

From Political Borders to Living Borders. Franco- Belgian Realities and Perceptions

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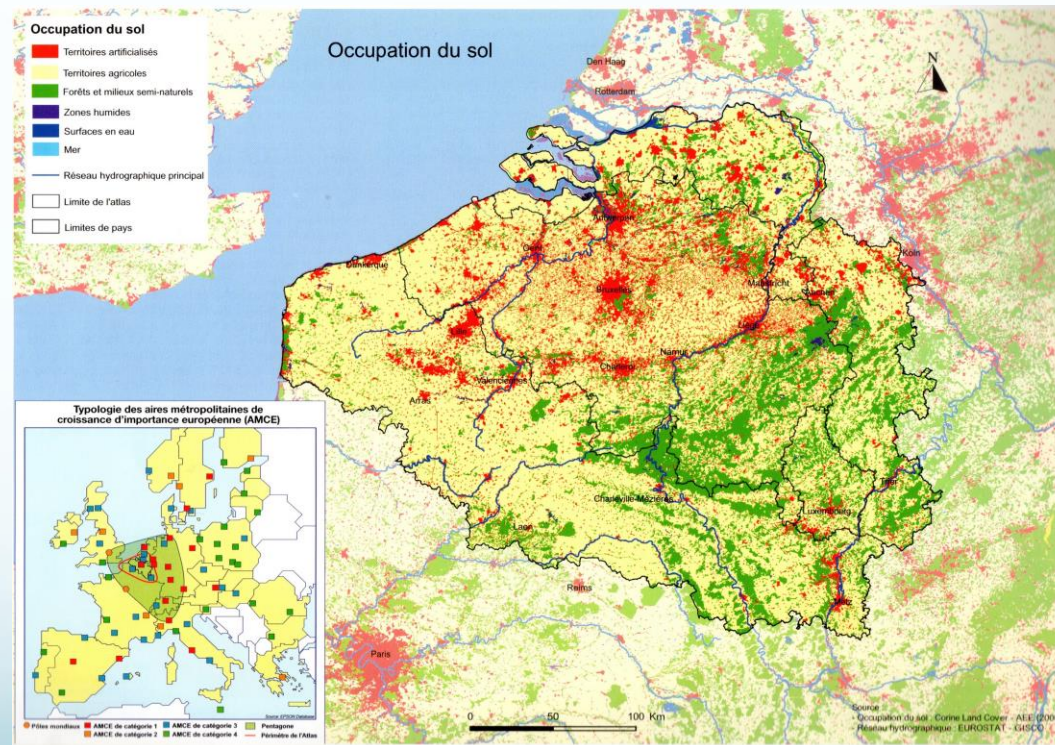
Introduction

The Franco-Belgian border

- **An invisible border...**
 - **...And a border marked by noticeable differences**
 - **A real spatial discontinuity...**
 - **... Plus intense flows and cooperation**
 - **A conflict-free border?**
 - **Conclusion**

An invisible border

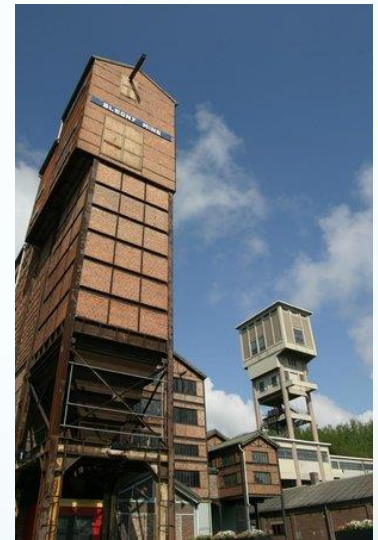
- Similar types of landscape: common topographical areas, crossbordering rivers, continuous urbanization



An invisible border

The F/B UNESCO World heritage

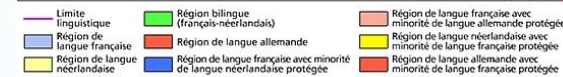
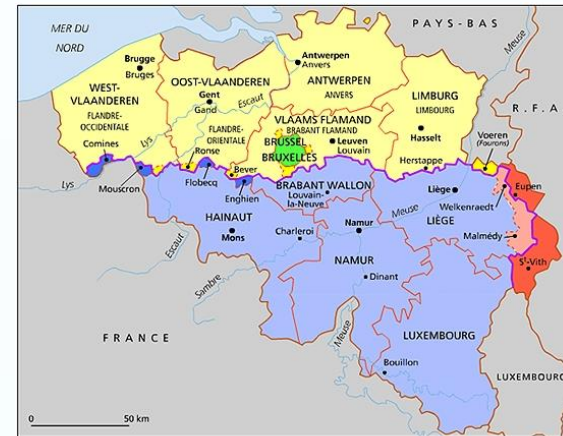
- Similar social, political & economic evolution e.g. coalfields or textiles
- Cultural and (partly) linguistic continuity, such as given in cooking habits, religion, folklore or the family names



A border marked by noticeable differences

Belgium

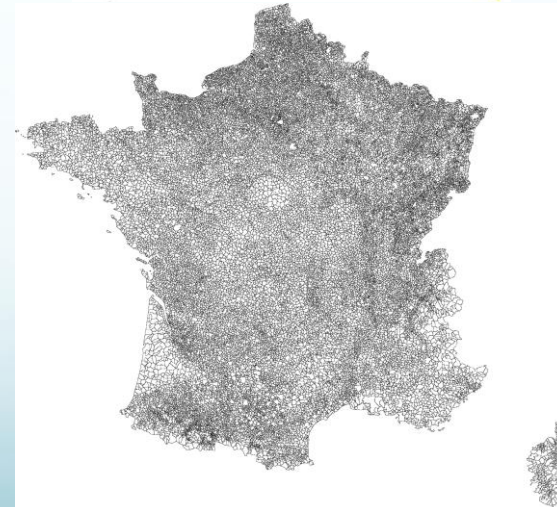
- federalism with regional, community and federal levels
- merged cities and historically autonomous municipalities
- tradition of consensus and subregional baronies



A border marked by noticeable differences

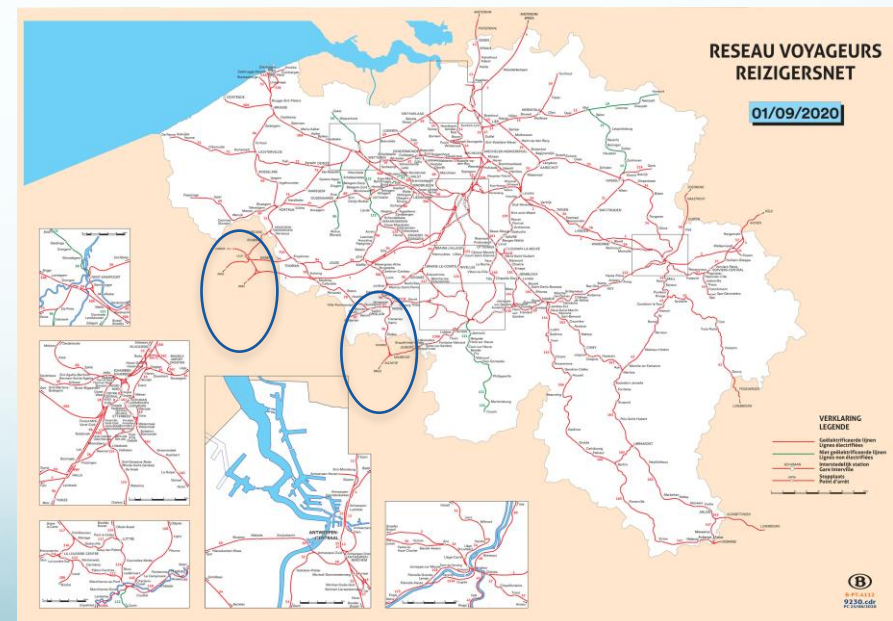
France

- centralized system with a territorial 'mille-feuille'
- process of regionalization
- diversified types of cities plus inter-communal groupings
- power relationship



A real spatial discontinuity

- Well developed motorway infrastructure excepted in the South of the F/B border
- Low public transport with only 4 cross-border railways lines

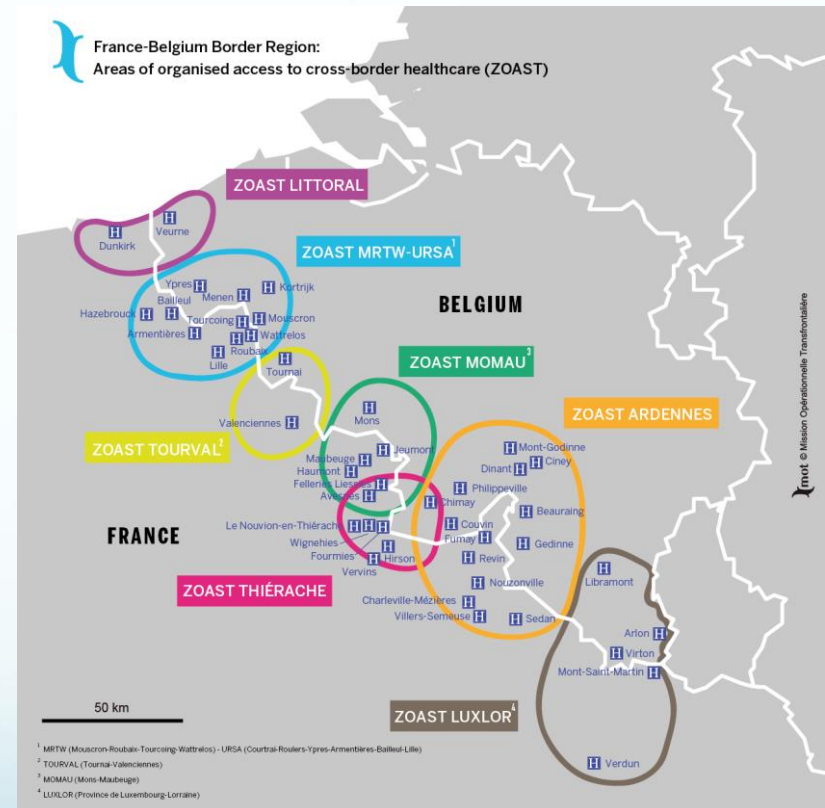


Intense flows and cooperation

- Intense flows of goods linking the ports of Rotterdam and Belgium to France crossing the border...
- ...combined with numerous short-distance flows (cross-border workers, students, consumers taking advantage of differences in the retail offer, etc.)

Intense flows and cooperation

- Intense cooperation in the healthcare field
- Many other forms of cooperation exist, not all of them formalized



A conflict-free border?

During crises (terrorism, migration, covid-19, etc.)

- Unilateral national decision of locking out
- Central security forces involvement, with no « cross - border understanding/feeling »
- Centrifugal forces, diluting the cross-border proximity

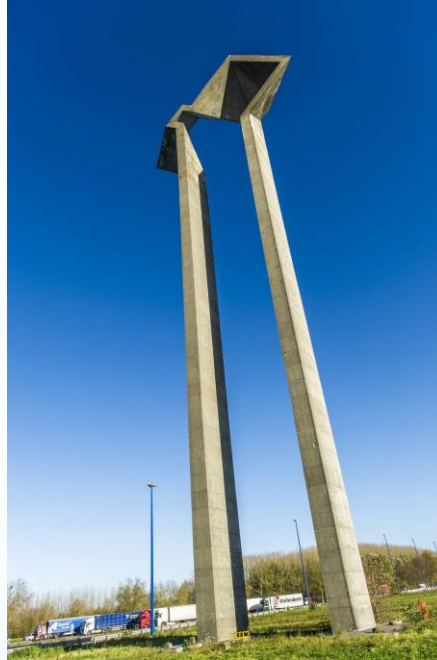
Outside crisis periods

- Various ways of addressing insecurity according to national context
- Fluctuating interests for cross-border priorities among public authorities due to diversified national, regional and local political agenda

Conclusion

- Intense but still invisible flows, based on similarities or asymmetries
- Cross-border cooperation vital for local social and economic balance
- Individual arrangements, inter-organisational agreements & cross-border institutions
- Weak interactions between local stakeholders and regional or national authorities for cross-border management

➤ *a kind of user-friendly border?*



Thank you for your attention!

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