

# Border Spaces and Regional Integration in ECOWAS

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**Abstract:-** Assessing the social, political and economic contributions of border areas at national and/or regional level is at the heart of many studies on the process of regional integration. In Africa in general, and in West Africa in particular, border areas are complex and highly dynamic. This research proposes to determine their importance in the regional integration process within ECOWAS. It is based on a descriptive analysis of data from OECD/WAC studies of West African border areas. Through a quantitative and qualitative approach, the results revealed that West African border areas represent natural integration zones, or small-scale integration zones where numerous actors of diverse origins, nationalities, cultures and activities interact. However, they struggle to have a positive impact and to make a relevant and appreciable contribution to the process of regional integration at both national and regional levels.

**Keywords:-** Border Areas; Regional Integration; ECOWAS; Transport Infrastructure; Energy Infrastructure.

## I. INTRODUCTION

After the Second World War, groups of countries emerged with the aim of achieving economic integration, with or without a political perspective. (Ramdé, 2004). Indeed, the process of regional integration had become a new phenomenon that went beyond traditional cooperation and the reciprocal opening up of markets as envisaged at the time with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the International Trade Organization (ICO), but seemed entirely appropriate to qualify projects whose aim was to bring the economies concerned ever closer together until complete unification was achieved (Deblock, 2017; Mballa & Mande, 2017).

For the political scientist Haas (1970), defining regional integration "means explaining how and why states cease to be fully sovereign, how and why they voluntarily merge with their neighbors and thus lose their attributes of sovereignty, while acquiring new means of resolving any conflicts that may arise between them". Deutsch (1970), basing himself on the construction of Europe, emphasized the presence of a "sense of community" in the process, as well as "the existence of institutions and practices strong enough to give rise, over a long period, to the hope of a peaceful international life". The concept of regional integration, as defined, mainly covers two (02) types of dynamics. One is market-driven, resulting from increased trade flows and the

movement of factors of production. The other, underpinned by political agreements, is achieved through rules and presupposes the establishment of institutions and the passage of stages programmed over time. (Brot & Gérardin, 2001). However, whatever the orientation of the integration process, the construction of an integrated and viable community space is the main objective.

In these dynamics, the border is the first target to be knocked down. Originally an instrument of differentiation, affirmation and regulation, the border is transformed by regional integration into an object of relations (Beylier, 2022). Border regions play a decisive role as bridges to integration (Brot & Gérardin, 2001). They establish links between larger territories separated by a border and act as models of small-scale integration (Ahrens & Schöne, 2008 ; O'Dowd, 2002). The process of regional integration increases openness and cooperation between states, and thus represents an opportunity to develop borders by overcoming historically constructed economic and institutional blockages (Brot & Gérardin, 2001; Leloup & Stoffel, 2001).

As a result, the link between border areas and regional integration seems natural, even indissociable, when considered in relation to certain integration processes such as those in Europe or Latin America (Gaubard, 2002; Szary, 2010).

For Sohn, border areas play a central role (resource vector) in regional integration. They have numerous advantages, in terms of geographical location, transactional advantages, price differentials, wages, taxes, regulations, socio-cultural advantages linked to a mix of ideas, values and identities, and finally, symbolic advantages (Sohn, 2014). These spaces therefore contribute significantly to the regional integration process and facilitate the circulation of production factors within integration communities (Ahrens & Schöne, 2008; Brot & Gérardin, 2001; Leloup & Stoffel, 2001; O'Dowd, 2002).

However, after decades of implementation, of including border areas in the regional integration process, of facilitating production factors across borders, in major integration communities such as NAFTA, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, the EU and many others, reservations are increasingly being voiced about the freedoms and facilitations of movement across borders. This natural interaction between border areas and regional integration seems to be showing its limits in many respects. According to Beylier, the greatest concern is the increase in terrorism. Border areas are being squeezed by

multiple and contradictory forces, leading to their hardening and consolidation, which in turn threatens and slows down the integration that has developed between countries. (Beylier, 2022). Similarly, observable practical realities call into question the extent to which border areas are taken into account in the regional integration process.

However, while in other regional integration communities, restrictions and reservations are increasingly encouraged with regard to border areas, in Africa, numerous works on integration communities, in particular that of ECOWAS, whose implementation is still dependent, and those due to numerous factors strongly encourage the consideration, planning and inclusion of border areas in their regionalization process (Diarrass, 2002; Egg & Herrera, 1998; Enda Diapol, 2007; Igué, 1993; OCDE/CSAO, 2019a; Ramdé, 2004).

Given these paradoxes regarding border areas and their impact on the regional integration process, what are the specific roles played by the border areas of ECOWAS states in the sub- region's regional integration, and how do they influence economic, political and social spheres?

To answer this question, this article entitled "Border Spaces and Regional Integration in ECOWAS" would identify the specific economic, political and social opportunities offered by the border spaces of ECOWAS states to strengthen regional integration. The aim of this research is to provide added value to the achievement of the Continental African Free Trade Area (CAFTA), which aims to considerably increase integration between Regional Economic Communities and on a continental scale through increased traffic flows. The remainder of this paper is divided into two main sections. The first part describes the general characteristics of border areas and regional integration. The second part focuses on the realities of ECOWAS border areas.

#### A. General Characteristics of Border Areas and Regional Integration

Border areas are multidimensional, enabling them to play many roles. This multiplication of their functions means that they represent analytical laboratories that can highlight or explain numerous phenomena or realities in many respects. Such is the case with regional integration, whose principles demand or impose certain conditions on integration communities.

##### ➤ How Border Areas Work

According to the Larousse dictionary, a border is "a limit between two states". For Diallo, it represents the limit of a state's sovereignty (Diallo, 2006). The border area is therefore an administrative subdivision with a direct opening onto a frontier line. It is an area on the periphery, on the edge of a national context (Oniboukou & Agbossou, 2019). To this end, the realities of these spaces are multiple and multiform. Thus, several theories help us to understand their different roles.

##### • Theories Structuring Border Spaces

Numerous theories highlight the different functions attributed to borders, and thus identify the roles of border areas in relation to them. Ratti, in his book "Theory of border-region development", divides them into three (03) main categories or approaches (Ratti, 1991).

The first theoretical approach that can be described as traditional corresponds to the notion of the **barrier-border**. It was developed by Hansen (1977), who highlighted the penalizing and discriminating effects of the border. For Ratti, however, border regions have traditionally been hindered and delayed in their development by their peripheral location in relation to the country's economic centers, and by the principle of separation, according to which the central government gives priority to sectoral policies over regional and inter-regional socio-economic relationships.

The second theoretical approach sees **the border in its role as a filter**, a discriminating mediator between two or more political-institutional systems, and between different economic systems. In other words, it separates in relative and discriminating terms two or more systems that are in potential reciprocal tension.

The last theoretical approach refers to the **open border**, where the function of contact (rather than separation) between different systems dominates. Indeed, the open border implies a shift from the concept of a border zone economy to that of a cross-border economy. Above all, this means an entrepreneurial spirit less tied to vertical relations with the rest of the country, and more willing to take an interest in and engage in network-type collaborations with regional entrepreneurs, particularly those in border areas.

Based on the latter approach, Alvergne defines the border area as a space where informality reigns, a strong collective feeling and an ever-sustained economic dynamic with joint actions that are essential to facilitate development and guarantee stability (Alvergne, 2023).

##### • Border Space: A Systemic and Spatial Concept

The geographical location of border areas has an impact on the realities that can be observed within them. For many authors, the morphology of border areas is mainly linked to their spatial and systemic character (Diallo, 2006).

At first glance, for Perez, border areas, being mostly on the periphery and often on the bangs of other cities (particularly in developing countries), represent composed, open spaces. Indeed, they are distinguished from other cities by a higher level of integration with an extra-regional environment and sensitivity to external events. This character is justified by the existing interaction between the national environment of two or all neighboring countries within a single space. According to the author, this is an intrinsic characteristic of border regions, irrespective of the type and intensity of geopolitical ties between neighboring states. Similarly, the dependence of border areas can be observed at national level through differences in exchange

rates, laws and regulations. At regional level, this dependence can be seen in demographic, employment and service differentials (Perez, 2000).

In the same vein, Ratti believes that border areas should be considered not only in terms of their national delimitation, but also in the context of the emergence of a regional economy. The author highlights the contrasts weighing on border areas. They represent both zones of separation and contact, spaces of tension, but at the same time anticipate the neighboring country. Taking these areas into account and integrating them can prove attractive, as it enables us to benefit from the advantages of proximity and the advantages determined by the spatial logic of activities (Ratti, 1991). It refers to the plurality of players, sometimes separated by different regulations, cultures, languages and currencies, but ensures the presence of specialized and complementary skills, which generate particular advantages for those who live there.

- *Border Area: Regional Cooperation Area*

In the current context of regionalization, undertaken in all parts of the world, border areas represent places of emergence on a small scale where many local and localized processes of economic and social integration from below are identified, and which extend over several states (Diallo, 2006). These local processes give way to cross-border cooperation, which represents a lever for regional integration (Beyeler, 2019). According to the practical guide to cross-border cooperation drawn up on behalf of the Council of Europe, cross-border cooperation could be defined as "the neighborly relations maintained by local communities and authorities on either side of borders, whether land or sea" (MOT, 2006). For Medina and Diallo, cross-border cooperation represents a tool for regional integration, as the birth of the latter seems to be linked to the desire to strengthen the process of regional integration worldwide. Indeed, cross-border cooperation makes it possible to deconstruct state divisions in order to decompartmentalize the regional space set up by states, by considering the border as an interface capable of creating political, economic and cultural links across various territories (Medina & Diallo, 2020).

Once the constraints associated with the barrier function of borders have been fully overcome, the convergence between States could help consolidate the dynamics of regional integration through the establishment of a partnership framework linking the efforts of different States, local authorities, private players and cooperation organizations to increase the process of regional integration through concerted management of border areas, the implementation of development plans, and the coherence of sectoral policies for harmonious and shared development of the community area<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Results of the Sikasso seminar, held in Mali from March 04 to 07, 2002.

## B. Analysis of Regional Integration

Almost all developing countries are involved in regional integration processes, ranging from sectoral cooperation to political unions with transfer of sovereignty. (DGCID, 2001). In fact, the concept of regional integration is a plurivocal and multidisciplinary one, with perceptions that are as different as they are complementary.

### ➤ Perceptions of Regional Integration

Regional integration is a notion that tends to be used in the same way as other notions such as **regionalism** and **regionalization**, with which it shares very close links.

In international relations, **regionalism** refers to any institutionalized process between two or more States designed to foster cooperation and coordination of their policies in certain areas (Deblock, 2006). It involves "a form of ordered pluralism that differs from multilateralism only in the number of players and the scope of the rules (Tshiyembe, 2012). In international economics, regionalism consists of "measures taken by governments to liberalize or facilitate trade on a regional basis, sometimes through free trade areas or customs unions". This WTO definition has the disadvantage of focusing on the commercial aspect, and leaves open the question of why two or more countries should seek "closer integration" of their economies. Generally speaking, regionalism implies the idea of conscious, planned action, of a strategy. The emphasis is more on action than on the concentration of trade itself. The actors of regionalism are generally states wishing to give an organized or better-regulated character to their neighborly relations (Échinard & Guilhot, 2007; Livros et al., 1992; Richard, 2014; Sani Adamou, 2015).

**Regionalization**, on the other hand, means focusing on the process in progress, or on the result, independently of its causes. Thus, it can be the consequence of concerted action by actors (governments, for example) or be more spontaneous in nature<sup>2</sup> (Richard, 2014). According to Figuière and Guilhot, regionalization accounts for situations in which the intensification of flows is not accompanied by formal rule-building processes, in other words, an "economy without rules". According to the same authors, **regional integration** is simply a combination of regionalism and regionalization. In other words, "a regional area will be said to be regionally integrated if, and only if, it records a concentration of flows between the nations that make it up, and if it reveals an institutional coordination that establishes common rules on a lasting basis". (Figuière & Guilhot, 2006).

In general terms, it should be noted that the regional integration process, whatever it may be called, mainly brings together the governments of the various states, as guarantors of national policies, and the populations, as key players and integral parts of the process. Similarly, the aim of this

<sup>2</sup> Various types of mobility can be considered spontaneous, whether they be individual, collective, permanent, temporary or seasonal, or other types of social practice.

mechanism would be to establish a growing degree of spatial cohesion and proximity **between populations.**

➤ *Regional Integration as a Mechanism for Eliminating the Barrier Role of Borders.*

Regional integration can be seen as a manifestation of the border losing its role as an obstacle or barrier (Anderson & Wever, 2003; Buch et al., 2009). Referring to the different perceptions or multitudes of existing definitions as clarified above, and to the most successful model of regional integration represented by the EU, Van Houtum in his book "European Perspectives on Border Areas" highlights three (03) approaches to the mechanisms of regional integration (van Houtum, 2000).

The first approach, based on flow theory, perceives **the border as an artificial barrier** that distorts the economic interactions that should normally take place. **Regional integration is therefore seen as the destruction of these barriers.** This perception is in line with the typology of border areas established by Martinez (1994), for whom an integrated area corresponds to a situation in which all obstacles to human and commercial movements are removed (Beylier, 2022). The second approach, according to the author, highlights **regional integration from the point of view of cross-border cooperation. Indeed,** border regions share many common problems due to their peripheral positions. As a result, they are called upon to cooperate with each other on the basis of numerous agreements, policies and cross-border institutions, which give them the role of active players in terms of economic development, if not blindly bearing the problems relating to their position as borders on territories. The last approach **refers to individuals, i.e. the social, cultural and identity-based dimension of regional integration.** This perception is based on the social construction of border spaces and the establishment of a cross-border identity.

These different approaches and principles of regional integration are supported by numerous authors. We can cite Evrard, for example, who, based on the European model, identifies three levels of regional integration, including "the opening of borders to the flow of people and goods", a "regional policy to mitigate border effects" and, finally, "institutional tools to facilitate cross-border cooperation". Brunet-Jailly believes that, for a region to be integrated, it is necessary to facilitate "economic, commercial and human flows, multi-level governance, and to ensure the presence of a cross-border culture and local initiatives". (Beylier, 2022).

An analysis of all these approaches reveals that the border is the first target that regional integration seeks to knock down. Originally an instrument of differentiation, affirmation and regulation, regional integration transforms the border into an object of relationship, in order to transcend the various constraints, it represents (Beylier, 2022).

## II. CHARACTERISTICS OF BORDER AREAS AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION WITHIN ECOWAS

The border is a complex institution with many functions. As Pradeau puts it, it is both seam and suture (Pradeau, 1994). It has a defensive or military function, a function linked to the control of people and goods, and an ideological and political function. (Foucher, 1991).

In Africa, however, the delimitation of state borders is not as natural as on other continents. This gives African border areas a complex and mixed aspect, especially when it comes to assessing their contributions and links to the continent's regional integration process.

First, we'll look back at the history of the delimitation of African borders, in order to better examine the role they play.

➤ *The Historical Dimension of African Border Demarcation*

The delimitation of the borders of African states is the result of the Berlin Conference, held from November 15 1884 to February 26 1885 during the colonial period. This conference laid the foundations for the division of Africa. In other words, the criteria for demarcating the land borders of African states were derived from the recommendations of this conference. As a result, there are few cases where borders coincide with the boundaries of traditional states, and 87% of the length of these borders was directly inherited from colonial divisions (ABeGIEF, 2016). However, in the aftermath of independence, the founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), created in 1963 and renamed the AU in 2002, adopted in their decision the principle of the intangibility of borders inherited from colonization. Thus, by favoring the status quo, the OAU has strongly contributed to making African borders, especially at the political level, barrier zones, places of division based essentially on security reasons (Bouquet, 2003; Fall, 2004).

Conversely, these frontiers also crossed areas where populations on either side of the border lines shared very similar ethnologies (ABeGIEF, 2012; Sossou-Agbo, 2011).. These affinities therefore foster permanent and growing mobility between the various localities located around the border zones. It is for this reason that they are recognized under various names such as "solidarity zones", "natural integration zones", etc. They represent spaces in which various forms of exchange and cooperation, both formal and informal, take place. (Enda Diapol, 2007). To this end, they form a dense environment in which different types of actors interact. Similarly, from the outset, the various RECs, through their objectives, have strongly expressed the desire to create a borderless sub-region.

These various paradoxes make African border areas complex and mixed places, because the will of regional authorities on the role of border areas in the regional integration process is not necessarily the same as that observed on the ground.

➤ *Regional Integration and Border Areas in West Africa: the Gap between Institutional Integration and Community Integration*

The economic, political and social integration of the African continent represents a major development challenge. As such, the path chosen by the African Union to launch this integration remains marked by the community ideal, notably the idea of closely combining economic and institutional integration (Mballa & Mande, 2017). However, after more than fifty years of implementing the process, it has to be acknowledged that progress has not matched the hopes placed in the integration mechanisms (Gbaguidi, 2013). The institutional advances made have struggled to translate into attitudes and practices at local level. Within ECOWAS, for example, the integration of the sub-region has been marked by numerous initiatives since independence. Although these initiatives reflect a certain political enthusiasm, their impact has been limited by weak organizational capacities and economic structures ill-suited to intensifying regional trade

(DGCID, 2001). As a result, the process of regional integration is being held back by the existing gap between institutional integration and the realities experienced by local populations.

For Hugon, African regionalization by actors and networks prevails over institutional regionalism (Hugon, 2012). In the same vein, Lambert asserts that the failure of the various regional organizations demonstrates the impasse of top-down attempts at integration, i.e. by states (Egg & Herrera, 1998).

In West Africa, various studies have demonstrated the existence of a very dense downward integration dynamic around state borders, where different categories of people and activities interact spontaneously. For Enda Diapol, these border areas represent genuine natural zones of integration or border countries

**III. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSES OF THE DYNAMICS OF BORDER AREAS AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN ECOWAS**

Given their situation, border areas have a number of characteristics that make them dynamic and exceptional places, with particular effects on regional integration. In order to assess their contribution to the regional integration process in ECOWAS, the OECD/SWAC work is based on three main dimensions: density, distance and division.

Table 1 below shows the characteristics of the different dimensions, as well as those to which they refer.

Table 1 Characteristics of the Dimensions used to Analyze the Contribution and Constraints of Border Towns

Dimension	Features	Indicators and Dimensions of Regional Integration	Definition
<b>Density</b>	It refers to the plurality of players, sometimes separated by different regulations, cultures, languages and currencies, but ensures the presence of specialized and complementary skills, which generates particular advantages for those who live there.	Demographics	Population, density and growth in border towns
		Morphology	Urban building and the existence of a cross-border morphological conurbation
<b>Distance</b>	Border towns are generally located at a great distance from decision-making centers. This is often synonymous with political marginalization, and is reflected in a lack of public investment in road infrastructure, energy, health services and so on.	Companies	The aim is to identify formal companies specializing in certain sectors of importance to regional integration.
		Health	Assess the existence and quality of cross-border healthcare infrastructures.
<b>Division</b>	On an international and/or regional level, border towns act as nodes in the transport and trade networks that link West African countries to each other and to world markets. Their role as crossroads enables people and products to circulate. This has led to the development of transport and communication infrastructures designed to facilitate the flow of regional trade. This dimension highlights the facilities and/or difficulties that populations face when crossing borders.	Road access	It refers to ease of access and ease of movement between border towns on either side of the state.
		Infrastructure	Existing control stations

Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Regional integration of border cities, OECD edition

Analysis of each of these dimensions should help to highlight the contribution of border towns and the constraints

they face in the process of regional integration in West Africa.

**A. Density**

Population density is one of the main indicators used to characterize an area in order to assess the dynamics that can be observed within it. (Girard, 2023). As mentioned in the table above, two (02) variables have been highlighted.

➤ *Demographics*

It calls for a study and comparison of population growth in border towns and other urban cities. This will highlight the specific features of border towns in the West African sub-region. This will be assessed using the number of towns with populations of over 10,000 around the borders of ECOWAS states, and the annual population growth of these towns.

➤ *Number of Towns with over 10,000 Inhabitants by Distance from Borders*

West African border towns, on average, are smaller than non-border towns (OECD/WAC, 2019b). However, despite their very small surface area, they experience more consistent annual population growth than non-border towns.

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the number of towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants at distances of 20 km, 50 km, 100 km and more than 100 km around the national borders of ECOWAS states.

Table 2 Population and Number of Towns with more than 10,000 Inhabitants in Relation to their Distance from the Border, 2015

	20 km	50 km	100 km	> 100 km	All Cities with more than 10,000 Inhabitants
<b>Number of towns with More than 10,000 inhabitants</b>	319	681	1173	1296	2469
<b>Population</b>	12 016 669	27 382 565	65 242 901	116 820 097	182 062 998

Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Population and morphology of border towns, OECD edition

An analysis of this table shows that in 2015, for all West African states, towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants located less than 20 km from a border accounted for around 12 million of the 182 million West Africans, or 7%. Cities located 50 km and 100 km from a border account for over 27 million and 65 million inhabitants respectively, representing 15% and 36% of the population. Of the 2,469 cities in West Africa in 2015, almost half are less than 100 km from a border, 681 less than 50 km and 319 less than 20 km. These data show that around the borders of West African states, the density of observable populations is very considerable, and can at the same time have a considerable impact on the development of states on a national and regional scale

➤ *Annual Population Growth by Distance from Borders.*

In recent years, the border areas of ECOWAS member states have experienced rapid population growth, outstripping that of all other cities, and growing steadily over the years.

Figure 1 below shows the average annual growth of cities by distance from borders between 1950 and 2015.

Analysis of this figure shows that, in the 1950s, annual growth in ECOWAS states for cities located less than 20 km from state borders exceeded 8%, behind that of cities located 100 km and 50 km from borders. However, since the 1980s, even though it has declined significantly, it has remained in first place, with a percentage that varies between 4% and 5%. This is followed by the growth of cities located around 50 km from state borders, also varying between 4% and 5%.

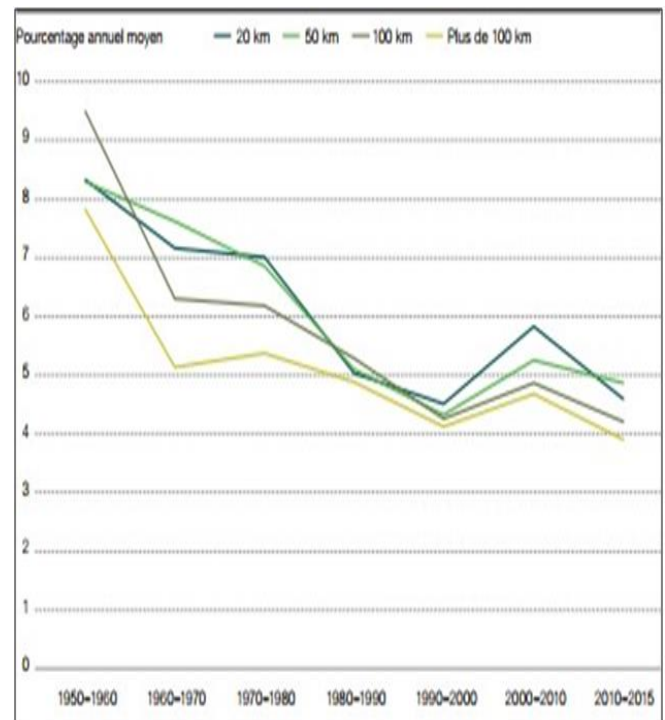


Fig 1 Average annual growth of cities by distance from borders, 1950-2015

Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Population and morphology of border towns, OECD edition

➤ *Morphology*

Morphology helps explain how the existence of borders affects the environment and/or border towns.

Border areas, being considered as places of convergence between national territories, whose physical and human characteristics tend to converge, or as places of social, economic and political interaction between actors located in different countries, tend to be impacted in various ways. These impacts can be both positive and negative for the regional integration process.

➤ *In Terms of Positive Impacts on Morphology, these Mainly Concern:*

- ✓ The growth of border markets due to variations in price differentials, currency exchange rates and taxes between countries;
- ✓ Bans on imports or exports from countries in the sub-region.

➤ Negative impacts can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ Problems linked to the lack of development and infrastructure
- ✓ Increasing informal and uncoordinated development

Table 3 below shows a breakdown of the morphological features that can be observed in the border areas of the ECOWAS states, according to their different characteristics.

Table 3 Morphological Characteristics Observable in the Border Areas of ECOWAS States

Morphological Characteristics Positive		Features
Expanding border markets & Bans on imports or exports from countries in the subregion	Presence of a merchant community (business communities)	Effectively exploit market differentials to take advantage of different national markets.
	Combining commercial and productive activities	West African border markets are closely linked to trade flows in raw materials, commodities and services. They therefore increase transnational flows of goods and people.
	Porous borders	Relatively open borders, generating specific flows of goods and people. Increasing informal flows, encouraging cross-border trade.
Negative morphological features		Features
Lack of planning, especially for infrastructure services.		Financial decentralization, which is still imperfect, does not provide local authorities with the financial resources they need to meet the new challenges facing border areas. No shared development plans with national centers
Informal development		Like a chain reaction, the lack of planning has led to the growing development of informal and uncoordinated activities that are hampering economic potential.

Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Population and Morphology of Border Towns, OECD Edition

➤ *The Distance*

Distance is used to assess the spatial position of border areas. It refers to their peripheral location, often cut off from national decision-making centers. In order to study this variable and assess the consequences of this position on border areas, two integration indicators will be evaluated, as shown in Table 1. These are the "business and health" indicators.

• *Companies*

Analysis of the "companies" indicator involves identifying the existence or otherwise of formal companies operating in border areas within ECOWAS states. It highlights the level of control over the various flows that can be observed in border areas. Indeed, the existence of a large number of formal companies presupposes a priori state control and profits benefiting both states and individuals, and

not exclusively the latter.

Indeed, economic exchanges between countries are ensured by a large number of formal and informal businesses, which facilitate the circulation of products between states. In order to focus on companies in regional integration sectors, let's identify the areas of activity that are sine qua non to regional integration.

➤ *Regional Integration Sectors*

A number of important business sectors make a strong contribution to regional integration. Table 4 gives a breakdown of these sectors and their different characteristics. The table shows that there are four (04) main areas of activity that contribute strongly to regional dynamics. These are: logistics and transit, transport, maritime services and international trade.

Table 4 Key Sectors for Regional Integration

Field of activity	Features
Logistics and transit	Companies involved in goods flow management
Transport	Road and rail carriers
Marine services	Port activities
International trade	Companies active in import and export

Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Business and health in border cities

➤ *Formal Enterprises by Country and Sector*

Table 5 gives a breakdown of the number of formal businesses by country and sector.

Table 5: Number of formal businesses by country and sector, 2016

Country	Logistics and transit	Transport	Marine services	Internationaltrade	Total
Benin	51	22	20	182	275
Burkina Faso	2	135	-	407	544
Cape Verde	8	7	4	168	187
Ivory Coast	-	-	-	433	433
Gambia	-	-	-	9	9
Ghana	335	9	45	397	786
Guinea	-	-	-	105	105
Guinea-Bissau	-	-	-	46	46
Liberia	-	-	-	51	51
Mali	335	507	3	1515	2360
Niger	55	21	-	160	236
Nigeria	1 998	428	405	3 675	6 506
Senegal	103	41	21	163	328
Sierra Leone	1	-	-	30	31
Togo	-	-	-	375	375
Total	2888	1170	498	7716	12272

Sources: OECD/CSAO (2019), Business and Health in Border Cities

An analysis of this table reveals that, for all countries, international trade is the sector with the highest number of formal companies, with a total of 7,716 companies declared, representing a rate of 63.36%. This sector is followed by logistics and transit, with a rate of 23.53%. Formal companies in the transport and maritime services sectors are non-existent in almost half the countries in the sub-region.

➤ *Economic Capital's Share of the Number of Formal Companies Active in Regional Integration*

Looking at the breakdown of the number of formal businesses per country (table5), figure 2 shows that almost all of these businesses engaged in activities that contribute to the regional integration process are located in the countries' economic capitals. The proportion of formal businesses located in the economic capital of a country tends towards 100% in Guinea-Bissau, Gambia, Senegal, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Niger, Benin, Sierra Leone and Mali. It varies between 70% and 80% in Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Only in Ghana and Cape Verde is the share below 50%.

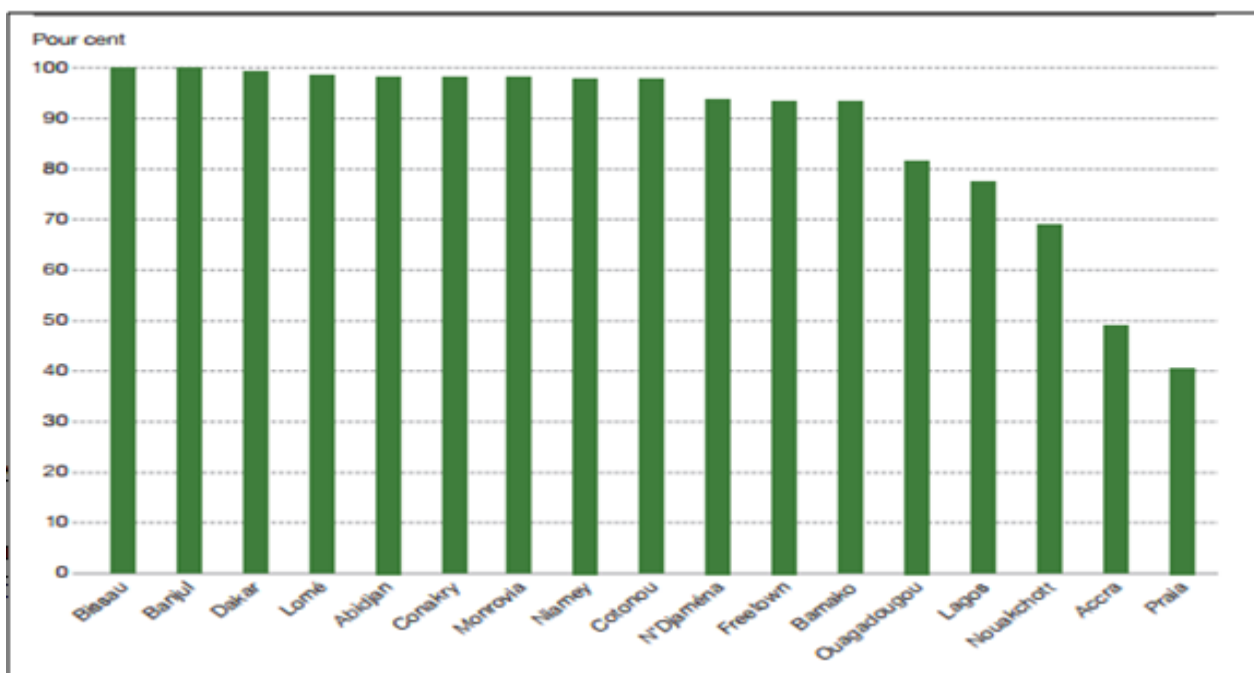


Fig 2 Economic Capital's Share of the Number of Formal Companies Active in Regional Integration

Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Business and Health in Border Cities



- *Figure 3 Shows a Breakdown of Formal Companies Active in Regional Integration by Distance from Borders.*

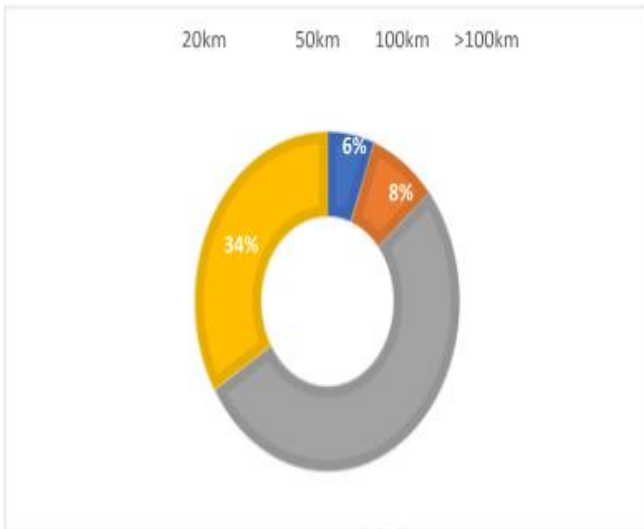


Fig 3 Share of formal companies active in regional integration by distance from borders,2016  
Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Business and Health in Border Cities

Analysis of this figure reveals that only 6% of formal companies operating in the regional integration sector are located within 20 km of state borders in West Africa, and 8% within 50 km of borders. On the other hand, more than 52% and 34% are located 100 km and more than 100 km from borders respectively. These results corroborate those described in figure 2, according to which most companies in the regional integration sectors are located in the economic capitals of states.

Assuming that West African border areas are zones of convergence and interaction between the various states in the sub-region, it must be admitted that most of the businesses and/or entrepreneurs operating in these areas are informal. These only benefit individuals, and is of less benefit to governments. According to the International Labour Organization, the proportion of non-agricultural West African workers operating in the informal sector ranges from 69.7% to 71.4% (ILO, 2012).

➤ *Health*

The health indicator, based here on healthcare facilities, helps to highlight disparities/differentials in national and cross-border healthcare coverage. Let's note that it represents a sufficiently attractive potential to motivate institutional cooperation between two geographical entities separated by a national border, and to encourage the movement of local populations.

- *Figure 4 Shows a Breakdown of Healthcare Facilities by type and Distance from Borders.*
- *Figure 4: Distribution of Healthcare Facilities by Type and Distance from Borders, 2017*



Fig 4a: Healthcare Facilities' Share of Distance to Borders, 2017  
Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Business and Health in Border Cities

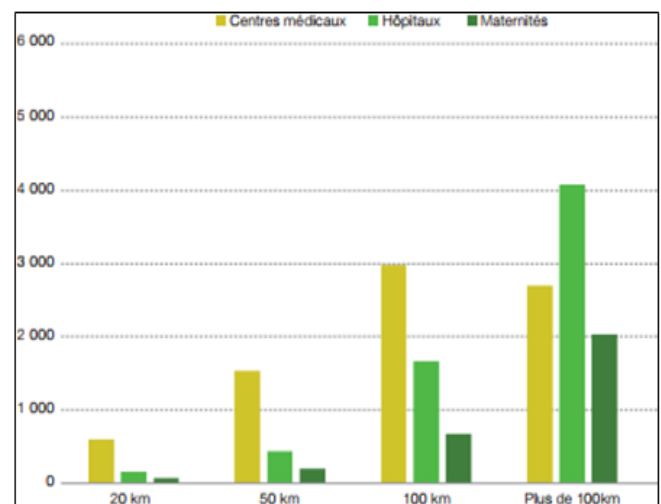


Fig 4b: Healthcare Facilities by type and Distance from Borders, 2017  
Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Business and Health in Border Cities

Analysis of figure 4.a shows that, for all the states in the sub-region, only 10% of healthcare facilities are located less than 20 km from borders. Conversely, 26% and 64% are located 50 km and 100 km from the borders respectively. These results demonstrate the lack of healthcare infrastructure in border areas, despite the growing dynamics that are taking place. Following the same logic, and based on figure 4.b, even among the 10% of health establishments found in border areas, the majority are just medical centers. This demonstrates the inadequacy of health facilities in cross-border areas in West Africa.

*B. Division*

In order to assess the intensity of interactions between states in the sub-region, based on border areas, the division dimension has been highlighted in the work of the OECD/WAC. This dimension highlights the facilities and/or difficulties that populations face when crossing borders. It is based on two indicators: road accessibility and infrastructure.

➤ *Road Access to Border Areas*

Road accessibility, when controlled, should have a positive impact on social exchanges between populations of different origins, languages and nationalities.

In order to study the realities of road accessibility in border areas in West Africa, three (03) main variables were

evaluated. These were distance, transport infrastructure and city network.

Table 6 gives an approximate description of what these three variables refer to, and the realities surrounding them in relation to border towns within ECOWAS states.

Table 6 Description of Road Accessibility Variables

Variables	Definition	The reality of West African border towns
Distance	In this case, distance highlights the length of the journey required to get from one city to another.	Border towns may be far from other towns in their own countries, but they are also very close to towns in neighboring countries. However, the existence of borders represents a handicap, as crossing them (formal or informal administrative procedures, road checks, road network conditions, etc.) causes delays that increase travel times.
Transport infrastructure	Transport infrastructure is one of the levers of accessibility. They include the advantages of passable roads (asphalt, tarmac, etc.), and those that are more subject to the vagaries of the weather.	Transport infrastructures in West African border areas follow a model that favors national cohesion over regional integration. As a result, direct links between border towns and the capital are favored over cross-border links, of which there are few in the region. As far as existing road networks are concerned, few are sufficiently well-maintained to maintain high speeds.
City networks	It highlights the spatial distribution of cities (whether dense or not) and the advantages this could bring to integration clusters.	Social and commercial exchanges within state border towns are intense, yet they remain very poorly regulated by public policy.

Source: OECD/CSAO (2019), Accessibility and Infrastructure in Border Cities

Analysis of this table highlights the reality of the "proximity in division" that the border areas of ECOWAS states have to contend with, or the "barrier role" that state borders constitute. In fact, despite the close proximity between border towns on either side of the States, the various existing constraints, such as red tape, which generates all kinds of defects, the poor state of connectivity infrastructures and the low level of involvement of national and regional public policies in cross-border dynamics, have a very negative impact on the role played and the externalities that border areas should generate in the West African regional integration process.

➤ *Border Town Checkpoints*

The limits of West African regional integration can be seen most clearly in the border towns, where permanent disorder reigns despite the numerous protocols designed to promote the free movement of services and goods. In order to control formal and/or informal red tape, numerous corridors and single checkpoints have been set up to reduce the physical and institutional obstacles encountered by individuals and companies moving around the region. However, these clash with the interests of civil servants and private players experiencing the frictions of regional integration (OECD/CSAO, 2019).

In the light of the above, it is clear that West African border areas represent natural integration zones, or small-scale integration zones where numerous actors of diverse origins, nationalities, cultures and activities interact. However, they are struggling to have a positive impact and to make a relevant and appreciable contribution to the regional integration process at both national and regional level.

IV. INTERPRETING AND COMPARING RESULTS

Analysis of the results obtained above enables us to draw a number of conclusions about the different realities that can be observed in the border areas of the West African sub-region.

➤ *Interpretation of Results*

A number of observations can be drawn from the various results obtained.

• *Urban Development and Urban Network*

With regard to urbanization and the urban network (density dimension), with demography and morphology as analysis indicators, the results obtained demonstrate the existence of a dense and complex environment in which different types of players interact, with different types of specialized and complementary skills, but which is still under-exploited by both the authorities and the local population. As a result, the negative effects of border morphology far outweigh the positive ones. This makes a moderate contribution to the integration process in the sub-region. It should also be noted that the different characteristics of the border areas of ECOWAS states represent the basis for the establishment of an agglomeration economy, which could boost the development of border towns, which is unfortunately not being taken advantage of. The border areas of West African states therefore have many advantages which, if used to good effect, could benefit regional integration, and more particularly economic integration.

- *Spatial Position*

Analysis of the effects of the spatial position of border areas (through the distance dimension) confirms the greatest of the problems that border areas face on a daily basis. This is precisely the barriers or gap that exist between them and national decision-making centers. For these areas, this means political marginalization, through a lack of public and even private investment in community infrastructure (whether roads, large-scale businesses, health centers, education centers, etc.).

- *Crossroads Role in Regional Integration*

An analysis of the divisional dimension, based on road accessibility and infrastructure, shows that border areas represent genuine zones of interaction, connecting the states of the West African sub-region. Their location enables the various players operating in regional fields to move their goods easily. Similarly, the realities of border towns encourage the development of infrastructures of all kinds. However, the numerous constraints weighing on these towns, such as red tape, the persistent effects of corruption, the poor state of connectivity infrastructures, and the weak involvement of national and regional public policies in cross-border dynamics, significantly reduce the externalities that border areas should generate in the West African regional integration process.

➤ *Comparison of Results with those of other Authors*

From a theoretical and empirical point of view, our various results are for the most part in line with many previous works. We can cite the study of three case studies carried out in West Africa by Enda Diapol. In the work presented for these studies, the concept of "border countries" was developed, in which the border areas of the zones studied (SKBo, southern Senegambia and Maradi-Katsina-Kana)<sup>3</sup> are defined as zones of solidarity, natural zones of integration where various forms of formal and/or informal exchange and cooperation take place. (Enda Diapol, 2007). Similarly, Boluvi's work considers border areas as axes that are part of an economic logic that goes beyond them and projects them towards a regional or even international perspective (Boluvi, 2004). As for Diarra, he defines the phenomenon of "border countries" as those countries that share the same geographical space, which physical barriers have not been able to divide. (Diarra, 2002). Another study, carried out within the sub-region, presented border areas as shared development zones, and proposed that a new look be taken at these areas in order to modify their nature and functioning so that they can have a positive impact on regional development (Igue & Zinsou-Klassou, 2010). In other works, West African border dynamics are presented as

<sup>3</sup>Three (03) case studies have been carried out on border areas and regional integration. One was carried out in 2002 on the cross-border triangle formed by the towns of Sikasso in Mali, Korhogo in Côte d'Ivoire and Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso (SKBo zone). Another was carried out in 2003 in Gambia, Guinea and Senegal (southern Senegambia zone). Finally, in 2004, the last one was carried out between Niger and Nigeria (Maradi-Katsina-Kano zone).

levers for the revival and consolidation of the regional integration process (Bach, 2015; Mohamadou & de Vries, 2007; Walther, 2019).

Finally, the work of the OECD/CSAO, whose data were also used, concluded that these areas are distribution nodes for national, regional and international trade. These various studies all point to the same conclusion: border areas are special places, just like the economic and/or political capitals of states, with their own reality and dynamism which, if properly exploited, will have a very positive impact on the development of states, both nationally and regionally.

Conversely, Denert and Hurel's work on European border areas, which have already experimented with the construction of shared border areas, has shown that it would be illusory to believe that a regional construction of border areas could eliminate the ideological effects of borders on regional development. These are mainly administrative, political, cultural or technical effects, which will always be present as soon as a border exists (Denert & Hurel, 2000). Following the same logic, Casteigts' work has shown that the regional construction of border areas is not as easy as it might seem. States are confronted with numerous difficulties of different kinds, which limit their room for manoeuvre and make it difficult for them to act. These include the inadequacy of legal instruments, the heterogeneity of decision-making processes, conflicting interests, cultural differences, the fragility of political support, the complexity of procedures and the length of time it takes for projects to gestation, and so on. All of which represent obstacles to be overcome by the various stakeholders (Casteigts, 2003).

## V. CONCLUSION

This work enables us to highlight the contribution of border areas to ECOWAS regional integration.

On a practical level, this contribution from border towns has been examined through the assessment of local dynamics, such as demographic, morphological, social, economic and political characteristics.

The demographic study revealed that the sub-region recorded almost 12 million inhabitants located within 20 km of a border in 2015, spread across 319 towns.

On the morphological level, changes in legislation, import bans and exchange rates between countries generate capital gains, which are often positive for the development of border towns.

Similarly, the proximity of border towns on both sides of the border encourages the implementation of specific and original initiatives and cooperative ventures that strengthen the regional integration process, for example through the pooling of socio-economic infrastructures.

In fact, despite the trade flows they experience, border towns are also centres of life for border populations and a political stage for local authorities.

However, they face numerous challenges that hinder their contribution to the regionalization of the subregion at all levels.

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