflicts of interest between urban and rural spaces can be adapted to Hungarian conditions.

Table 1. Factors facilitating and hindering micro-regional cooperation.

Level		Factors facilitating cooperation	Factors hindering cooperation
Commune level	Local officials	Opportunity to increase influence. Retaining services, improving their quality. Chance to get access to state and EU funding.	Fear of increase in taxes. Fear of smaller scope of authority, less power and fewer available financial resources or of losing them at all. Fear of being legally bound (joining and quitting a community). Being afraid of losing sovereignty. Representatives do not have enough knowledge about the relevant legislation. Fear of having to transfer the local business tax.
	Inhabitants	Demand for better services. Demand for an improvement in services and having access to more of them. Demand for improvement in the quality of life.	Being afraid of losing their identity. Fear of growing tax burden. Demand for transparency. Weakness of social participation.
Regional level		Existing network of relationships: relatives, social, economic, cultural (etc). Providing services, offering more and improving their quality.	Personal and party policy-related conflicts between mayors. Lack of trust. Fear of the central commune becoming dominant within the EPCI. Problems related to having to transfer funds (the financial contribution of communes to operation) from the commune level.
State level		Increasing the efficiency of spatial planning and financial resource use. Reducing the number of associations formed earlier because of cost efficiency and transparency reasons. Performing tasks related to EU memberships: prevalence of principles, efficient use of resources, improving the position in global competition etc.	Constant reduction in state funding of associations.

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