

Cross-border mobility in the Liège-Limburg area in the past and the present (19th-20th centuries). The results of the survey in a historical perspective

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A major turning point in the history of the Meuse-Rhine area was the integration of Belgium, the Rhineland and the Dutch territories alongside the Meuse into the French Republic at the end of the 18th century. The French occupation put an end to the patchwork of sovereignties that had covered the area for a long time. However, after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire (1814) administrative fragmentation was re-introduced. First, the border between Limburg and the Rhineland was re-drawn in 1815, at the Congress of Vienna. Next, the Meuse was to be a frontier as the Belgians went their own way, seceding from the Netherlands in the 1830s. As a result, the region was criss-crossed again by borders of three modern nation states: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany.

As a social historian, the chief purpose of my research is to investigate the social consequences of the rise of the modern nation state for the people living in border regions, such as the Dutch province of Limburg. How did the incorporation of these peripheral regions into the nation state interfere with the everyday reality in which many people lived? Did the incorporation prevent large numbers of boys and girls, living in border communities, from seeking potential husbands and wives in the neighbouring villages across the border? Did these national borders cut off the Limburgers from labour markets in which the working people had been fully integrated for a long time? What was in general the impact of boundaries on cross-border mobility and migration? This historical introduction focuses on cross-border activity in the Limburg-Liège area, leaving aside for the moment interactions alongside the German border. ¹

Allegedly, the Meuse-Rhine area, once the homeland of the Carolingians, has always shown a rather high degree of cohesion, in spite of the natural, linguistic and political frontiers dissecting the region. During many centuries human life has evolved here in quite a similar way. In spite of the rise of nation states, the inhabitants of the area retained a cross-border orientation. As it is said by a German historian: «Denn die Menschen der Euregio Maas-Rhein haben jeden Tag mit “drei Ländern

Notes

¹ Interactions alongside the Dutch-German border region were at least equally important. LANGEWEG (Serge), «Werken over de grens. Limburgers naar Duitsland, 1870-1914», in *Studies over de sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Limburg/Jaarboek Sociaal Historisch Centrum voor Limburg*, vol. XLVII, 2002, p. 27-48.

² TREE (Wolfgang), *Euregio Meuse-Rhine. European prelude/Euregio Maas-Rhein. Europäisches Vorspiel*, 1992, p. 39.

³ *Historical overview of the MHAL-area. The three-country area Maastricht/Heerlen, Hassel/Genk, Aix-la-Chapelle-Liège*, LEERSSEN (J.Th.) et al. ed., Maastricht, 1994.

4 Owing to the enterprises of the Regout brothers, who founded an industrial empire of earthenware manufactures, crystalleries and clout nailworks. JANSSEN (J.C.G.M.), «Maastricht tussen 1813-1850», in *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 101, 1986, p. 529-550.

5 The lettering on the Maastricht road signs was both Dutch and French until the late 19th century. KESSELS-VAN DER HEIJDE (Marina), «Maastricht, Maestricht, Mestreech. De taalverhoudingen tussen Nederlands, Frans en Maastrichts in de negentiende eeuw» in *Maaslandse Monografieën*, vol. 65, Hilversum, 2002, p. 82-84.

6 The proportion of the Dutch Limburg population born in Belgium declined from 2.6 % around 1850 to 1.3 % around 1890.

7 VAN WETTERE-VERHASSELT (Yola), «Les frontières du Nord et de l'Est de la Belgique. Etude de géographie humaine», in *Revue Belge de Géographie*, vol. 89, Bruxelles, 1966, p. 287.

8 Maastricht, the only Limburg town left under Dutch control, was completely cut off from its hinterland in the 1830s.

9 This development should have stimulated the orientation of the Maastricht people on the Dutch nation, however they tended to marry increasingly among each other. The proportion of endogenous couples, bride and bridegroom both from Maastricht origin, almost doubled between 1830 and 1900!

10 From the 1880s and 1890s the proportion of mixed marriages recovered in Eijsden as well as Mheer c.a., but this was a temporary phenomenon, related in the case of Eijsden to the foundation, with Walloon capital and know how, of a zinc industry that attracted pretty much migrant workers from Lanaye and the Geer Valley. This development was set back however by World War I.

11 KNIPPENBERG (Hans), «The incorporation of Limburg in the Dutch state», in KNIPPENBERG (Hans) en MARKUSSE (Jan) ed., *Nationalising and denationalising European border regions, 1800-2000*, Dordrecht, 1999, p. 39-60.

12 For exemple in the Belgian censuses: *Population : recensement général (15 octobre 1846)*, Bruxelles, Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1849 and *idem (31 décembre 1866)*, Bruxelles, Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1870.

13 VAN ES (Constance), *Migratie te Maastricht, 1850-1920*, doctoraal scriptie, Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 1980.

14 Proportionally, the increase was from 1.1 (1846) to 1.4 % (1866).

15 HANSON (Dominique), *L'immigration étrangère à Liège dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, Mémoire de Licence, Université de Liège, Liège 1974; HANSON (Dominique), «L'immigration étrangère à Liège (1920-1975): endogamie matrimoniale?», in *Actes du colloque international amour et mariage en Europe*, Luik, Musée de la vie Wallonne et Ministères de la culture belges, 1978, p. 192-205.

16 DESAMA (Claude), *Population et révolution industrielle. Evolution des structures démographiques à Verviers dans la première moitié du 19^e siècle*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, Fasc. CCXLIII, Liège, 1985, p. 175-176, p. 192-193; LEBOUTTE (René), *Reconversions de la main-d'œuvre et transition démographique. Les bassins industriels en aval de Liège XVIIe-XXe siècles*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, Fasc. CCLI, Liège, 1988, p. 454-467; PASLEAU (Suzy), *Industries et populations : l'enchaînement des deux croissances à Seraing au XIXe siècle*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, Fasc. CCLXXV, Liège, 1998, p. 231-248.



17 VAN WETTERE-VERHASSELT (Yola), *Les frontières du Nord et de l'Est de la Belgique, op. cit.*, p. 289, 363.

18 «Les Hollandais construisent du logement [à Liège]. Un investissement de 410 millions», *Le Soir*, 19 décembre 2001.

19 Regarding leisure and shopping people from Liège display a preference for Luxembourg, secondly for Dutch and Belgian Limburg, which are at a match for each other.

20 KORRES (Achim), «Historische interacties in de Euregio Maas-Rijn: migratiestromen in een grensgebied», in *Studies over de sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Limburg/Jaarboek Sociaal Historisch Centrum voor Limburg*, XLVII, 2002, p. 7-26.

21 This bias might also apply to other subregions, like the Aachen district. As much as 16 % of the Aachen respondents declared to originate from Belgium or Dutch Limburg. Apparently the confusion did not blur the results for Liège and Luxembourg. These might as well be plausible.

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