



Acceptability in cross-border regions: towards a new condition of emergent coordination

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Résumé :

Emergent coordination relies on the accomplishment of three integrative conditions : accountability, predictability and common understanding. In this perspective organizations must constantly work to (re)create them, despite the many collective dynamics that can erode their achievement (Okhuysen & Bechky 2009). In particular, organizations operating in cross-border regions face social and political challenges as 1. diverse profile of actors are permanently required and 2. because every situation at the border naturally raises political concerns associated to questions of national sovereignty. Because of divergent political agendas and interests, social incompatibilities or geopolitical conflicts, uncertainty can arise and erode the coordination process yet without necessarily affecting the capacity to achieve the three conditions identified by Okhuysen and Bechky (2009). Based on an in-depth investigation of the Mont-Blanc and the Franco-Belgian regions, we developed a coordination-practice perspective that stress the need to consider **acceptability** as a new condition of coordination and in doing so, emphasize the efforts and work of actors engaged in such coordination process. Acceptability can be defined as the actors' willingness to accomplish and/or maintain tasks allocation and to support interaction articulations so that each member can benefit from the interaction. By creating acceptability, actors agree to engage in coordination work and consent to make and/or maintain such efforts so that complex interdependencies can be managed. We suggest that acceptability is achieved through three different practices: practices of consensus building, valuing distinctive learning or territorial arbitration. Each of these practices is supported by different institutional, strategical and operational actors whose work converge respectively towards different dynamics : unity, coexistence and calculation.

Mots-clés : Emergent coordination; Practice-based approach; Cross-border regions.



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INTRODUCTION

Coordination has been a core topic of organization studies, emphasized through different perspectives along the years. In the practice-based approach of coordination, authors focus on the conditions that make coordination possible rather than on the mechanisms (Okhuysen & Bechky 2009). In particular, emergent coordination is seen as an ongoing accomplishment in which actors manage their interdependences by constantly searching for maintaining and achieving accountability, predictability and common understanding (Faraj & Xiao 2006; Okhuysen & Bechky 2009; Wolbers et al. 2018). Studies of complex and large-scale phenomena (e.g. transboundary crisis, international projects) has also shown that the number of actors involved in the process and their differences in terms of interests, motivation or profiles are such that it can generate uncertainty, ambiguity and discontinuity of actions (Wolbers et al. 2018). This may ultimately necessitate additional work to achieve coordination conditions.

However, if many coordination practices in the literature emphasize what actors do to achieve and maintain these three conditions (Faraj & Xiao 2006; Schakel et al 2016; Godé, 2015; Wolbers et al. 2018), some challenges still remain to tackle. First, by considering coordination as an ongoing accomplishment, this means that actors constantly need to work to (re)create conditions that make coordination possible (Okhuysen & Bechky 2009). However, coordination work and the constant efforts and motivations it required from actors hardly seems to be considered in practice. On the contrary, we often have the feeling that coordination practices are presented in the literature as a phenomenon that emerge naturally, thanks to a simple and undisputed consensus among actors. This paper challenges the tacit idea that actors are spontaneously willing to coordinate to manage their interdependences in a given situation but may, on the contrary, need to often satisfy an additional condition during the process.

Second, these practices are not always embodied in the literature meaning we do not necessarily know which actors are involved in coordination practices, what do they do and their role in the process (Bouty & Drucker-Godard 2018). As a consequence, we still lack visibility on the actors behind these practices, although their role are essential in maintaining and activating these conditions (Bouty & Drucker-Godard 2018). This is all the more complex when many actors



have to manage their interdependencies while facing disparities regarding their personal motivations, political interests or social status. With such collective uncertainty, coordination process focuses less on tasks regulation than on creating the adequate support to articulate heterogeneous actors interactions. In this regard, actors may have a clear distribution of tasks responsibilities (accountability), they may be able to predict the tasks to be carried out (predictability) or can share a common perspective on these tasks (common understanding), but without any willingness nor motivation to consent to work towards their achievement. In other words, although the three conditions are necessary, they sometimes seem insufficient to capture some political and social challenges that may affect coordination. This article calls in particular for reassessing the role of these diverse actors who must daily make significant efforts to coordinate despite various obstacles. In particular, we will highlight a new condition of coordination, that of acceptability, which shows that actors with varied interests and motivations must often satisfy their own benefits in order to consent to manage their complex interdependences.

To address such gaps, this article aims at studying how coordination unfold in the particular context of cross-border regions. Cross-border regions (CBR) have been the subject of growing attention in the literature over the last twenty years, in particular by highlighting issues related to territorial management, multi-level governance, the importance of supra-national institutions (e.g. European Union) and also mainly associated to inter-regional coordination (e.g. Euroregion) (Jessop 2002; Perkmann 2003). Because of the disparities of actors operating in cross-border regions and because every situation at the border naturally raises political concerns associated to questions of national sovereignty, many social and political challenges arise in the particular context of CBR, creating particular dynamics that can erode the accomplishment of coordination conditions.

In this article, we adopt a practice-based approach to understand why actors operating in cross-border regions, despite the many efforts required to tackle the political and social challenges they may encounter, accept to engage in the coordination process. We also questioned the practices these divergent actors develop to make the work towards the (re)creation of coordination acceptable.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. COORDINATION AS AN ONGOING ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SEVERAL CONDITIONS



Historically, coordination in the contingent perspective relied on *designability* (Argote 1982; Van de Ven et al 1976; Gittell 2002) through which authors specify mechanisms that allow individuals to complete their interdependent work. However, in the last two decades, the emphasis have been gradually putted on a processual view of coordination. In this approach we adopt, coordination is defined as "a temporally unfolding and contextualized process of input regulation and interaction articulation to realize a collective performance" (Faraj & Xiao 2006: 1157). Authors therefore see coordination as a process (Okhuysen & Bechky 2009) in which interdependencies are reconfigured and negotiated in action and as situations evolve (Wolbers et al. 2018; Kellogg et al. 2006). In this regard, authors give coordination mechanisms a secondary role, by mainly shedding lights on the three conditions that make coordination possible (Okhuysen & Bechky 2009). First, through the condition of accountability, actors recognize where the responsibilities of interdependent parties lie by identifying pockets of control over specific elements of the task (Wolbers et al. 2018). The second condition that makes coordination possible is predictability. This means that actors are able to anticipate which tasks are to be carried out subsequently and to situate their actions in the overall sequence of tasks (Okhuysen & Bechky 2009). Finally, the last condition highlighted by Okhuysen and Bechky (2009) relates to a common understanding of the whole task to be carried out. It is not a matter of understanding which task arrangement need to be prioritize (predictability), but rather of integrating each other's work into a larger whole. This includes thinking about the objectives and goals to be pursued or developing deeper interactions between interdependent actors (Cannon-Bowers & Salas 2001).

In this emergent perspective, coordination is then seen as an ongoing accomplishment in which it is necessary to continuously search for (re)creation of these three conditions as “everyday dynamics in organizations intrude on coordination by eroding the integrating conditions ” (Okhuysen & Bechky 2009: 493). To capture this processual perspective of coordination and see how actors create and maintain these conditions, many authors rely on the theoretical framework of practices (Faraj & Xiao 2006; Wolbers et al. 2018; Godé 2015; Bouty & Drucker-Godard 2018; Kellogg et al. 2006; Schakel et al. 2016). Practices can be defined as “ a temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleo-affective structures, and general understandings” (Schatzki 2018). This approach is also interesting in our study as it allows to focus on “coordination work” (i.e. the temporal and contextually situated work undertaken by actors to achieve these conditions) while



acknowledging the fact that coordinated actions rely extensively on a large set of interactions, enacted among specific sets of actors (Faraj & Xiao 2006).

By facing regular dynamics than can erode coordination practices, the literature has also shown that different sources of organizational dynamics are continuously threatening coordination. They can come from 1. the complexity of tasks to be carry out or the uncertain nature situation encountered by actors (task related) or 2. They can be attributable to the actors who try to manage their interdependences (people related).

First, when these organizational dynamics are task related, they can for example be illustrated by manufacturing errors or mistake in execution that can impede trust and then make predictability difficult to achieve (Bechky 2003). This can also be caused by an unexpected turns of event or a situation degradation. While facing a quick deterioration in the patient trajectory in a trauma center, Faraj and Xiao (2006) show for instance how actors rely on dialogic practices by developing joint sensemaking or cross-boundary interventions to ensure tasks performance. Others show that SWAT officers or film crews handle unexpected situations often by relying on role shifting or reorganizing routines practices (Bechky & Okhuysen 2011). In these situations, actors can then rely on a role system where the position of every actor is clearly established and well recognized by every discipline (Faraj & Xiao 2006). They can also benefits from a common agreement on the work to be done or on cross-member expertise developed by members (Bechky & Okhuysen 2011). It is important to mention that in such settings, authors do not deny the existence of some social tensions among individuals. For example, Faraj and Xiao (2006) acknowledge the fact that some distortions between communities of practices and disciplines can occur in the trauma center, causing epistemic contestations in which members have different opinions regarding ways to treat the patient. However, these tensions between actors do not threaten the way they manage their interdependences : it is mainly here the extreme nature of the patient trajectory that prevails. Social tensions among the group are then put in the background and authors seem to consider these contestations as naturally resolved in action thanks to a general consensus between communities. This can then suggests that a natural agreement and consent around the work to accomplish could exist between actors in order to achieve and maintain accountability, predictability and common understanding.



However, when these organizational dynamics are attributable to actors themselves (people related), such consensus cannot necessarily be found, no matter the urgency of the situation. In certain contexts, there could indeed be certain social tensions, power games or conflicts of interest, status differences or a big geographical distance between member of the group (Metiu 2006) which can influence the achievement of these conditions. In such settings, the shared perspective on the task to be carried out (common understanding), where the responsibilities of interdependent actors lie (accountability) and the ability to anticipate the order in which the task must be carried out (predictability) can then possibly be known but not necessarily accepted by the interdependent actors, creating potential ambiguity and discontinuity in actions (Wolbers et al. 2018). In this sense, despite common understanding, accountability and predictability, coordination cannot successfully unfold. This leads us to reflect on these conditions of coordination which, although necessary, do not always seem to be sufficient in certain configurations. Also, while these actors-related dynamics are essential to study coordination, literature shows that when engaging in coordination practices, the emphasis is more on the integration of complex set of tasks (tasks related) than on the way in which the work of the divergent actors - who supported these tasks- is articulated and permanently fits into a whole. This is reflected in the literature through two aspects. First, if actors, through their practices, play an important part in (re)creating the conditions of coordination, these practices however often seem disembodied in the literature. In fact, the actors behind these practices are not always well-known nor clearly identified, as if the practices emerge by themselves, without any support. Actors are then often mentioned in general, without specifying their role or sometimes without even an indication on who they are : “ when referring to individuals, the literature on coordination mentions theoretically and empirically the 'actors' in general, and indicates at best their seniority, their area of professional expertise or their leadership ”(Bouty & Drucker-Godard 2018: 570). This is even more problematic considering that in some context, the profile and status of the different interdependent actors are very diverse. As a consequence, their interests as well as the challenges they are facing can be numerous.

Additionally to a lack of emphasis on the actors' profile and nature, we note that it is also difficult to find studies highlighting the important efforts of these actors to activate and maintain coordination practices. This suggests, as we pointed out earlier, that coordination could emerge naturally whereas it is in reality an ongoing accomplishment which requires time, permanent work and actors willingness to engage in such a process. In particular, Bouty and Drucker-



Godard (2018) insist on managers efforts and their essential role in enabling coordination to take place. In other words, the authors propose to reconnect the practice of coordination to the work of actors that allow practices to unfold on a daily basis. In addition to describing the practice and what it leads to, identifying the actors behind these practices and their concrete role in activating and maintaining the coordination conditions seem to be of interest (Bouty & Drucker-Godard 2018). By analyzing the contribution of the manager (captain) in the study of coordination on a racing ship, the authors show that the captain gives rhythm and support the articulation between more or less flexible coordination schemes carried out by the crew. But such articulation is questionable in settings where there is not a single defined leader to orchestrate the collective performance (Beck & Plowman, 2014). Consequently, it seems essential to reevaluate actors' position in the unfolding of coordination practices, by shedding lights on their profile and nature. This is all the more important as the actors involved in this coordination process can be diverse and multiple and as each encounter specific challenges associated to their very own expertise or collaboration history (Wolbers et al. 2018).

1.2. COORDINATION CHALLENGES IN CROSS-BORDER REGIONS

Along these lines, studying coordination in a cross-border region is interesting to address such gaps. Historically, the main definitions of the cross-border region (CBR) focus on a territorial dimension by highlighting the particular spatial anchoring of these areas. In this perspective, these areas are conceived as "natural" and immutable territorial units (Anderson & O'dowd 1999: 595) that straddle state borders (Perkmann 2003). However, since the 2000s, some authors have been calling for the redefinition of CBR, pointing out the social process behind the concept. The CBR is then primarily thought in terms of diverse actors interactions that structure their territory rather than only thought as a territorial unit. In other words, it is because these dynamics of social alignment and integration exist that the CBR makes sense (Perkmann 2003).

We adopt this social perspective for several reasons. First, by considering CBR as a process of social construction, we can ultimately reassess the role of cross-border actors in managing their complex interdependences. In particular, the vision of CBR as a social process allow to better consider coordination challenges that can possibly erode the way actors maintain or achieve the conditions that make coordination possible. Some authors for example underline that this construction process is not only the result of work between actors exclusively sharing



similarities thanks to their anchorage on a same territory (Anderson & Wever 2003) (vision of CBR as a space of homogenization). Conversely, what bring actors together is rather the result of a historically rooted process of social construction which can also raise the existence of profound differences (CBR as space of differentiation) (Perkmann 2003; Sohn & Reitel 2016; Sousa 2013; Dahles & Van Hees 2004; Reitel 2006). This two antagonist versions are interesting to capture different dynamics of interactions between actors who may be similar (e.g. cultural or ethnic commonalities, a common historical past) but who also have diverse interests and motivations (e.g. developing a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the central state, take advantage of the cross-border neighbor's resources). These differences can affect each counterpart's willingness to engage efforts (or not) towards the achievement and maintenance of coordination conditions. These actors can also have different identities, culture or language (Anderson & Wever 2003; Benet-Martínez et al. 2002; Huynh et al. 2011) that can potentially erode actors ability to (re)create conditions of coordination. For example, the study of operational coordination between different fire brigades on the German-Dutch border show that despite organizations' discursive strategies to culturally bring together these diverse brigades, it never totally eliminates the fundamental differences between them. Indeed, each organization is still driven by its own organizational culture, one oriented towards public service and the other more professional (Dahles & Van Hees 2004).

Second, this perspective allows to study coordination with multiple actors embedded in different legal and institutional context, while sharing a same territory and a common risk pool. As a consequence, any situation at the national border naturally acquires a greater magnitude. For national sovereignty matters, the way coordination unfold is highly impacted by the mobilization from each side of the national border of a duplicated number of actors who have their own political and diplomatic agendas. Perkmann (2003) for example, highlight that, at a regional level, actors are highly dependent on their central government, and are therefore not legal entities on their own. As a consequence, coordination between actors from both side of the borders rely more on informal relations and agreements with their counterparts at the other side of the national border. However, this does not mean that cross-border actors are not inclined to formalization. Other authors highlight the dynamics that lead to the stabilization of cross-border exchanges through the strengthening of regional or supranational institutions (e.g. European Union) (Anderson & Wever 2003). Studying coordination in a cross-border context is therefore interesting to better understand the phenomenon as not being disembodied but supported by diverse social actors. Consequently, it questions the conditions that make



coordination possible mainly on reassessing actors contributions and what motivate them to make major efforts in order to overcome challenges they may face. Accordingly, we seek to answer the following question: **to what extent are the conditions that make coordination possible sufficient to tackle political and social challenges heterogeneous actors operating in cross-border region may encounter ?**

2. METHODS

2.1. DATA SELECTION

This paper proposes to reassess the importance of actors behind coordination practices. Because we want to show that coordination implies continuous work, big efforts supported by actors, it is therefore important to understand who these actors are and what their role is in maintaining and/or activating coordination practices. We mainly highlight these coordination practices in the context of cross-border regions where different types and a large number of actors are involved. In this article, we focus on the Franco-Italian and Franco Belgian territories that both highlight the definition of a cross-border region, primarily understood as “a territorial unit which comprises contiguous national sub-units of two or more nation states' s” (Perkmann & Sum 2002: 3). This territorial anchorage is particular in each of the two cross-border regions studied.

The Mont Blanc region, delimited by the Alps mountain range, is mainly distinguished by the existence of a tunnel which is a “place of passage” (Dahles & Van Hees 2004), directly linking France and Italy. The Mont-Blanc tunnel is 11.6 km long (the largest road tunnel at its inauguration in 1965) and connects the French and Italian motorway networks across the Alps. 7640 meters of the tunnel are on French territory and 3960 meters on Italian territory (delineation according to the peak of the mountain). France and Belgium, on the contrary, do not have only one single crossing point but 620 km of common border, with more than half (358 km) between the Hauts-de-France region (the North department on which we base our analysis is part of it) and the neighboring Belgian provinces. In this paper we restricted our analyze on the North department and its Belgian counterpart, the Hainaut province. This because this French department is the area that has the longest border in common with Belgium. As a consequence, the North department and the Hainaut Province are both cross-border in essence.



Also, in a social perspective of CBR, we can acknowledge that many actors are brought to interact for any situation at their common border, putting into perspective different visions of the CBR as a space of homogenization and differentiation.

On the one hand, in the Mont-Blanc region, local interdependencies are pushing the organizations involved in the tunnel towards a dynamic of homogenization. Although the tunnel is territorially more anchored in France than in Italy, the tunnel concession is indeed shared 50/50 between France and Italy (i.e. a 5.8 km concession for France and 5.8 km for Italy). The management of public rescue services within the Mont-Blanc Tunnel is also structured identically in France and Italy, then highlighting strong commonalities (i.e. a central competence with prerogatives shared between the State, the regions and the provinces (Italy)/departments (France)). In particular, in 2003, the competence for fire-fighting was transferred from the Italian Ministry of the Interior to the Valle d'Aosta Region, which became an autonomous detachment and therefore more able to organize itself at local level with the French side. This homogenization is also reflected in the signing of agreements (Franco-Italian convention for assistance signed on 10 September 1995, regional cooperation in 1998 which allows for joint regional funding requests).

Regarding, the French-Belgian region, homogenization is emphasized because the border between the two countries has been stable since the 19th century. In this region the proximity between French and Belgian is such that in some cities (e.g. Tourcoing or Mouscron), one side of the pavement is in France and the other in Belgium without any physical or geographical obstacle between the two. The absence of a topological border then makes it almost impossible to distinguish the geographical limits of each national state and is also favorable to a high population density, particularly around the cross-border urban space of the Eurometropole (including Lille - Tournai - Kortrijk) that appear as a common economic space for the region.

On the other hand, in these two CBR, differentiation is emphasized through the co-existence of several national authorities that led to the multiplication of actors to consider.

These regions are indeed disrupted by the sovereignty of different governments regulating each side of the border. Actors are then embedded in a same territory while belonging and following different political authorities. As a consequence, for national sovereignty matters, they are following the arrangements of their own national institutions that are not necessarily compatible with those of their counterpart at the other side of the border. For example, whereas France is a centralized state, Belgium has gradually become a federal one, which implies that the regions



are becoming highly autonomous, enjoying a range of state competences, particularly in terms of public works, transport, economy and foreign trade. The federal level thus remains competent in matters relating to the coordination of police and rescue services, but delegates mainly to the municipal level. In practice, this translates into certain prerogatives in terms of crisis management which are assigned to the mayors (municipal level) where these same tasks would be entrusted to the zone prefect in France. In operational terms, the differences of relief organizations resources on either side of the national border are also an important aspect that affects coordination needs. In France, the decentralization dynamic has led to the departmentalization of fire and rescue services since 2001. These French organizations became then well-equipped in terms of resources and skills, particularly because of the large population to be covered in the North department. Contradictory, in Belgium, it was not until 2014 that the fire services were operationally grouped together through the creation of rescue zones. In the Mont-Blanc, for these political reasons, many coordination difficulties can arise and are often reflected in the complexity of setting up the governance of the tunnel (i.e. concessions with different statutes, difficulties in reaching agreement because of perfect parity in the intergovernmental commission of the tunnel).

Additionally to this political challenges, actors are also embedded in their own historical and cultural environment. In the Mont-Blanc tunnel for example, cultural diversity is emphasized through languages and ways of working that are different between French and Italian actors. These cultural divergences can also be emphasized in organizational prerogatives that might differ on each side of the border. For example, the technical vocabulary used by actors in Belgium can be different than the one used in France while however referring to the same thing. For instance, the communal officer who first lead operations command in any incident at the border is called a “mayor” in France and a “Bourgmestre” in Belgium. In some other situations, prerogatives attributed to a same professional entity can diverge from each side of the tunnel (e.g. firefighters in Italy has a police officer role that is not assumed by French firefighters).

2.2. DATA COLLECTION

Because coordination is seen as an ongoing accomplishment, it is essential in this article to collect data over a long period of analysis. Data collection encompasses two stages. First, we had to understand the historical issues and developments associated precisely with each of the two cross-border regions studied. We therefore first collected archive data, tracing the historical



process of construction of these two cross-border regions. The choice of these two cross-border regions is not insignificant insofar as these two regions have experienced a major cross-border crisis which has highlighted major dysfunctions in terms of coordination. The main period analyzed goes from 1999 (date of the tunnel fire) to 2020 for the Mont-Blanc case and from 2004 (Ghislenghien disaster) to 2020 for the Franco-Belgian case. In each case, we will give a particular attention to 1. The coordination process that has been put in place within the tunnel to enhance security and safety of users and 2. Initiatives that have been developed in the Alarm project aiming at enhancing cross-border civil security coordination between France and Belgium and in the aftermath of Ghislenghien crisis.

In Mont-Blanc region, some data goes back to the 19th century with documents and reports showing, already at that time, the willingness of the two countries to engage in more extensive cross-border coordination. In the case of the Franco-Belgian region, only few elements exist in the archives. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the archive system in Belgium is not centralized, as is the case in France, so organizations are not obliged to send in these documents. Consultation of the archives is therefore left to the discretion of each organization individually. This has involved a tedious process of requests and research, with a difficulty in the Belgian case to trace back documents prior to the 1950s. Conversely, the Mont Blanc archives are for the most part centralized in Paris. By supplementing this collection of national archives with departmental and municipal archives in Chamonix, we have therefore been able to obtain substantial data. The main difficulty was to engage in numerous derogations processes, , due to the sensitivity of certain files in order to obtain these documents (more than a year and a half process). Secondly, it was more difficult to collect written elements on the Franco-Belgian case, mainly because the degree of coordination formalization in this region is less advanced than in the Franco-Italian case. Having relied for centuries on informal relations between partners on each side of the national border, it appears that fewer written documents were available so that keeping trace of cross-border coordination in this region was more difficult.

Because we are in a cross-border context, we also wanted to keep the different actors perspectives and consequently collect data and documents in every country considered. This has been relatively simplified in the Franco-Italian case insofar as the national archives show common documents written in both languages. In particular, we have been able to collect minutes of meetings, exchanges of e-mails between administrations and political actors, discussions resulting from inter-ministerial meetings in France, government press releases,



reports of public debates, situation reports on Mont-Blanc or on the state of Franco-Italian coordination. In total, we collected in archives 5102 of official documents including both confidential archives under specific derogation and national and local press and newspapers), 4 hours of audio archives (see table below for details).

Documents collected in archives enable to greatly enrich our understanding of cross-border contexts by identifying the actors, whatever their nature and level of responsibility, who have a role to play in the coordination process in these areas. Secondly, it allowed to identify key moments or episodes of interaction between these actors where coordination has been a major challenge. We were therefore able to understand through these documents what was at stake in these episodes, particularly in terms of actors' interests and motivations for initiating the coordination process (e.g. power play between actors, operational difficulties in engaging in the process).

In order to delve deeper into these elements and gain a more detailed understanding of these actors, we also conducted a series of 39 interviews with these different stakeholders. These interviews were carried out with organizational actors of different nationalities, different hierarchical levels and different organizations on either side of the national border. In the Franco-Italian case, for example, we conducted interviews with: the SDIS 74, the president of the tunnel victims' association, various leaders of the EEIG since its creation (both French and Italian), directors of the operating companies, a manager of the association for the preservation of the Mont-Blanc site, firemen from Valle d'Aosta, operational staff and those responsible for safety in the tunnel. In the Franco-Belgian case, we conducted interviews with commanders or colonels of the Belgian rescue zones, the French zone headquarters, commanders of the SDIS 59, representatives of the university hospital, a Belgian medical director, institutional representatives such as the deputy head of the cabinet of the governor of Hainaut, and more operational players, particularly those involved in the Apport and Alarm projects for improving cross-border coordination.

Data collection	Mont-Blanc region	Franco-Belgian region	TOTAL
Archives and secondary data (agreements, reports, notes, letters,	3535 pages	1567 pages	5102 pages



email statements), synthesis documents, feedback, reports, press)			
Video and photo Archives (documentary on the day of the Mont-Blanc crisis, video of the day of the explosion for Belgium)	Documentaries ¹²³	Videos	4h12 of videos and 98 photos
Interviews	15 interviews	24 interviews	39 interviews

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

To shed lights on actors behind coordination practices and go beyond the simple description of what actors do and say, the analysis of the data was carried out in several stages.

First, we identified different situations that highlight a challenge in terms of coordination. These situations, which include simulation exercises, cross-border meetings or cross-border intervention episodes, were selected because they highlight a situation of interdependence between different actors from each side of the national borders. In these different situations, the first part of our work focused on identifying very clearly which actors interact and what do they need to manage their interdependencies (nature, roles, intervention space, levels of responsibility of these actors). At the same time, we highlighted the specific context and the challenges actors were facing in each situation that could eventually erode the coordination process. Because cross-border region are strategic areas with issues of national sovereignty, any situation, even for operational actors, raises questions of a political nature. As a consequence, interests and motivations of these actors may not necessarily be aligned, which may impact the interactions between interdependent actors.

In a second step, after having clearly identified the actors (profile, interests and motivations), we have also tried to highlight the coordination work done by these actors, on both sides of the border, in order to maintain and accomplish coordination conditions. In a way, we are searching for what people effectively do and say so that coordination can unfold despite the political and social challenges emphasized. We firstly talk of “coordination work” (i.e. what actors do and say to achieve coordination) because we think this term is appropriate to show the **work**

¹ Documentaire de Pierre Chassagnieux (2012) sur l'incendie du tunnel du Mont-Blanc (55min)

² Reportage Saison 1 de La Minute de vérité (2004) Le Tunnel du Mont Blanc HD (Gabin) (2h12)

³ Vidéo sur le procès du tunnel du Mont-Blanc (non daté, youtube)



engaged by these actors and the fact that coordination does not appear naturally as it is perceived in the literature. It is, on the contrary, the result of a continuous efforts, sustained by different actors in a situation of interdependence. Thanks to a “zooming out” (Nicolini 2012) strategy, it is only when this coordination work is shared by different actors and in different situations that we were able to identify coordination practices in a strong perspective (i.e. going beyond the analysis of what actors do and say and following the effects in time and space of actors' coordination work) (Nicolini & Monteiro 2016). As a consequence, in the first-order results, we are not yet analyzing the practices in their strong practice perspective (Nicolini 2007; Nicolini 2009) but we mainly seek to identify actors work and the challenges they may face to manage their interdependences. Then, actors' coordination works were converging towards different approaches of coordination in time and space, so that we were secondly able to specify different coordination practices.

3. RESULTS

3.1. FIRST-ORDER RESULTS : DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTORS FACING MULTIPLE COORDINATION CHALLENGES

Our initial results show that in cross-border regions, coordination work is the result of interactions between different organizations belonging to different side of the national border. However, these organizations have a deep interconnection on their joint territory that emphasize complex interdependences. In particular, we have identified three types of actors engaging in the coordination process: institutional, strategic or operational actors. What differentiates these three types is, first of all, **the profile and nature of the actors who interact**. For example, the institutional type often refer to state administrations interacting at the national border : French and Italian ministries, French or Italian delegations, French-Belgian prefecture and provincial administrations, town halls or mayors of municipalities who interact via their representatives (e.g. official delegations, representatives of the national authority in each state). For these actors, the scope of action is largely political and outreach local decisions. Regarding the operational and strategic type of actors, organizations involved in the coordination process can be of the same nature. For example, the coordination between the SDIS 74 (Haute-Savoie) and the fire brigade of Val d'Aoste, the staff of the French and Italian tunnel operating companies (public company in France, private company in Italy), the SDIS 59 (rescue departmental service in the North department) and Belgian rescue zones, or the French and Belgian hospitals can both considered both as strategic and operational actors. The distinction between this two types



of actors is then linked to the differences in the **content to be coordinated** and the **field** on which these actors negotiate and interact. For example, coordination work undertaken by operational actors is related to the allocation of tasks or the distribution of resources occurring on the direct field of intervention (e.g. action of firefighters at the closest to the fire). Conversely, officers can also act outside the field of intervention. They are instead in charge of taking decision that impact operational actors (e.g. in the operations command room or a crisis center). In this case, we highlighted the strategic dimension with actors having a command role and responsibilities in decision-making.

What seems essential to underline is that these different type of actors share difficulties and challenges that may impact their willingness to work towards the achievement of coordination yet without questioning the ability to achieve accountability, predictability and common understanding. In a sense, certain issues can be obstacles impeding the motivation and interests of the different stakeholders to manage their interdependencies without directly affecting accountability, predictability or common understanding. The table below summarizes the main disparities and issues between actors from both side national border that may impact the process.

Table 1. Challenges for actors working to achieve and maintain coordination

Actors difficulties	Franco-Belgian region	Mont-Blanc region
Institutional: issues of national sovereignty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of involvement of local authorities - Partitioning of the Belgian territory (Flemish/Walloon): distrust, "protectionism" - Unequal funding of partners in INTERREG coordination projects - projects are very people-dependent (i.e. political turn-over affects projects continuity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fantastic source of income for State (through a public French concession): high States regulatory power - a vital crossing point for economic, social and cultural exchanges in Europe - Different national sensitivities to deal with national concerns: competition and frustration
Strategic: organizational tensions for the preservation of stakeholders' positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of formalization in relations between cross-border partners: essentially informal exchanges based on good-will - Lack of a reliable and long-term governance structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operating companies representing their home State positions (fear of losing their concessions). - Sectarian squabbling over strategic choices



Operational: technical inconsistencies	- Territorial resources distortion ("the great Frenchman versus the little Belgian")	- Contractual differences between the employees operating in the tunnel
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Regarding operational actors, main tensions among cross-border partners are related to technical incompatibilities in a situation of interdependence. These operational difficulties in the Franco-Belgian region are mainly emphasized by deep resources and competences disparities. The North department is the largest department in terms of population coverage in France, it has significant resources in terms of civil protection (i.e. advanced operational techniques and management tools, stable process). On the contrary and despite a recent Belgian structuration into relief zones, the communal structures in Belgium remains smaller than in France so that it becomes impossible to obtain comparable relief resources. As a consequence, this may generate a feeling of inferiority and suspicion among Belgian actors, which can be detrimental to coordination between cross-border partners.

« And when at that moment the French arrived to manage the situation with us, we looked at each other with Mr. X. There was a moment of confusion because we like the French, but they are sometimes a little... how do we say, in Belgium we say they are a little bit " Dikkenek ", Dikkenek is " big neck " in Flemish (he started laughing). And so we said to ourselves that's it, here they are, they're going to teach us how to do it. (...) In the end, it didn't turn out that way and we were really able to work together in reality, but yeah that was something ». (Belgian medical operation director interview)

In the Mont-Blanc tunnel, these incompatibilities are mainly reflected at the operational level by a contractual discrepancy. In the tunnel, operational employees working in the common structure (i.e. European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)) are actually contractually affiliated to each of the French and Italian operating companies. This means that French and Italian employees work together in a common structure, embodied by the European Economic Interest Grouping, but are contractually attached to different companies, from different countries. This lack of legal and contractual harmonization can be a source of tension between operational actors, which in certain situations can lead to a “logic of over-bidding” that weaken coordination process. Indeed, as employees of a same team can witness different contractual treatments (e.g. different bonuses, various days-off or different working hours), they can sometimes try to bypass the common European grouping and request direct advantages to their reporting company, be it French or Italian :



« There were problems on both sides because there wasn't a same contractual and human resources management unit and therefore if the Italians, for example, didn't get what they wanted from me (i.e. the EEIG) and my HR director. Well, if they didn't get it, they were going to the Italian company's head officers by saying, well, these EEIG members are doing too much what the French are asking for. We, who are Italian trade unions, within an Italian company, give it to us. I've seen a number of cases where, although I didn't want to give this or that for very specific reasons, before I had time to warn... the trade unions had already obtained the opposite from the Italian company or the French company, depending on the case.

- But how did it manifest itself in the field?

- It was like a parrot ladder : The Italians wanted it and got it, so the French said we want it too... but I think this problem must have changed recently " (member of the Tunnel Operations Management in the EEIG, undated).

Regarding strategic actors in the two cross-border regions, different challenges and difficulties stress the existence of organizational tensions between actors for the preservation of their positions. These organizational quarrels may be a potential barrier to coordination. In the Franco-Belgian case first, the lack of formalization between civil protection actors operating in cross-border context can impede coordination of relief organizations (e.g. medical teams, fire brigades) in case of a disaster occurring in the area. As a consequence, actors on the field often lack knowledge about the resources held by the cross-border neighbor and which may be needed in some situations. The absence of local administrative arrangements also make many of these interventions uncertain because they are based solely on the goodwill of actors. Commanders can indeed spontaneously show solidarity towards their neighbors with who they develop relationship over the years thanks to their geographical proximity. But as this mutual aid is not formalized, this support is far from being systematic. Our results have shown indeed that the officers in charge often refuse to assist their cross-border neighbors because, if something goes wrong, their operational teams risk not receiving any protection to cover their intervention outside their territory. This is particularly detrimental when certain emergency situations occur in so-called *white areas*, in which relief teams of the neighboring country is geographically closer than the ones operating on the national territory (e.g. in the Belgian town of Mouscron, the nearest fire station is located on the French side of the border). Cross-border officers' refusal to engage their teams can lead to significant delays in national rescue teams mobilization, at a time human lives are at stake. On the other hand, in the Mont-Blanc tunnel, a formalization work led very quickly to the establishment of specific governance arrangements (i.e. a two-headed structure with an alternate managing director) and the signing of administrative agreements (e.g. the Lucca convention in 2006). However, despite a better formalization than in the Franco Belgian case, organizational tensions do exist as resulting from a strict parity



between French and Italian concessions (i.e. the public company in France and private company in Italy share half of the tunnel's profits and manage operations on a 50/50 basis). In this respect, some sectarian squabbles between the two concessions can be felt, in particular when it comes to strategic choices affecting the tunnel (e.g. new investment, reconstruction work or modernization of the tunnel). The fear of these companies of being removed from their concessions can lead to intimidation among representatives or to negotiations obstructions. It may also reflect indirect pressure from the French or Italian government on these concessions that are required to represent the interests of their home nation. This can then make the work of coordination more difficult to achieve.

« But every time he called his colleague from the South (i.e. Italian side of the tunnel), he spoke in Italian so that we wouldn't understand (...) Because structures prefer their independence rather than their interdependence, it was a fact. The European grouping was not a choice but was imposed by both government as a requirement to keep their concession, so they accepted it by making the best out of a bad situation ». (interview strategic actor of the tunnel, not dated)

Finally, institutional actors face difficulties emphasized through the existence of national sovereignty issues which overcome local challenges encountered by actors on the field. This is particularly clear in the Mont-Blanc tunnel where the infrastructure is perceived as the main source of income for both national state. Also, the strategic importance of the tunnel is revealed because it represents a unique and vital crossing point for economic, social and cultural exchange in Europe. Consequently, any decision in the tunnel is important in terms of national sovereignty. It is particularly exacerbated The board committee of the French concession is then often assigned to high representative of the State and having a significant political background and technical knowledge (e.g. engineer graduated from the most prestigious national engineer university, previous political and ministerial career, strong social affinity with members of the government). Also, due to the public nature of the infrastructure in France, French and Italian administrations' sensitivities regarding the treatment of certain critical issues may differ. For example, issues related to the pollution of the valley, caused by lorry traffic passing through the tunnel are more acknowledge by French than Italian institutional actors. After the crisis of 1999 inside of the tunnel, caused by a heavy truck carrying margarine, several French citizen initiatives and NGOs have clearly protested for banning heavy trucks traffic from the tunnel. While this has not engender any national action on the Italian side, the French government has initiated various round tables and consultation meetings with local elected officials and citizens. This led to a deterioration in relations with the Italian concession, which



saw a possible slowdown in the reopening of the tunnel, thereby generating opinion discordances or a competitive feeling among actors that can impede coordination. This may be reflected in situation of information retention or through the unwillingness of some actors to discuss issues of importance to the tunnel.

« What? Our queen? Our national diamond? The Italians, we're going to show them... ». Because, as a result, security comes after this kind of chauvinism, perhaps a state secret. I don't know, I'm exaggerating, but that's it. It's a state of mind that we must certainly have in our ministries (...) It can last 15 days if there is good will from the authorities on each side with people who understand what the problem we are asking them is and people who need a solution. But then it can last 15 years if there is no good will or if the officials in charge find it too complicated compared to the current law or the situation». (interview with a legislative actor related to the Mont-Blanc trial)

Conversely, in the Franco-Belgian region, actors mainly rely on informal relations to structure their interactions in a high-proximity territory. As a consequence and despite huge territorial interdependences, difficulties for institutional actors in the Franco-Belgian region mainly stem from a lack of involvement of many elected representatives regarding the necessity to improve and formalize a long-term dynamic of coordination. Projects for improving cross-border coordination remain very people-dependent and subject to changes in current political priorities (i.e. very different agendas and willingness/obligations of commitment for political representatives). Additionally, the administrative machinery and the slowness of the processes make the signing of bi-national administrative agreements quite complex in certain areas because coordination does not always seem to be a political priority (e.g. First bi-national agreement for civil protection between emergency teams only signed in 2019). This can create long-term frustration for the few actors involved continuously in the process and can ultimately erode coordination over time.

« We can see that the Franco-Belgian Interreg (i.e. European Union program to enhance cross-border regions dynamics in Europe) project is dragging on because there is a lack of involvement... without being judgmental, of course. But as long as we don't have so much goodwill and as long as we have to continue to make European projects where we spend three quarters of the time to fill in administrative formalities to justify financing, we must accept that the machine will take some time to get going » (interview with a Belgian commander relief)

3.2. SECOND-ORDER RESULTS : ACCEPTABILITY ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH DIFFERENT COORDINATION PRACTICES

3.2.1. Acceptability as a new condition of emergent coordination



The various challenges encountered by each operational, strategical and institutional actors highlight a variety of difficulties that can impede the coordination process. What is most interesting to emphasize in our results is that these social challenges do not necessarily challenge the achievement of predictability, common understanding or accountability. In particular, our results show that in cross-border regions, the diversity of organizational profiles and the multitude of actors, as well as the many issues encountered by each category of actors (i.e. power games, divergent interests and motivations of actors) are such that full coordination requires the fulfilment of a new condition that make coordination possible, that of **acceptability**. This means that, in situations where social and political challenges are at stake, organizations from both side of the national border can create accountability, predictability and common understanding but without succeeding in managing their interdependences to achieve a collective performance. In this sense, the three conditions for coordination identified by Okhuysen and Bechky (2009) are obviously necessary for coordination but not sufficient. Acceptability can be defined as the actors' willingness to accomplish and/or maintain tasks allocation and to support interaction articulations so that each member can benefit from the interaction. By creating acceptability, actors agree to engage in coordination work and consent to make and/or maintain such efforts so that complex interdependencies can be managed.

This condition of acceptability is essential for several reasons. First, acceptability reevaluates actors 'responsibilities in allowing the coordination process to unfold. It shows that coordination is not only a technical question that consists in arranging tasks and orchestrating their realization. The different challenges emphasizes by operational, strategical or institutional actors all show that coordination is also, if not mostly, a matter of creating a good organizational environment to support the individuals responsible for these tasks in the ongoing accomplishment of coordination.

In line with this first reason, acceptability is also necessary to show the effort required by these different actors in the coordination process. Indeed, cross-border regions show that because of the various challenges previously highlighted, coordination is a constant **work** that requires time and intense contributions from each actor involved in the process. Consequently, coordination is far from being a phenomena that naturally emerge thanks to a general consensus among actors. It implies sufficient motivation and satisfaction for actors to consent to make these significant efforts. The table below identify such work done by the different actors to achieve this condition of acceptability. In particular, actors work to achieve the condition of acceptability follows different logics (i.e. uniqueness, coexistence and calculation) at the core



of different coordination practice, respectively the practice of consensus building, valuing distinctive learning or territorial arbitration

Table 2. Coordination practices for the acceptability condition achievement

Actors Dynamics		unity	coexistence	calculation
Actors involved in CBR		Practice of consensus building	Practice of distinctive learning	Practice of territorial arbitration
downward dynamics in the Mont-Blanc region	Institutional : ministries, official delegations, inter-governmental commissions	Engagement work, awareness-raising work	Negotiation work	External arrangements work
	Strategic : firefighters officers in the command room and department director of the tunnel , control officers, liaison officers, hospital director	Co-construction work	Work to maintain balance	Operational performance management work
	Operational : firefighters operating inside the tunnel or sent on the field, operators in the tunnel	Commitment and solidarity work	Learning work	Contractual and outsourcing work
		upward dynamics in the Franco-Belgian region		

3.2.2. The practice of consensus building: acceptability based on a logic of unity

First, in order to address some of the challenges encountered by the different actors in some situations (transboundary intervention, exercises, cross-border meetings), part of the work engaged by operational, strategic and institutional actors to achieve acceptability converge towards a practice of consensus. By following actors' work in time and space, we revealed a logic of uniqueness at the core of this practice of coordination. Indeed, through the practice of consensus, actors generate acceptability by relying on a solidarity and a sense of commitment (logic of unity) thanks to which actors seem to unanimously agree on managing their interdependencies and overcome their differences. Because actors are conscious of belonging to the same territory, they are also aware that they share the same risks associated to their territory and may all confront similar difficulties. The work of all actors (operational, strategic and institutional) is then rooted in a sense of unity through which even a local problem on one side of the border (e.g. a house fire) is the responsibility of all organizations established on the territory (i.e. smoke diffusion on the other side of the national border, future assistance needed



if the fire was occurring on the other national territory). This practice of consensus is first visible through the operational actors work. For example in the tunnel, operators are naturally embracing a bi-national environment by working in French-Italian teams in which actors generally value this unique exploitation that promote cultural diversity :

« Personally, I defended and I am still defending a unique tunnel vision ». « After that, It is also link to the special place we work in. That is to say that when the tunnel was reopened, the managers of the time insisted that all the staff should say: "There is no France, there is no Italy". This is the area of the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG). We are all working in this same area so, we are going to speak of North to consider France entrance and South to speak about Italy entrance because we are obliged to indicate somehow the localization. But we are in fact erasing the national differences, from the administrative point of view as well as from the technical or operational point of view. You can be French, work on the Italian platform and vice versa. This is the domain of the EEIG, which is our common workplace » (interviews with an operational actor working in the tunnel and a former general director of the tunnel)

Regarding strategic actors, the consensus practice is reflected in a co-construction work that is emphasized in the French-Belgian case by the development of projects to improve cross-border coordination. These projects are initiated by certain key actors (e.g. the departmental fire and rescue service) that have a primary leading role in stimulating interaction between cross-border actors. A particular attention is paid to enhancing social and friendly ties between these few actors so that they can establish trust over the years and erase administrative boundaries between them.

« In fact, what we're doing is trying to get the partners more involved in these projects and invite them to join us in a future high-tech, mobility project (...) My wish would be to be able to create micro-projects where the players can really get involved. My wish would ideally be to reduce the loss of energy, to mobilize people, to bring them together. Especially unfunded partners who have to move from one place to another for a meeting. The multiplicity of agendas: 26 partners, 26 different agendas, in other words we don't bring 26 together at the same time, but by themes, otherwise it can become complicated. It's important to focus on territories, on projects with a more human dimension as well, while keeping a transversal platform » (interview with the project leader of Departmental fire and rescue service of the North of France).

Finally, the practice of consensus building essentially relies on engaging and raising awareness among institutional actors to encourage them to joint efforts in managing their interdependencies and create acceptability. In the years following the two cross-border crisis that these regions have experienced (1999 for the Mont Blanc Tunnel and 2004 for the Ghislenghien disaster), this commitment has quite naturally emerged because of the repercussions and the collective trauma generated by these disasters. Because the lack of



coordination was pointed out in the various official crisis reports, institutional actors thus became aware of their responsibility to improve cross-border coordination. But if this common trauma generated at that time a natural enrolment, acceptability, almost 20 years later, involves a commemorative work to raise elected representatives awareness regarding the need for coordination improvement. Because, availability, agenda or personal willingness of these actors to promote cross-border coordination can be limited in the French-Belgian region, this awareness-raising work therefore involves the organization of different cross-border workshops targeting local elected representatives. In these workshops aiming at enhancing coordination at the border of France and Belgium, discussions often start by a short reminder of what happen during the Ghislenghien crisis and what evolve since this date to avoid a same situation to happen again. Social affinities and proximity are also encouraged as these elected representatives are invited to workshops in areas close to where these actors work so that it is easy for them to participate (i.e. cost reduction and time saving)

“ It's hard, but we manage to do it, particularly with elected representatives. It works rather well with these workshops of elected representatives, with partners that we meet at their hometown because if we move them they don't come ” (interview with the Chief of the Hainaut governor office).

Also, a display work engaged by institutional actors is useful to achieve the condition of acceptability as these meetings and workshop also bring together political and highly esteemed actors who often introduce the sessions (e.g. prefect of the area, mayor of the town, etc.). This then contributes to the legitimacy and credibility of these meetings in which elected representatives are then more inclined to discuss their respective actions with their peers and on their territory. In the Mont-Blanc tunnel, this work this practice is revealed by the launching of joint institutional projects between France and Italy that outreach the only management of the tunnel (e.g. new transalpine transport policy with the launching of road-rail transport connection, also known as the Lyon-Turin project). For example, in the 2000s, the global articulation between the Mont-Blanc and the Fréjus tunnels' regulation led the two governments to think about ways of setting up joint strategy to regulate traffic and tolls between the only two tunnels that linked France to Italy. By associating the institutional actors beyond the Mont-Blanc tunnel, acceptability emerged thanks to a reinforcement of French and Italian interdependencies. Because institutional actors start to have more in common, they generally search by all way to consent to an acceptable sharing of tasks and responsibilities, so that all



their previous efforts will not be in vain. In this sense, it satisfies the condition of acceptability by making the institutional actors aware that the functioning of the entire Transalpine valley is at stake here, and not only the challenges associated to the Mont-Blanc tunnel. Thus, the obstacles of certain actors to engage in the coordination process could not only affect actors operating in the tunnel but also the whole valley :

« And if it is necessary to discuss the principles of goods transport in all the sensitive mountains, let's discuss it, I agree, but not as an excuse to postpone the implementation of decisions (NB: in this case, the reopening of the tunnel) that I believe are good for the two Savoy regions, for Rhône Alpes and, I have no hesitation in saying so, for France and for Europe » (Official transcription of the French Transportation Minister during the round table on 2 October 2001 on transport policy in the Alps).

3.2.3. The practice of valuing distinctive learning : acceptability based on a logic of coexistence

Secondly, part of the coordination work highlighted in the French-Belgian and French-Italian cross-border regions seems to converge towards an approach in which actors value the coexistence of different ways of doing things. Through this logic of coexistence that is visible in the work of all actors, it is then possible to highlight a practice of valuing distinctive learning. This practice show that actors in cross-border regions achieve acceptability by relying on adjustment and distinct experience everyone can gain from cross-border interactions. Actors can then agree to manage their interdependencies but without jeopardizing each way of working and each national entities.

First, what will encourage operational actors to make efforts to achieve acceptability is very clearly emphasized in the Franco-Belgian case by a learning process work. Indeed, we have previously mentioned the challenges of the relief resources inequality between the Hainaut province and the North department. In this sense, some of the Belgian actors are encouraged to take advantage of this territorial proximity to learn and structure their action procedures. For Belgian operators, this learning dynamic enable to better develop their method, in line with what is already functioning well in France. This learning of different methods is also acceptable for French actors as it is a way of exporting French ways of doing things and thus gaining visibility internationally :



« And so, the fire brigade of the North (SDIS 59), which was already organized on a supra-local level, was much more strongly organized than we were, with means and structure, because they already had the concepts of group leader, column leader, site manager... I don't know if it was already called this way. But all our operational management systems of command were only beginning, we were in our infancy in our relief zones. And so, all this means that the French are all arriving like that. Pooooof VPC (command post vehicle). They're starting to open things, big boards, maps, and so on. And so it gives structure to your intervention ». (Belgian Emergency Operations Commander interview).

For strategic actors, the practice of valuing distinctive learning involves seeking to maintain a balance, particularly in the case of the Mont-Blanc Tunnel. It is mainly because balances are respected among managers of the tunnel's departments, that French and Italian agree to engage in a work to manage their interdependencies and then achieve acceptability. Indeed, it seems difficult to conceive that all the managerial positions would be granted to one nationality in a structure that is intended to be binational. If this were the case, no negotiation would be possible because one of the two side would necessarily feel disadvantaged and would not consent to enrolled in the coordination process. Consequently, managers of the tunnel often have the responsibility of searching to maintain an equilibrium between nationalities when recruiting. This in return can help the coordination process as it allows to benefit from the particularity of actors from both side of the border and who may have special prerogatives (e.g. a mayor in Belgium have more responsibilities associated to the security of its area while this same prerogatives are devoted to a more institutional level) or standards (e.g. local emergency and response plan compulsory in Belgium while optional in France).

« At the company level, there is a position which is to try to maintain a balance between French and Italians with a maximum difference of 2%, which means that you may have 102 from one nationality and the other 98 and not just 100 of each.. But in the last few years this has changed a little, because maintaining a balance has brought a lot of employment problems and things like that. You know how the EEIG is made up. But then still... the heads of departments are divided two by two: two French and two Italians, since there are four departments in the tunnel : traffic safety department, customer department, technical and IT department and administrative and financial department »(interview with Italian department director)

This balance is also reflected for institutional actors, who are encouraged to engage in a process of consultation and negotiation in which the contributions and ideas of each of the stakeholders are discussed and debated. To do this, institutional actors can also open up discussion and organize local concertation to help them clarify some actors' positions (e.g. public debate with citizen in the Alpine Valley regarding the new transport policy).



3.2.4. Territorial arbitration practice: acceptability based on a logic of calculation

Finally, part of the coordination work in the French-Belgian and French-Italian cross-border regions converge towards a logic of calculation. Through this logic, it is then possible to highlight a practice of territorial arbitration in which actors generate acceptability by relying on an assessment and a cost/benefit calculation that encourage actors to manage their interdependencies by supporting the most effective and simple solution offered to them.

At the operational level, this arbitration takes the form of a contracting work in which the organizations operating from both side of the tunnel can agree to outsource the performance of certain tasks and activities to an external structure in order to avoid managing complex Franco-Italian interdependencies. For example, the tunnel safety service has been outsourced to a company by invitation to tender, after years of attempting to create a French/Italian operators team to ensure the security of the tunnel. Because actors from France and Italy used to have their own prerogatives and languages, composing such diverse team start being a daily challenge for the European grouping operating in the tunnel. To avoid political disagreement the choice was made to allow one external company, jointly chosen by French and Italian tunnel managers, to provide this service. This calculation logic, which allow the arbitration practice to unfold, can also be revealed in the Franco-Belgian regions by formally contracting assistance among French and Belgian actors. Recent discussions show the willingness to charge every assistance made in the future between the two country (contract with an invoice to sign) so that it would offer a protection to operators involved outside of their national territory. What prevails here is the territory and the willingness to enhance life condition of citizens and actors of these areas.

This arbitration practice also relies on work aimed at developing performance and operational efficiency for the strategic actors. Indeed, in the Mont-Blanc Tunnel, the strategic actors are encourage to arbitrate on the best way to resolve the difficulties and issues they encounter, especially in situations where they are forced to manage their interdependencies immediately in action. The various arguments between the actors from both side of the national border, as well as the existence of different standards and ways of doing things, lead the tunnel managers to prioritize, in certain areas, the logic of the most restrictive procedure. In certain situations where the procedures/methods are different between French and Italian operators, directors in the tunnel can chose to refer to the most constraining standard so that it simplify actors'



contributions. This calculation based on the logic of the most constraining procedure at the French-Italian border is translated in the Franco-Belgian case by the logic of the fastest (e.g. authority in command taken by the first to arrive on site).

« So we have French and Italian regulations. And we have to juggle with them. Today the method that is considered is to take the most restrictive regulation between the two. Whatever the field. I'm saying something very stupid, for example we have to mark signs forbidding smoking in different places, we have to put it in several places : 5 times on the Italian side but 3 on the French side ... well, we'll do the same thing on the French side, 5 everywhere. To simplify, in general, we try to take the most restrictive standard if it suits both » (tunnel safety director).

This arbitration practice is also reflected in the arrangements made by the various institutional actors. Indeed, in order to deal with the political divergences between actors that tend to weaken the coordination process, the arbitration practice relies on the acceptance of the various actors to refer to chosen "arbitrators" to resolve their arguments. For example, during meetings of the Mont-Blanc Tunnel Inter-Governmental Commission, the safety committee may be asked to provide technical expertise alongside local actors (e.g. a fire brigade commander) to give its neutral opinion on a discussion that is essentially political. This may also involve referring to neutral service providers (e.g. a Swiss firm for the evaluation of renovation work in the tunnel). This arbitration in the case of the French-Belgian cross-border region is not supported by external actors. On the contrary, in this logic of calculation, the cross-border partner is often seen as a means (at both strategic and institutional levels) of overcoming national divisions between different communities or professions (e.g. the Walloon/Flemish division; competition between certain French departmental rescue services). Coordination with other organizations/institutions from the other side of the border is then more preferable than engaging in a relationship with national partners with whom actors can be in competition :

« So we still have that little parochial spirit and communal rivalry. When the French come to help the Belgians, it's a little bit exotic... Thank you, the French. And so we get on well, we have a drink. But when it's the Belgians booooh... we had to get back-up from our neighbors (Author note: here provincial or communal). So there's this feeling of weakness, of not being able to do everything alone. And there's the complex feeling of superiority of the person who comes and says "Did you see that? We've been there, thanks to us. I'm caricaturing, but, but we're not far from it (...) even if it's fading away with the grouping into zones in our country » (interview with Belgian emergency commander)

3.3. COORDINATION PRACTICES ACTIVATION AND DYNAMICS OF ACTORS

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, in both cross-border regions, although these three different practices highlight the systematic need to satisfy the condition of acceptability that



makes coordination possible, differences remain between the two regions. In table 2. presented earlier, we can mainly consider two actors dynamics, an upward and downward one, by considering how coordination practices firstly emerge. In particular, although the practices of consensus, valuing distinctive learning and territorial arbitration all unfold in both CBR, the activation of these practices is not initially initiated by the same actors' profile. In the Franco-Belgian case, it is essentially operational actors who first drive the coordination process (downward dynamics): they highlight incompatibilities and operational challenges, coordinate on the basis of their informal network with actors on the other side of the border, and then work with strategic and institutional actors on further formalization and on making them aware of the necessity to maintain coordination practices. On the other hand, the tunnel is a highly political and politicized structure. Consequently, coordination and the associated challenges are first perceptible and discussed at the level of the institutional actors and then spread to the level of the concessions and operators (upward dynamics).

4. DISCUSSION

Our article underlines the importance of considering acceptability as a necessary and additional condition for understanding emergent coordination. Acceptability is particularly emphasized in organizational configurations where many actors have to compose despite their many social differences and political priorities. Consequently, coordination appears not to be a natural process that erases spontaneously between actors but is rather a daily effort through which actors commit to manage their complex interdependencies. The study of cross-border regions in particular has shown that acceptability emerges in different routine or extreme emergency situations affecting civil security coordination (e.g. cross-border exercises, real-time intervention or cross-border meetings) and in which the differences actors have to deal with are multiple and difficult to overshadow. In this sense, acceptability in cross-border regions highlights that the coordination process involves efforts for a large set of actors operating in this heterogeneous configuration. These actors, whether institutional, strategic or operational, must then find some benefits in the interaction in order to consent and commit to manage their interdependencies. This acceptability is then not only driven by a consensus through which actors value a common existence in a same living area. In particular, our results also highlight acceptability emerges also thanks to a practice through which actors benefit from a network in which different nationalities and expertise coexist. They can then have access to particular resources that allow them to enhance their very own national systems. Finally acceptability be



supported by a pragmatic and political calculation that allows for arbitrations conducive to the improvement of the daily work of the actors in the territory (time saving, economy, intervention efficiency).

In this article, we then highlighted coordination practices that feed acceptability in cross-border regions, paying particular attention to 1. the actors behind these practices and 2. to the work these actors do to resolve the social and political challenges they may encounter.

First, in this article, we focused on how coordination unfold in cross-border regions in which multiple actors with different profiles (operational, strategic, institutional) manage their interdependencies while facing many mismatch in terms of political interests, motivations or social statuses. In this sense, it contributes to the literature on coordination by seeing coordination not as a disembodied phenomenon, but as a phenomenon supported by identifiable and identified actors (Bouty & Drucker-Godard 2018). There is indeed plethora of operational, strategic or institutional actors operating in the cross-border coordination process so that coordination is far from being only a technical phenomenon. Maintaining and achieving emergent coordination is also, if not mainly, a matter of supporting and articulating interactions of individuals who are responsible for these tasks. In those many contexts where social and political challenges are at stake, **acceptability** then becomes a new condition to allow emergent coordination to unfold, in addition to the condition of predictability, common understanding and accountability (Okhuysen & Bechky 2009).

Second, to achieve and maintain this new condition of accountability, actors are not always relying on a general consensus in which they unanimously agree to maintain tasks allocation and interaction articulation (consensus practice). Our article aims at better emphasizing the work and effort these many actors do daily, through their practice, to achieve acceptability as a new condition of coordination. When talking about "coordination work", we mainly emphasize that coordination is not a self-fulfilling phenomenon nor a process of achieving, almost naturally, integrative conditions. On the contrary, coordination is often the result of efforts, work and labor, supported and sustained by actors on a daily basis. The work behind valuing distinctive learning and territorial arbitration practices in particular show that actors' unity and natural communion around their territory (i.e. logic of unity at the core of the practice of consensus), is not what often drives the achievement of acceptability. Actors can sometimes consent to some efforts to coordinate with other actors with whom they may not agree on many things, just because they may have no other choice (logic of coexistence) or because they may



also benefit from the interactions (logic of calculation). Finally, these practices are not always initiated by the same category of actors. We presented two different dynamics through which actors can drive the coordination process: an upward and downward dynamics. These two dynamics are interesting to highlight the fact that, contrary to a bureaucratic argument, coordination is also a decentralized phenomenon that is not only supported or driven by decisional actors (Boin & Bynander 2014).



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