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The EUrope of Differentiated Territorial Integration?
Regional Cross-Border Governance in the Multi-Level Governance System of the EU

A Case Study of the EUSALP and the EUSDR

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List of Abbrevations

AC	Alpine Convention
AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
AER	Assemby of European Regions
AGL	Action Group Leader
ARGE ALP	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpenländer
ASP	Alpine Space Programme
BAGL	Board of Action Group Leaders
BDCP	Budapest Danube Contact Point
CAA	Club Arc Alpin
CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
CEI	Central European Initiative
CEB	Council of Europe Development Bank
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CF	Cohesion Fund
CIPRA	Commission Internationale pour la Protection des Alpes
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
CoDCR	Council of Danube Cities and Regions
CoE	Council of Europe
COREPER	*Comité des représentants permanents*
COTRAO	Communaut´é de Travail des Alpes Occidentales
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
DARIF	Danube River Forum
DCP	Danube Cooperation Process
DCSF	Danube Civil Society Forum
DG	Directorate General
DI	Differentiated Integration
DMC	Decision Making Capacity
DRRIF	Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund
DSP	Danube Strategy Point

DTC	Danube Transfer Centers
DTP	Danube Transnational Programme
EACC	European Atomic Energy Community
EC	European Commission
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EGTC	European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMU	European Monetary Union
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSALP	European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FRMM	Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HLG	High Level Group
IAD	International Association for Danube Research
ICPDR	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube
IO	International Organization
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JTS	Joint Technical Secretariat
LEADER	Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale
LRAs	Local and Regional Actors

MEDA	MEsures D'Accompagnement
MFF	Multi-Annual Financial Framework
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
NC	National Coordinator
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics or NUTS
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PA	Priority Area
PAC	Priority Area Coordinator
PHARE	Poland and Hungary: Aid for Restructuring of the Economies
RCBG	Regional Cross-Border Governance
RCI	Regional Competitiveness Index
REGLEG	Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power
SEA	Single European Act
SEE	South-East Europe
SEECP	South-East European Cooperation Process
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SG	Steering Group
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
TACIS-CBC	Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States – Cross-Border Cooperation
TAD	Transport Analysis for the Danube Region
TAF-DRP	Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects
TEU	Treaty of the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TOs	Thematic Objectives
V4	Visegrád Four
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WGs	Working Groups
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the topic

The 23. June 2016 marked a historic date for the European Union. For the first time after nearly 65 years of existence, a member state's population decided voluntarily to leave the "club" and loosen the mutual political, economic, and institutional relationship in a substantive way. The "United Kingdom European Union membership referendum" constitutes an important watershed for the country. The economic and political short and mid-term effects still cannot be comprehensively assessed. For the community of EU member states, it is as well a decisive "game-changer". For the first time, the premise of an "ever closer union", was not just encountered by a member state by a self-chosen exemption in a particular policy area, the so-called "opt-out", but a member state actively decided to withdraw from EU-membership with all its accompanying consequences. This far-reaching decision by the government in London makes the question of "Quo vadis European Union?" salient as never before.

The issue of how the EUropean states should adapt and proceed under the given circumstances, especially regarding the issue of how to maintain comprehensive governmental commitment towards the EU's further integration, has become an integral element of basically every academic and political debate.

In terms of political debates after the "Brexit" referendum, this topic's pressing nature has triggered a comprehensive deliberation process in the national capitals and Brussels. Already shortly after the referendum, Donald Tusk, as acting president of the Council of the EU, made the following statement at the 40th anniversary of the European Peoples Party regarding Brexit and its consequences:

> *"Obsessed with the idea of instant and total integration, we failed to notice that ordinary people, the citizens of Europe do not share our Euro-enthusiasm. [...]The spectre of a break-up is haunting Europe and a vision of a federation doesn't seem to me like the best answer to it. We need to understand the necessity of the historical moment." (Council of the European Union, 2016)*

Tusk's clear-cut assessment, as representative of one of the EU's central institutions, concerning the hovering threat of a dangerous destabilization marked a novelty in the debate. It illustrates not only the rising concerns but also the change of mindsets among the EU's institutions and national leaders, who increasingly acknowledge that the current European Union is due to its size and heterogeneity hardly manageable "according to old recipes and the ideas that stood behind the project of common Europe." (Koller, 2015, p. 49). Detached from the political debate

of the political parties, the European Commission (EC) consequentially initiated the institutional deliberation process in the same year and contributed to it with the "White Paper on the Future of Europe". In the document, the institution outlined, among others, potential paths and scenarios for the future development of the EU-27 – after the formal leave of the United Kingdom.

The white paper constituted in terms of its content and character a comprehensive innovation within the debate. While the EC and other EU institutions did in former contributions already address the issue and feasibility of differentiating the EUropean integration process, the explicit outlining of tangible scenarios was the first of its kind in this regard. The white paper included scenarios ranging from a substantial further deepening of the integration in all policy areas, over a territorially differentiated application of integration measures ("core vs. peripheral Europe"), to the EU's self-limitation to halt its integration process at the European Single Market (European Commission, 2017a).

The white paper by the EC was soon followed by the "Rome Declaration", which was adopted by the Council of the EU, the European Council, the European Parliament, and the European Commission on 25 March 2017. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the "Treaty of Rome," the leaders underlined in the declaration their firm commitment towards the premise of EUropean unity. They further acknowledged the necessity to "respond to the concerns" of their citizens by realizing ways of cooperation that "[…]makes a real difference, be it the European Union, regional, or local, and in a spirit of trust and cooperation, both among Member States and between them and the EU institutions, in line with the principle of subsidiarity." (Council of the European Union, 2017).

This explicit statement from this high-level group of political actors concerning the need to carry out this process on an intergovernmental level and also across various other jurisdictional levels, especially the subnational ones, was again a decisive novelty.

However, while we currently experience a comprehensive transformation of the mindset among EUropean decision-makers towards the prospective integration-path of the Union, the debate about potential differentiation is not new, neither within the political nor the academic debate. On the political level, the first discussions are nearly half a century old. They can be dated back to Willy Brandt, former chancellor of Germany, and Leo Tindeman, former prime minister of Belgium, who were among the first leaders initiating debates regarding a differentiated EUropean integration in the 1970s (Koller, 2012, p. 3). Due to its political virulence, not least because of the substantial ideological implications, the topic is since then consistently object of heated discussions and is addressed by "traditional Europhiles", or "Federalists", but also by

"Euro-pragmatists", "moderate Eurosceptics/Eurocritics", "Euro-realists" and even by political groups, who reject the EU as a whole (Koenig, 2015, p. 6).[1]

This intrinsic contradiction within the political debate results in a stark terminological fuzziness, a strong normative connotation, and leads to the term's widespread instrumentalization as a political catchword. The massive politicization of the topic consequentially contributed to an "excess of terminology" in the last decades (Von Ondarza, 2012, p. 7) in the political but also in the academic debate.

The vast number of yielded concepts do, however, not only widely fail to agree on common denominators (Koenig, 2015, p. 1), but many authors often fail to take the territorial implications of the differentiated integration process into account. Despite the indisputably growing importance of the subnational territorial dimensions in this process, local and regional actors (LRAs) will often only be considered, especially in terms of their activities and institutional involvement, as "supporting actors" in EUropean politics.

Theoretical approaches, which focus on the empowerment of these subnational levels and actors, will, thus, often only be acknowledged as helpful complementary analytical tools.

Their value as stand-alone and significant concepts within the differentiated integration debate will be often neglected. This often observable analytical "sidelining" of the local and regional level does, however, barely concur with the actual reality.

In fact, the subnational actors did, especially in the last thirty years, not only become an increasingly important factor in terms of the general functional differentiation of governance, but more and more ongoing integration processes culminate in a territorially highly diversified system of Multi-Level Governance, which constitutes the European Union today.

The appearance of a considerable number of differentiated governance approaches, which are among others based on the premise of multidimensional cooperation between supranational, national, subnational, and also non-governmental entities, has become a reality. These governance approaches are increasingly carried out in network-like settings with a distinct

[1] While the various actors concur on the fact that a differentiation of integration consists, among others, of a diversified institutional setting, the accompanying political demands by these actors are based on a strongly diverging set of aims and political goals. Actors and institutions which are firmly in favor of a significant further supranationalization generally endorse a differentiation of the integration process due to their conviction that such a measure is a “necessary evil” in terms of political feasibility, namely to achieve the intended deep integration (e.g., “multi-speed Europe”, “core Europe”, “Europe of concentric circles”) in the long-run. On the other hand, their political adversaries emphasize the differentiation as an opportunity to realize a more intergovernmental structure, which is commonly known as the “EU of fatherlands” (Koenig, 2015, pp. 5–6; Von Ondarza, 2012, pp. 15–16).

territorial scope, which I call networks of Regional Cross-Border Governance (RCBG), and are becoming more and more prominent in the EU, impacting its overall institutional structure.
The increasing presence of RCBG networks can be measured not only in numbers but also in terms of their whole territorial coverage in the EU.
Particularly prominent cases are in this regard the Macro-regional strategies, which have become a strongly endorsed governance approach within the EU in the last decade. Politicians and scholars alike have high expectations concerning these strategies' impact, while some even proclaim a prospective "macro-regionalization of Europe", which will eventually lead to a "Europe of Macro-regions". While such prognoses can be considered as overly enthusiastic, high anticipations concerning Regional Cross-Border Governance and especially the Macro-regional strategies nevertheless persist. Therefore, it is necessary to critically analyze and assess their current and their potential future impact on the EU's integration process. The following research question shall be answered: Can these forms of RCBG in the looming Brexit's limelight indeed contribute to a comprehensive differentiation of the EU's integration process and the Multi-Level Governance system as such, or are these a typical case of 'much ado about nothing'.

1.2. Object and aim of research

The following work aims to contribute to the scientific debate by providing new insights and explanations through its empirical and theoretical part. The work will be subdivided into three parts, which are, however, content-wise, closely linked together.
The first part of the work is a comprehensive assessment of the theoretical debate concerning the differentiation of the EUropean integration process, especially in terms of the above briefly mentioned territorial dimension. I will approach this topic by applying the concept of Multi-Level Governance (MLG) as a theoretical basis. Due to the existence of the MLG concept for nearly three-decades, a large number of publications are available, resulting in a well-advanced state of research with a high richness of detail concerning various aspects of the European Union as a research object. The concept is characterized by an actively ongoing academic debate, where scholars still contribute to further development of the concept. It makes the concept one of the most well-known and academically renowned approaches, which has a particular analytical focus on the subnational levels of decision-making. However, despite its indisputable value, the concept of MLG is characterized by several shortcomings, which make a substantial adaption and extension of the theoretical premises necessary.
The first adaption concerns the explanatory approach regarding the "causes" of the integration process. Being strongly influenced by the theory of neo-functionalism, the overwhelming

majority of MLG scholars base their theoretical premises on this theory's guiding principles. This often results in an explanatory research focus on the functional spillover, or in this particular case the so-called dispersion process, from the national to the supranational respectively, the subnational level(s). Therefore, states will often be depicted as entities affected by a disempowerment that benefits the supranational and subnational levels. With the increasing number of differentiations (e.g., opt-outs, enhanced cooperation mechanism, etc.) within the EU's integration process, and especially in the limelight of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU, these theoretical assumptions can hardly be upheld. To take these recent developments into consideration, the concept will be adapted by introducing the theory of Differentiated Integration (DI), which will be integrated into the framework. The premises of the DI literature, which are strongly influenced by the various works of Frank Schimmelfennig, introduce a new valuable point of view and yield important considerations for the adapted MLG concept. The theory of DI further provides the opportunity to create an approach where the evolving differentiated integration processes will be taken into account. Through the constitution of the premise that a highly nuanced system of membership nowadays characterizes the EU, decisive implications can be derived regarding the intergovernmental, intragovernmental, and the subnational levels as areas of analysis. Another added-value of this theoretical approach is the introduction of a new basic premise concerning the causes of integration. In contrast to the above-mentioned widely persisting usage of the neo-functionalist approach, I shall apply the premises of rationalist institutionalism in the following work. Based on the assumption that the integration process and the particular dispersion process, which results in the empowerment of the supranational and subnational levels, is based on a distinct rationalist-driven cost-benefit rationale of the member state governments, a comprehensive theoretical explanatory approach can be created, which is supported by the actual as well as earlier political developments in the EU.

The second major adaptation of the MLG concept will be carried out regarding the framework analysis concerning the subnational territorial levels. The original concept splits the EU, as a research object, into the vertical and the horizontal dimension of Multi-Level Governance.

The vertical dimension focuses on the direct political interactions between the various territorial levels and administrative actors. Over the years, the wide range of political engagement opportunities for local and regional actors (LRAs) within this dimension was extensively scrutinized and assessed. Basically every form of engagement by LRAs was intensively analyzed by researchers, leading to a repeated refinement of the concept. In contrast to this, the horizontal dimension of Multi-Level Governance was, by most scholars, addressed in a very

limited way. Although some publications exist, which address the horizontally oriented network-like governance structures in the EU, these are often detached from the MLG concept's analytical framework and build their typologies often on a very specific case example. These works shed, without a doubt, some important light on this area of analysis, however, the general state of research is characterized by an internal fragmentation with a lot of stand-alone typologies. Furthermore, these typologies often assert a very exclusive focus on network-like governance structures, which are located on the intergovernmental and the supranational level, while paying very limited attention to their counterparts being aligned around the regional cross-cooperation of the already mentioned local, regional, national, and supranational entities. Therefore, the MLG concept lacks an adequate analytical framework and instruments of analysis, especially in this area of regional cooperation. To compensate for this research gap, I will resort in the following work to the Regional Governance approach, which does not only complement the MLG concept but should in the following part of the work also serve as an analytical instrument to analyze and assess regional cross-border cooperation within the EUropean framework. Due to the interdisciplinary character of the Regional Governance approach, its state of research is thus shaped by scholars of the discipline of economic science, sociology, economic geography, spatial science, regional planning, and of course, political science. The resulting overlap of disciplines leads to a very diverse set of research approaches, which have, depending on the researcher's area of expertise, very individual analytical focuses (Panebianco, 2013, p. 16). This has mixed consequences for the approach and, in particular, for the following work. As such, Regional Governance is affected by a conceptual fuzziness, where a commonly accepted definition is still not identifiable. The term will instead often be used by many scholars as 'keyword', 'catchphrase', or 'orientation framework' (Pütz, 2004, p. 11). While this makes a methodological operationalization for the research purpose more challenging, it also provides a distinct advantage and opportunity. The lack of a rigid conceptual framework allows a more flexible adaption of the approach, which makes the conceptual integration into the MLG concept easier. It further facilitates the analysis and assessment of cross-border cooperation within the institutional boundaries of the European Union. For this aim, the Regional Governance approach must be adapted and complemented in several particular aspects. Compared to the overwhelming majority of publications concerning Regional Governance, which focus particularly on territorial cooperation within national jurisdictions, I will strictly concentrate on cooperations across national borders. The typical border-effect with its economic, political, sociocultural, and institutional implications is just one of the many factors that distinguish cross-border cooperations from their domestic counterparts. Such

aspects, therefore, will be addressed explicitly by this new Regional Cross-Border Governance approach.

The third part of the work is based on the empirical analysis of actual cross-border cooperations, which are currently initiated and carried out within the European Union's institutional framework. Due to the wide variety of cooperation formats and the enormously large number of cooperations, a two-pronged strategy will be pursued. While the ETC-supported and EGTC-based cooperation exceed the mark of 200 case examples, the number of Macro-regional strategies is still at the manageable number of four. Therefore, the first group of Regional Cross-Border Governance networks can only be analyzed in the form of an overview analysis, with the depiction of these networks' general characteristics. For the latter group of Macro-regional strategies, two case examples (EUSALP and EUSDR) have been selected for a comprehensive in-depth assessment. This approach should provide two distinct added-values regarding our research aim. The two Macro-regional strategies' case-analysis should provide new insights concerning their setup, functionality, and impact. Beyond these new case-based insights, the findings combined with the mentioned overview analysis should also yield new answers to the following overarching research questions.

1. What are Regional Cross-Border Governance networks? How do they work, and what is their setup? What are their peculiarities, what common attributes do they have, and what are the particular differences?
2. What is their impact on the Multi-Level Governance system of the EU? Are they indeed an innovative governance approach, which provides substantial place-based added value and mobilization of subnational actors in the region, or are they the typical example of "Much Ado About Nothing"?
3. What role do the Macro-regional strategies have in this regard? Do the EUSALP and EUSDR fulfill the high expectations ("macro-regionalization of EUrope"), and are they indeed a gamechanger in terms of these anticipated added-values?

Based on the general state of research and the constituted research questions, the work will be structured as follows. In the theoretical part of this work, a general introduction to the topic of governance differentiation will be given (chapter 2.1). Based on the premise that the functional differentiation of governance is an accompanying effect of the economic and political globalization process, the EU's evolution towards a system of Multi-Level Governance will be embedded in this overarching approach. This will be followed by a depiction of the Multi-Level Governance system of the EU (chapter 2.2). At first, the institutional structure with the vertical and horizontal dimensions, including the various territorial levels and networks, will be outlined

(chapter 2.2.1), followed by the description of the internal procedural dimension (chapter 2.2.2). A particular emphasis is put on the so-called dispersion process of competencies between the supranational, national, and subnational levels. In this chapter, the premise of the *rationalist institutionalism* will be elaborated, which serve as an explanation-basis for the dispersion process's reasons and causes. After this more general elaboration of the procedural dimension, in which the basic character and extent of the dispersion process are outlined, this research area will be further refined. Regarding the vertical dimension of Multi-Level Governance, first, the reallocation of competencies to the supranational level will be assessed (chapter 2.2.3.1), where the differentiation of the general integration process will be put under additional scrutiny. This is then followed by an analysis of the subnational dimension (chapter 2.3.3.1). A short excursus will be given in this regard, where the main structural opportunities of regional and local mobilization in the vertical dimension will be individually outlined (chapter 2.2.4). The already mentioned adapted approach of Regional Cross-Border Governance follows afterward (chapter 2.4). This chapter will be accompanied by a general assessment of the theoretical added-values of this approach. A conceptual model will be developed in the closing sub-chapter, which shows the unfolding impact of the general competence dispersion regarding the MLG system's vertical and horizontal dimensions (chapter 2.4.3.5).

In the empirical part of the work, the elaborated RCBG approach will be applied to assess the general ETC/IPA/ENP supported cooperation in the form of an overview-analysis (chapter 3). The EGTC-based cooperations will be put under their own scrutiny (chapter 4). After the assessment of these RCBG network-types, the case studies of the Macro-regional strategies follow. After a general short introduction to this new type of RCBG networks, the first case study to be analyzed is the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (chapter 6). The first sub-chapter consists of a general depiction of the geospatial, economic, and political framework conditions to outline this macro-region's unique characteristics (chapter 6.1). This will be followed by an analysis of the EUSDR with the adapted RCBG approach. However, this analysis is carried out in the form of a differentiated temporal assessment, where the network development is separated into the two network phases, namely the phase of initiation (chapter 6.2) and the phase of implementation and evolvement (chapter 6.3). The analysis of the EUSDR will be closed by a final SWOT-analysis (chapter 6.4). The second case study is the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). The assessment of the EUSALP follows the same pattern as its outlined counterpart (chapter 7). In the final chapter, a comprehensive conclusion will be carried out (chapter 8). A particular emphasis will be put on the aforementioned central research questions, which will be recapitulated in the limelight of the numerous findings of this work.

The chapter will eventually close with a short outlook on the future development of RCBG in the EU.

1.3. Methodical approach, evaluation period, and limitations of the work

As already mentioned, Regional Cross-Border Governance will be used for the analysis and assessment of the various cross-border cooperations in the European Union. The interdisciplinary nature of the academic debate concerning RCBG also has a substantial impact on the methodical approach itself. Depending on the particular area of expertise, scholars of Regional (Cross-Border) Governance apply quantitative and qualitative research methods. Researchers stemming from classic spatial sciences discipline often apply econometric models and statistical calculations, while scholars from relational, economic geography often resort to qualitative and explorative analyses. While both approaches possess legitimacy and provide substantial insights for a comprehensive assessment of these cooperations, I will resort to a qualitative network-analysis for the following work. To find satisfying answers to the above-stated research questions, it is necessary to carry out significant adaptions of the original Regional Governance approach. Besides the inclusion of new factors, like the border effect or social capital issue in a cross-border context, it is essential to integrate these analytical factors into the framework for a comprehensible analysis.

Therefore, I will carry out a differentiation of the concept by compartmentalizing RCBG networks into three internal political analysis dimensions. Networks will be, as a consequence, analyzed concerning their policy dimension, the polity dimension, and the politics dimension. Although during the work, this approach turned out to be quite challenging in various cases, especially because of partial overlap of analytical factors, the approach proved nevertheless as feasible. A particular added value of this approach is the opportunity to pinpoint certain aspects in the respective RCBG network and assess them in regard to their overall effect on the cooperation. Based on the same premise, another differentiation was carried out, namely regarding the temporal dimension. While the majority of Regional Governance scholars acknowledge that such territorial networks go through a temporal evolvement, which influences the cooperation substantially, most works nevertheless refrain from a clear-cut temporal differentiation within the analysis. In this work, such a temporal differentiation will be carried out for the macro-regional case studies, however, due to the work's limitation, not for the ETC and EGTC-based cooperations, which are assessed in form of an overview-analysis. Concerning the two Macro-regional a so-called SWOT analysis will be made, where the individual Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of each strategy will be outlined in detail.

For this work, an extensive review of primary sources, legislative texts, statistical data, and academic publications was necessary. Depending on the specific part of the work, the origin of sources strongly differ. In the first two parts, in which I address the Multi-Level Governance system concerning its institutional structure, the underlying competence dispersion process, the differentiation of the membership structure, and the mobilization capabilities of local and regional actors, a comprehensive review of the academic debate was carried out, dating back to the early 1990s. Regarding the conceptual integration of the differentiated integration literature, Frank Schimmelfennig and colleagues' publications were used as a primary source. Due to the distinct fragmentation and terminological fuzziness within the differentiated integration literature, which not least resulted in a wide non-alignment of the respective concepts, the works of Schimmelfennig were considered as most comprehensive and most beneficial for the research aim. For the Regional (Cross-Border)Governance approach, a similar broad review of the literature was carried out to base the empirical analysis on a sufficiently broad theoretical foundation.

In the empirical part of the work, the end of the evaluation period was set for the 31. December 2017. The ETC and EGTC cooperation, as well as the EUSDR and EUSALP, are characterized in terms of analysis as "fast-moving objects", which made this temporal limitation necessary. The two case examples of Macro-regional strategies require, due to their substantial network-size, including the large number of individually operating sub-networks with their mandatory monitoring and reporting activities, a comprehensive analysis, thus leading to this limitation.

A comprehensive analysis was carried out regarding the numerous legal texts (ETC, ERDF, EGTC, ENP, IPA, CPR regulations, etc.), which are regulating the RCBG in terms of the financial and institutional structure, potential areas of intervention, policy goals, actor-constellations, and many other areas. Communications, motions, programming documents, or policy documents like "Action Plans" as well as other contributions by the EUropean institutions were also involved in the analysis. In the case of the ETC/EGTC networks, further primary and secondary sources were reviewed. Internal monitoring reports and studies by the European Commission, European Parliament, Committee of Regions, or Interact as well as external assessments from organizations like the Association of European Border Regions, were evaluated to get a diversified basis of sources. These were complemented by statistical databases (e.g., from Eurostat) and academic publications.

The conduction of own potential surveys or interviews was waived in the following work. This decision was made based on various considerations. Concerning the first group of ETC/EGTC supported cooperation, a survey was due to the large number of RCBG networks neither

feasible nor would have it yielded a substantial added-value concerning the research aim. For the Macro-regional strategies, this omission was due to the fact that governmental and institutional actors within each of the strategies were often characterized by an apparent unwillingness to respond to surveys or interview requests. In the past years, the EC commissioned several research institutes (IHS Vienna, m&e factory, Cowi) to carry out a major and comprehensive stakeholder survey concerning the Macro-regional strategies. During the realization of their surveys, these institutes were, however, confronted with exceptionally poor respondent rates. In the limelight of these very unfavorable conditions, which persisted even for such institutions with substantial research capabilities, I therefore decided, to concentrate on the analysis of the substantial amount of available primary sources and data. In regard to the EUSDR and EUSALP, it is, however, necessary to differentiate. While the EUSDR having its kick-off in June 2011, the start of the EUSALP's implementation began only in January 2016, constituting a differing evaluation period of nearly five years. This obviously also affected the depth of analysis of the implementation phase. For the EUSALP, only a comparably brief overview could be given together with an outlook on the prospective development of the strategy. A major difference between the two strategies is also their individual approach towards the publication of internal reports. The EUSDR pursues in this regard a substantially more transparent approach, where not only general monitoring results are consistently published, but also the monitoring reports of the so-called *Priority Area Coordinators* in the subordinated policy networks are –with few exceptions– regularly published on the EUSDR homepage. This provided a deep and comprehensive insight into the development of the strategy. The EUSALP, on the contrary, pursues in terms of general transparency a significantly more restricted approach. Although the strategy is equipped with several internal and external monitoring mechanisms, these are not designated to be published for the general public. Neither the so-called *Action Group progress reports*, which are similar to the above-mentioned reports within the EUSDR nor the general assessments of the implementation progress by the *AlpGov project*, a project by the Alpine Space Program, were available. After contacting several representatives of the EUSALP and the Alpine Space Program, it was confirmed that these documents' publication or submission is not planned for the foreseeable future.

Based on these analytical framework conditions for both Macro-regional strategies, a similar approach was carried out, however, with one decisive difference. Due to the already extensive analysis of the EUSDR by institutions and academic scholars, the assessment of the initiation phase was based mainly on secondary sources. In the case of the EUSALP, a similar state of research was not existent. However, due to the extensive involvement of a wide array of public

and non-governmental actors (e.g., Arge Alp, Alpine Space Program, Alpine Convention, CIPRA, Alliance in the Alps, Alpine Regions, CAA, WWF, etc.) during the initiation phase, a vast number of quantitative and qualitative analyses, assessments, and position papers were contributed to the drafting process. This provided a comprehensive basis for the analysis of the phase of initiation of the EUSALP.

For the following phase of implementation, namely the years between June 2011 and December 2017, a large number of primary sources were available. Especially the prior mentioned reports by the Priority Area Coordinators turned out as a valuable source of information. Apart from qualitative assessments, the reports contained quantitative indices and milestone-assesments, which gave good insight into the cooperation process. Despite the initial concerns of biased reporting and eventual "window dressing" behavior by the PACs, the overwhelming majority of reports were characterized by a very differentiated and critical approach, however often affected by a differing quality level. These reports, which constituted the foundation for the analysis of the implementation phase of the EUSDR, were also complemented by other assessments from internal as well as external actors, institutions (e.g., Institute for Advanced Studies, ICPDR, Interact Point Vienna, etc.), and publications by the academia.

For the EUSALP, the short duration of the implementation phase, namely from January 2016 to December 2017, was characterized by a relatively limited number of sources. Overarching reports by the EUSALP presidencies, the EUSALP Steering Committee, or other involved actors were some of the publications which could be used in this regard. These were complemented by the above-mentioned major survey commissioned by the EC, whose results concerning the EUSALP were analyzed and assessed. However, despite these sources, the lack of available internal reports marked an unfortunate limitation regarding the research aim.

2. The European Union. A differentiated system of Multi-Level Governance

2.1. From government to governance: The transformation of governmental decision-making in the light of globalization

For more than three centuries, the principle of the Westphalian sovereignty defined statehood in Europe. Constituted at the Peace of Westphalia (1648), governmental decision-making was constituted on the premise that states possess exclusive authority on their territory and are consequentially solely responsible for their populations. With this entitlement to act as exclusive authorities within their national boundaries, the European states and their governments managed to extend their role over the years. Parallel to the further ongoing institutionalization of statehood, the governments increased their administrative capabilities

and their power and influence in various new policy fields. As a result, they became the key focal points for their citizens in many areas.[2]

While continuously extending their role within their jurisdictions, the governments also increased their role as gatekeepers between the international and domestic policies. National governments were as such not only the sole legitimate actors within the area of international relations but also achieved a strong controlling and regulating role in the area of their markets and economies, including also the trade flows across their national borders. This phenomenon can be subsumed under the term *mercantilism*.[3]

This uncontested gatekeeping role of the national governments became, however, during the 19th century increasingly challenged. The governments faced increasingly internationalized and globalized framework conditions and an accompanying differentiation of their societies.[4] Political leaders were increasingly forced to take external factors into account, even in regard to their domestic policies, to avoid negative externalities. This consequentially led to a growing intermingling of foreign and domestic policy issues as a newly evolving basic framework condition, which was described by Robert Putnam as the "two-level game".[5] This development got even more pronounced during the 20th century, especially in the light of the increasing globalization and internationalization process.

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[2] Over time, states acted in an increasing number of policy fields. Starting from the classical obligation of ensuring the physical integrity towards its citizens (e.g., externally against foreign menaces with its army or internally by the establishment of the rule of law and the extension of citizen rights), states also provided new services like a comprehensive health and welfare system during the 19th century in Europe. Achievements like the establishment of the "welfare state" contributed to new strong ties between citizen and state, which enhanced the further institutionalization of statehood (Piattoni, 2010, pp. 4–7).

[3] Mercantilism is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as follows: "[…]an economic theory developed in the 16th to 18th centuries that says that a government should control the economy and that a nation should increase its wealth by selling more than it buys from other nations." (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). For a more thorough explanation concerning the idea and the era of mercantilism, see (Blum, 2017, pp. 42–45).

[4] An accompanying phenomenon of globalization was the differentiation of societal structures. Long existing cleavages within the societies (e.g., between center and periphery, urban and rural populations, church and state, capital and work) became, over time, increasingly diluted in the light of societal differentiation and individualization. With the increasing regulation activities in new policy fields this lead also to a change of the state-society relations and new forms of cooperation with the non-profit sector/non-governmental sphere, like in the form of "new" corporatism, pluralism, etc. (Fürst, 2001, p. 371; Piattoni, 2010, p. 67, 2010, pp. 194–195).

[5] Putnam contributed to the theoretical debate with the valuable concept of the "two-level game", in which he stipulated that international politics must be seen as a double-edged process, which is based on the entanglement of domestic and foreign policy interests. Governmental decision-makers have to take domestic and foreign framework conditions and factors under consideration to achieve positive policy results. Both "levels" can have a decisive role in the decision-making process as such. They can either limit the state's actions (e.g., in case of a domestic infeasibility), or they can, to the contrary, open up a new window of opportunities and result in economically or politically fruitful cooperation. The two-level metaphor of Putnam helped in the academic debate to overcome the strict dichotomous distinction between the domestic and international sphere as two autonomous and independent fields and thus paved the way for the elaboration of the various "governance" approaches (Benz, 2007, pp. 299–300, 2005, p. 96; Putnam, 1988; Zürn et al., 2012, p. 8).

While being for more than two centuries in the position to maintain firm regulatory control over every aspect of its domestic economic policies, the European states and their governments were faced with a comprehensive internationalization of their trade flows and thus of their economies. This materialized in a steady opening of the former –more or less– closed domestic markets, which significantly facilitated the cross-border movement of citizens', labor forces, economic goods, services, or financial capital (Benz, 2004, p. 118).

With the increasing density of external trade flows,[6] the inevitable integration of the national economies and markets into European or global formats also led to the rise of new differentiated framework conditions, which created very positive externalities, but also led to new considerable challenges for the governments (Tömmel, 2008, p. 16). For example, Western Europe experienced considerable internationalization-induced economic growth through the cost-effective internationalized division of labor.[7]

Simultaneously the growing interdependency and entanglement also increased the interdependency and thus the vulnerability of national economies. Public and private actors were not only competing in this situation with their national counterparts, like in the pre-globalization era but had to face fierce economic rivals from the whole continent and even the globe. The international level's increasingly important role as a reference point for governmental economic actions is simultaneously accompanied by a growing role of the regions as a new territorial scale and policy space. This is described in the academic literature as 'regionalization/territorialization of economies' or as 'second side of the globalization'. It is based on the premise that economic activities are undergoing a comprehensive re-territorialization process resulting in a 'global mosaic of regional economies' (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 23; Glietsch, 2011, p. 44; Voelzkow, 1998, p. 14). Over the last decades, it can be increasingly observed that economic production processes are not only dispersed across several countries, but they are within these states often territorially concentrated in so-called "production clusters" or "industrial districts". Such economic regions are characterized by the typical agglomeration and clustering effects and are based on the availability of beneficial soft

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[6] Although the internationalization of the markets achieved particularly in the last 30 years a level, which is historically unparalleled, the level of internationalization of the OECD countries, as well as the external trade of the European countries, was until the 1990s only marginally higher than in the run-up to the First World War (Diller, 2002, pp. 42–43; Voelzkow, 1998, p. 10).

[7] The effects of globalization, particularly the opening of the domestic markets, the liberalization of economic policies, and the increase of external trade flows unfolded its impact on the Eastern European countries only after the implosion of the socialist regimes of the "Eastern Bloc" and the USSR. Although these socialist states experienced a kind of internationalization of their economies like in the form of the *Council for Mutual Economic Assistance* (Comecon), which did provide a distribution of production processes among the communist states, these effects were diminishingly low in comparison to the capitalist countries.

and hard location factors (Benz and Fürst, 2003, p. 21; Diller, 2002, p. 43; Scheer, 2008, p. 3).[8] In this regard, states are still essential in providing favorable economic framework conditions and necessary public goods for the regions (e.g., roads and other infrastructure). However, the new freedom of economic actors to move and to allocate their capital widely unrestrained between countries and continents based on the premise of an optimal cost-benefit ratio led to a new competition between regions for these so-called *Foreign Development Investments* (FDI) (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 23; Pierre and Peters, 2000, p. 29; Torfing, 2006, p. 12).

Being faced with this increasingly fierce economic race since the 1980s, a new territorial relocation of economic processes can be observed. This materializes in economic "booming regions", which are characterized by positive agglomeration effects, and on the other hand "losing regions" with steady negative development, being characterized among others by decreasing average wages, high unemployment rates, outflux of the young population and various other detrimental factors (Behrendt and Egger, 1997, p. 19; Benz, 2004, p. 118; Heintel, 2005, p. 31; Hilligardt, 2002, p. 35).

While regions are thus under pressure not to be on the losing side of this economic race, they are forced to adapt to these globalization-induced changing framework conditions rapidly.

During this adaption process, it became increasingly apparent that the traditionalist "top-down" oriented and centralist governing style has come to a deep crisis. The interventionist approach of decision-making is, especially in the area of economic and geospatial policies, often concentrated on an exclusive sectoral premise, while simultaneously ignoring the increasingly differentiated territorial impact of globalization. The lack of taking these factors into consideration, geospatial economic development measures, often resembled a "scattergun approach" (Böcher et al., 2008, p. 11), which often did not achieve the anticipated added-value, but instead deflagrated more or less. [9]

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[8] Due to the increasing complexity of production processes, economic actors are looking for regions, which provide beneficial location factorsa and are in geographic proximity to each other. Beneficial location factors are often in an interdependent and mutually enhancing relationship and thus provide the typical agglomeration effects. In the academic literature, we differentiate between "soft" and "hard" location factors. Soft location factors are, for example, the availability of qualified labor forces, high average wages, quality of life, rich cultural scene, good social life, and a low crime rate, among others. These are accompanied by hard location factors like the supply of education, research and development (R&D), the quality of the infrastructural network including telecommunication networks to fulfill the requirements of the "just-in-time-production", the presence of potential economic cooperation partner, and many more. Prime examples for such regions are the Silicon Valley in the USA or the German districts Upper Bavaria and Stuttgart (Glietsch, 2011, p. 43).

[9] This "paternalistic-institutionalist" approach by governmental decision-makers is often based on the logic of inducing economic growth effects by providing considerable allocations for the respective economic sectors. This, however, often was realized more like a politically motivated distributive policy instead of a comprehensive and integrated regional development approach (Benz and Fürst, 2003, p. 21; Fürst, 2001, p. 371; Glietsch, 2011, p. 141). In various cases, such measures were often motivated by short-term political

A major reason for this decreasing success of the classic "top-down" oriented policy-making was the sharp rise of information asymmetry with which the governments were faced. Due to the rapid differentiation and increasing complexity of the framework conditions, which affected the governments in a multidimensional way. To counteract this information deficiency, governments initially began to inflate their administrative structures. However, instead of improving the policy measures' success rate, the decision-making processes often became more time-consuming, cumbersome, and overall effective. This resulted in a further worsening of the cost-benefit ratio concerning spatial development policies (Pierre and Peters, 2000, pp. 18–19; Wald and Jansen, 2007, pp. 94–96).

The increasingly apparent 'failure' of this traditional approach by the national governments became even more salient in light of the massive deacceleration of Europe's economic growth during the 1980s and 1990s. Struggling with the economic decline, the governments were also facing an enormous rise of their public expenditures, resulting from the increased regional development allocations of the previous years. The lack of effectivity of these measures accompanied by declining tax revenues, which turned the high expenditures soon into rapidly accumulating budget deficits and a sharp rise of the national debt, led to severe economic crises in the countries.

Governmental decision-makers were thus faced with a "crisis of thought and behavioral patterns", who were forced to acknowledge that a comprehensive change in terms of governmental steering is necessary (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 26; Piattoni, 2010, p. 68; Pierre and Peters, 2000, p. 53). The following shift of strategies among the European governments, particularly since the late 1980s, is in the academic debate often described by scholars as the transformation process from "government to governance".

Although the *governance* concept is often used as a fuzzy umbrella-term and consists of a broad range of individual approaches, all scholars' common assumption is that governmental decision-making undergoes a comprehensive transformation in recent decades. Instead of applying the classical unilateral, top-down, and hierarchical oriented approach, national governments increasingly tend to differentiate their decision-making to adapt to the globalization-induced changing political and economic framework conditions (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 53; Panebianco,

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considerations of politicians towards their political clientele. A prime-example was in this regard the so-called "Kohlepfennig" in Germany, which was an ongoing governmental subsidy of the domestic coal industry by the federal government. Despite the obvious and lasting decline of the coal industry in Western Europe, which made the lacking autonomous viability of the sector obvious, the "Kohlepfennig" was maintained until 1995 and was only abolished after a decision by the German Constitutional Court, assessing the financial support as an unconstitutional measure (BVerfGE 91, 186).

2013, p. 52). The increasingly apparent necessity towards innovative, flexible, and highly differentiated policy measures and governance structures result increasingly in a new political steering style, which is based on a broad repertoire of instruments.

Formerly one-sided and interventionist decision-making patterns are complemented or even substituted by functional differentiated approaches. These are based, among others, on cooperation, negotiation, and bargaining, as well as guiding and management of political processes, resulting in a multiplicity of potential actions (Héritier, 2001, p. 1; Hix, 1998, p. 39; Knodt, n.d., pp. 2–3; Kohler-Koch, 1998a, p. 242, 1998b, p. 1; Tömmel, 2008, pp. 26–27; Torfing, 2006, p. 2).

The actual selection of available governance instruments is not detached from the political and economic surroundings but is based on the governments' (self-)reflective approach. The accompanying mutual interdependency between the states, markets, or the transforming relations between domestic governmental authorities as well as non-governmental actors are just some of the examples which resemble the above-mentioned increasing domestic and external dynamics, complexities, and social-political issues, which need to be taken into account by the states in this regard (Peterson, 2003, p. 1). In contrast to the prior increase of governance capabilities, states in recent years, therefore, strive to utilize the interdependency towards other authorities and non-governmental actors to their benefit to overcome together the political challenges (Heinelt and Knodt, 2008a, p. 312; Schlangen, 2010, p. 68). This will be often carried out through a mutual internalization of technical, political knowledge, or the pooling of the individual capacities, which are generally dispersed across a large number of various actors (Jessop, 2004, p. 57; Kooiman, 2003, pp. 3–4).

The potential range of actors being potentially involved in the particular governance process is enormously wide. They can be located within a country or in the international sphere and can represent public, quasi-public, distinctively private economic interests, or be NGOs as with a social-political agenda (Jessop, 2004, p. 58).The diversified actor-constellation results in various cases in the de-hierarchization of decision-making within states. This can be carried out within the domestic context either through a territorial re-scaling of decision-making through the involvement of subnational authorities (Fürst, 2007, p. 355, 2001, p. 371; Schlangen, 2010, p. 222) or through the involvement of new non-governmental actors in more or less barely institutionalized networks (Benz, 2008, p. 37; Eberlein and Kerwer, 2004, pp. 122–123; Kohler-Koch and Eising, 1999, pp. 5–6). Similar patterns can also be seen in the international dimensions, where states functionally differentiate their decision-making in various new forms, where they depart from the long-time persisting unilateral steering towards a more polycentric

governance process (Hix, 1998, p. 39; Maurer et al., 2010, p. 33; Peters and Pierre, 2009, p. 92).

In contrast to the stipulated assumption by various scholars, however, who proclaim the 'de-statization' and "de-nationalization" of policymaking and the general withdrawal of states from governance processes (Grasnick, 2007, p. 5; Gualini, 2004, p. 43), I argue instead that national governments intentionally differentiate their decision-making. While states in various cases pursue a new differentiated governance approach, which manifests in more heterarchical actor-constellations, especially when cooperating with non-governmental stakeholders, their role in the governance process remains, however, central. National governments provide the institutional, procedural, and political framework conditions in which the very complex and polycentric governance processes are realized. The functional differentiation of governance depends consequentially on the subliminal or distinct approval of the national authorities. This results consequentially in the preservation of the dominant role of nation-states even in the light of the ongoing internationalization and globalization process (Diller, 2002, p. 32; Jessop, 2004, p. 57; Kohler-Koch, 1998b, p. 1).

This outlined complex nature of the transformation process makes universally valid assumptions, particularly on a global scale, very difficult. Acknowledging the huge difficulties of integrating the enormously broad range of procedural facets, which can be subsumed under the outlined governance umbrella-term, I shall in the following chapters, therefore, focus on the ongoing transformation of governmental decision-making within the institutional boundaries of the European Union as an "objective sui generis". The EU's governance process led to a particularly unique transformation of statehood in the last decades.

2.2. The Multi-Level Governance system the in EU: Functional and territorial rescaling of governance processes

Since the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952 as an institutional forerunner, the European Union is an object of a perpetual academic debate concerning 'the nature of the beast'. Even after more than six decades, the academic debate is characterized by a widely persisting disagreement among scholars concerning the causes and character of the integration process, the EU's future development, or even its legal and institutional nature (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 1). Therefore, researchers often resort to depicting the EU based on the lowest common definitional denominator by calling it an "object sui generis". Although such a definition is far from sufficiently describing the EU, the nature of this organization and its integration process is in a global comparison indeed unique and shows in various aspects unparalleled characteristics. The singular nature the EU also affects its

member states in a comprehensive way, not only in terms of their governance structure, but also regarding their statehood. The impact of the EU is, despite its genuine nature, however, not decoupled from the globalization-driven change of the framework conditions but is quite to the contrary a prime example of how internationalization-induced political and economic interdependencies can trigger and shape integration processes on the European continent.

These interdependencies are characterized not only by a vertical dimension between public authorities, ranging from the local up to the supranational level, but they are also complemented by a horizontal dimension, which unfolds between the public and non-governmental actors. To utilize these framework conditions, namely by decreasing the negative externalities and simultaneously increasing the positive effects of globalization and internationalization, the EU's integration process underwent several repetitive readjustments over the last decades (Bache, 2004, p. 96; Börzel, 1997, p. 9; Grande and Jachtenfuchs, 2000, pp. 14–15; Stephenson, 2013, p. 831).[10]

The most well-known consequence in the European Union is the profoundly researched deepening of the legal integration process. This materializes, among others, in the intensified cooperation between national governments with the provision of binding regulations in an increasing number of policy areas, the supranationalization of decision-making, and the supranational merging of resources and institutional structures.

Many scholars depict the causal chain between the above-mentioned comprehensive mutual interdependencies and the consequential integration efforts as a one-directional process, which only occurs between the national and supranational levels. Particularly advocates of neo-functionalism and constructivism outline the integration process as an inevitable competence dispersion from the nation-state to the supranational level in various policy fields.

Although this perspective certainly has its legitimation, it shows two distinct shortfalls. In the last thirty years, it became increasingly apparent that the deepening of the integration process in Europe can either deaccelerate, come to a halt, or can even be revoked (Schimmelfennig et al., 2014, p. 15). However, these actual developments are only insufficiently taken into account

[10] Fritz Scharpf already addressed this mutual interdependency of actors in 1985 prior to the elaboration of the Multi-Level Governance concept. He described this phenomenon as "Politikverflechtung" (in English: the entanglement of policies) and stipulated in his various works that actors are located within states and underlie a mutual interdependency of policy arenas, which define the policy approaches by these actors (Scharpf, 1992). The MLG concept can consequentially be seen as an advancement of Scharpf's work, where the basic premises were translated into the EU's international context. By functioning as a conceptual bridge for integrating the domestic and the international entanglement into one concept, the approach of Multi-Level Governance brought decisive advantages for the academic debate (Benz, 2007, p. 298; Grande, 2000, p. 14; Peters and Pierre, 2004, p. 79).

by the two major theories, where the analytical focus is primarily on the reallocation of competencies from the national to the supranational level.

However, the actual integration process has become much more differentiated in the institutional, procedural, and policy dimensional in the EU in the last years (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 4). To give an adequate depiction of this differentiated integration process, which materializes increasingly in new governance structures and also across various territorial levels (Benz, 2000a, pp. 21–22; Benz and Eberlein, 1999, p. 333), I will resort in the following work to the Multi-Level Governance concept. The concept, which was originally elaborated by Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe, was since then significantly extended and refined by numerous scholars. For my research purposes, I will adapt the concept in various significant aspects to improve the methodical operationalization and address new aspects of the EU's Multi-Level Governance system, which are only insufficiently covered in the current academic debate.

2.2.1. The institutional framework of the Multi-Level Governance system in the EU

The Multi-Level Governance (MLG) concept has its basic theoretical focus on the functional differentiation of governmental decision-making in the EU. It concentrates, therefore, on the procedural dimension of decision-making. Before turning to the analysis of these processes, it is imperative first to outline the institutional framework, which characterizes the European Union. This is necessary due to the immanent functional logic of these institutional structures, which do not only define the complex web of linkages between the various supranational, national, regional, and even local public actors but also the relations with non-governmental actors. The institutional structures shape and constrain the particular governance processes by setting the room for action with its respective boundaries. The procedural dimension and the institutional dimension are consequentially in a synergetic relationship, which both shape the overall nature of the European Union (Benz, 2007, p. 297; Piattoni, 2010, pp. 89–90; Tömmel, 2008, pp. 36–37). When taking a closer look at the European Union's particular institutional structure, it unfolds as a multi-dimensional system, in which decision-making is dispersed over a large number of decision-making arenas. These arenas can be distinguished in two overarching dimensions: The vertical dimension and the horizontal dimension of Multi-Level Governance (Eberlein and Kerwer, 2004, p. 128; Marks et al., 1996a, p. 372).

Vertical dimension of Multi-Level Governance

The *vertical dimension* of Multi-Level Governance consists of a limited number of territorially defined levels of authority, ranging from the municipal, regional, national level to the European

Union as supranational level (Bache, 2011, p. 2; Benz, 2007, p. 298; Benz and Eberlein, 1999, p. 329).

The vertical dimension can be further distinguished for analytical purposes in two sub-dimensions: the *vertical intergovernmental dimension* and the *vertical intragovernmental dimension* (Benz, 2012, pp. 218–19).[11] Each territorial level within this system is a highly institutionalized layer equipped with a bundle of various decision-making competencies and functions. Public authorities stemming from each of these institutional levels do possess their own and autonomous decision-making authority within their respective territorially defined jurisdictions. The decision-making authority is in each of these jurisdictions not task-specific but ranges over a variety of policy areas, also resulting in a broad responsibility of these authorities for their respective populations (Hooghe and Marks, 2003, p. 14). Scholars describe these jurisdictions as non-intersecting, which means that lower territorial levels are usually encompassed within the higher levels (Hooghe and Marks, 2012, p. 19).

The vertical dimension of the MLG system is therefore often described concerning the alignment of levels as being "[…]in a Russian Doll set of nested jurisdictions, where there is one and only one relevant jurisdiction at any particular territorial scale" (Marks and Hooghe, 2004, p. 16).

Although the emphasis on this structurally persisting non-intersection of the various levels is indeed a valid point, the comparison with a Russian doll is too strict by not considering the states' actual organizational setup. When looking at the procedural dimension (outlined further below), the various levels and respective authorities are characterized by a much more interwoven and fluid institutional relationship (Peters and Pierre, 2004, p. 75). Therefore, the vertical dimension can be described regarding its structure resembling a 'marble cake' with partially blended institutional structures or, described more formally, as being a 'penetrated system of governance' (Kohler-Koch, 2002, p. 4).

Particularly concerning the supranational level, the above-stated premise of a non-intersecting jurisdictional setup can only hardly be applied. With the ongoing legal differentiation of the EU integration process since the beginning of the 1990s, the formal EU membership structure for nation-states has departed from the former binary setup. It has instead become a highly differentiated model of graded EU memberships. The integration of a particular country within

[11] Both sub-dimensions are mutually permeable and intersecting. However, this distinction is beneficial for the analytical purpose to outline the complex relations between the EU and the national governments on the one side and the complex structural interlinkage of jurisdictional layers within the countries on the other.

the EU's institutional framework can differentiate based on the particular policy area. (see chapter 2.2.3.1).

Scholars in general often point out that the structural setting of the vertical MLG dimension has based its "intellectual foundation" on the organizational setup of federal states with its vertically layered territorial units (Heinelt and Knodt, 2008b, p. 12; Marks and Hooghe, 2004, p. 17). While this is certainly a valid point, it is, however, important to highlight some distinct differences between the classic federal systems of states and the MLG system of the EU:

First, while the EU experienced a significant valorization as an overarching institutional layer during the integration process, it is in terms of its legal character still far from being equal to the "competence-competence" decision-making power of federal states. Therefore, the EU member states are, compared to the EU institutions, still the central actors within the multi-level system. They are not only allocating competencies to the supranational level through the adoption and constitution of primary law, but they can withdraw from the application of these competencies within their jurisdiction through the firm maintenance of the exit-option (outlined further below). This legal option is not available for states/regions/provinces within federal states, where the national level maintain a firm and comprehensive decision-making authority.

Second, even despite the mobilization of local and regional actors (LRAs) within the MLG system, which I will address in the next chapters, regions are still located in a firm "shadow of hierarchy"[12] of their national governments and depend on their distinct approval to take part in a number of supranational governance processes. Their leeway is thus, in many cases, defined by the political support of the national level. Thus, subnational public authorities pursue a very dynamic approach within the EU's MLG system, where they adapt their procedural approach based on the given –and permanently changing– institutional framework. In comparison to this, the room for action for subnational authorities in federal nation-states is strongly predetermined by the constitutional and legal framework, making the particular room for action for LRAs more static (Conzelmann, 2008a, pp. 4–5; Grande and Jachtenfuchs, 2000, pp. 15–18).

[12] The term "shadow of hierarchy" was originally defined by Fritz Scharpf and is since then used by many scholars, especially in the discipline of Regional Governance: In contrast to the traditional exercise of governmental authority, namely in the form of classic legislative and executive decisions, this term describes a hierarchic authority structure, in which LRAs are acting widely autonomously and comply with the given boundaries. While the nation-states refrain from an active exercise of their powers, the LRAs are aware that states can engage any time in case of an infringement of the "rules of the game". They can limit or stop activities. The knowledge of this firmly maintained power, which resembles a shadow influencing the activities of the LRAs, consequently shapes their behavior (Diller, 2004; Héritier and Lehmkuhl, 2008, pp. 1–2).

The multidimensionality of Regions: Analytical unit, historical space of identity, and active political entities

Before outlining the horizontal dimension of Multi-Level Governance, it is first necessary to briefly outline the definitional content of the term "region" as a decisive level within the vertical dimension and as a central object of analysis. Although being used as a common and general term, the actual definition of this territorial scale suffers from a serious vagueness. Used in different contexts, the term can describe various spatial scales, which can significantly vary concerning the size and character. It can be used, for example, as a label in the administrative context simultaneously for a small county within a state but also as a term for a transnational macro-region within a continent. In the academic literature, regions are therefore often described by the minimum definition, namely described as "intermediate" territorial level or space between the national and the local (municipal) level, which are based on a common set of attributes (Bauer and Börzel, 2012, p. 253). However, the definition of these commonalities constitutes a considerable challenge for scholars and academic debate in general. Based on the individual research approach, the definition and following assessment of regions can strongly vary due to the diverging application of analytical categories. It is, therefore, necessary to differentiate between three specific types of regions:

1) *Regions of analysis and description* have clearly identifiable geographic, spatial, or socio-economic features (e.g., reliefs, natural spaces like mountains or river areas, or economic areas, etc.). They are used for analytical purposes as statistical entities.
2) *Administrative regions and regions of activity* range from sheer spaces of action (e.g., spatial planning purposes) to regions with own governance structures and comprehensive political decision-making capacities (e.g., municipalities, counties, provinces, federal states, etc.).
3) *Historical identity-regions* are products of a long and complex regional identity-building process. Based on a deep place-based socio-cultural interconnection of citizens and a mutual sense of solidarity, such regions constitute the frame of reference for domestic political processes and decision-making (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 33; Keating, 1998, pp. 9–10).

This threefold differentiation underlines the aspect that regions constitute a space that does not have a generalizable clear-cut territorial delineation. They further vary in terms of their character, size, and functionality and are often the product of a "social construction process", which defines their particular setup (Benz and Meincke, 2007, p. 8). Regions can be thus

characterized, for example, either as historic identity regions, which are the product of a long ongoing identity building process or a sheer statistical entity for analytical purposes. Regions can also fulfill the criteria for more than one of the above-depicted categories at the same time. They can be simultaneously statistical units, spaces of (geo-)spatial activities, and simultaneously have a strong regional identity and self-administrative competencies (e.g., Bavaria, South Tyrol, etc.). In light of these very fuzzy conditions, the European Union resorts to a strict definition and compartmentalization of the regions based on their statistical characteristics, which covers only one specific aspect of the wide variety of the term.[13]

As Derichs points out, it is therefore advisable, particularly regarding the research focus, to apply an "open approach" for the following analysis (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 35).

Therefore, regulations shall not be analyzed with a pre-defined list of criteria, but only based on the above elaborated minimal definition as "subnational" intermediary level between municipalities and the national level. This term shall be consequentially specified during its case-based application.

Horizontal dimension of Multi-Level Governance

The second dimension in the Multi-Level Governance system is the *horizontal dimension.* In contrast to its already outlined vertical counterpart, this dimension is characterized by less institutionalized and more flexible jurisdictions (Hooghe and Marks, 2012, p. 20). Cooperations located within this dimension often have, as a result, a network-like character and are thus often described by scholars as a form of "network governance" (Benz, 2008, p. 43; Conzelmann, 2008b, p. 14). The establishment of such structures within the horizontal dimension is often aligned around one or few specific tasks, which define the functionality, competencies, and decision-making authority of these networks (Bache and Flinders, 2004a, p. 200; Börzel, 1997, p. 5; Hooghe and Marks, 2003, p. 237; Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2006, p. 42).

The constituted tasks and goals in these network-like governance structures are often aligned around challenges, which were prior exclusively tackled by sovereign states but did either not bring the anticipated positive results or were completely beyond the reach of effective governmental regulation. Through the involvement of new actors and the internalization of their capabilities and potentials, these networks provide a new opportunity to address policy

[13] The European Commission will differentiate the subnational dimension into five individual scales, which are the so-called Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques (NUTS). These are typically based on the size of the included population: The first level NUTS 1 represents a median population of 3.89 million people; the NUTS 2 level 1.42 million; NUTS 3 jurisdictions have 369,000; NUTS 4 have a median population of 48,000. As the smallest scale, NUTS 5 regions consist of a median population of 5,100 (Hooghe and Marks, 2003, p. 14).

challenges and prior existing functional problems with better results (Hooghe and Marks, 2003, p. 8; Papadopoulos, 2007, p. 473; Piattoni, 2010, p. 24).

A prime example of such a challenge is the issue of environmental protection. Being often faced with the situation that a unilateral approach often led to suboptimal policy outcomes, states recognized over the last decades that multilateral approaches are the only viable solution.

This insight also catalyzed the functional horizontal differentiation of governance in various other policy areas. However, the realization and maintenance of horizontal governance networks are based on a distinct output-legitimation, meaning that they must produce a substantial positive impact within a short- or medium-term for the involved actors (Beisheim et al., 2012, pp. 370; 377).

Such networks' result-oriented nature affects their internal actor-constellation, which is considerably more diversified than in the vertical dimension. Public actors within the networks can stem from all the above outlined administrative levels, while private actors can originate from between these levels (e.g., intraregional, sub-regional, sub-local etc.) or they can be located completely outside of the governmental institutional structure (Bache, 2008, p. 29). Non-governmental actors can thus stem from a vast number of areas. They can strongly differ in terms of their capabilities, actions, aims, or general nature (e.g., economic agents, interest representatives, experts, general stakeholders, etc.) (Papadopoulos, 2007, p. 470).

However, this broad array of potential members gives no particular insight into the distribution of authority within the networks' specific governance structure. Although the networks tend to be realized in the form of a more polyarchic respectively heterarchical setting, there is no "must-have". Scholars, therefore, often stick to a very rudimentary minimum definition by describing the decision-making within these structures as a "complex" or "variable" process (Ansell et al., 1997, p. 349). This description is often justified with reference to the adaptive and shifting character of the actor-constellations and power structures, which also substantially influences decision-making.

Based on the particular cooperation objectives and the accompanying tasks, such networks can, for example, require more heterarchical constellations or can even require non-governmental actors' involvement in the form of a privileged role if necessary (Hooghe and Marks, 2012, p. 21). However, even in such heterarchical setups, the governmental actors maintain a decisive and essential role within the actor-constellation of the horizontal MLG dimension. As such, their political support or at least their (tacit) approval of the cooperation is decisive to maintain the network's operability. While the networks do not infringe with formal competencies and the member states' general decision-making authority, the necessary approval of the national

governments largely depends on the positive assessment by the governmental actors regarding the output and added-value of the governance approach (Benz, 2008, p. 49; Tömmel, 2008, p. 28).

The conclusion of Hooghe and Marks in this regard that governmental control has 'slipped away' from the nation-states due to the more heterarchical power structures within the horizontal MLG dimension (Marks and Hooghe, 2004, p. 19), shall be consequentially disagreed in the following work (see chapter 2.2.2). Instead, I argue that this governance approach's successful realization depends on these national authorities' structural and procedural support. A withdrawal of governmental actors from the respective network leads, in most cases, consequentially to a failure of the network-like governance setting.

The decision-making structure within these horizontal governance setups is often consensus-oriented. Due to the low degree of institutionalization, all actors participate voluntarily and maintain the possibility to withdraw from the cooperation at all times. The maintenance of this "exit-option" often results in a decision-making procedure, which is based on the principle of unanimity. The necessary prior comprehensive deliberation process of policy issues, which needs to be realized to achieve the necessary aggregation of interests, contributes to a structural stabilization of the network and lowers the risk of an actor's withdrawal. Typical procedural steering mechanisms like the comprehensive coordination, negotiation, and, in cases of conflicts, the mediation between actors, are essential for attaining prior designated policy goals (Esmark, 2006, p. 254; Papadopoulos, 2007, p. 482). Voluntary participation also results in a structural interdependency between actors, who are required to cooperate based on mutual trust. This contributes to establishing social capital between actors, a low degree of moral-hazard, and an absence of free-riding behavior, which are decisive for the successful realization of such a governance approach (Benz, 1992, p. 193). [14]

[14] Although these enumerated characteristics do not belong to the institutional aspects of the MLG system's horizontal dimension, they must be considered as decisive underlying premises for the successful realization of these network-like structures. These shall be addressed in more detail in a later part of the work (see chapter 2.4.2)

Table 1 Dimensions of Multi-Level Governance	
Vertical dimension	**Horizontal dimension**
• General-purpose jurisdiction	• Task-specific jurisdictions
• Tendency of non-intersecting memberships	• Strongly intersecting memberships
• Jurisdictions organized on a limited number of territorial levels	• Jurisdictions with cross-level character
• System-wide architecture with enduring territorial scopes	• Flexible design and territorial scope

Source: Adapted depiction based on (Hooghe and Marks, 2012, p. 18)

The "loose coupling" of the MLG dimensions

Despite the different functional logics and immanent setups of the two MLG dimensions, both are standing in a mutual relationship that can be best described as "loosely coupled".

The horizontal dimension, for example, is not only open for participation by the public actors of the various territorial levels, but the networks can be established regarding their structure, their policy goals, their territorial scope, or procedural process in and across these various territorial layers, resulting in a possible overlapping between the two dimensions (Bache, 2008, p. 27; Piattoni, 2009, p. 171). The opportunity of realizing institutionalized 'embedded games' between the two dimensions is based on the principle of the above-mentioned "loose coupling" between them. Both dimensions are not strictly bound to each other but have a self-containment-based functional logic and operate more or less autonomously (Hooghe and Marks, 2012, p. 23). This setup allows public and private actors within the MLG system to variate and adapt their particular procedural approaches and realize a cross-dimensional governance structure[15] when positive interaction effects and positive externalities can be anticipated (Benz, 2000a, pp. 36–37, 2012, p. 216; Benz and Zimmer, 2010, p. 19; Eberlein and Kerwer, 2004, p. 128). This complementary cooperation opportunity of the loosely coupled dimension helps avoid a political deadlock, while still providing the opportunity to attain cooperation-based benefits (Hooghe and Marks, 2003, p. 15).

[15] Scholars will often describe this polycentric nature of governance structures within the horizontal MLG dimension as a manifestation of *fragmegration.* This term refers to the apparent contradiction between these networks' integrational character, namely in the form of the diverse actor-membership, and the parallel unfolding decentralization/fragmentation of decision-making processes. However, this phenomenon is not a genuine characteristic of the EU's MLG system, but can be observed among various globalization-induced functional differentiations of governance patterns (Bache and Flinders, 2004b, p. 6; Rosenau, 2004, pp. 34–37).

The Multi-Level Governance system thus provides the institutional flexibility to tackle policy issues and challenges at the 'optimal scale of government' (vertical dimension) and it further allows to differentiate the governance process across and beyond these governmental scales by utilizing the endogen potentials and capabilities of the respective public and private actors. Policy approaches can be, therefore, realized in an optimized and innovative way in the form of new polycentric governance constellations (Benz, 2000a, p. 37; Hooghe and Marks, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2007, p. 479; Peters and Pierre, 2004, p. 84; Piattoni, 2009, p. 171).

As a result, I shall depart from the original MLG assumption by various scholars, who stipulate that the differentiation of governance follows in the vertical dimension strictly the principle of territoriality, while in the horizontal dimension it follows the premise of functionality (Heinelt and Knodt, 2008a, pp. 313–314) strictly.

I argue instead that both dimensions are based on the distinct principle of a functional differentiation of the overall governance structure and processes, while they both also maintain a distinct territorial reference. However, the major difference is the application of the particular territorial scope within the respective MLG dimension. The particular functional differentiation of governance in the vertical dimension is aligned around one more or less static and enduring territorial jurisdiction. The majority of networks within the horizontal dimension are, in contrast, concerning the functional differentiation more dynamic and adaptable. Thus, networks can intersect several territorial levels of the vertical dimension (Piattoni, 2010, pp. 206–207).

2.2.2. Functional and territorial differentiation of governance in the shadow of hierarchy

Before outlining the functional and territorial differentiation process within the MLG system, it is first necessary to discuss the underlying premises from a procedural perspective.

This is, however, a quite challenging task due to the immanent characteristics of the MLG approach. The approach is often described as an 'amalgam of already existing theoretical assumptions', which are utilized and integrated into the concept to give a comprehensive description of the EU's evolution process. Despite a strong focus on neo-functionalist premises, particularly in the works of Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, as most prominent MLG scholars, the approach maintained over the years a conceptual openness, leading to its continuous evolvement. This conceptual openness is, however, often criticized by advocates of the other EU integration theories.

Particularly the often observed omission to comprehensively deal with the causal factors of the EU integration is stated as one of the most salient critique points. Therefore, some scholars often deny the MLG concept the status as a complete EU integration theory due to the lack of

causal explanatory power. Instead, they stipulate that MLG should only be considered as a helpful instrument to give a 'dense description' of the integration process (George, 2004, pp. 118–119; 123; Knodt and Große Hüttmann, 2012, p. 197).

In contrast to this alleged "weak spot", I argue that the concept's openness allows us to further refine the original MLG approach and contribute to the academic debate with a new valuable theory-based perspective. It provides further the opportunity to take the most recent developments of the integration process into account and give a reasonable explanation for the EU's current and future state.

Another consequence of the MLG approach's conceptual openness is that an amorphous condition characterizes the state of research. Although all scholars acknowledge that the differentiation of decision-making impacts the EU's MLG system in all three analytical areas of political interaction, namely the policy, polity, and politics dimension, most researchers focused in the last 30 years within their work only on one particular dimension. While some scholars focus primarily on the degree of political mobilization of local and regional actors within the system (politics), others emphasize the content of policy-making (policy). Others then again concentrate on the transformation of the institutional structures within the states and the EU (polity). Thus, the vast diversity of research foci leads to a wide array of assessments and research results, culminating in a very heterogeneous, if not to some degree, fragmented research state. This again evoked criticism by some scholars who stated that the concept of Multi-Level Governance is running the risk of becoming a "catch-all phrase" (Piattoni, 2010, p. 18, 2009, p. 165).

To avoid such a terminological fuzziness in the following chapters, it is necessary to set some basic conceptual perimeters first, which are generally acknowledged by most MLG advocates. Based on the already above-outlined premise concerning the EU's multi-level institutional structure, the procedural differentiation of governance is carried out within the institutional boundaries of vertical and horizontal dimensions (Piattoni, 2010, p. 187).[16]

In the vertical dimension, the functional differentiation of governmental decision-making is carried out through a reallocation of national governments' competencies in a centrifugal way in two directions (Conzelmann, 2008b, p. 13; Marks, 1993, pp. 401–403).

The first direction is materialized in a reallocation of competencies upwards, namely either in the form of a communitarization of decision-making in intergovernmental formats between the

[16] However, due to the often ad-hoc based differentiation of governance within the latter dimension, we shall set it first aside and elaborate it in more detail in a theoretical and empirical approach later (see chapter 2.2.3).

EU member states or through the entire reallocation of authority to the EU as a supranational entity (see chapter 2.2.3.1).

Parallel to this upscaling of decision-making, the reallocation of competencies is also carried out in a downward direction, namely in the form of a delegation of competencies to the local and regional level (see chapter 2.2.3.2). While this so-called "dispersion process" is differently assessed by scholars concerning the reasons and consequences, three generally acknowledged procedural impacts can be stated:

1. Decision-making competencies are shared by actors at different levels instead of being monopolized by state executives.
2. Collective decision-making among states results in a significant loss of direct control for individual state executives.
3. Political arenas are interconnected rather than nested. Actors can realize new formal or informal modes of cooperation, creating new associations in the process (Bache, 2008, p. 25; Bache and Flinders, 2004c, p. 96; Gualini, 2004, p. 37; Hooghe and Marks, 2001, pp. 3–4).

To understand and successfully discuss this dispersion process's nature, particularly in terms of the "how" and "why", it is necessary to focus first on the role of the state within the MLG system. However, assessing the state's role is far more complex than it seems at first glance. Due to the original nature of the MLG approach as a counterview to the state-centrist theory of liberal intergovernmentalism, most MLG scholars follow the basic premises of neo-functionalism, however, without the strong emphasis on the spill-over effects (George, 2004, p. 112). They argue that the centrifugal dispersion of competencies is the result of an ongoing erosion of state power. According to this group of MLG advocates, the erosion materializes, among others in the state's inability to maintain firm control over the dispersion process. National governments are thus losing their former role as "gatekeepers" of decision-making authority. Some scholars even made in this regard the bold prediction that states are due to their ongoing power-loss in the long-run "doomed to disappear" between the subnational and supranational level (Keating, 1998, p. 161; Marks et al., 1996a, pp. 371–372). The justification of this assumption is, however, often characterized by a programmatic and in some cases even openly biased approach (Kohler-Koch, 1996, p. 206), where some scholars not only describe the supranationalization as a one-directional and unstoppable process but equate it in a quite undifferentiated way as automatically more efficient than other forms of competence dispersion.

Regarding the downward dispersion, a similar prediction will be carried regarding the mobilization of local and regional actors, who will be stipulated as new strong actors within the MLG system (see further below). This is accompanied by an overemphasis of the normative aspects regarding this process. Factors like the strengthening of cultural pluralism, especially in federal or regionalized states, the improved closeness to citizens, or the optimized democratic feedback mechanisms as results of this dispersion process are some of these aspects, which are nearly exclusively focused upon by various advocates (Kohler-Koch, 1996, pp. 204–205; Sturm and Bauer, 2010, pp. 11–12). Although all these factors are without question integral aspects in realizing a good and democratic governance approach, this overemphasis of normative aspects often is accompanied by an overvalued assessment of the perceived and actual positive impacts of the EU integration process at the local and regional level.

This materializes in the further assumption that LRAs are unconditionally eager to support the deepening of the EU integration process. This assumption is, however, based on an oversimplified picture. In fact, the perceived and actual cost-benefit ratio of the integration process for LRAs is often much more mixed. While a considerable number of local and regional actors did profit indeed from the dispersion of competences induced by the EU integration (e.g., particularly unitary states), others (e.g., especially federal states) have not experienced any improvement of their status or had even to accept net-losses in terms of their decision-making authority (Dieringer, 2010, p. 348; Tatham and Bauer, 2014, p. 240).

The strong focus on the subnational dimension by scholars also contributed, as mentioned above, to an overestimation of the LRAs role within the MLG system. Based on the thesis of the –allegedly– eroding state, LRAs were often considered in the academic debate as new empowered and decisive actors within the EU. This even resulted in the proclamation that the EU has become an "Europe of Regions", which was a particularly popular assumption starting from the late 1980s until the midst of the 1990s. Academics and even some politicians (e.g., Jaques Delors as president of the European Commission) stipulated that the regions would become, through the dispersion process, equal partners of the member states and the EU institutions regarding decision-making. While this assumption was initially supported by the particular reform measures concerning the Cohesion Policy in the aftermath of the Single European Act, which introduced the so-called *partnership* principle among others (see chapter 2.2.4), it soon became apparent that the comprehensive empowerment of the LRAs at the expense of the nation-states was overstated (Bauer and Studinger, 2011, p. 4; Elias, 2008, pp. 483–485; Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2006, p. 32).

In the light of the recent developments with the increasing occurrence of primary and secondary law-based differentiations in the EU (see chapter 2.2.3.1), an increasing number of MLG scholars acknowledge in the meanwhile that states still remain "[…]the most important pieces of the European puzzle[…]″ (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 3) even despite their vanished formal monopoly over all decision-making procedures.

In contrast to the assumption of Hooghe and Marks, who among others nevertheless still consider the states as being an object of a continuous disempowerment, I go even a step further and argue that not only "states are here to stay" in the long-run, but that the dispersion process is carried out in a still maintained firm "shadow of hierarchy" of the nation-states.

Following the assumptions of *rationalist institutionalism* (Richardson and Mazey, 2015, pp. 39–41), I argue that the intentional dispersion of competencies is based on a distinct cost-benefit rationale of the national governmental actors, where each reallocation of authority is carried out under a distinct calculation of the economic and political utility (Kohler-Koch, 1995, p. 5). Thus, the dispersion aims to improve the impact of decision-making or even to realize measures, which wouldn't have been feasible with traditional top-down governmental decision-making (Anderson, 1990; Börzel, 1997, pp. 9–10; Gualini, 2004, pp. 34–37).

States are, therefore, eager to maximize their utility concerning their governmental decision-making. However, the states' cost-benefit rationale goes beyond a sheer zero-sum calculation, as state-centrist theories like liberal intergovernmentalism often state it (Benz and Zimmer, 2010, p. 18; Marks et al., 1996a, p. 349).

The "rational choice" in terms of competence dispersion is instead often carried out under a strategic perspective. Individual relocation of competencies can limit the particular countries' room for action, such as through the introduction of mandatory co-decision making procedures, where the national government is obliged to coordinate with other member states. It can even result in the reduction of the national government's influence in a particular policy field. While such a competence-relocation seems, at first sight, as a "loss", governments always consider it in the limelight of the overall cost-benefit rationale. Concerning the EUropean integration process, this can be outlined as follows: While a country is considering a particular integration measure (supranationalization/regionalization) detrimental from its point of view, it nevertheless accepts the decision due to the anticipated overall benefits of the whole integration step. Even when the integration step is not considered positive, the remaining in the EU constitutes a more beneficial status quo, thus resulting in the further formal support of integration (e.g., due to the necessary unanimity principle).

However, the supranationalization/regionalization of competencies must be perceived regarding the cost-benefit rationale as still positive.[17]

This rationalist approach does not negate the intrinsic heterogeneity in states, which affects governmental decision-making. The cost-benefit ratio is not a calculation based on objective facts but depends on the individual national government's –subjective– perception. The assessment of the framework conditions is influenced by constructivist aspects (e.g., regional, national identity), internal power constellations (e.g., power of political parties with their respective ideology, the influence of interest groups or LRAs etc.) as well as by the asymmetric availability of information in connection with the different administrative capabilities of the government. Such factors influence the decision-making, can even result in a distorted assessment of the cost-benefit rationale and thus lead to different outcomes regarding the governmental actor's choice (Marks, 1997, pp. 23–24; Marks et al., 1996b, p. 170; Piattoni, 2010, p. 223; Richardson and Mazey, 2015, p. 41).

Suppose the perceived overall cost-benefit ratio shifts in a negative direction for a particular government. In that case, they can be encouraged to limit or deaccelerate the functional differentiation compared to other member states. Especially in the last three decades, states

[17] This cost-benefit rationale also applies to the accession of new member states to the EU, which is explained by the so-called "club theory" (Richardson and Mazey, 2015, p. 41). The admission of new states to join the "club" of the EU is based on both sides on a distinct cost-benefit ratio. While states lose on the one hand decision-making power within the intergovernmental institutions (e.g., Council), namely in the form of a higher risk of obstructions during the decision-making process and are even obliged in most cases to allocate a significant amount of financial resources to support these new members (e.g., Cohesion Policy), admission can be nevertheless endorsed in the light of political or economic advantages. In the case of the "Eastern Enlargement" of 2004, the accession of the countries provided, for example, two distinct benefits for the old member states. The first advantage was the opportunity to support the transition of the post-socialist countries politically, and thus stabilize the "backyard" of the EU, while the second benefit was the opening up of new markets for the domestic industries as well as the availability of new workforces for the domestic economies from abroad.
Another example was the comprehensive reforms of Cohesion Policy in the aftermath of the Single European Act in 1986. With the establishment of the European Single Market, the member states were confronted with considerable new challenges due to their domestic markets' opening. Territorial economic imbalances within the countries threatened to become even more significant, which made the necessity to reform the regional development policies of the national governments obvious. This resulted in a significant communitization of these approaches and led to a major increase of the EU's Cohesion Policy budget, accompanied by introducing new procedural mechanisms and spatial programs in 1990/1991 (e.g., INTERREG, LEADER, etc.). Especially for the economically strong performing Western European countries, this constituted an obvious setback at first glance, who had to not only reallocate considerable competencies to the supranational level that were before located exclusively within the regional/national jurisdiction, but they were also obliged to increase their financial contributions to the common budget. Particularly the latter measure benefitted foremost the South European states (e.g., Greece, Spain, etc.). However, this apparent negative externality was weighed and considered by the Western European States against the positive externalities. The establishment of the above-mentioned European Single Market with the accompanied opening up of the former more or less closed national markets in the southern part of Europe meant, like the Eastern Enlargement, new and substantial economic chances for the countries and the industries in Western Europe.

increasingly resorted to instruments like an "opt-out" from particular EU integration steps, which they formulated as a "conditio sine qua non" towards other supranational and national actors (Kölliker, 2010, p. 52). National governments even demonstrated in the time-period since the early 1990s that in contrast to the alleged erosion of state power, they can *de jure* or *de facto* "clawback" already supranationalized competencies if they consider it as highly detrimental in regard to their cost-benefit ratio (see next chapter). Although there are certain so-called "lock-in effects" regarding the European integration, as emphasized by various scholars (Marks, 1997, pp. 32–34; Stephenson, 2013, p. 826), manifesting in considerable increasing administrative, political, and financial costs in case of an exit, a withdrawal from the structural interdependencies are not insurmountable and can be tackled if the central-governments deems it necessary.

The above-stated rationalist approach provides on the first look a comparably strong state-centrist perspective. These stated premises apply, however, not only for national governments but all public and private actors. As such, each actor assesses its participation regarding its cost-benefit ratio and tries to adapt its approach within the given boundaries of this MLG system, however, with the limitation of the "shadow of hierarchy" constituted by the nation-states. Public actors from the other vertical territorial levels as well as the private actors become mobilized and try to influence the respective decision-making procedures to the benefit of their designated aims and goals, to expand their power within the given setting (Bache, 2008, p. 25; Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 70).

Due to the MLG system's immanent structure, which I described earlier as 'penetrated system of governance', this can also be achieved through active coalition-building between the respective actors. With the newly evolved situation that states are no longer the sole interface between the various vertical levels or the horizontal dimension, actors can maintain their relations and coordinate their actions through institutionalized channels or less or non-institutionalized ad-hoc coalitions (Hooghe and Marks, 1997, pp. 23–24). These newly opened opportunity structures for the various actors also affect their behavioral patterns to a large degree. In contrast to the assumption by a large group of MLG scholars, I argue that in the limelight of the given opportunities there is no automatism in terms of a "natural" alliance-building between the EU institutions and LRAs "against" the nation-states (Auel, 2003, p. 23; Benz and Eberlein, 1999, p. 331).

Instead, the particular nature and form of cooperation strongly depend on the given framework conditions, which shape the actors' behavioral approach. The willingness to cooperate is flexible in selecting the potential "ally", but it also depends on the given actor, policy area, and

the respective institutional framework conditions as factors. Each of these factors influences the potential alliance-building and the whole cooperation in a very dynamic way (Ansell et al., 1997, pp. 356–358; Bauer and Studinger, 2011; Tatham and Bauer, 2014).

Given these new framework conditions, regions achieved through these developments a new structural room for action, which are called *regional mobilization opportunities* (Gualini, 2004, p. 38; Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 91; Jeffery, 2000, pp. 4–6).

Although the regions can utilize these opportunities to a diverging degree, the often stated comprehensive "bypassing of the state" within the MLG debate is exaggerated. Local and regional actors are still far from having unchangeable and fully unmediated access to supranational decision-making and are not remotely in the position to substantially shape decision-making on the EUropean level (Bauer and Studinger, 2011, pp. 5–6; Jeffery, 2000, pp. 2–3).

2.2.3. The competence dispersion in the vertical dimension of Multi-Level Governance

2.2.3.1. Reallocation of competencies to the supranational level: From the premise of an "ever closer union" to the establishment of a differentiated membership structure

For many decades the integration process of the EU was characterized by the nearly unquestioned principle that every new step towards a deepening of the integration has not just to be realized with unanimous approval by all member states, but every adopted EUropean law also has to be applied uniformly to each EU country as well (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 16).

This principle was based since the foundation of the *European Coal and Steel Community* (ECSC) in 1952 on the membership structure's pertaining premises, which differentiated in the clear-cut binary differentiation between member states and non-member states (so-called third countries). Being a member went along with a homogenously applied bulk of rights and obligations for the respective governments, constituted in the treaties as primary law. The establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958 introduced new association instruments towards European third countries, like the free trade agreements with the EFTA-states (Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland). However, the "club-like" membership structure with the comprehensive integration of the countries in the respective policy fields remained in the following nearly unchanged (Schimmelfennig, 2016, pp. 791–796).

In the next four decades, the European Union[18] experienced the commonly well-known deepening of its integration process, while it also was considerably enlarged from originally six member states to more than 28 governmental entities (until the planned leave of the United Kingdom on the 31. January 2020). In nearly every policy area, the EU shows a substantially high degree of integration. However, significant differences between the respective policy areas exist.[19] The reallocation of competencies from the national to the supranational level and the considerable enlargement of the EU was realized in various individual steps in the form of the ratification of eight new treaties.

Although the individual integration steps were far from being free of stalling political conflicts,[20] the continuous and uniform deepening of the integration process and the enlargement of the EU was overall characterized by the so-called "permissive consensus" of the national governments, which persisted until the 1980s. This status quo then started to increasingly undergo a 'piecemeal revolution', replacing the original premise of unified integration with a more differentiated approach (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 16). With more and more governments issuing their differing expectations, anticipations, and to some degree also their criticism concerning the development of the integration process openly, the debate about the future development of the EU and its "one size fits all" approach got more and more

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[18] The European Union underwent since the *European Coal and Steel Community Several (ECSC)* several evolutionary stages. After the ratification of the Treaty of Rome in 1958 and the accompanying establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EACC), as two new organizations, the executive institutions of these were merged under the roof of the European Communities (EC) in 1965. While each organization remained legally independent, they afterward shared common institutions as EC. The Maastricht Treaty in 1993 integrated these in the pillar structure of the European Union followed by their full dissolving into the EU through the Treaty of Lisbon. Being aware of this historical development, I shall however refer to the entity as European Union regardless of the given time context to facilitate the readability of this work.

[19] While, for example, taxation and the issue of foreign and security policy are still widely characterized by a primarily intergovernmental oriented deliberation process, which produces in some aspects common policy approaches, other policies like monetary policy, agriculture, the area of economic freedoms, cohesion policy or market regulation measures are highly communitarized in contrast (Schimmelfennig and Rittberger, 2015, pp. 36–38).

[20] The integration process was not free from reservations by some member states in this period, neither in terms of the enlargement policies nor in regard to the communitization of the sectoral policies: Just to name three exemplary cases, which temporarily stalled the integration and enlargement processes: First such obstruction was the rejection of the application for membership by the United Kingdom in 1961, which faced a veto by France. This was followed by the politics of the "Empty Chair" again by Paris, which manifested in 1965 in a boycott of the Council meetings, resulting in an incapability of the Council to make formal decisions for more than six months. While these conflicts could be solved, the integration process experienced a further significant deacceleration from the 1970s until the early 1980s. This was caused by the detrimental macroeconomic framework conditions (e.g., the oil crisis in 1973) due to which the states did put a halt on further integration. Parallel to the deaccelerated deepening of the integration process, the enlargement policy was further continued by several enlargement rounds in 1973 (Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom), 1981 (Greece), and 1986 (Portugal, Spain).

momentum. Individual national governments started to increasingly push the political debate, in which they addressed the feasibility of an eventual differentiation of the integration process for the first time.[21] These reservations became even more salient in the last years, which are described in the literature as "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 5) between the EU member states. National governments began to state their open reservations for the first time to participate in the further reallocation of competencies in some policy fields.[22] This was recognized and accommodated within the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986[23], by realizing the so-called "opt-outs" as the first legal provisions of EU law-based differentiated integration. However, even despite these concessions to individual countries, some member states' reservations and criticism remained. This led to a turning point in the run-up of the drafting and ratification of the *Maastricht Treaty*. For the first time, the planned further deepening of the integration process was the object of a public debate in several EU countries. For the first time, governments issued their active contestation and distinct criticism of the planned integration measures. The adverse stance of some countries' populations resulted in Denmark and France

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[21] The opening of this debate was, however, already initiated in the midst of the 1970s, when Willy Brandt, as Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, and Leo Tindemans, as prime minister of Belgium, addressed for the first time the potential necessity of differentiated integration (e.g., "Tindemans Report"). These political leaders' statements were followed by an intense debate concerning the potential added-value and risks of differentiated integration, which is still salient among politicians and academic scholars until today (Koller, 2012).

[22] While many publications try to identify the origins and causes of the unfolding "constraining dissensus" and the governmental criticism, respectively the rejection of the EU integration process, I shall only briefly outline two major explanatory approaches. The first major strand identifies an increasing *politicization* of the integration process as the cause for the growing dissent among the member state governments, which manifests in an increasingly controversial character of the policy communitization and increasing supranational character of decision-making. Scholars are divided into two groups concerning the causes for this politicization: The first group argues that the politicization of the EU integration is foremost an actor-driven process (e.g., by the media, trade unions, NGOs, churches or political parties, etc.), where the debate about the EU is introduced and emphasized on purpose in the political debate and is based on basic ideological premises (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). The second group of scholars argues that this process is the automatic outcome of the increasing impact of the EU's decision-making on the everyday life of the citizens and results from the integration-induced growing economic and political interdependences (Schimmelfennig et al., 2014).
The second major explanation strand is based on the premise of an unfolding cultural and identity politics-based cleavage in the respective member state societies, which leads to a differentiation between supranationalist and more intergovernmentalist oriented groups. While this explanatory approach certainly has its legitimation, this particular academic debate often runs the risk of being a victim of an overly normatively loaded explanation attempt. Just to illustrate this, I shall refer to Tanja Boerzel (Börzel, 2016, pp. 9–10), who differentiates electorates in the group of "nationalists", who base –allegedly– their identity on an "[…]illiberal, nationalist ideas of Europe, which are exclusionary and anti-Islam.", while she characterizes the other group of "cosmopolitans" as people with "[…]Europeanized identities of EU citizens based on shared values of solidarity, liberty and humanity[…]". However, such exemplary normatively connotation –and in my opinion undifferentiated– argumentation falls short of adequately depicting the actual much more complex reality.

[23] The increasing contestation of the integration process manifested legally for the first time in the *Single European Act* (SEA), where the possibility of "opting out" (Art. 100A of SEA) was constituted. It provided the possibility for member states to not participate in a certain policy field if they signal it during the treaty's drafting process.

even in a referendum about the treaty's ratification. While the French electorate surpassed the necessary absolute majority by a very small margin, the Danish population rejected the ratification initially. Only after granting Denmark (and also the United Kingdom) the demanded "opt-out" clause concerning the accession of the European Monetary Union (EMU), the repeated vote was finally in favor of the Treaty's ratification.

The challenging ratification process also affected the integration process by slowing the EU's integration pace significantly down. The following two EU treaties, namely the *Treaty of Amsterdam* (1997) and the *Treaty of Nice* (2003), were significantly more modest in terms of the designated reallocation of competencies.

Parallel to the deaccelerated vertical integration, the EU experienced a significant extension of its membership structures. With the post-socialist Central and Eastern European states' planned accession, the EU intended its historically largest enlargement round. In contrast to the vertical integration efforts, the enlargement was accompanied by comparably unanimous support in the member states' national capitals, which finally led to these states' successful accession in 2004 and 2007.

In contrast to this, the further deepening of the integration remained contested. With the so-called *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe* (2004), the initiating governments and the European Commission (EC) planned to realize a considerable shift of competences to the supranational level and further give the treaty a symbolical constitution-like character. This, however, spiked open refusal in France and the Netherlands, where 54,7 % and 61,6 % voted against the ratification of the treaty at the held referendums. The firm refusal in these two countries finally led to the ratification process's failure, constituting a historic novelty in the EU's integration process (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, pp. 19–21). However, after the EU's enlargement in 2004, the new constellation of member states agreed to carry out another integration attempt with the *Treaty of Lisbon* (originally called "Reform Treaty"). While the new draft resembled the prior *Constitution for Europe* to a large degree, it was stripped of its highly contested constitution-like wording. Nevertheless, the ratification process was confronted by a negative voting outcome by the Irish electorate, this time as the only country holding a referendum. To overcome the Irish rejection, new opt-out clauses were granted to Dublin's government alongside already granted agreed "opt-outs" for the United Kingdom and Poland.[24] The following repeated referendum in Ireland resulted in a swing of the electorate

[24] The opt-out for Ireland was granted in the area of security and defense, ethical issues, and taxation (Protocol No. 25) and, together with the United Kingdom, in the area of freedom, security, and justice (Protocol No. 21).

towards a "yes", which paved the way for the ratification's successful closure and led to the Treaty becoming effective in December 2009.

While these granted "opt-outs" were over the years the most publicly known measures of differentiated integration, which had the aim to accommodate the reservations and criticism by the individual countries through the adaption of the treaties (Von Ondarza, 2012, p. 15), in the last thirty years the EU law-based differentiation has become a decisive element of the integration process as such. This status quo has also been increasingly politically acknowledged by the political leaders of the EU member states. In a meeting of the European Council on 27 June 2014 the heads of state and government stipulated that "[…]the concept of ever closer Union[…]", which is enshrined since the Treaties of Rome in the primary law and can be found in the Treaty of Lisbon (Article 1 TEU), "[…]allows for different paths of integration for different countries, allowing those that want to deepen the integration to move ahead, while respecting the wish of those who do not want to deepen any further." (European Council, 2014, p. 11).

The conclusions of the European Council marked an important step in terms of symbolically acknowledging the differentiation of the integration process and thus opening the subject for necessary political deliberation about the future course of the EU. However, it constitutes, at the same time the recognition of an already long manifested political and legal reality (Koenig, 2015, p. 11). Parallel to the increased supranationalization of competences, the integration process as such has become less uniform not only regarding the above-mentioned publicly well known "opt-outs", but also in various other forms within the primary (treaties) and secondary law (regulations and directives).[25] Legal differentiation can be found in nearly all EU policy fields, making it an integral part of the integration process (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 8). Illustrated in numbers, the differentiated application of EUropean law accounted alone in the time-period between 1990 and 2014, up to 267 differentiations in total. Among these, 112 are based on differentiations in the primary law, while 155 can be found in the secondary law (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 684).

Differentiations in the primary law occur in various formats. The most well-known are located in the area of the European Monetary Union, the European Banking Union, the Schengen

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Further opt-outs were given for Poland and the United Kingdom from the *Charter of Fundamental Rights*, which had the same legal validity as the treaties.

[25] While opt-outs are considered as the most well-known form of differentiated integration, particularly due to their aforementioned role as an instrument of overcoming the stalling treaty ratification processes, this instrument is, in fact, only seldomly used by the member states in comparison to other legal instruments of differentiated integration. Out of 1654 opportunities, member states resorted only in 73 cases to this particular instrument (Winzen and Schimelfennig, 2015, p. 9).

regime, the European Fiscal Compact, Area of freedom, security and justice, among several other areas (Schimmelfennig, 2016, p. 792; Winzen, 2016, p. 105).[26] The vast number of legal differentiations apply to the member states and non-members/third countries within the vertical dimension of Multi-Level Governance.

Based on the premise of realizing an external governance approach, the various legal provisions provide the instrument to extend and strengthen the bilateral relationships between third countries and the EU in a differentiated form and thus improve the political and economic cooperation like in the form of the *European Neighborhood Policy* (Regulation (EU) No 232/2014). These forms of external governance differentiation can also be realized through individual agreements or treaties like between the EU and Switzerland. Other legal provisions are constituted to further differentiate the external relations with adjacent states in the form of providing a long-term membership conditionality, for example, the *Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance* (Regulation (EU) No 231/2014) and thus provide the opportunity of a gradual association and integration into the EU (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009, pp. 797–798).[27]

Another difference between these two external governance differentiations is their temporal application (Kaiser, 2017, p. 184). While the European Neighborhood Policy is structured as differentiation of permanent nature, the latter is constituted as temporary differentiation based on the premise of eventual membership for the respective IPA countries. Similar temporary differentiation can also be found for EU member states. New EU member states are provided the opportunity to gradually adapt to the EU's internal framework conditions, such as the existing market pressures and/or regulatory obligations (e.g., competitiveness of industrial sectors, environmental standards, etc.), among others.[28] Other temporary differentiations are

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[26] The majority of legal differentiations can be found in more than 90 % of the three policy fields cases. In total, more than 40 % of legal differentiations are applied in the area of the internal market, more precisely concerning the four market freedoms, competition, and taxation rules. Approximately 32 % address the issue of free travel within the Schengen regime, while EMU is accounting for 20 % of the primary law-based differentiations (Schimmelfennig and Winzen, 2014, p. 360).

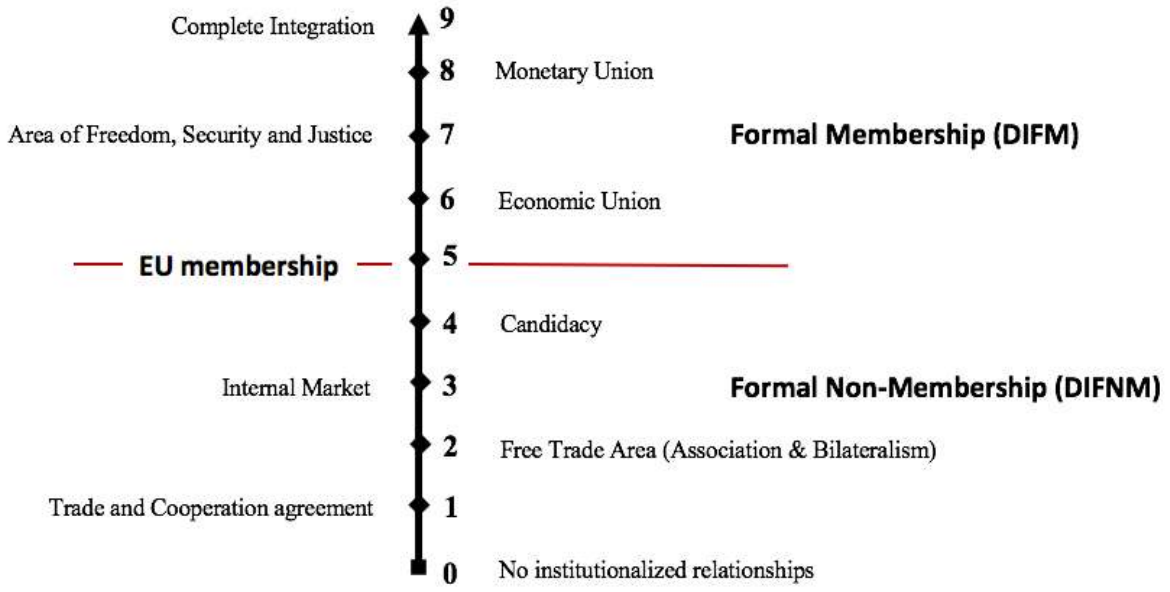
[27] Legal provisions and instruments like the IPA are constituted to realize a "preferential treatment "of third countries, which are often affected by a limited capability to comply with the various obligations which come along with an EU membership. Therefore, these countries' gradual association should ensure a structural opportunity to improve these capabilities and make these countries fit for an eventual membership (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 690).

[28] The EU accession of economically less competitive states, for example, in the enlargement rounds of 2004, 2007, and 2013, came despite the new opportunities along with various risks. The low competitiveness of domestic economic actors in the various sectors of the CEE countries was faced with the threat of being driven out of the domestic market by the new western competitors, who gained new access to the markets. As a result, these new member states were granted a transitory period for various policy sectors, in which internationalization was only carried out gradually after a predetermined number of years. This was constituted

constituted, on the other hand, to the benefit of "old" members, for example, to shield their labor markets against the influx of low-wage workers from the new member-states.[29]

This increasing legal differentiation of the integration process also has a major impact on the EU membership structure. While the binary differentiation between members and non-members/third countries maintains its validity and is still a decisive factor in legal, political, and economic integration, the membership structure underwent a massive differentiation during the last thirty years. Therefore I will maintain the classical binary differentiation as a basic analytical category and apply a further differentiated categorization with a more refined depiction of the membership structure. Therefore, I shall base my approach on Schimmelfennig's concept of graded EU memberships (Schimmelfennig, 2016). This concept will be adapted for the overarching research focus in the following.

Figure 1 Grades of EU membership as outcome of the primary and secondary law-based differentiated integration



Source: Adapted depiction based on (Schimmelfennig, 2016, p. 799)

to give the economic actors the chance to adapt to the new single market's new framework conditions (Winzen and Schimelfennig, 2015, pp. 8–9).

[29] After the Eastern Enlargement in 2004, the EU-15 members were legally allowed to restrict their labor markets' access for workforces from the new member states up to seven years. This provision was adopted to prevent a mass emigration from the new to the old member states, where a significantly higher average wage level was existing (Schimmelfennig et al., 2014, p. 19).

The adapted concept of Schimmelfennig is based on the premise that the law-based differentiation of the EU integration process leads to a diversification of the relations between the individual states and the EU. Differing levels of integration within the individual policy areas manifest in varying levels of participation for each state, resulting in the status quo. Each country has a different level of association, interdependence, and membership towards the EU. As mentioned above, each country on the European continent maintains in some way in an institutionalized relationship with the EU and can be therefore pinpointed at some grade on this scale, which shows their degree of integration into the EU. The individual grades are listed in ranked order, starting from step 0 (no institutionalized relationships) up to grade 10 (complete integration) with the scale's bifurcation at grade 5 with the formal EU membership. Therefore, the concept resembles a "ladder of integration" for the individual states, which they can climb up if they deem it a reasonable choice regarding their cost-benefit ratio (see chapter 2.2.2).
However, the ladder does not constitute any inevitability for countries regarding an "ever closer union" towards complete integration. Although many countries still pursue the aim of full integration and try to climb up the integration ladder, if endorsed by the other EU member states, other countries show contrary behavioral patterns. While, for example, as a non-member, Switzerland refrains from a further integration, member states like Poland, Ireland, or Denmark also used the opt-out instrument to refrain from a further reallocation of competencies in various policy fields. With the United Kingdom's planned leave, a member state even decided for the first time, despite the aforementioned "lock-in" effects, to significantly loosen its association with the EU, descending the integration-ladder.
While the grading of membership/association is more complex than the above depicted 10 level scale, this depiction is useful for the later analytical operationalization regarding the research purpose.
Nevertheless, it must be noted that some grades comprise a combination of several individual levels of legal differentiation. Just to give a short illustration: The association in the form of a *Free Trade Area* (Grade 2) combines two aspects of differentiated integration, namely the establishment of the bilateral relationship between EU and state either in the form of association agreements based on IPA regulation or in the form of specific bilateral treaties (e.g., with Switzerland). Although these two forms of integration are diverse, they are subsumed under one category to maintain conceptual clearness. Another such combined grade is grade 7, which

consists of the Schengen regime and other justice and home affairs policies, which are two different policy areas from a formal perspective.[30]

Therefore, each level of integration marks a concrete level of legal integration for the particular state, which comes with a bulk of rights and obligations for the individual countries. However, the space between each of these integration levels is no "empty space". Instead, it constitutes a stage that can either intentionally or unintentionally be of a temporary or permanent nature.[31] When we look at the countries' distribution on the above-depicted scale, it can be further stated that while a comparably large number of countries indeed belong to the group of completely integrated states, a broad dispersion across all grades of membership can be observed.[32] While the primary and secondary law-based differentiation of the integration process led without a doubt to a major transformation of the EU and shaped its institutional structure, this process also impacted to a large degree the subnational levels. In this differentiated structure's limelight, the LRAs had new opportunities for mobilization, which shall be outlined in the following.

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[30] This depiction of law-based differentiated vertical integration consequentially cannot depict all variations of formal association between individual states and the EU. This leads admittedly in specific cases to some conceptual "flaws" in terms of its application. In some individual cases, this constitutes a conceptual misfit like in the case of Switzerland: Although the country is formally a member of the Schengen regime and would be theoretically located at grade 7 (Area of freedom, security, and justice), it is simultaneously not a member of the EU. In economic terms, it is further associated with the EU only in the form of a Common Market (grade 3). Taking these conceptual misfits into account, the concept of Schimmelfennig provides a significant added-value nevertheless for the upcoming elaboration of the theoretical approach.

[31] To give two examples: Although granted the formal candidacy status in 1999, the EU and Turkey's accession negotiations are characterized in a stalling status due to various political tensions. Especially in the limelight of the newest political developments and violation of the rule of law principle by Turkey, it is highly unlikely that advancement will be achieved in the upcoming years. In contrast to the Turkish accession stalemate, which primarily derives from the obstruction by the EU member states, the dwelling association of Switzerland is based on the unwillingness of the government in Bern to agree on a further integration, which was repeatedly stated by the representatives in the last years that the country does not pursue a further integration in the EU.

[32] The distribution of countries on the scale is as follows: Grade 9 (Complete Integration): Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain; Grade 8 (Monetary Union): Ireland, Cyprus; Grade 7 (Area of Freedom, Security and Justice): Sweden, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland; Grade 6 (Economic Union): Denmark, United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania; Grade 5 (formal EU membership); Grade 4 (Candidacy): Albania, Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey; Grade 3 (Internal Market): Norway; Grade 2 (Free Trade Area with association and bilateralism): Bosnia and Hercegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Switzerland, Ukraine; Grade 1(Trade and Cooperation agreement): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Grade 0 (No institutionalized relationships): Kosovo; (Schimmelfennig, 2016, p. 801).

2.2.3.2. Reallocation of competencies to the subnational levels: Asymmetric mobilization of LRAs instead the anticipated "EUrope of Regions"

Before assessing the reallocation of competencies towards the subnational levels, which led to the often-stated empowerment of LRAs, it is necessary to outline the various forms of this dispersion process briefly. This is of particular importance due to the often observable overemphasis of regional mobilization and the nearly exclusive focus in some specific policy areas, while other areas are only given very limited attention. Such examples are the research concerning the net-increase of regional influence within the area of Cohesion Policy, or the concentration on the institutional extension of formal decision-making rights for LRAs.

While these research foci are without doubt very important areas of analysis within the MLG approach, such rather one-sided approaches fail to grasp the actual complexity of the dispersion process towards the LRAs. In fact "regional mobilization" will be triggered by a broad array of sources and manifests in legal, administrative, financial, institutional, or relational competencies. It can further take place either in the vertical but also in the horizontal dimension of MLG. Therefore, the mobilization and empowerment of LRAs must be consequentially not considered a monolithic process, but as a highly diversified and complex development (Bourne, 2003, p. 599). Taking this into account, it is necessary to realize a more differentiated approach regarding the outcome of the process. Hence, it is even more important to renounce the often stipulated assessment in the MLG literature, which was particularly present during the 1990s, namely that the EU has become a "Europe of regions".

This hypothesis was often based on the above-mentioned vague and overly enthusiast assumption that LRAs succeeded with their strategy of not only "[…]breaking out of the orbit of weakened states with the assistance of the EC", (Anderson, 1990, p. 417) but also transform the EU into a system, where the LRAs constitute dominant and central actors within the decision-making process (Elias, 2008, p. 488; Keating, 2008, 1999, p. 7).

These stipulated assumptions were, however, not remotely fulfilled regarding their actual empowerment. A major factor is the disregarding of the substantial heterogeneity among the LRAs. Subnational actors differ significantly regarding their territorial scope, size of the populations, and specific competencies. Some regional actors in the EU are equipped with comprehensive constitutional rights, are authorized even to collect own taxes and possess own independent budgets, have self-administration rights, have own branches of government, or are even authorized to represent themselves in the foreign policy arena partially (e.g., regions in Austria, Germany, Belgium). Other regional entities completely lack similar competencies and

are often only empowered to primarily execute duties in the central government's name (e.g., Greece, Hungary, Romania).

The highly differing attributes also result in substantial differences concerning their capabilities of being empowered within the MLG system. This derives from the fact that the mobilization of LRAs requires the allocation of already preexisting resources and the utilization of formal or informal competencies. These are, however, shaped through their role and their standing within the domestic institutional embeddedness, the availability of own financial resources, or the capability to access the arena of EU policymaking without obstruction by the national government (Auel, 2003, pp. 24–26; Bauer and Börzel, 2012, p. 255; Börzel, 2000, p. 19; Kohler-Koch, 1998c, p. 126).

The strong persisting differences between the LRAs led in the MLG debate to the new terminology of the so-called "Europe with (some) regions", which increasingly substitutes the old "Europe of regions" term over the years. While there is a certain general tendency of an ongoing decentralization among the majority of the EU member states, where the LRAs are in charge to carry out an increasing number of tasks,[33] a comprehensive mobilization effect is only observable among the already more powerful regional entities in the EU. Less powerful LRAs, on the other hand, still lack the necessary capabilities to influence the EUropean decision making or at least increase their leeway within the MLG system, which underline the above-constituted statement regarding asymmetrical empowerment of LRAs in EUrope (Elias, 2008, pp. 485–487; Kohler-Koch, 1998a, p. 232; Marks, 1997, p. 32; Piattoni, 2010, p. 28; Sturm and Bauer, 2010, p. 17).

Especially after the enlargement rounds in 2004 and 2007, the diversity between the decentralized/federal states, with comparably powerful regions, and unitary states, with regions characterized by a limited set of competencies, became even more substantial.[34] The accession of the ten countries from Central and Eastern Europe, which are almost exclusively classified as unitary in terms of their political organization, marked an overall decisive shift towards a

[33] In the last two decades, this led to the paradox situation that LRAs are generally in charge of the implementation of the majority of supranational regulation and directives, which sums up to even 70 % of all legal acts (Tatham and Bauer, 2014, p. 242). However, this additional workload was not accompanied by a parallel extension of the formal competencies, constituting a distinct misfit.

[34] Before the Eastern Enlargement, the division of powers among the EU-15 was as follows: Austria, Belgium, and Germany are categorized as federal states, while Portugal and Italy are considered as regionalized countries. Finland, France, Denmark, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom are, according to their constitutions, unitary states. They show, however, to diverging degrees trends towards decentralization of their institutional structure. The last group of states, which can be assessed as classic unitary states, are Greece, Ireland, and Luxemburg (Committee of Regions, 2017).

majority of states with a high degree of institutional centralization (Ágh, 2010, p. 7; Bauer and Börzel, 2012, p. 131). While this constituted already a contradiction towards the politically endorsed premise of the "Europe of Regions" by the former European Commissions under Jacques Delors, the intended premise to strengthen the local and regional level within the EU (European Commission, 2001, p. 10) was actively counteracted by the very same EC during the later phase of the accession process of CEE countries.

During the turn of the millennium, this led to the paradox situation that in contrast to the initially stated aim of the EC, namely to carry out the membership negotiations under the premise of supporting the states in their administrative decentralization efforts, the Commission shifted its stance and started to promote a centralized policy approach towards the governments instead (Bruszt, 2008).

This departure from the original principle was caused by strong reservations concerning the administrative capabilities of the LRAs within the respective countries. Many LRAs were often still struggling with ineffective administration procedures, corruption, or a strong degree of institutional politicization due to the various negative legacies of the communist past. In the light of the simultaneous pressure to comply with the accession conditionalities within the candidate countries in time, the EC consequentially started to nearly exclusively focus on the central governments as main administrative actors and negotiation partners. The LRAs, as a result, were widely sidelined during this process (Ágh, 2010, p. 9). This also resulted as one decisive factor in the failed comprehensive empowerment of the subnational levels, which are still characterized in the CEE region by a comparably weak role, by being equipped with only few competencies.

Another major factor that has counteracted regional and local actors' comprehensive empowerment has been the fiscal and economic crises since 2009. The massively deteriorating economic situation in the EU resulted in a massive recession within the overwhelming majority of member states, particularly for regional and local actors. Under the premise of carrying out necessary fiscal consolidation measures, the national governments pursued a recentralization of their administrative structures, which led to a reallocation of decision-making competencies to the national level. Additional public expenditure cuts were often carried out at the expense of the subnational levels, who were, before the crises, widely in charge of the financial management in various growth-friendly policy areas like education, healthcare, environmental protection, R&D, energy, or transport.[35]

[35] This financial management meant however not that the LRAs managed own financial resources. Instead the management of these budgets were in many cases based on financial transfers by the national government.

Despite the successful fiscal and economic return of these states to their pre-crisis level, half of the member state governments did not revert to decentralized fiscal structures but maintained their centralized approach.[36] This quite mixed picture concerning the fiscal autonomy of regions also continues regarding the actual decision-making competencies. While since the crisis, slight tendencies towards decentralization are observable in some EU countries (e.g, Francemost states' political organization remains unchanged (Bauer and Börzel, 2012, p. 256; Elias, 2008, p. 487).

It must be further noted that while the competence dispersion led for LRAs in some specific areas to a net-gain of power compared to the countries' pre-membership period,[37] this was, however, not unconditionally the case for all subnational actors. The mandatory compliance with the *acquis communautaire*, consisting of the accumulated legislations, legal acts, and rulings by ECJ, applied not only for the central governments but also for all public authorities. Subnational actors of new member states have no power to influence the acquis in any way, while the general decision-making procedures remain even after the accession, often beyond a decisive influence of LRAs. Regional and local actors consequentially often find themselves in a situation in which they must comply with the regulations of their respective central governments and with an additional large bulk of new supranational legal acts, which to some degree further constrain their room for action and thus counteract their regional interests (Ansell et al., 1997, p. 367; Fleurke and Willemse, 2006, p. 85; Tatham, 2014a, p. 24).

In some specific cases, central-governments managed to even get access to policy areas through the EU integration process, which were before the EU membership exclusively regional competencies (Börzel, 2000, p. 20; Carter and Pasquier, 2010, p. 301).

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[36] The subnational government expenditures increased from 2000 to 2009 by an average rate of around 2,8 % of the GDP. Subnational government expenditures peaked in 2011 with around 16 % of the GDP. With the deteriorating economic framework conditions and the resulting realization of expenditure cuts, the average rate experienced, however, a downfall back to around 8 % of the GDP in 2012 (European Commission, 2014a, pp. 143–147). Despite the stabilization of the EUropean economies and consolidation of the member state budgets, a comprehensive return to the decentralized fiscal structures did not occur. Only half of the EU member states were since then willing to re-increase the sub-national expenditures in these growth-friendly policy areas. Furthermore, a general trend is observable in the form of an increasing gap between the group of more decentralized countries, where the public expenditures remained unchanged or even increased in comparison to the pre-crisis values, and the more centralized ones, especially Hungary and the Baltic States, where the degree of fiscal centralization has further increased (European Commission, 2017b, pp. 167–169). Exceptions from this trend can be observed among the generally decentralized countries in the form of Italy, which showed a tendency towards centralization, while among the centralized counterparts Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia showed on the other hand slight tendencies towards fiscal decentralization.

[37] However, in this general analysis, it is not possible to say which particular factors led to the valorization of the LRA's role within the EU's policy processes. This can only be analyzed in the form of an individual case-based assessment (Bauer and Börzel, 2012, p. 254).

This also led among regionalist parties to quite diverging perceptions concerning the effect of EU integration for their regions. While many regionalist parties have a strong pro-integrationist stance, there are also a considerable number of parties with EU-skeptic positions or have in some cases even a clear antagonistic approach towards the EU integration (Keating et al., 2015, p. 448).

However, despite these mixed framework conditions, the integration-driven establishment of the EU's Multi-Level Governance system provided the LRAs new opportunity structures within the vertical dimension that are potentially open to being exploited. These windows of opportunity materialize either in formal and legally embedded institutional channels and participation rights or in the form of non-institutionalized alliances to exert political pressure (Getimēs et al., 2008, p. 95):

The most prominent example in this regard is the area of regional development policies, more precisely the Cohesion Policy of the EU, which is since the 1980s considered as one the most important policy area of improving the standing of LRAs within the MLG system.[38]

Besides the important role of the Cohesion Policy, the LRAs do possess the more defensively oriented legal instruments. They can bring eventual infringements of the subsidiarity principle through the Committee of Regions in front of the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

The Belgian and German regions are further entitled to represent their interest in representation of their national governments within the Council of the EU. However, this quite powerful instrument is only available for the above mentioned two regions, making it rather an "exotic exception" on the EU scale. Regional and local actors can influence the EU's legislation procedure on the institutional level through their membership within the Committee of Regions with its comprehensive advisory function. Another option is the participation in consultative committees of the European Commission or the European Parliament (e.g., through MEPs). However, these latter committees have only a consultative function. Other EUropean institutions are not obligated to comply with these bodies' recommendations, due to which the actual regional influencing power remains quite modest. Regional and local actors can, however, also become active beyond the institutional channels of the EU, namely through the establishment of own regional representations in Brussels to carry out para-diplomatic

[38] The prominence of the Cohesion Policy among LRAs is based on the consideration that the mobilization of regions directly depends on their socio-economic prosperity. The Cohesion Policy, which is constituted as the main instrument to improve the socio-economic conditions in less prosperous regions, thus experienced in the last 50 years a steady increase of the budget and an increasing political valorization also in terms of regional mobilization (Kohler-Koch, 1998c, pp. 149–150).

activities, the creation of interregional associations respectively transnational pressure groups to influence the decision-making process to their advantage (George, 2004, p. 115).

While regions thus possess a variety of potential mobilization capabilities, these opportunity structures are far from being a panacea in terms of empowerment. Instead, regions have to say "earn" their influence through active engagement and allocation of their own resources. Based on their capabilities, meaning if they are even able to afford this often resource-intensive mobilization, they must also decide whether an activity within these channels and formats can realistically bring the anticipated results (cost-benefit rationale). Experiences from the last decades show that for many regions, such "opportunity costs" were so high that a comprehensive regional mobilization within the vertical dimension was often only feasible for few well-resourced subnational actors (Elias, 2008, pp. 485–487; Kohler-Koch, 1996, p. 217).

While keeping in mind that regions use these opportunity structures to a different degree and can even fully refrain from their utilization,[39] I shall briefly outline these enumerated regional mobilization structures in more detail.

2.2.4. Excursus: Channels and forms of regional mobilization within the vertical dimension of the Multi-Level Governance system

Subsidiarity as codified political and legal principle

Since its first formal appearance during the Maastricht Treaty's drafting process, the principle of subsidiarity has become as a legal and political term an integral element in the EUropean public discourse. Although the principle is in a general historic perspective nearly as old as democracy itself,[40] its introduction into the primary law took place parallel to the increasing debates concerning the depth, scope, and future of the EU integration process. The implementation of the political and legal principle was carried out as so to say "legal guarantee" to counter the increasing publicly stated concerns by Denmark and the United Kingdom in the

[39] It must be noted that the utilization of these mobilization opportunities is not mandatory. Weak LRAs often tend to refrain from an autonomous mobilization and instead resort to a broad alliance-building with other regional counterparts from their country or the national government itself to achieve their designated goals. The central governments of federal states, on the other hand, also increasingly pursue a strong cooperation-oriented stance towards regions. This derives from the consideration of using potential synergies like especially in the area of regional development, where the respective LRAs often can provide the necessary manpower and expertise for successful implementation of general policy goals (Ansell et al., 1997, p. 368; Börzel, 2000, p. 21).

[40] Subsidiarity as an organizational principle can be traced back to the beginning of western civilization, more exactly to ancient Greece. The Greek philosophers, like Platon, Homer, and especially Aristotle, defined and refined the functional principle of subsidiarity. During the course of history, this principle did often and repeatedly find application, like in the Roman Empire (e.g., military and family law), the Catholic or Calvinist social theory (e.g., Thomas Aquinas or Pope Pius XI, Johannes Althusius), or in the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" (Gsodam, 2013, pp. 25–27).

early 1990s regarding a too far-reaching supranationalization of the integration process (Peterson, 1994, p. 124). In conjunction with the principle of proportionality, subsidiarity constitutes a programmatic maxim for *good governance* within the EU governance framework, which is based on the following premise:

> *„ When applied in the context of the European Union, the principle of subsidiarity serves to regulate the exercise of the Union's non-exclusive powers. It rules out Union intervention when an issue can be dealt with effectively by Member States at central, regional or local level and means that the Union is justified in exercising its powers when Member States are unable to achieve the objectives of a proposed action satisfactorily and added value can be provided if the action is carried out at Union level."* (European Parliament, 2017a)

The subsidiarity principle has, according to this definition, in terms of its application a protective function. It shall prevent any supranationalization that does not result in improved governance (Gsodam, 2013, p. 27). As an overarching political guideline, the principle constitutes the premise to carry out political solutions as citizen-oriented as possible. This means that political decision-making should be carried out on the lowest feasible territorial level and be as decentralized as possible in a vertical dimension. However, it should simultaneously also comply with the principle of efficiency, which must always be given priority. Due to its relatively vague definition, the subsidiarity principle was –and to some degree still is– for a long time considered widely as a "political and commonsense principle" rather than a justiciable legal term (Partan, 1995, p. 68).

As a legal principle, it was originally encoded in the EU primary law with the Maastricht Treaty (Article 3b now constituted as Art. 5 (3) TEU). It was further specified in the form of an accompanying protocol (No 2) within the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 to facilitate its judicial application.

Its self-denotation by the Protocol as "dynamic concept" and its character as an amalgam of political compromises and general statements, as well as the fuzzy set of specified legal conditions for its applicability makes it dependent on the general political framework conditions and political debate (Ritter, 2005, p. 1130; van Hecke, 2003, pp. 59–60).

While still not constituting a strong and thus effective legal term, the Treaty of Lisbon introduced, however, some substantial improvements for the LRAs. For the first time, legal applicability was extended to the local and regional actors, who are explicitly stipulated as the principle's beneficiaries (Tatham, 2014a, p. 29). The treaty brought additional beneficial innovations. Based on the new legal provisions, the so-called 'early warning mechanism' can be called upon by the Committee of Regions, as institutionalized assembly of the LRAs, and

national and regional parliaments themselves.[41] They can reason a legislative draft's non-compliance with the subsidiarity principle, putting the draft under a mandatory new review process. An even more powerful instrument was introduced with Article 8 of the adapted Protocol (No 2). Based on this provision, the CoR is empowered to bring legislations *ex-post* before the European Court of Justice (ECJ) if a breach of the subsidiarity principle occurs in the form of a violation of legally guaranteed legal and regional competences (Keating et al., 2015, pp. 455–456; Tatham, 2014a, pp. 29–30).[42] However, although this legal valorization of the subsidiarity principle constitutes a significant mobilization potential for LRAs, until today, the CoR did not resort to the use of this instrument. Therefore, it must be seen whether the new competencies will qualify indeed as strong and decisive instruments for the LRAs.

A major challenge for the effective application of the subsidiarity principle's application remains the mandatory weighing against the principle of efficiency. As a result, EUropean institutions often argue with the latter principle in case of a potential conflict, thus prioritizing it over the other. This can also be observed regarding the ECJ's communitization-oriented jurisprudence, which often acts as a distinct "motor of integration", benefitting the supranationalization of competencies. Taken this into regard, it is, therefore, highly doubtful if these new competencies accompanying the subsidiarity principle will unfold as a strong instrument for the LRAs.

Regional mobilization through regional development: The EU's Cohesion Policy

Since the end of the 19th century, regional development policies experience a constant political valorization by the European nation-states. Despite diverging approaches over the course of years each of these approaches followed the same premises: decreasing regional disparities within the state boundaries and providing basic conditions for a successful economic and social development (Fischer, 2010, p. 53). Therefore, the allocation-based development of regions fulfills a basic premise of regional mobilization, namely by improving location factors (e.g., infrastructural preconditions, etc.) or directly supporting the economic activities of individual actors, who contribute to the general prosperity of the region. Especially with the

[41] Every member state is provided with two votes in this procedure. In states with a bicameral parliamentary system, each chamber receives one vote. For the activation of the 'early warning system', at least one-third of the votes have to favor this proceeding (Art. 7 Protocol (No 2) on applying the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

[42] This process can be activated by a simple majority vote within the CoR to overcome eventual internal gridlocks, which derive from the strong internal heterogeneity within the assembly and the consequential political fragmentation between regional and local actors on the one side and political groups on the other (Carter and Pasquier, 2010, p. 301).

internationalization of the national economies, which materialized in the EU's case in a very high degree of market integration, this prior exclusively domestic area of governmental engagement became a communitized policy issue during the EUropean integration process. Subsumed under the term of *Cohesion Policy,* the issue of regional development experienced a continuous valorization by the EU institutions, the member states, and the LRAs alike. Cohesion Policy is, therefore, a quite contested policy area. Each level is committed to cooperation but is also eager to influence the framework conditions to its benefit (Benz, 2000b, p. 149).

Over the years, this also resulted in the changing nature of the classic Cohesion Policy. For several decades it was a strictly top-down and intergovernmental oriented policy area located in the MLG system's vertical dimensions. Since the end of the 1980s, the classic vertical decision-making is complemented and, to some degree, even substituted by new polyarchic governance structures, which are typical for the decision-making within the horizontal MLG dimension. This qualifies the area of Cohesion Policy as a hybrid policy area with embeddedness in both MLG dimensions. To what extent the governance structure is located more in one or the other dimension depends on the degree of administrative decentralization within the respective EU member states and the mobilization capabilities of the LRAs (Committee of the Regions, 2015a, p. 16).

The initial years (1958-1988) of the EU Cohesion Policy as intergovernmental "pork-barrel politics" (Bachtler et al., 2013, p. 14)

The beginning of a genuine Cohesion Policy within the EUropean framework can be traced back to the Treaty of Rome in 1958, which introduced in the follow up the European Social Fund as the first regional development instrument (Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p. 5). Since the beginning, the focus was on decreasing regional disparities in and between the EU member states. Especially in the case of Italy with its substantial economic north-south divide, Cohesion Policy was already at that time a salient issue.

Overall, regional development remained on the EUropean level until the accession-negations of Ireland, Denmark, and the United Kingdom in the early 1970s quite a "niche topic". However, it gained new impetus with the accession of these new member states. Especially the debate concerning a substantial financial increase of the Cohesion Policy budget gained new momentum in the following (Piattoni, 2008, p. 79). Besides the distinct calls for increased funding, first proposals were issued on the supranational level to communitize this still intergovernmentally led policy area. The so-called "Werner report" in 1970 argued, for example, that this upward scaling of competencies would be a fundamental precondition for further economic integration, especially concerning the planned creation of the European

Monetary Union (EMU) (Bachtler et al., 2013, p. 31). The demand for supranationalization, as well as the increase of the budget, faced, however, initially firm reservations by countries like Belgium and especially the Federal Republic of Germany as "paymaster" of the Cohesion Policy, who were not willing to make substantial concessions (Bache, 1998, p. 39; McAleavey and Rynck, 1997, p. 10).

This resulted in a twofold development. The Cohesion Policy experienced a political valorization and received an own community budget in the shape of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 1975. However, the allocation of resources was strictly based on intergovernmental decision-making and was furthermore established on fixed national quotas.[43] Additional reforms followed a few years later with the looming end of the "Oil crises" and the advancement of plans concerning the European Single Market's realization.

In 1979 and 1984, several new changes were introduced. Besides the budgetary increase of the ERDF budget by more than 50 % in only one year (1978-79), the intergovernmental distribution mechanism started to be substituted by a new allocation mechanism based on indicative ranges.[44] These were complemented by introducing a non-quota based budget section (accounting for 5 % in 1979 and 20 % in 1984 of the ERDF budget) and an extension of the ECs competencies in the selection process. In contrast to the apparent competence dispersion to the benefit of the supranational institutions, LRAs and non-governmental actors remained in the meantime widely or fully excluded from the decision-making (Bache, 1998, pp. 54–65; Bachtler et al., 2013, pp. 30–31, 2013, p. 39).

The reforms of 1988 as a landmark for LRAs

Despite the continuous increase of the funds, the Cohesion Policy was generally perceived as highly ineffective. Aggravated regional disparities on the EUropean level, especially after Greece and Spain's accession, led to growing concerns regarding the planned establishment of the Single Market and the creation of the European Monetary Union in the long run (Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p. 13). While the Commission criticized the insufficient and opaque funding

[43] The member states agreed on 1.3 billion ECUs as an initial budget for the ERDF (1975-1978), constituting 5 % of the overall community budget. In the following years, this was continuously increased to 3.098 billion ECUs, accounting for 8.8 % of the overall budget by 1986. However, instead of constituting the allocations on particular national/regional needs, the distribution of these resources was realized in the form of fixed and prior intergovernmentally negotiated national shares of the budget. This resulted in the paradox situation that some of the prosperous regions were eligible for higher funding than their counterparts with significantly lower per capita GDP, leading to substantial distortions in the policy area (Bache, 1998, p. 42; Bachtler et al., 2013, p. 41; Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p. 10; Piattoni, 2008, p. 74).

[44] With the new reforms, member states were obliged to submit annual statistical reports to the EC concerning the measures' success. The Commission reviewed these according to the prior constituted community guidelines.

mechanisms, the member states, especially the more prosperous ones, were strongly endorsing the realization of the Single Market and were therefore ready not just to increase the funds, but were also for the first time willing to approve of substantial competence reallocations.[45]

The consequence was a trade-off that materialized one the one hand in the Single European Act (SEA) with the introduction of the European Single Market, and on the other hand, in the major reform of the Cohesion Policy in 1988 (Regulation (EEC) 2052/88).[46]

With the newly implemented principle of *partnership,* the former exclusively intergovernmental policy competencies were further reallocated to the supranational and for the first time also to the local and regional level (Bache and Jones, 2000, p. 2). This competence dispersion and consequential involvement of LRAs in the decision-making process were groundbreaking. It resulted in establishing the horizontal MLG dimension within the Cohesion Policy and provided LRAs –and private actors– for the first time the structural opportunity to become active as more or less independent players within the Cohesion Policy (Kopp-Malek, 2008, p. 151). However, the accompanying euphoria among the actors lasted not for long. Due to the unexpected and abrupt top-down-based allocation of competencies to the LRAs, who were characterized by substantial differences in terms of their administrative capabilities, particularly the smaller and less competitive entities, were often overwhelmed by their new tasks (Bache, 1998, p. 96). The extensive involvement of LRAs was further limited to some phases of the newly reformed Cohesion Policy's allocation-process. While LRAs were in

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[45] The member states' general aim advocating the establishment of the Single Market was based on the motivation to achieve further integration of their economies and thus created positive economic externalities. With the accession of Greece and Spain, whose membership was strongly characterized by geostrategic considerations (integration of post-dictatorial systems as an instrument of democratization), the aim of creating a cohesive Single Market became increasingly difficult. With both countries' accession, the number of people in the EU doubled who were living in regions, which had a GDP per capita of less than 50 % of the community average. This also spiked debates about the so-called 'Golden Triangle'. Critics stated that peripheral regions ran the risk of being excluded from the benefits of the Single Market and Cohesion Policy, while already more competitive regions would become even more the main-beneficiaries of the policies. In anticipation of the aforementioned positive externalities and planned increase of the funds, not only the patrons of a more bottom-up oriented approach were in favor of the reforms, but member states, who before rejected such reforms, were in this limelight also interested in more effective coordination of funding. This was hoped to be achieved through a place-based and bottom-up oriented management together with LRAs on the one hand, complemented by a technocratic and interventionist overseeing of the processes by the EU institutions on the other (Bache, 1998, pp. 67–69; Bachtler et al., 2013, p. 18).

[46] Besides the involvement of LRAs, a major increase of the Cohesion Policy budget was adopted by the member states, which reached in 1993 ECU 14 billion, constituting around 25 % of the general EU budget. Additionally, four new complementary principles were introduced: 1) *Concentration* of the majority of available funds in the areas with the largest territorial disparities based on new index-based monitoring mechanisms; 2) *Multi-annual programming* to realize a more strategic approach concerning Cohesion Policy measures; 3) *Partnership* with the new involvement of LRAs in the process; 4) *Additionality* to prevent the misuse of community funding as a substitution for national programs by the member state governments (Bache, 1998, pp. 70–79).

charge of implementing and monitoring activities, the drafting and programming procedure remained mainly by the member states or was coordinated by the EC (Bachtler et al., 2013, pp. 21–22).[47] Centralized unitary states or smaller countries (e.g., Portugal) were furthermore resisting this decentralization attempt or were only willing to carry out superficial domestic administrative changes, thus maintaining a firm top-down oriented policy approach within the area of Cohesion Policy (Bache and Jones, 2000; Bache and Olsson, 2001, p. 233; Bailey and De Propris, 2002, p. 305).

New reforms in 1993 and 1999: Backshift of competences to the nation-states

In the aftermath of the 1988 reforms, many observers noted that the partnership principle was, despite its groundbreaking character, insufficiently realized regarding its actual application (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 85). This also spiked new debates concerning further reforms, which became especially salient with the looming plans to establish the Economic Monetary Union (EMU), which was considered a substantial step towards a comprehensive market integration. To further adapt the Cohesion Policy, major reforms were carried out in 1993 and 1999, which also lead in the given period to a doubling of the respective Cohesion Policy budget (Bachtler et al., 2013, p. 49; Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p. 16). The budget increase was accompanied by a significant streamlining of the decision-making process, complemented by an extension of the *partnership* principle to non-governmental actors in 1993, which led the LRAs to a substantial loss of their newly attained influence.[48] The streamlining measures were also extended to the supranationally managed Community Initiatives, which were criticized by the member states as bureaucratic, cost-intensive and too many in numbers. The consequence was a reduction of the Community Initiative's share from the Cohesion Policy budget, namely first to 9 % in 1993 and five years later to 5.35 %. The number of programs was simultaneously reduced from thirteen to four and then to three programs. The management of the Community

[47] During the negotiation process concerning the so-called Community Support Framework (CSF), as a strategic document, which defined the specific objectives and constituted, therefore, the basis for the operational programs, were within the smaller EU countries (e.g., Greece, Portugal) completely carried out with the exclusion of the LRAs (Bache, 1998, pp. 94–95).

[48] The partnership principle's reform was carried out under the premise to improve the democratic accountability of the Cohesion Policy by extending the partnership to non-governmental actors. However, this meant a substantial devaluation of the LRAs role, which lost their special role as sole partners of the national governments within the Cohesion Policy. The role of the LRAs was additionally weakened by the merger within the Community Support Framework (CSF), where some LRAs had at least a partial influence during the drafting process, and the Operational Programs (OP), which was negotiated by the EC and the member states on an intergovernmental level. With the new Single Programming Document, the influence of the LRAs was weakened, while the national governments again extended their influence (Bache and Olsson, 2001, p. 214; Bachtler et al., 2013, p. 24; Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p. 16).

Initiatives was additionally put under oversight by the member states in the form of the newly established "Committee for the Community Initiatives" (Bachtler et al., 2013, pp. 53–54).

This partially re-diminished role of the subnational actors was further aggravated with the following reform in 1999, which was already realized in the limelight of the CEE countries' looming accession. Being aware of the enormous increase of administrative tasks, which would come along with the EU's enlargement by 12 member states, the Commission further continued its streamlining efforts and also prepared its partial withdrawal from the implementation processes of the Cohesion Policy (Bache and Olsson, 2001, p. 235; Kopp-Malek and Lackowska, 2011, p. 159). The EC also departed from its initial strategy constituted at the beginning of the 1990s and ended its endorsement of administrative structures' institutional decentralization within the CEE countries.

Around the millennium turn, the EC was increasingly concerned about the widely inefficient and ill-working administrative structures in many CEE countries, particularly regarding their future management of the Cohesion Policy funds.[49] Instead of involving the LRAs in the accession negotiations, the EC continued the negotiations nearly exclusively with the central governmental level.[50] This was also complemented by a general shift of the EC's stance concerning the originally supported institutional decentralization of the candidate countries. Centralized government structures in most of the CEE candidates were in the following not just accepted but actively promoted by the EC with the premise to ensure effective absorption of

[49] The post-socialist CEE countries were affected by the decades of the communist ruling, which was characterized by a highly centralized and ineffective administrative structure from an institutional point of view. The regional and local levels were often functioning in a 'dual subordination' to party and state bodies and were consequentially used as sheer tools to exercise political power, while the actual administrative tasks remained widely on the central level. This resulted in the situation that administrative bodies from the regional and local level were after the system transition lacking the necessary capabilities and were often still affected by intrinsic clientelism and nepotism, which in several CEE countries led to their disempowerment or even full dissolution (Scherpereel, 2010, pp. 49–50). These persisting structural deficiencies gave reason for concern among the member states and the EC, especially regarding the prospective successful absorption and management of the Cohesion Policy funds. Being aware of the already forthcoming considerable enlargement-costs, especially in the area of the Structural Policies, the EC decided to endorse a streamlining of administrative structures in the respective states (Bailey and De Propris, 2002, p. 309; Downes, 1996, p. 269).

[50] This resulted in a very centralized approach towards the management of the Cohesion Policy programs. In the countries, the programs were either directly managed by the central government offices (Hungary), the national finance ministries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), or by regional development ministries (Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia), which were also located on the national level and were directly depending from the central government. Regional authorities were mostly involved during the actual implementation cycle and were only empowered to do so in some of the CEE countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland). Only 1.5 % of the overall available Cohesion Policy resources were as a result directly managed by LRAs in the CEE region, which was a sharp difference to the EU-15, where these actors managed more than 71 % of the funds (Bachtler et al., 2014, p. 749; Scherpereel, 2010, pp. 53–54).

the structural funds after their accession (Bauer and Börzel, 2012, p. 256; Bruszt, 2008, p. 616; Hughes et al., 2004; Keating, 2008, p. 631).

Cohesion Policy after the Eastern Enlargement (2007-)

The enlargement rounds in 2004 and 2007 induced a massive rise of regional disparities between the old and new member states. As a consequence, the Cohesion Policy funding was increased to EUR 347 billion and constituted 35,7 % of the whole EU budget for the MFF 2017-2013. To increase the geospatial impact and decrease the substantial imbalances, the financial resources were strongly concentrated on the CEE region. This was accompanied by a new policy architecture, which replaced the previous policy objectives with three new strategic goals, based on the premises of 1) Convergence 2) Regional Competitiveness and 3) Territorial Cooperation (Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p. 19).

The consequence was again a twofold development. The issue of Regional Cross-Border Governance gained with the formal valorization of Territorial Cooperation a new impetus by adding a distinct cross-border dimension to the cohesion goals (see chapter 2.3). However, in other policy areas, the firm grip of central governments was further strengthened. National authorities were, for example, able to increase their autonomy in the drafting-process of their Operational Programs. Additionally, they were further granted the competency to designate the eligibility of areas under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective. [51] Parallel to this the EC proceeded with its functional shift from an interventionist and content-shaping entity to a more strategic, controlling, and overseeing entity.[52]

To further maintain the constituted *partnership* principle, the guideline to involve LRAs and non-governmental actors during the whole decision-making process was emphasized by the EC

[51] The Operational Programs, which had to be submitted by the member states to the EC and had to outline the national priorities regarding the regional development policies, provided in accordance with the new guidelines more flexibilities for the member states. The new guidelines constituted lower requirements in terms of their richness of detail and had, in general, a more strategic character. Specific rules for the funding eligibility of regions were also constituted primarily by the national level in compliance with the provisions of the supranational level. These new guidelines gave the member states significantly more flexibility in regard to their financial management or the implementation of the programs, thus strengthening their role during the program cycles (Kopp-Malek and Lackowska, 2011, p. 159).

[52] The Commission's approach shifted during the years significantly. Starting after 1988 with a very pro-active role, the EC focused in general on regulatory compliance (1989-93). After the reforms of 1993, a decisive shift occurred from the pro-active stance to a more controlling role, focusing on financial inputs, monitoring, and auditing activities (1994-2006). The focus on audit and control also increased during the next MFF (2007-2013), with the institution becoming less involved in other areas of the Cohesion Policy (from 2006). This withdrawal from 'the operational business' became necessary especially due to the significant enlargement of the EU in the meanwhile, which increased the range of tasks significantly for the EC and forced the institution to concentrate its activities (Bachtler et al., 2013, pp. 25–26; Kopp-Malek and Lackowska, 2011, p. 168; Manzella and Mendez, 2009, pp. 22–23).

in several documents. This emphasis was constituted, for example, within the newly established *Common Provisions Regulation* for all Regional Policy areas or the specifically drafted a *European Code of Conduct on Partnership* (European Commission, 2014b, p. 5). However, this premise was relativized again in the documents by the reference that the particular involvement of the *partners* should be carried out in compliance with the institutional and legal framework of the member states. This, however, actually results in most cases in their comprehensive involvement during some phases of the allocation-process, namely, foremost during the implementation and monitoring phase.

While the EC's stance remained widely ambiguous regarding the general LRA involvement, various unitary states realized an institutional decentralization on their own. This manifested in the area of Cohesion Policy in the quite active additional involvement of the LRAs in the programming process (Bruszt, 2008, pp. 617–619). [53]

Regarding the LRA competencies, the EC further continues its strong rhetoric emphasis on the premise of equal treatment between subnational public and private actors. This will be underlined by the institution with the statement that LRAs would be in general "[…]overrepresented at the expense of the general public society and the social and economic partners." (European Commission, 2016a, p. VIII). The EC's statement indicates that it pursues a further departure from the original approach of granting the LRAs a unique and special status within the decision-making procedure.

The only partial success of LRAs to successfully achieve a mobilization within the Cohesion Policy is, however, not only caused by the EU's framework conditions but by endogenous factors. As the Committee of Regions correctly states, many LRAs, especially the smaller ones, still do not have the necessary financial or administrative capacities to engage successfully within all Cohesion Policy cycles. Especially in the aftermath of the fiscal and economic crises, with the already mentioned recentralization measures by various national governments, the LRAs are, as a result, still unable to manage the programs by themselves or are even unable to pre-finance projects due to a lack of capabilities (Committee of the Regions, 2015a, pp. 145–146). For a long time, the CEE countries and their LRAs struggled with poor absorption rates concerning the Cohesion Policy funds, which only improved during the last MFF (2014-2020).

[53] Among the CEE countries who joined the EU in 2004/2007, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia underwent a significant institutional decentralization process in the past two decades. This also resulted in a substantial increase of the LRA's self-government capabilities (Committee of the Regions, 2015a, p. 144; European Commission, 2014a, p. 173; Scherpereel, 2010, p. 56).

When taking a concluding look at the Cohesion Policy concerning the overall mobilization of the LRAs, the following can be stated: while LRAs over the years were granted with a significant window of opportunity to mobilize in the area of Cohesion Policy, the expectations concerning their comprehensive empowerment were not fulfilled. Member states instead successfully managed to remain the gatekeepers within this particular policy area. This resulted in the situation that some countries, which are generally more open to an administrative decentralization (e.g., federal or regionalized states) allowed, facilitated, and actively supported the mobilization of the LRAs. In contrast, unitary states, especially the centralized ones, maintained a firm grip over this policy area, limiting subnational actors' role to a quite limited degree.

From interregional associations to the institutional representation of regional and local interests on the EUropean level

Interregional associations

The label of interregional co-operation suffers within the EU framework from a strong terminological fuzziness. Besides using various denotations in the academic debate, which basically describes the same phenomena,[54] it is necessary to outline the basic perimeters of this form of regional mobilization and distinguish it from the cross-border initiatives (Keating, 1998, p. 180). In contrast to the phenomena of Regional Cross-Border Governance (see chapter 2.4), located in the horizontal dimension of the MLG system, these associations are located in the vertical dimension and strictly pursue lobbying activities across the given jurisdictions to influence the decision-making on the EUropean level.

In contrast to the –below outlined– *paradiplomatic* activities of individual LRAs, these associations are often characterized through their nature as one collective body in which regional and local authorities voice their common interests and problems in a joint and coordinated approach (Weyand, 1997, p. 167). While interregional associations all have the common goal of extending the influence of the respective LRAs within the EUropean arena, the individual associations show substantial differences concerning their structural setup, legal nature, degree of institutionalization, and their specific aims. For example, their aims can be either aligned around specific geospatial challenges or aim at sectoral policy issues (Bomberg

[54] Aside from the denotation as interregional associations, scholars call this phenomenon of regional mobilization also 'trans-regional networks', 'inter-subnational networks', or 'networks of regional cooperation' (Trobbiani, 2016, p. 25).

and Peterson, 1998, p. 229).[55] Due to their nature as interest associations, these organizations have to face severe competition by other advocacy groups (e.g., NGOs and other interest groups), which often materializes only in a comparably limited success of influencing the EU decision-making. There are two exceptional groups among the associations, which are due to their successes and because of the research focus worth to be separately mentioned in this brief chapter.

Functioning as an umbrella organization for cross-border regions, *the Association of European Border Regions* (AEBR) constitutes since its establishment in 1971 an important instrument in agenda-setting and advocating cross-border issues. One of its main achievements was the realization of the first Interreg *program*, which was realized by the EU in collaboration with the AEBR. After the initiation of Interreg, the AEBR experienced a considerable increase in its role as the mouthpiece of the cross-border regions in the first years of the program's existence (Tömmel, 1998, p. 76). Although various newer institutions like the Committee of Regions are actively co-representing cross-border issues on the EU level, the AEBR constitutes with its membership of more than 100 cross-border regions, still a decisive player in this regard. Besides providing networking opportunities for political decision-makers of the cross-border regions, the organization further contributes to the general CBC debate with comprehensive expert-knowledge on a regular basis (Association of European Border Regions, 2009; Ramirez, 2010).[56]

While the AEBR is advocating a very narrow and specific range of regional issue, the Assembly of European Regions (AER) was at the time of its establishment in 1985 for a long time with 107 members the most representational forum for general regional matters in the EU (Richardson and Mazey, 2015, p. 454). Shortly after its founding, the AER emphasized several regional matters and formulated distinct demands towards the nation-states and the EU. The call for inserting the principle of subsidiarity in the primary law, the opening up of the Council to the regional level representatives, or the creation of an own institutionalized regional body of regions are in this regard the most prominent demands. Especially in the run-up to the Maastricht Treaty, the AER experienced its heydays as an interest representation of the regions

[55] To mention a few: Assembly of European Regions (AER), Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Conference of Peripheral Maritime Authorities, Association of European Regions of Industrial Technology (RETI), Four Motors, Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power (REGLEG), or the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN), and many more.

[56] These expert opinions range from addressing sectoral issues (e.g., the economic barrier effect of borders, environmental protection issues, infrastructural issues) to general debates concerning the status quo and the future of border-regions in the EU's framework.

advocating several demands successfully. As such, the principle of subsidiarity was, as requested, enshrined within the Maastricht Treaty. Even more importantly, the Committee of Regions was founded in 1994, which constituted one of the highest priorities for the AER members (Borras-Alomar et al., 1994; Jeffery, 1997a, p. 166).

However, in the Maastricht Treaty's aftermath, the AER was faced with a rapidly decreasing influence. With the CoR being put in place, the AER lost not only its "unique selling point" as an advocate of regional and local interests but was also struck by a substantial internal dissent between the more powerful regions on the one side and the weaker ones on the other, which became increasingly salient in the following years. This dissent peaked finally in the establishment of the new format of the *European Regions with Legislative Power* (REGLEG) who started to pursue an own agenda for their regions, while the AER faced a severe prolonging crisis of its own (Borras-Alomar et al., 1994; Jeffery, 1997a, p. 166; Keating, 1998, p. 179).

European Committee of Regions

The Committee of Regions as a new institutionalized EUropean assembly of local and regional entities, and so to say successor of the AER, faced in 1994 an intense political dispute among the public actors. The demand of LRAs for a more active institutional involvement was faced by strong reservations among the member states, who considered any regional body as an additional complication of the decision-making process. Further reservations persisted, particularly concerning the eventual interests of the regions. National governments were concerned that LRAs would try to use the CoR as an instrument to bypass their member states as a gatekeeper by trying to directly influence the policy process (Domorenok, 2009, p. 145). This resulted in the limitation of the CoR's competencies already from the beginning and constrained its influence to a sheer advisory role (Carroll, 2011, p. 341). The original aim of the regions, namely to establish the CoR as "guardian of subsidiarity", was, as a result, not even remotely fulfilled. Even with the Lisbon Treaty and the newly upgraded competencies, the CoR is only partially able to succeed in this role.

However, as an advisory body, the CoR is entitled to issue so-called "opinions" during the EUropean legislative process. It can state its particular perspective as representative of the LRAs. The Council and the Commission are always obliged to consult the CoR if the legal act concerns local or regional matters.[57] These institutions consider the CoR's opinion and refer to

[57] This mandatory consultation applies to the policy areas of education, vocational training and youth (Article 165 TFEU), culture (Article 167 TFEU), public health (Article 168 TFEU), trans-European transport, telecommunications energy networks (Article 172 TFEU), economic and social cohesion (Articles 175, 177 and 178 TFEU) (European Parliament, 2017b).

it in their statement by justifying their course of action (Carroll, 2011, p. 350). However, in contrast to their actual legal obligation, only the EC consistently drafted follow-up documents, in which it explained its motives to the CoR (Domorenok, 2009, p. 154). Aside from the compulsory consultations, the CoR is entitled to issue opinions regarding any legislative acts. While it is not hesitant to use this opportunity,[58] other EU institutions are not obliged to consider these in their decisions. In more than 40 % of the drafted non-compulsory opinions, the stance of the CoR will be completely ignored by the other institutions (Hönnige and Panke, 2013, p. 453).

As in the beginning of the sub-chapter briefly mentioned, the CoR received with the Treaty of Lisbon the competency to activate the 'early warning procedure'. Thus, it is empowered to demand that the EU institutions involved in the legislative procedure have to review the legal act if a breach of the subsidiarity principle occurred. The CoR has further the right to question the EC, the EP, and the Council if they fail to consider its compulsory opinion[59] concerning a legislative draft. It can further demand a second mandatory consultation if the legal proposal was significantly changed during the legislative process.

An even more powerful instrument is the CoR's new competency to bring a legislative act *ex-post* in front of the ECJ if a breach with the subsidiarity principle took place and was not fixed during the legislative process. However, it remains to be seen if and how the CoR will use these new and still unused instruments to strengthen its influence on behalf of the local and regional level within the legislative process (Keating et al., 2015, p. 455).

While the competencies of the CoR were continuously upgraded over the last three decades, the heterogeneous composition of its membership structure still poses a major challenge for the functionality of this institution. As an assembly, which consists of 350 representatives of regional and local public authorities, the debates are often characterized by significantly diverging interests among the members. These differences can be summed up in five distinct "divides", which persist among the actors: regional vs. local levels of government, executive regionalism vs. deliberative regionalism, northern vs. southern regions, dissent between

[58] While the EU institutions are obliged to acknowledge and consult with the CoR in a variety of policy areas, the body is very active in also issuing various optional opinions. In the period between 1996 and 2002, the optional contributions outnumbered the obligatory ones by nearly three to one. Among the issued 91 opinions, 60 were optional, 19 were fully based on their own initiative, and only 21 were mandatory (Carroll, 2011, p. 346).

[59] The policy areas in which compulsory consultation of the CoR is necessary during the legislative process was, in 2009, further extended through the addition of the area of civil protection, energy, climate change, and services of general interest (Tatham, 2014a, p. 29).

national delegations, and dissent between political groups based on ideological cleavages (Brunazzo and Domorenok, 2008, p. 438; Keating, 1998, p. 171).

While the CoR maintained its ability to generate clear voting outcomes with one-third of the votes even being unanimous (Brunazzo and Domorenok, 2008, pp. 435–436), the often issued opinions are based on the lowest common denominator of its members, often resulting in comparably bland statements (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 82). In this regard, the most salient issue is the particularly perceivable dissent between regional and local actors, who often have a strongly diverging perspective and anticipation towards regional policies of the EU.[60] Both groups face however also internal dissent. This dissent is particularly between the larger, more prosperous, and thus more powerful, regional and local actors on the one side (e.g., regions in federal states/the capital and metropolitan cities) and the weaker counterparts with more limited financial or decision-making capabilities (e.g., regions in centralized unitary states or small peripheral municipalities with weak economic performance) on the other.

Although this membership structure was originally realized to involve the broad variety of subnational actors and thus include also countries with a distinct institutional focus on the local level (e.g., UK, Ireland, Greece, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden, Finland) (Loughlin, 1997, p. 157), the asymmetric membership structure led together with the still limited competencies of the CoR to disenchantment and a deprioritization of the institution among some regions. Besides the continuously dropping attendance-rates over the years, various regions either lost their interest already at a very early phase of the CoR's existence or decreased their initial strong political endorsement over time (Carroll, 2011, p. 343; Reilly, 1997, p. 138).[61]

Representation of LRAs within the Council of the EU

The Council of the EU introduced with the Maastricht Treaty for the ministers of regional governments the opportunity to participate within the body as representatives of their nation-states and even vote on behalf of the national governments (now Article 16 (2) TEU). While this constitutes decisive potential concerning the empowerment of regions within the institutional framework of the EU, this opportunity is strongly restricted only to regions from federal states, which are not only constitutionally legitimized but have the explicit approval and

[60] This materializes in open contradictions like how to tackle urbanization tendencies, where regions are often in favor of a decentralized policy approach, while metropolitan cities, as most dominant actors of the local level, often want to strengthen the agglomeration effects to their benefit further.

[61] Especially the very influential German "Länder" supported the CoRs activities in the beginning with political "heavyweights" like the Prime Ministers Erwin Teufel (Baden-Wurttemberg), Edmund Stoiber (Bavaria), Johannes Rau (North Rhine-Westphalia) as representatives of their regions within the body (Loughlin, 1997, p. 160). However, this high-level political endorsement decreased over time, often resulting in the region's representation by ministerial or even parliamentarian deputies in the last years.

support of the national governments (Bauer and Börzel, 2012, p. 257). This, however, reduces the number of potentially participating regional actors down to regions from Austria, Germany, and Belgium, where the provinces or the regions have exclusive decision-making competencies in several policy areas. Besides these "usual suspects", some Italian regions or autonomous provinces (e.g., South Tyrol, Trento, Aosta Valley), the Spanish Autonomous Communities, the devolved governments within the UK (e.g., Scotland) would also, in theory, be entitled to represent their country within these policy areas. However, in contrast to these potential *de jure* rights, these enumerated regions' actual involvement can only very seldomly be observed (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 83; Tatham, 2011, p. 59).

The German "Länder" on the other hand, utilized this opportunity due to their firm constitutional empowerment in a very active way. Regional actors are commissioned on behalf of the "Bundesrat", the provincial governments' parliamentarian chamber, to represent the German regional level's interest. This applies to policy areas, where the federal constitution explicitly empowers them. Beyond this formal involvement, the Länder and the German federal government actively consult and cooperate in a broad range of policy areas where the subnational level's interests or competencies are touched upon. The principle of strict compliance further characterizes the cooperation between the two levels. If a regional delegation represents Germany's federal government, they must not act in any way against the interests of the federal government in the Council (Bullmann, 1997, p. 16).

The appearance of *paradiplomacy* as new instrument of regional and local interest representation

The new opportunity to engage on the supranational level, led to the new approach by LRAs, who began to formulate and promote their political interests and aims independently on the EU level. The LRAs started to establish their own representations in Brussels, beginning with the liaison office of the city of Birmingham (United Kingdom) in 1984 (Kettunen and Kull, 2009, p. 120). Many regions and municipalities followed, which triggered a downright "run to Brussels" with currently more than 200 existing offices/representations (CoR.eu 2017). Although the economic and fiscal crises starting from 2009 led to severe budget cuts on the subnational levels and caused a slight interim decrease of regional representations, the number of such offices is in the last years on the rise again. This derives from the fact that this form of regional interest representation, which is called in the academic literature *paradiplomacy*[62], is

[62] Although regions and local entities' activities resemble the traditional patterns of classic diplomacy in many ways, there are substantial differences. Despite the establishment of their own representations/offices, the LRAs, in most cases, do not have similar diplomatic accreditations like their national governments. Instead, the more

still regarded as one of the most important vertical political mobilization vehicles by LRAs (Tatham and Thau, 2014, p. 271).

The motivation for LRAs to establish a representation in Brussels and to engage in paradiplomatic activities is based on several considerations. Foremost it is a unique opportunity for LRAs to prove their newly attained procedural "autonomy" within the MLG system by realizing their own and autonomous (para-)diplomatic activities (Studinger, 2013, pp. 63–65). Concerning the scope and intensity of such activities, a basic rule can be stated: The stronger the regional/local identity of an LRA, the more it is willing to establish and maintain an own – costly – representation (Blatter et al., 2008, p. 467; Studinger, 2013, p. 91). With the establishment of a representation, LRAs hope to not only symbolically "represent themselves" towards other actors through self-marketing activities[63], but they are also eager to influence political and economic decisions on the EU level to improve their situation. Paradiplomatic activities of LRAs often focus on the policy area of Cohesion Policy. Especially the economically more prosperous LRAs consider the policy area as a very important window of opportunity to maintain or even to further increase the funding for their regions and thus strengthen their economic competitiveness and by that their structural capabilities (Donas and Beyers, 2013, p. 6; Studinger, 2013, p. 49). Although the poorer LRAs would be naturally more interested in lobbying for adequate structural funding, they often lack the adequate funding to maintain a regional representation in Brussels, which thus limits their activities in this regard (Donas and Beyers, 2013, p. 15; Tatham, 2014b, p. 353).

Aside from being used as a lobbying instrument, regional representations also function as "eyes and ears" of the regions and cities (Blatter et al., 2008, p. 468), who often face a substantial information-deficit compared to their national governments concerning political developments in the EU.[64] This deficit constitutes a significant handicap in influencing the decision-making

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powerful LRAs possess the right to participate individually or collectively in the embassy of the nation-state in Brussels. While even these powerful entities are strictly embedded within the "shadow of hierarchy" of their nation-states, their less powerful counterparts do not possess similar diplomatic accreditations. They have to resort to either domestic influencing of the national government or to regular "lobbying" activities on the EU level to influence the supranational institutions to their advantage. In the latter case, they are, however, in very heavy competition with the huge number of interest representations (NGOs, lobby groups, interest associations, etc.), which are also active within the "Brussels bubble" and try to influence decision-making (Mast, 2013, p. 138; Moore, 2008, pp. 522–524; Tatham, 2014b, pp. 356–357, 2013, pp. 66–67).

[63] The maintenance of the regional profile is an important aspect not just in terms of political networking but also in attracting potential investors towards the own region/city. Especially with the increasing volume of FDIs and the increasing development of economic cluster-regions and the synergic agglomeration effects, such PR activities have become in the last decades a very important area of engagement for regions and thus also for their representations (Jeffery, 1997b, p. 195).

[64] Especially the German "Länder" stated since the early days of EU integration their critique that the federal governments would only inform them in a very insufficient way concerning developments on the EUropean

process and weakens their role within the domestic political arena, making the activities in this regard even more important (Studinger, 2013, pp. 21–22).

A main task for the representations is to gain access to new sources of information (e.g., through networking), the gathering and filtering of these information, and finally the forwarding of them in the form of reports to their respective governments (Mast, 2013, p. 137).

Although the bulk of academic literature is considering paradiplomacy as an instrument of the LRAs to "bypass" the national governments and strengthen the relationships with supranational institutions, national and regional governments work in many cases together to gain a stronger political impact on EU decisions. This phenomenon is even more present after the EU enlargement in 2004/2007 due to the generally more "state-centric" approach of political elites in CEE. Subnational actors in these countries are not even remotely able to bypass their governments and are forced to achieve their goals through establishing a cooperative relationship (Moore, 2008, p. 519; Tatham, 2010; Tatham and Bauer, 2014, p. 242).

Overall the paradiplomatic activities of the regional offices and representations depend strongly concerning staffing, budget, and other aspects, on their domestic constitutional capabilities, which is integrally connected to the degree of institutional decentralization in their country. This, however, results in strongly divergent framework conditions for the individual LRAs (Marks et al., 2002, p. 14; Studinger, 2013, p. 27; Tatham, 2010, p. 83). While some regions, especially the German ones, can thus resort to substantial capabilities and can be very present on the EUropean stage, other representations have only very modest capabilities. Even in the best case, the latter group of LRAs can only partially fulfill their role as a gatherer of information (Moore, 2006). This underlines the above-elaborated argument again that a comprehensive regional mobilization occurred only for some and not all regions within the EU (Donas and Beyers, 2013, p. 19)

2.3. Competence dispersion in the horizontal dimension of Multi-Level Governance

The cooperation between public and non-governmental actors within the horizontal dimension of the EU's MLG system experienced a continuously growing importance during the last three decades. The increasing role of these approaches materialized in a general steep numerical rise of existing network-like cooperation formats. Due to their already outlined structural flexibility (see chapter 2.2.2), which allows actors to adapt the networks to the given framework

level. This led to the increasing demands of establishing their own instruments to gather information (Studinger, 2013, p. 22).

conditions' requirements, the horizontal MLG dimension is characterized by a broad variety of networks with diverging peculiarities concerning their setup, actor-constellations, aims or other aspects. The networks alone, which are based on the EU institutions' exclusive initiative, constitute a broad range of research objects. Just to name the most popular and exemplary forms: The intergovernmental and top-down constituted networks by the Council like *COREPER* and its subordinated working groups, the European Commission with the *Comitology* mechanism, the *Open Method of Coordination*, or the European Parliament, the European Committee of Regions, and European Economic and Social Committee with their institutionalized committees which are just some of the many network forms initialized by these EU institutions (Christiansen and Kirchner, 2000, p. 6). The vast diversity of networks also had a substantial impact on the research. It led many scholars to an increased research interest regarding these specific supranationally initiated governance approaches within the EU. The result is a substantial number of publications concerning the above-enumerated examples. However, while a broad range of research exists concerning these network-like cooperations within the EU's horizontal dimension, the current state of research is far from reaching a generally acknowledged consensus regarding the characteristics of these governance approaches (Tömmel, 2008, p. 19). Instead, the academic debate is quite the opposite, characterized by a distinct fragmentation resulting in a distinct terminological fuzziness.

A variety of different governance typologies exist, for example, "network governance" (Kohler-Koch and Eising, 1999), "new governance" (Eberlein and Kerwer, 2004), "new modes of governance" (Héritier, 2001), "committee governance" (Christiansen and Kirchner, 2000), "democratic experimentialism" (Dorf and Sabel, 1998), "democratic network governance" (Marcussen and Torfing, 2006), "transgovernmental networks" (Slaughter and Hale, 2012), or just "policy networks" (Peterson, 2003). All of these typologies address the network building within the horizontal dimension of the MLG system. However, while each of these approaches constitutes the claim to be considered a stand-alone typology, it must be noted that the overwhelming majority of these approaches show a very high degree of congruence concerning their depicted conceptual premises. [65] The often stipulated and highlighted differences between

[65] In general, the various networks or network-like entities show distinct similarities in most areas of analysis regardless of their specific setup. To give some examples: The reason for their establishment is based on the premise that traditional governmental decision-making is incapable of solving specific problems (Committee of Regions, 2001, p. 1; Eberlein and Kerwer, 2004, p. 122; Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2006, p. 36; Pierre and Peters, 2000, p. 23; Windhoff-Héritier et al., 1996, p. 10). Actors instead anticipate to use the endogenous potentials of the participating actors within the networks to achieve common goals and improve policy results (Dorf and Sabel, 1998, p. 317; Heinelt and Knodt, 2008c, p. 17; Héritier and Lehmkuhl, 2008, p. 3)**.** In terms of the specific governance structure, the networks are characterized by an "institutional bricolage" (Gualini, 2004,

the individual typologies are compared to the similarities often, not only less in numbers but also in terms of their scope more modest.[66] This leads to the question that if the differences between the individual typologies are actually sufficient to consider them as stand-alone concepts rather than seeing them as differently materialized forms of governance approaches within the horizontal dimension. Another detrimental characteristic regarding the various governance typologies is their often observable alignment around one specific policy area, on which the individual approach is based. This overly sectoral and selective approach often leads to the situation that various scholars of the above-enumerated typologies outline regarding their empirical application only one or very few examples while disregarding other forms of network-like cooperation approaches. Such a substantial disregard is particularly observable in regard of the horizontal cooperation of regions in network-like governance formats. Despite the rapidly increasing importance and numerical rise of such cooperation formats within the MLG system, still only few scholars address this issue sufficiently in their works. Instead the majority of MLG works are overly focused or "preoccupied" (Piattoni, 2010, p. 72) on the mobilization of governmental authorities within the vertical dimension, while creating the appearance that horizontal dimension would be a more or less "de-territorialized" arena, which is utilized by the EU, the member states, and non-governmental actors to primarily deliberate supranational policy issues (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2006).

Therefore, while some of the above named approaches constitute a territorial reference, these are often not comprehensive enough to sufficiently analyze and assess the vast number of cross-border cooperation networks, which are becoming a decisive element within the EU's MLG system. In the following part of the work I shall therefore undertake the attempt to shed light

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p. 16), a polycentric and heterarchical setting of actors, who stem from the various public administration levels and/or from the non-governmental sphere (Jessop, 2004, p. 62). In the procedural dimension the heterarchical actor-setting unfolds in a "soft-law"-based steering and coordination process by actors, who are participating and cooperating within the network on a voluntary basis and can withdraw if they deem the collaboration as not advantageous (Héritier, 2001, p. 4; Marcussen and Torfing, 2006, p. 2; Peterson, 2003, pp. 2–3; Tömmel, 2008, p. 18). However, all of these networks remain despite their heterarchical setting in a "shadow of hierarchy", where state entities continuing to be the gatekeepers (Wiener and Diez, 2009, p. 93).

[66] The main difference for an example between the typology of "network governance" on the one hand and the "committee governance" on the other is, for example, the nature of their creation. Committees are characterized by a more distinct top-down setting and are based on the initiative of supranational or national actors, while policy networks are characterized by more spontaneous and more polycentric initiation processes. Another exemplary difference is the degree of institutionalization between the two entities. Committees are usually characterized by an enduring and a temporally non-limited character, while this is not necessarily the case for networks, which can be established only for a certain time-period (Christiansen and Kirchner, 2000, p. 11; Piattoni, 2010, pp. 20–23).

on this area by outlining the basic premises of Regional Cross-Border Governance and develop a research concept for the later following empirical analysis.

2.4. The concept of Regional Cross-Border Governance (RCBG)

2.4.1. Chances and challenges of cross-border cooperation for local and regional actors

As already outlined in the previous chapters, regions are territorial spaces and often constitute the structural framework for human activity and governmental intervention. Depending on the given conditions, regions can develop in manifold ways, resulting in entities of different shapes and quality with highly diverging characteristics (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 32). As diverse as their particular nature can be, their individual territorial scope differs, which makes statements concerning the general territorial delineation of these cross-border cooperation areas often challenging. This derives from the often very complex framework conditions, in which the territorial delineation processes take place and which define the particular shape and nature of the regional boundaries (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, pp. 16–17). These regional boundaries can either be very clear-cut and comprehensible, like when they are imposed in a top-down way and are based on statistical or geospatial considerations, or they can be somewhat "fuzzy" in their nature and be shaped as the product of a long-lasting historical formation process, which is influenced by a very complex web of constituting factors (e.g., historical identity regions).[67] Regions can, particularly in the EU, thus come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from small "micro-regions" covering a local and quite limited territorial unit within a country up to "macro-regions" with a geographic scope, which stretches across the territories of several countries and can be in terms of their overall size even larger than the territory of some EU member states.

The number of cross-border regions did experience a steep increase, especially in the last decades. This trend is directly connected to the already outlined internationalization of markets and economies on the one side, and the vertical as well as horizontal differentiation of governance processes in the EU on the other. Before taking a more comprehensive look at these many different cross-border regions and the particular governance activities which are carried

[67] Regionalism and region-building processes are often characterized by a complex web of interdependent political, historical, cultural, and social factors, which shape the nature and the shape of the particular regional entity. However, these construction-processes differ strongly from case to case, which makes, as already outlined in a previous chapter (see chapter 2.2), a generalizable comprehensive assessment very difficult, if not impossible.

out within them, it is pivotal to first briefly outline the genuine nature of cross-border spatiality, which is intrinsically connected with the transformation of national borders as such.

The existence of borders as artificial human-made barriers accompanied human civilizations for several thousand years and dated back to Ancient Greece (12th-9th century BC). While initially only being used by these city-states as physical lines of defense, artificial borders became throughout history a decisive demarcation line between different cultures, societies, and empires. Especially since the creation and –ongoing– institutionalization of territorial nation-states in the second half of the 17th century (Rausch, 2000, p. 21)**,** borders became even more important as integral elements of modern statehood. This went along with introducing a new understanding of territoriality, in which borders had a multidimensional purpose for their states and needed to fulfill several specific functions. In their most original role, borders are constituted as a "frontier" or "boundary", which provides an artificial line of separation between the domestic and the external world. While in times of peace, borders are therefore used only as 'legal lines separating different jurisdictions' (Chilla et al., 2012, p. 962), in times of war, they constitute an embattled line of defense against external powers. In both cases, borders constitute, however, the territorial ending of the particular state, where the institutional system and with it the hierarchic power of the respective governmental entity ceases to exist (Blatter, 2000, p. 32; Rausch, 2000, pp. 21–22; Schmitt-Egner, 2005, pp. 19–20). Besides being used as this "centrifugal" demarcation line, borders have an integrative role as a decisive element of nation-states' identity-building process. Borders have in this regard a substantial symbolic value by not only constituting a physical separation between the inner and outer "world", but they contribute to a socio-cultural differentiation between the inner "community" and the external groups and societies (Anderson and O'dowd, 1999, pp. 594–595; Johnson et al., 2011, p. 63). This clear-cut "us vs. them" differentiation thus serves to integrate the community inwards by providing a sense of commonality and solidarity, which are considered integral elements of national and regional identity-building processes.[68] Borders have also a centripetal purpose. While borders constitute, as already outlined, the state's territorial ending, they simultaneously also represent as 'foreland' or 'borderland' the beginning of the state's territory. Border regions are therefore also considered as a contact area for economic and socio-cultural interactions,

[68] Although a more in-depth analysis of border-related identity-building processes would go way beyond the scope of this work, following the definition by Keating is useful to grasp the complexity of this process. *"States are based on clearly-delineated territories. Within these state-builders seek to construct a national society, internally integrated and externally demarcated; a culture based often on language and always on shared reference points; a national economy; and a system of political domination and representation."* (Keating, 2012, pp. 24–25).

often leading to increased cultural diversity in the given area (Anderson and O'dowd, 1999, p. 596). Since the beginning of the 20th-century, borders underwent, however, a substantial transformation in Europe. In the aftermath of the two world wars, Europe experienced the establishment of several new nation-states, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, leading to a comprehensive redrawing of the continent's political map. While on the one hand some of the ethnic groups achieved their long-time pursued aims of political independency, the new territorial demarcation lines led in various cases to the reallocation of ethnically heterogenous regions to new countries, thus resulting also in the separation of ethnic groups from their original home countries. The detrimental situation for these "new" national minorities persisted for many years and continued also during the post-war period. Many countries considered even after the world wars ethno-culturally homogenous societies as "ideal picture" for their nation state building process.[69] In several countries of Eastern and Western Europe this led to assimilation attempts by the respective central governments, which were realized in some cases with very repressive measures. However, despite being faced with thes hardships the national minorities were in most cases able to maintain their ability to reproduce their cultural identity or even achieved administrative decentralization/regionalization respectively territorial autonomy within the particular nation-states (Blatter, 2000, p. 61; Medve-Bálint and Svensson, 2012, p. 225). Such minority regions are prime examples of ethnocultural diversity in the border regions. However, border regions are even without such genuine "hybrid cultures" (Rausch, 2000, p. 22) characterized by increased socio-cultural diversity. Due to long and ongoing historical economic and political cross-border relations, such regions are impacted by various ethnocultural influences leading to this cultural heterogeneity (Richter, 2005, p. 39). Depending on the particular political and socio-cultural intra-regional dynamics, the specific attributes of the border communities can either enhance and facilitate cross-border cooperation or, quite to the contrary, exacerbate them (Jaschitz, 2012, pp. 33–34; Svensson, 2015, pp. 280–281). In the time-period between 1945 and 1990 the actual situation for cross-border regions in Europe was characterized by the widely persisting "hermetical sealing" of the borders between the socialist states in Eastern Europe and the democratic capitalist states located in the western part of the continent. The separation of these two ideological and military blocks made any significant

[69] This was based on statehood's maintained premise since the late 19th century, which considered ethnocultural homogeneity as an important precondition for a successful institutionalization process. This premise followed the idea that ethnocultural homogeneity would be the ideal framework for creating mutual solidarity among citizens and strengthening the common identity. This, on the other hand, would be necessary to create vertical (citizen to the government) and horizontal (citizen to citizen) loyalty structures (Anderson and O'dowd, 1999, p. 596; Schöpflin, 2000, pp. 20–21).

cross-border activities, especially after the building of the so-called "Iron Curtain", not possible, transforming the demarcation lines to "ultrahard borders". Countries and regions, which were located in these border areas, for example the Austrian "Länder" in the eastern part of the country (e.g., Burgenland, Lower Austria, Styria, Carinthia), were in an economic understanding located at the "end of the world", thus facing distinct economic seclusion (Steiner and Sturn, 1993, pp. 178–179).

Similar "ultrahard borders" were also present within the Eastern Bloc between the socialist countries, whose cross-border activities were limited to a minimal level. In the western part of the continent, a more diverse picture was observable during this time. Between EU member states and third countries, so-called "hard borders" existed, like between the EU and the member states of the *European Free Trade Association* (EFTA). Economic activities in a cross-border context were limited between these "blocks" to some particular areas and beyond that regulated by general tariffs and other legal provisions (Schmitt-Egner, 2005, pp. 20–21). In the European Union, the state borders underwent a comprehensive transformation process over the years, which materialized in several decisive measures. One was the establishment of the European Single Market with the introduction of the four market freedoms (freedom of movement, goods, capital, and persons). It resulted in the wide-reaching abolishment of protectionist measures and the mutual opening of the EU members' economies and markets. The Schengen Agreement flanked the following increased permeability between the economic systems and the borders. Member states who participated as signatory states of the Schengen acquis agreed on abolishing systematic border controls in the Schengen area, which should enhance the freedom of movement and improve the European Single Market's economic and social integration (Jagetič Andersen and Sandberg, 2012, p. 1). These and other –less salient– measures led in the consequence to a functional differentiation of borders, which became more permeable in some specific areas and thus allowed a facilitated movement of goods, capital, services, and people (Gualini, 2003, p. 44; Johnson et al., 2011, p. 68; Schmitt-Egner, 2005, p. 21; Sousa, 2013, pp. 669–670). However, although internal EU borders became with the Schengen regime less 'physical', borders and states are not "vanishing" into a "borderless world" as often claimed by scholars of the globalization theory. Instead, they remain central demarcation lines of the respective political systems (Keating, 2012, p. 24).[70] Central functions

[70] Therefore I'm afraid I have to disagree with the thesis that a *de-bordering* process would occur in the European Union. Especially in the limelight of the latest developments, particularly in regard of the asylum and migration crisis, it is observable that member states still act as firm gatekeepers of their territory. Since 2015, several member states, for example, resorted to a reconstitution of systematic and strict border controls even towards neighboring Schengen-states.

are furthermore continued to be exerted by borders concerning their legal function, their control function, or their fiscal function. They can become again more impermeable if considered as necessary by the national governments.[71]

In contrast to the increased –selective– permeability of the national jurisdictions within the EU, the external borders of the EU experienced a substantial "hardening" respectively 'freezing' (Pénzes and Tagai, 2012, p. 7; Topaloglou et al., 2005, pp. 85–86). Non-members are faced with a considerably limited permeability of the borders in a wide range of areas. This contributed often to a distinct disadvantageous situation for these countries, where private and public cross-border activities are significantly exacerbated (Committee of the Regions, 2013, p. 31; Johnson et al., 2011, p. 61).

However, although the EU's external borders constitute the most "hardened" barriers, so-called "negative border effects" are omnipresent in all border regions, albeit to a different degree. In general the delimiting effect of borders have often the consequence that their adjacent regions often find themselves in a disadvantageous economic situation (Cappellin, 1993, p. 11).

By being geographically situated in a peripheral location within the state, these regions are often secluded from their countries' economic processes. Larger distances to the countries core regions, accompanied by often observable less developed infrastructural networks, are resulting in higher transportation costs for economic actors, which make the activities in these peripheral areas often unattractive (Rietveld, 1993, pp. 50–51; Topaloglou et al., 2005, p. 70). This disadvantageous "core vs. periphery" situation is further aggravated by the long-time persisting political negligence of these peripheral regions by their central governments regarding regional development activities, which were considered less "worth of support" than the core regions.

Border regions are further faced with the above mentioned delimiting impact of the border itself. They are cut off from their "[…]natural hinterland across the border, which effectively distorts possible functionality of economies and markets[…]", more precisely the exchange of capital, goods, work forces, trade, and services (Blatter, 2000, p. 26; Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 13; Garcia-Duran et al., 2011, p. 348; Medeiros, 2011, p. 144; Pénzes and Tagai, 2012, p. 7). While this general border effect can vary, namely by depending on the above outlined "hardness" of

[71] This differentiation of border functions is outlined by Ratti as follows: In terms of its legal function, the border demarcates the territories being subject to the individual country's legislation. The control function derives from the classic physical overseeing of the borders and controlling the crossing of goods, people, etc. The fiscal function is exerted additionally to the classic control function, namely by ensuring the adjustment of actors to the fiscal laws being in force at the time of their entry into the country (Ratti, 1993, p. 51).

the respective border, natural entities like sea-coasts, mountains, rivers, which in various cases coincide with the jurisdictional boundaries of the states, substantially aggravate the negative border effect and thus make any cross-border activities in such regions significantly more difficult (Rietveld, 1993, p. 47).

One of the most tangible border effects regarding cross-border activities is the increased *transaction costs* for actors.[72] The different institutional and legal systems of the countries, the dissimilar fiscal and social legislation, the language barrier between the communities, or the socio-cultural differences are just some of the many factors[73], which can increase the transaction costs for private and public actors. If these transaction costs are considered as too high, it can trigger a change in an actor's approach, which can be motivated to redirect the activities towards creating market access to the domestic center regions instead of pursuing cross-border activities (Pénzes and Tagai, 2012, p. 6; Topaloglou et al., 2005, p. 70). This can even lead to the out-migration of people and companies, respectively, the reallocation of capital. Such measures lead vice versa to the further economic deprivation of the peripheral regions and an ongoing aggravation of the already detrimental framework conditions (Association of European Border Regions, 2009, p. 3; Brakman et al., 2012, p. 45; Gabbe et al., 2008, pp. 13–14). Such a negative development does consequentially harm the specific region and substantially affect the macro-economy of the state and the EU; border regions are by no means some secluded territories but constitute a considerable share of the overall national territories in the EU. In 2015 more than 37,5 % of the EU's general population lived in direct proximity to borders, while 40 % are in some form directly affected by the presence of borders. Around 7 % of the general population are regularly engaging in cross-border mobility activities (e.g.,

[72] Blatter defines transaction costs as follows: "Such transaction costs are especially costs, which are caused during the search after potential trading partners, the negotiation and conclusion of contracts, and costs deriving from the monitoring and sanctioning" (Blatter, 2000, p. 39).

[73] To give a better overview over the vast number of potential factors that can increase the negative border effect, respectively the transaction costs of cross-border cooperation, I shall enumerate some of these in the following. This list does however not claim to be exhaustive in nature: Different administrative structures and competences of the respective governmental entities; diverging fiscal and social legislation; varying economic and market structures; diverging labor markets, varying wage structures and social systems; lack of mutual adaption of vocational training; political negligence of the peripheral region by central governments with resulting socio-economic deprivation and low productivity of the industry; non-diversified industrial sectors; different infrastructural preconditions; different environmental regulations; currency disparities; diverging geospatial planning approaches by the governments; insufficient cross-border trading areas with persisting legal and financial barriers; socio-cultural antagonisms, manifesting in prejudices, stereotypes, and lack of mutual understanding; persisting everyday border-problems; security concerns due to rise of cross-border criminality in form of drug and human trafficking, increased number of burglaries, car thefts, etc. (Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 14; Student, 2000, p. 80).

commuting, daily shopping etc.),[74] of whom more than 80 % are living in direct adjacency to the national borders (Beck, 2010, pp. 143–144; Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011). Especially with the latest EU enlargement rounds since 2004, the length of internal national borders almost tripled, making improving the cross-border cooperation all the more critical (Weith and Gustedt, 2012, p. 293). With the realization of sustainable cross-border cooperation, not only the negative border-effects can be decreased, but they can be transformed into manifold positive externalities.[75] Besides the improvement of the framework conditions "on the spot" sustainable cross-border cooperation does also contribute to the achievement of the overarching aims of the EU, namely to improve the integration process through a better economic, social, and territorial cohesion between the individual member states (Medeiros, 2015, p. 99). It is further beneficial and a promising way of further strengthening the Multi-Level Governance system of the EU, namely by supporting the underlying premise of subsidiarity (Association of European Border Regions, 2009, p. 5). Especially in the limelight of regional mobilization within the MLG system, in which LRAs can participate as to some degree autononomously, these new formats of *Regional Cross-Border Governance* (RCBG) should be considered as new promising undertakings of overcoming border-related fragmentation (Blatter, 2000, p. 67; Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 13). However, to achieve such ambitious goals and aims, it is necessary to put Regional Cross-Border Governance under methodological scrutiny.

Similarly to the already outlined diversity of border-types and cross-border regions, each form of RCBG is based on a wide array of factors, which constitute the particular cornerstones of cooperation. These factors substantially impact the form, the scope, the depth, and the quality of the specific approach. Thus, they can either function as stimulus for the cooperation or, quite

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[74] According to a survey of the EC the majority of people who participated in cross-border activities are using these opportunities for leisure activities (44 %), shopping of goods and services (26 %), visiting friends (17 %) or family (11 %). Only 11 % of the people are using the proximity to the border for business purposes, while only 7 % leave their country to use public services (European Commission, 2015a, pp. 11; 37).

[75] The most salient beneficial results are the achievement of a better institutional and economic integration, like improved economic cooperation between SMEs, the mutual adaption of regulations concerning the labor markets, and the diversification of the mono-structural peripheral economies as well as in many other areas. Aside from exclusively economic goals, cross-border cooperation can also allow the opportunity to tackle common challenges like common cross-border environmental issues, the provision of a cross-border energy supply, and the improvement of infrastructural interconnections, and various other matters. This concerns also basic issues in the daily life of the citizens who are located in these regions like in the form of improved trans-jurisdictional access to hospitals, an overarching improvement of cross-border emergency services, the improvement of public transportation opportunities for cross-border communities, better cross-border access to educational facilities, or the nourishing of the transnational/transregional cultural relations in general (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, p. 9; Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 11, 2008, p. 53; Ramirez, 2010, pp. 285–286).

to the contrary, constitute an obstacle for the actors (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, p. 59). These internal factors can be furthermore material, like the presence of (un-)favorable infrastructural, institutional or economic preconditions, or they can be immaterial, for example, the presence of mutual (dis-)trust of actors, the absence/presence of cultural adversity, or the presence of positive/negative cooperation experiences. Material and immaterial factors alike affect the cooperation substantially (Blatter, 2000, p. 63; Gabbe et al., 2008, pp. 89–90; Schmitt-Egner, 2005, p. 26). To shed some light on this complex issue, I shall in the following outline the basic attributes and premises of Regional Cross-Border Governance, which then will be operationalized in the aftermath for the analysis of existing schemes in the EU.

2.4.2. Basic premises and attributes of RCBG networks

Networks of Regional Cross-Border Governance are based on various factors that shape the cooperation from within and outside the framework. Being embedded in the horizontal dimension of the EU's MLG system, the RCBG networks are faced with complex institutional conditions. Located between at least two national jurisdictions with highly institutionalized government structures, the RCBG networks function in a firm "shadow of hierarchy" (see chapter 2.2.2). Based on the already elaborated general (territorial) premises of cross-border cooperation and the already outlined institutional framework conditions, RCBG networks are often characterized by a typical bottom-up oriented and a heterarchical respectively polyarchic actor-constellation. Governmental and non-governmental actors voluntarily participate in these governance structures, which goes along with cooperation-oriented procedural steering of governance processes. This principle has a particularly strong relevance due to the given cross-border context. Although borders have undoubtedly transformed in terms of their functional logic, RCBG is still considered a highly politicized and "sensible" issue by the central governments, especially when autonomy or independence movements are present in the respective country (e.g., Basque Country, Catalonia, South Tyrol, Transylvania). This often results in either a very firm monitoring based on suspicion by the national public authorities or the limitation of such RCBG networks. This makes a successful and sustainable cross-border cooperation, in many cases, very challenging or not feasible at all.

Due to these complex starting conditions regarding RCBG, I shall in the following, pursue a highly differentiated methodological approach. Therefore, I will use the general concept of Regional Governance as initial model and adapt it substantially to operationalize it for my research purposes. A differentiated analysis of all three political interaction levels, namely the policy, polity, and politics dimension within an RCBG network, will be carried out. Another

adaption is the more nuanced analysis of the temporal dimension by differentiating the specific development phases of such a network.

The three PPP-dimensions of political interaction

To comprehensively assess the RCBG networks, it is necessary to first shed some light on all three dimensions of political interaction. To give better comprehensibility regarding the following qualitative network analysis, these below-enumerated factors will be put in the next chapters under comprehensive scrutiny.

- **Policy:** 1) Establishment of the actor-constellation and delineation of the territorial scope with reference to the existing framework conditions; 2) Constitution of the cooperation objectives and establishment of the monitoring system
- **Polity:** 1) Depiction of the institutional embeddedness of RCBG networks in the MLG system; 2) Institutional differentiation within the network; 3) Institutionalization and financial structure of the network;
- **Politics:** 1) Mobilization of actors and establishment of social capital; 2) Establishment of intra-network actor-roles; 3) Forms of procedural steering within the network; 4) External marketing activities to maintain public support;

The three temporal phases of RCBG network evolvement

When outlining the temporal dimension of RCBG, scholars unanimously agree that the development of the networks can be distinguished in several phases of evolvement. However, these phases are often partially overlapping (Behrendt and Egger, 1997, pp. 26–27), making a clear-cut distinction quite difficult. This leads to a persisting academic dissent concerning the actual number of phases. While a significant number of scholars use a temporal distinction in three phases, other authors claim that there can be five (Schmidt, 2008, p. 20) or even six different phases (Payer, 2008a, p. 17). This already fuzzy state of research becomes even more complicated when looking at the particular denotation of these three phases, which are deviating in many publications. I will stick to the three-fold temporal differentiation and adapt and operationalize the individual phases for the following concept in my analysis. These three phases are the *phase of initiation*, the subsequent phase of *implementation and evolvement,* and the final *phase of consolidation.*

A profound assessment of time as a decisive factor and, particularly, the outlined phase-differentiation of such Regional (Cross-Border) Governance networks is, as Diller points it out, often neglected in the empirical analysis (Diller, 2002, p. 197). This, however, constitutes a significant analytical deficit. As a matter of fact, time is a very important factor and often

impacts the development of a network in a tangible way. From an analytical point of view, it is observable that each temporal phase constitutes a distinct stage of network-evolvement, in which the characteristics of the three dimensions of political interactions change. This impact of the temporal factors is by itself undergoing a transition process. Due to the so-called "path-dependency," the individual dimension of political interaction is impacted by the temporal factor to a diverging degree in the respective phase. (Diller, 2002, p. 199; Meincke, 2008, pp. 100–101).

The phase of initiation: The phase of initiation is characterized as a period in which the networks receive, in general, the most significant political attention and support. At the beginning of this phase, there is the trigger-event, where actors unanimously decide that cross-border cooperation is not just worthy of being considered, but it should be realized in the form of an RCBG network (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, pp. 38–39; Behrendt and Egger, 1997, p. 17). Potentially interested actors initiate first cooperation-impulses by outlining their personal room for action and, from their point of view, an acceptable framework for the particular governance approach. This often results in a self-mobilization and self-recruitment of actors, who start to engage in the planning and coordinating activities for the following cooperation. Actors are interested in taking part in the process either due to the expectation of realizing positive externalities through this governance approach or concerns of missing out on eventual opportunity costs, which could eventually emerge and lead to a disadvantageous position compared to other participating public or private actors. Following the self-mobilization, actors also try to persuade and mobilize other potentially valuable actors. They further try to ensure comprehensive political and financial support by internal and external governmental authorities, which is necessary for sustainable cooperation (Diller, 2002, p. 34; Fürst, 1999, p. 56; Glietsch, 2011; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 14). With the ongoing initiation phase, the actors determine in a consensus-oriented approach the basic perimeters of the RCBG network, which includes in the policy dimension the formal actor-constellation, the network goals, and the particular projects. In the polity dimension this includes the institutional structure and financial setup and in the politics dimension the form of procedural steering and management of the network. In more top-down oriented networks, the perimeters' constitution can also be carried out by a transnational/supranational entity, which must be accepted by the participating governmental actors. Regardless of the particular constituted perimeters, it is decisive for a positive development of the network that the initiation process results in first tangible achievements already at a very early stage, which is necessary to maintain the mobilization of actors during the implementation phase (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, pp. 41–45; Bayerisches

Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 130; Behrendt and Egger, 1997, p. 27; Benz and Meincke, 2007, p. 19; Fürst, 1999, p. 54; Heintel, 2005, p. 66; Lindloff, 2003, p. 52; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 64).

The phase of implementation and evolution: The transition from the initiation to the implementation phase marks a significant milestone and the first "stress test" for the RCBG network. Policy goals, the constellation of actors, the institutional governance structure, the availability of funding, or the cooperation process will be tested for the first time. While adequate planning can prevent the emergence of major network-relevant problems, cross-border cooperation is most seldom free of frictions. These challenges, therefore, often mark a crossroad regarding the future evolvement of the network. If the cooperation process can be "normalized", further stabilized, or readjusted in case of malfunctioning, the network can continue to evolve in a positive direction. This usually materializes in the first tangible achievements of designated policy goals, which are also necessary to maintain the cooperation's political support. Suppose this is not the case, and substantial problems arise. In that case, these problems can evoke frustration among actors and, in the worst case, even lead to their demobilization or total withdrawal from the cooperation. However, even in well-working networks, distinct segregation between the actors is observable, namely in the form of differentiation between a proactive core-group of actors, who show a high readiness towards new initiatives within the network and participate regularly, and a peripheral-group, who either half-heartedly contribute to the cooperation process or even show distinct signs of demobilization. Such detrimental behavior must be either contained by remobilization attempts or, in the worst case, engaged upon by excluding these actors to prevent any "free-riding" action, which could eventually negatively impact the RCBG network in the process. The phase of implementation and evolvement is, therefore, of crucial importance for the network. While the network has in this phase still the opportunity to readjust ill-functioning elements, an omission of such measures usually leads to a steep decline of the goal-attainment success and triggers, in consequence, general frustration and general demobilization within the network (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, pp. 46–54; Benz and Meincke, 2007, p. 19; Fürst, 1999, pp. 53–54; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 64).

The phase of consolidation: In comparison to the initial phases, the consolidation phase is characterized by a strong path dependency, which culminates finally in the sustainable success or failure of the network. Beneficial or detrimental planning, decisions, and actor-behaviors unfold to their maximum effect and either lead to the anticipated activation of the endogen cross-border potentials or quite to the contrary to a total failure of the network.

If the cooperation continues to develop positively, the network experiences a further consolidation of its processes and institutional structures and continues to work increasingly autonomously. Additionally to the increasing successes in the attainment of policy goals, such a positive development goes along with an advancing and sustainable innovation capacity of the network, which, among others, materializes in the ability to adapt to eventual changing framework conditions. If the RCBG approach's development takes a negative turn, the goal attainment and the cooperation process usually hit a deep stagnation phase. The lack of success consequentially results in a further demobilization of the participating actors. Network structures tend to become sclerotic and solidify in the form of inefficient cooperation formats and working mechanisms, which finally often triggers a network-failure, which at this point is very difficult, if not impossible, to be overturned (Benz and Meincke, 2007, pp. 19–20; Diller, 2002, pp. 201–203; Fürst, 1999, p. 54; Schmidt, 2008, p. 21).

2.4.3. Temporal and political dimensions of Regional Cross-Border networks

2.4.3.1. The phase of initiation

Policy dimension

Actor-constellation and territorial scope: The RCBG networks are regarding their formal actor-constellations constituted as “exclusive” clubs. The participation in these is based on a formal membership and underlies distinct conditions.[76] As a bottom-up oriented governance structure, the network can be set up by a wide array of actors. Besides the representatives from the public institutions and governmental sphere, who can stem from all administrative levels, depending on the network's territorial scope, a substantial share of the RCBG actors have a non-governmental background. Non-governmental organizations, societal groups, or economic actors are only some examples of the potential array of participating representatives from the private sphere, who can contribute to the goal-attainment (Ansell, 2000, p. 309; Heintel, 2005, p. 76; Lukesch et al., 2006, p. 6).

The actor-constellation size can range from at least two governmental actors from at least two countries up to a –theoretically– unlimited number of actors. However, although a diversified selection of actors can contribute to the network's innovation capacity,[77] the actor-constellation

[76] The formal actor-constellation should not be confused with the procedural actor-roles. While the first category describes the formal selection of actors as members of the network, the latter describes their immanent procedural roles within a network.

[77] While small networks tend to be more efficient than large networks, they are also prone to create so-called "lock-in" or "group-thinking" effects. The lack of diversity within the actor-constellation can thus lead to non-

inflation leads to a steep rise in coordination-complexity, decreasing transparency, and eventually an increase in transaction costs. This vice versa triggers at a certain point a massively decreasing goal attainment efficiency, resulting in the situation that overly inflated RCBG networks tend to be in general very ineffective (Baitsch and Müller, 2001a, p. 1; Diller, 2002, p. 180; Knieling, 2003, p. 473; Wetzel et al., 2001a, p. 15).

While it is thus essential for networks to be representatives of their respective cross-border regions concerning their actor-constellation (Fürst, 1999, p. 53), the output-oriented character of RCBG networks requires an actor-constellation with a distinct focus on functionality and effectivity (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 204; Diller, 2002, p. 131; Lukesch et al., 2006, p. 7; Schlangen, 2010, p. 270). This focus on the premise of functionality is of particular importance when selecting the individual actors for cooperation. Every individual entity's potential involvement should be based on a distinct cost-benefit ratio (Payer, 2008b, pp. 35–36). It is important to exclude any actor with eventual free-riding ambitions already from the beginning of the cooperation process (Bergmann and Jakubowski, 2001, p. 470).

Similar premises also apply to the constitution of the particular territorial scope. As such, RCBG networks differ substantially regarding their cooperation area and can range from bilateral cross-border cooperation of small-scale regions, which are in direct adjacency to the national borders, up to transnational and macro-regional cooperation formats, where the territorial scope consists of parts or whole national territories (Diller, 2002, p. 56; Schubert, 2008, p. 43). However, with increasing territorial scope, a simultaneous increase of actors can be observed, which vice versa, leading to rising transaction costs and higher risks of decreasing goal-attainment success.

Despite the potentially broad array of participating actors, in most RCBG networks, most actors stem, in fact, from the public and governmental sphere. With the increasing size of the actor-constellation and/or territorial scope, this particular actor group's numerical predominance increases simultaneously (Diller, 2005, pp. 118–119). The resulting asymmetry between the public and private sphere continues regarding the specific actor-powers. Although RCBG networks tend to formally pursue a heterarchical/polyarchic internal power-structure (Ansell, 2000, p. 308), a dominance of the public and governmental actors can be observed (Boman and Berg, 2007, p. 197; Müller et al., 2001a, p. 147). This dominance derives from the respective nature of the actor-groups. While non-governmental actors can provide valuable expert-

sufficient innovation capabilities, resulting in a decreasing success regarding the general goal-attainment (Benz and Meincke, 2007, p. 18; Fürst, 2001, p. 372; Scheff, 1999, p. 22).

knowledge in the various policy areas, increase the general societal acceptance of measures as repeaters of external-marketing activities from the network, or, in some cases, even contribute financial resources to the cooperation process and are therefore essential elements of the cooperation process, they mostly persist having a subordinated role (Panebianco, 2013, p. 113; Pütz, 2004, p. 52; Schlangen, 2010, p. 57). On the other hand, public authorities remain, in general, the central actors in terms of the overall decision-making and financial and administrative support (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 59).[78] This also substantially impacts the polity and politics dimension within RCBG networks, where a strong dependency on the public sphere remains (Diller, 2005, p. 122).

Selection of cooperation objectives: Based on the immanent goal-setting RCBG networks can be constituted as two different types of networks: The first type of network is the so-called *issue network* (Diller, 2005, p. 21, 2002, p. 57), or *policy/project-network* (Fürst, 1999, p. 53). Within this network type, the actors pursue one specific policy goal or even assemble the network to realize one specific project. The second network type is called the *strategic network* (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 58). A strategic network is usually based on a broad array of policy goals. Thus, it has a stronger focus on establishing a framework for daily cross-border cooperation activities in the designated area. The careful selection of policy goals also impacts the strategic orientation and the temporal duration of these two networks. The single-issue network focuses on achieving this particular objective and will –if it is no long-term objective– dissolved afterward. On the other hand, the strategic network has neither regarding its temporal dimension nor its goal-setting any limitation, but it functions "open-ended." This means that a strategic network is constituted as an enduring entity based on a long-term improvement of the status quo in the given cooperation area (Diller, 2005, p. 21, 2002, p. 58; Schubert, 2004, pp. 186–187). However, the large majority of RCBG networks tend to be strategic networks, with a distinct focus on a specific set of some sectoral issues. This concentration on a few issues is considered in theory as the most promising form for tackling cross-border related policy challenges (Fürst and Schubert, 1998, p. 356; Schubert, 2008, p. 53). Regional cross-border cooperation is established in most cases due to a pressing challenge. Its cross-boundary impact

[78] This effect is further enhanced due to the particular actor-motivation: Although non-governmental actors contribute to the cooperation process with valuable attributes, they are mainly motivated by particularistic interests, which naturally limits their engagement to a particular policy area of the RCBG networks. On the other hand, public and governmental actors are often characterized by far more generalist and territorial-oriented approach. While private actors are thus considered as very valuable actors in regard to specific sectoral issues, the governmental actors are key in realizing comprehensive territorial policy approaches in the designated region (Fürst, 2007, p. 359; Panebianco, 2013, p. 131).

cannot or only poorly be solved by one single governmental entity alone. This necessity to cooperate is reflected ideally within the goal setting. The cooperation objectives' constitution should be realized in a bottom-up oriented manner and address specific place-based challenges. To even identify these so-called "political opportunity structures" (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 38; Capellin, 1997, p. 51; Fürst, 2004, p. 278), a comprehensive "framing process" (Fürst, 2004, p. 270) must be initiated among the actors, where they, first of all, have to acknowledge the need for action jointly. This must be followed by a common assessment of the policy challenges, where all potentially participating actors must univocally support the potential added value of a prospective RCBG approach. After identifying the sectoral policy issues, the actors must then discuss whether and how the intended measures can be realized. The next step is a comprehensive formal action plan. In this action plan, the overarching strategy and also the particular operative measures are outlined in a commonly accepted document (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 109; Frey, 2003, p. 458; Fürst, 2007, p. 358, 1999, p. 56; Glietsch, 2011, p. 69; Hilligardt, 2002, p. 31; Schlangen, 2010, p. 141; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 42). This bottom-up oriented and deliberation-based approach provides a decisive advantage during the formulation of the policy goals. The openness of this process allows each actor to take part in the drafting process, which is particularly beneficial when considering that the spatial proximity of these regional actors often provides them a genuine insight into the given framework conditions of the area. With their so-called "tacit knowledge," they can thus contribute valuable information to this framing and policy-goal drafting process, which can consequentially increase the geospatial impact of the designated policy goals (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 44, 2007, p. 76; Genosko, 1999, p. 2; Löb, 2003, pp. 105–106, 2003, p. 110; Müller et al., 2001a). While the socio-emotional "regional identity" and the attachment to "cultural milieus" can have an additional positive effect on the cooperation-willingness and thus on the mobilization of the individual actor (Jekel, 1998, pp. 46–47; Panebianco, 2013, pp. 110–111; Schlangen, 2010, p. 189), these factors play a subordinated role compared to their rationalist driven and utility maximization-oriented stance.[79] The majority of actors do not primarily participate within RCBG networks because of territorial or socio-cultural affiliation but because of a distinct cost-benefit rationale. Actors

[79] While cross-border cooperation is based on the principle of geographic proximity, basic perimeters are missing compared to its classic domestic Regional Governance counterpart. Attributes like social-communicative (e.g., preceding social-capital) proximity, personal trust (e.g., former cooperation-based experiences), or even emotional closeness (e.g., common identity) are, in most cross-border cases, the exemption. Common regional identity (Payer, 2008b, p. 45) is, therefore, often just partially existing in this cross-border context and needs an active procedural framing.

hope to gain distinct cooperation-based benefits, which are substantially higher than the required contributions and allocations (financial, administrative etc.) they have to make in order to participate within the governance structure. The cross-border-based nature of this cooperation often provides a genuine "window of opportunity" regarding the anticipated goals, which individual actors could otherwise not or only poorly achieve (keyword: cross-border based interdependency).[80] These genuine cross-border based opportunity structures are for the large majority of actors the most important aspects to actively participate within RCBG networks (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 189; Ansgar, 2003; Bergmann and Jakubowski, 2001, p. 470; Müller et al., 2001a, p. 134; Obermaier, 2002, p. 24; Panebianco, 2013, p. 112; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 96). However, in many cases, the cooperation objectives are, in fact, often constituted in collaboration with external actors like the EU or nation-states. Especially in RCBG networks where either the actor-constellation or the territorial scope is quite large, or where the actors are interested in the realization of large-scale projects (e.g., infrastructural projects), or where substantial allocations and a firm planning process is necessary, actors tend to involve the supranational institutions of the EU in the drafting process (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 115; Boman and Berg, 2007, p. 202). However, such approaches bear the risk that the goal setting and the designated projects can easily shift towards being dominated by a top-down oriented policy approach, which can be too generalist and aligned foremost around sectoral policy issues instead of genuine place-based challenges. [81] This can also affect the actors in a detrimental way, who start to consider the network and the accompanying projects and goals not "as their own", resulting in half-hearted implementation activities or even their demobilization (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 38; Fürst, 1999, p. 54). The constitution of policy goals must strictly follow the premise of feasibility. Cooperation objectives driven by typical actionist motivations are generally unrealistic in terms of their actual feasibility and must be strictly avoided. Suppose they turn out to be not attainable. In that case, they can trigger a broad frustration among actors during the implementation process, which in the worst case can again lead to a demobilization

[80] Regional Cross-Border Governance is generally characterized by substantially higher transaction costs than for an example cooperation-formats, which are exclusively carried out within the national jurisdictions. This is caused by the already outlined distinct border effects (e.g., different administrative structures, different legal systems, language barrier, etc.), which requires not only substantial administrative, financial, and political efforts by the respective actors, but prove in most cases additionally challenging in regard of the procedural steering (Fürst, 2004, p. 266).

[81] This potential threat is particularly salient within RCBG approaches, which are predominantly initiated and promoted by the European Commission. Such networks often tend to align the particular policy goals around overarching general policy guidelines.

(Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 59). While a diverse set of cooperation-objectives characterizes strategic networks, taking many different sectoral and geospatial issues into account, the goal-setting should be internally coherent, follow clear guidelines and logic of continuity. It is of key importance that any kind of fragmentation will be avoided.[82] However, while it is necessary to provide sufficient cooperation topics to generate a broad interest among potentially participating actors, a too large number of objectives can also result in quite a contrary effect. Namely, an overstretch of available capabilities, massively increased transaction costs and coordination efforts and consequentially lead to less success in goal attainment (Diller, 2002, p. 190; Knieling, 2000, p. 94; Meincke, 2008, p. 79). Such an internal coherency of the policy framework is of particular importance to achieve potential cross-sectoral synergies on the one hand [83] and avoid an actor-segregation on the other, which could detrimentally affect the goal achievement (Diller, 2002, p. 122; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 30). The constitution of cooperation objectives should particularly, in the beginning, exclude any politicized or conflict-laden issues, which could impact the cooperation detrimentally. Instead, the focus should be on more easily achievable and symbolical objectives (e.g., so-called lighthouse projects) to initiate and maintain actor-mobilization.[84] Suppose the cooperation starts to stabilize during the implementation process. In that case, more contested topics can subsequently be introduced through an adaption of the goal-setting, which then runs less the risk to paralyze the implementation activities (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 194; Diller, 2002, p. 117; Fürst, 1999, pp. 55–56; Schlangen, 2010, pp. 185–186).[85] However, while short-term goals are important to maintain the mobilization of actors during the first period of the implementation phase, an equal number of mid-and long-term objectives should also be constituted to realize a sustainable goal-setting (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 59; Diller, 2002, pp. 190–191; Müller et al., 2001a, p. 150). A distinct prioritization between the goals and projects should further be realized. More important or

[82] Policy goals that lack a reflection of overarching policy goal-setting run the risk to only achieve very limited positive externalities by missing out on providing an adequate contribution to the overarching territorial aims (Schlangen, 2010, p. 184).

[83] Cooperation objectives should have in the policy dimension an integrative and cross-sectoral nature. In a best-case scenario, they also should have a complementary character and allow vertical and horizontal coordination within the RCBG network. This should provide policy synergies, which can, in the long run, contribute to a further sectoral and thus territorial integration within the cooperation area (Schlangen, 2010, p. 142).

[84] Lighthouse projects are defined as projects, which have a high symbolical value for the regions. In some cases, this can even lead to the situation that the projects as such have even a higher symbolical than practical added-value (Diller, 2002, p. 140).

[85] Particularly in the cross-border dimension, many issues are generally affected by a substantially higher degree of politicization than in an exclusively domestic framework. Processes are therefore more easily affected by politics-related obstruction by some actors.

pressing objectives should be dealt with not only with increased efforts by the participating actors (Löb, 2003, p. 116), but, regarding the temporal dimension, also at an earlier time-period. More bulky, challenging, or resource-intensive issues can be tackled during a later stage of the cooperation process. Such an approach can help to avoid an overstretch of the limited network capabilities, which can occur when a too large number of issues will be tackled at the same time.

In order to realize a properly working goal setting, it is imperative to establish a comprehensive monitoring mechanism, which is, in the best-case, realized in the form of a strategic action plan. The action plan should contain a timetable, which is, from a temporal perspective, realistic and feasible regarding goal-attainment (Rey, 1997, p. 76). To ensure this,s a clear set of qualitative and quantitative indicators must be formulated for the policy goals, which should like the timetable be precise, specific, and realistic (Schlangen, 2010, p. 184). For better reviewability, it is, therefore, recommended that the cooperation objectives are constituted with internal milestones so that the development of the implementation process can not only be differentiated in immanent phases, but the implementation process as such can also be backtracked if a detrimental development takes place (Diller, 2005, p. 142; Schubert, 2008, p. 77, 2004, p. 196). Overall, all of these outlined aspects concerning policy goal monitoring can be subsumed under the so-called SMART principle. Each cooperation objective should follow the principle of being **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ccepted, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime**-**Bound (Schubert, 2008, p. 78).

Polity dimension

Embeddedness in the "shadow of hierarchy" and differentiation of the network structure: Networks of Regional Cross-Border Governance are characterized by a typical polyarchic setting, which is typical for governance approaches within the horizontal dimension of the EU's Multi-Level Governance System. While within the network, this manifests in the absence of hierarchy, the actors remain nevertheless embedded within a distinct "shadow of hierarchy", constituted by the national and supranational institutional framework (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 55). Cooperations in RCBG networks are thus constituted as complementary and not substitutionary structures and contribute to the differentiation of governance approaches within the EU. They do not have direct democratically legitimized decision-making structures but are authorized to act as semi-autonomous setups on behalf of the national governments (and the supranational) level to fulfill territorial cohesion (Fürst, 1999, p. 57). Due to their institutional embeddedness, RCBG networks depend on a distinct approval and political, financial, and institutional/administrative support of the national governments as "gatekeepers" (Schlangen,

2010, p. 127). While this factor is already important for regional networks, it is even more critical in the cross-border dimension.

Regardless of whether regional networks are realized only within a country or in a cross-border dimension, its institutional structures' basic role is to act as a regulation system, which structures processes among actors. However, this effect is not determinist, but it instead defines a potential 'repertoire' of actions (Diller, 2005, p. 20; Glietsch, 2011, p. 78; Heintel, 2006, p. 354). The instititutionalization of a network across national borders is, however, a quite challenging issue. In general, national governments are as gatekeepers highly critical towards any regional network-institutionalization, especially when the legal embeddedness of such a structure is at stake. This resulted in the past decades to a fairly limited degree of institutionalization of RCBG networks. Their establishment was additionally often carried out on an exclusively bi- or trilateral basis. Only in the last years, more precisely since 2007, a decisive turning point evolved in the EU in this regard, namely when new legal instruments were introduced to establish more institutionalized networks (see chapter 4).

A high degree of network institutionalization provides several distinct benefits for RCBG. It stabilizes the cooperation processes and contributes to the intensification of the cooperation process (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 195). External actors often assess highly institutionalized networks as more "legitimate", contributing to a more positive assessment of these structures. They are valued as being more safe and more shielded against eventual negative external effects or internal shocks (Diller, 2002, p. 179, 2002, p. 344; Pütz, 2004, p. 35). Thus, actors are often more motivated to participate within such highly institutionalized frameworks rather than within a loosely coupled sets of actors (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 205). However, an increased attractivity persists, not only in terms of the "entry-option" for an actor, but remains also valid regarding the maintenance of their participation within the RCBG network. While actors maintain their formal "exit-option" at all times by withdrawing their membership from the network (Schmidt, 2008, p. 20), a certain institutionalization level enhances the general network-commitment of actors. An institutionalized network structure also offers an advantage in regard to eventual conflict-management. With clearly defined structures, for example, in terms of voting, networks are less prone to run into procedural stalemates if a conflict between some of the actors arises. Such structures also contribute to a decrease of the potential transaction costs due to these more firm and clear "rules of engagement" (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 195; Derichs et al., 2007, p. 78; Fürst, 2004, p. 273; Fürst and Schubert, 1998, p. 355; Pütz, 2004, p. 35). While a too-low level of institutionalization can trigger a de-commitment and free-rider behavior among the actors, a

too-high level can lead to declining institutional adaptability of the network structure (Meincke, 2008, pp. 75–76). The lack of involvement of new actors often leads to the actor-constellation's self-isolation and thus to an absence of innovation inputs by new actors. Such "old boys networks", which I will outline in more detail below, often create detrimental network-sclerotization. This vice versa results in the long-run in decreasing goal-attainment success (Derichs et al., 2007, p. 78; Diller, 2005, p. 13; Fürst, 2004, p. 273).

While a large variety among the RCBG networks exists, especially regarding their size and particular structural setup, some general basic premises can be observed concerning their internal structural setting. The majority of networks show a distinct differentiation of their internal governance structure in *core network(s)* and *peripheral network(s)*, where each network has not only a particular functional logic, but this differentiation contributes in larger governance structures[86] to the proper functionality of the coordination and implementation process as such (Benz and Meincke, 2007, pp. 24–25; Heintel, 2005, p. 67; Panebianco, 2013, p. 119; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 47).

This differentiation of the governance structure is realized independently from the above-outlined degree of institutionalization. It can thus be found in loosely coupled networks and highly institutionalized governance structures alike.

The core network within an RCBG network is constituted to carry out efficient and effective decision-making for maintaining the basic functionality of the network. Wide-reaching and strategic decisions, which can include the eventual reform of the governance structure, the actor-constellation, the goal-setting, or the basic alignment of the network to framework conditions, are made in this network by a quite homogenous so-called "steering group" of public actors (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 201; Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 14; Schlangen, 2010, p. 351; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 48). The organizational core can also consist of several overlapping individual core-networks if the network's size requires it. Regardless of its particular setup, the core-network remains accessible for a small circle of central actors, who are in charge of the governance structure's essential functionality. Therefore, it is "off-limits" for less "important" actors,[87] who

[86] Although this basic governance structure can be found in the majority of RCBG networks, an increased differentiation in the form of several core and peripheral networks is only carried out if the general governance structure is large enough in terms of its actor-constellation. Especially in small-scale networks, where the actor-constellation is limited to only very few public actors, for example, in a project network between public authorities, such differentiation is generally not carried out. However, if a diversified actor-constellation with public and private actors is constituted, such a governance differentiation is often observable.

[87] This, however, does not mean that the actor-constellation within the core-network(s) cannot be changed. In case of a general overhaul of the network, the organizational core underlies the same reform caveat as other

have only a sectoral function, for example, the majority of non-governmental actors, or have only a limited role regarding the network's overall functionality. By limiting the actor-constellation in this particular sub-network, the risk of potential obstructions or a stalling of the decision-making process remains contained, and the efficiency of these processes are in general increased (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. viii; Fürst, 2004, p. 276; Schlangen, 2010, p. 370; Schubert, 2004, p. 192). The peripheral networks provide the structural framework for the actual policy goal-attainment. These sub-networks can be further differentiated in policy and project networks, whose establishment again depends on the actual size of the general RCBG network (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 125; Schubert, 2004, p. 193). In general, all peripheral networks should be established as an open and flexible structure, where an ad-hoc and case-based involvement of new actors can be realized. This structural opportunity to diversify the actor-constellation allows the establishment of new forms of cooperation and the inclusion of new external policy inputs. The flexibility can consequentially increase the flow of information within the network and eventually boost the innovation capacity regarding the policy and project implementation (Benz and Fürst, 2002, p. 25, 2002, p. 30; Müller et al., 2001b, p. 10; Panebianco, 2013, pp. 119–120; Schubert, 2004, p. 181). Within this peripheral sphere, the policy networks constitute the basic structural framework for coordinating any goal-attainment activities. Through intermediary actors or institutions, they are interconnected with the core-network, however, they do not have any direct access to the decision-making within the steering group (Schlangen, 2010, p. 164; Schubert, 2008, p. 72). While the peripheral sphere can produce positive externalities, the core-network remains shielded against detrimental actor-behavior of any external actors involved within individual policy or project networks. Depending on the size of the overarching RCBG network, the number of embedded policy networks can range from one single network, for example, constituted as a forum and space for the general coordination of activities, up to a large number of parallel existing individual policy networks. This depends on the degree of the sectoral differentiation of the policy goals put in place (Meincke, 2008, p. 76).

The subordinated project networks function in this regard as “implementation networks”, where the structural opportunity is provided to tackle specific projects in an even more differentiated setup. With a small selection of specialized actors, who engage in realizing the particular project, these networks are often characterized by relative functional autonomy (Benz and

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network structures. Especially during a later phase of the network-development, for example, when the strategy has stabilized, and the participating actors developed mutual trust, the involvement of an actor from the periphery can be introduced into the core-network.

Fürst, 2002, p. 26; Schubert, 2008, p. 15). This materializes in its own procedural steering mechanisms, own internal setup of actor roles, and project-related decentralized decision-making competencies. Schubert therefore describes this overall setup of Regional (Cross-Border) Governance structures as a "network of the small networks" (Schubert, 2004, pp. 193–194).

The high degree of differentiation provides several advantages for the network. For an example, it can prevent the above-mentioned "network-aging" and sclerotization, which are omnipresent and persisting threats for the RCBG networks. Such aging processes regularly occur when networks and the actors remain isolated and lack new actor-inputs. Activities in such isolated formats become increasingly ritualized, complemented by rigid cooperation routines among actors. The absence of heated –but still constructive– debates and diverging opinions among the actors also negatively affect their thinking patterns. By not approaching issues in a critical and self-reflective way, the cooperation process often lacks new ideas and innovative policy approaches (Behrendt and Egger, 1997, p. 28). This complacency with the status quo consequentially results often during the advancing implementation and goal-attainment process in a decreasing efficiency (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. viii; Schubert, 2001, pp. 23–24).

Funding and budgetary provisions: The overwhelming majority of RCBG networks in EUrope are initiated with the comprehensive financial support of specific development programs by the EU and national governments (Blatter, 2004, p. 542; Fürst, 2004, p. 264).

Being often faced with very strained budgetary framework conditions, which are in the cross-border context, particularly salient (Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 106), these external financial sources are playing a decisive incentive. They facilitate the engagement of actors in such networks (Böcher et al., 2008, p. 13; Schlangen, 2010, p. 166). Missing financial support, particularly during the initiation phase, is often a "deal-breaker" and can result in a rapid and broad demobilization of actors. In a general perspective, comprehensive external financial support is of decisive importance to give the actors during the implementation process, the necessary capacities and thus increase the impact of projects and policy measures. Although the adequate funding of a network is essential, governmental actors, especially in the cross-border context[88], are somewhat unwilling to allocate significant resources for a successful

[88] The creation of common goods by RCBG networks is often a quite challenging task. Each financial allocation on one side of the border runs the risk of being considered a net loss by the respective society and the political actors. Therefore, political elites can be tempted to allocate the financial sources primarily to their region to generate more electoral support. However, this can create grave conflicts within the network and lead to a destabilization of the cooperation. The competitive situation is also aggravated regarding the supranational funds. The ETC/ENP/IPA funds are limited compared to other Cohesion Policy programs (Diller, 2005, p. 171).

RCBG. In the EU case, this lack of willingness will often be circumvented by the financial support from the supranational level. However, this crucial funding should be followed by a distinct diversification in the later phases. It should, if possible, originate not only from the supranational or national sphere. It should also be levered by contributions from private entities like banks with the provision of eventual loans, financial grants and donations by participating companies, or the general financial support of foundations, institutions, and other organizations (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 23, 2003, p. 25; Diller, 2002, p. 128; Hilligardt, 2002, p. 51; Schmidt et al., 2002, pp. 108–109).

It is of utmost importance for a network to generate its own funding resources over time. This can be achieved, for example, through the constitution of membership fees.[89] This form of internal funding, as well as other complementary funding sources, can contribute to an increased (financial) independency of the network towards the national and supranational level, which is also beneficial regarding to the intended bottom-up orientation (Diller, 2002, pp. 177–178; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 110). The financial independence lowers the threat of heteronomy and a potential network-capture by external actors. (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, pp. 23–28; Boman and Berg, 2007, pp. 200–201; Fürst, 2007, p. 363).

An overdependence from one or very few external sources bears for RCBG networks in aspects a substantial risk (Heintel, 2005, p. 93). Significant external funding can trigger decisive rent-seeking behavior among actors. They can be motivated to start their engagement in the cross-border cooperation not because of the genuine place-based political, economic, or geospatial added-value, but because of the opportunity to access additional financial grants, which pose an attractive financial opportunity. However, this can result in the worst-case, in so-called "phantom cooperation", where the cooperation process is mainly fund-driven. These cooperations are due to widespread rent-seeking behavior, often lacking any substantial policy impact (Boman and Berg, 2007, p. 201; Lindloff, 2003, p. 217).

The financial dependency on EU funds can also result in the establishment of the so-called "golden reins"(Obermaier, 2002, p. 137). In such situations, RCBG networks prioritize the policy alignment with overarching and strategic sectoral objectives of the EU or the member

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This can increase the competition between actors if the procedural steering is handled poorly by the process promoters.

[89] The most common form of membership fees in RCBG networks is the financial contribution by public actors, whose particular amount of fees are based on the size of their particular population (Diller, 2002, p. 178; Fürst, 2003, p. 445).

states to increase the potentially available financial allocations from these entities. Especially in the case of the EU Cohesion Policy programs, more precisely the ERDF and ETC, the allocation of financial resources are linked to the mandatory adaption of a highly complex set of guidelines and provisions. However, these supranational guidelines often follow a very distinct sectoral approach, which tend to be very generalist in their nature. However, such a generalist and EU wide approach runs the risk to counteract the actually intended bottom-up and place-based approach of a network (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. xi; Müller et al., 2001a, p. 214). Nevertheless, while a budget diversification is especially in the first phase highly unlikely and the support by the available public programs often pose a very beneficial initial support for the RCBG networks, participating actors should strive for diversification of their budget to increase the general autonomy of the network in the following phases.

Politics dimension

Social capital, actor and stakeholder mobilization: Networks of RCBG will be established in specific framework conditions. Regions, which are ready to engage in cross-border activities face internationalization and globalization-related regional competition or geospatial challenges, which forces them to become active and find innovative policy solutions. The transformation of the borders regarding their functionality presents in this limelight a "window of opportunity" for governmental actors, who hope to realize some specific positive externalities through the joint approach. The particular set of motives also motivates them to initiate and carry out such a network despite the high initial transaction-costs (Behrendt and Egger, 1997, p. 28; Glietsch, 2011, p. 86) and other challenging factors.[90]

As already mentioned, Regional Cross-Border Governance is generally established as bottom-up oriented networks (Hassink, 2004, p. 5; Heintel, 2005, p. 77). Paradoxically, however, the majority of networks in the EU are based on initiatives by national or supranational actors and are established in a firmly top-down oriented approach (Diller, 2005, p. 30, 2002, p. 41; Fürst, 1999, p. 54; Lindloff, 2003, p. 53). In cooperations with a larger territorial scope, for example,

[90] Based on our already outlined point of view that actors base their actions within the system of Multi-Level Governance on a cost-benefit rationale, I, therefore, argue that the establishment is not based on normative considerations, despite being highlighted by various political decision-makers, but primarily on the aim to maximize their benefits (Diller, 2005, p. 23; Fürst, 1999, p. 55; Schlangen, 2010, p. 311).
Furthermore, the cost-benefit rationale is based on a subjective perception, which can be influenced by a nearly endless number of internal and external factors. One example in this regard can be the self-centeredness of actors, where administrative actors are not reflecting their surrounding environment to a sufficient degree and thus cannot take potential opportunity structures into account (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 118; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 94).

macro-regional or transnational cooperations, this often translates into an extensive involvement of these two actor-groups during the whole cooperation process (Diller, 2005, p. 31). These larger networks are therefore often characterized by the maintenance of the more top-down oriented approach during all phases of the network-development. The small-scale networks, constituting the majority of cooperations, however, realize in contrast already during the progressing initiation phase to a distinct bottom-up driven procedural approach, which they maintain over the course of time.

A decisive factor for realizing a sustainable working RCBG network is the establishment of mutual trust between actors. Although other factors are also significant for the proper functioning of such a governance setup, the cooperation stands and falls with the presence of the so-called *social capital.* The establishment of social capital unfolds in manifold ways, for example, the creation of mutual knowledge and understanding between the actors, the creation of the mutual trust, the building of some sense of cross-border togetherness, the development of reliable working relations between the actors, and, in the best-case scenario, the construction of a certain degree of solidarity (Behrendt and Egger, 1997, p. 27; Diller, 2002, p. 39; Schubert, 2001, p. 12).

Social capital can be distinguished into two types, the *bridging social capital*, which is necessary to create cooperation between the actors. The second form is the *bunding social capital*, which is required to strengthen the created ties between the actors, leading to the gradual stabilization and improvement of the cooperation process (Schubert, 2004, p. 188, 2001, p. 34)**.** The increase of social capital decreases *moral hazard*[91], which overshadows the cooperation to a different degree during the collaboration (Payer, 2008a, p. 8; Wetzel et al., 2001b, p. 20). The lack of mutual knowledge between the actors, which is significantly enhanced due to the border effect, constitutes an unknowingness regarding the individual actor's mind-set and its ulterior motives (Fürst, 1999, p. 56). The initiation phase includes, as a result, a significant risk for the participating actor. The allocation of own resources constitutes to some degree a "leap of faith" and can be exploited by cooperation partners, who have eventual bad intentions regarding the cooperation from the beginning (Schlangen, 2010, pp. 262–263). This moral hazard will be further increased due to the missing possibility of realizing

[91] Moral hazard is defined as follows: *"Moral hazard is the risk that a party to a transaction has not entered into the contract in good faith, has provided misleading information about its assets, liabilities or credit capacity. In addition, moral hazard may also mean a party has an incentive to take unusual risks in a desperate attempt to earn a profit before the contract settles. Moral hazards can be present any time two parties come into agreement with one another. Each party in a contract may have the opportunity to gain from acting contrary to the principles laid out by the agreement."* (Kenton, n.d.)

comprehensive sanctions against actors within the polyarchic network structure.[92] The persisting mutual skepticism, which primarily derives from a lack of mutual knowledge, does unfold a substantial negative impact on the cooperation process. Overly precautious engagement by an actor results in very high transaction costs and a weak cooperation-intensity in the network (Fürst, 2007, p. 363).

Besides a careful prior selection of actors and an overall deliberation process to guarantee a sufficient availability of information (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, pp. 118–119), the individual actors are also required to engage within the process actively and allocate own resources to the network despite the presence of a moral hazard. In the case of positive network development, this triggers a reciprocal process, which materializes in creating the already mentioned social capital and reducing the general transaction costs (Benz and Fürst, 2002, p. 26; Diller, 2002, p. 145; Schubert, 2004, p. 184).[93] Besides the advantages within the politics dimension, the increasing density of cooperation-activities leads to increasing actors' mobilization within the process. Thus, active engagement within the network often results in increased financial support not only by the internal actors but also by external entities, who consider the cooperation as increasingly promising and worth of support. A comprehensive social capital based mobilization is also necessary regarding the policy dimension, where broad participation is of crucial importance to ensure proper implementation of projects (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 191; Ansgar, 2003, p. 84; Benz and Meincke, 2007, p. 16; Derichs et al., 2007, p. 74; Schmidt, 2008, p. 24). Thus, the establishment of social capital is based on a distinct cost-benefit rationale and a healthy self-interestedness of actors. These actors have to be aware that only in well-working RCBG setups the cross-border cooperation can be of success. On the other hand, cooperation without mutual trust is most often doomed to fail due to exorbitant transaction costs and a lack of engagement (Schlangen, 2010, p. 265; Schubert, 2001, p. 37).

The presence of an already existing “common identity”, which is often addressed by Regional Governance scholars, can potentially facilitate the cooperation in this regard and is, therefore,

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[92] In case of such detrimental actions, the affected actor has only a limited repertoire of options, namely either to use their maintained *exit-option* by leaving the network or convince the core-network or the process promoter (elaborated below) to initiate measures against the procedural opponents. However, the latter option is similarly limited in regard to the applicable options. It basically only involves the exclusion of the actor from the cooperation process in some areas or their total exclusion as members of the network.

[93] With the reduction of the moral-hazard, a general transformation of the individual actor-approach is often observable, where the initial competitive point of view, perhaps even a distinct “zero-sum oriented” cost-benefit rationale, changes to a more cooperation-oriented stance (Bergmann and Jakubowski, 2001, p. 466; Diller, 2002, p. 38; Fürst, 2004, p. 271; Schlangen, 2010, p. 80).

in theory, an essential factor. However, a distinct common identity is only present in a few specific cases, where a socio-cultural historic kinship of the communities in the cross-border regions exists. With the presence of a national minority and the often accompanying socio-cultural convergence of the communities, the overlapping identity-structure can in such particular contexts substantially facilitate cross-border cooperation (see chapter 2.4.1). However, while a significant number of national minorities exist in EUropean cross-border regions, such framework conditions constitute neither the norm for RCBG, nor are they a panacea for successful cooperation, but can quite to the contrary lead to a distinct politicization at the national level.[94] In cases where no historical socio-cultural commonality exists, the often constituted premise of a comprehensive identity-building process through RCBG is exaggerated. In most exemplary regions where the cooperation is characterized as successful, some sense of vicinity is reported by the surveyed populations, which, however, never reached the establishment of a genuine and robust cross-border identity. If such an identity is existent, it is, in most cases, only limited to political representatives or a very small group of people (Diller, 2002, p. 146). As a matter of fact, even the creation of a resilient and sustainable social capital, which is considered a preliminary step to a coming identity, constitutes a considerable challenge to be created by the RCBG network.

Procedural actor-roles within the RCBG network: While the formal actor-constellation is constituted before the establishment of the network and is further embedded within the network's more or less institutionalized governance structure, the procedural actor-roles will be shaped to a large degree during the actual cooperation process. This results in a relatively heterogeneous setup of actor-constellations within the RCBG networks in EUrope, which will be even further diversified through the wide variety of actors with their different individual procedural approaches. ‘Constructive’, ‘system-oriented’, ‘competitive’ or ‘cooperative’, ‘risk-friendly’ or ‘risk-averse’ are just some of the vast number of behavioral patterns, which can be

[94] National governments can consider establishing a cross-border cooperation approach as a potential threat for their territorial integrity, which leads to a severe and harsh politicization of the issue. This is often followed by the national government's harsh resistance towards RCBG with the accusation of alleged hidden motives like irredentism or secessionism by the particular regional authorities (Boman and Berg, 2007, p. 198). Even the EGTC Tyrol – South Tyrol – Trentino, which is considered nowadays by many scholars(Engl, 2014a; Klotz and Trettel, 2017) as a paradigm of successful and sustainable RCBG, was initially facing grave accusations by the national government authorities and particular the Italian governing parties, who claimed that the regional actors would pursue a secessionist (hidden) agenda with the cooperation (Csizmadia, 2016, pp. 95–96).

observed among actors already before their engagement within the network (Benz and Fürst, 2002, p. 26; Fürst et al., 2003, p. 58).

This pre-existing diverse set of attributes will be during the cooperation process even more complicated by a large number of policy-, polity-, and politics-related factors, which additionally shape the actor's role and attitude within the given structure and vice versa (Faller, 2011, pp. 22–23; Wetzel et al., 2001a, p. 14). While some roles are constituted on the basis of a formalized decision-making process, where actors mutually agree on the delegation/commissioning of some particular tasks to the participant, other roles are shaped by internal process dynamics. To shed some light on this highly complex area of RCBG networks and give better comprehensibility concerning the network as such, I shall resort to the often-used classification of actor-roles in the Regional Governance literature.

Scholars distinguish between three basic actor-types in a network: *1) General participants; 2) Procedural opponents, and 3) Promoters*.

A non-special actor-behavior characterizes the first group of general participants regarding the procedural dimension. These actors participate in the network and contribute to the goal-attainment during the implementation process. Still, beyond that, they do not have any extraordinary effect on the cooperation process and are therefore more or less participating "followers" in the network.

In contrast to this, the group of *procedural opponents* is characterized by a behavioral pattern, which is actively "braking" the process either through attempted free-riding, an overly competitive or even zero-sum oriented stance, through the active and intentional obstruction of the cooperation, or other forms of detrimental behavior.

The third group is called the group of *promoters,* who are considered the "motors" of the RCBG network and contribute to the network's success in a substantial way (Diller, 2002, pp. 111–112). Due to the broad array of possible promotional activities, further differentiation of this third group is necessary, namely in the three sub-groups of 1) *Political/Power promoters;* 2) *Technical promoters*, and 3) *Process promoters,* which I shall elaborate in the following in more detail.

The group of *power promoters* consists mainly of governmental actors and political elites, whose active support is of utmost importance for realizing an RCBG network. In the core-network, they are in charge of the strategic decision-making and alignment of the whole network. As already outlined in the two previous chapters, this concerns the basic goal-setting, the formal actor-constellation in the policy dimension, or institutional issues like the governance structure or budgetary matters, among others (Diller, 2005, p. 125, 2002, p. 188;

Schmidt et al., 2002, pp. 24–26). As elected political representatives or representatives of the governments, they are the only actors who have a direct democratic legitimation, which is also crucial in terms of democratic accountability (elaborated further below). By being equipped with the political and/or administrative powers, political promoters not only act as firm gatekeepers of the network, but they simultaneously also work as "door-openers" through the allocation of own local, regional, national, or supranational resources to the cooperation process, which allows cooperation in the first place (Schubert, 2004, p. 191).

These resources can be of financial or administrative nature, which is essential for the policy implementation. Suppose the respective power promoter is convinced that the RCBG network constitutes a measurable added-value and is worthy of support. In that case, in general, these actors are engaged in mobilizing additional political and thus governmental support. In the best-case scenario, the political support materializes in so-called "promoter-alliances", where this actor-group realizes the support in a joint and coordinated approach (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 190; Fürst et al., 2003, p. 57; Schlangen, 2010, p. 320). However, due to their nature as political or governmental representatives, this role also contains some decisive threats for the network. While, on the one hand, these actors can pursue their own political interests, which can potentially contradict the aims of the network and thus damage the established social capital, cooperation between political decision-makers often runs the risk of politicizing the cooperation. Antagonistic ideological positions or the populist instrumentalization of border issues (e.g., national-minority issues) can unfold a dangerously detrimental effect on the cooperation process.

The second group of actors is called *technical promoters*. They contribute to the proper functioning of the network with valuable expert-knowledge or administrative know-how. To optimize the decision-making process, and more importantly, the implementation of policy measures, they will be consulted in the framework as distinguished experts in the respective policy field (Obermaier, 2002, p. 75; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 24). In contrast to the power promoters, they are no generalists but are highly specialized in one or a few policy areas. They are, as a result, in most cases, not involved in the cooperation process of the overarching general networks but can be found primarily within the subordinated policy or project networks. Technical promoters can be private or public entities, ranging from educational and research facilities, special departments of the respective governments to non-governmental organizations and SMEs (Schubert, 2001, p. 24). Despite their formal role as sheer "consultants", these actors should not be considered neutral advisors. Especially NGOs or economic actors pursue in the overwhelming majority of cases particularistic interests.

The *process promoters* have a central role within the RCBG network. Being in charge of the network's procedural steering, which will be elaborated below, the process promoters act as a "gateway" between all actors by managing, coordinating, or even mediating their activities (Ansell, 2000, p. 310). As central network-knot(s),[95] the process promoters have not only one of the most important roles within the network, but they also have significant leeway in shaping the procedural dimension (Diller, 2002, p. 308). Despite their influential position, they are obliged to act more or less as "neutral" entities within the framework. Therefore, some networks resort to the commissioning of external actors outside the region to ensure such neutrality. While this constitutes a reasonable approach, such assignments are very cost-intensive, which can only be realized with adequate budgetary resources. In fact, external actors' commissioning is often not a viable option for most RCBG networks, which are, regarding their size, setup, and budgetary resources quite limited. Therefore most RCBG networks resort instead to internal actors, who will be commissioned and accepted as process promoters on a unanimous basis (Müller et al., 2001a, p. 210; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 13). While this bears the increased risk of biasedness, a particular advantage of such an internal approach is that these promoters already have profound knowledge about the cooperation area and the involved actors, which cuts down the time of adaption (Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 88).

Procedural steering: In order to understand the politics dimension in an RCBG network, it is necessary to have more in-depth scrutiny of the ongoing processes and their steering by the process promoters. Due to the aforementioned central role of process promoters, every process within the network is, to some degree, depending on this entity's adequate management activities. Even the strategic decision-making within a core-network is integrally connected to the process promoter's coordinating activities, especially if the decision-making process is, as in most RCBG networks, based on a unanimous voting-procedure.[96] Although the actual

[95] Depending on the size of the network and the particular governance structure, several process promoters can be either in charge for the coordination of all internal processes or are managing the activities in the specific subordinated policy and/or project networks.

[96] While decision-making processes based on unanimity have the advantage of having a high degree of legitimacy and actor-support, the achievement of such quorums is often very difficult due to each individual actor's veto power. As a result, Voting-procedures tend to be very lengthy, quite ineffective and can be often unsuccessful. On the other hand, most decisions are more easily to achieve but always leave a group of actors behind who are not satisfied with the results. This can, particularly when conflict-laden issues turn up, even lead to actors' frustration or demobilization within the RCBG network. As a consequence, the majority of RCBG networks often resort to a decision-making process based on unanimity within the core-networks. This ensures full actor-support of internal measures and avoids potential network-threatening demobilization. However, the voting-procedures can be changed over time if the cooperation has achieved a sufficient degree of stability, and the initial risk-adversity of the actors has decreased. This is particularly beneficial to increase the innovative character of policy measures, which eventually can also increase the general goal attainment success

decision-making procedure within the core-network is, to some degree, structurally decoupled from the rest of the network and thus from the area of responsibility of the process promoters, the decision-making process itself stands, in general, at the end of a prior dense interaction- and implementation process carried out by all involved members. These interactions are characterized by alternating negotiation, bargaining, and cooperation processes between actors in the general frame, which are required to be managed, coordinated, or even mediated by the process promoters (Diller, 2005, p. 129).

In order to ensure this successful procedural steering, there are, however, some basic procedural preconditions. These have to be fulfilled to provide adequate framework conditions for actors to engage within the network. One is the preservation of the polyarchic actor-constellation. Although the participating actors are highly diverging in terms of their capabilities, their power-structures, their dependencies, or their institutional embeddedness (e.g., as LRAs being restricted by the national level, while private actors are widely free in their engagement), they nevertheless must consider each other within their particular framework/sub-network as equal actors (Fürst, 1999, p. 56). This also includes their general willingness and motivation to create policy solutions through joint and cooperative approaches based on equal grounds (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, pp. 25–26; Diller, 2002, p. 185; Fürst et al., 2003, p. 57; Schlangen, 2010, p. 242).

While this does not mean that actors will participate free from competition within the network, but maintain a natural and distinct self-interestedness (Schlangen, 2010, p. 80, 2010, pp. 135–136; Schubert, 2001, p. 28)**,** this behavior must remain at a limited and manageable degree. In this regard, process promoters are obliged to monitor these inter-actor relations and engage if necessary to prevent a detrimental impact on the cooperation process (Diller, 2005, p. 168). A particular risk is, in this regard, the occurrence of network-threatening conflicts. There are a wide array of potential causes for conflicts, starting from a conflict of interests concerning various sectoral issues, normative and/or value-based conflicts, policy goal-related conflicts, procedural conflicts in terms of how to achieve a goal, conflicts concerning the distribution of positive externalities, up to personal conflicts between individual persons (Baitsch and Müller, 2001a, p. v; Diller, 2002, p. 145; Schmidt et al., 2002, pp. 101–102).

(Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 22; Diller, 2005, pp. 24–26, 2005, p. 128, 2005, p. 131; Glietsch, 2011, p. 95; Heintel, 2005, p. 77; Knieling, 2003, p. 467; Schlangen, 2010, p. 400, 2010, p. 432; Wiechmann, 2001, p. 151).

These conflicts do not necessarily unfold a decisive negative impact on the network. However, the dissent between actors must remain on a manageable level, which can be mediated and settled by the process promoters (Diller, 2005, p. 129). Fundamental or escalating conflicts can induce not only a massive erosion of social-capital but can spread across the network to other areas of the cooperation, causing frustration and eventually leading to the demobilization of actors (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 194; Fürst, 2012, p. 367; Fürst et al., 2003, p. 36; Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 101; Schmidt, 2008, p. 25).[97] Process promoters, who are also often called *Regional Managers*, must limelight of this threat step up as mediators if an inter-actor conflict is at the brink of becoming a potentially escalating threat (Schmidt et al., 2002, pp. 102–103; Wetzel et al., 2001a, p. 17). To successfully fulfill their role as mediators, they must strive for the re-establishment of a basic consensus between the actors. If this cannot be achieved, they must try to settle the dispute by stepping up as firm arbitrator in the conflict (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. ii; Behrendt and Egger, 1997, p. 27, 1997, p. 30; Diller, 2002, p. 156, 2002, p. 276). Process promoters are, as aforementioned, in this regard, the advocates of the network's interests and not of any particular actor's will (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. v).

They can be thus considered as regional leaders within the network, where they have a substantial and even dominant role, especially in small-scale networks, where governmental entities are faced with strongly limited capabilities and are thus depending on successful management of the process (Diller, 2002, p. 292, 2002, p. 326). However, while process promoters are obliged to act exclusively in the interest of the networks, in some cases, which I will elaborate on in the second part of this work, process promoters actually tend to pursue their own interests by shaping the networks towards their advantage in a more or less subtle way. However, such a misuse of the role impacts the network in a very harmful way.[98]

The conceptual depiction of procedural steering is quite challenging. Although the basic principle is based on the steering of actions between actors within and across (sub-)networks, this role includes a wide array of particular activities and measures. It comprises the supervision

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[97] Knieling distinguishes between these two types of conflicts by characterizing them as "cold" or "hot" conflicts (Knieling, 2000, p. 95).

[98] Although the misuse of their very powerful position is quite harmful to the network, process promoters can rely on a wide range of possibilities in this regard. In most cases, they will be commissioned at a very early phase of the network development to coordinate the establishment of the basic cornerstones of cooperation. Therefore, they can assert their process-based influence, for example, during the drafting of the strategic guidelines, during the drafting of the policy goals, drafting the major projects, or basic framework agreements between the actors (Diller, 2002, pp. 310–311).

and monitoring of all activities within the networks, the constitution of boundaries and general guidelines for activities, and the realization of virtual arenas of cooperation and deliberation (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. xi). The particular forms of steering can be quite varying. They can include coercive steering (e.g., through prohibitions, provisions, and directives), incentive-based steering (e.g., through the allocation of money, awards, or general support), or persuasive steering (e.g., through arguing, mutual learning, promotion), or other activities of organizational management (Elbe, 2008, p. 24; Fürst et al., 2003, p. 55; Hilligardt, 2002, p. 33; Pütz, 2004, p. 93; Schlangen, 2010, p. 23, 2010, p. 362, 2010, p. 364; Schubert, 2008, p. 59).

The steering process includes beyond the basic moderation, coordination, or mediation of the actor-interactions, also many other obligations, for which they are in charge within the policy and polity-based dimension.[99]

In case of successful procedural steering, the process promoter has a significant share in decreasing the transaction costs with the already mentioned continuously growing exchange of information (due to the social capital) and increasingly dense communication-flows between the actors (Frey, 2003, p. 458; Obermaier, 2002, p. 78; Payer, 2008b, p. 44). To achieve this, they must create adequate structural opportunities for communication, like in the form of meetings or through the provision of adequate communication canals via the internet (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 125; Schlangen, 2010, p. 188).

The provision of such structural opportunities is also of key importance to create and maintain the procedural momentum within the network and keep the actors mobilized in this process (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. xiii; Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 11; Benz and Fürst, 2002, p. 31).

The safeguarding of actor-mobilization also includes the prevention of detrimental actor-behavior, which can substantially damage the network. Particular threats are in this regard free-

[99] The role and the accompanying tasks of a process promoter/regional manager can in fact strongly vary depending on the given framework conditions. Just to give a rough overview on some of the typical tasks of process-process promoters I shall list some of them in a non-sorted order: Recruitment and mobilization of actors, motivation of actors to allocate own resources to the cooperation process, steering of the cooperation processes, mediation between actors in case of eventual conflicts, management of the framing process within the policy dimension, identification and prioritization of relevant policy goals and projects, identification of potential sponsorships and acquisition of external financial sources, controlling of the monitoring system including an evaluation of the network, drafting of reports, initiation and management of potentially necessary reforms, participation within the external marketing activities etc**.** (Adamaschek and Pröhl, 2003, p. 56, 2003, pp. 25–26; Ansell, 2000, p. 318; Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. viii; Diller, 2005, p. 20, 2002, p. 264; Lindloff, 2003, p. 46; Löb, 2003, p. 98; Schubert, 2008, p. 64, 2004, p. 196).

riding, the intentional obstruction of the process, or a non-compromising and egocentric approach of an actor. These three behavioral-patterns can severely affect the cooperation process by destroying the social capital, increase the transaction costs and as in the case of a conflict lead to frustration and demobilization of the initially motivated actors (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. ix; Müller et al., 2001a, p. 136; Schlangen, 2010, p. 333). Process Promoters must therefore engage with all the available above-mentioned instruments, which they have at their disposal in the network. As a last resort, they can even sideline such actors from the particular cooperation process within a project network or even initiate a formal exclusion of the procedural opponent from the formal actor-constellation (Genosko, 1999, p. 3).

External marketing for creating support: The positive momentum within the RCBG network's politics dimension is dependent on the internal mobilization of actors and the external support of the cooperation, which goes beyond the sheer financial support. The cooperation process is substantially reliant on the general backing by the public or, at least, the general tacit consent of the respective communities living in the cooperation area. Such a positive public approach towards the cross-border activities is also essential for a basic democratic legitimation of the network (Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 71). In any means, positive public awareness is key for the functionality of an RCBG network.

However, a total lack of public awareness can easily become an issue for the cooperation, especially when the respective political promoters must allocate financial, administrative, and other resources within and beyond their jurisdictions to establish a successful and sustainable network. These contributions can, especially if regarded from a "zero-sum" perception, put political promoters under pressure to defend the added value and legitimacy of the cooperation. Especially political representatives are always faced with the pressure of re-election, which forces them to present visible results in a short amount of time to promote the political "rightfulness" of such decisions.[100]

Therefore it is pivotal to establish at a very early stage of the network's development distinct external marketing activities. Subsumed under the premise of "do good and talk about it", these activities are aligned around the aim to realize a comprehensive promotional strategy (Davoudi and Cowie, 2016, p. 53) by highlighting the specific added-value of the goals and projects. Besides creating public support, another important issue has become the attraction of potential

[100] This often results in the call for short-term results by political promoters, which are, however, in various aspects actually contradicting the purpose of the cooperation (Genosko, 1999, p. 8). If such early achievements cannot or will not be presented, the tangible risk persists that political promoters withdraw their support and concentrate on other –more promotable– issues (Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 26).

private investors (or other external actors) and their capital in the last decades. Especially in times of strained regional and municipal budgets, the allocation of additional financial sources is a welcome opportunity to diversify the financial support of the network (Jekel, 1998, p. 53; Lindloff, 2003, p. 201). While the actual aims and reasons for such external marketing activities can be clearly pinpointed to the aforementioned two reasons, the forms and measures of how to realize them are manifold and can consist of a wide variety of approaches. The establishing of own media formats, the organization of events, the promotion of the RCBG network in the local, regional, or national media are just some of the many opportunities, which can be exploited in this regard. [101]

[101] Some of the manifold forms of external marketing are, for example, the publication of success stories in regard to policy goal-attainment, the promotion of successfully progressing projects, or the highlighting of economic net-benefits and other RCBG-related successes. Such achievements can be promoted through regional or even cross-border related events or cultural festivals, the conducting of studies and assessments, and their promotion. The general awareness can also be increased through sponsorships, cross-border related scholarships, or the creation of a corporate design and identity (e.g., creation of a jointly used logo). More traditional forms of external marketing should also be considered like the advertisement of the cross-border cooperation in newspapers, continuous drafting of press releases, presence in radio and TV through commercials, or just creation of a basic presence in the internet via a continuously updated homepage.
(Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 62; Hilligardt, 2002, pp. 52–53; Jekel, 1998, p. 59; Knieling, 2000; Schlangen, 2010, p. 397; Schmidt et al., 2002, pp. 77–82).

	Table 2 Scheme of Regional Cross-Border Governance: Phase of Initiation		
	Policy	**Polity**	**Politics**
	Phase of initiation (mobilization/drafting)		

Temporal features	• First cooperation-impulses by individual actors
	• Self-recruitment and mobilization of actors
	• Problem identification and solution-finding
	• Drafting of common guidelines and establishment of the governance system
	  ○ Policy: Actor constellation and network goals
	  ○ Polity: Institutional and financial structures
	  ○ Politics: Procedural management
	• Start of cooperation with strong political promotion and establishment of mutual trust		

General features	Policy	Polity	Politics
	Actor-constellation • Balanced and numerically limited involvement of governmental and private actors (functionality of networks) • Containment of power-asymmetries among actors (avoidance of network capture) • Actor-involvement based on the willingness for constructive cooperation (preventive free-riders exclusion) **Setting of goals:** • Selection of cooperation-topics should be of broad regional interest for successful mobilization (strategic network-character) • Transparent setting of a limited number of topics and attainable/realistic but also non-conflicting goals for the reduction of transaction-costs (output-legitimation)	**Functioning in the shadow of hierarchy:** • Institutional embeddedness of networks within the individual national and EU MLG system affects the internal space of action. It can lower or increase transaction-costs. • Despite the *gatekeeper* role of nation-states, networks should obtain institutional independence (self-organization in the "shadow of hierarchy") **Level of institutionalization and budget capacity:** • Level of institutionalization should be realized in the light of proportionality. Minimal institutionalization is needed to create actor-commitment, while over-institutionalization can lead to procedural stalemates	**Heterarchical decision-making:** • Voluntary heterarchical decision making is dependent on consensus-based cooperation and coordination • Competition among actors can be turned to positive externalities through a broad flow of information's (reduction of transaction-costs) **Intra-procedural actor roles:** • Networks establish new immanent actor-roles, which can be differentiated in: • <u>Opponents:</u> Free-riders and brakemen • <u>Promoters:</u> 1) Power-promoters (political elites) 2) Process-promoters (regional manager) 3) Technical promoters (experts)

	• Setting of benchmarks for efficient monitoring → **SMART goals:** **S**pecific **M**easurable **A**ccepted **R**ealistic **T**ime-Bound **Territorial scope and framework conditions:** • Need for actions has to be based on salient regional challenges and should not be based on external virtual framing process (factual and pressing need for action) • Problem-solving should be dependent on genuine cross-jurisdictional cooperation (cross-border opportunity structure) • Spatial, factual, social, or cultural proximity can be advantageous attributes for the framing-process (principle of territorial proximity)	• Institutional innovation and adaption capacity should be obtained to prevent network-aging • Overdependence on external funding should be avoided to prevent free-riding **Institutional differentiation:** • Internal network structure should be internally differentiated in core and peripheral networks to attain an optimal division of labor with corresponding selective involvement of actors → differentiation in 1) strategic core network 2) subordinated project networks 3) coordination network **optional** 4) public consultancy network Establishment of an independent coordination-agency for successful regional-management	**Procedural steering by regional managers:** • Despite non-interventionist decision-making, process management is necessary to obtain network functionality. These tasks contain the management of: 1) Inter-actor resource allocation Flow of information 2) Mobilization of internal and external support 3) Inter-actor relation (Mediation, Moderation, etc.) 4) Goal-attainment monitoring 5) Decrease of moral-hazard and establishment of social capital **Social Capital:** • Initial mistrust among actors (moral-hazard) leads to high transaction costs, which must be decreased in order to make the network efficient • Successful cooperation leads to the growth of social capital and increasing efficiency of the network • Despite the successfully managed social-capital building, the process is not unidirectional and can experience relapses due to internal or external shocks

Source: Own depiction

2.4.3.2. The phase of implementation and evolvement

Policy dimension

The constitution of cooperation objectives and policy goals are in the implementation phase for the first time being tested regarding their attainability. Process promoters are in this phase obliged to monitor the implementation process closely and report to the core-network if any substantial aberration concerning the timetable and milestones can be observed. If such a detrimental development occurs, the actors within the strategic core-network must initiate reforms concerning the actor-constellation or have to adapt of the original goal-setting.

Concerning the actor-constellation, such changes can become necessary if one or several actors pursue a continuous detrimental behavior, as mentioned above, which in most cases, only starts to occur during the actual implementation process. However, an adaption of the actor-constellation can also occur if the number of actors turns out as too large and makes the network's management and, thus, the implementation of policy goals hardly feasible or even impossible. Negative effects of such an actor-inflation unfold their detrimental effect usually only in this phase, making a general adaption necessary. However, while this measure is, in theory, a clear and legitimate option, in reality, such reform is quite difficult, if not impossible, to carry through. Due to the polyarchic setting, most of the networks' decision-making process is based on the unanimity principle. However, this makes the exclusion of one or several actors quite difficult, who will most probably show resistance against such a measure and try to mobilize allies against it.

The adaption of the actor-constellation can, however, also take a more pleasing direction. If a network initiated an operation in a smaller constellation, which is generally advised, and the cooperation proves during the implementation phase to be a successful and stable network, an extension of the actor-constellation can be carried out gradually. Especially actors, who were initially only involved in the peripheral networks through ad-hoc involvement, can be invited to become full members of the network after proving themselves as valuable and constructive actors. This limits the risk of potential detrimental actor-behavior. However, each subsequent extension of the network is underlying the same premises as stated for the phase of initiation. Actors must be selected in this phase with the same caution to prevent the inclusion of any potential procedural opponents (Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 42).

The phase of implementation has a twofold function regarding the network’s development. As the denotation of this phase suggests, it marks the start of the actual goal implementation. Thus, it is the first actual “stress test” for the goal-setting and the complementary monitoring mechanism. In the case of well-done drafting and planning of the activities during the preceding

phase, first tangible positive results unfold in the form of successfully finished projects or achieved milestones. Parallel to the advancing implementation activities, the efficiency and the success of the goal-attainment process should also increase. In the case of a positive evolvement, this should materialize in an increasing level of policy innovation, which means that the goal-setting is the object of continuous and ongoing optimization. Improved alignment around the given or changing framework conditions or a further adjustment of the goals, namely for an example to increase the policy impact, are just some of the manifold opportunities, which can be exploited to increase the innovation potential. However, in the case of an ill-defined goal setting, for example, when the goals turn out to be unfeasible, actionist-driven, or in general not precise enough, these cooperation objectives must be overhauled as soon as possible to avoid the potential risk of triggering frustration and a consequential demobilization among actors. Suppose actors are not taking care of this issue, first and foremost, the process promoter, who has to steer this necessary reform process. In that case, it can lead to the frustration mentioned earlier and the withdrawal of actors from the cooperation process. The consequence is, in many cases, the beginning of a network failure of the respective policy or project network (Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 64). In the worst-case scenario, the failure of these individual sub-networks can also affect other areas, namely to a general demobilization of frustrated actors, leading thus to the stalling of the whole network. If such a negative condition has developed, actors can counteract these developments within the policy dimension by initiating a "reboot" of the (sub-)networks as a last resort option. In general, this includes a wide-reaching redesign of the goal-setting, with new cooperation-objectives, new monitoring systems, including new qualitative and quantitative indices. Such a "fresh start" can also lead to the remobilization of frustrated actors. It is, however, facing substantial obstacles. To carry out such a wide-reaching measures, such actions require broad support by all the participating actors, which are, however, at this point often affected by general frustration and demobilization and will probably prefer a withdrawal rather than a re-engagement within the network.

However, malfunctioning project-networks must not necessarily be caused by ill-defined goals, but they can also be the result of a substantial interim change of the external framework conditions, which make a decisive adaption necessary (Fürst and Schubert, 1998, pp. 358–359). The change of political or economic circumstances, the occurrence of a major natural disaster, or various other events can require a major adaption regarding the policy dimension. To identify such impacting factors in time and in an adequate manner, it is crucial that the monitoring mechanism is working adequately and provides sufficient information to all network members. To ensure such full-time monitoring, each initiated project should be monitored in the form of

at least an ex-ante and ex-post impact analyses, which in the best case is carried out by internal and external actors to get the most reliable information possible. If external entities' commissioning constitutes a too high cost-factor, internal assessments can be realized through mutual cross-assessments by actors. Especially if several sub-networks are put in place, mutual assessments of the networks can be a promising alternative to get this needed information. As an ongoing process, the monitoring should include the publication of reports regularly, which allows the actors to act and readjust the goal-setting if necessary (Schlangen, 2010, p. 392; Schubert, 2008, pp. 77–78). The monitoring activities should also include detailed meeting minutes of all events to capture any eventual debates concerning the goal attainment process, which can then be utilized to readjust the policy dimension (Schlangen, 2010, p. 396).

Polity dimension

With the progressing implementation phase, the RCBG networks are characterized by a distinct path-dependency regarding their structural setup. In the case of a positive development of the cooperation process, the RCBG networks tend to increase their institutionalization level to further stabilize the cooperation. This is often driven by the logic that actors are less prudent to resort to their "exit-option" within such evolving network structures but consider the network structures instead as more reliable. Therefore, they can be more interested in using the "voice-option" in the network, namely by issuing their criticism to further improve the network. A higher degree of institutionalization also has, in general, a positive effect on the willingness of actors to contribute to the network with their (financial) resources (Baitsch and Müller, 2001b, p. viii; Diller, 2002, p. 183).

While a stabilization and further institutionalization of the structural setup is materializing, which is decisive for the further increase of the goal-attainment success, it is simultaneously also imperative that a distinct focus is put on the maintenance of structural flexibility by the actors (Benz and Fürst, 2003, p. 193). Especially in the limelight of the ongoing cooperation process, eventual adaptions of the governance structure can become necessary. The readjustment of the networks' internal setup or the establishment of new project networks are just two examples in this regard. A particular emphasis must be put on preventing the already outlined threat of "network-aging", which becomes an increasingly salient issue over time. Although a structural aging-process is "natural" to some degree, actors must counteract these processes repeatedly and in a proactive manner. This can be achieved either by introducing new actors or through an adaption of the structural set up as such. This applies not only for the setup of the peripheral networks but also for the core-networks, which have to be eventually adapted (Fürst, 2012, p. 373). In the case of a negative structural development of the network

characterized by solidified “lock-in” effects and an increasing path-dependency due to overly isolated sub-network, the lack of policy innovations will decrease success regarding the goal-attainment. In such a case, actors must carry out a comprehensive overhaul of the governance structure to prevent further sclerotization of the network (Fürst, 2003, p. 447; Meincke, 2008, p. 76).

Being embedded in a distinct “shadow of hierarchy”, the RCBG networks are very vulnerable towards external shocks like sudden budget cutbacks or administrative reforms by the respective participating countries. This vulnerability increases congruently to the territorial scope of the RCBG network, where a mounting number of involved governments also means more potential risks of obstruction. Therefore, it is particularly important to create, during the implementation phase, own budgetary capacities. With the introduction of an autonomous finance mechanism, for example, through the outlined membership fees, networks can further increase the actor-commitment if the network has taken a positive development and the actors established already some sense of ownership towards the network (Diller, 2002, p. 176; Schlangen, 2010, p. 166). Own budgetary capacities reduce the network's general external vulnerability and thus make it more stable. This is important due to the nature of the regional development programs by the EU and the national level. Even if the RCBG network is supported initially by a program with adequate financial resources, these programs are always constituted for a limited period. After the expiration of such programs, the RCBG networks must participate in new tenders, which always bears the risk of failure. A lack of success at new tenders combined with an overdependence from a non-diversified set of sources can result in massive financial difficulties concerning the goal-attainment. It can, in the worst case, even lead to the stalling of the implementation process and a following frustration/demobilization of actors, leading to the failure of the (sub-)network (Fürst, 2012, p. 370).

Politics dimension

After the first establishment of social capital within the initiation phase, the process promoters, together with all actors within the RCBG network, must further develop the *bunding social capital*. This type of social capital is critical to reduce the transaction costs, increase the density of communication flows, respectively, the exchange of information, and eventually reduce the moral hazard between the actors, which is vice versa essential for the cooperation process. However, this obligation constitutes a major challenge for the actors due to the continuous general vulnerability of social capital concerning potential harmful internal or external factors. The potentially detrimental factors are manifold and can derive from all three dimensions of political interaction. Starting from a lack of goal-attainment success and accompanying

frustration of actors, the lack of financial resources, to the intentional detrimental behavior by actors (e.g., free-riding), all these factors can potentially negatively impact the cooperation and make the procedural steering even more difficult. Even in an advanced implementation phase, a detrimental behavior can rapidly damage the already built-up social capital and lead to a resurgence of the moral-hazard, which can destabilize the RCBG network (Schubert, 2004, p. 152). In comparison to domestic networks, this threat is in the cross-border context substantially higher. The jurisdictional fragmentation of the cooperation-area, which gives actors potentially more leeway to pursue malicious behavior without effective sanction-mechanisms, can motivate such conduct. Participants, promoters, and opponents must be therefore equally identified and adequately dealt with. The later actor-type must, as already elaborated, be isolated by the process managers or entirely excluded based on a decision by the core-network members.

The frustration-driven demobilization of actors has a similarly negative impact on the network and is more often observable during the implementation phase. While the phase of initiation is often characterized by a general euphoric atmosphere, the following implementation phase can lead to partial disillusionment among actors, who are forced to acknowledge that the network's anticipated added-value often comes with substantial challenges. While this already leads to a decisive disenchantment among some actors, it can easily turn into downright frustration if initial objectives and goals are ill-defined and turn out during the implementation phase as hardly feasible or unrealistic at all. Implementation phases are thus often characterized by a partial withdrawal by some actors, a reduction of allocated resources, or even a re-strengthening of their competitive and egoistic behavior. A rise of transaction costs, followed by decreasing effectiveness are just some of these effects which characterize a negative downward spiral with a potentially existence-threatening outcome for the network (Schlangen, 2010, pp. 194–197, 2010, p. 262, 2010, p. 333). Therefore, process promoters are again required to act in a preventive way with their procedural steering instruments. Individual talks, the initiation of reform-process, public naming and shaming of the respective actors within the network, or formal network-related sanctions can be some of the many possibilities to remobilize these actors and maintain their engagement within the network. A consistent mobilization of the actors in the network is also decisive regarding marketing activities. Especially after the initiation of the RCBG network, which often brings “natural” publicity due to its novelty, public awareness is generally fading during the advancing implementation phase. Therefore it is pivotal to keep the cooperation at least to some degree on the general political agenda through the marketing activities and to ensure public support (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für

Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, 2003, p. 63). Therefore, power promoters must consistently advertise the cooperation and use their general public presence as leverage for their specific marketing activities during this phase (Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 76).

	Table 3 Scheme of Regional Cross-Border Governance: Phase of Implementation and Evolvement		
	Policy	**Polity**	**Politics**
	Phase of implementation and evolvement (normalization/frustration)		
Temporal features	• Begin of implementation and goal attainment • Stabilization of cooperation **OR** frustration based withdrawal of stakeholders → Segregation within actor-constellation in active core group and demobilized peripheral group • Further evolvement and adaption of the network structures **OR** increasing stagnation of the network-cooperation		
General features	Policy **Constellation of actors:** • Exclusion of harmful demobilized free-riders and veto-actors • Prevention of excessive network growth **Setting of goals:** • Continuous readiness to adapt topic selection and goal-setting in case of dysfunctionality **Framework conditions:** • Network adaption towards changing framework conditions and if necessary reform of the governance structure	Polity **Functioning in the shadow of hierarchy:** • Continuous political and financial support should be kept up by political actors while rapid changes of the framework conditions should be avoided (sudden budget cutbacks, administration reforms etc.) **Level of institutionalization and budget capacity:** • Financial autonomy of the network should be continuously increased by the stakeholders **Institutional differentiation:** • Institutional permeability should even be obtained in the core group or risk of sclerotization remains	Politics **Heterarchical decision-making:** • Continuous increasing density of cooperation-structures and flow of information's is indispensable for a sustainable decrease of transaction-costs **Intra-procedural actor roles:** • While opponents must be fully excluded or at least marginalized, a network-capture by political promoters should be avoided **Procedural steering by regional managers:** • Process-promoters must be granted a central steering role within the network and their authority must be accepted by all actors **Social Capital:** • Social capital building must show first significant progress in order to secure sustainable actor-motivation

2.4.3.3. The phase of consolidation

Policy dimension

In the consolidation phase, the policy dimension's room for action underlies concerning the actor-constellation and the goal-setting the same premises as in the previous phases. It is, however, even more impacted by a firm path dependency. Actors are, therefore, obliged to maintain an adaption-readiness regarding the actor-constellation or the goal-setting if the implementation process hits an unexpected problem or takes a negative turn. Especially in the limelight of a perennial network-development, the probability of changing framework conditions increases substantially, which must be taken into account by all actors. The eventual rise of new cross-border challenges, which demand eventual new policy solutions, should not lead to the establishment of new RCBG setups but instead, result in the existing framework's alignment. The existing actor-constellation and goal setting should be adapted, especially if the existing setup has proven as a well-working format. During the consolidation phase, a particular issue is the observable aging of network structures (see chapter 2.4.2), which often comes with a decrease of the general innovation capacity within the policy dimension. While this development is simultaneously located within the policy and polity dimension, this development can be prevented within the policy dimension due to a diversification of the actor-constellation with new full members. The network is overall characterized in its third development stage by a distinct consolidation. This means that even within the policy dimension, a path dependency is observable, which substantially limits the room for action to carry out eventual reforms or other measures. In case of a negative development already within the implementation phase, it is tough to readjust the network. Still, even a comprehensive "reboot" of the policy goals does not ensure a "rescue" of the network. Actors are already characterized by a broad and sustainable demobilization, which makes comprehensive support of reforms unlikely.

Polity dimension

The structural setup of RCGB networks is in the third phase more than ever, characterized by a comprehensive and firm path dependency. The governance structure is in this phase, characterized by a distinct consolidation process. In the case of unfavorable development, the governance structure is affected by distinct sclerotization and solidification. This materializes

in the governance structure's inability to institutionally adapt to the framework conditions, thus negatively affecting the policy dimension's innovation capabilities. Such sclerotization also materializes in an increased dependency from external actors (e.g., EU institutions, national governments), which naturally limits, as aforementioned, the place-based added-value. A strong dependency further increases the likelihood that external actors use their position to influence the network to their benefit. In the case of positive development, the RCBG network structure has further stabilized and continues to contribute to the cooperation's successful functioning (Diller, 2002, p. 178). Like the previous phases, the networks must maintain continuous self-reflection and structural flexibility regarding the governance setup. A transformation towards an "old-boys network" persists as a constant threat and, therefore, requires the actors' continued attention. The core-network is particularly prone to such a hermetical solidification of its structure and should thus be observed with special attention. The reduction of the network's dependency, particularly in financial terms, must also be continued by the actors.

While external financial support can be maintained even in this phase, the budget diversification should have reached a substantial level in this phase. The general network-operability should be ensured, even if one financial source would no longer be available (e.g., the previously mentioned expiration of a program). This also follows the overarching aim, namely to increase the RCBG network's independence from the institutional "shadow of hierarchy". The long-term commitment to this premise contributes to the general objective of increasing the regional mobilization of actors within the MLG system. It also supports the goal of improving the territorial cohesion in the border regions through new structures, strengthening the EU's integration process.

Politics dimension

In the consolidation phase, the cooperation process has reached a point in which a strong path-dependency is observable. In case of positive development, the cooperation process has come at this time to a level, where the information-flow is characterized, despite the border effect, by a maximum degree of density and further materializes in a comprehensive cooperation-oriented stance by the actors. This goes along with an extensive mobilization of the actors, who are all actively contributing to the network. However, even despite such beneficial framework conditions, cooperation and social capital are always facing the pending threat of relapse, which must be consistently considered.

In the case of a negative network-development, the above-mentioned path dependency often materializes in a significant downward spiral, where the cooperation process is characterized by frustration, withdrawal, and following demobilization among actors. At this point in the network-development, it is very hard, if not impossible, to overturn the development. While the cooperation between actors can often be described as being in a "dormant state" with only very few actively pursued activities, the social capital has widely eroded and is primarily substituted by a firm moral hazard. Networks tend to exist at this point in the form of a "phantom presence", where measurable cooperation is not taking place anymore, leading sooner or later to the formal dissolution of the RCBG network.

	Table 4 Scheme of Regional Cross-Border Governance: Phase of Consolidation		
	Policy	**Polity**	**Politics**
	Phase of consolidation (innovation/sclerotization)		
Temporal features	• Consolidation of a saturated and increasingly autonomously working network **OR** further demobilization of stakeholder-activity due to missing trust • Sustaining innovation potential through the further evolvement of the network **OR** solidification of sclerotic, inefficient network structures • Long-term stabilization **OR** starting collapse of the network		
General features	Policy	Polity	Politics
	• Ongoing reform readiness in all three Policy areas due to network-aging which occur even in good-working consolidated networks **OR** • Total revision/restart due to impending network failure	• Institutional susceptibility of networks to become "old-boys networks" should be prevented by continuous adaption of the network core-group • Foreign financial aid should be decreased to a minimal level in order to attain maximum institutional interdependency	• Social capital-building must be balanced through procedural involvement of new actors (avoidance of lock-in effects and sustainment of innovation capacity) • Attained level of social capital has to be continuously cultivated due to the persistent threat of external-shock related relapse

Source: Own depiction

2.4.3.4. General added-values of Regional Cross-Border Governance

The RCBG networks are defined by many different factors within the three dimensions of political interaction. This results in a vast diversity of potential cooperation formats. While each network can be identified as a specific cross-border based governance structure due to its basic attributes, namely as a network with a distinct territorial reference and a cross-border based alignment of the cooperation area, each one differs from one another by its overall genuine

setup. For example, some RCBG networks are more top-down oriented in the policy dimension, have a large transnational territorial scope, and are widely steered and funded by the EC as supranational process and technical promoter. Other networks are substantially smaller regarding the actor-constellation or the cooperation area, are more bottom-up oriented and have their own regional financial sources and process promoters. Thus, it can be stated that RCBG networks thus literally come in "all shapes and sizes", contributing another piece in the already complex mosaic of network-types within the horizontal dimension of the MLG system. However, it is nevertheless necessary to categorize these approaches. By taking into account the EU's particular framework and the development of its Cohesion Policy, I shall therefore distinguish between four types of actually existing RCBG networks.

1) Stand-alone Euroregions located outside the EU's institutional framework with eventual financial support by the EU
2) Regional Cross-Border Cooperation with embeddedness in the specific ETC/ENP/IPA framework
3) Macro-regional strategies as innovative stand-alone RCBG networks
4) *European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation* (EGTC) as highly institutionalized and legally embedded RCBG networks[102]

Each of the four listed RCBG network-types differs substantially from one another concerning their attributes, while even within these types, significant differences can be observed. This contributes to a very fragmented general picture concerning RCBG in the EU. However, all of the networks underlie the same overarching aims and premises. As networks located within the horizontal MLG dimension, each of them serves to contribute to the further functional differentiation of governance in the EU. By activating endogenous regional potentials in the cross-border dimension and through the tackling of place-based challenges, RCBG networks can contribute in several additional aspects substantially to the aim of improved territorial integration while also complying with the general globalization-induced trends of regionalization. I shall briefly elaborate on these added-values in the form of the following five principles:

Principle of regionality: RCBG Networks are based on the premise of creating place-based policy solutions on the most optimal territorial scale. In most cases of domestic and cross-border

[102] Each of these types will be elaborated in the following parts of the work by either giving an overview analysis (types 1-3) or by realizing a more in-depth assessment (4) in the form of two case-studies.

based Regional Governance, this is the regional or local level, where proximity to the local economy, politics, and most importantly, the citizens is provided. Properly established RCBG networks thus comply in terms of their functionality with the basic principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The best possible congruence between the area of decision-making and the area where the particular challenge occurs, facilitates for actors to adapt to the framework conditions more easily and in a shorter amount of time. Actors can rely in this regard on an improved exchange of information and enhanced communication flows due to the territorial closeness, which is then again important to tackle particular place-based challenges more efficiently. In theory, actors are not necessarily required to involve actors from higher levels in the decision-making process (e.g., national or supranational level). They can limit the number of involved actors to the group, which is directly affected by the geospatial challenges or can contribute to the cooperation process. This is also beneficial for adequately assessing the situation, develop a sustainable policy approach, and to achieve the anticipated results.

Principle of partnership: Due to actors' involvement from the vertical and also horizontal dimension of the MLG system, RCBG networks generally consist of a vast array of actor-types. They can stem not only from various economic, political, or administrative sectors but are in general located across several territorial levels. Within the polyarchic structure, each actor can contribute to the cooperation process with its individual and particular set of skills and know-how, resulting in the realization of synergy-based policy solutions. Such an approach is particularly important due to the increased information-complexity, which actors face in these cross-border frameworks. They also provide the necessary preconditions, namely distinct openness between the participating actors (social capital) and the structural opportunity for the aforementioned dense exchange of experiences and information due to territorial closeness. However, this added value can only be achieved through such a comprehensive and broad involvement of manifold actors, which is only possible in such a framework. Especially regarding the often-criticized democratic deficit of the EU, this partnership principle is a strong added-value. Although RCBG networks are not based on a direct democratic legitimation by the electorates, the decision-making is due to its place-based character much more responsive regarding public feedback and the persisting threat of eventual procedural obstruction. Actors must thus pursue their activities by active public support or tacit consent.

Principle of reflexivity: With the delegation of decision-making competencies to an RCBG network, the policy goals and the general objectives, as well as the accompanying monitoring system, are constituted based on clear agreements between the actors instead of a hierarchic top-down ruling. This decentralized and polyarchic approach allows a greater receptiveness to

change and provides the opportunity to adapt the goal-setting in a less bureaucratic manner. Actors can reflect in such place-based polyarchic governance structures more easily the particular framework conditions. They can review and revise the impact of the specific measures (e.g., in the form of a SWOT-analysis), adapt if necessary the routines, instruments, and approaches in the face of the newly gained information, thus improving the effectivity the governance system as such. This reduces not only the general transaction costs in the RCBG network, especially in comparison to the often typically lengthy, rigid, and complex top-down oriented traditional government approaches but can provide the opportunity to fulfill the often local and very specific demands of the respective populations.

Principle of competition: While actors are required to pursue within the RCBG network a cooperative and not a competitive approach, the formats as such are, however, in a competition against the more traditional governmental decision-making to provide more effective policy solutions. Suppose the network, for example, does not provide the anticipated results and create tangible added-value. In that case, it is due to its output-legitimation forfeiting its right to exist and can be consequentially dissolved. The RCBG networks are therefore not only "doomed to success", but to achieve these results, they are obliged to undergo a continuous self-assessment and self-optimization process to remain more effective as other governance approaches within the MLG system.

Principle of regional integration: In the case of a beneficial and sustainable development, an RCBG network contributes substantially to the achievement of the overarching objective of the Cohesion Policy, namely to deepen further the territorial cohesion within and between the member states. With the establishment of new and well-working governance structures in areas where a prior governance void existed, member states become more mutually integrated. The comprehensive involvement of the local and regional level results furthermore in a synergetic strengthening of the subnational administrative levels. It mobilizes the respective actors to participate within the institutional setup. This, as a result, improves not only the quality of the EUropean integration as such but also gives the process a more territorial depth, thus strengthening the institutional foundation of the EU's MLG system (Benz and Meincke, 2007, p. 24; Capellin, 1997, p. 49, 1997, pp. 59–60; Davoudi and Cowie, 2016, pp. 49–54; Derichs et al., 2007, pp. 45–47; Diller, 2002, p. 346; Fürst, 2004, pp. 278–279, 2003, p. 441, 2001, p. 377; Panebianco, 2013, p. 96; Richter, 2005, p. 38).

2.4.3.5. Mobilization of Local and Regional Actors within the Multi-Level Governance system of the EU

With the increasing functional differentiation of the integration process and the further advancing transformation towards a system of Multi-Level Governance, local and regional actors find themselves in a new situation. In this situation, they can mobilize and act, more or less, autonomously in the institutional framework despite the shadow of hierarchy. This new window of opportunity allows them to promote their interests and increase their role and power within the MLG system. To illustrate this development, I shall outline in the following a model of regional mobilization, in which the interdependency between actor-engagement of subnational actors and the functional differentiation of governance will be highlighted. To do so, it is first necessary to briefly recall the main theoretical findings regarding the MLG system, which shall be then applied and integrated into my model:

In the previous chapters, I elaborated that the EU's MLG system can be differentiated into two different main dimensions. The first dimension is the *vertical dimension*, which is due to analytical purposes differentiated into two sub-dimensions, namely the *vertical intergovernmental dimension* and the *vertical intragovernmental dimension* (see chapter 2.2.3). The second main dimension is the *horizontal dimension,* with RCBG networks constituting a specific cooperation form (see chapter 2.3). In terms of their establishment, both dimensions are constituted through the dispersion of decision-making competencies. The outcome of this allocation-process materializes, however, in strongly different forms. In the vertical intergovernmental dimension, this dispersion-process towards the supranational level led in the EU, particularly over the last three decades, to a differentiated membership structure. In contrast to the original and long-time existing binary membership structure of states, namely distinguished between members and non-members, we can differentiate the integration between an individual state and the EU in 10 different grades (see chapter 2.2.3.1). [103] This substantially affects the institutional integration, various concerned policy areas, and the cooperation between the entities. The general differentiation of governance resulted within the EU in a distinct supranationalization of competencies and created a decisive impact below the national level. For several decades, already existing general trends of administrative decentralization and regionalization, which can be observed among the EUropean states, were particularly since

[103] As outlined, the vertical integration of a state can be differentiated in the following ten grades of membership: 0) No Institutionalized Relationship 1) Trade and Cooperation Agreement 2) Free Trade Area with Association and Bilateralism 3) Internal Market 4) Candidacy 5) Basic EU-membership 6) Economic Union 7) Area of Freedom, Security and Justice 8) Monetary Union 9) Complete Integration.

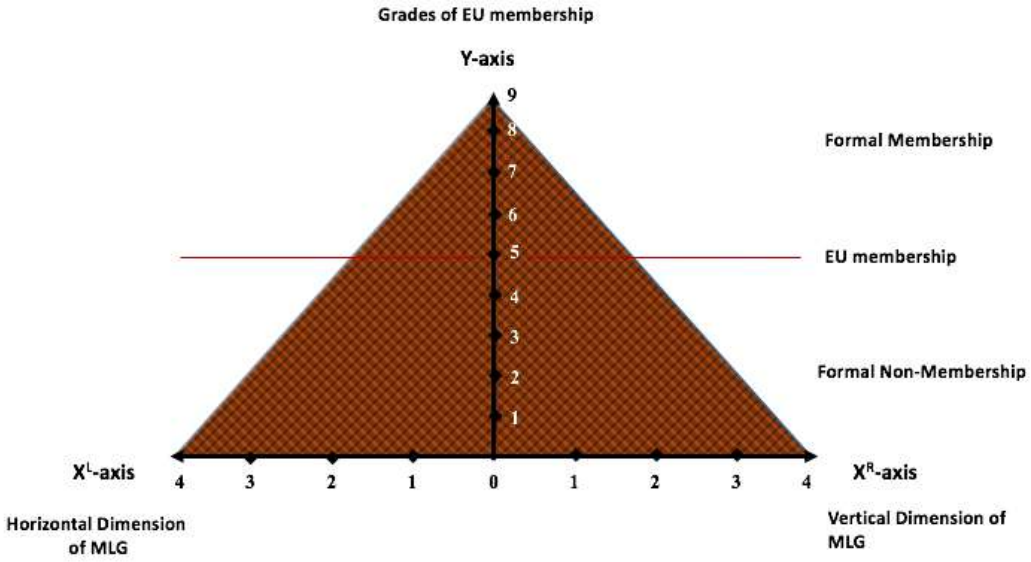
1986 enhanced by the EU's integration process. Although this did not even remotely lead to the often stipulated "EUrope of Regions" and did not create any genuine and powerful new administrative levels, existing decentralized power structures became more powerful, thus leading to an increased leeway for LRAs. In the intragovernmental vertical dimension, the administrative decentralization can be distinguished in the following four[104] types: 1) Unitary state; 2) Asymmetrical regionalized state; 3) Symmetrical regionalized state; 4) (Con-)Federal state.

A similarly ascending scale of regional integration can be outlined for RCBG networks within the horizontal dimension, namely the already enumerated four types: 1) Stand-alone Euroregions 2) RCBG networks based on ETC/ENP/IPA programs 3) Macro-regional strategies 4) EGTCs. Each of these four existing types of RCBG networks constitutes an increasingly advanced level of horizontal integration. While Euroregions can, for example, partially or even completely function outside the EU framework and require a limited degree of institutional and legal liabilities, the rest of the networks are strictly bound by the provisions of the community. The ETC/IPA/ENP supported cooperation are the most common RCBG setups within the EU. Their policy goals, governance structure, and, to a lesser degree, their procedural steering are based on overarching guidelines set out by the EU.

The third category is constituted by Macro-regional strategies (MRS), which are a substantial innovation in terms of the policy, polity, and politics approach. Due to their premise of constituting a large-scale and coherent macro-regional strategic approach, all established MRS pursue a cross-over approach by combining various available instruments of RCBG. The last type is the group of EGTCs. Especially in the last years, despite their high institutional requirements, an increasing demand for EGTCs can be observed in many countries. Due to their specific attributes, they provide a substantial potential impact on the EU's integration process and MLG system in the future.

[104] While EU member states' political power structures could be depicted in a significantly more nuanced form, I shall stick to this four-level scale to maintain the comprehensibility for the following analytical purpose.

Figure 2 The triangle of potential LRA mobilization in the MLG system



Source: Own depiction inspired by (Piattoni, 2010; Schimmelfennig, 2016)

The already outlined two dimensions, respectively three dimensions when counting the inter- and intragovernmental vertical integration as two stand-alone dimensions of the MLG system, are depicted in the figure as a model in the form of a triangle. It comprises the following three axes:

1) The vertical Y-axis represents as a scale the already outlined ten grades of EU memberships, constituting the degree of intergovernmental vertical (differentiated) integration.
2) The X^L-axis embodies the MLG system's horizontal dimension with the above outlined four specific types of RCBG networks. The EGTCs constitute, due to their high degree of institutionalization and legal anchoring, the highest degree of horizontal integration in the EU.
3) The X^R-axis represents the MLG system's vertical intragovernmental dimension, namely with the four degrees of administrative decentralization in the EU member states. The highest grade on the scale, namely number four, constitutes the most decentralized type of (Con-)Federal states.

   While three axes constitute together the institutional framework of MLG for the states and the LRAs, the triangle as a whole embodies the national entities in the setup.[105] Depending

[105] The state's simplified depiction should not lead to the misperception that it would be embedded in the MLG structure only as a one-dimensional entity. Instead, we should recall the already outlined premise that the state and

on the particular framework conditions, the particular shape of the triangle constitutes, in terms of its surface, the potential mobilization capability for the LRAs within the two dimensions of the MLG system. Depending on the level of functional governance differentiation on the X-axes, respectively the grade of EU membership by the nation-state on the Y-axis, LRAs face overall differing leeway to mobilize within the institutional setup as autonomous entities.

Based on this assumption, I further argue that each dimension of this triangle has a distinct impact on the LRA's overall mobilization capability. Furthermore, they even have, to some degree, a mutual influence on each other. (e.g., the X-axes).

In order to elaborate on this argument, we must look at the grades of membership for nation-states in the EU (Y-axis). It can be seen that the particular degree of a states' integration has a decisive impact on the intragovernmental vertical dimension (X^R-axis) as well as on the horizontal dimension (X^L-axis). With an increased level of integration, meaning a higher number on the Y-scale, the potential surface of the triangle increases within the two other dimensions, thus constituting an increased capability for LRAs to mobilize.

For example: The formal EU membership (Y=5) constitutes regarding the LRA mobilization a decisive milestone. When states are integrated into the EU as regular members, the LRAs have in both dimensions a substantial number of potential opportunities, channels, and instruments, which they can exploit for their mobilization (see table below).

Most regional mobilization opportunities are strictly dependent on this formal membership, while only a few options are also available for utilization to non-members.

However, even in lower level of integrations, where regional mobilization is open to member states and third countries alike, the members have substantial mobilization advantages (e.g., much more procedural leeway, exclusive institutional structures, more financial resources, etc.).

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the EU are shaped like a 'marble cake'. Both entities are constituted as systems with partially blended institutional structures.

Table 5 Potential mobilization opportunities for LRAs within the MLG system			
Vertical Dimension	Necessary EU-membership	Horizontal Dimension	Necessary EU-membership
1) Regional empowerment within EU-primary and national constitutional law	**Yes**	1) Stand-alone Euroregions	**No**
2) Mobilization through the EU's Cohesion Policy	**Yes**	2) Regional Cross-Border Cooperation with embeddedness in the specific ETC/ENP/IPA framework	**Partially** **No** **No**
3) Interregional interest associations &	**No**	3) Macro-regional strategies as stand-alone RCBG networks	**Partially**
4) Institutional involvement of regions on EU-level	**Yes**	4) European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as highly institutionalized and legally embedded RCBG networks;	**Partially**
5) Regional paradiplomacy	**No**		

Source: Own depiction

The particular degree of LRA mobilization is also substantially dependent on the functional governance differentiation within the X-axes dimensions. The intragovernmental vertical MLG dimension (X^R-axis) with the four main forms of administrative decentralization constitutes the framework, and with it, the institutional boundaries, for vertical LRA mobilization in the countries.

For example, centralized states are often very dismissive towards autonomous activities of LRAs, especially when this goes beyond their domestic jurisdictions. They thus often try to prevent or limit the leeway for LRAs in this regard. Concerning the already outlined opportunities of vertical mobilization (see chapter 2.2.4), they reject not only the particular empowerment of their LRAs within their domestic law, but they, for example, also narrow down their potential room for action regarding the overall Cohesion Policy to a bare minimum. This also applies to the other mobilization opportunities like the participation of LRAs in interregional interest associations, their participation within EU institutions (the CoR), and especially the realization of their paradiplomatic activities. Although most activities cannot be totally impeded, through the withdrawal of financial resources and narrow legal boundaries, they can be substantially limited. In contrast, (con-)federal states do not only provide substantial

leeway for the LRAs to engage within the MLG system, but they actively support their participation as partners within the regional development policies, European law-making, or entitle them to act as representatives of their central governments in specific EU policy areas.
The horizontal dimension (X^L-axis) constitutes a specific issue concerning LRA mobilization. In some cases, the above-stated principle of interconnectedness with the other two dimensions.[106] The constituted premise can, however, nevertheless be upheld. Decentralized and highly integrated states provide in general much more opportunities and room for action for their LRA's to realize RCBG networks.
However, overall the horizontal dimension is characterized by a high degree of fragmentation. Due to the still very recent establishment of the particular RCBG types, with the EGTCs and the MRS being put in place for only 12 respectively nine years, their territorial distribution still resembles a patchwork on the EUropean map.
Since their premiere, however, the number of RCBG networks with an increasingly diversified portfolio of policy objectives is steeply rising. The rise of RCBG networks together with their substantial potential mobilization capabilities leads, therefore, to the question of what impact they will have on the MLG system in the future.
Especially regarding the previously outlined theory-based assumptions, namely that the RCBG networks will have a decisive impact on the functional differentiation of governance in the EU, it is necessary to verify these theses in the following chapters in the form of an overview-analysis and a comprehensive assessment of case-studies.

3. The emergence of Regional Cross-Border Governance within the EU: From the creation of the "EUREGIO" to the establishment and differentiation of community funded CBC programs

Regional Cross-Border Governance has come a long way since its first appearance on the EUropean territory. Its "hour of birth" dates nearly back to the constitution of the EU itself. Two years after the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the first association of local governments' was established in 1954 at the Dutch-German border. This initial cooperation format was four years later, followed by the formal establishment of the so-called "EUREGIO" in 1958. As an association of municipalities, towns, and administrative districts, the EUREGIO consists of 140 members, located in parts of the three Dutch provinces Overijssel, Gelderland, Drenthe, and two German provinces North Rhine-Westphalia and

[106] For example, unitary states like Hungary, who substantially limit the role of LRAs within the vertical dimension, pursue simultaneously a particularly supportive approach regarding RCBG networks, thus resulting, among others, in an exceptional national/LRA engagement in EGTCs as well as in the EUSDR as well.

Lower Saxony. Its territorial scope covers approximately 3.4 million inhabitants. To overcome the adverse border effects, the EUREGIO, as so to say "first of its kind", underwent since its establishment a comprehensive transformation and institutionalization process[107] and was for a long time operating outside the EU framework. In the beginning, it, therefore, benefitted only to a minimal degree from financial contributions by the EU. Over the years, the EUREGIO became a "success story" (Perkmann, 2007b, p. 260) and a forerunner of RCBG within EUrope, triggering a surge of new eponymous "Euroregions" in the border regions (Medeiros, 2011, pp. 141–142).

While these entities' initiation was realized parallel to the ongoing EU integration process, all Euroregions were formally still located outside of the EUropean framework (Sousa, 2013, p. 677). A stark heterogeneity additionally characterized the various established Euroregions. While some of the CBC approaches were initiated as intergovernmental formats to generally coordinate the national/regional policy approaches, like the International Lake Constance Conference (1974), or the Upper Rhine Conference (1975), other RCBG networks were embedded, similarly to the EUREGIO, within the legal system of the respective participating countries (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, p. 11). However, the overall number of Euroregions remained until the 1990s with 18 entities relatively low. They were, furthermore, mainly concentrated in the Belgian/Dutch/German border region. This significantly limited the impact of RCBG in terms of overcoming the border effects in the EU (Medeiros, 2011, p. 143). The limited number and strong territorial concentration of the Euroregions derived from the open adversary stance towards RCBG by the national governments, who insisted on upholding the decision-making rights within the area of foreign policy exclusively. The increasingly often proclaimed vision of an "Europe of Regions" was often equated by national governments as regionalist and secessionist endeavors. This led to a twofold development. Outside of the EU framework, the Council of Europe organized the first "European Symposiums of Border Regions" in 1972 in Salzburg (AT) and 1975 in Innsbruck (AT), where a legally based institutionalization of CBC was debated for the first time (Student, 2000, p. 91). Shortly after, these were followed by elaborating and ratifying the *European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or*

[107] The institutional structure of the EUREGIO was several times extended. After the establishment, the association was equipped with its own Working Group in 1956. It further received a secretariat, which was financed through a joint budget in 1971. In order to increase democratic legitimacy, a parliamentary assembly was established in 1978. In the early 1990s the EUREGIO was established as legal entity by being embedded within the countries' respective legal systems (Engl, 2014a, p. 24; Perkmann, 2007a, p. 869; Van Winsen, 2009, p. 154).

Authorities (so-called "Madrid Convention") in 1980. The Convention provides for CoE members a commonly agreed international legal framework for CBC activities. A principal added value of the Madrid Convention is the mandatory codification of CBC activities into the respective states' domestic legal system. Countries are obliged to assume legal liabilities regarding the individual cross-border activities, which significantly widened the leeway for participating actors in the RCBG networks. In general, the convention marked a significant step towards the institutionalization of CBC on the territory of the CoE (Engl, 2014a, p. 112; Palermo, 2012, p. 77). However, since their signing, the convention and its accompanying protocols had a comparably limited impact on CBC. The main reasons for this were the low number of actual ratifications by the states and the documents' vague formulation, which provide the national governments a persisting decisive gatekeeping role.[108]

While the Madrid Convention marked a decisive step forward in the area of RCBG, the activities in the EU were characterized by a continuous stalemate. During the 1970s, the first push towards establishing an RCBG approach was undertaken in the European Parliament. In 1975 the regulation proposal ("Gerlach report") was presented, including provisions concerning establishing regional cross-border associations in the EU. Besides financial support by the EU, the report demanded a comprehensive delegation of competences to the RCBG networks.[109]

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[108] The Madrid Convention is until today ratified by 36 of 47 member states of the Council of Europe. Constituted as an intergovernmental treaty, the Madrid Convention aims to facilitate RCBG through providing a commonly agreed international legal framework. In order to not infringe on the gatekeeper role of the signatory states, the Convention foresees a very narrow cooperation framework and does not enhance the competencies of the particular communities. Local actors are obliged to strictly act within the domestic legal boundaries and depend on continuous approval by their respective central government. For streamlining purposes the Outline Convention includes 14 inter-state agreements, 16 outline agreements, as well as contracts and statutes for local authorities, which are to be used as blueprints for CBC activities. With the changing geopolitical framework-conditions the Outline Convention was accompanied by a First Protocol in 1995 and a Second Protocol in 1998. The First Protocol aims to further strengthen local actors' decision-making capacity by obliging the signatory states to implement CBC measures with the same legal validity as regular domestic measures. CBC bodies should additionally be granted the status of a public law entity (Additional Protocol to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, 9.11.1995, EIS No. 159.).
The second protocol foresees an enlargement of the territorial scope, namely by providing the opportunity of cooperation between authorities, who are in no geographic proximity but have a common cooperation interest (Protocol No.2 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning interterritorial co-operation, 5.5.1998, ETS No. 169.). The Convention and its two accompanying documents are, however, only ratified by less than half of the CoE members. Additionally, the intergovernmental character of the documents constitute a rather “soft” approach towards national sovereignty. The vague formulation of the provisions allows the individual countries to strongly limit the actual leeway for the LRAs. This significantly decreases also the potential impact of the documents as such (Engl, 2014a, p. 107, 2014a, p. 116; Odendahl, 2010, pp. 91–92, 2010, p. 101; Palermo, 2012, pp. 76–78; Sodupe, 1999, p. 63).

[109] The Gerlach report included, among others, the delegation of municipal tasks in the area of water and energy management, healthcare, or environmental protection. According to the proposal, the associations would have

The potential wide-ranging empowerment lead, however, not only to a firm rejection by the European Commission but also by the majority of parliamentarians in the EP, who equally criticized that the regulation would undermine the sovereignty of the member states as exclusive authorities in the domain of foreign policy (Engl, 2014a, pp. 140–145).

The "Gerlach Report" was followed by several initiatives like the "Boot report" in 1983 or the "Poetschki report" in 1986, in which a considerable valorization of CBC was urged. However, each report failed to unfold an actual impact due to the negative stance by the EC (Dühr and Nadin, 2007, p. 382; Hachmann, 2011, p. 1546; Perkmann, 2007a, p. 862; Student, 2000, pp. 93–94; Zillmer et al., 2012, p. 48).

These quite unfavorable framework conditions regarding RCBG improved only from the mid-1980s and were primarily induced by the general reacceleration of the EU integration process. Two developments were particularly decisive. The first measure was the signing of the Schengen agreement in 1985 with its implementation agreement in 1990, which abolished the systematic border controls on the signatory states' territory. With the Schengen agreement, not only the borders changed their functionality (see chapter 2.4.1), but the adjacent border regions were faced with significant facilitation of the CBC activities (Lambertz and Ramakers, 2013, p. 62). Another major measure was the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986, which introduced the *European Single Market establishment*. To realize the completion of the single market, the SEA stipulated as new overarching policy goals the objectives of economic and social cohesion in the EU, leading to the introduction of the *partnership principle* (see chapter 2.2.4) within the Structural Policy, as well as to the establishment of the so-called *Community Initiatives.* [110] For the first time, both innovations provided a genuine EU instrument to establish a RCBG approach in the EU. Being empowered to allocate financial resources autonomously, the EC started not only to change its stance towards a more LRA-friendly policy approach[111], but it also received the opportunity to financially support RCBG networks on a broad basis (Van Winsen, 2009, p. 155).

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further the competence to either carry out these tasks in cooperation with regional and national authorities or autonomously.

[110] The EU introduced community Initiatives as specific financial instruments of the EU structural policy, which should address issues of community relevance. With their experimental character, they should contribute to creating new and innovative solutions for realizing the stipulated goal of territorial cohesion.

[111] With its new leeway, the EC started to change its position towards a more LRA friendly stance. As such, it began to actively pursue continuous agenda-setting in terms of highlighting the importance of the *partnership* principle, which should be achieved through a sustainable Cohesion Policy (Perkmann and Sum, 2002, pp. 116–117). Therefore the EC underlined the necessity of a competence dispersion from the national governments towards itself and the LRAs.

These previous developments manifested in Interreg's start as the first comprehensive RCBG approach by the EC in 1990 (Perkmann, 2002a, p. 119). The Interreg programs are directed towards overcoming the typical negative disjunctive border effects, which detrimentally affected the border regions in a socioeconomic, geospatial, and cultural dimension. At the time of its initiation, the Interreg's basic premise was to realize a regional policy approach within a limited but contiguous territorial scope across the borders. This should be achieved by integrating various sectoral policies within a strategic network. Through the community-funded establishment of new RCBG networks, new endogen potentials should be activated, contributing to a positive economic development in the respective area (Miosga, 2000, p. 260; Ramirez, 2010, p. 290).

While the first Interreg phase (1990-1993) was aligned exclusively around the cross-border cooperation of adjacent NUTS 3 regions, it experienced a massive differentiation in nearly every aspect. Concerning its territorial scope and actor-constellation, the program was extended by the transnational (Interreg B) and interregional (Interreg C) strand in 1997 and 2000. The collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the anticipated accession of the post-socialist states to the EU further induced an external governance dimension. It became necessary to provide a structural opportunity for realizing cross-border cooperation with third countries across the EU's external borders.[112] Over the last 28 years, the Interreg programs and their general aims also received in regard of their polity dimension a considerable valorization by an increase of their budget and a significant strengthening of the principle of territorial cooperation among the general cohesion goals. These were also accompanied by an increasingly diversified internal actor-constellation, which included not just (governmental) authorities from supranational, national, regional, and local level, but were also carried out with the involvement of non-governmental actors (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, pp. 92–93, 2011, p. 98; Gualini, 2003, p. 48; Miosga, 2000, pp. 259–260; Svensson, 2013, p. 2). With the continuously improving framework conditions, the EU

[112] The collapse of communism in Europe marked a major geopolitical watershed for the EU. The necessity to redefine the bilateral relations with the post-socialist countries and consequentially introduce a pre-accession strategy for a prospective EU membership determined the external governance approach for the EUropean member states. The *Poland and Hungary: Aid for Restructuring of the Economies (PHARE)* program marked the beginning of a series of programs, which had the aim to facilitate the association of the post-socialist countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) by realizing new CBC approaches, among others. The former „dead border“ between the former communist states and their democratic western counterparts was characterized initially by the total lack of trade flows in the cross-border regions, which constituted a particular challenge for the EU and consequentially had to be taken into account by the various programs (Derya, 2005, p. 58; Odendahl, 2010, p. 101; Steiner and Sturn, 1993, pp. 178–179).

also experienced a steep quantitative rise of Interreg supported RCBG networks on its territory. While in 1988, only 26 initiatives were financially supported in Western Europe, the number of RCBG networks increased in connection with the several enlargement rounds over time significantly. The number of ETC/IPA/ENI supported cross-border programs rose to 107 (Levarlet et al., 2016, p. 20), while the total number of RCBG networks in the EU is currently at 187 in total (Association of European Border Regions, 2018; Perkmann, 2002b, p. 11). Due to the vast number of EU supported RCBG networks, we shall outline CBC's evolution and main characteristics within the EUropean framework. This analysis shall be consequentially based on the already elaborated RCBG approach. Due to the vast number of Interreg supported RCBG networks, the analysis is designated to give a general overview while waiving any in-depth assessment of particular case examples. The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation marks a considerable conceptual development within the EU framework. Its genuine setup, therefore, demands an independent and stand-alone assessment to illustrate the increasingly differentiated approaches of RCBG in the EU.

3.1. The policy dimension

Actor constellation and territorial scope: Since the introduction of Interreg in 1990, the issue of RCBG experienced a significant differentiation in the EU. During the five Multiannual Financial Framework periods (MFF) since 1990, [113] Interreg and other CBC instruments experienced a considerable maturing process, which manifests in a substantial diversification of the CBC approaches. These can be among others identified within the policy dimension, more precisely in the area of the territorial scope, the actor constellation, and policy goal setting (Dühr et al., 2007, p. 293; Levarlet et al., 2016, p. 19; Sousa, 2013, p. 678).

In terms of the territorial scope, the Interreg respectively the ETC programs (elaborated below) are currently differentiated into three so-called "strands", which also pose as a guideline for RCBG networks which are funded by other EU programs (e.g., IPA, ENI, etc.).

The first and most "popular"[114] strand is the Interreg A strand. Since its formal establishment in 1990, the strand facilitates the potential cooperation of adjacent local or regional authorities

[113] At the beginning of every Multiannual Framework, which constitutes the EU budgetary framework for five to six years, a regulation for the Interreg programs has to be adopted. The Interreg funding periods are therefore differentiated analogous to the MFR in five periods: Interreg I (1990-1994), Interreg II (1994-1999), Interreg III (2000-2006), Interreg IV (2007-2013), and Interreg V (2014-2020).

[114] As the most traditional form of RCBG, the Interreg A string is since its establishment the most popular cooperation scheme within and across the EU's external boundaries. Since its initiation, Interreg A experienced a rise sharply in numbers, namely from 19 projects (RCBG networks) in the first period (1990-1993) to over 88 funded projects in the fifth (2014-2020) programming period (EC.eu 2017).

in a contiguous area across at least one national border, either a land or a maritime border.[115] While this Interreg strand stipulates a minimum number of two local and/or regional authorities for the cooperation of an RCBG network, the number of potential participating governmental actors is not limited and can be expanded and aligned to the specific geographic framework conditions. Due to the limited territorial scope of the Interreg As supported networks, most RCBG approaches focus their activities on solving specific geospatial problems, which can be genuinely found in the border regions and are a consequence of the typical border effect (Cassin and Zolin, 2008, p. 4; Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 69; Sodupe, 1999, p. 70).

In 1997 the transnational cooperation was introduced as the new Interreg strand (Interreg B)[116] and marked a significant extension of the territorial scope and actor constellation. The transnational collaboration funded by the Interreg B strand spans over a vast contiguous area and can include territories from many nation-states. The cooperation areas are aligned around specific geographic entities like rivers, seas, or mountains (e.g., Alpine Space, Danube Space, Baltic Sea Region, North Sea Region, etc.). The Interreg B programs justify the territorial scope with similar geospatial challenges, which can be found all across these transnational regions and demand a coordinated, strategic, and joint approach. Areas of intervention are therefore often aligned around environmental issues, for example, the battling of sea and river pollution or the threat-reduction of droughts and floods, which are in their impact similarly transnational. The actor-constellation within these programs consists of national, regional, and local authorities and supranational entities in a multilateral format. However, in most cases, the national actors are predominantly represented, while regional and particularly local actors are much more seldomly involved. Activities within the regions are often directed towards soft-type policy approaches, which are designed to exchange mutual expertise, expert knowledge and expertise (Dühr et al., 2007, pp. 378–379; Engl, 2014a, pp. 42–43; European Commission, 2011a, p. 14; Interact, 2010, p. 7).

The interregional cooperation (Interreg C) marks the newest strand of the Interreg programs. While interregional approaches existed already during the 1990s, they were characterized by a patchy setup as innovative pilot projects. With the beginning of the Interreg III (2000-2006)

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[115] To receive financial support, the LRAs must be in direct territorial proximity. This limits especially in case of maritime borders the maximum distance between the two cooperating actors to maximum 150 kilometers.

[116] The transnational cooperation strand was originally introduced as continuation of the former REGEN Community Initiative during the mid-period of the Interreg II funding phase (1994-1999). Named das Interreg IIC approach, it was renamed and consolidated as Interreg B strand since the third funding period (Interreg III 2000-2006). Since 2000 it operates under the name of Interreg B (Interact, 2010, p. 7; Levarlet et al., 2016, p. 22).

phase, the approach was finally consolidated as Interreg C strand. While its two counterparts emphasize the territorial scope and demand for the activities in a contiguous space of more or less adjacent territories, the Interreg C projects have a distinct focus on the functional dimension. Bi- or multilateral cooperation links between LRAs or public facilities (e.g., institutions of higher education and research) are not embedded within a contiguous area of cooperation and do not necessarily share a common border but are based on the premise of creating functional networks. Participating actors consequentially do not have to be in any territorial proximity but can be dispersed over the whole EUropean territory. The only condition is for actors to have common regional policy challenges, which demand the elaboration of new joint solutions (e.g., development of "greener cities" and urban renewal, cooperation in the area of R&D, etc.). Due to the immanent character of the Interreg C strand, the main focus of activity lies on the mutual exchange and deliberation of experiences, knowledge, and good practices, which shall be carried out through the organization of joint seminars, exchange of personnel, or other measures to enhance the mutual learning effect (Engl, 2014a, p. 41; European Commission, 2011a, p. 16; Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 72; Levarlet et al., 2016, p. 20; Odendahl, 2010, pp. 97–98; Perkmann, 2002b, p. 6).

While the Interreg programs were constituted to support CBC activities within the EUropean territory, several other programs were initiated to complement existing RCBG approaches with an external dimension. The first program to help CBC across the EU's outer boundaries was the PHARE program, which was equipped in 1994 with an additional strand to support cross-border activities with the regions of prospective EU members from Central and (South-)Eastern Europe. The PHARE program had a distinct aim to facilitate the future accession of these countries. It focused, therefore, on the socioeconomic "revival" of the socioeconomically deprived border regions, which were severely impacted by the former "dead border" between the "West" and the "Eastern bloc".

In 1996 the TACIS-CBC program was launched as an additional approach. In contrast to its precursors, the program promoted cooperation with regions, which would not have a potential accession conditionality to the EU in the short or medium-term.[117] For years both programs managed to improve cross-border collaboration and triggered the establishment of multiple

[117] The *Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States* (TACIS) was launched in 1991 as a program, which should provide technical assistance to the 12 post-soviet countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan) and help them to manage their post-socialist transition process successfully. Like the PHARE program, the TACIS-CBC was created as a complementary strand to include the aspect of cross-border cooperation within the general external governance approach and improve the socioeconomic integration of the respective regions.

Euroregions in the external border area (Derya, 2005, p. 57; Engl, 2007, p. 15; Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 33). Due to the increasing political valorization of the EU's external governance approaches, particularly regarding the accession policies, further differentiation of the CBC approaches was carried out in the following years. In 2000 the CARDS program was established, which had a similar setup to the TACIS program but focused explicitly on the South-Eastern European region.[118] All three programs continued operations until the MFF 2007-2013 and were then the object of a comprehensive reorganization. While Interreg was incorporated under the new objective of European Territorial Cooperation (see next chapter), PHARE and CARDS were replaced –among others– by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). After the successful EU accession of the Central European states, the new IPA program shifted its geographical focus explicitly towards the Western Balkans, underlining the CARDS program's prior constituted accession conditionality (Gaubert and Yann, 2010, p. 12). Besides the overarching policy aims, namely the development of human resources, rural development, and institution building support, the IPA again focused on CBC by supporting after its initiation ten cross-border programs. The number of financially supported RCBG networks was further expanded in the MFF 2014-2020 under IPA II.[119] The TACIS (and MEDA for the Mediterranean countries) program was in 2007 replaced by the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The ENPI did not provide an accession-perspective for the countries[120] but instead emphasize a wide range of issues to improve regions' economic and social development. This also included a distinct focus on RCBG activities between the EU and the respective states (Committee of the Regions, 2014a, pp. 75–76).

The differentiation of CBC supporting programs and instruments also opened up the potential actor constellation for the various RCBG networks. In theory, authorities from all three major governmental levels (national, regional, and local) can participate within the multiple strands

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[118] The CARDS-CBC program included the financial support of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia (including Kosovo), Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In contrast to the TACIS program CARDS had the aim to strengthen the general stabilization and association process of these countries. Although the countries received an "entry perspective", this was still far from a distinct membership guarantee or a timetable for accession.

[119] For the MFF 2014-2020 the IPA II cross-border programs include cooperation between following states: (1) Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro; (2) Italy-Albania-Montenegro; (3) Croatia-Serbia; (4) Hungary-Serbia; (5) Romania-Serbia; (6) Bulgaria-Serbia; (7) Bulgaria-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; (8) Bulgaria-Turkey; (9) Greece-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; (10) Greece-Albania; (11) Greece-Turkey; (12) Cyprus-Turkey (Levarlet et al., 2016, pp. 38–40).

[120] The ENI will support CBC activities between (1) Kolarctic/Russia, (2) Karelia/Russia, (3) Sweden/Finland/Russia, (4) Estonia/Russia, (5) Latvia/Russia, (6) Lithuania/Russia, (7) Poland/Russia, (8) Latvia/Lithuania/Belarus, (9) Poland/Belarus/Ukraine, (10) Hungary/Slovakia/Romania/Ukraine, (11) Romania/Moldova, (12) Romania/Ukraine. (13) Italy/Tunisia (14) Black Sea, (15)Mediterranean, (16) Mid-Atlantic (Levarlet et al., 2016, pp. 38–40).

and formats. Third, organizations like interest associations, regional development agencies, chambers of commerce, and various other stakeholders can become involved. This potentially diversified actor constellation is, however, in fact only seldomly realized. In the overwhelming majority of cases supported by the Interreg programs, regional and especially local actors dominate the CBC strand's membership structure. At the same time, the transnational dimension consists primarily of national actors. (Dühr and Nadin, 2007, p. 381; Perkmann, 2002b, p. 7; Sodupe, 1999, p. 72; Svensson, 2015).

The structural participation of non-governmental stakeholders as full members is also only very limited within the various formats. This has several reasons. Large national or multinational non-governmental organizations are often centrally organized and aligned around national or supranational topics, limiting their potential policy scope concerning territorial CBC issues. Similar patterns can also be observed among business/industrial organizations or institutions of higher education and research, where a distinct sectoral specialization is observable. Broad participation of these institutions can be primarily found within RCBG networks funded by the Interreg C strand. In general, cultural organizations can be found most evenly in all formats due to their often cross-border oriented character. However, even their participation is often not realized on a structural basis as equal full-members, but they are often involved by a case-based procedural *ad hoc* involvement or as consulting/monitoring stakeholders (Boman and Berg, 2007, pp. 200–201; Gualini, 2003, p. 48).

Selection of cooperation objectives: The ongoing valorization and differentiation process of RCBG within the EU also affects goal-setting to a large degree, which has become increasingly diversified over the years. This also applies to the accompanying premises. In the beginning, CBC was considered "only" as an approach to overcome the national borders' adverse barrier effects. However, the various programs currently additionally aim to create comprehensive functional links on the vertical level between the domestic governmental levels and the horizontal level with other governmental and non-governmental entities (Engl, 2007, p. 6). This territorial dimension of RCBG is combined with a broad range of sectoral policies, which should create sustainable place-based added-value in the particular regions and thus decrease territorial disparities within the EU. In general, the CBC approaches pursue two goals, namely, to overcome the economic, financial, legal, administrative, socio-cultural, and other disjunctive factors. At the same time, they aim to improve the cooperation between the various authorities and thus accomplish a new form of differentiated territorial integration (Engl, 2014a, p. 29).

To attain these overarching aims within the EU, the *European Territorial Cooperation* regulation, which was adopted on 17 December 2013, lists a variety of potential policy goals

(Art. 4 Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013), which can be addressed by RCBG networks in case they apply for community co-funding by the ERDF, ESF, or Cohesion Funds (Bauer and Studinger, 2011, pp. 5–6; Jeffery, 2000, pp. 2–3).[121] Rhe ETC regulation outlines in Article 7 a considerable range of potential policy goals for cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation, and interregional cooperation.[122] The range of intervention areas can be further expanded by applicable policy goals of the ERDF regulation (Art. 3 (1) Regulation (EU) No. 1301/2013).[123] The basic document, which defines the overarching policy goals for the ETC, is the *Common Provisions Regulation* (CPR) with its 11 *Thematic Objectives* (TOs) (Art. 9 (EU)

[121] The Cohesion Policy for the MFF 2014-2020 introduced various implementation tools and instruments to increase the multiple programs' impact. Tools like the Community Led Local Development (CLLD), an extension of the LEADER approach, or the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI), which provides the opportunity for integrated investments, are just two of the innovations are potentially available to be incorporated into the ETC programs. However, until now, the demand for such tools is exceptionally low and will, therefore, not be outlined in the following chapters (Levarlet et al., 2016, pp. 10–11).

[122] "[…](a) under cross-border cooperation: (i) promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labor mobility by integrating cross-border labor markets, including cross-border mobility, joint local employment initiatives, information and advisory services and joint training; (ii) promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination by promoting gender equality, equal opportunities, and the integration of communities across borders; (iii) investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing and implementing joint education, vocational training and training schemes; (iv) enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and institutions; (b) under transnational cooperation: enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by developing and coordinating macro-regional and sea-basin strategies; (c) under interregional cooperation: enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by: (i) disseminating good practices and expertise and capitalizing on the results of the exchange of experience in relation to sustainable urban development, including urban-rural linkages pursuant to point (3)(b) of Article 2. (ii) promoting the exchange of experience in order to reinforce the effectiveness of territorial cooperation programs and actions as well as the use of EGTCs pursuant to point (3)(c) of Article 2; (iii) strengthening the evidence base in order to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy and the achievement of the thematic objectives through the analysis of development trends pursuant to point (3)(d) of Article 2;" (Art. 7 Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013)

[123] "The ERDF shall support the following activities in order to contribute to the investment priorities set out in Article 5: (a) productive investment which contributes to creating and safeguarding sustainable jobs, through direct aid for investment in SMEs; (b) productive investment, irrespective of the size of the enterprise concerned, which contributes to the investment priorities set out in points (1) and (4) of Article 5, and, where that investment involves cooperation between large enterprises and SMEs, in point (2) of Article 5; (c) investment in infrastructure providing basic services to citizens in the areas of energy, environment, transport and ICT; (d) investment in social, health, research, innovation, business and educational infrastructure; (e) investment in the development of endogenous potential through fixed investment in equipment and small-scale infrastructure, including small-scale cultural and sustainable tourism infrastructure, services to enterprises, support to research and innovation bodies and investment in technology and applied research in enterprises; (f) networking, cooperation and exchange of experience between competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities, economic and social partners and relevant bodies representing civil society, referred to in Article 5(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, studies, preparatory actions and capacity-building." (Art. 3 (1) Regulation (EU) No. 1301/2013)

No 1303/2013). [124] For the cooperation across the external boundaries of the EU the policy goal can even further be extended by the provisions of the two regulations of the *Instrument for Pre-Accession* (Regulation (EU) No. 231/2014) and the *European Neigbourhood Instrument*[125] (Regulation (EU) No. 232 /2014). Both instruments provide a distinct and individual set of policy goals with their diverging territorial scope and program-logic. The IPA II CBC regulation defines seven so-called *Thematic Priorities* as potential policy goals.[126] Simultaneously, ENI-CBC aligns its policy goals mainly around the ETC principles complemented by some additional specificities for the external governance dimension. [127]

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[124] The CPR includes following Thematic Objectives (TOs): "(1) strengthening research, technological development and innovation; (2) enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT; (3) enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, of the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and of the fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF); (4) supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors; (5) promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management; (6) preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency; (7) promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures; (8) promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility; (9) promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination; (10) investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning; (11) enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration." (Art. 9 (EU) No 1303/2013).

[125] The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) has replaced the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) in 2014. Its territorial scope is divided in two groups: ENI South includes the countries of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia. ENI East includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

[126] Thematic Priority a: promoting employment, labor mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders through, inter alia: integrating cross-border labor markets, including cross-border mobility; joint local employment initiatives; information and advisory services and joint training; gender equality; equal opportunities; integration of immigrant communities and vulnerable groups; investment in public employment services; and supporting investment in public health and social services; Thematic Priority b: protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management through, inter alia: joint actions for environmental protection; promoting sustainable use of natural resources, resource efficiency, renewable energy sources and the shift towards a safe and sustainable low carbon economy; promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems and emergency preparedness; Thematic Priority c: promoting sustainable transport and improving public infrastructures by, inter alia, reducing isolation through improved access to transport, information and communication networks and services and investing in cross-border water, waste and energy systems and facilities; Thematic Priority d: encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage; Thematic Priority e: investing in youth, education and skills through, inter alia, developing and implementing joint education, vocational training, training schemes and infrastructure supporting joint youth activities; Thematic Priority f: promoting local and regional governance and enhancing the planning and administrative capacity of local and regional authorities; Thematic Priority g: enhancing competitiveness, the business environment and the development of SMEs, trade and investment through, inter alia, promotion and support to entrepreneurship, in particular SMEs, and development of local cross-border markets and internationalization; Thematic Priority h: strengthening research, technological development, innovation and information and communication technologies through, inter alia, promoting the sharing of human resources and facilities for research and technology development (Annex III Regulation (EU) No. 231/2014).

[127] The Thematic Objectives for the ENI-CBC programs are as follows: 1. Business and SME development; 2. Support for education, research, technological development and innovation; 3. Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage; 4. Promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty; 5. Support for local and regional good governance; 6. Environmental protection, and climate change mitigation and adaptation; 7. Improvement of accessibility to the regions, development of sustainable and climate proof transport and

The three documents provide a vast number of potential areas of intervention. This broad selection of policy goals, which is often criticized for diluting the intended initially efficient and territorially focused policy impact, is set forth to comply with the ETC-regulation. The ETC-regulation stipulates that 80 % of the ERDF allocations, as primary sources of funding (see next chapter), must be concentrated in the cross-border and transnational dimension on maximum four Thematic Objectives of the Common Provision Regulation. The interregional dimension Regulation. The interregional dimension remains due to its strictly networking-based character unaffected by this provision (Art. 6 (1-2) Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013).

Figure 3 Selection of policy goals by the ETC and IPA-CBC programs



Source: (Levarlet et al., 2016, p. 42)

However, the requirement of streamlining the goal setting is over-complied with by the various ETC as well as the IPA programs, although the latter programs are not addressed by the provisions above. More than 80 % of the established cooperations concentrate on four or fewer Thematic Objectives. As it can be seen in the figure, a particularly strong concentration can be observed in the cross-border strand (Interreg A) with a focus on the issues of environment (TO 6) and R&D (TO 1). In contrast, within the transnational strand, most programs focus on sustainable transport (TO 7). Among the IPA CBC, program activities are similarly aligned around environmental protection (TP b), tourism, and cultural heritage (TP d) as primary intervention areas. In contrast to these programs, the ENI CBC programs do not show any particular thematic focus (Levarlet et al., 2016, p. 42, 2016, p. 10).

communication networks and systems; 8. Common challenges in the field of safety and security; 9. Promotion of and cooperation on sustainable energy and energy security; 10. Promotion of border management border security and mobility; 11. Other areas not listed above likely to have a substantial cross-border impact (case by case justification required) (European Commission, n.d., pp. 18–19).

While the various CBC programs led to a stark numerical increase of RCBG networks in the EU's border regions and provide financial support for a vast amount of policy goals, the majority of programs, however, leave significant room for improvement in terms of their actual goal-attainment success. Most supported RCBG networks are as such not able to provide essential impulses in the designated areas of intervention or can transform their goal-setting in actually verifiable and practical results (Barca, 2009, pp. 97–98; Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, pp. 97–98; Sousa, 2013, p. 676). When taking a closer look at the individual ETC programs, the cross-border cooperation programs (Interreg A) were able to create the most visible place-based added-value (Association of European Border Regions, 2009, pp. 13–16; Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 61; Perkmann, 2007b, p. 254), while the impact of the transnational (Interreg B) and interregional (Interreg C) counterparts was significantly more limited and more intangible due to their program intervention logic and immanent "soft" policy approach.[128]

An often-criticized aspect concerning the CBC programs is their particularly strong alignment around sectoral policy goals, which goes at the expense of adequately considering the territorial dimension. The transnational strand often lacks a comprehensive and proper identification of geospatial challenges within the respective programs. Instead, it concentrates on overarching and general sectoral policy goals, which are embedded in the Lisbon, Gothenburg, or Europe 2020 strategies. This, however, results in an often lacking place-based added-value and consequentially limits also the potential policy impact of the RCBG networks as such (Dühr and Nadin, 2007, p. 382; Hachmann, 2011, p. 1546; Kaiser, 2014, p. 102; Perkmann, 2007a, p. 862; Zillmer et al., 2012, p. 48).

Another challenge in terms of the policy goal-setting is the strongly top-down oriented programming of the so-called *Operational Programs.* These are constituted as basic policy documents for the Cohesion Policies and CBC approaches in the respective states and will consequentially be elaborated bilaterally between the national governments and the EC. Due to the often centralized administrative structures of the particular EU states (see chapter 3.3), the subnational actors of the RCBG network will usually not be sufficiently taken into account

[128] The description of the Interreg B and C strands as “soft” policy approaches derives from their already mentioned program character, namely to put a strong focus on networking activities, exchange of experiences, mutual learning, and other similar measures, which are often based on the premise to coordinate the policy approaches in a mid or long-term scale. In comparison to this, the “hard” policy approaches, which can be more often found within the Interreg A strand, include among others the realization of infrastructural projects, joint economic spatial development projects, or common cultural and/or political events, which are more based on an anticipated short-term success (Dühr and Nadin, 2007, pp. 375–376).

during the respective drafting procedure of the Operational Program (Miosga, 2000, p. 264; Perkmann, 1999, p. 659). Therefore, this proceeding is prone to not considering the actual place-based challenges and problems of the various program areas in an adequate way. The risk of a consequential insufficient place-based approach is even more increased when we recall the above mentioned strong sectoral orientation of the designated policy goals and their alignment with EU mainstream strategies.

The LRAs thus often find themselves in a rather disadvantageous situation. While the top-down oriented programming of the OPs widely excludes LRAs as such, the participating actors of the RCBG networks are afterward in charge to carry out the application for project funding and the realization of the following implementation on their responsibility (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, p. 98). Due to this discrepancy, the risk of a potential misfit between Operational Program and actual project-implementation can occur, which can significantly limit the success in terms of goal attainment and thus weaken the added-value of the network. This unfavorable situation is further aggravated by the considerable complexity of the project application as such. While most participating LRAs are equipped with substantially limited administrative capabilities, the bureaucratic requirements are often highly complex and are often criticized as being disproportionate to the potential added value of the financial program support (Diller, 2005, p. 139; Köhler, 2010, p. 246).

The strong influence of the EC and the national governments further affect the potential goal-setting of the RCBG networks detrimentally. To avoid possible conflict-laden topics, which could lead to diplomatic alienations between the respective governments, most RCBG approaches are further characterized as "fair-weather cooperation", which are not necessarily in line with the actual need for action. In multiple cooperations, it can be observed that RCBG networks have become a "window dressing" initiative, which are often aligned around more symbolic policy issues (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, p. 98; Sousa, 2013, p. 676, 2013, p. 682).

To increase the goal-attainment's visibility, the implementation focus was mainly put short-term projects with a duration between 6 and 24 months (Engl, 2014b, pp. 15–17; Kiefer, 2010, p. 106; Nadalutti, 2013, p. 760). Although this is not necessarily bad, the overemphasis on such projects contradicts the principle of a sustainable and long-term territorial cohesion approach in the respective program areas.

3.2. The polity dimension

Embeddedness in the "shadow of hierarchy" and differentiation of the network structure:

As outlined in the theory chapter (see chapter 2.2.2), cross-border cooperation is embedded in a distinct "shadow of hierarchy". National governments firmly maintain this status quo as central *gatekeepers* despite the ongoing developments within the EU's Structural Policy and, particularly, with Interreg/ETC (keyword: partnership principle). However, for the last three decades, the bottom-up oriented RCBG experienced a substantial valorization within the EU primary and secondary law. In 1990 as a Community Initiative, Interreg was set up primarily as an innovative pilot project with experimental character and was therefore considered a niche policy issue within the EU's Structural Policy. Despite its increasing role compared to the rest of Community Initiatives, its overall limited role remained widely unchanged until the end of the Interreg III period (2000-2006). The Lisbon Treaty marked in 2007 finally a significant watershed by constituting territorial cohesion as a new fundamental EUropean policy objective beside the already existing objectives of social and economic cohesion (Art. 3 TEU and Art. 174 TFEU).[129] This resulted in a standard overhaul of the EU's Cohesion Policy architecture. The three Interreg program strands were integrated into the goal of the so-called European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), which pursues the aim to reinforce territorial cooperation between governmental and non-governmental authorities in the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the EU's system of Multi-Level Governance. The ETC became in 2007 one of the three EU Cohesion Policy goals (besides the *convergence objective* and the *regional competitiveness and employment objective*). In the latest MFF (2014-2020), the ETC gained even more importance. Due to streamlining measures, European Territorial Cooperation is now one of the two main EU Cohesion Policy goals. The new valorized role of RCBG within the primary law also resulted in the already above-mentioned differentiation of the EU's secondary law, which was realized in adopting the ETC, IPA II, and ENI regulation (see chapter 2.2.3.1). However, despite these developments, the legal and actual "shadow of hierarchy" is strictly maintained by the primary law. In Article 4 (2) of the Treaty of the European Union, it is explicitly stipulated that the EU respects the functional autonomy of the member state

[129] While the territorial cohesion objective does not exclusively refer to the aspect of territorial cooperation, it includes the premise that a balanced and sustainable territorial development must be achieved among others through closer cooperation of authorities in a cross-border context (European Commission, n.d.). As new binding objective the aspect of territorial cohesion (Art. 175 TFEU) must be taken into account by all actions of the EU, which also constitutes a considerable valorization of CBC within the EU primary law.

authorities to preserve their territorial integrity.[130] This legally provided ultimate decision-making authority by the member states also determined the EU's approach towards RCBG for the last three decades.[131] This premise was firmly upheld during the various reforms of the Interreg/ETC programs. Even with the introduction of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in 2007, this premise was only slightly adjusted (see chapter 4).[132] While the EGTC provisions provide new stand-alone regulations concerning the realization of an RCBG network and thus ensures a significantly increased institutionalized leeway for LRAs, cross-border cooperation in the EU is not carried out without the explicit approval by the respective nation-states.[133] With the legal liability remaining exclusively by the central governments (Palermo, 2012, p. 81), the states continue to be the sole gatekeepers to authorize the establishment of RCBG networks. Especially in non-EGTC based cooperations, the central governments are also entitled to decide about the actual form of collaboration and the allocation of the particular funding. A formal authorization by national governmental authorities further does not oblige them to provide any kind of own administrative or financial support. This not just limits the mobilization capabilities of LRAs, but forces them to resort to very individual and case-based flexible governance structures (Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 11; Gaubert and Yann, 2010, p. 15).

In most cases, especially in the cross-border dimension (Interreg A), two options are used to provide a basic institutional framework, which is however increasingly substituted by EGTCs in the last years. Actors can either create an association governed under public law or form cooperation under private law. To create a body under public law, actors are obliged to either resort to the creation of domestic legal bodies (e.g., an association of local or regional authorities, or public interest group), or the cooperation is based on a bilateral treaty between the respective central governments. These latter highly institutionalized formats were, however, already before the EGTC regulation quite seldom. The more widespread approach is the private

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[130] "The Union shall respect the equality of Member States before the Treaties as well as their national identities, inherent in their fundamental structures, political and constitutional, inclusive of regional and local self-government. It shall respect their essential State functions, including ensuring the territorial integrity of the State, maintaining law and order and safeguarding national security. In particular, national security remains the sole responsibility of each Member State." (Art. 4 (2) TEU)

[131] In 1992 the EC stipulated that it has not any intention to push for an adaption to the EU's legal framework in the area of cross-border cooperation and referred as potential remedy to other international law based instruments outside the EU framework (Engl, 2014a, p. 149).

[132] Although the EGTC regulation marks with its adoption in 2007 a decisive step in regard of EU supported CBC, particularly in terms of institutionalization, a considerable number of community co-funded cooperation are still carried out without the usage of this legal provision, which makes a detached assessment necessary.

[133] While the program provisions did influence the organization structure of the networks, it was far from an alleged "institution-building", which was often used in the EC's jargon (Perkmann, 2002a, pp. 116–117).

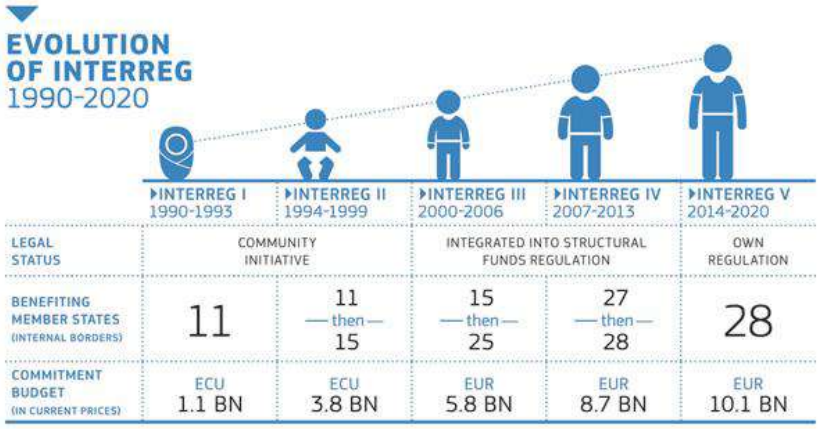
law based cooperation, which is based on creating joint associations with limited legal liability. These associations are entitled to act within the given domestic legal framework and, in some cases, were even empowered to create an own budget for CBC allocations (Engl, 2014a, pp. 33–35). The embeddedness within the domestic legal system demands creating a so-called "twin association", which requires establishing an association/body on each side of the border and requires the general legal framework's necessary adaption. However, the resulting low degree of institutionalization restrains the actual range and depth of cross-border actions and provides a significantly lower degree of institutional stability due to the persisting legal fragmentation (Derya, 2005, p. 60; Gualini, 2003, pp. 47–49). The low degree of institutional stability is particularly affected by the rudimental mutual financial or legal liability, which often results in a persisting moral hazard and limited social capital between the actors (Deppisch, 2012, p. 321; Medeiros, 2015, p. 103). A quite detrimental factor is the public actors' inability to carry out a mutual alignment between the administrative levels. While RCBG is based on the premise to realize a cross-sectoral and cross-level approach within the horizontal and vertical dimension of the MLG system, public actors from the various administrative levels (national, regional, local) are often unable to overcome the diverging power structures which are being present in an RCBG. Due to the asymmetrical legal empowerment, they often cannot find joint institutional approaches with a decisive added-value (Blatter, 2000, p. 261). This situation contributes in many cases to the above-mentioned "fair-weather cooperation" among actors, where the cooperation addresses policy issues that do not necessarily require substantial allocations. The heterogeneity regarding the actor-empowerment also continues in terms of the general actor-capabilities, especially concerning the potential allocation of personnel, financial, and administrative resources. While large regional entities, like the Austrian, Belgian, German states and regions, can allocate significant resources and are empowered with a wide range of competencies, small local authorities often lack these attributes. Especially in Central and (South-)Eastern Europe, where the LRAs are still faced with the legacy of the socialist centralization of powers, the cooperation of small adjacent LRAs is often characterized by a limited level of success or impact (Dühr and Nadin, 2007, p. 385).

The weakly developed administrative capabilities are particularly salient among the overwhelming majority of IPA and ENI states, whose administrations are characterized by an intense politicization, nepotism, and corruption. The additional persisting high degree of fiscal centralization often results in very low-skilled civil services with a high personnel fluctuation level. The usually very weak local and regional administrative level contributes overall to weak citizen participation and consequentially a rudimental democratic culture on these levels

(Committee of the Regions, 2014b, 2015b, 2016a). These administrations, which are substantially struggling with their everyday administrative tasks, also often turn out to be less capable of being a strong partner within the respective RCBG networks.

Funding and budgetary provisions: Since 1990, Regional Cross-Border Governance experienced not just a formal valorization in the EU but was also equipped with a continuously growing budget. Especially the budget of Interreg experienced a considerable increase. Over the years, the three strands' overall budget increased inflation-adjusted from EUR 1.1 bn. to EUR 10.1 bn., which constitutes a nominal tenfold growth. This must be, however, assessed in the given context of the parallel changing framework conditions.

Figure 4 Development of the Interreg budget (1990-2020)



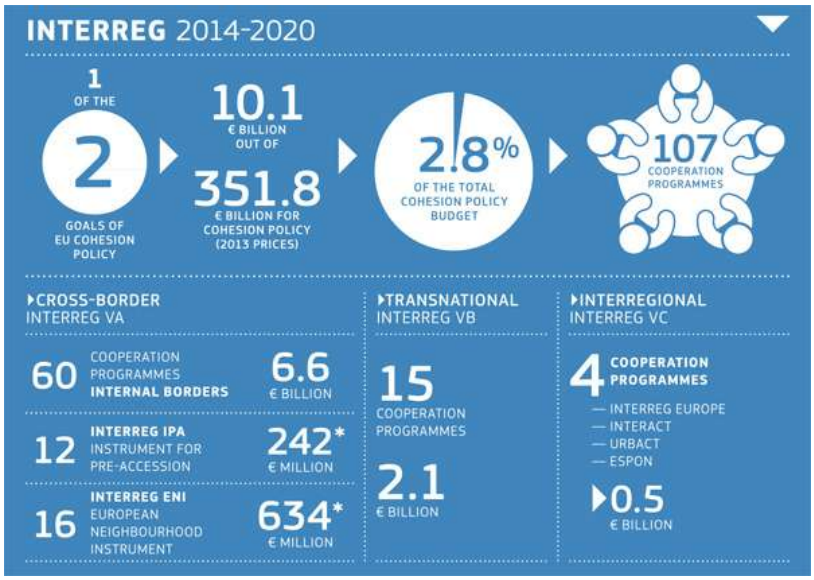
Source: European Commission – DG REGIO (2017)

With the four enlargement rounds since 1990 (1995, 2004, 2007, 2013), the number of potential eligible states increased by a factor of 2.5, namely to 28 countries in total. In 2010, more than 181 million people lived in cross-border regions (Interreg A) and were thus eligible for funding. This equaled approximately 37 % of the total EU population (Gaubert and Yann, 2010, p. 16). The increase of the Interreg/ETC budget must also be put in the given context of the general budgetary increase of the cohesion funds since 1989. After the establishment of Interreg, the initial budget was limited to a modest share of 1,4 % of the budget. While this share was sharply increased in the next financing period (1994-1998), since then, the increase was relatively low.[134] For the current MFF (2014-2020), Interreg's budgetary share remains still at 2,8 % of the overall Cohesion Policy budget. Especially in the limelight of the recent formal valorization of the ETC as one of the Cohesion Policy's two major goals, this unfolds as a significant gap between aspiration and reality.

[134] The overall Cohesion Policy budgetary share by Interreg was as follows: Interreg I (1989-1993) 1,4 %; Interreg II (1994-1999) 2.5 %; Interreg III (2000-2006) 2,3 %, Interreg IV (2006-2013) 2,5 % , Interreg V (2014-2020) 2,8 %.

The current ETC budget of EUR 10.1 bn. is distributed over the three Interreg strands. A significant share of the available funding is allocated to the strand of cross-border cooperation (Interreg A). With EUR 6.6 bn. It constitutes by far the largest budgetary item within the ETC. It is followed by the transnational strand (Interreg B) with EUR 2.1 bn. with a wide margin by the interregional strand (Interreg C) with EUR 0.5 bn.. Therefore, two-thirds of the allocated funding is reserved for the first strand, which underlines the cross-border dimension's importance as the most important territorial scope but emphasizes its expectations as an approach with the most anticipated geospatial impact. The realization of the ETC's external RCBG approaches provides for the cooperation with IPA states EUR 242 mn. from the ERDF budget. For the cooperation with ENI states EUR 634 mn. are reserved for the period.

Figure 5 RCBG funding in the EU for the MFF 2014-2020



Source: European Commission – DG REGIO (2017)

Additionally, to Interreg funding, the IPA and ENI programs contribute with their resources to the realization of CBC activities. The IPA allocates EUR 395,2 mn. of its overall EUR 11,7 bn. through its *Multi-country approach*, which will be complemented by *additional strategic papers* for the individual IPA countries, where 4 % of the individually assigned budget is designated for CBC activities (Art. 15 Regulation (EU) No 231/2014). The ENI allocates 5 % of its total budget of EUR 15.4 bn. for such measures (Art. 17 Regulation (EU) No. 232 /2014), which equals EUR 770 mn. for the years between 2014 and 2020. However, while these numbers seem to be substantial compared to other mainstream programs, the potential eligible funding for CBC activities remains despite its continuous growth in the internal (ETC) and an external dimension (IPA & ENI) relatively modest. This often results in a limited geospatial impact.

The allocation of funding is based on co-financing between the EU and the respective governmental authorities. The obligation to joint financial support aims to strengthen actor ownership and reduce the risk of potential free-riding by the governmental actors. Another anticipated effect is creating a financial leverage effect by mobilizing endogen resources of the

governmental actors, which should improve the overall economic impact. Due to the often observable insufficient financial capabilities of the LRAs, this co-financing by the EU was substantially increased over the years. The increase from initially 50 % to 85 % within the ETC (Gabbe et al., 2008, p. 69) marked a significant improvement for the local and regional actors. Many authorities are, however, still unable to mobilize their resources adequately. The major problem is the necessary allocation of the whole sum in advance by the authorities, which will be reimbursed by the EU later. However, this reimbursement can take up to nine months, which often makes it impossible for the authorities to realize projects with their very restrained budgets (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, p. 100).

The already detrimental situation, which is particularly salient for small local actors, is aggravated by the budgetary provisions' general toughening. An example is the introduction of the n+2 rule,[135] which puts these actors under additional pressure to allocate the reserved money within two years. Due to the fear of potentially losing funds, actors can be therefore tempted to realize actionist "window-dressing" measures, which are without significant geospatial impact (Sousa, 2013, p. 682). Another problem is that many (border-)regions are often over-dependent on the community funds due to their budgetary constraints. The fiscal and economic crisis in 2007 also contributed to this detrimental situation due to massive budgetary consolidation measures by the central governments, which often led to administrative recentralization and massive budget cuts for the LRAs. The consequence is a substantial increase of the financial dependency of LRAs from community funding. The lack of financial resources also induced a change in the actor-behavior within RCBG networks. The cooperation as such became, in various cases, very fund driven, where the aim of maximizing the financial support from the community level was increasingly considered as the primary target. This approach, which is still observable among various RCBG networks, however, collides with the general premise of aligning the policy goals strictly around the principle of place-based added-value (Committee of the Regions, 2016a, p. 13; European Commission, 2014a, p. 144; Interact, 2010, p. 9; Sousa, 2013, p. 676).

The overdependency from community funding thus also significantly increases the vulnerability of RCBG networks. As Diller already stated in 2005, being still valid, it is highly doubtful that many cooperations would continue to exist if the EU's financial support would

[135] The n+2 rule within the Cohesion Policy is based on the Regulation (EC) 1083/2006 and stipulates that allocated funds within an Operational program must be used within the period of two years by the related authorities or they will be reallocated by the EC to other programs (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, p. 96).

cease one day. This, however, gives room for concern regarding the intended principle of creating sustainable governance frameworks (Diller, 2005, p. 138).

3.3. The politics dimension

Social capital, actor and stakeholder mobilization: A deciding factor for cross-border cooperation is the constitution of social capital, which materializes among others in mutual trust between actors and a low degree of moral hazard during the governance process. The resulting strong and stable ties between the actors are an essential precondition for creating successful cross-border activities and ensuring a successful implementation process. Although the ETC is setting the establishment of reciprocal trust and even a so-called "cross-border mentality" as a basic premise of cooperation, the realization of this is faced with various and significant difficulties (Deppisch, 2012, p. 329). One of the most salient issues is the disjunctive character of the borders, which remain firmly a decisive obstacle for the cooperation process (Svensson and Nordlund, 2015, p. 378). While political representatives often tend to proclaim symbolically not just the already achieved establishment of social capital, but even the creation of this "cross-border mentality" in their region (Banjac, 2012, p. 55), in fact, most RCBG networks are still far from achieving such a degree of social capital (Veemaa, 2012). It is often observable that administrations remain in their institutionalist behavioral pattern and do not comprehensively open up to the framework conditions. Activities by the participating governmental actors are often characterized by a distinct need for coordination with their respective central administrations, limiting their autonomy and flexibility within the network. Implementation processes are, as a result, often very dragging and bureaucratic, limiting also the room for action in terms of policy goal-attainment (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011, pp. 17–19).

Various RCBG networks further suffer from a lack of a shared "geospatial vision". Two factors can cause this. The first potential reason is insufficient knowledge and understanding of the problems by administrations and political representatives. These actors are often unable to put themselves in the position of their counterparts across the border. However, the second reason can be an open unwillingness to give up the national/regional/local "tunnel vision", materializing in ignorance towards other actors' problems (Dühr and Nadin, 2007, p. 386).

Due to these factors, various scholars constitute that the building of social capital, especially a common CBC identity within the RCBG networks, are still far from realized and show a distinct gap between aspirations and reality (Boman and Berg, 2007, p. 197; Deppisch, 2012, p. 329; Dühr et al., 2007, p. 299).

An exception from these generally observable patterns are the minority regions. As already outlined in this work's theoretical part (see chapter 2.4.1), ethnocultural commonalities between national minorities and nation-states can substantially facilitate cooperation in the cross-border region. Especially in cases where the national governments have given their approval and refrain from any obstruction, the cooperations are characterized by a particularly low degree of moral hazard and a high degree of social capital. Various ETC supported RCBG networks, which are based on such beneficial framework conditions, show very dense CBC activities and are very successful regarding their goal attainment and project implementation (Engl, 2014a, p. 88; Klotz and Trettel, 2017, pp. 17–19; Medve-Bálint and Svensson, 2012, p. 197). However, the existence of a national minority in the border region is far from being a panacea for providing a stable socio-cultural framework.

On the contrary, many minority border-regions exist in EUrope. The socio-cultural and political framework conditions are characterized by a tense relationship and even history-based open antagonisms (e.g., armed conflicts, wars, and expulsions of the populations). Such factors are, even after decades of political cooperation, challenging to be overcome. A good example is in this regard the German-Polish cross-border cooperation, which was after its initiation for a long time characterized by a low degree of social capital and significantly hampered the governance process of these RCBG networks (Student, 2000, p. 1999; Trippl, 2006, p. 12). A similar example is the Estonian-Russian border, where even before the recently risen geopolitical tension, the cross-border region was characterized by a very tense relationship and, to some degree, even an "us vs. them" antagonism between the respective communitites (Boman and Berg, 2007, p. 206).

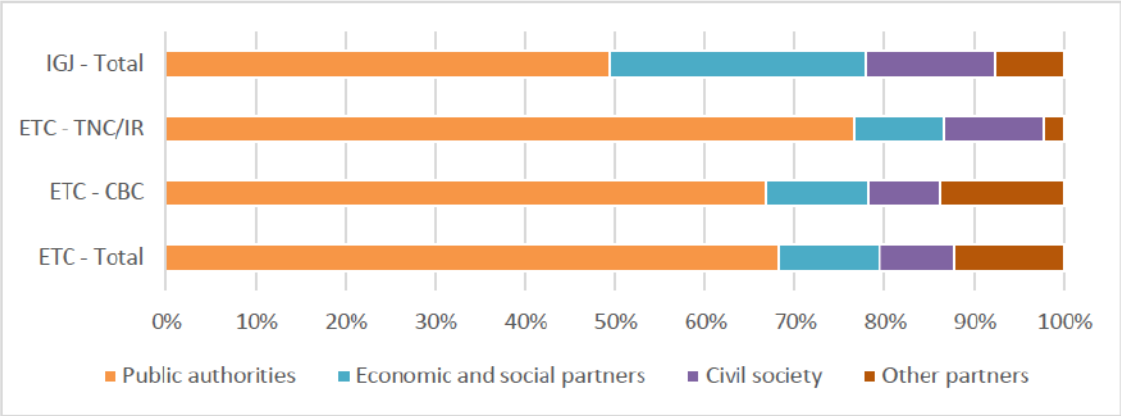
Procedural actor-roles within the networks: While the Cohesion Policy and the implementation of the ETC programs are characterized by a large bulk of provisions, which are stipulated in the Common Provisions Regulation and ETC Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and 1299/2013), these do not provide any guidelines concerning the actor-roles or the procedural steering within the RCBG networks. Most cooperations, however, align their intra-network actor-roles around the typical triad of important network promoters. Depending on the size and the formal actor-constellation, the political champions are typically represented by the respective local, regional, or national governments, either political decision-makers or delegates from the administrations. In most cases, technical promoters are supranational bodies, such as the EC, with its respective DGs or INTERACT as supporting entities. Depending on the Interreg strand and the network's size, this role is also to some degree carried out by NGOs, chambers of commerce, research institutions, or other actors as additional facilitators (see

further below). The process promoters' role is realized within the particular RCBG networks either through the establishment of joint offices or secretariats or a commissioned private entity. Despite these structural cornerstones, each RCBG network realizes its particular governance setup from case to case very differently (Perkmann, 1999, p. 662), resulting in a vast diversity of actor-constellations actor-roles. This makes an adequate depiction within the narrow boundaries of this overview not feasible. However, a partial homogenization in this regard occurred after adopting the EGTC regulation in 2006, where first tangible provisions concerning the governance structure and the setup of actor-roles were constituted. Due to the increasing number of EGTCs, more and more networks comply with these regulations leading to a decreasing heterogeneity (see chapter 4).

The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders within the RCBG networks is crucial in realizing a comprehensive bottom-up approach within the respective territories. According to the theoretical premises, these stakeholders' extensive participation is beneficial in terms of democratic legitimacy, namely by involving representatives of the non-governmental sphere and contributing to the diversification of decision-making by including experts' opinions. However, most ETC programs show a relatively limited involvement of such stakeholders. Depending on the respective territorial scope of the CBC program, various challenges can be named. Concerning the cross-border scope (Interreg A), a considerable mobilization problem occurs due to the diverging territorial areas of engagement. While most ETC-supported RCBG networks focus on a minimal cooperation area, most stakeholders (e.g., interest associations, chambers of commerce, etc.) are centrally organized and engage primarily in national arenas. Thus, this territorial incongruence makes the NGO activity within such a small territorial scope often unattractive, leading to a predominance of governmental actors (European Commission, 2016a, p. 30). The overrepresentation of public authorities at the expense of non-governmental stakeholders can also be observed within the other two strands, which show an even less degree of non-governmental participation (see pillar ETC – TNC/IR figure below). While these networks' territorial scope would be more beneficial for stakeholders, the lack of involvement derives particularly from considerations concerning the network stability. Due to the already inflated actor constellation with a large number of public authorities, these networks refrain in the majority of cases from the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders or limit their participation to activities within expert groups and thus a sheer advisory function to obtain network functionality (European Commission, 2016a, p. 33).

However, this triggered in the past criticism concerning a lack of involvement of the "civil society" (Boman and Berg, 2007, p. 197; European Commission, 2016a, p. 30).

Figure 6 Involvement of non-governmental stakeholders in ETC-supported RCBG networks



Source: (European Commission, 2016, p. 31)

The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders is even more challenging in terms of cross-border cooperation with third countries. Being affected by the above-mentioned lack of administrative capabilities or the inexperienced/untrained personnel, the general governance process in these countries is often faced with significant challenges to realize such a comprehensive bottom-up oriented approach. Third countries, especially in Eastern Europe, are struggling with a dysfunctional social and political environment on the local or regional level, like in Ukraine or Moldova (Committee of the Regions, 2016a, p. 50). Non-governmental stakeholders are often faced with very limited institutionally guaranteed participation opportunities, making their involvement in RCBG networks often unfeasible. The cooperation as such is often nearly exclusively government-driven.

External marketing for creating public support: The establishment of social capital is dependent on the level of mutual trust between the participating (governmental) actors and the general support by the public in the respective cross-border regions. Therefore, external marketing activities are essential, which are, in theory, carried out primarily by the political promoters. Based on their prominence, these actors are obliged to raise the public's awareness towards particular place-based challenges and problems in the respective regions while simultaneously emphasizing the potential added value of these cooperations. While these activities are, in fact, vital to generate important public awareness, most ETC-funded RCBG networks, in general, fail to do so. Scholars often assess cross-border cooperations, which are funded by the ETC programs, as being 'relatively separate from the everyday lives of ordinary people' (Boman and Berg, 2007, p. 197). This assessment is also confirmed by a major survey of the European Commission, carried out in 2015. More than 68 % of the surveyed population responded that they are entirely unaware of cross-border cooperation activities in their region. Only 19 % heard

of any CBC activities but were unable to describe them, while only 12 % were fully aware of the ongoing cooperation efforts and had a comprehensive knowledge of them (European Commission, 2015a, p. 7). Even in comparably more successful RCBG networks, the general unawareness constitutes a significant challenge for the actors. The Euroregion (and now EGTC) Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino, for example, is considered a relatively successful approach in the academic debate, struggling with a considerable lack of awareness by the respective populations in the area (Traweger and Pallaver, 2014).

4. The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as the institutional evolvement of Regional Cross-Border Governance

Over the years, the various CBC programs presented a very heterogeneous picture concerning their institutional setup, geographic dispersion, and goal attainment success. As such, the individual Interreg programs were often not able to sufficiently achieve the designated objectives (e.g., territorial, social, or economic cohesion) being set out within the Structural Policy framework of the EU. Although the numbers of phantom cross-border cooperation schemes, which didn't show any actual activity, continuously decreased over the years, the number of genuinely successful cooperation schemes with a considerable place-based added value remained limited. One of the main reasons for this evident and salient capabilities-expectation gap concerning the Interreg programs was often the lack of a common cross-border juridical and institutional structure within the Euroregions. Cooperation was therefore either forced to be carried out in an informal constellation or had to be based on involved public or private law based solutions, respectively bi- or multilateral intergovernmental agreements, which were seldomly realized (Engl, 2014a, p. 207).

To overcome this disadvantageous situation, the European Committee of Regions became, since its establishment in 1994, the leading promoter for a legal instrument within the area of territorial cooperation. The dedication of the CoR to convince its institutional counterparts on the EU level, foremost the Commission and the Council, regarding the necessity of such an instrument was faced, however, initially by significant resistance. The resistance by the EC was, however, ambivalent in this regard. It acknowledged the importance of a valorization of RCBG within the EU and emphasized this issue within its White Paper on European Governance in 2001 (European Commission, 2001); however, it rejected the CoR's appeal due to the conviction that such an undertaking would be "doomed to fail in the Council" (Gsodam and Alcolea Martinez, 2014, pp. 43–44). The CoR maintained its pressure, like through its 2002 issued Opinion, in which it called again upon the EC to take the initiative and formulate framework legislation (Nadalutti, 2013, p. 762). Finally, the activities were awarded success,

when in 2004, the EC finally gave in and began to draft a legislative proposal (Eisendle, 2011, p. 49). In the following two years, the CoR, the EP, and the EC jointly became active to convince the national governments in the Council, who were, as expected, firmly rejecting the proposal.[136] Supported by Germany and especially Austria as acting EU Council presidency in the first half of 2016, the veto was finally overcome after lengthy negotiations. The result was the adoption of the regulation on the *European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)* (Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006) on 5th July 2006 (Greiter, 2011, p. 84; Kiefer, 2010, p. 110). While the national laws' adoption to apply with the provisions of the regulation was characterized by significant delays, which mounted up to nearly two years in almost all member states except Hungary and the United Kingdom[137], first debates started in the meanwhile concerning an eventual adoption of the EGTC regulation. Especially the facilitated involvement of third countries and non-governmental actors within the EGTC, particularly regarding public-private partnerships, were issued as matters of importance. This deliberation process was again strongly promoted and steered by the CoR, who organized a row of consultation events between the EGTC stakeholders between 2009 and 2011, leading up to the initiation of the formal revision process in the following two years and the final adoption of the regulation (Regulation (EU) No. 1302/2013) on 17th December 2013 (Engl, 2014a, pp. 210–211; Gsodam and Alcolea Martinez, 2014, p. 47). The EGTC as such marks a significant innovation in the area of RCBG within the EU framework. The regulations constitute an approach, which tries to successfully realize a balancing act between filling the often criticized institutional and legal void in the area of the EU's cross-border cooperation framework on the one side, and on the other to comply with the gatekeeping role of the member states and their persistence to maintain the "shadow of hierarchy" (Greiter, 2011, p. 93).

The EGTCs differs thus significantly from their regular Interreg counterparts by being equipped with significant own institutional capabilities, which gives them not just leeway in term of attaining the overarching cohesion goals, creating place-based added value, but also to increase the ownership among actors and increase the level of sustainability (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, p. 11; Engl, 2016, p. 162). However, the EGTCs must

[136] A primary reason for the national governments' initial rejection was the concern that the regulation would hollow out the "shadow of hierarchy "within the area of territorial cooperation by creating higher-ranking EU secondary law, which would significantly extend the room for action by the regions towards their central governments.

[137] The deadline for adoption was constituted for August 2007, although various countries only managed to adapt their national laws in 2009. The cause for the delays were manifold and resulted from the lack of political will, administrative problems, or change of governments (Engl, 2014b, p. 21).

not be considered a new form of RCBG, which aims to replace the pre-existing Euroregions or other forms of RCBG (Engl, 2007, pp. 28–29). Instead, it shall be considered a significant development-step of the already existing Interreg approach for actors who want to increase their cooperation efforts. In the following brief chapter, we shall outline the main characteristics by applying the already introduced RCBG approach.

4.1. The policy dimension

Actor-constellation and territorial scope: Created as a legal instrument to enhance the territorial cooperation within the EU framework, the EGTC is aligned around the three known strands of the Interreg programs with their respective territorial scope, namely the cooperation area of cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation (Article 1 (2) Regulation (EU) No. 1302/2013).[138] According to their cross-border oriented character, one requirement is that actors have to originate from at least two states but are not limited concerning the maximum number of participating actors (Art. 3 (2) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). While this gives the RCBG network a variety of potential actor-constellations, from the 68 established EGTCs, as of December 2017, the overwhelming majority of cooperation is created for a small-scale cross-border scope. As depicted on the table, 59 EGTCs can be accounted to this group. Simultaneously, only 9 in total are established as transnational cooperation with a large-scale contiguous cooperation area or are constituted as a territorially non-contiguous interregional network approach. Although a slight increase of transnational and interregional cooperation can be observed recently, the dominance of the CBC dimension can be ascribed to the immanent characteristic of actor constellations. An increasing number of actors within an EGTC network demands not only congruent compliance with the

Table 6 Actor-constellation within the EGTCs

Cross-Border:	
Local level:	
• 2-20 actors	**17**
• 21-100 actors	**6**
Local-regional constellation	**9**
Regional constellation	**17**
Regional-national constellation	**2**
Local-regional-national constellation	**6**
Transnational / Interregional:	
Local-regional constellation	**6**
National constellation	**2**
Without territorial authorities:	
Cross-border	**2**
Transnational / Interregional	**1**

Source: (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 108)

[138] Although the EGTC is based on the already outlined adapted regulation, it is still supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which underlines its alignment again with the objectives and the territorial scopes of the ETC (Zillmer et al., 2015, p. 19).

various domestic institutional and legal provisions of each member (see next chapter), but the inflation of the actor constellations also leads to the outlined sharp rise of the necessary procedural steering efforts (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, p. 18). An inflated actor-constellation also significantly affects the goal-setting. Based on the principle that policy goals will be elaborated within RCBG networks on a common perception of the framework conditions and accompanying challenges, these must be acknowledged as pressing enough to realize a joint approach to consequentially allocate own administrative and financial resources. With an increasing number of participating actors, especially when these are dispersed over a large territory (e.g., transnational or interregional scope) this perceived need for action is prone to become distorted, thus making the necessary unanimous definition of common policy goals significantly more difficult (Zillmer et al., 2015, p. 36). Given this context, most EGTCs' actor-constellation remain with a limited number of actors to avoid the overload mentioned above (Engl, 2016, p. 165). The orientation towards a "simplified" actor constellation is also observable regarding the potentially feasible external governance approach within the EGTC framework (involvement of third countries), which was facilitated in the adaption of the regulation in 2013. The regulation stipulates that even in the smallest possible actor-constellation, namely with two actors located in two states, only one has to be from a member state. In contrast, the other can be located in a neighboring non-EU state. This also applies to the outermost regions of the EU. A precondition for this is besides the territorial proximity the premise of realizing the cooperation approach in a cross-border, transnational or bilateral setting and taking the general legal provisions of the program framework and other regulations into account (Art. 3a (2) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). However, due to the substantially increased coordination efforts, especially regarding the alignment with the third country's domestic law, the involvement of non-EU countries was often refrained from. Even after the first creation of an EGTC with an external governance dimension in 2015, namely between Hungary and Ukraine, such actor constellations remain the exception (Pucher and Hauder, 2016, p. 2).

When looking at the actual territorial distribution of EGTCs, a strong concentration can be observed on the Hungarian, Slovakian, French, Spanish and Portuguese territories. Particularly Hungary turned out as a major promoter of EGTCs and thus shows an exceptional territorial coverage with a vast number of CBCs (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 106).

The EGTC regulation is based on a very differentiated actor-constellation. Within the vertical dimension, this materializes in a potential involvement of national, regional as well as local government authorities (Art. 3 (1) (a-d) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). It can be constituted

either as a one-dimensional constellation, with authorities originating from one particular governmental level, or a multi-dimensional setup, with actors stemming from different levels (Zwilling and Engl, 2014, p. 316). The only restriction in this regard is that the policy goals of the EGCT must fall within the legal competence of every actor unless the respective state explicitly authorizes the actor to participate within the network and thus empowers it to carry out the specific task (Art. 7 (2) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013).[139]

Overall, 42 of 68 EGTCs are constituted with a one-dimensional actor constellation, which again is realized in the limelight of reducing the potential institutional and procedural steering complexity in the particular grouping. Additionally to the governmental authorities, the membership is also open to bodies governed by public law[140] and public undertakings[141] or undertakings entrusted with services of general interest[142] (Art. 3 (2) (d-f) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). Especially the last enumerated actor type opens interesting new opportunities for the RCBG network. With the membership structure's opening towards private law bodies, new innovative policy approaches and can be realized, which would be otherwise only hardly possible. A prime example is the EGTC Hospital de la Cerdanya, which provides binationally health care in the cross-border region of Spain and France.[143] Although a formal membership

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[139] In accordance with the principle of proportionality, policy goals or general measures within the EGTCs must not go beyond the individual competencies or the respective authorization (*ultra vires*) of the respective actor (Recital 5, 8, 15 Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). A violation of this principle can eventually lead to the dissolution of the EGTC as such (see further below).

[140] A body governed by public law is defined by Article 1 (9) of Directive 2004/18/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as follows: „[…]*(a) established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character; (b) having legal personality; and (c) financed, for the most part, by the State, regional or local authorities, or other bodies governed by public law; or subject to management supervision by those bodies; or having an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law.“*

[141] A public undertaking is defined by Article 2 (1) (b) of Directive 2004/17/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as follows: *„a 'public undertaking' is any undertaking over which the contracting authorities may exercise directly or indirectly a dominant influence by virtue of their ownership of it, their financial participation therein, or the rules which govern it.“* ('Contracting authorities' are State, regional or local authorities, bodies governed by public law, associations formed by one or several such authorities or one or several of such bodies governed by public law.

[142] Services of general interest (SGI) are defined by the EC in its Communication COM (2011) 900 final of 29 November 2011 as follows: *„Service of general interest (SGI): „SGI are services that public authorities of the Member States classify as being of general interest and, therefore, subject to specific public service obligations (PSO). The term covers both economic activities (see the definition of SGEI below) and non-economic services. The latter are not subject to specific EU legislation and are not covered by the internal market and competition rules of the Treaty. Some aspects of how these services are organised may be subject to other general Treaty rules, such as the principle of non-discrimination.“* (European Commission, 2011b, p. 3).

[143] Established as EGTC in 2010 and opened to the public in 2014, the hospital is operated in a cross-border dimension and provides health care in the remote area of the Pyrenees for the French and Spanish population.

is not provided for non-governmental stakeholders and other entities, the EGTCs can provide the opportunity to participate in the ad hoc established project networks under the term of *extended partnerships.*

In case of a beneficial evolvement of the groupings, the actors have to enlarge the actor constellation right *a posteriori*. If the designated new EGTC actor stems from an already participating EGTC member state, only the particular country's national authorities have to approve of the admission. In the case of an actor, who is located in a non-participating state, the extension of membership and with it the necessary adaption of the convention (see next chapter) foresees a unanimous approval of all actors (Art. 4 (6) and 6a Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013).

This option to gradually increase the number of actors provides various potentially added values for the EGTC. The most obvious factor is the limited risk of network inflation with a too large number of actors. Each actor, which has to be considered and involved within the governance process, constitutes an additional workload for the process promoter within an RCBG network and can affect the procedural steering detrimentally. In the case of a too large number of actors, the governance process can become ineffective, which also significantly lowers the goal-attainment's potential success. On the other hand, the network's continuous and gradual growth allows it to be more flexible and react better to detrimental evolutions. Through the successive invitation of actors, eventual detrimental actor-behavior can be easier and faster identified and more easily taken care of by the process promoters or other actors.

Many EGTCs resorts to this option. In 2015, for example, more than 16 cooperation reported that they extend their actor constellation (Pucher and Hauder, 2016, p. 5), while two years later, another 15 EGTCs were enlarged (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 107).

Selection of cooperation objectives: The EGTC regulation provides a variety of potential areas of intervention for the respective RCBG network. While networks can be aligned around one specific policy goal (as so-called policy networks), the majority of EGTCs are based on a particular set of objectives, qualifying these as strategic networks.

The range of policy goals is, however, in most of these EGTCs, still limited to a specific group of intervention areas, which have to be clearly outlined within the convention and the statutes (Pucher and Hauder, 2016; Zillmer et al., 2018). While the members of the EGTCs are free to

Members of the EGTC are France, the regional government of Catalonia and the respective health and insurance agencies of both countries (Zillmer et al., 2015, p. 28).

decide about the number of policy goals, they are obliged to comply with several legal provisions concerning the actual definition of the policy goals.

The EGTC regulation stipulates that every potential action should not only be in strict compliance with the overarching aims of the EU, namely to pursue the aims of strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion (Art. 174 TEU), but they should actively facilitate and promote these objectives (Art. 1 (2) and 7 (2) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). Within this given framework, the EGTC is authorized to carry out two types of actions. The first type consists of actions and projects, which are specifically aligned around the ETC program's objectives. These actions and projects are eligible to be co-financed by the ERDF. To operate within the EU Cohesion Policy's policy and financial framework, they must be realized in compliance with the Cohesion Policy Objectives for 2014-2020. These are explicitly defined in the form of eleven *Thematic Objectives* (TOs) in the *Common Provisions Regulation* (CPR) (Art. 9 (EU) No 1303/2013).[144] In fact, most EGTCs align their goal setting around the TOs of the CPR. A particularly high alignment can be observed in the area of research and development (TO 1), environmental protection (TO 6), and infrastructural interconnections (TO 7).[145]

The second type of action includes measures in the area of territorial cooperation, which are not designated to be supported by the funds mentioned above. They stretch over a wide range of potential cooperation areas, which are located outside the CPR framework, but still provide an added-value in terms of CBC. They must be further in strict accordance with the overarching Cohesion Policy objectives of the EU (Art. 1 (2) and Art. 7 (3) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). Intervention areas are, are among others, fire control, civil protection, provision of water supplies, waste and water management, flood protection, promotion of culture and tourism, health, management of protected areas and business parks, youth and sports projects, which are all to be realized within a cross-border, transnational or interregional scope (Engl, 2014b,

[144] The CPR foresees following Thematic Objectives (TOs): (1) strengthening research, technological development and innovation; (2) enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT; (3) enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, of the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and of the fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF); (4) supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors; (5) promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management; (6) preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency; (7) promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures; (8) promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labor mobility; (9) promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination; (10) investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning; (11) enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration.

[145] A medium level of alignment can be stipulated for TO 2, 3, 4,8, and 9. An exceptionally low level of alignment can be noted for TO 5, and 11 (Zillmer et al., 2015, pp. 54–55).

p. 20; Pucher and Hauder, 2016, p. 128). Especially the area of culture, tourism and sports were very popular among the EGTCs over the years (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 2).

Therefore, the regulation provides a significant leeway to individually adapt the policy goal-setting to the challenges within the given territory and further elaborate innovative policy approaches. This underlines the place-based added value of the legal instrument again and constitutes a potentially valuable instrument to strengthen and mobilize the regional level. To simultaneously not infringe with the "shadow of hierarchy" of the national governments (keyword: states as gatekeepers within the regional policy), the policy goals must be in strict compliance with the domestic legal provisions of each member state, which is directly or indirectly involved within an EGTC. Explicitly excluded from a potential cooperation are tasks, which are carried out by public authorities and are located in the area of police and regulatory powers, justice and foreign policy or are aimed to safeguard the general interest of the particular state (Art. 7 (4); Art. 13; Art. 16 Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013).

Each state is further entitled to veto *ex-ante* certain intervention areas within the EGTC, which are not explicitly covered by the CPR thematic objectives. There are however some exceptions. Policy goals, which fall under the *Investment priorities* of the ERDF regulation (Art. 7 Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013) are not allowed to be rejected by the states. After the initiation of the EGTC network the particular national authorities maintain the right the oversee the implementation process and can become active when an infringement of the aforementioned provisions occurs. If the EGTC is not complying with the overarching Cohesion Policy goals, or pursues activities which exceed the designated tasks (*ultra vires*), the member states court, in which the EGTC is registered (see next chapter), can impose the dissolution of the network (Art. 14 Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013).

Although there are a variety of legally provided opportunities within the policy dimension, innovative large-scale approaches like the EGTC Cerdanya are still the minority. Most of the EGTCs focus on policy goals with a primarily "soft type intervention" character, based on small-scale budgets (see next chapter). Furthermore, the obligation to pre-finance projects, which would be eligible for community co-financing, is identified as a major challenge by the EGTC actors, who often lack the required financial capabilities (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 122). Another problem is the lack of administrative capabilities in the EGTCs, especially regarding project implementation. Although legally entitled to manage Interreg programs as Managing Authority, except for two EGTCs, none of the networks utilize this structural opportunity but instead participate in ETC projects as a partner or lead partner (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 33).

4.2. The polity dimension

Embeddedness in the "shadow of hierarchy" and differentiation of the network structure:

Despite the introduction of the Interreg programs in the EU, the lack of a common legal basis within cross-border cooperation constituted a major challenge for the actors. The strong asymmetry between the individual legal systems was often so severe that actors had distinct problems creating a common framework and successfully realizing joint policy approaches. This very disadvantageous situation also shaped the expectations towards the EGTC regulation. Particularly, the LRAs hoped that a common institutional and legal basis would significantly improve CBC's framework conditions within the EU.

However, the actual adoption of the EGTC regulation was faced with difficult starting conditions due to the member states' initial unwillingness to give their consent to such a new legal provision. Major concerns were again issued towards the perceived threat that the regulation would undermine the national governments' role as gatekeepers in the area of regional policies and particularly CBC. To reassure the national governments regarding their concerns and to fill the institutional void within the CBC dimension, the EGTC regulation was strictly elaborated under the subsidiarity principle (Recital (15) Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013). This materializes in the form of a legal double anchoring (Zwilling and Engl, 2014, p. 314), which foresees for the EGTC the creation of a legal entity within the EU law and also within the national domestic law (Art. 1 (3-4) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). This legal double anchoring constitutes a compromise between the national level on the one side and the supranational/local/regional level on the other. While the EUropean community law has formal priority over national law, the national governments maintain a comprehensive supervision authority and play a dominant role in terms of defining the institutional setup of the respective EGTC (Nadalutti, 2013, p. 761).

Every EGTC must be formally based on a convention (Art. 8) and statutes (Art. 9) as two alone-standing documents. Both documents have to be unanimously adopted by the member states. The convention is the main legal document and defines the basic framework of the EGTC, while the statutes determine the internal organization and *modus operandi*. Any eventual adaptions of the convention must be unanimously approved by each member state and must be registered or published in the member state, where the EGTC office is registered. For the adaption of the statutes, a notification of the member states is sufficient (Art. 4 (6) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). Both documents must be drafted in strict mutual accordance and must not contain contradictory provisions. The two documents must be further in full compliance with

each member state's domestic legal provisions, which are involved directly or indirectly (e.g., through LRA or public body, etc.) in the EGTC. In case of non-compliance, each member state has the right to deny its approval *ex-ante* during the initiation process, which leads to the failure of the EGTC's establishment. The national authorities can further initiate the dissolution of the EGTC if an eventual legal infringement occurs during the implementation phase. These rights of the member states are, however, limited by the obligation that both measures have to be explicitly justified and are further embedded within an accompanying formal judicial procedure (Art. 4 (3) and Art. 14 Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013). The complex dissolution procedure and the detailed provisions concerning the establishment of the EGTC consequently limit the national governments' potential leeway, namely to unilaterally counteract the initiation or functioning of an RCBG network without any elaborated formal concerns. At the same time, they firmly maintain their position as gatekeepers of these networks.

A decisive innovation to overcome the legal fragmentation is creating a joint office within the EGTC. This office must be located and registered in one of the participating member states. The selection of the particular country is of high importance for the internal organizational structure and the actual procedural management. With the establishment of the office in the respective country, the EGTC acquires legal personality under the country's domestic law and empowers it to "[…]acquire or dispose of movable and immovable property and employ staff and may be a party to legal proceedings." (Art. 1 (4) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). While this marks a particular leeway and increases the procedural "autonomy" from the national governments, various aspects of the EGTCs become subject of the respective national law. This applies for the aspect of the EGTC's financial control (Art. 6), liquidation, insolvency, cessation of payments and liability (Art. 12), or eventually occurring judicial disputes within an EGTC, which are not regulated by EU law and have to be therefore dealt with by the responsible court (Art. 15 (2) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). The application of one particular national legal framework can, for example, prevent eventually arising political disputes between the members[146] and further facilitate the application procedure for EU funding by stepping up as one applying legal entity (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, p. 10).

While the regulation marks a significant step forward in creating a joint legal basis, it is far from being a panacea to solve comprehensively the typically occurring problems, which come

[146] With the unanimous decision concerning the location of the EGTC office actors, explicitly have to approve of the domestic legal framework, which will consequentially afterward be applied in the aforementioned areas. Through this legal clarity, the risk of an unexpectedly arising dispute between the governments can be reduced.

with the institutional and administrative heterogeneity within an RCBG network. Strongly diverging degrees of administrative decentralization, the asymmetrical distribution of competences for the respective governmental authorities, and the strongly differing administrative traditions and priorities constitute still major obstacles for the actors in the EGTCs. These factors often lead to very long-lasting initiation processes or even the failure to establish an EGTC (Pucher and Hauder, 2016, p. 9).[147]

The governance structure of an EGTC follows the premise to be "as specific as it must be and as open as it can be" (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, p. 32). The EGTC pursues an institutional balancing approach in this regard. The EGTC regulation tries to achieve an increased degree of actor-commitment within the RCBG network through the legal provisions and the governmental authorities' subsequent legal measures. Simultaneously the regulation provides a significant degree of institutional flexibility. To a large degree, participating actors are free to decide about the specific institutionalization level and the particular structure of the RCBG network.

Founding members are entitled to realize a comprehensive deliberation process, through which they can adapt the governance structure to the place-based challenges and the framework conditions in general and thus realize a comprehensive bottom-up oriented RCBG approach (Sousa, 2013, p. 679; Zwilling and Engl, 2014, p. 326). Regarding the governance structure, the EGTC regulation has only a few provisions, which are constituted as cornerstones of the RCBG network and as minimum institutionalization criteria.

The only mandatory organs designated in the regulation are the *assembly* and a so-called *director*. The assembly is constituted as the central decision-making network of the EGTC. It consists of all involved members, who are represented through the highest representatives or their respective delegates (Art. 10 (1) (a) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). It is mandated with the strategic decision-making and decides about central issues like the annual budget, for example (Art. 11 (1) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). While members of the assembly are obliged to meet continuously, this body is not designated to carry out the daily operations. This duty is allocated to the director as an institutionalized body, which is assigned to carry out the

[147] Just to give some examples: Slovenian EGTCs are constituted under private law, while Italian ones fall under public law. Polish authorities reject unlimited liability, while Czechia does not accept EGTCs with limited liability. EGTCs established with French partners must have the EGTC office in France. Slovak municipalities have significantly fewer competencies than their Hungarian counterparts. In comparison to the Austrian provinces, however, Hungarian counties have much more limited competencies and financial capabilities (Hegedüs, 2011, pp. 165–168; Zillmer et al., 2015, p. 38).

external marketing activities as well as the central coordination within the EGTC (Art. 10 (1) (a) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013).

However, the particular range of tasks or the setup of both organs is only outlined in a very rudimentary form, which allows the EGTC members to individually elaborate the particular roles of these two bodies within the final network (see next chapter). The members are further entitled to establish additional organs within the EGTC, allowing a further differentiation of the governance structure and the particular actor roles. The only provision in this regard is that the actor roles and consequentially their competences must be clearly defined and are not allowed to infringe EU or domestic laws (Art. 10 (2) in conjunction with Art. 9 (2) (f) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). In the limelight of the aforementioned institutional flexibility, the members of the EGTC also have the opportunity to adapt the governance structure after the EGTC's initiation (Art. 4 (6) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). This option is a potentially useful instrument to counteract detrimental developments, like evolving network-sclerotization or actor demobilization, by changing the network's structural framework. The regulation also foresees the possibility to install a "fail-safe mechanism". This mechanism comprises two options. On the one hand, the EGTC can be established with a limited time duration, which can be repeatedly prolonged by the assembly. On the other hand, the assembly can also stipulate particular conditions under which a network has to be dissolved (Art. 8 (2) (d) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). Such dissolution of demobilized or sclerotized networks can prevent a phantom network's cost-intensive maintenance or function as a motivator for the actors to maintain their commitment. However, in fact, only very few EGTCs have embedded such an instrument in their convention (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, p. 29; Zillmer et al., 2015, p. 33).

Funding and budgetary provisions: The financial over-dependency of the Interreg-based cooperations towards community funding was an often-criticized issue by many scholars. Cross-Border Cooperation schemes were often characterized by strong rent-seeking behavior by the participating actors, which diminished, in many cases, the sustainability and the success of these RCBG networks drastically. The EGTC regulation provides innovation in this regard by introducing the opportunity to create an own budget (Art. 11 Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013), which can manage the allocations from various EU programs stemming from various external financial sources. The budgetary provisions contain specific criteria regarding the operability and the running costs of the EGTC. The EGTC has to submit a budget draft annually, which has to be adopted by the assembly. Besides the necessary unanimous consent, the budget has to comply with the financial liability provisions of the country where the EGTC

has its registered office (Art. 2 (1) (c) and Art. 11 Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). Most EGTCs pursue a twofold approach. To cover the basic expenses for daily operations (e.g., wages of the personnel, operating fix costs of the office etc.), most EGTCs resort to the collection of membership fees and separate complementary financial support by the governments (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, pp. 24–25). The membership fees still provide the main source of income for the EGTC budgets in 2017 (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 109). However, while the financial contributions by public authorities or even international organizations are very unevenly dispersed over the EUropean territory, these funding sources constitute a considerable share of the available EGTC funding in Central Europe. For example, Hungary is very proactive in establishing EGTCs and providing financial support (Zillmer et al., 2015, p. 46). The Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) established further funding opportunities in policy areas (e.g., culture, science and research, youth exchanges, cross-border cooperation, and tourism promotion), which are generally not eligible for funding by the ETC programs (Visegradfund.org: Purpose).

The majority of EGTCs –or at least the 53 who reported their budget to the CoR– operate with an average budget of approximately EUR 613.000. This aggregates up to a total annual budget of EUR 52 million for all groupings. Since 2016 a significant rise in the annual budget, namely 9.5 %, can be observed. While this is certainly a promising improvement, especially in the limelight of establishing a self-sustaining financial structure, several factors have to be considered in this regard. More than EUR 20 million of the aggregated budget stems alone from the EGTC Hospital Cerdanya's annual operating budget, which is around 38 % of the total budget for all the reported 53 EGTCs. This disproportionate share results from the strongly diverging financial capabilities of the various EGTC members, whose membership fees range in general from EUR 0.0034 to EUR 1.0 per capita (Hegedüs, 2011, p. 164; Pucher and Hauder, 2016, pp. 122–123, 2016, p. 6; Zillmer et al., 2018, pp. 109–111).

This joint budget, which stems from mandatory fees by the EGTC members and other public contributions, facilitates the operability of these RCBG networks and establishes considerable actor ownership (see next chapter). Through the mandatory allocation of their financial resources, the risk of eventual free-riding by individual members cannot be fully prevented but significantly reduced.

Aside from the above mentioned financial contributions by the public authorities, the main source of funding for the EGTC's goal attainment and project implementation are the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (IPA), the Cohesion Fund

(CF), the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance CBC programs (IPA) and the European Neighborhood Instrument CBC programs (ENI).

The potential large funding portfolio is, however, in fact, much more limited. The Cohesion Fund or the Connected Europe Facility, for example, are designated to realize large scale projects. At the same time, they simultaneously demand pre-and co-financing financing by the governmental authorities. For example, programs like the European Networks in Transport and Energy (TEN-T/TEN-E) are based on large-scale infrastructural investments. Due to the necessary major financial contributions, EGTCs are widely unable to realize such projects. Another challenge is the nature of Operational Programs of the EU mainstream programs. While the EGTC regulation stipulates that projects need to have an explicit cross-border character, CF projects, for example, have in most cases an exclusive national territorial scope. This, however, considerably aggravates the feasibility of the project implementation (Pucher and Hauder, 2016, p. 2, 2016, p. 20). [148] For the cooperation with third countries, the ENI and IPA CBC programs are also available as funding sources; this, however, marks still a widely theoretical option due to the very limited current number of EGTCs, which have a third country participation (Tisza EGTC, EUCOR The European Campus, Interregional Alliance for the Rhine- Alpine Corridor EGTC and Amphictyony). Among the 68 EGTCs in total, only 15 groupings indicate that they attained EU funding outside the ETC program. [149]

Therefore, the ETC program and the ERDF funds constitute since the establishment of the first EGTCs the main source of EU funding. With a co-financing rate of 85 % and a strong program alignment, which results in much more unproblematic project implementation, many groupings focus their efforts on attaining financial support by these funds. For the last year, 33 EGTCs reported that they are involved as partners or lead partners in 83 ETC projects. This constitutes 2.5 ETC projects per EGTC (Zillmer et al., 2018, pp. 117–118). Due to the characteristic smaller nature of the ETC programs, most projects are only of a more limited place-based impact than the mainstream programs.

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[148] As Pucher and Hauder indicate, this obstacle could be overcome by splitting the CF projects in several smaller ones, which are only partially funded by the mainstream programs. This however results in a still pertaining major demand for pre- and co-financing by the LRAs, which is often difficult to realize

[149] These funds/programs are: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EGTC Linieland van Waas en Hulst, EGTC Spoločný región, PAHT EGTC); European Social Fund (ZASNET), Horizon 2020 (EGTC Efxini Poli - SolidarCity Network), Connecting Europe Facility (Interregional Alliance for the Rhine-Alpine Corridor EGTC), Creative Europe (AEuCC EGTC, EPM EGTC), Erasmus + (AEuCC EGTC, EPM EGTC, EUCOR The European Campus, León-Bragança EGTC), Europe for Citizens (BTC EGTC), Hercule III (Mura Region), Direct funding from DG Regio under the Urban Agenda (EUKN EGTC) (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 111).

4.3. The politics dimension

Social capital, actor and stakeholder mobilization: The success of an RCBG network stands and falls with its participating actors' mobilization and ongoing commitment. This also goes along with the necessary establishment of social capital among actors and the consequential reduction of the moral hazard, which is a decisive factor in realizing a successful governance process. The EGTC provides in this regard two beneficial framework conditions. As already outlined, the initiation process of the EGTC is based on a prior comprehensive deliberation process among potentially participating actors, who are obliged to elaborate the policy goals as well as the institutionalized governance structure based on unanimity. While this condition is a challenge for the actors and can result in delays of the EGTC's establishment process, the resulting legally binding agreement (convention and statutes) is advantageous to increase the transparency within the network and thus reduce the moral-hazard. Another aspect is that EGTCs are, to a large degree, established based on already existing cooperation experiences. Most of these cooperations are further located within a cross-border dimension between local and regional actors in territorial proximity, for example, the Novohrad-Nógrád EGTC Ltd. between Hungary and Slovakia (Zillmer et al., 2015, p. 28). These two conditions often result in already existing mutual knowledge between the actors before the establishment, which is a beneficial factor in establishing social capital. Several EGTCs are further aligned around cross-border regions, which have strong historic ethnocultural ties across the borders (e.g., presence of national minorities). The common ethnocultural background, a common language, or a common history often facilitates the initiation and implementation process. However, such a framework is no guarantee for creating a successful RCBG network (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, p. 11; Zillmer et al., 2015, p. 76).

While it must be noted that the comparably highly institutionalized framework of an EGTC is far from being a panacea regarding maintaining the commitment and the activity of actors within the groupings, several factors can improve the probability to realize a successful governance process. This starts with the provision to draft and explicitly adopt the convention and statutes. The resulting legal liability for the actors consequentially increases the hurdle of initializing a detrimental actor behavior. In contrast to normal Interreg programs, where the detrimental rent-seeking or free-riding was/is often observable among actors, the EGTC further reduces this threat due to mandatory allocation of financial resources through membership fees (Engl, 2014b, p. 34). Another important factor is the political promotion by central political decision-makers. The initiation process goes along with adopting the two legal documents and will also be accompanied by a symbolic declaration of intent. The publicly stated will to

establish long-term cooperation creates a particular degree of political commitment for the actors, who will try to avoid a loss of face towards the public and will thus likely actively endorse and promote the EGTC (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, p. 11).

The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders is also of decisive importance for the governance process. The EGTC does not explicitly mention the involvement of NGOs in the form of full membership. Instead, this involvement is based on the mentioned principle of extended partnerships, which foresees their participation based on associating non-governmental stakeholders in the form of a procedural involvement (Engl, 2014b, p. 152). This approach of extended partnerships principle was initially heavily criticized by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), which emphasized that the regulation should provide these stakeholders full membership and thus realize an extensive involvement of the "civil society" (Eisendle, 2011, pp. 52–53). While such a critique can be legitimately debated in the limelight of democratic legitimacy, one must not forget that the actor constellation's inflation by additional full members significantly complicates the governance process and aggravates the necessary procedural steering. The EGTC approach, which can be also seen within other RCBG networks like the MRS, must be therefore considered as compromise between the comprehensive involvement of the non-governmental sphere and the maintenance of network operability. In detail the extended partnership is in most cases carried out either in form of advisory committees or in form of working groups when more intense cooperation is necessary. Due to the lack of specific provisions or guidelines, the actors are widely free to decide about the form, constellation, or institutionalization level. Therefore, such bodies can either be constituted for the realization of one specific project or realized as a formally established organ of the EGTCs with specific tasks and competencies (Art. 8 (f) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013). However, each form contributes to the diversification of decision-making and can thus contribute to a better place-based added value in terms of goal attainment. Further, it can increase the publicity of the EGTC through the NGOs as multiplicators regarding external marketing activities (Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur, 2014, pp. 19–20).

While being not directly involved within the groupings framework, the European Committee of Regions plays an extraordinary role in the establishment and development of the EGTCs. Besides the already outlined role of the CoR (see chapter 4) of not only significantly influencing but also steering the deliberation process before the adoption of the EGTC regulation, including the later amendment process, the Committee is also since then the strongest supporter of the

EGTC approach among the EU institutions. The CoR steps up as an amplifier of the grouping's concerns by communicating their opinion through seminars and conferences. Due to the obligation of every EGTC to inform the CoR after their establishment by sending it the convention and the statutes, the Committee is the central contact point for all groupings. Annual monitoring reports and other publications are further measures to maintain the agenda-setting on the EU level and point out particular difficulties that the EGTCs face (Nadalutti, 2013, p. 763; Svensson, 2014, pp. 92–93). The activities of the CoR are supported in this regard also by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) as one of the central non-governmental organizations, which further enhances to some degree the political impact of the institution (see chapter 2.2.4).

Procedural actor-roles within the EGTCs: Despite their highly institutionalized governance structure, the EGTCs must develop as RCBG networks a sustainable cooperation process with promising procedural steering mechanisms to attain a successful goal-attainment. The regulation provides in this regard only very rudimentary provisions (Art. 9 (2) (a-b) Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013), resulting in a considerable leeway for the involved actors.

As outlined in the last chapter, the regulation stipulates only two mandatory organs within the network, while again only roughly defining their particular tasks. The *assembly* is designated to consist of all full members of the EGTC. Participating actors within this assembly, who are representatives of the local and regional governments in most cases, can consequently be qualified as political promoters. In most cases, the assembly is therefore used as the core decision-making network of the EGTC. As representatives of their respective governments and entities, the actors have, besides their decision-making role, also the duty to represent the interests internally and externally. Within the internal dimension, they are mandated to represent their government/entity's matters towards the other EGTC members and influence the goal-attainment to their own best benefit while not developing an eventual detrimental actor-behavior. Within the external dimension, the political promoters are also obliged to communicate the activities and success stories to their administration and political decision-makers to maintain political support for the undertaking (Svensson, 2014, pp. 89–90).

The second mandatory organ is the so-called *director*. Its field of activity is similarly rudimentary described by the regulation. The regulation only stipulates that the organ should "represent the EGTC and act on its behalf". Due to the network structure of the EGTCs, the director, in most cases, is in charge of the coordination and procedural steering, which qualifies the organ as a Process Promoter. The structural setup of each EGTCs director does significantly vary. It depends among others from various framework conditions, like the size of the EGTC,

the number and depth of the various areas of intervention, or the financial capabilities of the involved members. While some directors are, for example, only unpaid delegated employees by the respective members (Parc européen / Parco europeo Alpi Marittime – Mercantour) or are hired working staff (MASH European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation), other directors are equipped with comprehensive administrative capacities (e.g., Arrabona EGTC Ltd. with 10 full-time employees). Depending on the given structural conditions, the director's task can consequentially include the management and coordination of tasks and duties like fundraising, public procurement, project implementation, or external marketing.

Especially for more large-scale oriented EGTCs, adequate staffing is of essential importance for the EGTCs. In such cases, directors often can delegate the respective tasks to experts and concentrate on their role as strategic coordinators and thus steer the governance process. The sheer task of steering the processes within an RCBG network is already very time-demanding and challenging and binds many resources. Additional tasks, like the supervision and implementation of projects and the management of public procurement processes, demand comprehensive expertise and time. To carry out further implementation tasks in one or more intervention areas by one staff member is very challenging if not completely unfeasible (Committee of the Regions, 2016b, pp. 12–13, 2016b, p. 23; Zillmer et al., 2018).

As already outlined, the EGTC does not constitute any additional formal actor-roles within the EGTC. This, however, does not restrict the actors from establishing any additional organs with new formal actor-roles. While institutions like the CoR, or to a significantly less degree the EP, steps up as Technical and Political Promoter on the supranational level by supporting the development of the EGTC approach with expert-knowledge (e.g., in the form of publications and events), such a role is not designated within the networks on a mandatory basis. Some EGTCs pursue innovative approaches, such as the *HELICAS EGTC,* where a so-called "board of directors" was established to distribute the coordination tasks to several employees. For better implementation efforts, the organ also includes legal entities, which are stemming from the "civil society sector". The combination of the technical promoter and process promoter's role within is in this limelight a significant innovation (Zillmer et al., 2018, p. 98).

External marketing for creating public support: The long-term success of an EGTC is despite the institutional structure foremost depending on the support by political elites, which is often intrinsically connected to the network's political "marketability". While it is certainly true that most RCBG networks are generally considered as very technocratic and bureaucratic projects and tend to be often unknown to the broad general public, it is nevertheless important to continuously strengthen the awareness and the general acceptance of these cooperations. Open

refusal or the impression of a missing added-value by the public often leads to a rapid deprioritization of the EGTC. It can, therefore, lead to the demobilization of the participating actors. While this is quite challenging to attain such public support, the overwhelming majority of EGTCs are concentrating on common cultural events to strengthen the general awareness and try to involve NGOs in local projects for a broader involvement of stakeholders (Sousa, 2013, p. 683).

5. The Macro-regional strategies

The history of the EU integration process is characterized by several alternating periods of stagnation and acceleration. In periods of stagnation, the supranational institutions, especially the Commission, are always eager to "jump-start" the process again by introducing new forms of differentiated integration. While this manifested, among others, in EU-law-based differentiation measures, transnational and subnational functional differentiation approaches were often considered a promising alternative. The introduction of the Interreg programs and the adoption of the EGTC regulation, as institutional development of RCBG within the EU framework, are exemplary efforts that aim(ed) to overcome the integration stalemates through regional mobilization (Piattoni, 2016, p. 80).

Since the Lisbon Treaty's ratification in 2009, the EU integration process has faced various major political and economic crises accompanying strong dissent among national governments on various policy fields. Persisting stalemates within the decision-making process across multiple policy areas led to further measures of differentiated integration. In some cases, these were realized even outside the EU's legal framework (e.g., European Fiscal Compact or the European Stability Mechanism) to circumvent potential blockades on the EUropean level. Parallel to these legal differentiation measures, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was initiated in 2009. This marked not only the "hour of birth" for *Macro-regional strategies (MRS)*, but constituted a caesura and major innovation of Regional Cross-Border Governance within the EU framework.[150] The EUSBR's kick-off triggered afterward a

[150] While the establishment of the various Macro-regional strategies is considered a new approach of RCBG, the underlying idea of regional cooperation with such a large territorial scale is no new phenomenon and has found already its manifestation in the form of the already outlined transnational cooperation schemes within the Interreg B programs since 1997. As a regional cross-border cooperation model, which spans over a large contiguous area of several EU member states, the Interreg B programs already do foresee a territorial scope, which is comparable to these new MRS. However, the programs showed various significant deficiencies over the years, which were also soon acknowledged in various studies (*Europe 2000* and *Europe 2000+)* of the Commission (Nagler, 2013, pp. 37–38). The observed low-level cooperation intensity between involved actors and the programs' tendency to have a comparably minor spatial impact are just some of the issues, which are anticipated to be improved by the macro-regional strategies.

downright "macro-regional fever" (Dühr, 2011, p. 3). Within the academic debate and among the particular EU-institutions, the process of "macro-regionalization" (Gänzle and Kern, 2011, p. 265) was depicted and presented as a process, which would eventually even lead to a substantial restructuring of the EU. Proclamations like a future "Europe of Macro-regions", advertised by the Latvian EU-presidency in 2013 (Bos, 2017, p. 19), or the outline of a prospective compartmentalization of the EU in macro-regions (Matarrelli, 2012, p. 36), were just some of the various euphoric statements among academics and politicians.

The macro-regionalization process led in the following to the adoption of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in 2010, the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) in 2014, and finally the Alpine Region (EUSALP) 2015 by the Council of the EU.

The increasing number of macro-regional strategies invoked among the EU-institutions, scholars, and politicians the will to find a common definition for this particular macro-regional governance model. This turned out quite a challenging undertaking due to the apparent differences between each strategy regarding their policy, polity, and politics dimension. The most prominent definition, which is still used as the lowest common denominator for the strategies, was stipulated by Pawel Samecki, former EU commissioner for Regional Policy (DG REGIO), who characterized a "macro-region" as "[…]an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges" (European Commission, 2009, p. 1). This definition by Samecki was over the years several times refined. Macro-regional strategies were defined in the following by the EC, for example, as "[…]integrated frameworks, which cover member states and third countries in the same geographic space […] and would profit from the intensified cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion" (European Commission, 2013a, p. 3).

These definitional approaches, namely with the constituted aims of achieving an improved economic, social and territorial cohesion within a distinct contiguous area of cooperation, are since then applied for each macro-regional strategy as an overarching guideline in all of the three political dimensions (policy, polity, and politics).

The strong emphasis on the principle of territoriality, manifests for example, in the alignment of the macro-regional cooperation area around specific natural entities like seas (EUSBSR), rivers (EUSDR), coastal lines (EUSAIR) or mountains (EUSALP) (Groenendijk, 2013, p. 17). These entities stretch over several national borders and thus also determine the potential constellation of governmental actors. States and Regions must be not only in direct (and sometimes indirect) proximity to these entities but have to be affected by their accompanying geospatial effects. The consequential framework conditions in these areas and the challenges

for actors and stakeholders regarding the economic, social, and territorial cohesion also affect the particular goal-setting of these strategies. Macro-regional strategies are obliged to tackle these specific challenges, realize place-based policy solutions, and thus create added-value for the area of cooperation. This should be achieved within the macro-regional governance scheme through the activation and utilization of endogen regional potentials.

The strengthening of subsidiarity and proportionality within the macro-regions was stipulated as complementary aims, which should be attained through a vertical rescaling of governance. National governmental actors, however, rejected in this regard any potential ideas of a prospective "EUrope of regions" (Streitenberger, 2017, pp. 43–44). This resulted in the constitution of the "three noes" rule, which is generally valid for every Macro-regional Strategy and foresees the following three guidelines: 1) No adoption of any new EU-law concerning the MRS; 2) No new specific budgets for the MRS; 3) No establishment of new institutions on EU level (Sielker, 2017, p. 86).[151]

The considerable structural limitation towards the Macro-regional strategies is primarily based on the considerations of the national governments and supranational institutions, who want to avoid, on the one hand, the creation of cost-intensive new structures, which would demand further administrative/institutional capacities, and, on the other hand, to prevent any fragmentation of decision-making in new institutional arenas in the area of regional cooperation (Piattoni, 2016, p. 84). Subsumed under the term of "soft governance" (Bos, 2017, p. 34) the governance approach is aimed to be balanced between the aim to establish the lightest possible institutional structure and the goal to maintain the operational capacity for successful policy coordination. Therefore, each of the Macro-regional strategies puts a strong emphasis on a network-based strong deliberation process between involved actors and stakeholders with the aim to realize an orchestrated common policy approach. According to the EC, this should increase the visibility of projects, improve their sustainability, and generate a more substantial spatial impact in the macro-region (European Commission, 2013a).

To achieve these goals, a particular emphasis is put in the program documents ("Action Plan" and Communication from the Council) on the governance process and procedural steering by Process Promoters due to the designated institutional limitations within the macro-regional framework (Bos, 2017, p. 38). As a network of RCBG, the strategies should bring together governmental entities from various levels and non-governmental stakeholders (NGOs, IOs,

[151] In the limelight of the "three noes rule," the strategies should instead contribute to a better alignment of existing funding, better coordination among involved actors, and the realization of new place-based projects. These objectives should contribute to the added-value of macro-regional strategies as such (Bos, 2013, p. 32).

private companies, etc.). This designated broad vertical and horizontal involvement of entities should underline the designated "bottom-up" orientation of the strategies, their anticipated place-based added value, and in the long run contribute to the establishment of a Multi-Level Governance system in the EU (European Commission, 2009; Interact, 2017, p. 33).

A comprehensive analysis of the macro-regional strategies shall be carried out in the limelight of these manifold constituted aims. In contrast to the previous chapters, where a conceptual overview over the Interreg and EGTC cooperation schemes was given, we shall base the following analysis on two particular case examples, namely the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). While all four Macro-regional strategies are based on common guidelines and premises, each one faces strongly diverging framework conditions and differs concerning the particular attributes significantly. Based on the already and applied Regional Cross-Border Governance approach, we will put each strategy under detailed scrutiny. A summarizing SWOT analysis should follow each assessment to point out the strategy's main strengths and weaknesses and give in the limelight of potential opportunities and threats an outlook on their eventual future development.

6. The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

6.1. The Danube and its region: An important lifeline and pan-EUropean corridor between fragmentation and cohesion

With a length of over 2857 kilometers and a width of up to 1,5 kilometers, the Danube is the second largest river within Europe. With its hydrologic well located in the southwest of Baden-Wuerttemberg, a province in Germany, the Danube flows across 10 European countries and ends in the Black Sea. Its estuary mouth lies in the so-called Danube Delta, which can be found in the binational border region between Romania and Ukraine. As such, the Danube is not only the most international river in Europe, but because of its sheer size, it is one of the most determining natural entities in the continent. The Danube affects in many ways its surrounding area by being an essential factor in environmental, economic, historical, and social terms and thus shapes the daily life of the adjacent populations to a large degree.

Before we turn to the Danube's various effects as a geographical entity with its underlying specific challenges and changes for political decision-makers, it is first necessary to outline the river's territorial scope and its surrounding region.

Similar to other geographic regions, the so-called "Danube Region" is outlined with numerous and diverging definitions and territorial delineations, which are often aligned around a particular research approach. Depending on whether it is from a geographical, political, economic, or historical point of view, the given territorial scope of the Danube Region largely

varies in terms of its perimeters, like for example concerning its territorial extent, the included number of (Danube-)states, or the size of the located population being accounted as living in the Danube Region. To give a short illustration, we shall therefore briefly outline the two most common territorial delineations: The first given definition is based on the hydrological perimeters, while the second is primarily used more because of its political and socio-economic indicators and thus is also used by the EUSDR and the Danube Transnational Program as territorial scope for the program area.

When applying the hydrologic definition which is used for an example by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube Region (ICPDR), the Danube Region is strictly defined by its river basin and its tributaries (e.g., Tisza, Prut, Inn, etc.), lake water bodies (Balaton, Neusiedler See, etc.), coastal water bodies (Danube Delta), and canals (Duna-Tisza csatorna, Canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră) among others. In this context, the Danube Region can be further differentiated into three geographical sub-regions, which are based on the gradients of the river basin. The "Upper Basin" stretches from Germany to Bratislava (SK) and continues as "Middle Basin" to the Romanian-Serbian border. The "Lower Basin" comprises the Danube Delta and the Romanian and Bulgarian plateau with approximately 6,750 km² of territory (ICPDR.org).

From this rather strict ecological point of view, the Danube Region's territorial catchment spans over the territory of 801,463 km^{2,} including the territories of more than 19 nation-states[152] with over 80 million people, which makes it one of the single largest contiguous hydrologic regions in the EUropean continent. However, the number of "Danube states", which are part of the hydrologic Danube region, must be considered with some reservations. Although all of the countries are connected to the river basin by a tributary, the overall national-territorial share of some countries in the Danube Region is so marginal[153] that the country's ecological impact on the river basin can be more or less "neglected". Even the above mentioned ICPDR, which is considered as the main IO with an environmental protection agenda for the Danube Region, constitutes its membership structure on this consideration and consequentially includes only 15

[152] The catchment of the Danube region comprises of following countries: Albania, Austria, Bosnia Hercegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

[153] The already small territorial share by countries like Montenegro with 0,9 %, or Moldova with 1,6 % is undercut by countries like Switzerland with 0,2 %, or FYROM and Albania, whose aggregated territorial share does not even add up to 0,1 % of the whole Danube Region.

out of the 19 countries as regular members[154] (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), 2009).

Figure 7 Territorial delineation of the Danube Region



Source: Interreg.de

While the Danube Region's ecologically determined territorial delineation spans over a vast territory, its political and socio-economic impact on the adjacent regions and countries extends even beyond this scope. Especially in the run-up to the European Strategy of the Danube Region (EUSDR) and later the Danube Transnational Program (DTP), a significantly larger territory was constituted in order to resemble the various additional impacts of the river basin on its surrounding area. These impacts affect the directly adjacent regions and often have large-scale effects on the whole neighboring countries as such. As a result, this definition's territorial scope is aligned with jurisdictional frontiers of the adjacent nation-states located in the Danube Region. Although this approach was even within the above-mentioned strategy and Interreg program not uncontested, the Danube Region's final territorial delineation includes over 14 countries[155], including their whole national territories except for Germany and Ukraine.[156] This more comprehensive approach as a consequence leads not only to a

[154] As a result, the ICPDR provides membership only for states with a territorial share of over 2000 km^2 of the Danube River Basin, which narrows down the actual number of participating states within the organization to 14 countries.

[155] The area of cooperation of the EUSDR consists out of nine EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) and third countries (Bosnia and Hercegovina, Moldavia, Serbia, Ukraine) with no formal EU membership (European Commission, 2010a, p. 3).

[156] In the EUSDR and also the DTP, both countries are only partially included. This is due to the size of their overall national territory. As a result, only some regions of these countries are considered as part of the Danube Region and thus included within the EUSDR/DTP.

significantly more extensive territory but also results in the inclusion of a much larger population, which is approximately around 114 million people and accounts for more than 22 % of the total EU population (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015).

While both briefly outlined territorial delineations depict the area as one contiguous area, the Danube Region is characterized by a stark internal heterogeneity and fragmentation, which evolved throughout history and shaped the adjacent communities and their socio-economic status to a large degree. The main cause for this is the impact of the river itself, which has a conjunctive and disjunctive character in political and economic terms. Its conjunctive function materializes as a unique transportation opportunity, namely, a waterway, on which a dense trade unfolded. Throughout history, settlements in direct proximity to the Danube became the following important trade centers. The increasing economic prosperity was often accompanied by a simultaneous political valorization of these settlements. They often became cities of major influence and, in various cases, evolved to be the capitals of former empires or the capitals of nation-states in present times (e.g., Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, Beograd, Bucharest, etc.). The role of the Danube as a connecting geographic entity also shaped the course of history for its adjacent populations. A prime example in this regard is the Austrian Hungarian Monarchy, also known as the "Danube Monarchy", which was located in the catchment area of the river and included a large variety of ethnicities under its roof. The resulting denotation as a multi-ethnic empire was furthermore one of the first of its kind in Europe. Even despite the various unfolding historical tensions between the ethnic groups in the monarchy and even after the monarchy's breakdown as such, the idea of a multi-ethnic governmental structure persisted, namely as a confederation of Danube States. Although various historical personalities emphasized this idea, it was never realized and was fully abolished during the interwar period.[157] The Janus-faced character of the Danube, however, is also characterized by its disjunctive character. As a natural border, the Danube was, throughout history, often used as a frontier between the various communities. It was foremost used as a defensive line during the Roman Empire era, namely as the so-called "Danube Limes". After the nation-building process of the late 18th and 19th century and particularly after the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy

[157] The idea of the “Danube Confederation” was first constituted by Lajos Kossuth, the governor of Hungary during the failed uprising in 1848 against the Austrian emperor. The plan of a confederation was sketched out by Kossuth in 1862. According to these plans he did foresee a political confederation among Hungary, Transylvania, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, and other South-East European countries to successfully attain independence from Austria. While this plan was already unlikely at that time, the idea of Kossuth was brought back up in an adapted version by Oszkár Jászi in 1918 after the end of the First World War and the following breakup of the monarchy. Jászi was arguing in favor of constituting a multiethnic federal state called the “United States of the Danube Nations” (Koller, 2011, pp. 174–176).

breakup at the beginning of the 20th century, the Danube functioned as a demarcation line between the various newly established nation-states.[158] Although nation-states' concept was considered as being in direct contradiction to the marxist/communist ideology, the formally constituted borders of the states pertained in different manifestations also during the socialist period in the 20th century. These were constituted either as classic state frontiers (Warsaw Pact) or as sheer administrative jurisdictional boundaries (SFRY or the USSR). Regardless of the particular setting, all countries of the Danube Region were confronted with heavily limited foreign trade opportunities and economic or political cross-border activities due to the nearly hermetical sealing of the external boundaries, particularly across the Danube. This segregation was particularly salient regarding the geopolitical division between Eastern and Western Europe, which resulted in a total standstill of commercial activities across the so-called "Iron Curtain" (Steiner and Sturn, 1993, pp. 178–180). While the Danube, as a result, functioned foremost as a sheer natural border between regions and states and constituted a geospatial vacuum in terms of cross-border cooperation for nearly half a century, the collapse of the socialist regimes in Europe did not lead to the anticipated rapid establishment of cross-border cooperation, which was already present in Western Europe. Quite to the contrast issues like historical border disputes and conflicts, the issue of transnational kin-minorities, which were accompanied by a delayed and often very aggressive nation-building process,[159] spiked open diplomatic confrontations between the post-socialist states and led in the case of South-East Europe even to the breakout of so-called "Yugoslav Wars" (Walsch, 2017, p. 96). While the formal wars ended in the Western Balkans at the beginning of the 2000s, the border disputes and ethnicity-based conflicts within and between states pertain in a still more or less salient form. In the meantime, new violent conflicts emerged, for example, in Ukraine.[160] Although

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[158] As frontier, it nowadays demarcates Hungary from Slovakia, Croatia from Serbia, Serbia from Romania, or Romania from Bulgaria.

[159] The drawing of new demarcation lines in Europe after the two World Wars led to the establishment of various national minority communities, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Emerging conflicts between the ethnic majority and minority were, as a result, often suppressed by the communist governments by stigmatizing ethnic attributes (diverging culture, language, etc.) as an adversary to the Marxist ideology. Some communist leaders, on the other hand, like for example Nicolae Ceaușescu, used the "ethnic card" as a deflection from the own political and economic inadequacies by scapegoating the national minorities. After the collapse of the socialist regimes, many party politicians within the new democratic government structure instrumentalized the already virulent and adversary sentiments against the national minorities and their neighboring kin-states for their own political benefit (e.g., for the mobilization of voters), which often lead to diplomatic disputes with neighboring governments or in the case of Yugoslavia even to a bitter series of wars (Schöpflin, 2000).

[160] Examples of persisting political conflicts between countries are between Serbia and Kosovo/Croatia/Slovenia etc., which still strongly hinders an effective economic or political cooperation. Virulent ethnic conflicts, which are, however, strongly diverging regarding the level of intensity, can be further found within Moldavia

such tense framework conditions were not present in all of the (South)-East European Danube countries or were soon successfully overcome during the democratization process, like in the form of the peaceful dismemberment of the Czechoslovakian Republic in 1993, the Danube Region as such is overall characterized by a state of fragmentation. Quite to the contrary to the often stipulated "common Danube identity", which was over the last years often emphasized by various EU institutions (Committee of the Regions, 2009, p. 3), such a pronounced sense of community is absent across the states and regions in the area (Koller, 2011, p. 181). Instead of a comprehensive readiness to even engage together on transnational issues, the EUSDR states' stance was widely characterized by quite the opposite understanding, namely a rather competitive approach. This translated into generally detrimental framework conditions for eventual transnational cooperation schemes (Walsch, 2017, p. 96). With some exceptions, like the Visegrad Four Cooperation, this resulted in a broad institutional void regarding transnational cooperation approaches before the EUSDR.

The cconomic development of the Danube Region

The Danube Region's socio-economic framework conditions are characterized by a stark heterogeneity between the countries and a pertaining fragmentation concerning their mutual economic integration level. From an overall perspective, the Danube Region countries are generally characterized by an economic performance, which is compared to the EU-28 under average (Eckardt, 2017, pp. 256–258). As shown in the first depicted figure, from the fourteen depicted states, only Germany and Austria are able, based on the GDP per capita, to outperform the EU average. In contrast, the remaining 12 countries are all significantly below the average value.

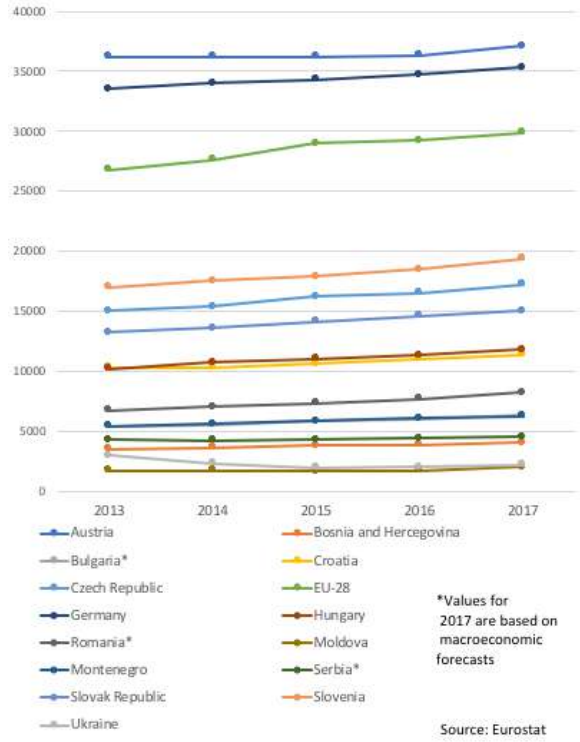
Another factor is the stark economic imbalances between the individual countries located in the Danube Region. While Austria and Germany both belong not only within the group of Danube countries to the economic frontrunners, but also in all EU member states among the highest performing national economies, Ukraine and Moldova belong to the most impoverished performing counterparts in the whole continent. This economic divide derives to a large amount from the already briefly outlined historic socialist past of the majority of Danube countries. Compared to Austria and Germany, which were only partially or for a short time struck by the negative socio-economic impact of communist totalitarian rule, the other 12 countries experienced market liberalization only less than three decades ago. The diverging prior –

concerning the question of Transnistria and Gagauzia or the allegation of Romanian intervention in domestic affairs Bosnia Hercegovina with the Republika Srpska, or the regions of Donbas and Lugansk in Ukraine.

forced– allocation of the individual countries to different socialist power blocs (USSR, SFRY, Warsaw Pact) constituted either further aggravated or less difficult economic starting conditions at the beginning of the post-socialist era.[161] This historical legacy's pertaining impact is still very stark when looking at each country's economic performance. The two German provinces Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg, and Austria's state constitute together more than 70 % of the total GDP in the Danube Region. In comparison, the other twelve states' total economic performance summed up together represent only less than 30 % of the total GDP (Ágh, 2014, p. 138). In order to illustrate the stark difference a little more: While the annual GDP per capita of Moldova for 2017 was 1,983 EUR, which marked it as the lowest-performing in the Danube Regions. On the other end of the scale, Austria showed an annual value of 37,100 EUR, which is more than eighteen times higher than its South-East European counterpart.

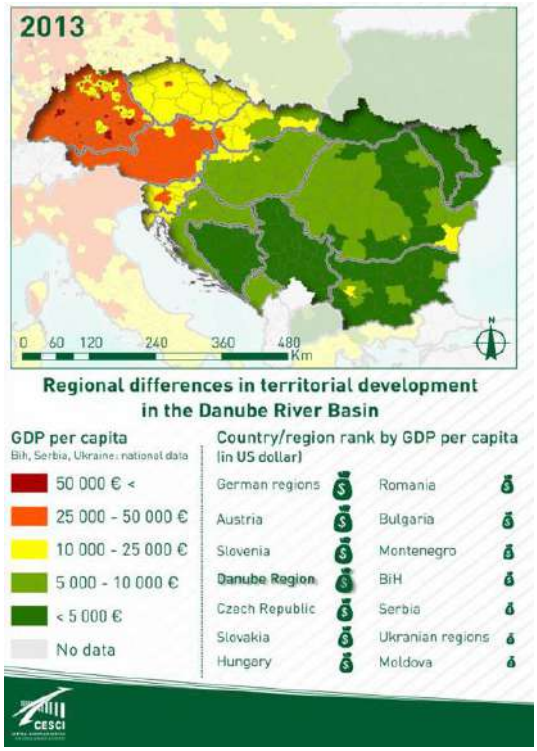
[161] While all post-socialist countries were suffering from the economic mismanagement of communist rule, there were stark differences between the individual power blocs. Within the SFRY, an increasing decentralization of political and economic decision-making was observable, particularly after the administrative reforms of 1974, while the USSR, on the other hand maintained until the era of Gorbachev (with his famous “perestroika” policy reforms in 1986) a rigid communist economic policy. This also resulted in strongly differing framework conditions between the post-socialist countries. While the economic hardships in the Ukraine and Moldova, as post-soviet countries, were particularly harsh, countries like Slovenia or Croatia as ex-Yugoslavian countries were able to initiate after their independence more successfully a liberalization of their markets and thus be more successful in terms of the post-socialist economic policies.

Figure 8 GDP per capita (in EUR) in the Danube Region between 2013 and 2017



Source: Eurostat

Figure 9 Regional differences in territorial development in the Danube Region



Source: (Pete and Gyelnik, 2016, p. 24)

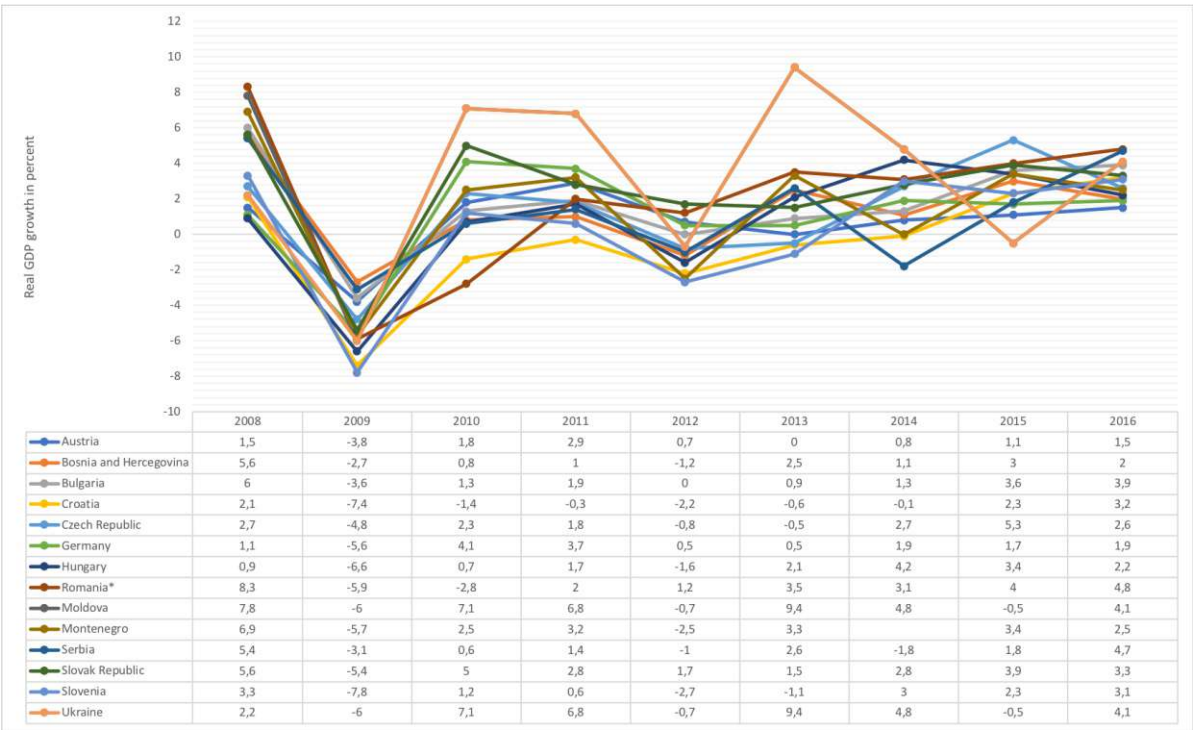
As shown in both above-depicted figures, regional imbalances are observable between individual countries. They follow a regional pattern, which is aligned around the flow direction of the river basin. Therefore it is necessary to differentiate the Danube Region into three economic sub-regions. The first group of states and regions is located in the Danube's upper area, comprising the already outlined two countries of Germany and Austria with an average GDP per capita of 36.200 EUR (in 2017).

This first group is followed by a second group, consisting of the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, and Croatia and constitutes the mid-part of the river basin. The economic performance of each state is still below the EU-average. However, since their EU accession, their economic development was very positive with significant economic growth due to which they could catch up to a large degree to the EU-28 average. The average GDP per capita for 2017 is approximately at 10.650 EUR for the mid-group. The last group, which is located in the lower part of the Danube, comprises of the South-East European countries, namely Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Ukraine, and Moldova, who have a GDP per capita, which does even reach the threshold of 50 % of the EU average. The average GDP per capita value for this country group in the lower Danube is around 4777 EUR for 2017. The group of EU non-members is showing within this region the weakest performance. Ukraine and

Moldova, as already mentioned lowest-performing countries, are with 2176 EUR and 1983 EUR only attaining 22 to 25 % of the EU GDP per capita average (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, pp. 8–11; Pete and Gyelnik, 2016, pp. 28–29). The stark sub-regional differences between the three sub-regions are becoming more apparent when we put the average GDP per capita values in comparison. The frontrunner group of the upper Danube sub-region has a 3,39 times higher value than the mid-group and a 7,6 times higher per capita GDP than the countries in the lower regions.

This stark economic incline in the Danube Region, which was already severe before the fiscal and economic crises, further aggravated after 2009. While Austria and Germany overcame the crises in only one year and managed to turn the negative GDP growth back into a positive value, the Central European member states and especially the third countries were heavily struck by the rapidly aggravating macroeconomic framework conditions. Additionally to a rapid downfall of the GDP growth in 2009, various countries were struggling with their national economies in the following years (see figure below).

Figure 10 Real GDP growth of the Danube countries (percentage change on the previous year)



	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Austria	1,5	-3,8	1,8	2,9	0,7	0	0,8	1,1	1,5
Bosnia and Hercegovina	5,6	-2,7	0,8	1	-1,2	2,5	1,1	3	2
Bulgaria	6	-3,6	1,3	1,9	0	0,9	1,3	3,6	3,9
Croatia	2,1	-7,4	-1,4	-0,3	-2,2	-0,6	-0,1	2,3	3,2
Czech Republic	2,7	-4,8	2,3	1,8	-0,8	-0,5	2,7	5,3	2,6
Germany	1,1	-5,6	4,1	3,7	0,5	0,5	1,9	1,7	1,9
Hungary	0,9	-6,6	0,7	1,7	-1,6	2,1	4,2	3,4	2,2
Romania*	8,3	-5,9	-2,8	2	1,2	3,5	3,1	4	4,8
Moldova	7,8	-6	7,1	6,8	-0,7	9,4	4,8	-0,5	4,1
Montenegro	6,9	-5,7	2,5	3,2	-2,5	3,3		3,4	2,5
Serbia	5,4	-3,1	0,6	1,4	-1	2,6	-1,8	1,8	4,7
Slovak Republic	5,6	-5,4	5	2,8	1,7	1,5	2,8	3,9	3,3
Slovenia	3,3	-7,8	1,2	0,6	-2,7	-1,1	3	2,3	3,1
Ukraine	2,2	-6	7,1	6,8	-0,7	9,4	4,8	-0,5	4,1

Source: Eurostat; own depiction

The economic crises also caused significant and rapidly growing budget deficits, which forced the countries all over the Danube Region to carry out severe budget cuts and reduce personnel within the respective public administrations. After this critical period, the countries were able

to stop the negative trend and managed to return to a slight but still pertaining economic growth (Pete and Gyelnik, 2016, pp. 25–26).

The already outlined characteristic pattern of economic imbalances between the three sub-regions can also be observed when we look at the overall employment rate. The frontrunner group from the upper Danube Region group has a particularly low unemployment rate, respectively, 3,6 % for Germany and 5,4 % for Austria in December 2017. Even more positive values can be assessed for the Czech Republic with an unemployment rate of 2,4 % and Hungary with 3,8 % located in the Danube Region's mid-part. This positive trend can also be observed for other EU member states located in the Danube Region, which are with some exceptions (e.g., Croatia) below the unemployment rate of the EU-28 average (Eurostat, 2018). Due to non-available present data, it is necessary to resort to data-sets of 2015 for the Danube third-states. Each of the five countries shows regarding the general unemployment rate, except Moldova with 4,9 % unemployment, values from 9,1 % unemployment (e.g., Ukraine) up to 27,9 % (Bosnia and Hercegovina). In direct comparison to the pre-crisis values, it must be additionally noted that positive development is not observable for these states (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017a, pp. 27–30). Another side-effect of the unfavorable conditions in terms of the labor market and the large internal economic imbalances is a distinct migration activity between the Danube regions and states. This appears in a twofold dimension. Within the Danube countries a substantial migration from the rural areas into the metropolitan regions can be observed, which leads to a decreasing or aging population in the countryside.

In contrast, the metropolitan regions experience the typical agglomeration effects and influx of well-educated young labor forces. These migration activities are also observable in a cross-border dimension, namely foremost from the eastern countries to the western counterparts, which results in a continuing "brain-drain" of young and well-educated labor forces (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, p. 9; Pete and Gyelnik, 2016, pp. 67–75). The out-migration of young employees, who are searching for higher wages compared to their homelands, also affects the transnational distribution of human capital in the Danube Region. While regions which are confronted with a negative net-migration are experiencing a fallback in their economic competitiveness, particularly in sectors with a great demand for highly qualified employees, the upper Danube countries, namely Austria and especially the German provinces of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg, extend their position as being central hubs of research and development (R&D) based industries. In the last two decades, this results in a continuously increasing agglomeration effect in the upper Danube Region with a mutual rise of research and innovation capital and a continuous influx of domestic or foreign human capital.

The two German regions, as an example, therefore managed to be frontrunners on the Innovation Scoreboard of the EU for several consecutive years, while Austria also shows comparably high values in this regard. The post-socialist EU member states located in the mid-region of the Danube, which are also facing a significant out-migration of employees, can still manage to realize average innovation values within the SME sector. In the Danube's' lower part, the EU members are continuously underperforming in this regard. For the third countries no sufficient data is available (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017a, pp. 56–57). The modest or poor performance of most Danube countries within the R&D sector derives from the member states' lack of financial capabilities. While the provinces of Germany and Austria allocate 3 % of the national GDP to the R&D sector, the mid-group only assigns between 1 % and 2 %. In the lower part of the Danube Region, the allocation was significantly worse with a rate of less than 0,5 % of the national GDP (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, pp. 13–14).[162]

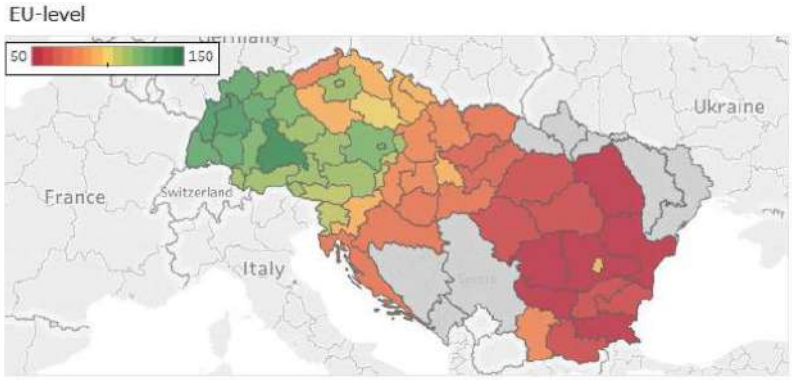
The detrimental effects of the socialist legacy on the mid-and lower part of the Danube countries still severely limit the budgetary capacities after three decades and hamper their competitiveness in various other aspects. The slow improvement of institutional and governance quality or the moderate development of the infrastructure, health, and education sector are just some of the still pertaining challenges which the post-socialist countries are faced with. When applying the so-called Regional Competitiveness Index (RCI), a composite index developed by the EU comprising of various indicators[163], this above stated overall picture will be confirmed concerning the significant pertaining gap between the upper part of the Danube and the rest of the countries regarding the general competitiveness. While adequate data-sets regarding the third-states are again missing, each of these countries is heavily struggling with deficiencies in the above-outlined policy sectors (Committee of the Regions, 2014b; Iovu, 2015; Studennikov, 2015).

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[162] This translates in terms of actual sums to budget allocations, which are for the majority of Danube states below 2 million Euro, while the worst-performing countries only allocate 0,5 million EUR in total for R&D in the SME sector (Trandafir and Panaitescu, 2015, p. 86).

[163] The Regional Competitive Index (RCI) by the EC bundles 11 individual factors as a composite index, assessing the general long- and short-term performance capabilities by the regions. The RCI comprises of the following indices: (1) Quality of Institutions, (2) Macro-economic Stability, (3) Infrastructure, (4) Health and the (5) Quality of Primary and Secondary Education, (6) Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, (7) Labor Market Efficiency and (8) Market Size, (9) Technological Readiness, (10) Business Sophistication, and (11) Innovation. RCI aims at showing the short and long-term capabilities of the regions. While regions, which are marked green, show an above EU-average degree of competitiveness, orange and red ones show a slight or significant lower competitiveness rate (European Commission, DG Regio).

Figure 11 Regional Competitiveness (RCI) of the Danube Regions (NUTS) in comparison to the EU average



Source: (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017a, pp. 53–55)

In contrast to the stark economic heterogeneity and sub-regional fragmentation of the macro-region, the Danube countries are characterized by a comprehensive integration in terms of foreign trade and exports. In this term, frontrunners are Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Hungary, and Serbia, whose exports to the adjacent Danube countries account for over 50 % of their total exports. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia show similar values with a share of around 45 %, while Bulgaria's, Romania's and Moldova's total macro-regional export-share ranges from 30 % to 37 %. An exception in this regard is Ukraine, whose economy is more integrated within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) than with its Danube neighbors. Additional to the positive macro-regional trade integration, the already outlined typical sub-regional economic patterns can be observed. While all of the countries have strong trade relations with Germany as an "economic giant", particularly in the mid-region of the Danube due to the automotive industry, the trade flows within each sub-region are very dense (e.g., between the V4 countries, between Slovenia and Croatia, etc.). It can be further observed that since the EU accession in 2004, the exports of the new member states towards the macro-region experienced a continuous increase (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017a, pp. 39–41).

The aim of integrating the national energy markets still constitutes a significant challenge for the macro-region in comparison, which shows overall a quite mixed picture. Approximately 10 % of the whole energy production in the Danube Region is exported to the macro-regional neighbors. An extraordinarily high macro-regional export share can be assessed for the former Yugoslavian countries. Among them, 100 % of Bosnia and Hercegovina's energy export is traded with the macro-region states, while Montenegro and Serbia have 40 % and 28 %. The three states of the Visegrad 4 Cooperation located in the Danube Region, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, are also highly integrated into the common energy network with export shares of 29 %, 23 %, and 19 %. Due to their former stark integration into the energy market of the USSR and afterward the Russian Federation, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine show very poor values with a macro-regional export share from 0,3 % to 0,0 %

(Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017a, pp. 45–47).

A key challenge for further integrating the national economies is the reduction of the physical barrier effect in the border regions through the establishment of border crossing-points. While since the beginning of the migration and asylum crisis, many Schengen countries (e.g., Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, etc.) reintroduced border controls, which led to a partial reemergence of the mentioned barrier-effect, non-members of the Schengen Acquis lack in general sufficient physical border crossing-points (see figure below).

The establishment of such crossing-points often goes along with very costly investments, either through the provision of road and rail infrastructure for the overland route or the even more expensive building of bridges in case of creating crossing-points across the Danube river basin. Such investments constitute significant financial challenges for the very constraint national budgetary capacities and are as a consequence only realized in more limited numbers (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, p. 10; Pete and Gyelnik, 2016, pp. 15–17).

Figure 12 Density of border crossing points in the Danube River Basin



Source: (Pete and Gyelnik, 2016, p. 16)

6.2. Drafting and initiation of the EUSDR

With its kick-off event in June 2011, the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) marked the second Macro-regional strategy in the EU. Considered by many observers as the final rise of a "macro-regional fever", which still pertains until today and led to the establishment of two additional strategies, this new approach was of particular importance for the Danube Region. Confronted with various geo- and socioeconomic challenges, the river basin area, the surrounding regions, and countries experienced in the years before the EUSDR kick-off, more precisely since 2007, already special attention within the Cohesion Policy. In the time-span of the MFF 2007-2013, more than 41 ETC programs were initiated in the macro-region, which constituted more than half of all established ETC programs on EUropean territory. The various programs already cover different parts of the macro-regions. Over 18 classic cross-border cooperation schemes (Interreg A) are located within the Danube region's EU territory, while 13 are established with third countries being in the association process (IPA). Three are also realized with third countries covered by the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI). The cooperations were also accompanied by seven transnational (Interreg B) programs, which are partially overlapping with the cooperation area of the EUSDR (Coroban, 2011, p. 99).

Despite these large numbers of newly established programs, which were considered by various authors as some-kind of "old" macro-regional approaches due to their territorial scope and their policy goal setting, the EUSDR constituted, regardless of the territorial commonalities, a widely new approach in various aspects (Kaiser, 2011, pp. 59–60).

The EUSDR was accompanied by exceptional high expectations by the EU institutions, national governments, local and regional authorities (LRAs), and various non-governmental stakeholders within and beyond the EU territory. The actors based their expectations foremost on the premise to realize a new "tailor-made" solution for the macro-region by using unexploited potentials of the area and through that attain a place-based added value in the limelight of "good governance" (Wulf, 2016, p. 443). The demand for such a new innovative governance approach also manifested in the spotlight of the continuously aggravating political and economic framework conditions. In political terms, the EU integration process was, as already outlined (see chapter 2.2.3.1), faced with a steadily evolving dissent among the member states concerning the prospective vertical integration process. The dissent materialized in the near failure of the Lisbon Treaty's ratification and an increasing number of fundamental disputes among the member states regarding the prospective form of integration. As a result, many countries were only willing to consent to cooperation, which did not foresee any deepened

legal integration. Not only the Danube Region but the large majority of EU states were simultaneously faced with an unfolding major fiscal and economic crisis, which brought several governments near to bankruptcy. Even the less crisis-struck governments were forced to carry out severe budgetary restrictions and were in need of improving their allocation efficiency (Gänzle and Kern, 2015, p. 14).

This need for action also influenced the considerations regarding the governance structure of the EUSDR. Before its kick-off, EU commissioner (DG REGIO) Pawel Samecki stipulated that macro-regions "[…]should be defined so as to maximise the efficacy of the strategy." through "[…]flexible, even vague, definitions of the boundaries." (Samecki, 2009, p. 8). Samecki's constituted premises were designated to be implemented into the basic structural setup of the EUSDR. As such, the strategy should follow the classic function principles of a system of Multi-Level Governance by realizing it through a strong vertical and horizontal functional rescaling of governance (Kaiser, 2017, p. 184). This should be realized in the vertical dimension through a comprehensive cooperation between the various administrative and territorial levels (e.g., local, regional, national and supranational) within the states to improve policy implementation (EUSDR, 2015, p. 1). The macro-regional approach also implied the cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries between the member states within the EU territory and across the external borders with third countries. The cooperations should also be carried out with non-governmental stakeholders' involvement in a heterarchical network of Regional Cross-Border Governance (Ágh, 2011a, p. 11, 2014, p. 128; Ágh et al., 2014, p. 16).[164] This multidimensional cooperation approach in the Danube Region, which will be outlined in the following chapters, also pursues additionally to the particular set of designated policy goals the aim of tackling the place-based challenges through a joint and coordinated approach. In the long run, this should realize a further territorial integration in the Danube Region by overcoming the partially persisting structural, economic, and social fragmentation of the area (European Commission, 2010b; Kaiser, 2017, p. 179).

Temporal milestones within the phase of initiation: From the idea to the launch of the EUSDR implementation

The formulation of the policy and governance goals for the EUSDR underwent a long initiation process, which is characteristic for all RCBG networks regardless of their size. In contrast to the actual drafting of the basic policy documents, which are often carried out in a relatively

[164] Although Ágh and his colleagues use a different term for this approach, namely territorial governance, the already outlined RCBG approach is based on the same fundamental function principles, while also undertaking a more differentiated approach concerning the observable network characteristics of the MRS.

short amount of time, the preceding deliberation process between the potential participating actors often demands an equally adequate lead time.

In the case of the EUSDR, this phase of deliberation pertained nearly for a decade between the first upcoming of the idea of creating a Macro-regional strategy for the Danube Region and the actual kick-off event. The start of this process was marked by the so-called "process of Ulm" in 2001, initiated in the eponym German city of Ulm. The first conference was followed by subsequent meetings in Melk (Austria), Esztergom (Hungary), Passau, Stuttgart (both Germany), where the basic principles for a macro-regional cooperation in the Danube Region were outlined and laid down for the first time (Pete and Gyelnik, 2016, p. 18). One year later, the Members of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, Austria, Romania, and the European Commission initiated the Danube Cooperation Process (DCP) at the ministerial conference in Vienna in May 2002. More than 13 countries[165] were represented by their foreign ministers in this format, who emphasized the necessity of enhancing regional cooperation in the Danube Region. The laid-out policy fields of cooperation already had a strong alignment around the Danube Region's specific challenges, namely, for example, the policy issues of waterway transportation, environmental protection, tourism, and culture (Gänzle, 2015, p. 61). With specific support from Romania and Austria in 2008, the DCP finally presented the first draft of a Strategy for the Danube Region. The issue of a Danube Region based cooperation scheme, which was initially emphasized in a foremost intergovernmental setting, finally wound its way through the DCP on the agenda of the EU institutions. The Committee of Regions took over being a frontrunner by establishing the internal interregional working group "Danube". This group invited EU Commissioner Danuta Hübner (DG REGIO) at the end of 2008 to issue an opinion with guidelines regarding a macro-regional cooperation for the Danube Region (Sielker, 2012, p. 82). The issued invitation towards the European Commission by the CoR to prepare and present a draft for the EUSDR was in June 2009 accompanied by a conclusion of the Council underlining the call towards drafting a EUSDR program document. These actions were followed by an informal deliberation process between the institutions from November 2009 and continued afterward in a formalized format. Between February 2010 and April 2010, the potential EUSDR actors were asked to carry out national consultations and submit so-called "non-papers". In these documents, they could issue their point of view regarding the potential main policy areas of strategy. Parallel to the bilateral intergovernmental consultations, various national stakeholder conferences were carried out in Ulm (DE), Budapest (HU), Vienna (AT)

[165] These countries were Germany, Austria, Czech, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine

and Bratislava (SK), Ruse (BG), and Constanța (RO) between February and June 2010. An online consultation for non-governmental stakeholders accompanied this during the same period. Based on the received feedback, the EC led during the following months' bilateral talks with various potential EUSDR states, accompanied by intra-institutional consultations, foremost the various EC directorates. The finalization of the actual drafting was carried out in December 2010 with the Communication and Action Plan's official adoption, serving as basic policy documents of the strategy drafted by the Commission. The adoption also constituted the transition to the implementation phase, while in the meantime, first Priority Area and National Coordinator meetings were already realized. With the issued Conclusions in April and the following endorsement by the Council in June 2015, the initiation of the EUSDR ultimately found its end. This was followed by the official "Kick-off" event in the same month, which formally induced the implementation phase of the EUSDR.

Table 7 Main milestones of the of the EUSDR's drafting process	
June 2009	Invitation of the EC by the European Council to present a EU strategy for the Danube region
February 2010	EP resolution on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Regio
February 2010	Submitting national "thesis-papers" of the EUSDR countries to the EC
February to June 2010	National Stakeholder Conferences (Ulm, Budapest, Vienna-Bratislava, Ruse, Constanta) and public online consultation of stakeholders
April 2010	Submitting national "non-papers" regarding main intervention areas and flagship projects
July-November 2010	Bilateral consultations and intra-EU institutional consultations
December 2010	Adoption of the EUSDR Action Plan and the Communication by the European Commission
April 2011	Council Conclusions on the EUSDR (Council for general affairs)
June 2011	Official endorsement of the EUSDR by the European Council and "Kick-off" event of the Priority Areas

6.2.1. Policy dimension

The European Commission characterizes the Danube Region as a "functional space, which is defined by the river basin" (European Commission, 2010a, p. 3). This functional space thus also defines the particular need for action for the strategy.

In terms of the policy dimension of the EUSDR, this impacts the governance setting in a twofold way. The first effect concerns the territorial scope of the EUSDR. As an approach of Regional Cross-Border Governance, the selection of EUSDR actors, who are in geographic proximity to the river basin and are thus impacted by the Danube as geospatial factors, also defines the network's character. The second effect unfolds in the specific selection of policy goals. Due to the apparent disability of the individual regional or national governments to solve specific geospatial challenges in the macro-region, the constitution of policy goals must be transnational and must also have a comprehensive macro-regional approach, which addresses the genuine challenges of the area. The actor constellation and the policy goal setting are decisive elements within the policy dimension and the drafting process and are within the EUSDR addressed in the strategy's primary policy documents, namely the Communication and the so-called "Action Plan".

Actor-constellation

As the second Macro-regional strategy, the formal actor constellation of the EUSDR follows to a large degree the pattern of the EUSBSR as its precursor by involving foremost national governments. The only exception from this pattern is the case of Germany as a EUSDR actor. Due to its federative structure, two provinces, namely Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg, were included as formal actors. With the manifold challenges in the macro-region reaching from socioeconomic to environmental issues, the alignment of the territorial delineation made it soon evident that a comparably large scope was needed for the cooperation. Compared to the ICPDR, which mainly constitutes the direct hydrologic area of the Danube River Basin as its intervention area (see chapter 6.1), the EUSDR covers the whole territory of the involved countries (Bos, 2013, p. 26).

While a comprehensive approach in terms of the territorial scope was standing to reasons from the beginning, the actual number of involved countries was not uncontested during the initiation phase. According to the original plans, the territorial scope of the EUSDR did only foresee a much smaller actor-constellation with only six EU members (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia), two candidate countries (Croatia and Serbia), and two ENP third countries (Moldova and Ukraine). These countries signed a letter of intent for the cooperation already in March 2006, which was reaffirmed in May 2009. While this more

narrow territorial delineation pertained for over three years, it was overturned at the first EUSDR summit in Budapest between 24-25 February 2010. A significantly enlarged actor constellation substituted it. According to the new plans, the Czech Republic and Slovenia were included as EU member states despite being in a non-riparian location to the Danube. Additionally, Bosnia and Hercegovina, as well as Montenegro, were further included in the EUSDR as third countries. Especially the involvement of the third countries constituted a significant shift in the strategy towards an increased role of the external governance dimension (Molnár, 2011, pp. 113–114).

With the newly extended actor-constellation, the EUSDR constitutes in its current form is not just the Macro-regional strategy with the largest territorial coverage but also with the most participating governmental actors. These actors can be differentiated into three groups according to their attributes:

1) The nine formal EU member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia (since 2013), Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary
2) The two German provinces of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg –as more or less– autonomously acting regional actors and representatives of Germany
3) The five EU non-members differentiated into three IPA states with Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and two ENP states with Moldova and Ukraine (participating only with some regions: Chernivetska Oblast, Ivano-Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast, Odesa Oblast).

Figure 13 Territorial coverage of the EUSDR



Source: (Sielker, 2016, p. 90)

With 14 participating countries and two German provinces in total, the territorial scope of the EUSDR is characterized by significant inflation compared to the initially designated cooperation area. This significantly larger actor-constellation also constitutes a substantially more complex governance framework due to the necessary coordination activities between these actors. A particular challenge in this regard constitutes the involvement of the five non-member states, which demands a differentiated governance approach. Due to their status as third countries, neither the EU acquis nor new regulations are legally binding for these states, resulting in the RCBG typical "shadow of hierarchy" of the EU being more absent than for the member states. This framework condition, therefore, makes a more "soft" and "diplomatic" approach necessary. The already complex situation is further complicated due to the diverging levels of vertical integration of these countries towards the EU (grades of EU memberships). While some countries have a potential EU membership perspective formally and are therefore more integrated into various policy areas, the relationship between the Union and the ENP states is characterized by more classic intergovernmental relations. Another major factor is the already outlined starkly diverging geo- and socio-economic framework conditions, particularly

between members and non-members. Due to the strongly varying economic development levels, joint geospatial projects are faced with widely differing conditions.

However, these various diverging framework conditions made a uniform external governance approach widely unfeasible for the whole macro-region from the beginning. Furthermore, it also constituted the procedural steering major challenges, namely to address the specific challenges of the third countries, while simultaneously creating a coherent network for all actors (see politics dimension).

Despite these problematic framework conditions concerning the actor constellation, the involvement of such a large number of third countries, representing more than a third of all EUSDR actors, was considered by various political decision-makers and scholars alike as a feasible solution to overcome the unfolding "carrot-crisis" [166] of the EUropean enlargement policy (Ágh, 2011a, p. 12). The setup of the EUSDR was considered as a window of opportunity for the IPA countries, namely to continue the association process through the "soft" network approach of RCBG. The EUSDR should realize a (re-)mobilization of the designated IPA countries, who were expected to implement further conditionalities and, by that, make further progress within their pre-accession process. Another anticipated added value was the IPA states' expected gathering of governance experience through the macro-regional network's coordination activities, which would also benefit their association process (Ágh, 2011a, pp. 18–19; European Commission, 2016b, p. 3). This approach was welcomed explicitly by some of the IPA states like Croatia, for example.[167] The involvement of the ENP third countries, namely Ukraine and Moldova, was also realized with the anticipation that the participation of these states within the EUSDR would enhance the intended "stabilization" of the bilateral relations as well as the domestic political situation in these states (Ágh, 2016, p. 151; Wulf, 2016, p. 247).

The actor-constellation did not just demand a necessary governance differentiation in terms of internal and external governance dimension but also resulted in a vertical rescaling of governance, at least in Germany and partially Austria, who were both involved in the EUSDR

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[166] Attila Ágh introduced the "carrot-crisis" as term, which describes the observable enlargement fatigue of the EU after the Eastern Enlargement in 2004. The EU used the potential prospect of EU membership for many years as a "carrot" towards third countries, who were obliged to carry out domestic reforms in various policy areas as conditionality to attain the intended accession. With already outlined increasing dissent among the EU member states concerning the prospective integration of the EU, which also translated into a growing political unwillingness to incorporate new member states, who would be in need of significant structural funds, the "carrot" of the EU started to loose since then its appeal towards these third-states.

[167] In its non-paper Croatia, for example, stipulated that the involvement in the macro-regional governance framework had an "added value" for their accession negotiations and was an opportunity to gain experience as an equal partner among the member states (Griessler, 2017, p. 121).

through their provinces. As representatives of Germany, the provinces of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg became regular members of the strategy. Their membership was of a complementary hybrid nature. Both entities do not replace Germany as an EUSDR state but are instead involved as complementary actors. In this regard, they are obliged and empowered with duties and rights in the same way as the regular national counterparts but are simultaneously limited to some particular intervention areas within the strategy.

In comparison to this, the mobilization of Austrian LRAs is significantly more limited. Among the Austrian LRAs, only the federal city-state of Vienna is partially involved in the strategy as a so-called Priority Area Coordinator (elaborated further below). It is thus only entitled to coordinate the implementation process in one particular policy area. Compared to the German provinces, the Austrian federal city-state does not possess any decision-making competencies within the strategy. It can be therefore not be attributed as a formal EUSDR actor. Local and regional actors from other countries within the EUSDR have no formal actor role at all. They are mainly designated to function as executing administrative structure of their national governments (e.g., in the form of Regional Development Agencies) and are thus strictly bound by instructions from the national capitals. This led, in contrast to some expectations, only to a minimal mobilization of the regional and local actors in general (Committee of the Regions, 2009, p. 3), which will be further outlined in the upcoming chapters.

While the already strong top-down and intergovernmental oriented membership structure of the EUSDR limited the mobilization potential of regions significantly, a formal membership of non-governmental actors or international organizations was not designated within the actor-constellation. This consideration followed the premise to not additionally increase the governance complexity of the strategy with more actors contributing to an even more heterogeneous set of interests.[168] As a result, the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders was realized under the premise of an ad-hoc procedural involvement within the individual policy and project networks of the EUSDR (see chapter 6.2.3).

[168] The individual interests and motivations of non-governmental actors ranged over a broad range of issues and were, in various cases, contradictory. Whereas interest organizations of business groups were, for example, interested in the development of infrastructural networks, like the Danube River Basin as a waterway, environmental groups, on the other hand, wanted to avoid any further construction measures to protect flora and fauna of the river (Szabó and Polgár, 2011, p. 147).

Selection of cooperation objectives

The policy goal setting of the EUSDR is constituted in two policy documents. These are the Communication of the Council and the Action Plan, drafted by the European Commission and characterized as a "soft" policy framework for the strategy. This characterization derives from the already outlined "three noes" principle, which excludes the possibility of adopting a legally binding regulation for the EUSDR. While the two documents have the same function, they diverge in their setup significantly. The Communication serves foremost as a document, which stipulates the underlying general principles and cornerstones for the strategic network and therefore provides the general policy framework. In comparison to this, the Action Plan provides a much more detailed policy guideline for the participating actors. It is elaborated on 89 pages and lists not only 129 policy actions and illustrates these in detail but according to the self-constituted motto "words to action", it additionally outlines 123 potential exemplary projects to give the actors and stakeholders guidelines for the following implementation activities (European Commission, 2010b, 2010b). The policy goal setting of the strategy spans over a wide variety of topics, which results in a compartmentalization in four overarching thematic pillars, 12 so-called Priority Areas as intervention areas, and additional 57 underlying individual targets. [169]

[169] The original targets were overhauled in the meantime.

Table 8 Policy goal-setting of the EUSDR with adapted targets

Pillar	Priority Area		Thematic Objectives of the Common Provisions Regulation (Art. 9 (EU) No 1303/2013)	
(1) Connecting the Region	**PA 1a**	**Mobility – Inland waterways**	(7)	"promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Increase cargo by 20 % by 2020 compared to 2010 2) Solve obstacles to navigability of the Danube and its tributaries and establish effective waterway infrastructure management by 2020 3) Develop efficient multimodal terminals by 2020 4) Implement River Information System and exchange of data by 2020 5) Solve shortage of qualified personnel and harmonize education standards		
	PA 1b	**Mobility – Rail, road and air**		
	Targets (2016-)	1) Support efficient freight railway services and improved travel times 2) Support fully functional multi-modal TEN-T Core Network Corridors by 2030 3) Support improvement of efficient multimodal terminals at sea, river and dry ports and ensure connectivity and integration by 2030 4) Improved regional air connectivity and implementation of Single European Sky initiative 5) Facilitate improvement of secondary and tertiary roads 6) Support safe and sustainable transport and mobility		
	PA 2	**Higher Sustainable Energy**	(4)	"supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Help achieve national targets for 2030 climate and energy targets 2) Remove bottlenecks in energy to fulfil Energy Union goals 3) Better interconnect by joint activities		
	PA 3	**Culture and tourism**		
	Targets (2016-)	1) Develop a Danube Brand 2) Implement harmonized monitoring system of tourism data 3) Develop cultural routes 4) Develop green tourist products 5) Create a "blue Book" on Danube cultural identity 6) Ensure preservation of cultural heritage and natural values by networks and clusters 7) Promote exchange and networking in contemporary arts		

(2) Protecting the environment	**PA 4**	**Water Quality**	(6)	"preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Achieve Objectives of Danube River Basin management Plan 2) Reduce nutrient levels 3) Elaborate Danube Delta Analysis Report and complete Data management Plan 4) Secure viable populations of Danube sturgeon species 5) Elaborate and implement sub-basin management plans for Sava, Tisza and Prut		
	PA 5	**Environmental Risks**	(5)	"preserving promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Address challenges of water scarcity and droughts and climate adaptation 2) Support implementation of Danube Flood Risk Management Plan to achieve significant reduction of flood risks by 2021 3) Update database of accident risk spots		
	PA 6	**Biodiversity**	(6)	"preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Halt the deterioration of status of all species and habitats by 2020 2) Establish green infrastructure and restoration of 15 % of degraded ecosystems by 2020 3) Identify and eradicate invasive alien species and prevent new establishments by 2020 4) Secure viable populations of Danube sturgeons and other indigenous fish species by 2020		
(3) Building prosperity	**PA 7**	**Knowledge Society**	(1)	"strengthening research, technological development and innovation"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Increase effectiveness of investment in R&I through min. 2 coordinated activities dedicated to EUSDR 2) Increase no. of EPO and PCT patent applications by 20 % by 2020 filed from Danube Region 3) Enhance regional research and education co-operation to reach 20 % academic mobility in region by 2020 4) Increase annual co-publications by 15 % by 2020 5) Develop RIS 3 by 2020 in all Danube countries		
	PA 8	**Competitiveness of Enterprise**	(2) (3)	enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT; "enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs of the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and of the fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF)"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Improve innovation and technology transfer by new measures by consulting services by chambers etc. 2) Establish Cluster network focusing on bio-based industries and analysis of smart specialization strategies 3) Improve technological knowledge and implementation of environmental technologies through best-practices in the area of e.g. sewage treatment, solid waste management 4) Improve capacity building to enhance competitiveness in rural areas and agricultural sector 5) Best practices models and pilot projects for vocational training 6) Improve entrepreneurship education, in SMEs through lifelong entrepreneurial learning system in line with SBA for Europe 7) Improve business support of SMEs for international cooperation		

	PA 9	**People and Skills**	(8)	"promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labor mobility"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Contribute to higher employment rate tackling youth and long-term unemployment 2) Improve educational outcomes and skills 3) Increase higher quality and efficiency of education, training and labor market 4) Closer cooperation between educational, training and labor market and research institutions	(9)	"promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination"
(4) Strengthening the region	**PA 10**	**Institutional Cooperation**	(11)	"enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration"
	Targets (2016-)	1) Improve World Bank governance indicators in comparison to 2011 2) 80 % of EUSDR countries involve national, regional and local authorities, as well as CSOs through national EUSDR consultations 3) UPDR of UPDR stakeholder organizations involved, and at least one Urban Danube Project 4) Increase average absorption rate of EU funds in comparison to 2007-2013		
	PA 11	**Security**		
	Targets (2016-)	1) Enhance police cooperation to improve security and tackling serious and organized crime as well as strengthening efforts against terrorism threats 2) Develop strategic long-term cooperation between law enforcement actors by 2020 3) Improve border control systems, document inspection management		

Source: own depiction

Although the EUSDR is formally not part of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), its Pillars, Priority Areas, and Targets are nevertheless aligned around the priorities and objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy as an overarching policy framework. Similar to the already outlined ETC schemes, like the three Interreg strands and the EGTC, the EUSDR follows a combined approach as a network of RCBG in this regard. It integrates the general sectoral policy aims of the Europe 2020 strategy with the aims of social and territorial cohesion of the EU's Structural Policy, constituted within the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), in its goal-setting (Ágh et al., 2014, p. 19).[170] This resulted in a comprehensive alignment between the EUSDR and the

[170] The three priorities of Europe 2020 are as following: 1) Smart growth – developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation with particular emphasis on strengthening the R&D sector and SMEs. 2) Sustainable growth – promoting a more resource-efficient, greener, and more competitive economy with a distinct focus on environmental protection agendas 3) Inclusive growth – fostering a high-employment economy delivering

above mentioned two policy documents. All of the three constituted priorities in the Europe 2020 document can be found within the policy goal setting of the EUSDR starting from *smart growth* (PA 7, PA 8), over the priority of *sustainable growth* (PA 2, PA 4, PA 5, PA 6) to *inclusive growth* with the subordinated aims of social and territorial cohesion (PA 1a, PA 1b, PA 3, PA 9, PA 10). Concerning the alignment with the Common Provision Regulations, as shown in the above-depicted table, 9 out of 11 Thematic Objectives are to be found within the goal-setting of the EUSDR. Only Priority Area 11 (Security) is not embedded in the CPR or the Europe 2020 strategy. This is because transnational security issues, for example, the fight against cross-border criminality, cooperation in the area of border controls, or the transnational cooperation of policy forces, are generally deemed as politically sensitive issues and are generally negotiated as "high-level politics" is primarily more intergovernmental formats. Consequentially this issue is being excluded from the Cohesion Policy as a highly integrated policy area. Another formally non-aligned area of intervention is Priority Area 3 (Culture and Tourism). Although neither Culture nor Tourism are explicitly embedded within the CPR or in Europe 2020, both policy issues can indirectly be subsumed under social and territorial cohesion principles. The embedded goals of the PA, namely to create a common identity within the Danube River Basin, which undoubtedly resembles the aim of social cohesion, as well as the goal of strengthening the tourism industry as an economic sector and thus improving the territorial cohesion, qualifies the PA as an area of intervention with an indirect alignment with both documents.

The high degree of policy alignment of the EUSDR's policy goals, especially with the Europe 2020 strategy, led during its initiation phase to the general perception among observers that the goal-setting was actually the attempt to realize a "regionalized EU 2020 strategy" by the Commission (Wulf, 2016, p. 421). In contrast to the officially stipulated general aim, namely to realize a RCBG network for the Danube Region with a distinct place-based approach, the broad integration of such an overarching and generalized policy document within the policy dimension of the EUSDR spiked concerns and criticism. In this regard, the main critique point was the alleged blurring of the original aim of creating policy goals with explicit addressing of place-based challenges (European Commission, 2013b, p. 17, 2013b, p. 28; Zillmer et al., 2012, p. 51). Some Priority Area Coordinators also acknowledged this during the implementation phase and noted that this very generalist approach makes it necessary to consider various

economic, social and territorial cohesion, which manifested, as already outlined, in the valorization of the ETC within the Cohesion Policy (European Commission, 2010c).

actions, not as specific EUSDR related, but more as "[…]guiding overall concepts or as long-term Vision." (EUSDR PAC 6, 2017, p. 9).

Another problematic aspect in terms of the general goal setting was the vast amount of embedded aims. With over 12 Priority Areas (including the PA tandem from Mobility), originally 129 actions, and more than 57 individual targets, the EUSDR actors face a very broad range of policy issues. The absence of additional funding (see chapter 6.2.2) also means that states' participation within the implementation process requires significant financial and administrative efforts, especially in cost-intensive areas of intervention like PA 1a and PA 1b (Mobility Waterways and Rail, Road, Air). These efforts, however, will be compensated only to a small degree from the supranational level. This bears the threat of an overextension of the actor capabilities during the actual implementation process, which is particularly salient for the third countries with obviously limited governance capabilities (see chapter 6.1).

A further detrimental factor is the partially underlying contradictory character of the various Priority Areas, especially regarding their designated goal attainment. While one of the Priority Areas foresees, for example, the aim of general infrastructure development through structural investments in the area of the road- and waterways (PA 1a & PA 1b), or the objective of developing hydropower production in the River Basin (PA 2), the general goal-setting also includes the aim of fostering the Biodiversity (PA 6) in the River Basin. This, however, results in an inherent contradictory goal setting between the various PAs and also constitutes a hard to surmountable challenge regarding the balancing of these diverging actor and stakeholder interests within the respective PAs and thus bore from the beginning the threat of unfolding a detrimental effect on the success of the overall goal attainment.

The conceptual incoherency of the 12 designated Priority Areas could have been resolved right from the beginning by a hierarchical prioritization, which was also urged by the Committee of Regions in the early drafting phase. However, it was not realized in the final version of the EUSDR Action Plan. Only in the later implementation phase, namely in 2015, this policy deficiency was taken care of with the introduction of flagship projects (see chapter 6.3.1). As a result, this lack of strategic focus spiked further critique by actors and stakeholders regarding the goal-setting during the phase of initiation (Bos, 2013, p. 34; Wulf, 2016, p. 376).

To attain the anticipated innovative governance character, the Action Plan of the EUSDR puts a strong emphasis on a comprehensive cross-sectoral policy implementation (European Commission, 2010b, p. 3). Therefore, the policy goal attainment should not just be carried out across jurisdictional boundaries in the macro-region, but also through synergetic cooperation between Priority Areas within the four pillars and across them. To realize this objective, a

tandem of EUSDR actors manage each Priority Area, namely by functioning who are obliged to function as policy coordinators, among others (see chapter 6.2.3).

This setup should result in a new dynamism within the transnational cooperation of Cohesion Policy and more efficient policymaking in the Danube Region (Aust, 2014, p. 5). In the long run, the cross-sectoral approach and the cross-jurisdictional coordination of policymaking should also ensure the detection and establishment of new functional spaces of cooperation and finally induce a definite comprehensive rescaling of governance in the particular macro-regional setting (Sielker, 2012, p. 107). Such a functional space, which would be realized by the EUSDR as a network of RCBG, would also contribute to a mobilization of the whole Danube Region and thus lead to an eventual mobilization of the actors in the macro-region. This cross-sectoral approach is, however, again potentially hampered by the goal-setting of the strategy. Besides the already outlined contradictory character of some PAs, which widely excluded a potential cross-sectoral coordination in those particular intervention areas (Ágh, 2016, p. 149), other counterparts suffered from a partial imbalanced goal setting. While some policy issues, such as transportation in PA 1, were adequately compartmentalized to avoid an overload of goals, this was not the case for PA 8 (Competitiveness of Enterprise) and especially PA 9 (People and Skills). In the two PAs, an evident overburden of goals can be observed. In PA 8, they range from technological and economic innovation, spatial development issues, capacity building in the agricultural sector, development of vocational training to the improvement of entrepreneurship and the cooperation of SMEs. In PA 9, the area of intervention also includes the goals of tackling all facets of labor market challenges, improving general education standards, and even various social issues like fighting discrimination of ethnic minorities, for example. Although the above named PAs are the most extreme examples, a general overload of the EUSDR PAs with subordinated policy goals can be stated. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask whether a more limited number of a better defined and more coherent set of policy goals would not have been more beneficial for successfully implementing the EUSDR, particularly during the strategy's early implementation phase. This was also pointed out by Thomáš Strázay, who noted that a more applicable “step by step” approach with a steady increase of policy goals would have been more beneficial than the pursued “big bang” goal setting, which led to various severe problems, particularly during the later implementation phase (Strážay, 2011, p. 139).

The suboptimal policy goal setting within the EUSDR also resulted in a partially unclear or even “fuzzy” embedded target setting. In contrast to the already outlined theoretical concept of the SMART-Principle (see chapter 2.4.3.1), which stipulates that such settings should follow

the premise of being specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timebound, this was in many aspects not pursued by the EUSDR.

While the Commission considered the extensive description of 129 potential actions and the additional 123 exemplary projects in the Action Plan as a promising basis for the target setting, it soon became apparent that the targets were often not feasible (Wulf, 2016, p. 406). This unfeasibility occurred due to several reasons. One reason was the lack of specificity of the designated targets, which in many cases did not have a clear objective. This manifested in two ways. Some of the targets were deliberately constituted as "intangible" objectives with a normative and strategic aim and with the purpose to create a general long-term "vision" for the macro-region (Chilla and Sielker, 2016, p. 11). Other targets, however, also lacked similarly measurable and quantifiable indicators, despite not being constituted as such "visionary" targets.

This lack of measurability presented a detrimental framework for the implementation process, especially regarding necessary monitoring activities and eventually occurring adaptions of the target setting.

Other targets, which possessed clear and controllable indicators, were in various cases characterized by such a high setting of the benchmark values that the projects and actions were considered right from the beginning as unfeasible and unrealistic. This often evoked open criticism among actors and stakeholders, who also criticized that the actors did not carry out any prior feasibility analysis regarding the target setting (European Commission, 2013b, p. 59), contributing to the later inefficient policy implementation. The lack of target measurability also occurred in a temporal dimension. Many targets were constituted without any concrete schedule or even deadline, making the assessment of the implementation process significantly more difficult (Chilla and Sielker, 2016, p. 4). The overall insufficient target setting also evoked distinct criticism from internal actors of the EUSDR. For example, the Priority Area Coordinators of PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation), who are among others in charge of the improvement of the governance process within the strategy, assessed that the goal-setting of the EUSDR suffers in general from a noticeable capabilities-expectation gap (EUSDR PAC 10, 2015, p. 9). This resulted in 2016 in a broad overhaul of the target setting (see chapter 6.3.1).

6.2.2. Polity dimension

As a strategic network of Regional Cross-Border Governance, the structural setting of the EUSDR serves as a framework for the procedural dimension and the actual coordination and implementation activities. It thus also influences the success of goal attainment to a significant degree. The structural setting of the EUSDR is strictly realized in the "shadow of hierarchy"

with the already outlined “three noes” rule, namely to carry out the institutionalization process without the allocation of new specific EU funding, without the establishment of new formal institutions, nor the adoption of new regulations to constitute a new legal basis (Council of the European Union, 2011). While the “three noes rule” as a result left very limited room for action for the establishment of the structural setting, the various EU institutions emphasized that this guideline would also present a window of opportunity for the governance of the EUSDR. A central argument in this regard was the improvement of efficiency. Concerning the institutional efficiency, this was justified with the avoidance of institutional duplications. Regarding financial support, the stipulated premise was to use already existing financial sources more efficiently. Both objectives should be attained through better alignment in general, which was considered as the underlying premise of the above-stated rule (Gänzle and Wulf, 2014, p. 2).

Although the depicted rule, as already outlined, is not a genuinely applied provision for the EUSDR but is used for all Macro-regional strategies, it nevertheless found strong support by various member states of the Danube Region. Especially the economically high performing countries were significant supporters of the “three noes rule”. This was based on their concerns that in case of the establishment of an own macro-regional EU budget, they would become, especially in the limelight of the unfolding fiscal and economic crises, the “paymasters” of the EUSDR (Wulf, 2016, p. 161). While the designated structural setting of the EUSDR constituted limited framework conditions for the governance process, the actors issued high expectations towards the macro-regional network's structural capabilities. Luc van der Brande, former president of the Committee of Regions, stipulated his expectations that the EUSDR would contribute to a comprehensive mobilization of LRAs in the Danube Region, especially in states with often very centralized unitary administrative structures. As former Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn further stated his anticipation that the strategy would overcome the Danube states' general ‘governance deficits’ (Ágh, 2011b, p. 16, 2011b, pp. 20–21).

These very high exemplary expectations towards the EUSDR’s institutional capabilities contrasted the actual institutional setting of the EUSDR and thus presented a significant capabilities-expectations gap.

Institutional predecessors

Before turning to the actual structural setting of the EUSDR, it is first necessary to give a short outline of the preceding institutional structures of the Danube Region. This is of particular importance due to the above-mentioned anticipation to use “already existing governance architecture” in the macro-region. However, this premise seems quite contradictory with the actual institutional structures being present in the Danube Region after a closer look. While the

EUSDR constitutes the first coherent territorial policy approach for the Danube Region, the already outlined long-lasting political, economic, and social fragmentation of the macro-region led to a comprehensive institutional vacuum. The communist legacy severely limited the institutional evolution until the early 1990s. Even after the democratic transition, this process was significantly hampered by unstable political framework conditions in the post-socialist countries. As a result, many cooperation formats, as so to say "predecessors" of the EUSDR, were either doomed to a short institutional lifespan or are functioning with a minimal degree of activity. For a better overview, the most prominent examples should be in the following briefly outlined. In terms of agenda-setting, they will be divided into two groups: cooperation formats with a particular focus on environmental and regional development issues as the first group and, as the second group, cooperations with the aim to improve collaboration in the region generally.

Among the latter group, the Central European Initiative (CEI) marks the oldest initiative in Central Europe. The CEI can be dated back to the creation of the so-called "Quadrogonale" on 11th November 1989, comprising of Italy, Austria, Hungary, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The goal of the Quadrogonale was to improve transnational cooperation among the states. The soon following implosion of the communist regimes led to the renaming of the format to its current name and the additional territorial expansion by including several other ex-member states of the Warsaw Pact. This was followed by multiple enlargement rounds in the next years (1993, 1996, 2000, 2006), which resulted in its current actor-constellation comprising of 18 member states with a total population of 250 million people (Wästfelt and Pibernik, 2017, pp. 233–234). While the CEI has an institutionalized structure with a permanent secretariat located in Triest (Italy), its overall objective to coordinate interests and initiatives among the member states is characterized by a general lack of success. Since its early years, the budgetary situation constitutes a major challenge for activities within the given framework. The overall efficiency is additionally hampered by the very infrequent number of meetings, while the low-level publicity contributes to a quite modest relevance of the format nowadays (Strážay, 2011, p. 137).

In its first years, the CEI was already outstripped by the so-called "Visegrad Group" or "Visegrad Four". With the signature of its founding document in the Hungarian city Visegrád, the former historical capital of Hungary, the format was established as a political initiative by the member states Czechoslovakia (today the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary, and Poland. The main aim was to mutually support the liberalization of their post-socialist economies, the further democratization and institutionalization of the rule of law, and the

pursuit of Euro-Atlantic integration with the particular aim of joining the EU. Since then, the V4 has adapted several times its strategic area of cooperation and its goal setting. It even established new additional intergovernmental formats to involve other neighboring countries on an ad-hoc basis ("V4 Plus"). As a non-institutionalized policy initiative, however, the policy approach by the V4 is very flexible and case-based, ranging, for example, from formulating common positions in the EU-budget negotiations or in the enlargement policies, in which the format was able to achieve particular success. Overall the V4 can be considered the most successful cooperation format, which contributed significantly to the strengthening of the transnational cooperation in a significant part of Central Europe (Walsch, 2017, p. 102, 2014, 2013). A major achievement of the V4 was the constitution of the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA). Founded as a trade agreement between the Central European states, the main goal of the CEFTA was to improve the economic cooperation between the countries, improve the competitiveness of their economies and thus improve the perspective towards an EU membership. In 2006 CEFTA underwent a major reform by extending the trade agreement to the Western Balkans countries. Countries that already joined the EU had to leave CEFTA, which significantly changed the membership structure[171] and gave the trade agreement a new legitimation to enhance the third countries' economic integration regarding their prospective EU membership (Griessler, 2017, p. 115).

In comparison to the Central European region, the initiatives in the South-Eastern European area are characterized by a distinct state of fragmentation. Still pertaining bilateral political tensions between the member states, the often overlapping objectives and activities of the individual organizations, or the limited respectively non-existent budgetary capacities marginalized the potential impact and with it the relevancy of these collaborations. Against this background, however, the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) is worth mentioning. Compared to most other international organizations in the SEE area, the initiative to establish this cooperation was not originated by external actors from Western Europe or the USA, which was regularly the case, but was originated by the SEE countries (Strážay, 2011, p. 137). The SEECP'S overall aim is to strengthen the SEE region by coordinating the member states' policy approaches[172], particularly in the areas of connectivity, economic and labor competitiveness, skills and mobility, Roma integration, the rule of law, and security

[171] Current members of CEFTA are Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, FYROM, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo.

[172] The member states are Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, FYROM, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey.

cooperation. However, its final goal setting and its institutional structure were only realized with the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council as an embedded governance body in 2008. The late constitution of its final governance structure, which happened parallel to the ongoing initiation process of the EUSDR, only partially qualifies it as an institutional predecessor of the MRS.

The youngest of all noteworthy cooperation schemes is the Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CoDCR), founded in 2008. Based on the 1998 adopted manifest "The Danube and its cities – a European network of the future," the participating LRAs based their policy focus on topics ranging from the policy issues of arts and culture over economic challenges to environmental issues. The city of Ulm already founded in 2002 a permanent secretariat called the "Danube Office". Although formally not being a member of the CoDR, the office supported and coordinated the activities in the Danube Region on behalf of the organization after its establishment (Wulf, 2016, pp. 234–235). The CoDR showed a very high level of activity initially, which, however, unexpectedly took a stark decrease since 2013/2014. In the following two years, the initiative's homepage was only sparsely updated with new events and measures. The reporting finally stopped with the last news entry dated November 2016 (Council of Danube Cities and Regions, 2016).

In contrast to the above-outlined cooperation schemes, which foremost had the aim to improve the transnational cooperation in the designated areas, other formats had a particular geospatial on the Danube River Basin and its accompanying challenges. The first such collaboration is the Danube Commission as an International Organization. Its roots date back to the Paris Treaties of 1856, when it was initially founded as a public authority. In 1948 it was (re-)founded as International Organization in 1948. Since then, in the representation of its member states[173], the Commission is concentrating its efforts on improving the navigation on the Danube River through the coordination of the national policy initiatives. For example, this includes the mutual governmental recognition of regulatory documents or the joint adoption of regulations for developing the Danube as a transport corridor (Danube Commission, n.d.). However, due to the passivity of the member states within the IO's framework and the lack of involvement of these countries in transport matters, the Danube Commission consequentially had a very limited impact in this policy field, which also devaluated its role (Dobrescu and Grigorescu, 2011, p. 173). Based on a broader policy setting, the ARGE Donauländer was founded in 1990.

[173] The member states of the Danube Commission are Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Croatia.

Comprising of 10 Danube countries with 23 regions[174], the areas of intervention of the ARGE are culture, research, waterway traffic, sustainability, economy, tourism, and youth. As a platform of political deliberation, which sees its function foremost as "policy stimulus" and as "think-thank for activities in the Danube Region", while not having an own budget, its overall impact is very limited. Since the valorization of the Interreg initiatives in the 1990s, the ARGE concentrates on the EU's Regional Policy and uses its institutional setting as an additional political forum for decision-makers (ARGE Donauländer, 2014). An essential organization concerning the protection of the environment in the Danube Region is the already mentioned International Commission for the Protection of the Danube (ICPDR), which was established in 1998. The international treaty on which the ICPDR is based and the organization itself have, among others, the overarching objectives of sustainable water management, the diminishment of chemical pollutions, and the realization of a comprehensive flood prevention system in the river basin. Due to the various major floods, particularly in 2003 and 2013, the ICPDR gained a window of opportunity in terms of successful agenda-setting, creating public attention, and utilize the gained political momentum for its agenda (Dobrescu and Grigorescu, 2011, p. 174; International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), 2009). Besides its alone-standing activities, the ICPDR further managed to become an integral stakeholder within the EUSDR (see chapter 6.3.3).

Embeddedness in the "shadow of hierarchy"

The constituted "three noes rule" meant for the EUSDR the establishment of an institutional network structure, which has to operate in a strict "shadow of hierarchy". Although this obligation to waive any new institutions was primarily addressed towards the EU level and in theory still included the opportunity for national, regional and local actors to create own institutions or funding (Dieringer and Wulf, 2011, p. 114), this option was highly hypothetical due to the often limited administrative capabilities of the EUSDR actors and their central governments. The lack of the EUSDR's legal anchoring within the EU secondary law (like the EGTC with its two adopted regulations) or its formal inclusion within the ETC regulation constituted a high degree of dependency from the national administrative structures and thus a very strong intergovernmental "shadow of hierarchy". Therefore it is crucial to take a brief look at the administrative structures to understand the particular institutional setting, particularly concerning the establishment of RCBG networks like the EUSDR.

[174] The member states of the ARGE Donauländer are Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova,

The Danube states' administrative structure shows a strong tendency towards a unitary setting with a high level of centralization. The largest group are the unitary states (on the MLG I scale around the level 1), comprising of ten countries, while only four countries are considered as decentralized: Three countries, namely Austria, Germany, and Bosnia Hercegovina, are categorized as federal states (MLG I scale level 4). The last decentralized group is Serbia, categorized as asymmetrically regionalized (MLG I scale level 2). Symmetrically regionalized states are not present within the EUSDR.

Table 9 Administrative territorial structure of the EUSDR countries

1) Unitary state	2) Asymmetrical Regionalized State	3) Symmetrical Regionalized State	4) (Con-)Federal State
(10)	(1)	(0)	(3)
(8) Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania Slovenia Ukraine	Serbia		(3)Austria Bosnia Hercegovina. Germany
(2) Czech Republic, Slovakia			

Source: (Dieringer, 2010, p. 353; Committee of Regions.eu, 2018, Division of Powers;)

Within the group of unitary states, it is necessary to undertake a differentiation between the individual countries. Although each of the ten entities qualifies as unitary regarding their constitutional administrative structure, which means that legislative power remains exclusively at the national level, there are significant differences regarding the domestic distribution of competencies to the administrative levels and thus a diverging degree of LRA mobilization. Bulgaria, for example, is considered a centralized unitary state. The central government gives its LRAs a limited legal room for action. Thus, Bulgarian regions have very limited decision-making capacities and act foremost as statistical entities for –centralized– regional development purposes. The regions in the Czech Republic or in Slovakia, on the other hand, possess a broad range of competencies within various policy fields. Although the regions do not possess any own legislative power, they are nevertheless empowered to act in many policy fields as administrative actors on behalf of the central government with their decision-making competencies. Compared to other unitary states, the two countries thus present a more decentralized setting and an increased level of regional mobilization, which makes it necessary to list them separately from their centralized counterparts (Pete and Gyelnik, 2016, p. 17).

The level of decentralization can be, however, in no way compared to classical federal states, in which the provinces (e.g., Austria, Germany, and Bosnia Hercegovina) have not just the legal empowerment to adopt own provincial laws but are also represented within the national legislative process through a bicameral body (e.g., in AT and DE the so-called "Bundesrat"; in BA the "Dom Naroda").

A special case is the Republic of Serbia. While the country proclaims itself as a unitary state in its constitution, the government pursues an asymmetrical delegation of legislative power in two cases. The first case is the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which is empowered, among others, with the right to constitute an own legislative body, an own budget, and exercise in various policy fields self-governmental competencies (Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, n.d.). The second case is Kosovo, which the Serbian constitution considers an asymmetrically empowered province within the Serb state. However, due to Kosovo's actual declaration of independence in 2008, this has to be regarded as a politically motivated constitutional provision without any actual legal applicability. While Serbia is, therefore, *de jure* constituted as a unitary state, due to the case of Vojvodina, its actual structure will be categorized as an asymmetrically regionalized state.

The general predominance of centralized unitary states within the Danube Region affects the governance structure and the institutionalization process of the EUSDR detrimentally. As outlined in the theory section (see chapter 2), states with overly centralized administrative structures often provide for networks of Regional Cross-Border Governance only very limited mobilization potential in the vertical dimension or the horizontal dimension. This was also observable in the Danube Region before the EUSDR's initiation. In most of the Danube countries, Cross-Border Cooperation was non-existent or characterized by low-level activity. Although there were some exceptions, like Hungary as a very active country in this regard, the politicization of regionalism and regionalization, particularly in states with national minorities, often led to a political unwillingness to support CBC activities. In countries where such cooperation schemes were nevertheless established, the governance structure was usually carried out in a strict top-down way. A very reserved cooperation willingness additionally limited the cooperations to very few policy issues. This particular "shadow of hierarchy" led in the case of the EUSDR also to comparably narrow institutional and procedural framework conditions.

Differentiation of the intra-network structure

As outlined above, the EUSDR was predetermined by the guidelines of the "three noes" rule. As a result, the strategy was bound to be carried out without establishing any new formal institutions on the EU level. The network structure was established in the following under the premise of compartmentalizing the general strategic network in several subnetworks, where each subnetwork followed a distinct operating principle. Similar to the theoretical concept of a Regional (Cross-Border) Governance network, the differentiation between a core-network and peripheral networks can be found in the EUSDR, however, in a very complex setting. For better comprehensibility of this governance structure, we differentiate the network into two spheres, namely the *sphere of strategic decision-making* and the *sphere of implementation*, which will be outlined in this chapter only based on the fundamental principles of functionality.[175]

The sphere of strategic decision-making functions as an overarching network, which is constituted for central actors to decide upon the strategy's strategic guidelines regarding all three of its dimensions (Policy, Polity, Politics). Binding decisions from this sphere can range, for example, from resetting the overall policy goals of the strategy, over the structural resetting of the network, to the rearrangement of actor-roles in both spheres. This sphere comprises national central governmental actors with decision-making competencies and also of supranational institutions and entities, which are involved either as Political, Process, or Technical Promoters within the strategy. Each participating actor is in a –more or less– continuous mutual interaction and coordination. In this sphere, the EUSDR thus realizes a horizontal cross-jurisdictional coordination across the whole EUSDR region. Coordination is also carried out in a vertical direction, namely across various territorial levels, primarily the supranational and national level.

The *sphere of implementation* functions as the level of operation and implementation. To attain the designated policy goals, this subordinated sphere comprises various Policy and Project networks used as structures for the above-mentioned implementation activities. In both subordinated networks, a strong horizontal and vertical coordination will be carried out. Horizontal coordination occurs when the networks align their goal attainment and implementation activities to realize a cross-sectoral policy approach. Similarly to the decision-

[175] A further elaborated depiction of this setting can be found in the politics chapter (see chapter 6.2.3), which also includes the particular functioning of the individual networks as well as the intra-network actor-roles. The splitting of the issue over two chapters was carried out due to the varying focus of analysis. While the above-outlined chapter focuses strictly on the general structural setting of the network, the other chapter carries out the analysis emphasizing the embedded actor-roles within the individual sub-networks.

making sphere, the governmental and non-governmental actors, which are active in the Policy and Project networks, actively work together to realize a comprehensive stakeholder involvement and create a place-based value for the region.

A strong vertical dimension accompanies this horizontal dimension. In this regard, both spheres should not be considered as independent or even isolated structures but are somewhat entangled with each other through various coordination channels, which are carried out either by individual governmental actors or as a collective body materialized in one of the embedded networks. Through this entanglement of the various dimensions, namely by vertical governance across territorial levels and horizontal governance across governmental jurisdictions with additional involvement of non-governmental entities, a complex system of Multi-Level Governance and more specifically Regional Cross-Border Governance will be realized by the EUSDR.

Funding and budgetary provisions

The provision of not to create any additional new funding for the EUSDR, as one of the "three noes rule", had a significant impact on the initiation phase and the following implementation activities. In contrast to the theoretical premise concerning RCBG networks, which stipulates that establishing an own network budget is necessary to provide a sustainable functioning (see chapter 2.4.3.1), the EUSDR constituted without such financial sources. Even an initial "kick-starting" fund, which can be found in many RCBG networks, was not designated for this Macro-regional strategy. Instead, the overarching guideline was the already mentioned premise to "unlock" existing and available financial sources through the more efficient cross-sectoral mobilization of these (European Commission, 2013b, pp. 10–11; EUSDR, 2015, p. 2). The EC consequentially argued in its Communication that the more efficient utilization of funds should be exclusively achieved through the new innovative structural framework of the EUSDR. As a potential source of funding, the EC further referred to the available "[…]EUR 100 billion from Structural Funds 2007-2013, as well as significant IPA and ENPI funds." It further stated that an additional EUR 30 billion from the European Investment Bank would be at the full disposal for the stakeholders. This should help to improve the "navigability and depollution of waterways" among others, which could be further enhanced by other potential private and governmental funding opportunities (European Commission, 2010a, pp. 11–12).

The EC's argument concerning the better use of funding was justified with the extremely poor absorption rates of Structural Policy funds, especially by the new member states of the EU's Eastern Enlargement in 2004 and especially 2007. Two years after their EU accession Bulgaria and Romania, for example, were still only able to absorb 9,21 % and 10,24 % of the available

ERDF funds in 2009, while Malta and Slovakia, who were already for five years EU members at this time, also had still low absorption rates of only 9,37 % and 9,41 % (European Commission, 2018). Similar detrimental framework conditions were also observable for the EUSDR third countries (e.g., Republic of Moldova, Bosnia Hercegovina) with available funds from the European Neighborhood (ENP) or Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).

However, the Commission's constituted approach regarding the cross-sectoral mobilization of already available public and private funding soon turned out as widely unrealistic. Concerning the Structural Policy funds, particularly regarding the ETC budget, the accessibility through the EUSDR framework was in several aspects not feasible in a comprehensive way. The first problem was the timing of the EUSDR's initiation. With the beginning of the implementation phase in 2011, the EU's Multi-Annual Financial Framework for 2007-2013 was already going on for more than four years. With the financing period finished already halfway, the majority of EU projects were for several years active and were actively using available EU funds. New EUSDR projects were thus facing an overwhelmingly large competition by already consolidated and well-functioning counterparts. The MFF's well-advanced state further meant a significant depletion of the available budgets, limiting the potential success of the EUSDR projects already before the actual beginning of the implementation process.

A further problem was the lack of a transnational funding scheme within the Interreg B framework, which was explicitly aligned around the territorial scope of the EUSDR. This constituted a particular problem. Based on the experiences of the EUSBR, as a macro-regional forerunner, it turned out that such a transnational program was used as one of the most important financial sources.[176] Instead of having such a specifically aligned Interreg program, the EUSDR was obliged to utilize the *South East Europe (SEE)* program.[177] However, this Interreg B program covered a much larger cooperation area than the sole Danube Region, including parts of the Mediterranean Sea, large parts of Central Europe, and the whole area of South-East

[176] Although it is still often emphasized by the EU institutions that the Macro-regional strategies and the transnational Interreg programs are two alone-standing Structural Policy approaches, the latter ones turned out as major financing source for the MRS. Therefore they are having a key role by contributing to the realization of the strategy, which they achieve through a comprehensive policy alignment with the particular strategies. In regard to the EUSDR, this is particularly the case since 2014 with the initiation of the Danube Transnational Program. However, a question is, if this explicit mutual alignment between programs and MRS are counteracting the integrative character of the MRS, especially in terms of cross-budget allocations and cross-sectoral goal attainment (Zillmer et al., 2012, p. 53).

[177] While many official documents also mention the potential usage of the Central Europe (CE) Interreg B program as funding opportunity, its territorial scope had an even lower degree of alignment with the EUSDR territory compared to the SEE program. As a result, the CE program had a marginal role in the overall financing of the EUSDR until 2014.

Europe (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, p. 7). It consisted out of 16 countries from whom several countries were not even part of the EUSDR (e.g., Albania, FYROM, Greece, or Italy). This made targeted funding very difficult, especially concerning tackling specific geospatial challenges of the Danube Region.

Figure 14 SEE program area and list of participating states



Country/Area	Relations with EU	Prospects	Funding
Albania: Whole territory	Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA)	Potential Candidate	IPA
Austria: Whole territory	EU member state		ERDF
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Whole territory	No contractual relations with EU, autonomous trade preferences by the EU, negotiations on SAA since 25/11/2005	Potential Candidate	IPA
Bulgaria: Whole territory	EU member state		ERDF
Croatia: Whole territory	EU member state		IPA/ERDF
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Whole territory	SAA (signed in 2001, implementation since 2004), since 17.12.2005 Candidate State, but still no Negotiations	Candidate status (no negotiations)	IPA
Greece: Whole territory	EU member state		ERDF
Hungary: Whole territory	EU member state		ERDF
Italy: Regions: Lombardia, Prov Autonoma Bolzano/Bozen, Prov. Autonoma Trento, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Umbria, Marche, Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia Basilicata	EU member state		ERDF
the Republic of Moldova: Whole territory	Partnership and co-operation agreement (PCA) since July 1998, ENP Action Plan in force since February 2005	Third country	ENPI
Montenegro: Whole territory	Autonomous Trade Preferences since 2000,	Potential	IPA

Source: (Interreg South East Europe, 2007, p. 12)

At the end of the drafting and initiation phase in Summer 2011, the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) was in its fifth budgetary year, which limited the potential funding by the SEE program to a significant degree. Despite being practically one of the main sources of funding, this situation meant a potential budget of EUR 100.237.408, although for the whole SEE territory.[178] The already half-way finished program cycle and the not specific geographic coverage of the program further increased the competition among the participating states for funding and vice versa decreased the likelihood for a successful broad financial support of EUSDR projects already before the beginning of the implementation.

[178] The total remaining community funding has to be subdivided into 87.737.408 million EUR from the ERDF for member states and 12.500.000 for non-member states in the IPA program. (Interreg South East Europe, 2007, p. 122, 2007, p. 119)

The overall low availability of financial resources, either within the SEE program or other EU mainstream programs, further diminished the probability for large-scale project funding significantly. Especially eventual cost-intensive infrastructural projects, which were designated in the PA 1a and 1b within the EUSDR, were, for example, confronted with widely lacking financial support. This absence of potential funding opportunities led to a rapid diminishment of the initial euphoria among the EUSDR states and other stakeholders. Confronted with an unfolding economic and fiscal crisis, which, as already outlined, forced the Danube governments to undertake severe budget cuts and austerity measures, resulted in a decreasing willingness to realize new cross-border cooperation initiatives (European Commission, 2014a, pp. 149–155). The already outlined lack of an own financial budget within the EUSDR further detrimentally impacted the actor-commitment. Many countries were widely unwilling to either contribute their financial resources to the strategy or even reallocate funding from the Cohesion and Structural Funds due to the fear of losing financial resources available for their own national development. This perceived zero-sum game regarding the financial cost-benefit ratio led overall to a very limited degree of cross-budget allocations and weakened the financial capabilities of the strategy even further (Dieringer et al., 2011, p. 75). These overall very detrimental budgetary starting conditions resulted in tangible problems within the later following implementation phase, especially for the Priority Areas and their coordinators.

6.2.3. Politics dimension

While struggling with the crisis-related economic impacts, the establishment of the EUSDR was accompanied by high expectations in terms of improved policy goal attainment and the expected added-value of the macro-regional governance structure and its procedural steering. The procedural network approach of the EUSDR was anticipated as a promising approach to overcome the increasing fragmentation within the Danube Region by strengthening the cross-border relations. This expectation was also issued by the Council, which stated that with improved cohesion, a consequential differentiated integration in the macro-region would be attainable within the territory of the EU and across it:

> *"[…]the contribution the EU Strategy for the Danube Region can make to the further integration of the internal market and to economic, social and territorial cohesion, as well as its contribution to fostering cooperation with third countries in the Danube river basin, and its assistance to participating candidate and potential candidate countries on their European path"* (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 2).

The stated aim of the Council faced, however, various challenges. Besides the already outlined economic fragmentation, which led to strongly diverging framework conditions within the Danube Region, an even bigger problem for the procedural network steering was the area's political fragmentation. Due to the already outlined institutional void and the often politically tense or even conflict-laden bi- and multilateral relations of the countries, particularly in the lower part of the Danube Region, the rudimentary presence of social capital constituted a significant problem for the realization of the EUSDR. The wide absence of social-capital meant very high transaction costs within the potential network and formed a potential problem for successful procedural steering within the EUSDR. To successfully manage this challenge and to meet the high general expectations towards the strategy, it became soon apparent that the EUSDR would be in dire need of comprehensive and continuous political support by the relevant governments as so-called Political Promoters.

Besides the demand for strong political support, the realization of the EUSDR was further approached under the premise of establishing a system of Multi-Level Governance within the macro-region. This also implied firm procedural steering in a horizontal dimension through the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders as well as in a vertical dimension through comprehensive involvement of the various administrative levels and actors ranging from the supranational to the local level (European Commission, 2010d, p. 11, 2010b, p. 4). The realization of such comprehensive procedural steering in both dimensions should contribute to the already stated aim of realizing a differentiated territorial integration in the Danube Region. These aims had to be attained in the limelight of the aggravating political and economic framework conditions, which also detrimentally impacted the procedural steering of the EUSDR. The Danube states were forced to act in a state of continuous crisis management to handle the unfolding crisis. This resulted in top-down oriented decision-making located foremost at the national level, which also manifested in a general recentralization of governance structures. Already bottom-up-oriented policy approaches, like already existing CBC networks, were, as a consequence, driven back due to fiscal considerations (Ágh, 2011a, p. 22, 2011b, p. 28). This administrative (re-)centralization and the intergovernmentalization of the decision-making in the international dimension also affected the particular governance structure of the EUSDR in the initiation phase. In contrast to the above stated basic MLG premise, namely to realize a comprehensive vertical mobilization of all actors including the LRAs through a bottom-up approach, the decision-making within this particular strategy was dominated from the beginning by a rather strict top-down orientation (Bos, 2013, p. 32; Kaiser, 2017, p. 178, 2011, p. 64).

Already before the formal constitution of the actor roles within the Communication and Action Plan, it soon became clear that the European Commission and the participating countries were motivated to be the dominant actors within the drafting process and through that also become the key players within the overall macro-regional network (Wulf, 2016, p. 239). While the EUSDR states and the EC maintained this role as key-players during the whole phase of initiation, their particular influence, especially in direct comparison, strongly diverged in the various sub-phases (informal and formal consultation phase, drafting phase, etc.).

Governance process during the initiation phase

The beginning of the EUSDR's initiation phase was marked by the informal deliberation and agenda-setting process, in which the idea for a macro-regional strategy for the Danube Region was outlined for the first time. This took place at the already outlined "Process of Ulm" and the Danube Cooperation Process, which were exclusive intergovernmental formats. This strictly intergovernmental deliberation process pertained until June 2009, when the Council of the EU, again as an intergovernmental body of the EU, mandated the Commission to draft a policy document for the EUSDR and by that formally invited it to the drafting process (Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 13). The EC was mandated with the actual drafting of the policy documents and the task to carry out the initiation process's overall coordination, granting it a powerful role within the following initiation phase. The EC's first action was the opening of formal consultation on the EU level by calling upon the EUSDR countries to submit so-called "position papers" or "non-papers"[179], in which they would have the opportunity to outline potential prospective fields of policy cooperation within the macro-regional framework. This rather open intergovernmental consultation, where each state had the chance to formulate its particular point of view regarding the EUSDR, was followed by a complimentary online consultation in April 2010. The online consultation was open to all stakeholders and was explicitly aimed to involve the non-governmental sphere. Every stakeholder was invited to submit their recommendations for the EUSDR and highlight, similarly to the governmental non-papers, the policy areas that they deemed to be of special importance for the macro-region. This overall consultation period, including the intergovernmental and online stakeholder survey, lasted only four months in total, beginning in February and ending in June 2010. Due to this short consultation period, the consultation had a rather disappointing turnout with

[179]The EC initially called upon the member states to submit non-papers, which are unofficial working documents without any formal or legal binding effect. Such documents are generally treated as publicly non-existent documents. In contrast to this, various EUSDR countries, however, submitted their papers as public governmental statements, due to which these documents transformed to a formal governmental position paper.

comparably few responses. In contrast to the initially hoped broad involvement of the non-governmental sphere, the EC received only around 80 contributions through the platform. These were submitted by 72 stakeholders stemming foremost from countries which are located in the economically strong performing upper Danube Region, while contributions from the lower region remained sparse. A further detrimental aspect was the uneven participation of organizations. The received submissions were primarily drafted by larger multinational organizations, while local organizations played a very limited significant role in this regard (Dieringer et al., 2011, p. 71; Kodric, 2011, pp. 18–19; Pálmai, 2011, p. 97). The success of the stakeholder involvement during the consultation period must be, therefore, assessed as limited. Although some of the non-governmental contributions found their way into the later drafts of the Action Plan and were presented at the following conferences, a comprehensive and balanced involvement of the non-governmental sphere was not achieved.

The online consultations were accompanied by a row of national stakeholder conferences organized during the same period. To attain a macro-regional coverage, the conferences were organized in Austria (Vienna), Germany (Ulm), Hungary (Budapest), Slovakia (Bratislava), Romania (Constanța), and Slovenia (Ruse). A particularly important subject at each of the conferences was the debate of the prior submitted national "non-papers/position papers" of the respective governments, which had the purpose of determining the strategy's fundamental cornerstones. The submissions from the non-governmental consultations played a more limited role in this regard. However, during these conferences, a significant division among the governmental actors unfolded, especially in terms of actor mobilization, which was already observable before.

While all of the EU members, as well as various third countries like Croatia, Serbia, and Ukraine, did actively participate in the consultation process by submitting position papers, this was not carried out by Bosnia Hercegovina, Moldova, and Montenegro (Aust, 2014, p. 47; Gänzle and Kern, 2011, p. 278). The above-named states' general passivity increased at the following conferences, where the governance structure and the strategy's setup were discussed. None of the countries showed noticeable efforts to take over responsibilities and step up as so-called Priority Area Coordinator (explained further below) for the following implementation phase (Aust, 2014, p. 63), while other EUSDR states engaged very actively and took over major responsibilities within the governance structure. For example, Hungary and Germany declared that they would take over the role of a Priority Area Coordinator three times each.

The dominance of the intergovernmental and supranational level resulted, on the other hand, in a very limited room for action for the NGOs. This materialized, among others, in their small

share of speaking time at the various conferences. Out of the total 185 conference speakers, only six were representatives of NGOs (3,4 %), stemming from multinational organizations with rather large financial capabilities, while the rest comprised of representatives of public entities like the EC, various governments (national and sub-national), parliaments (national and EP level) and other administrative entities (Kodric, 2011, pp. 19–20; Lütgenau, 2011, pp. 194–195).

The conferences produced more than 800 statements and recommendations, which were presented at the final conference in Constanța. However, the closing conference in Romania also marked the end of the open consultation phase. It was followed by bilateral discussions between the respective national governments and the EC, particularly DG Regio. These talks aimed to consider the various national recommendations. It also marked a turning point in terms of actor influence. While during the preceding period, the EC and the national governments worked more or less like a tandem with one actor being in charge of the procedural steering and the other being responsible for shaping the content of the strategy to a large degree, this entirely changed with the beginning of the following drafting phase. As such, the bilateral consultations shifted more and more from being between the national and the supranational level to an intra-supranational deliberation between the various DGs of the EC. Being exclusively in charge of the drafting of the documents, the EC was also in the pivotal position to shape the EUSDR not just in terms of its governance structure but also define its thematic content, which later materialized in the Pillars and Priority Areas (Bos, 2013, p. 32; Pálmai, 2011, pp. 97–98). Although this was in general carried out in the limelight of a general consent by the EUSDR states and in particular the EU member states due to their veto power in the European Council, this led to a significant extension of the EC's structural role within the strategy. The expansion of power was even so significant that the EC was able to override individual EUSDR countries' position in some cases. An example for this was Romania and Bulgaria's assignment as Priority Area Coordinators in the Area of Culture and Tourism (PA 3). Although both countries prioritized different policy areas as key importance issues and did not even mention this intervention area in their non-papers, the EC nevertheless designated them as coordinators for the particular PA (Dieringer and Wulf, 2011, p. 120).

With the progressing initiation phase, particularly during the unilateral drafting period of the EC, the non-governmental sphere experienced, in the meanwhile, a further limitation of its involvement. The drafting of the Communication and the Action Plan by the EC was carried out by not making it available to a wider public, which basically meant a total exclusion of the non-governmental sphere. This pertained until the submission of the documents by the EC to

the other EU institutions for final adoption on 8th December 2010 (Kodric, 2011, p. 22). Consequently, the NGOs experienced a stark weakening of their role, resulting in their inability to influence the policy documents' content and secure a formal position within the governance structure for the following implementation phase (Bos, 2013, p. 32).

Structural involvement of LRAs and other institutional stakeholders

In sharp contrast to the outlined original premise, namely to provide a comprehensive vertical mobilization of actors across all territorial levels, the actual involvement of LRAs was even in comparison to the non-governmental stakeholder involvement marginal. In the limelight of the already outlined administrative "shadow of hierarchy" within the EUSDR countries, the call of LRAs towards realizing a comprehensive "bottom-up" approach within the strategy received only negligible political support. Although the EC initially constituted that the regional and local level would be of key importance for an efficient implementation of the strategy (European Commission, 2013b, p. 15), LRAs were, in fact, widely sidelined during the drafting process. LRAs were unable to influence the initiation process and the finally established governance structure with the particular actor-roles to their benefit. Instead, they were further exclusively depending on their own domestic institutional mobilization potential, which was, in fact, strongly limited or not available at all (Aust, 2014, p. 65). This successfully maintained the "gatekeeping" role of the nation-states allowed the LRAs only to participate as autonomous actors at the above-listed conferences. They were not granted a special status at these events, but they stepped up as one of many institutional and governmental representatives. During the initiation phase, the LRA's weak role was even so pronounced that in the majority of countries, they were downgraded to the sheer executive organs of their national governments. The delegation of tasks by the central governments occurred in some cases even without any prior consultation between national and regional level (Sielker, 2012, p. 99), leaving the latter actors in a very detrimental situation.

A significant exception was the two German provinces of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria, who were domestically empowered to not only act as representatives of the federal government but to participate on behalf of Germany during the initiation process actively. Especially Baden-Wuerttemberg emerged as a very active governmental entity and was not only significantly involved in establishing the so-called "Danube Group" within the Committee of Regions in 2009, contributing to the first agenda-setting regarding Macro-regional strategies on the EU level, but was also continuously pushing the agenda of regional involvement during the whole initiation phase (Dieringer and Wulf, 2011, p. 118; Wulf, 2016, pp. 235–236), however with limited success.

The distinct top-down-oriented decision-making with the EC and the national governments being the key-actors also strongly limited other EU institutions' role. While the European Council functioned from the beginning as a political initiator of the strategy and continued afterward as a sheer observer of the EUSDR, the European Parliament and the Committee of Regions were unable to extend their influence during the initiation phase. For the European Parliament, the failure of establishing a strong stance was in no small degree the result of an "homemade problem". While parliamentarians of the EP stemming from the Danube Region stepped up from the beginning with the demand not to be limited to observer status, they failed to mobilize the necessary political support simultaneously to shape the initiation process actively. A primary example of this was the plan to establish a parliamentarian intergroup for the EUSDR. This undertaking was supported by the EPP, S&D, and ALDE as political groups, who combined had the necessary majority easily for supporting the motion (*Motion for a Resolution on the Establishment of an Intergroup for the Promotion of the Danube River at the Beginning of the Next Parliamentary Term.*, 2009). The quorum was initially planned to be reached due to the sufficient number of "safe votes" from the own political groups and was additionally backed by informal support from parliamentarians of other political groupings. However, various MEPs, especially from South-East European member states, unexpectedly did not participate in the voting, which fell short of the necessary majority by two votes. This resulted in the failure of establishing the Danube intergroup (Dieringer et al., 2011, p. 70). Only in the second attempt, namely after adopting the Action Plan, the EP managed to finally establish the intended intergroup with the name "Danube Forum" in December 2010. Although the intergroup experienced a strongly increasing popularity and a rising number of members shortly after its establishment, its overall activity remained exceptionally low, which resulted in a low impact on the initiation phase (European Parliament, n.d.; Wulf, 2016, p. 238).

In comparison to the EP, the Committee of Regions managed to realize a much more active stance from the beginning. Besides the already outlined establishment of the "Danube Group", which was a major step to put the idea of the EUSDR on the agenda of the EU, the CoR supported the initiation process with comprehensive monitoring activities. Several Opinions by the CoR were drafted, in which it repeatedly stressed the necessity of strengthening the involvement of the LRAs within the governance structure. Due to its generally weak stance in the EU governance structure, the general influence of the CoR within the drafting process remained very modest, resulting in a very limited consideration of its contributions (Bengtsson, 2009; Committee of the Regions, 2009, p. 5).

Procedural actor-roles within the EUSDR

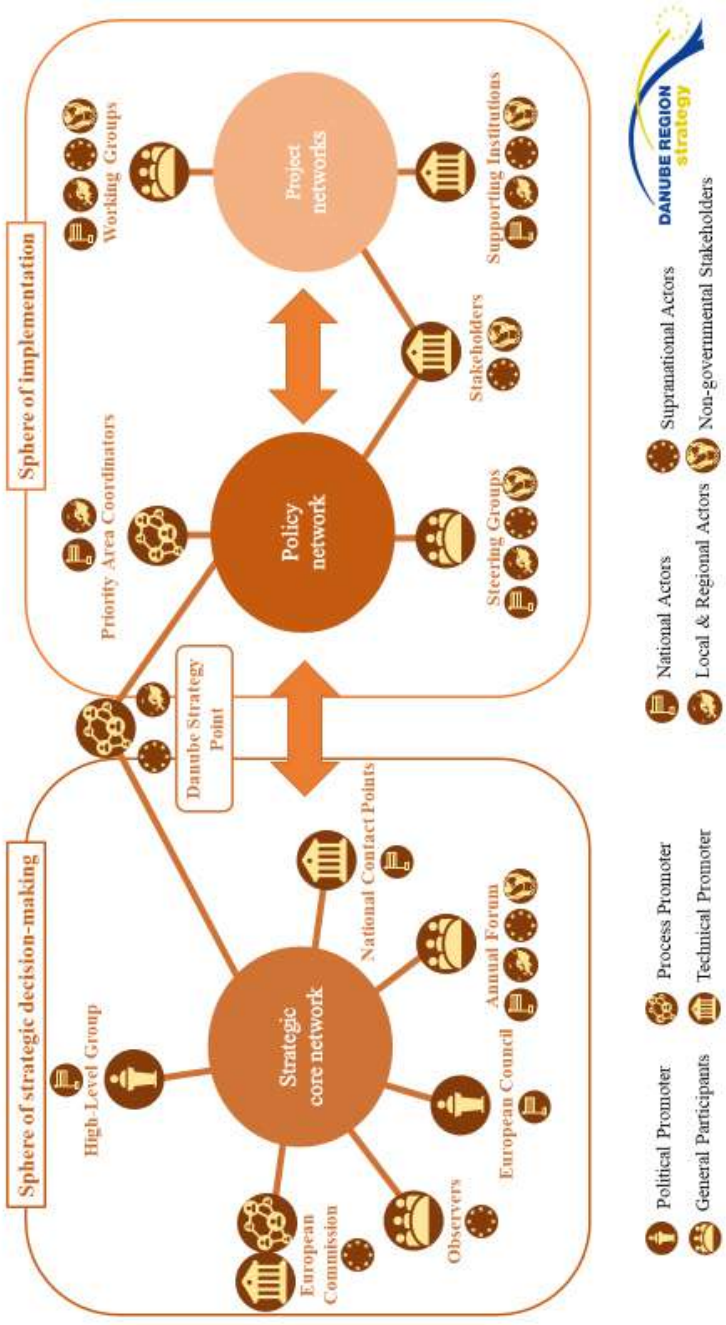
Following the premises of the RCBG theory, we shall distinguish the actor-roles within the EUSDR in the following groups of actors :

1) **General participants** with no specific detrimental or beneficial actor-behavior for the network
2) **Procedural opponents**[180] with active detrimental behavior (e.g., through obstruction or free-riding)
3) **Group of promoters**, which can be subdivided in
    a. **Political power promoters** as political representatives of the involved governments
    b. **Technical promoters** as experts from the administrative level of the governments or non-governmental stakeholders
    c. **Process promoters** are also called regional managers (see chapter 2.4.3.1).

However, this theoretical concept must be seen in the context of the EUSDR and its already outlined institutionally differentiated network structure (see chapter 6.2.2.). Its two spheres, namely the sphere of strategic decision-making and the sphere of implementation, resulted not just in an even more differentiated setting of actor-roles than compared to smaller, more "regular networks" (e.g., Interreg A), but also led to a more complex procedural configuration of the network. Due to the EUSDR network's size, actors are obliged to carry out particular intra-network roles together, for example, the role as a Priority Area Coordinator. They can also have multiple roles, depending on the specific set of tasks and activities in the two spheres and the various constituted networks. In the EUSDR, this was realized in the following way:

[180] The group of procedural opponents can be neglected for this chapter. While a detrimental behavior of involved actors can eventually occur already in the phase of initiation, this is for RCBG networks seldom due to the initial possibility of excluding them from the network. However, this option gets in later phases of the network evolution increasingly difficult, which basically increases the threat of potential free-riding or obstruction.

Figure 15 Intra-network actor-roles within the EUSDR



Source: Own depiction

Actor-roles within the sphere of strategic decision-making: The setting of strategic guidelines and the overall coordination of the EUSDR is carried out since 2011 (partially alternated in 2015)[181] by a set of various actor groups. In this regard, the most central actor is the European Commission, which determines the work of the strategic core-network to a large degree. While the EC was initially mandated to support the network by becoming "key in facilitating the process" (European Commission, 2010d, p. 4), the institution's actual influence, as aforementioned, was significantly extended during the drafting process. As a result, the EC constitutes the central Process Promoter within the sphere of strategic decision-making and became the central connection point for all actors within the whole strategy. As a strategic coordinator, all subordinated coordinating entities from both spheres must report their activities to the EC and align their actions with it. Besides its coordinating role, the EC further achieved to consolidate its role as an informal Political Promoter during the phase of implementation. Using its position as author of the annual reports concerning the "added-value of macro-regional strategies", the EC can shape the agenda-setting concerning the MRS to a large degree and thus influences the general political focus (European Commission, 2016b, 2016a, 2013a). Its role as an informal Political Prompter also results from its ability to undertake significant political decisions, which have a particular impact on the EUSDR. As such, the EC is in a very powerful position to decide over the heavily needed Technical Assistance grants, stemming from its budget, which shapes the governance process to a large degree.

Various additional protagonists support the coordination tasks of the EC within the sphere of strategic decision-making. Although the *Danube Strategy Point* (DSP) was only established during the phase of evolvement, respectively, the implementation process in 2015, its assignment as supporting coordination body constituted an innovation within the actor-setting. Due to the EC's overload as the leading overall Process Promoter (see upcoming chapters), the DSP was planned to facilitate its work by assuming the EC's coordination tasks. While the Commission maintained its role as an overall coordinator within the strategic core-network, the DSP was designated to carry out the coordination towards the sphere of implementation, particularly the Steering Groups and the Priority Area Coordinators (see below). The network processes' management is further facilitated by the so-called National Coordinators (NCs) as

[181] Although the alternation of the actor-constellation was carried out during the relatively far progressed implementation phase in 2015, this change is already taken into consideration in this chapter. This will be carried out to provide a better comprehensibility and to avoid unnecessary duplications concerning the depiction of the actor-roles.

Technical Promoters.[182] The NCs generally comprise representatives from the central governmental administration (ministries etc.) of the EUSDR countries. Their role includes two tasks. Their first task is to function as a monitoring entity and transmitter of information. By providing a continuous uplink or downlink of information across the administrative levels (supranational, national, regional, and local), the NCs function as the contact partner for domestic (non-)governmental stakeholders and for the actors within the sphere of strategic decision-making, especially the EC. Furthermore, the NCs also pursue a continuous exchange of information with their NC counterparts from other Danube countries. Their role as an information transmitter includes the obligation to assist with information about ongoing initiatives and potential funding opportunities for the general implementation of policy goals within the EUSDR. The assisting role of the NCs to find adequate funding opportunities applies, especially to the Danube Transnational Program. Due to their involvement in the Danube Transnational Program's Monitoring Committee, which serves as the main funding source for the EUSDR since 2014 (see chapter 6.3.2), the NCs have, due to their double membership in the DTP and EUSDR, comprehensive expertise in forwarding information regarding the various tender procedures. The second main task of the NCs is to carry out the marketing activities of the EUSDR within their countries (e.g., online and offline advertising and realization of various events) to generate public awareness and, in the best-case, generate public support for prospective measures. These activities are often carried out in collaboration with the PACs (see further below).

Two entities share the role of the Political Promoter. The first one is the Council, a main strategic decision-making institution of the EU in charge of the actual kick-off of the initiation process through adopting the policy documents. After this initiating role, this body's tasks are significantly limited, namely, to monitor the development of the strategy.

The Political Promoter's ongoing role is carried out in the so-called *High-Level Group* (HLG) format. This actor-group comprises high-level political representatives (ministers or their deputies) from all EU member states. This member setting is based on the necessity to provide political support within the Community framework. The EUSDR third countries are excluded from this format. This membership structure within the HLG is based on the premise of maintaining a narrow membership with –more or less– efficient decision-making structures to prevent any potential stalemates by an additional increase of the actor-constellation through the third countries. However, this formal exclusion from permanent membership is balanced by the

[182] The National Coordinators were formerly called National Contact Points (NCPs) but were renamed in 2012.

possibility to invite them to HLG meetings when necessary (European Commission, 2010d, p. 11). As the main Political Promoter, the HLG constitutes the ultimate decision-making authority within the strategy. The impact of the HLG's decisions can range, for example, from the adjustment of the policy goals within the sphere of implementation (e.g., in 2015 the introduction of the new-target setting) to the alternation of the governance structure (e.g., the founding of the DSP as additional Process Promoter) (Ágh, 2016, p. 150). Concerning the daily activities, the HLG pursues a more or less passive stance. It acts predominantly as a monitoring entity and provides high-level political support for the EUSDR. Its formal involvement is either carried out at the Annual Forums (see below) or through occasional high-level meetings (EUSDR, 2014). To improve public awareness and enhance the general political support within the EUSDR countries, the strategy is presided by a trio presidency, which is in its form similar to the Council presidency in the EU. The incumbent presiding country is responsible for preparing and organizing all major strategic meetings and events in cooperation with the outgoing and incoming Presidency. Furthermore, it is in charge of drafting the major preparatory documents. This allows the presiding country to prioritize and highlight its agenda regarding the EUSDR. This occasion was several times used by the countries, like by Hungary in 2011, as the first leading Presidency, whose foreign ministry strongly shaped the agenda-setting within the period (Kaiser, 2015, p. 103).

While non-governmental stakeholders' involvement is not designated within the sphere of strategic decision-making, at least within the daily work, a structural opportunity will be provided at the so-called *Annual Forum.* As an annual key event of the EUSDR, every important actor as well as (non-)governmental stakeholder is provided with the opportunity to participate in the forum. During these events, the participants can discuss and evaluate planned or already implemented policy goals and submit their recommendations for the strategy's prospective development. Therefore, the Annual Forum was planned to be the central arena of deliberation, where the long-term evolution of the strategy could be put under scrutiny in an open format, being open to all kinds of stakeholders.

Additionally to these actors and formats, which are embedded within the sphere of strategic decision-making, the strategy's overall development is also monitored by the European Parliament and Committee of Regions. Although both EU institutions are not structurally embedded within the EUSDR framework, their function in the overarching governance structure of the EU mandates them to monitor the strategy's implementation by drafting various opinions and expert analyses about the EUSDR. Both entities contribute to a general and continuous assessment of the strategy through their various publications.

Actor roles within the sphere of implementation**:** The implementation and general goal-attainment in the EUSDR are carried out in twelve different Policy Networks embedded in the so-called *sphere of implementation* (see chapter 6.2.2). These Policy Networks, found in similar constellations in all Macro-regional strategies, are named in the EUSDR *Priority Areas* (PAs). Each of the 12 Priority Area constitutes an area of intervention with underlying actions and targets (see chapter 6.2.1). As such, each of the Priority Area constitutes an individual and – more or less– autonomously working network aligned around the aim to carry out the policy area's implementation process. Therefore the internal governance structure of a Priority Area is divided into two parts.

Each Priority Area is led by two Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), who were selected during the initiation phase as Process Promoters of these networks.[183] Due to the top-down orientation of the EUSDR, the role of the PAC is in general carried out by representatives of the central government administration of the EUSDR states. An exception constitutes Austria and Germany, who both appointed regional governmental actors as PACs. In the case of Germany, PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes) is coordinated by Bavaria in tandem with Croatia, while PA 8 (Competitiveness of Enterprise) is led by Baden-Wuerttemberg together with Croatia. Only in PA 11 (Security) the role of the German PAC is carried out in a combined approach between federal and provincial governments due to the classification of transnational security issues as federal competency,[184] while Bulgaria is represented through its central government. In Austria's case, the coordination of PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation) is carried out by the city of Vienna as an Austrian province in cooperation with Slovenia.

On the other hand, in PA 9 (People and Skills), the Austrian federal government is together with Moldavia in charge of the policy network's procedural steering. The designation of the particular countries (and regions) as PACs, in general, followed the scheme that new EU members or third countries were often assigned to old EU member states (e.g., PA 6, PA 8, PA 11). This was realized to maintain procedural steering capacity while providing the opportunity for the young EU members/third countries to gain governance experience from their more experienced counterparts (Wulf, 2016, p. 257).

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[183] The selection of the particular coordinators was carried out either through a tender procedure within the states or through strict top-down oriented determination by the central government (Sielker, 2012, p. 90)

[184] The competencies concerning law enforcement in Germany are located at the federal and also provincial government depending on the particular area of law enforcement. The issue of border protection and cross-border law enforcement is considered domestically foremost as federal competency.

Table 10 The Priority Areas and their coordinators within the EUSDR				
Pillar	**Priority Area**		**Priority Area Coordinators**	
(1) Connecting the Region	PA 1a	Mobility – Inland waterways	Austria	Romania
	PA 1b	Mobility – Rail, road and air	Slovenia	Serbia
	PA 2	Higher Sustainable Energy	Czech Republic	Hungary
	PA 3	Culture and tourism	Bulgaria	Romania
(2) Protecting the environment	PA 4	Water Quality	Hungary	Slovakia
	PA 5	Environmental Risks	Hungary	Romania
	PA 6	Biodiversity	Bavaria	Croatia
(3) Building prosperity	PA 7	Knowledge Society	Slovakia	Serbia
	PA 8	Competitiveness of Enterprise	Baden-Wurttemberg	Croatia
	PA 9	People and Skills	Austria	Moldova
(4) Strengthening the region	PA 10	Institutional Cooperation	Vienna (Austria)	Slovenia
	PA 11	Security	Germany	Bulgaria

Source: Own depiction

The responsibilities of the PACs involve a broad range of tasks. As Process Promoters, the steering of the implementation process includes the drafting, selection, and supervision of projects within the PA. The PACs are also in charge of identifying potential funding opportunities inside and outside the EU framework, which can also be from public authorities or private entities. Project applications for tender procedures must be drafted and prepared by the PAC and submitted to these programs/institutions/actors. The PACs are also obliged to monitor the general implementation progress. Submitted reports from the individual Steering Group members must be rehashed by the PACs as one comprehensive and consolidated progress report and submitted to the Commission on a biannual basis. These reports contain

information about the actual goal-attainment progress and information about the state of project funding and the general activity of Steering Group members.

Due to their role as Process Promoters, the PACs' tasks do not only include the duty to coordinate in the PA among the Steering Group members, but they must coordinate vertically and horizontally across the framework of the Policy Network. Within the horizontal dimension, PACs seek to coordinate with their counterparts from other PAs, which qualifies their coordination as cross-sectoral. Within the vertical dimension, the PACs are coordinating their activities with the EC and the DSP, as overall strategic Process Promoters of the EUSDR, to attain a general alignment of the implementation activities with the strategic aims and goals of the strategy. Due to their manifold obligations and competencies, the PACs qualify as key actors within the sphere of implementation (Sielker, 2012, p. 97).

The *Steering Group* (SG) constitutes the central decision-making and implementation body of the PA. Members of the SG are obliged to carry out the role of Political Promoters within the Priority Areas to generate further awareness in their countries or regions (besides the NCs) to mobilize additional resources for successful goal-attainment. The Steering Groups comprise mainly governmental representatives of the EUSDR states and the European Commission (foremost DG REGIO). These members are in charge of selecting the individual projects for implementation and are entitled to decide over the individual PA targets' constitution in collaboration with the HLG. The SG members are furthermore responsible for the implementation of the policy goals within their countries or regions. They are also in charge of monitoring and reporting the achieved progress to the Priority Area Coordinators (see below) and the National Coordinators (NCs). Each EUSDR state is authorized to nominate two representatives as regular SG members, either as members with full voting rights or with an only advisory function. The majority of SG members are national governmental representatives, with the exception of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg. They participate in the individual Steering Groups as regional representatives with full voting rights. This also applies to the city-state of Vienna as representative of Austria within PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation). The overall majority of national representatives underlines in this regard the strong top-down oriented approach within the EUSDR. Regional participation within the PAs was even during the later implementation phase limited to delegated implementation tasks, which underlines again the comparably marginal role of LRAs within the EUSDR governance. Due to the “three noes rule” and the absence of potential legal liabilities within the EUSDR towards the actors, the success of the PAs, including the PACs and SGs, is to a significant

degree depending on a comprehensive mobilization of the SG members and high-level participation activity within the PAs.

The Steering Groups format further provides a platform for non-governmental stakeholders to debate specific thematic key issues and actions. While a formal and structural involvement for NGOs and IOs is not designated in this format, both types of stakeholders are nevertheless able to participate on case-based invitation by the regular SG members at the biannual meetings. They are thus able to take part in the deliberation process. Although the occasional and invitation-based participation opportunity constitutes a somewhat unfavorable precondition for the NGOs and IOs, especially in comparison to the regular SG members, some organizations nevertheless managed to significantly extend their influence within particular PAs (e.g., KAS and HSS in PA 10 or the ICPDR within the whole second pillar) and were able to become strong partners for the governmental counterparts within the later implementation phase (see chapter 6.3.3).

The wide-spanning designation of various policy goals, targets, and actions within the EUSDR and, particularly, within the individual PAs, poses a major challenge in terms of successful procedural steering and coordination of implementation activities. Therefore, each PA is entitled to establish *Working Groups* (WGs) as subordinated Project Networks. These WGs often deal with specific challenges and sub-issues of the Priority Areas to attain better implementation results. This differentiated approach also affects the membership constellations of the WGs, which are often diverging from the general setting in the PAs. Besides the regular members' participation in the WGs, these Project networks invite additional stakeholders to provide expert knowledge on specific issues and challenges. The involvement of stakeholders within this sub-network can be very beneficial in terms of implementation efficiency, namely to prevent an overblow of the membership structure in the already large SG format, while at the same time realizing an involvement of the non-governmental sphere (Aust, 2014, pp. 36–37).

To enhance the implementation process, several additional Technical Promoters are involved in the sphere of implementation. Although these actors/institutions are not structurally embedded in the network formats, these supporting entities either provide institutional support and/or expert knowledge, or grant private funds (e.g., loans) for the project implementation within the PAs. One of the most central Technical Promoters from the EU level is the Danube Region Strategy LabGroup, established in March 2011 as a think-thank. The LabGroup comprises experts from the ETC programs, Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), the European Commission, and various international financing institutions (IFIs) such as the European

Investment Bank (EIB). The LabGroup's main task is to monitor the coordination processes and support the Priority Area Coordinators in realizing their duties, namely improving the general implementation process through better alignment of projects with potentially available funding opportunities. It should function as an advisor by giving the coordinators continuous guidance during the implementation process (INTERACT Point Vienna, 2011).

The importance of adequate project funding, which constituted a major problem during the implementation phase (see chapter 6.2.2), resulted in the additional establishment of various other supporting institutions. One institution is the European Investment Advisory Hub, a common initiative established by the European Investment Bank and the EC, which functions on the EU level as a supporting institution for stakeholders to achieve proper project funding in all policy fields. Another institution is the Budapest Danube Contact Point (BDCP), which initiated operations in June 2012. As a joint project of the EIB and the Foreign Ministry of Hungary, the main objective of the BDCP is the facilitation of transnational investment projects located in the Danube Region. Besides providing in-depth knowledge, for example, by drafting feasibility studies, the institution gives potential project partners guidance to find funding opportunities and support them during the phase of project development. When needed, the BDCP can also finance external consultants' accommodation costs from third countries to include place-based expert knowledge and thus attain successful project realization within the particular countries (Info-Portal der Landesregierung Baden-Württemberg, 2017; Kaiser, 2017, p. 191, 2015, p. 104).

In 2015, the EuroAccess Danube Region platform was established as an additional assistance tool for the EUSDR countries. This online platform aims to facilitate the search for available funding. The EuroAccess platform was created due to the pertaining funding difficulties and the countries' general insufficient absorption rate. The city of Vienna carries out the platform's management as coordinator of PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation) in cooperation with a private consulting agency located in Vienna.

Besides the above-mentioned initiatives and platforms created within the EU framework, many other formats were established by various actors over the years. A very prominent example is the Danube Civil Society Forum created in 2011. Because of the often-lacking financial capacities of non-governmental organizations in the Danube Region, the Forum was established to create an overarching association to represent non-governmental stakeholders. The DCSF was planned to provide further the opportunity for mutual exchange and network building to develop stronger transnational ties among the particular organizations in the macro-region (Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), 2011; Lütgenau, 2011, p. 197).

Apart from the DCSF, many other transnational networks and initiatives were established over the years comprising governmental or non-governmental stakeholders as members. To illustrate the vast diversity of projects, some of them should be briefly listed:

- Danube Partnership Network: Initiative of Hungary to support the active participation of local stakeholders within the implementation process of the EUSDR
- DunaLog and River Cities: Open network of Danube cities with periodic conferences to debate particular issues and challenges of the municipalities located in the area of the river basin
- BPW Danube Net: Network of businesswomen in the region to promote transnational cooperation in the Danube Region
- Centrope Capacity: Transnational cooperation platform of regions from the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia to improve interregional cooperation in the designated region
- Clean Rivers Operation: Binational initiative between Hungary and Romania to eliminate the illegal deposition of waste in the river basin located in the cross-border area
- ClutStrat: ERDF financed project to enhance competitiveness in Central Europe
- Etc.

The above-depicted initiatives and projects (EUSDR, 2017a; Török and Ders, 2011, pp. 215–217) only constitute an exemplary selection. Overall a large additional number of initiatives can be found, which are located either in the governmental or non-governmental sphere and can be found all across the macro-region. Due to their very limited impact on the overall governance structure of the EUSDR, a more detailed description will be not carried out.

6.3. The phase of implementation and evolvement

6.3.1. Policy dimension

The "kick-off" event of the Priority Areas in June 2011 marked the formal transition from the *phase of initiation* to the *phase of evolvement* with the implementation of the policy goals. This transition constituted a significant milestone concerning the evolvement of the network. The setting of policy goals and the designated actor-constellation was put for the first time under an actual "stress-test".

As outlined in the previous policy chapter (see chapter 6.2.1), the policy dimension of the EUSDR was constituted with suboptimal starting conditions. This applied for the exceptionally large actor-constellation with additional involvement of more than five third countries, constituting a very complex governance structure with potentially high transaction-costs right from the beginning of the implementation phase. The potential goal attainment was further aggravated through a large number of designated areas of intervention (PAs), which spans over a broad range of issues, starting from infrastructural challenges to cross-border security issues. While some PAs had even partially contradictory aims, which made the intended cross-sectoral

coordination more difficult, the general policy framework was further aggravated by over-optimistic, unclear, or ill-defined target settings. These factors all lead to the already noted policy capabilities-expectation gap of the EUSDR, which unfolded from the beginning of the implementation phase.

Framework conditions

The strategy is since its initiation facing repeated rapidly changing framework conditions in some particular areas, which have a significant impact on the goal attainment. In some cases, these effects were beneficial. They constituted a window of opportunity by creating political momentum among the actors, or it had quite the opposite impact and paralyzed the cooperation within the RCBG network. These changes can be traced back to some determining events since 2011, which will be briefly outlined in the following:

The start of the EUSDR took place in the limelight of already rapidly deteriorating framework conditions. The exacerbating fiscal and economic crises, which hit the member and third countries in the lower part of the Danube Region particularly, led to a stark deprioritization of the EUSDR and the issue of Regional Cross-Border Governance not just on the general EUropean agenda, but also within the various Danube countries, which was in sharp contrast to the prior years. Between 2006 and 2010, a considerable political valorization of the RCBG agenda in the form of the EGTC regulation and the EUSBSR, respectively EUSDR, was carried out.

In the following years, the political crisis-management led to general political decision-making dominated by rather strict intergovernmental and top-down influenced approaches. This was particularly the case for the countries in South-East Europe (Ágh, 2014, p. 130).

Anti-crisis measures were decided and carried out by central governments either through an exclusive domestic approach or on the EU-level in intergovernmental formats outside the legal EU framework (e.g., EFSF and ESM). The measures were accompanied by severe fiscal cuts in the various Danube countries. Consequently, the central governments scaled back their activity within the Regional Policy and often resorted to a rather "minimalist program" also affecting the EUSDR (Szabó and Polgár, 2011, p. 148).

Thus, the crises had a severe effect on the LRAs in the Danube Region, which were facing a massive economic downturn and massive budget cuts by their central governments. This led in the first years of the strategy to an additional detrimental impact on the policy implementation by the LRAs, who were, despite their marginalized influence within the EUSDR governance, the main level of policy implementation (Assembly of European Regions, 2013; Committee of the Regions, 2015a; European Commission, 2014a; EUSDR PAC 9, 2012a, p. 1).

Although the EUSDR countries managed to recover from the economic shocks in the following years slowly, the LRAs, especially in the lower part of the Danube Region, often remained with insufficient governance capacities (see chapter 6.2.2). This also manifested, among others, in still pertaining weak vertical coordination between the sub-national and the national/supranational levels (Committee of the Regions, 2015a, p. 171), which constituted an additional challenge concerning the efficient policy implementation.

In 2013 the Danube Region was struck by one of the most catastrophic floods of the last centuries. The devastation was located all over the river basin's adjacent regions, spanning from Bavaria down to Serbia. The resulting enormous financial damages for LRAs as well as the EUSDR countries resulted in a significant political momentum within the policy framework of the strategy, particularly in the area of PA 5 (Environmental Risks), and led to the establishment of new initiatives and measures in the area of prospective flood prevention (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, p. 5, 2014, p. 10).

Only one year later, the Danube Region was confronted with the escalating crisis in Ukraine, which climaxed in the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia and triggered a rapidly aggravating conflict between Ukraine and the EU on the one side and Russia on the other. The conflict since then constitutes a major challenge for the actors in the area. Since the beginning of the crisis in 2014, the Ukrainian government is in a political state of emergency with an ongoing armed conflict in the eastern part of the country, particularly in the region of Donbas and Lugansk. This had a negative impact on the countries' implementation activities within the EUSDR. While the Ukrainian government showed already before the conflict lacking implementation efforts within the EUSDR, the conflict further detrimentally impacted the activities and manifested in a wide absence from SG meetings, Annual Forums, and overall deprioritization of the strategy as such (see chapter 6.2.3).

While the Ukraine Crisis and with it the Russian annexation of the Crimea led to severe political tensions between Brussels and Moscow, also resulting in a spiral of mutual sanctions (Jeszenszky, 2015), the accompanying reemergence of "energy security"[185] as a policy issue also constituted a window of opportunity for the EUSDR. Due to the EU members' broad

[185] "Energy Security "defines the continuous availability of energy resources to an adequate price. Within the EU, this issue was subject to a long and ongoing debate due to EU member states' energy dependency from Russian oil and especially gas supplies. The ongoing conflicts between Ukraine and Russia led already before the so-called "Ukraine crisis" in 2014 to various diplomatic clashes between the governments, which materialized among others in supply stops of Russian gas and oil to Ukraine. Being the main transit country, the supply stops to Kiev also resulted in massive supply shortfalls in the Central and South-East European EU member states in 2006 or 2009. The result was a significant securitization of "energy security" and lead to an overall prioritization of this topic (European Commission, 2011c)

stipulated demands to increase the independence from Russian energy supplies, the increase of cooperation in this policy area posed a window of opportunity. Especially for the Central and South-East European countries, which were severely hit by preceding oil and particularly gas supply stops by Moscow, this presented a promising cooperation area. The constitution of PA 2 (Energy Security) with its embedded actions and targets, as a result, included various sub-topics in this regard, namely among others the aim to extend the infrastructural interconnections of oil and gas pipelines as well as storage facilities in the Danube Region in case of eventual Russian supply stops in the future (EUSDR PAC 2, 2015, pp. 3–5). However, until now, major efforts in the macro-region were mainly dominated by intergovernmental decision-making outside the EUSDR and EU framework, often spiking intergovernmental disagreements over how to politically address the issue of energy security.[186]

The armed conflict in Ukraine and the aggravating bilateral relations between the EU and Russia were soon followed by a new political challenge, which since 2014 has a major impact on the EU and the Danube Region in particular. The rise and intensification of the asylum and migration crisis since 2014 led to new challenges for the Danube countries. In general, crisis management is either realized through unilateral national measures or is approached on the EU level, which is, however, characterized by limited success. While the issues of asylum and migration were considered a pressing "high-level" issue and were mainly debated on the intergovernmental EU level (Council), the EUSDR countries were also faced with particular security issues. Due to the Danube Region's widely overlapping territory with the so-called "Balkan route", which was until 2016 the main route of the influx of asylum seekers into the EU, the Danube countries were faced with various new challenges. The asylum seekers with steeply rising numbers of applications, accompanied by side effects like organized crime (e.g., human trafficking), and an increased threat of terrorism, constituted in several aspects a huge challenge for the governments. As a result, the EUSDR Priority Area 11, which was initially constituted as a structural opportunity for the mutual exchange of experiences and know-how

[186] The two most famous cases of political disagreements among the EU member states were/are the South Stream and North Stream pipeline cases. In the case of South Stream, the original plan was to establish a gas pipeline through the Black Sea leading through Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, and finally to Austria as a distribution hub, which would have resulted in circumvention of Ukraine as a transit country. The main aim was to avoid potential supply stops in case of future conflicts between Kyiv and Moscow. These plans, however, failed due to massive opposition by the European Commission. The North Stream 2 follows the same premise of bypassing Ukraine by building an underwater pipeline from Russia directly to Germany through the Baltic Sea. Although the construction is planned to be finished next year, the massive critique was issued by Ukraine and Poland, who fear becoming victims of prospective supply stops by Russia.

among police and security forces of the Danube countries, increasingly focused its activities on these particular issues (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 1, 2012, pp. 4–5).

Goal-attainment and general implementation progress

Besides the impact of the manifold and rapidly changing framework conditions, various internal factors were also affected by the implementation process's initiation. The observable ill-defined policy goal and target setting in several PAs from the initiation phase, as already outlined, unfolded since the beginning a very detrimental effect on the goal-attainment.

This affected the Priority Areas and the designated coordinators, who were overloaded with an excessive number and often hardly feasible and/or ill-defined targets (see chapter 6.2.1). Among the Priority Areas Coordinators, several stated that the generally ill-defined target setting caused problems due to the consequential inability to align them during the implementation process with designated actions. This soon caused evident problems for the goal-attainment activities within the individual PAs, either in the form of major implementation delays or general project failures (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 5, 2013, p. 10).

This unfolding dilemma was publicly acknowledged within the sphere of implementation, specifically within the implementation reports of the various Priority Areas, and within the European Commission's sphere of strategic decision-making.

While some PACs tried to overcome the deficits with auxiliary measures through defining additional own 'work targets" (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2012, p. 1), demands from both spheres were increasingly issued to revise the original target settings. These claims ranged from relatively small scale requests like a general '[…]stronger focus on the strategies core priorities.[…]' to the demand for generally "relaunching the EUSDR" (European Commission, 2016c, p. 4; EUSDR PAC 10, 2013). The need for action was generally acknowledged and also feasible due to the character of the strategy's "rolling Action Plan" (European Commission, 2010b, p. 5), which formally does foresee the option to carry out a general revision. However, this requested overhaul of the strategy's targets, indicators, and connected timetables was only realized at a very late time, namely four to five years after the kick-off event in 2015 and 2016.[187] These reforms were further only to a limited extent. They did foresee only the adaption of the targets within the Priority Areas. In contrast, the call for a comprehensive reform of the Action Plan

[187] In the "state of play" presentation by the DSP, held in Brussels between the 15th and 15th January 2016, revised targets were already submitted by 7 PAs (PA1b, PA2, PA4, PA6, PA7, PA10, and PA11), while 5 PAs were still working on the target revision (PA1a, PA 3, PA 5, PA 8, PA 9).

was negated by the EUSDR actors (Danube Strategy Point, 2016), despite occurring problems concerning the project level.

The policy dimension is characterized by an excessive number of initiated projects within the EUSDR framework. This often resulted over the years in a general overload for the Priority Area Coordinators during the implementation process. The main cause for this was the nearly inflationary labeling of projects by stakeholders allegedly of particular added value for the macro-region. The labeling of projects as a "tailor-made" EUSDR project is often carried out without actual justification and lack addressing specific geospatially relevant policy issues or challenges present in the Danube Region.

This applies specifically to the challenges of the regional and local levels within the EUSDR. Being in charge of the labeling process, the national actors often fully exclude the LRAs from decision-making concerning the EUSDR and waive to address their particular issues and challenges adequately. In many cases, these challenges consequentially neither find the entry in the national plans nor in the project applications in a satisfying way, despite LRAs are being in charge of more than 70 % of the actual domestic EUSDR implementation and are the largest group of operational partners. However, this underlines the strong top-down orientation of the EUSDR and shows the lack of a place-based approach within many projects (Aust, 2014, p. 51; Schneider, 2015, p. 77).

Thus, the excessive number of inadequately drafted projects had already in the early implementation phase, a detrimental impact on the EUSDR. INTERACT even characterized this situation as a threat to become a downright project "labeling virus" within the EUSDR (European Commission, 2013b, p. 63). The inadequately labeled projects often failed to achieve financial grants at tender procedures, leaving them consequentially without adequate funding. However, without the necessary financial resources, these projects are often entirely doomed to fail or can unfold only a limited impact in terms of the general goal attainment. A further negative side-effect of this detrimental labeling pattern is that the already limited implementation capacities by the PACs and SG members are additionally tied-up due to the vast number of projects. This negative effect was in the early implementation phase, further enhanced by the initially constituted waiver of prioritizing projects within the policy framework. No differentiation was made between projects concerning their potential added-value to use the limited capacities during the implementation more efficiently. This, however, aggravated the already challenging situation even further.

However, the various deficiencies mentioned above concerning the labeling process finally led to an overall revision of the labeling mechanism. This reform initiative was based on a joint

statement by the Foreign Ministers of the EUSDR states and the Commission in June 2014. They called for establishing new joint labeling with an immanent prioritization mechanism for individual projects (EUSDR, 2014). With this new approach, a differentiation between "regular" and "strategic" projects should be carried out. Projects of strategic importance should be awarded particular political attention and support. Additional implementation capacities should be in consequence provided by involved actors to improve the project's implementation and thus create added value for the Danube Region (Danube Strategy Point, n.d.). Three years after the initial statement, namely on 13 June 2017, the first nine projects were granted with the label as projects of strategic value for the strategy (EUSDR, 2017b).[188]

Due to the rather recent revision of the above-mentioned target-setting and project labeling mechanism, it is too soon to give a comprehensive assessment of the impact on policy implementation. Many new projects are still in their preparation and installation phase within the PAs (EUSDR PAC 6, 2017, p. 15) and can be at this time only insufficiently be evaluated. However, first reports show that the new target setting is considered promising by PACs regarding future implementation activities (EUSDR PAC 9, 2016a, p. 11). These first preliminary statements must be, however, seen with reservation. Since the target revision was carried out together by SG members and PACs, initial self-assessments regarding the alleged beneficial impact could be originated in the limelight of putting themselves in a more "flattering light". It must therefore be seen whether the constituted quantitative indicators can be successfully attained during the future implementation process, which will only then allow us to give an adequate assessment.

The policy dimension's goal setting was, as already outlined, accompanied by large expectations of the (non-)governmental stakeholders in terms of the anticipated multi-sectoral policy approach. This should be realized through an immanent cross-sectoral policy implementation, which should create synergies and benefit the goal attainment in general and enhance the territorial cohesion in the macro-region. In contrast to these high anticipations, the implementation phase's actual results were more mixed. In the first major survey, which was carried out by the EC in 2013 (European Commission, 2013b, p. 7), various observers responded that expectations concerning the creation of policy synergies were only unsatisfyingly fulfilled. Although different Priority Areas showed significant thematic overlaps

[188] From the nine projects, three were embedded within PA 1a (Mobility – Inland Waterways), one in PA 2 (Sustainable Energy), one in PA 3 (Culture and Tourism), one in PA 7 (Knowledge Society), one in PA 8 (Competitiveness of Enterprise), one in PA 9 (People and Skills), and also one in PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation).

concerning various immanent challenges, which would require a comprehensive and joint approach, Priority Areas pursued their implementation activities often, especially in the early implementation phase, detached from another, thus not using the available synergies of the policy fields. [189] This deficit was also noted by ministers from the Danube Region, who stated that further efforts would be needed to be made to '[…]make further progress in focusing co-operation on policy issues of special importance ensuring efficient and effective coordination with other relevant policies, programs, and instruments.' (EUSDR, 2014, pp. 1–2). Despite the general shortcomings concerning the aim of establishing a cross-sectoral approach, various positive examples should also be mentioned. One of the most prominent examples was the comprehensive cooperation in the second EUSDR Pillar (Protecting the environment) between the PA 4 (Water Quality), PA 5 (Environmental Risks), and PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes). While the alignment of policy goals between the mentioned PAs was during the first two years, also characterized by tardiness, the year of 2013 with the historic floods and its massive destructions along the river basin led to a fundamental rethinking among the involved stakeholders. The result was a rapid and significant intensification of cross-sectoral cooperation. A joint document between the PAs in collaboration with the *International Commission for the Protection of the Danube* (ICPDR) was drafted to align funding for coming policy objectives. The initiative was soon also joined by PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes), resulting in comprehensive coordination of activities across the whole Pillar (EUSDR PAC 4, 2014, p. 4, 2015, p. 22, 2016a, p. 6; EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, p. 4). Although Pillar 2 constituted the most successful cross-sectoral cooperation approach, cooperation in the third Pillar (Building Prosperity), which was initially very rudimentary, also improved over time. In contrast to Pillar 2, the cross-sectoral activities between the Priority Area 7 (Knowledge Society & Research, PA 8 (Competitiveness), and PA 9 (People and Skills) were primarily based on the premise of "[…]building a funding network and cooperation with existing European grant schemes as well as synchronizing cooperation[…]" (EUSDR PAC 7, 2015, p. 6). Although the Pillar's primary focus is put on networking activities and is still far away from the anticipated comprehensive joint policy approach, it marks a significant step forward in this regard.

[189] While of course, some Policy Areas, as already outlined (see chapter 6.2.1) had immanent objectives which were from the beginning partially contradictory, like for example the aim to further develop the Danube as a waterway (Pa 1a) while at the same time preserve Water Quality (PA 4) and Biodiversity (PA 6), other areas indeed showed potential synergies. One example is PA 1a and PA 11 (Security) cooperation with the potential improvement of cross-border security on the waterways. Intensive cooperation in this area was only intensified at a very late stage, namely only since the unfolding migration and asylum crisis, which underlines the often missed utilization of cooperation opportunities during the early implementation period (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2017, p. 8, 2017, p. 24).

Due to the manifold pertaining to the detrimental factors outlined above, the policy implementation was assessed by the stakeholders (PACs, NCs, and other non-governmental stakeholders) rather negatively.

In the already mentioned EC survey of 2013, only 14 % of respondents stated that the policy approach by the EUSDR improved the situation in the Danube Region in a measurable way. In contrast to this, 30,2 %, constituting two times more than the first group of respondents, strongly disagreed with this statement and stated a general dissatisfaction with the policy impact of the EUSDR, while over 56 % had a neutral opinion (European Commission, 2013b, p. 8). This overall picture will also be affirmed when we look at the implementation process within the individual Priority Areas in more detail.

Implementation within the individual Priority Areas

Before we turn to the analysis of the implementation process within the individual PAs, which should give us a more detailed insight, a prior differentiation should be made for better comprehensibility of this sub-chapter. As stipulated by Attila Ágh, the vast number of Priority Areas are based on strongly diverging legal premises (Ágh, 2016, p. 155), which affected the individual implementation success from the beginning. Ágh in the following differentiates the PAs into two groups, namely in the group of the Priority Areas 1 to 6[190] characterized by him within the policy framework as so-called "soft" policy areas. At the same time, the PAs 7 to 11[191] are defined as "hard" policy areas.

The division of PAs in the above-stated two groups is based on their particular level of unanimous acceptance by the Danube governments as macro-regional, transnational, or EUropean policy issues. This can include either policy areas, which are already legally highly integrated, for example, transnational infrastructural policies (e.g., TEN-T program) subsumed in the PAs 1a and b, or experience at least a high degree of political support due to changing framework conditions. An example is PA 2 (Sustainable Energy) in the following of the Ukraine crisis or PA 5 (Environmental Risks) after the historic floods in 2013. This group of "soft" policy areas showed during the implementation phase overall, in comparison, a somewhat better success rate in terms of goal-attainment than the latter group.[192]

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[190] These Priority Areas are: Pa 1a Mobility – Inland Waterways, Pa 1b Mobility – Rail, Road and Air, PA 2 Higher Sustainable Energy, PA 3 Culture and Tourism, PA 4 Water Quality, PA 5 Environmental Risks, PA 6 Biodiversity

[191] These Priority Areas are: PA 7 Knowledge Society, PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprise, PA 9 People and Skills, PA 10 Institutional Cooperation, PA 11 Security

[192] Some paradigmatic "success stories" in these Priority Areas are the Danube Flood Risk Management plan in the aftermath of 2013 as a product of an intense collaboration between the Priority Areas 4 (Water Quality), 5

In contrast to this, the group of "hard" policy areas, ranging from PA 7 to 11, is characterized by the condition that these issues are either highly sensitive political matters and/or are considered as strictly national competencies. Areas like vocational training (PA 7 Knowledge Society) or (higher-)education, as well as general labor market policies (PA 9 People and Skills), are, for example, still considered as strict national areas of intervention. As a result, both PAs show a very low degree of legal integration in the transnational and supranational dimension. They are strictly limited to occasional small-scale bi- and/or multilateral cooperation approaches. The reservation of these Priority Areas as widely domestic policy issues constitutes in the following particularly difficult starting conditions for the project implementation. An exception constitutes PA 11 (Security). The policy area is generally considered as a political issue of, particularly high sensitivity. It is thus realized –more or less– strictly within the national framework. However, the rise of new security concerns connected with the asylum and migration crisis led to a significant valorization of the PA and new policy approaches in the macro-region. Although the exchange of information primarily characterizes activities in the PA, this nevertheless marks a success story within the narrow legal boundaries and in the grouping.

To give a more comprehensive insight concerning the policy goal attainment and the implementation activities, each Priority Area will be put under a brief individual assessment. A particular analytical focus is put on the general framework conditions with their impact on the respective PA, the general character and progress of the policy implementation with the depiction of decisive lighthouse projects, and the cross-sectoral approach's realization.

- Priority Area 1a (Mobility – Inland Waterways): The policy area coordinated by Austria and Romania was accompanied since its beginning by a significant implementation effort. Although the issue of waterway rehabilitation and maintenance of the Danube river basin is in general considered as national responsibility by the national governments, the PA and its members can base their activities on various prior institutional efforts outside the EU framework (e.g., Danube Commission), which have

(Environmental Risks), and 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes). This management plan was adopted in December 2015 (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016a, p. 6; EUSDR PAC 5, 2016a, p. 10) and marked a major step towards a common macro-regional approach in terms of flood protection. Further progress was also made in PA 2 (Sustainable Energy) in order to overcome the fragmentation of the EUropean gas market, with new plans to realize infrastructural gas interconnections and storage facilities (EUSDR PAC 2, 2013, p. 8), or in PA 1a (Inland Waterways) to improve the trafficability of the Danube as waterway (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2014, p. 3, 2013, p. 3).

the aim to tackle these challenges (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2017, p. 5). The policy implementation faces, however, various constraints. Limited by the legal framework conditions and very limited budgetary opportunities, goal-attainment is not based on costly large-scale measures of developing the river basin's infrastructure but is limited primarily to networking and general coordination of policy approaches. This comprises, among others, the drafting of prospective action plans and accompanying feasibility studies. The main focus concerning the networking efforts is based on the mutual exchange of information, particularly towards third and non-governmental stakeholders (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2012, p. 6). This resulted in various lighthouse projects. Two examples to be mentioned are the *Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan (FRMMP)*, established in 2014, based on a cooperation between the waterway administrations and private shipping companies to coordinate the transnational activities in this regard. Another project is the successful realization of the research study on the Innovative Danube Vessels in 2013. The project aimed to improve the economic and environmental performance of ships on the Danube. However, the consequential "words into action" of the study did not happen but is still in a status of discussion. The cause for this is the absence of adequate large-scale funding opportunities (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2016, pp. 2–3). In an overall perspective the initially stated intention to implement actions and achieve the designated targets, which were among others emphasized in the so-called "Luxemburg Declaration", a policy document drafted by the responsible ministers of the EUSDR states, have not been realized in a satisfying way (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2014, p. 4). In 2016 the PACs consequentially noted that from the five designated targets, only two were implemented according to the schedule, while three were showing significant delays. The PACs, therefore, carried out in coordination with the Steering Group a revision of the five targets. However, this revision was no general overhaul but rather a partial adaption of the original setting (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2017, p. 14). A primary focus was put on the targets' temporal extension, extending the deadline from 2015 to 2020. Furthermore, remedial actions and milestones were added to the existing goal setting (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2016, p. 14). The implementation of projects is further detrimentally affected by the vast number of projects, namely more than 97 in 2014, which often makes a comprehensive project realization often not feasible (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2014, p. 4). To improve the implementation process, the number of discussed projects in the Steering and Working Groups were, as a consequence, significantly narrowed down (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2015,

p. 7). In terms of the cross-sectoral policy implementation the realization of this goal is faced with various difficulties, resulting only in very rudimentary activities. Cooperation with other PAs, like its policy counterpart PA 1b (Rail, Road, and Air), or with PA 4 (Water Quality), PA 5 (Environmental Risks), and PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes), remained over time very modest. While in 2017, the two Mobility Priority Areas were still searching for joint cooperation topics. The cooperation with the above named PAs is not even mentioned in the most recent PAC report anymore. An exception is PA 11 (Security) in this regard. As a result of the migration and asylum crises, cooperation was continuously increased in recent years, resulting in various joint SG meetings and in the drafting of common recommendations in the area of border procedures, which constitutes a new cross-sectoral approach (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2017, p. 24)

- Priority Area 1b (Mobility – Rail, Road, and Air): In comparison to its Mobility counterpart, the PACs of 1b, represented by Slovenia and Serbia, were not in the same beneficial situation to constitute their work on already carried out institutional efforts. Although some common approaches existed outside (e.g., The Danube Region Intermodal Strategy established in the 1990s) and also within the EU framework (e.g., Trans-European Networks within the Cohesion Policy), this policy area is in general characterized by the lack of interoperability between the governments regarding their national infrastructural networks. This derives from significantly diverging capabilities in developing transportation infrastructure or the inadequate transnational interconnection of the already built transport routes (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2015, p. 6). While within the EU framework, these issues are already addressed by the above-mentioned TEN programs, this is not the case in terms of infrastructural connection with the third countries, where various major bottlenecks pertain in the policy area (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2015, p. 7). This persisting fragmentation of the infrastructural networks in the Danube Region is also noted by the PACs in their various reports, in which they criticize a general absence of a "common transport vision", which needs to be overcome as one central objective (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2014, p. 4, 2013, p. 4). The attainment of this goal is, however, faced with various problems. Following the initial phase of implementation, which was characterized by major political enthusiasm, more than 130 project drafts were submitted. This peaked already two years later with 150 submitted projects stemming only from 10 EUSDR countries (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2014, p. 3). Faced with this vast number of projects, the PACs reported already in the period between 2014

and 2015 a general stagnation of the project implementation and monitoring caused by their overload (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2015, pp. 5–7, 2013). The wide diversity of projects, which foresee implementation activities in the three transport modes (rail, road, air) and imply the coverage of a wide territorial scope (national, cross-border and transnational) make the implementation activities very broad and thus unspecific. Insufficient mutual alignment between targets and actions, as well as the lacking consideration of funding opportunities, further limit the potential implementation success within the PA. For example, this became apparent during the repeated submission of large-scale infrastructural project drafts by PA members, which were drafted despite the general non-availability of allocations. The result was a lack of success at the tender procedures with the projects' consequential failure (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2012, pp. 1–4). Other submitted projects (e.g., VisTra) were simultaneously not been acknowledged at the tenders as being of an "added-value" for the macro-region, which similarly failed in attaining funding (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2017, p. 6). Despite these setbacks, the already mentioned focus on creating a "common transport vision" was maintained by the PACs, who continuously tried to keep the issue on the general agenda. This was carried out in form of various studies and initiatives like among others in form of the "Transport Analysis for the Danube region (TAD)". While such analysis-based initiatives had a more promising success-rate in terms of gaining financial support than the large-scale infrastructural projects, their actual implementation in general was often characterized by distinct tardiness. Project preparation and the accompanying planning of activities lasted often several years and were even further slowed down to the additionally occurring demobilization of actors (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2016, p. 9, 2015, p. 8). Initially stated efforts of realizing a comprehensive cross-sectoral policy implementation were in addition only partially fulfilled. Cooperation efforts with PA 1a (Mobility – Inland Waterways) were even due to the most recent reports –five years after the kick-off– still in the planning phase.

- Priority Area 2 (Sustainable Energy): Being in charge of coordinating the PA, the Czech Republic and Hungary were faced with rapidly changing framework conditions during the implementation process. The most central factor was the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The conflict peaked with the armed annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 by Russia, which led to a massive deterioration of Moscow and Brussels' bilateral relations. Consequently, the issue of energy security experienced a massive securitization in the EU, especially the Danube Region. Besides the major impact of

this conflict on the PA, various other evolvements influenced the securitization process. The general collapse of the global oil prices, the failure of South Stream and the Nabucco pipeline projects, or the massive political prioritization of the renewable energy sector are just some of the happenings, which affected the implementation process (EUSDR PAC 2, 2015, pp. 3–5). Based on these beneficial framework conditions, the PA could unfold comprehensive implementation activities already in the first years after EUSDR's kick-off. Under the overarching objective to increase energy independence and provide long-term supply security (EUSDR PAC 2, 2014, p. 10), the "Danube Region Gas Market Model" constituted the first significant project in this regard. The project aimed to identify potential transnational cooperation areas, which would serve the common interest to increase energy security. Various major gas infrastructure projects were identified and debated at conferences within the EUSDR framework and later also on the EU level (EUSDR PAC 2, 2013, p. 6, 2012, p. 8). In the following years, the PAC realized additional feasibility studies. Concerning the issue of renewable energy, the "Danube Region Geothermal Concept" project was realized. The concept comprised, among others, a harmonized pool of national geothermal datasets and comparative analyses of national regulatory frameworks concerning geothermal energy, which had the aim to identify new potential energy sources in the Danube Region. In terms of the prospective development potentials in the area of energy policy, the PA also carried out the "Danube Region Smart Grid Concept" project. This project, however, must be considered as "dreams of the future" lacking due to the present state of the energy infrastructure in the region, which is far from the establishment of flexible and "intelligent" energy networks (EUSDR PAC 2, 2014, pp. 4–6). While the PA overall successfully managed to kick-start the deliberation process concerning various energy policy issues in the region, it could not achieve various constituted targets. While target two is considered even by the PACs as infeasible due to unrealistic target-setting (remove energy network bottlenecks by 2015), target three shows significant implementation delays. Only target one and four are progressing as scheduled. The 17 actions, which were partially constituted as being more or less of symbolic nature, posed similar difficulties and showed, therefore, partially limited implementation success (EUSDR PAC 2, 2016a, p. 15, 2016a, pp. 8–10). Another deficiency was the absence of temporal milestones, which are typically aligned to the actions as a monitoring tool to assess the overall implementation process. This also impacted the overall revision process, which turned out as significant within the policy

dimension. Besides a streamlining of the targets, by narrowing them down from four to three, additional roadmaps and milestones were drafted with a three-year timeline. These were further equipped with the option to adapt them in case of a future change of the framework conditions (EUSDR PAC 2, 2016b, pp. 5–8). In terms of cross-sectoral cooperation, the Priority Area's activities were overall limited. Although sporadic consultation was carried out with PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes) and PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation), the PA focused its efforts primarily on its own agenda.

- Priority Area 3 (Culture and Tourism)[193]: The Danube is characterized as a tourist destination and a region characterized by a rich diversity of cultures. Therefore, the PA, under the leadership of Bulgaria and Romania, was based concerning the policy goal attainment on favorable framework conditions. Stakeholders constituted thus high expectations towards the PA, namely to realize a common policy approach in the tourist and culture sector, which was still not sufficiently realized in the macro-region.

  However, the beginning of the implementation process was in contrast to these expectations, soon characterized by many shortcomings. The first issue was the unfolding substantial expectations-capability gap, which materialized through the establishment of seven targets with intangible or infeasible objectives. This resulted for the reporting period of 2012, in other words, more than one year after the kick-off, in the situation that more than 88 % of project examples were still in the 'idea' or 'preparation' phase (EUSDR PAC 3, 2012, pp. 4–5, 2012, p. 10). Successfully realized projects were primarily comprised of networking activities, like the participation at the International Tourism Exhibition in Berlin 2013, where the PA organized an event platform for deliberating the various issues concerning the Danube Region. How far this can be assessed as an 'important milestone' in accomplishing a comprehensive tourism network, as stipulated in the progress report, is highly debatable (EUSDR PAC 3, 2013, p. 2, 2013, p. 5). In the following years, various actions and projects were initiated to speed up goal-attainment. However, project proposals were often characterized by insufficient preparation and drafting, resulting in very poor success rates at tender procedures. For example, from 207 submitted project proposals for the START

[193] Despite the PACs' obligation to biannually submit implementation reports, this was not carried out for 2016 in the outlined Priority Area. Due to this reporting deficiency by the coordinators, the following assessment must be considered in the light of limited available information for the mentioned period.

facility[194] tender procedures, only two were selected for financing. During the second call, from 40 submitted projects, again, only two achieved financial support. Although financial support through the TAF facility proved to be more successful, namely four out of five projects being financially supported, the overall picture remained quite detrimental in terms of successful project realization (EUSDR PAC 3, 2015, p. 2). Unfortunately, it is impossible to give any further information regarding the implementation activities for the following period or regarding the target and action revision since the PACs did not submit any implementation reports since 2015. Prior progress reports were additionally often inferior concerning the quality of the content compared to other PAs. In comparison to other PAs, the goal attainment of the PA can be described as rather poor in terms of performance.

- Priority Area 4 (Water Quality): As riparian states of the Danube, the coordination of the PA is carried out by Hungary and Slovakia. The implementation process's common coordination marks a particularly exceptional cooperation effort due to the massive bilateral tensions between the countries in the area of environmental protection in the past. [195] The project implementation was initiated with five targets accompanied by 14 actions with extensive thematic coverage. Roadmaps accompanied the actions to break them down into individual operational steps (EUSDR PAC 4, 2012, pp. 4–5). To promote the implementation activities of the PA, the Commission issued the "Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources". The document outlines major challenges and pertaining deficiencies in the Danube Region concerning sustainable water management (EUSDR PAC 4, 2013, pp. 1–2). The Budapest Danube Contact Point also contributed complementary assistance regarding the project preparation. Due to the often lacking financial resources, particularly in the area of Water Quality, the granted administrative and financial support was expected to mobilize further funding from EU budgets and

[194] START is an initiative of the EUSDR and provides small grants for the preparation and implementation of Danube Region projects in Seed Money. Seed Money means that beneficiaries receive an early pre-financing to cover the project expenses from the beginning. This helps especially small organizations with limited resources to START their projects. The financial allocation stems from the EC with 95 % and the City of Vienna with 5 % as PAC 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation) (EUSDR PAC 10, n.d.)

[195] The construction of the hydroelectric power station in Bős – Gabčíkovo was the cause for a major diplomatic confrontation between the governments in 1992. While the power station's construction was originally planned to be carried out bilaterally by the former socialist regimes constituted in an agreement in 1977, the post-socialist Hungarian government withdrew from the initiative in early 1990. Czechoslovakia carried out the initial plans despite the Hungarian warnings that the power station's unilateral building would cause major environmental damages, which occurred. This contributed to a significant deterioration of the bilateral relations in the early post-socialist period.

other financial sources (EUSDR PAC 4, 2013, pp. 4–6). The activities of the PA are overall characterized by a particularly strong emphasis on comprehensive project preparation, which manifested, among others, also in a pre-selection of projects by the PACs before they were submitted to the various tenders. From the 40 submitted projects for START funding, only 15 were selected by the coordinators. However, only two (STAWA and REWATER) were granted financial support from the finally submitted projects. With the incoming new MFF, a particular emphasis was put on comprehensive project preparation. Various meetings were organized comprising SG members, the above outlined auxiliary institutions, and the incoming DTP program representatives. This measure aimed to increase these projects' potential success rate, like the SEDIMENT and TISZA (SUB) BASIN COOPERATION project (EUSDR PAC 4, 2015, p. 6, 2015, p. 26). In regard to the target setting and the general goal-attainment, the PA showed overall satisfying results. Based on the assessment that all targets were adequately progressing, the target setting's revision was characterized by only minor adaptions. Only one target (Target 3) was adapted from the originally constituted five targets by modifying the initially stated timeline (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016a, pp. 8–9). From the 66 established milestones, 20 were at the end of 2016 completed. According to the PACs, this constitutes a satisfactory result due to some milestones' long-term character, while others are reported to be in an already ongoing finalization process (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016b, p. 11). In terms of cross-sectoral cooperation, the PA its counterparts from the second pillar showed exceptional activities within the EUSDR. Besides the cooperation with the above-stated auxiliary institutions, the PA pursued cooperation with various PAs of the strategy, resulting in joint meetings with PA 7 (Knowledge Society) and PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation) (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016a, p. 19). The cooperation within the Pillar, particularly with PA 5 (Environmental Risks) and partially PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes), turned out to be particularly intensive. In 2012 this resulted in a cross-sectoral harmonization of the labeling procedure of projects (EUSDR PAC 4, 2012, p. 6), which was followed by a joint policy paper between PA4, PA 5, and the ICPDR, identifying potential policy synergies to strengthen further cooperation (EUSDR PAC 4, 2014, p. 4). The two Priority Areas also engaged in developing joint projects like JOINTISZA and DANUBE SEDIMENT, which marks an overall major success in cross-sectoral policy implementation (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016a, p. 19; EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 18).

- Priority Area 5 (Environmental Risks): Being the coordinators of the PA, Hungary and Romania were faced during the implementation phase with a major change of the political framework conditions. The increasing number of extremely destructive floods (2002, 2006, 2008, 2010), posed a new major challenge for the governments in the Danube Region (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, p. 5). Especially the historic floods of 2013 with the major damages all along the riparian states and regions and the governments' widespread inability to realize comprehensive transnational response, made the need for joint actions obvious (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, p. 5, 2013, p. 3). Based on a new major political momentum, the implementation process was carried out from the early phase through close cooperation with the ICPDR and its Flood Protection Expert Group. The cooperation aimed to identify the particular need for action and potential policy bottlenecks, which would eventually hamper the realization of the macro-regional policy approach in the area of environmental risks (EUSDR PAC 5, 2014, p. 10). In September 2013, the cooperation realized the first draft of the "Danube Region Enhanced Flood Management and Cooperation Plan (DREFMCP)", which presented a policy blueprint for future alignment of the governmental measures. To avoid duplications and especially because of the absence of disaster management experts in the Steering Group, the cooperation with the ICPDR was continued and further expanded in the following years (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 1, 2014, p. 3). Complementary cross-sectoral stakeholder conferences and workshops were held together with PA 4 in 2015 to realize a comprehensive policy approach. Various aspects like the general impact of climate change and the development of a common cross-sectoral approach for mitigation of the harmful effects were incorporated under the overarching topic of flood prevention (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, p. 6). To boost the project preparation activities, the PACs realized various mutual country visits to enhance the exchange of statistical data, operation rules, and experiences among stakeholders. Despite these efforts, various submitted project proposals like DAREFFORT (Danube Region Flood Forecasting), a lighthouse project of the PA, were rejected DTP's first project financing call. This constituted a major setback within the implementation process for the PA, thus resulting in a major revision of the project proposal mechanism, which was carried out in cooperation with external experts (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 18, 2015, p. 5). From the 59 submitted stakeholder project proposals for TAF and the START budgets, only two were forwarded to the following tender procedures. The coordinators' intensified selection procedure derived from the prior often missing

alignment of projects concerning their placed-based added value in the Danube Region (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, pp. 7–8). The new approach leads to better success rates in terms of achieving seed money support (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, pp. 5–6). This measure was complemented by a comprehensive revision of the target setting. Target two and three were assessed by the PACs as satisfyingly progressing, while only the first target did show delays. However, all three original targets were finally overhauled (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, pp. 9–10).

- Priority Area 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes): Under the leadership of Bavaria and Croatia, the PA is covering a wide variety of topics, making it one of the broadest policy areas in the EUSDR (EUSDR PAC 6, 2015, p. 4). Following the kick-off event, the focus during the initial implementation phase was put primarily on the Priority Area's organizational setup, which also included establishing the cross-sectoral policy implementation. In this regard, various workshops were carried out with other PAs from the second Pillar (EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, pp. 2–4). To use potential policy synergies, the implementation activities of the PA also focused on already active projects located in the Danube Region. An example in this regard is Danubeparks. To increase the mutual alignment between PA and the project, the coordinators realized a follow-up project called Danubeparks II to create new political momentum for the project now under the strategy's roof. The main implementation focus was put on networking activities or the realization of joint assessment activities (e.g., feasibility studies). The first “success stories” were presented by the PACs four years after the kick-off. The project “Sturgeon 2020” resulted, for example, in a partial prohibition of sturgeon fishery in the Danube Region after their numbers declined drastically in the past years (EUSDR PAC 6, 2016, p. 6). Major efforts were further put into realizing a comprehensive “PA 6 Stakeholder Network” (EUSDR PAC 6, 2013, p. 11). The PAC of Bavaria carried out several feasibility studies to realize the above-mentioned network. After the finalization of the first study in March 2014 (EUSDR PAC 6, 2014, p. 4), it was followed by an additional study through the external consultant company Price Waterhouse Coopers in 2015. The second study's focus was on the assessment of potential legal hurdles concerning the establishment of an institutionalized joint organization. The organization would aim to improve cross-sectoral and macro-regional policy approaches further and thus enhance the impact of policy measures as such (EUSDR PAC 6, 2015, pp. 6–7). A particular topic posed the issue of invasive alien species in the biosphere of the Danube Region. As a prioritized issue, several conferences were realized with numerous stakeholders

like the International Association for Danube Research (IAD) among others. Potential projects should be carried out in the mid- and long-term through the comprehensive involvement of non-governmental stakeholders and EUSDR actors alike to successfully tackle these challenges (EUSDR PAC 6, 2015, p. 9). As outlined above, the very broad thematic scope also affected the setting of targets and actions, which were characterized not just by a very extensive thematic range but also by problematic or non-possible measurability. Some actions were constituted as very vague, while others were designated as going "[…]beyond the mandate and scope of EUSDR[…]" due to which they should be "[…] more considered as guiding overall concepts or as a long-term vision."(EUSDR PAC 6, 2016, p. 11). As noted by the PACs, the often stated satisfying progress of these targets should be in the limelight of their intangibility considered with some reservations. While other PAs focused during the general target revision on the aim to make the target setting more specific and thus more measurable, in the area of Biodiversity, the targets were even more broadened by aligning them with the general EU and global biodiversity targets (EUSDR PAC 6, 2017, p. 7). This, however, contains the significant threat of unfolding a potentially detrimental effect concerning future implementation success. As mentioned, the PACs put a strong emphasis on general network activities and cross-sectoral policy implementation right from the beginning of the phase. Besides the intensification of cooperation efforts within the EUSDR's second Pillar, joint events were realized with PA 1a (Mobility – Inland Waterways). These events aimed to determine and overcome potential conflicting objectives and thus to increase cross-sectoral policy implementation efficiency (EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, pp. 5–6). Further efforts to realize a joint approach in terms of tackling wildlife crime were carried out in the second half of 2016, resulting in first accomplished consultations between Pa 11 (Security) and Biodiversity (EUSDR PAC 6, 2016, p. 19).

- Priority Area 7 (Knowledge Society): Coordinated by Serbia and Slovakia, the PA's implementation process was facing rather detrimental framework conditions. A major issue was the setup of the PA as such. The national governments still consider embedded objectives as domestic areas of intervention, thus being rather unwilling to comprehensively support this PA (EUSDR PAC 7, 2015, p. 6). Another aspect was the extensively broad range of policy issues embedded within the PA, ranging among others from the goal to improve education and training systems, the aim to increase synergies in the R&D sector, the objective of fighting poverty, discrimination of minorities, and also promote gender equality (EUSDR PAC 7, 2016, p. 5). While some of these

embedded goals contained potential implementation synergies (e.g., VET and education in general), others constituted alone-standing policy issues (e.g., gender equality or discrimination), which complicated the feasibility to realize a comprehensive implementation approach. Another problem was the overly optimistic target setting, like the increase of the GDP investment in R&D to 3 % or the increase of academic mobility up to 20 % by the target group (EUSDR PAC 7, 2012, p. 2). Especially in the lower part of the Danube Region, such major numerical increases are rather unlikely in the short and mid-term target setting. Targets were overall showing a lack of place-based added value due to a comprehensive strategic alignment with the Europe 2020 goals, while they only partially addressed particular Danube Region related challenges (EUSDR PAC 7, 2015, p. 3). The implementation process was struggling with additional challenges. From the 19 collected project proposals, the PACs noted that the majority did not provide complete information about implementation-related aspects, like designated project partners, implementation progress, and designated length of the projects, etc., which limited the potential project success significantly (EUSDR PAC 7, 2012, p. 8). As a result, the PACs shifted their focus concerning the goal attainment. With the establishment of five Working Groups to attain a better alignment between the activities and the various areas of intervention, the following period was characterized by a particular emphasis on the assessment of policy challenges, collection and dissemination of data, and individual project preparation efforts. This was further accompanied by an ongoing feedback process concerning the eventual revision of the constituted targets, roadmaps, and the general monitoring activities (EUSDR PAC 7, 2013, p. 2, 2013, p. 7). The implementation activities were further concentrated on a small selection of "most relevant actions" (EUSDR PAC 7, 2015, p. 4, 2014, p. 3). In the area of R&D, the Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund (DRRIF) marked such an approach, which was realized with an accompanying comprehensive feasibility study through the external consultant agency Ernst & Young Slovakia (EUSDR PAC 7, 2014, p. 7). Before the major target revisions of the EUSDR, the PACs realized in a joint approach with PA 8 (Competitiveness) the so-called Danube-INCO.NET project to improve project labeling. This was realized by creating a new methodology and selection instrument for project preparation and establish new networks for improved expert involvement. This project constituted in the following also a lighthouse project of the PA(s) especially in the light of the approaching new MFF (EUSDR PAC 7, 2016, p. 6, 2016, p. 18, 2015, pp. 15–16). While all of the projects mentioned above involved

networking as a side-goal, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research funded over 18 projects with the particular aim to improve the networking within the PA (EUSDR PAC 7, 2016, p. 19). This and other efforts contributed to the successful establishment of comparably sustainable network structures. While this marked a success-story within the PA, the policy impact concerning other objectives remained rather limited (EUSDR PAC 7, 2017, pp. 5–6). In terms of the target setting, initial considerations in 2015/2016 to revise the targets and create more tangible policy impacts were rejected by the PA. Members of the PA referred in this regard to the already realized –minor– target amendments in 2012. Another rationale by the SG members was the PA's general long-term orientation, which allegedly justified the intangible nature of the targets and actions (EUSDR PAC 7, 2015, p. 7). However, this initial passivity was one year after substituted by the acknowledgment towards a need for action. In 2017, a broad deliberation process regarding the comprehensive revision of targets, actions, and milestones was followed to improve future implementation activities (EUSDR PAC 7, 2017, pp. 11–14). The goal of cross-sectoral implementation by the PA was carried out with mixed intensity. While the above mentioned cooperation with PA 8 (Competitiveness) regarding various projects marked certainly a milestone, cooperation with other PAs, especially PA 2 (Energy), PA 4 (Water Quality), PA 5 (Environmental Risks) and PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes) were mainly limited to occasional exchange of information (EUSDR PAC 7, 2015, p. 7).

- Priority Area 8 (Competitiveness): Like its above-outlined counterpart of Knowledge Society, the PA of Competitiveness comprises a broad range of policy goals. Under Baden-Wuerttemberg and Croatia's leadership, the PA was designated to engage on topics like innovation and technology transfer, (regional) cluster cooperation and environmental technologies, vocational education and entrepreneurial learning, and various other issues (EUSDR PAC 8, 2013, p. 1). Due to the broad policy goal setting, the PA established in the following four Working Groups, which had the initial task to break down the overly strategic and long-term objectives into more feasible intermediate goals, which should be embedded in adequate temporal roadmaps (EUSDR PAC 8, 2012, p. 1). Additional two Groups soon complemented the original four WGs to cope with the various policy challenges (EUSDR PAC 8, 2012, p. 4). However, the implementation activities were quickly faced with a vast number of submitted project proposals by the PA members. In 2012, more than 50 projects were submitted, from which 8 were self-declared “flagship projects”. All of these projects

were in the following forwarded and endorsed by the PACs to achieve financial support at the tender of the South-East Europe program (Interreg B). This vast number of project submissions however marked even in comparison to other PAs an exceptionally large sum, making financial support for all projects by the SEE, especially in terms of the already outlined limited funding opportunities, quite unrealistic (EUSDR PAC 8, 2012, pp. 1–2). The outcome concerning the project application for the SEE program and also for the Danube Transnational Program turned out as anticipated and was characterized by a general lack of success (EUSDR PAC 8, 2015, p. 11). The two Interreg programs' high funding requirements posed major problems and have at various times not been met by the applications. An example was the project "SIRA Danube - Competence Centers - Smart and Innovative Rural Areas", with the focus on the bio-economy of rural areas. Despite the project's status as a lighthouse project, the application failed already at the first DTP call and was put under reevaluation until 2017, when it was submitted as amended strategic project (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016a, p. 10). Among the project proposals a strong emphasis was put on networking activities between the various actors and stakeholders. By the time of 2014 more than 10 stakeholder events were realized (EUSDR PAC 8, 2014, p. 2). These efforts were crowned with success. In the area of innovations and technological transfer, two so-called "Danube Transfer Centers (DTC)" were created in Romania and Slovakia by 2016, while three additional centers, namely in Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, were in the process of realization. These centers were planned to work as networking hubs in the area of R&D, where stakeholders would be able to exchange know-how and experiences. Further joint policy approaches were also carried out concerning vocational education and training, though they were often only small-scale projects. Although this constitutes a decisive step forward, the results in this area are still far away from the constituted original goal setting, namely to achieve the game-changing impact on VET in the macro-region. Instead, a widely persisting fragmentation among national systems can still be observed (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016a, pp. 8–10, 2016b, p. 14). Similar to its counterparts, the PA revised the original target setting. However, these measures were not comprehensively outlined by the PACs within their implementation reports like it was done within other PAs. Due to the not available information concerning the target revision, it is not feasible to realize a further assessment in this regard (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016a, pp. 11–12, 2016b, pp. 11–12). In terms of cross-sectoral implementation, PA 8 managed to attain several achievements. Besides the already outlined Danube-INCO.NET project,

which was initiated jointly with PA 7 (Knowledge Society), another project is carried out in vocational education and training called DUAL HIGH SCHOOL. This project aims to successfully prepare the intended introduction of dual vocational training in Slovakia, similar to the German model, which is carried out as a cross-sectoral project of PA 7 and PA 8. The Working Group "VET" of PA 8, as the most active WG in terms of cross-sectoral activities, further aims to increase the coordination across all three pillars by increasing stakeholder involvement in this sector. Other cross-sectoral activities with PA 1 (Mobility), PA 3 (Energy) are due to the progress reports allegedly intensified, but simultaneously lack a more detailed description how these activities were carried out (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016a, p. 9, 2016a, p. 22).

- Priority Area 9 (People and Skills): The PACs Austria and Moldova were faced with a wide range of policy issues. This included, among others, general market policies, education policies, vocational education and training issues, and non-discrimination policies, especially towards ethnic and social minorities. These policy areas became during the implementation phase, particularly salient, thus posing beneficial framework conditions. With the unfolding fiscal and economic crises, youth and long-term unemployment and the consequential internal migration westwards became one of the Danube Region's various major challenges (EUSDR PAC 9, 2014, p. 3, 2012b, p. 1). The following increased pressure on the welfare and education systems and the accompanying challenges for the labor market mounted up even further in the limelight of the unfolding migration and asylum crisis since 2015 (EUSDR PAC 9, 2016b, p. 8). The new framework conditions also had put the original target-setting soon under major pressure. The original targets were characterized from the beginning by a very intangible, strategic and also very optimistic setting, which could hardly be considered as feasible objectives (e.g., the intended reduction of people being in risk of poverty and social exclusion below the threshold of 20 million people in the Danube region) in a short or mid-term perspective (EUSDR PAC 9, 2014, p. 3, 2013, p. 3). To overcome this detrimental situation, a partial amendment of the targets was already carried out at the second SG meeting on 6th December 2011. However, these measures were in contradiction to the general premise to realize a more focused implementation approach. Although various targets were merged (Action 4, 5, 6, and 8), new policy goals were also introduced within the PA, like realizing gender equality in the education and labor market sector, stretching the PA even further. To maintain flexibility concerning the use of targets, actions, and milestones, the SG decided to adopt the "Rolling Action Plan"

within the PA. The PA further stipulated its right to carry out reform measures whenever the members would deem it necessary (EUSDR PAC 9, 2012b, pp. 3–6). The self-assessment by the PA(Cs) depicted the own network as a "common umbrella" of policy issues with the particular aim to focus on common –and more feasible– deliberation and networking activities (EUSDR PAC 9, 2015, p. 5), while the implementation on the ground should be nevertheless considered as an essential part of the goal attainment (EUSDR PAC 9, 2014, p. 7). In this regard, the PA pursued a rather intensive selection of project proposals, which became, over the years, even more strict (EUSDR PAC 9, 2014, p. 5, 2013, pp. 4–5, 2012b, p. 4, 2012b, p. 7). Despite these efforts, the implementation progress in vocational education and training, higher education, and harmonization of the labor market policies were awarded only limited success (EUSDR PAC 9, 2015, p. 5). Achievements were mainly located in the area of networking. In this regard, efforts were increasingly expanded by the PA's various Working Groups with the realization of a large number of multiple events and meetings (EUSDR PAC 9, 2015, p. 20, 2015, p. 22). As a result, a major target revision was carried out in 2015/2016, which also included implementing new milestones to provide better measurability of the goal attainment. Similar to its counterpart PA 8 (Competitiveness) the progress reports by the PACs refrained from giving a more detailed outline about the particular target revision or the introduction of the above named milestones (EUSDR PAC 9, 2016a, p. 11). In the cross-sectoral dimension, the PA further pursued an active approach. Besides the already outlined several joint meetings with its counterparts from Pillar three, this was also carried out with PA 3 (Culture and Tourism) and PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes) on the topic of ecotourism in 2015 (EUSDR PAC 9, 2015, p. 21). Another cross-sectoral cooperation materialized in the ongoing exchange of information with PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation) to improve the PA's own project preparation activities (EUSDR PAC 9, 2016b, p. 21).

- Priority Area 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation): Coordinated by the city-state of Vienna (Austria) and Slovenia, the PA 10 is characterized by a goal-setting, which differs significantly from the other areas of intervention. In comparison to other PAs, which are constituted around specific policy goals and are mandated to implement particular actions and projects, this area of intervention is constituted to improve the institutional cooperation, administrative performance, general governance, or the improved involvement of LRAs and non-governmental stakeholders within the EUSDR as such. Another. Within the sphere of implementation, the PA poses as a central hub

and supporting Policy Network in terms of project preparation. This, however, marked a particular challenge for the PA, especially in the limelight of the general framework conditions and given governance structure. While, as already outlined, several states and regions, especially in the lower part of the Danube Region, are characterized by significant governance deficiencies, manifesting, among others, in a rather poor project preparation and implementation performance (EUSDR PAC 10, 2012, p. 11). Potential involvement and mobilization of NGOs and particularly LRAs, also constitute a quite difficult challenge due to the very top-down oriented governance structure of the EUSDR. Being aware of these challenges' particular extent, the PA started to focus its activities on two aspects. The first is its function as an information hub. The PA either provides directly external expert knowledge to other PAs concerning issues like project preparation and management or supplies the structural opportunity for cross-sectoral (PAs and NGOs) and vertical (supranational, national, regional, and local level) exchange of know-how and experiences (EUSDR PAC 10, 2012, p. 14). The second task is to actively support the project implementation by identifying funding opportunities (e.g., Danube Financing Dialogue) or providing direct seed money. This seed money was provided, for example, through the Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects (TAF-DRP), which had an overall budget of 1 million EUR for project preparation and was managed by PA 10 (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 7, 2013, p. 4). In cooperation with the state administrations, the PA carried out a comprehensive survey to further track down particular challenges limiting the success rates during the implementation process. The results of the survey underlined the general observations by stating that besides the insufficient communication flows in the vertical dimension, the lack of personal continuity (see next chapter), as well as the absence of comprehensive political promotion of the EUSDR and the PAs pose large obstacles to carry out the designated tasks (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 4, 2016a, p. 8). In the survey, the respondents further assessed that the EUSDR is affected by a major capabilities-expectation, which is particularly dominant regarding the limited legal/institutional and financial framework conditions that are contrasted by the stakeholders still maintained high expectancies towards the Macro-regional strategy (EUSDR PAC 10, 2015, p. 8). The PACs also referred to the general mismatched target setting, which was one of the main causes for the general dissatisfactory state of play (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016b, p. 20). As a result, the PA, similarly to its 10 counterparts, carried out a major revision of its original goal-setting. This manifested in a first reorientation already between 2012

and 2013 in terms of its strategic alignment. With the new aim to not just support sheer project development mechanisms but also to actively provide assistance for the political promotion activities, the PA hoped to overcome the prior lack of success concerning the project preparation activities for the upcoming MFF (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 3, 2013, p. 3).[196] A further measure was the revision of the PA's targets already in 2012. Due to the lack of alignment between the original two targets and the nine accompanying actions, the number of targets was extended to five. It was amended with updated actions and milestones for the time-period until 2015 (EUSDR PAC 10, 2013, p. 10). The project implementation within the PA, however, remained challenging despite these target revisions. With the approaching MFF and the DTP, the PA members concentrated their efforts on project planning and preparation for the new period (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 5). Thid resulted in a repeated revision of the target setting. The four new targets had in this regard a particular focus on a comprehensive alignment with the DTP in order to attain better prospective funding during the new MFF (EUSDR PAC 10, 2015, p. 18). Although a comprehensive assessment of the goal-attainment was not been carried out due to the "short time-period" since the last target revision, the PA struggled in 2016 with various challenges. From the 10 constituted actions four were showing delays, while one was not even started. Compared to this, four were showing satisfactory progress, while only one was successfully finished. In the limelight of these mixed results the PACs emphasized a further need for action and also warned of the increasing detrimental developments in recent years, like the decreasing trust of citizens in governmental institutions, which is contradicting the actual goal setting of the PA (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016a, p. 13).

- Priority Area 11 (Security): With Bulgaria and Germany, comprising the German Federal Ministry of Interior together with the Bavarian Ministry of Interior, being in charge of the coordination of the Priority Area, the two countries were faced with a set of policy topics, which were considered by the EUSDR governments as very sensitive and primarily domestic/intergovernmental issues. The various sub-topics of the PA, ranging from the fight of cross-border criminality and corruption, the cooperation between police and security forces, to the transnational harmonization of border-control management, thus marked such intergovernmental policy issues. However, the

[196] In 2013 from 33 projects being in preparation or planned to be soon initialized only one responded to the call of the PAC Vienna to submit a status report.

emergence or further increase of various crime-related threats in the Danube Region constituted a window of cooperation opportunity. They pushed the governments towards an acknowledgment of a general need for action. The smuggling of illegal goods and drugs, human trafficking, and cross-border black markets marked in this regard a major challenge for the Danube countries, which became particularly salient after the EU-enlargement in 2004 and the subsequent extension of the Schengen Area (EUSDR PAC 11, 2012, p. 1). Besides the general security challenges, two additional topics emerged, which needed particular political attention. The emergence of the migration and asylum crisis with the influx of asylum seekers through the so-called "Balkan Route" marked a particular challenge for border control-management. This was accompanied by the rise of the terrorist threat due to the exploitation of the incoming flows of asylum seekers by terrorists, who were able to reach the EUropean countries unnoticed. Both challenges were acknowledged by the Danube governments, who agreed to seek joint political approaches in this regard (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 20, 2016a, p. 5). Due to the above outlined narrow boundaries of the PA, the PACs initiated a comprehensive deliberation process from the beginning of the implementation phase. Various meetings were organized, where potential cooperation areas were discussed, and the potential willingness of actors in terms of joint projects elaborated (EUSDR PAC 11, 2013, pp. 5–6). Overall the area of intervention was thematically characterized by four main objectives. The first was the enhancement of international police cooperation, particularly in the area of illegal drug and human trafficking through the exchange of best practices and experiences, and the utilization of new potential synergies in this regard (EUSDR PAC 11, 2013, pp. 2–3). For this purpose, one main activity was the initialization of the "Danube River Forum" (DARIF) as a new institutionalized network for the Danube countries and other stakeholders (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 3, 2015, p. 6). Another objective was the creation of contact points along the Danube, which should also enhance the exchange of information between authorities. As the main coordination hub for these contact points, the center in Mohács (Hungary) was established, which started operations in September 2013 (EUSDR PAC 11, 2013, p. 3, 2012, pp. 2–3). In the area of border control management, the harmonization of visa issuance was a major objective. This resulted in the establishment of the "Danube Organized Crime Threat Assessment" (DOCTA) as a project, which should improve the efficiency of combating transnational criminality on the land route and also on the Danube as a waterway (EUSDR PAC 11, 2013, p. 5, 2012, pp. 3–4). A

further issue embedded in the area of security is the combatting of corruption and the securing of rule of law, which was also a topic at various PA meetings (EUSDR PAC 11, 2013, p. 3). Despite the relative success of the implementation activities within these narrow policy boundaries, the PA did also carry out a major revision of targets, namely to address the changing framework conditions (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 5, 2015, p. 20). The focus of the measures was put on a better alignment between actions and targets in 2016, which should serve the aim to improve align the milestones with the designated schedule (EUSDR PAC 11, 2016a, pp. 7–10). The PA's considerable success also continues in the area of cross-sectoral cooperation, although in a more modest extent. Strong cooperation materialized with PA 1 a (Mobility – Waterways), leading to the already outlined DARIF project. In this project, the PA 1, for example, stepped up as a mediator between public police authorities and shipping companies in order to create better implementation results (EUSDR PAC 11, 2014, p. 14). These efforts were also accompanied by an exemplary publication of a manual about border controls in the Danube River Basin and its navigable tributaries for companies to make the time-consuming control-procedures more efficient (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 4). Besides the significant cooperation with PA 1, other cross-sectoral approaches remained more limited. Cooperation efforts with PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation) and PA 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes) were mainly limited to occasional meetings, where potential areas of cooperation were discussed, although without significant results (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 4, 2016a, p. 4).

6.3.2. Polity dimension

With the beginning of the implementation phase, the structural setting of the EUSDR was in various aspects adapted and further developed. These measures included planned structural amendments and ad-hoc changes within the policy dimension to cope with new occurring framework conditions and problems. According to the original plans, the already mentioned Working Groups (WGs) were soon established within the Priority Areas after the “kick-off” in June 2011. These WGs functioned as Project Networks to increase the steering and implementation efficiency in the PAs. As already outlined in the previous Polity chapter (see chapter 6.2.2), their particular range of tasks included providing a new arena of coordination to tackle specific policy challenges, but they also acted as supplementary entities for the PAs. Taken the example of PA 7 (Knowledge Society), a major task of the WGs was to collect data and provide deliberation-based recommendations within their particular sub-area of intervention. These recommendations were then submitted to the PA/SG for final decision-

making and implementation (EUSDR PAC 7, 2013; EUSDR PAC 9, 2012a). The Working Groups in the following became an important element within the PAs and were intensively used as a structural instrument within the sphere of implementation.

The first WGs were soon followed by the first actual revisionary measure concerning the EUSDR, namely the partial deviation from the original "three noes rule", which started already prior to the actual kick-off event in April 2011. The prelude to this change was stated by the Council of the EU (General Affairs) in its conclusion, in which it stated (point 16 and 17) that the EC and other EU institutions, as well as the participating EUSDR states, should be invited and called upon to "[…]support the aims of the Strategy by facilitating the coordination of existing EU funds[…]" and "[…]explore and identify ways of providing technical assistance within available financial resources[…]" (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 4). This stipulation included two aspects concerning the future structural setting. While on the one hand, the Council underlined the primary goal again to use existing funding through better coordination better, it deviated from the strict formal provision of "no new funding" by referring to create a EUSDR specific technical assistance budget.

This materialized in establishing the Technical Assistance Facility (TAF-DRP), which was created in 2013. Under the supervision and management of PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation), the TAF-DRP should provide technical assistance and financial allocations to support coordination and implementation activities within the PAs. This applies particularly for the very much needed financial support during the preparation of projects, which are often not adequately drafted, massively underfunded, and therefore often doomed to fail (EUSDR PAC 10, 2013).[197] The allocation of these sources was realized through three tender rounds in the period between 2014 and 2016. The TAF-DRP and its management under PA 10 has been substituted through the newly established *Danube Strategy Point* (DSP) in the meanwhile, which takes over the role as complementary Process Promoter within the EUSDR and thus becomes the new provider of Technical Assistance grants with the associated funds (for information regarding the DSP see the next chapter). The allocation of specific grants by the DSP marks, as a result, just like the TAF-DRP, again an apparent deviation from the "three

[197] Although the establishment of the TAF-DRP certainly marked a deviation from the original "three noes rule ", it was not planned as a measure of major financial impact. Its financial support was limited to an overall budget of only one million Euro and was only designated to support small scale projects with the maximum financial support of 25.000 EUR for each project. The allocation of funding was move over time, additionally criticized as not really transparent. This also applied regarding the selection of external consultants, who were commissioned by the PAC to give technical assistance during the project preparation (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 9; Wulf, 2016, p. 387).

noes rule". However, due to the small budget size, the overall impact on the governance structure remains limited.

The premise of the "three noes rule" is despite these marginal deviations, however, in general, maintained. Occasionally upcoming debates concerning the establishment of an EGTC for the EUSDR, for example, are firmly rejected by governmental actors. This is based on the basic functioning principle and aim of an EGTC. Due to its nature as an RCBG network based on its own new institutions, a legal basis, and with an own budget to improve cross-border cooperation, such an approach would openly contradict the "three noes rule". Therefore the idea never found broader support among the actors of the EUSDR.

Despite the lack of success concerning the idea of establishing an EGTC, the idea maintained its small basis of supporters, who repeatedly try to restart the debate. As such, the CoR emphasized several times the necessity to initiate a comprehensive debate regarding the feasibility of the EGTC within the Danube Region (Committee of the Regions, 2009, p. 7). Another supporter is PA 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation), for example, where the coordinators emphasized their interest to initiate a feasibility study concerning the potential added value of an EGTC (EUSDR PAC 10, 2013, p. 17). The efforts of both entities, as mentioned above, proved, however, to be futile.

Embeddedness in the "shadow of hierarchy"

While the complex balancing of the institutionalization process between complying with the given "three noes rule" and simultaneously maintaining structural operability proved to be already very challenging governance task, the challenge became during the implementation process even more difficult due to the persisting "shadow of hierarchy". The structural embeddedness is a basic characteristic of all networks in MLG's horizontal dimension (see chapter 2.2). However, the particular dependence of the national administrations' strategy proves to be, especially in the lower part of the Danube Region, a major problem. A significant issue is the persisting governance deficit of the various EUSDR countries, which show low institutional and administrative capacity, a strong level of administrative centralization, and endemic corruption. In general, this is accompanied by missing financial resources, a lack of expertise in the administration, and a stark fluctuation of personnel due to significantly lower wages within the ministries compared to the private sector. With the upcoming and rapidly aggravating economic and fiscal crises, all of these detrimental factors became even more salient within the administrations, making successful goal attainment and coordination significantly more difficult in the last years (Ágh, 2016, p. 159, 2011a, p. 12).

The persisting governance deficits are particularly salient for the ENP (Ukraine, Moldova) and IPA states (Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, Serbia),[198] where the accompanying symptoms are starkly present or even worsened during the last years. This resulted, as a consequence, either in the stalling of the association process or the temporary interruption of ENI funding like in the case of Moldova, where a massive case of corruption was identified in the government, leading to the intermediate termination of financial support (Ágh, 2014, p. 133; Committee of the Regions, 2016a, 2014b; Studennikov, 2015). However, the persisting governance deficits are observable among the third countries and are also present in some of the EU member states from the Danube Region. Particularly Romania and Bulgaria still show massive governance deficits. In the area of Cohesion Policy, this unfolded in a long-time persisting failure to adequately access reserved community funds (European Commission, 2018). This also had a detrimental impact on their policy implementation within the EUSDR framework (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016b, p. 9, 2015, p. 11; Valchev, 2015, p. 93).

Another detrimental impact of the economic and financial crises was the further centralization of administrative structures. Although, as already outlined, most of the countries were constituted already as centralized unitary states, the stipulated necessity to carry out budget cuts was carried out primarily at the expanse of the regional and local level, particularly in the lower part of the Danube Region. Despite the austerity measures to the disadvantage of the LRAs, the impact of the financial crises hit the national governments severely, which were, and partially still are, massively struggling with decreasing financial resources. This further exacerbated the national administrations' already existing operational problems not just in a domestic dimension, but particularly regarding the EUSDR (Schneider, 2015, p. 77). Although obliged to participate in the coordination and implementation process actively, the EUSDR states, especially the third countries, are confronted with a partially insurmountable obstacle to adequately engaging within the implementation process (EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, p. 6; Varga, 2012). Some of the governments are even lacking the financial capacity to cover travel expenses for EUSDR events, like SG meetings in the sphere of implementation, which further detrimentally impacts the successful coordination and implementation efforts (see next chapter). Despite the financial support by the two Technical Assistance Facilities for the realization of various events and projects or the allocated travel reimbursements by some

[198] The administrative structure of all five states are characterized by a high degree of politicization, insufficient human resources (e.g., lack of professionalism, lack of expertise, high fluctuation rates), poor institutional and administrative capacities, lack of transparency, and in general, very poor program management in terms of IPA and ENI (Committee of the Regions, 2014b, 2014a).

EUSDR governments for the third countries (e.g., by the Czech Republic in its role as coordinator of PA 2), these are only "a financial drop in the ocean".

This also applies to other financial contributions by individual governmental actors. For example, Hungary allocated significant funding to support the implementation process, like co-financing a feasibility study on the flood forecasting systems in the Danube region in PA 5 (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, p. 4). The province of Baden-Wuerttemberg was also a considerable supporting actor with major financial contributions to the establishment of the Danube Strategy Point. However, the massive underfinancing of the EUSDR continued and is still not overcome until today. As a result, the general problems, for example, regarding actor attendance persist and lead in various cases to a broad actor-demobilization during the implementation process and thus to incomprehensive goal attainment in terms of territorial coverage (EUSDR PAC 2, 2015, p. 14; EUSDR PAC 9, 2016a).

Funding and budgetary provisions during the MFF 2007-2013

While the EUSDR states were widely unable or unwilling (e.g., the debate concerning the creation of an EGTC) to contribute with significant allocations to the strategy, the lack of comprehensive funding from the EU level died likewise persist during the implementation phase. As already outlined in the previous polity chapter (see chapter 6.2.2), the implementation phase kick-off happened in an already far progressed state of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) with already half depleted EU Structural Policy funds. Massive competition by already ongoing projects and the poor alignment between the EUSDR and Structural Policy programs were factors that contributed to overall insufficient funding. This applied in particular for the transnational Interreg B strand. While the macro-regional predecessor, namely the EUSBSR, used the aligned program (Interreg Baltic Sea Region) as one of the most important funding opportunities, such a territorially aligned program was not present at the beginning of the implementation phase. Actors and stakeholders of the EUSDR were, as a consequence, forced to resort to the territorially much larger SEE program or to a significantly less degree to the Central Europe program (EUSDR PAC 5, 2012, pp. 5–6; EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, p. 13). A further major problem in terms of financial support was the complexity of the transnational programs in general and especially the lack of pre-financing opportunities for projects. Even in the case of a successful tender application, the stakeholders were often forced to wait for financial reimbursement by the programs for more than half a year. This constituted a major challenge due to the very limited financial capabilities and led to a diminished actor-willingness to mobilize own funding during the policy implementation, which further paralyzed the goal attainment in the first years of the strategy.

To give a more comprehensive insight concerning the financial framework conditions within the sphere of implementation, each Priority Area should be put under a brief individual assessment. A temporal differentiation in this regard will be made, dividing the assessment period in the past (2007-2013) and current (2014-2020) Multiannual Financial Framework. A particular analytical focus is put on the general financial situation, their specific impact on the goal attainment, and eventually necessary complementary measures, which were carried out to overcome the financial straits:

- Priority Area 1a (Mobility – Inland Waterways): The national and supranational budget restrictions constituted for the PA a massive challenge. Being dependent on large-scale financial support to carry out the necessary measures in infrastructural development, the PA was faced with an enormous lack of financial resources (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2012, p. 3, 2012, p. 7). The lack of adequate funding was even so comprehensive that the PA was forced to starkly reduce its activities and concentrate its efforts in the limelight of the outgoing MFF on the project preparation for the post-2014 period. A particular focus was put on aligning the Operational Programs to increase the potential success rates in terms of accessing the Connecting Europe Facility and the Danube Transnational Program in the future. This was carried out with financial support of the already achieved seed money from the SEE program, the TAF-DRP grant scheme, or national budgets. (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2014, p. 7, 2013, p. 4).
- Priority Area 1b (Mobility – Rail, Road and Air): Similarly to its mobility counterpart, the PA signaled already from the beginning of the implementation phase a lack of available funding, which was causing major problems in terms of project initialization. The general budget restrictions and the existing EU funding schemes were considered as being widely insufficient in terms of comprehensive goal attainment (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2013, p. 7, 2012, pp. 5–6). Consequentially this also impacted the project preparation activities, which were concentrated on the upcoming MFF. While the PA of Waterways focused on the potential attainment of large-scale project funding, the PA of Rail, Road, and Air focused on the prospective realization of small scale “soft” projects like feasibility studies and the general collection of available information. This was justified with the necessity first to create a “common transport vision”, which would only need significantly smaller financial allocations and is also a necessary precondition in terms of prospective implementation efforts (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2014, p. 4). As potential funding opportunities for the post-2014 period, the Connecting

Europe Facility, IPA II, and ENPI grants were identified as main sources (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2014, p. 6, 2013, p. 7).

- Priority Area 2 (Sustainable Energy): Within the area of Higher Sustainable Energy, the EUSDR actors were confronted with a massive lack of financial resources. The lack of financial capabilities was even so severe for some of the countries in the lower Danube Region that they were unable to cover their travel expenses and were thus unable to attend the various events of the PA (EUSDR PAC 2, 2012, p. 11). The consequence was a very unsatisfying participation rate at SG meetings right from the implementation phase. While the general project preparation was financed with already mentioned EU grant schemes like (e.g., TAF-DRP), another funding source was the "Intelligent Energy Europe" program, a sub-program of Horizon 2020. A cost takeover of the travel expenses was further realized by the two PACs, namely the Czech Republic and Hungary, which stepped up by taking over not only the travel costs of the former abstaining countries but also organized the SG meetings largely at their own financial expense (EUSDR PAC 2, 2014, p. 14). Similar to the other PAs, major efforts were put into the project preparation for the upcoming MFF. The PACs in this regard stressed that it would be important to identify additional financial instruments (e.g., HORIZON 2020, CEF, etc.) aside from the DTP, because of its prospective small-scale project funding, which would be no sustainable alone-standing solution in terms of project financing (EUSDR PAC 2, 2014, p. 15).
- Priority Area 3 (Culture and Tourism): Already at the beginning of the implementation phase, the PACs of Culture and Tourism stipulated that there are "[…]no special funds for Danube Region projects[…]". Confronted with these detrimental starting conditions, the PACs constituted that project funding will only be realized through a comprehensive co-funding approach combining national budgets, sources from the SEE program, Interreg A programs, and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Program (EUSDR PAC 3, 2012, p. 11). Despite the PA members' consequential efforts to realize such a combined funding approach and thus create financial leverage in this particular area of intervention, the PA's budgetary situation remained widely dissatisfying. The overall very limited access to adequate funding, which applied in particular for the area of culture (EUSDR PAC 3, 2013, p. 7), led as a result already in 2013/2014 to the assessment by the PACs that the intended implementation activities have to be carried out in a persisting "financial vacuum"

(EUSDR PAC 3, 2014, p. 4, 2013, p. 3). This limited the potential implementation success severely.

- Priority Area 4 (Water Quality): While the PA started operations with the accompanying anticipations to realize large-scale investment projects in the area of water quality, actors and stakeholders were soon confronted with the quite limited funding opportunities (EUSDR PAC 4, 2012, p. 5, 2012, p. 10). The PACs soon reacted to this by stating in the first and second implementation report that visible implementation results will not be probable, especially because the CE and especially SEE programs had already often closed their final calls for the ongoing funding period, making it impossible in many cases to attain successfully adequate project funding (EUSDR PAC 4, 2013, p. 10, 2012, p. 14). Prior efforts by the PACs to influence the SEE program's application procedure in the ongoing cycle, like to adapt the evaluation criteria for project proposals, were also not successful (EUSDR PAC 4, 2012, p. 9). The further inability to access other EU funding schemes forced the PACs to concentrate on the upcoming MFF. Although the new program cycle, especially in the limelight of the new DTP program, was considered as promising financial opportunity, the PACs also stated that it would not be the "[…]universal solution for all the financing issues of the EUSDR projects[…]" due to the anticipated moderate budget of the program (EUSDR PAC 4, 2014, p. 16, 2013, p. 3, 2013, p. 11). Members of the PA nevertheless concentrated their efforts on incorporating the issue of Water Quality into their prospective Operational Programs (EUSDR PAC 4, 2014, p. 14). Due to the lack of financial capacities, the two PACs, namely Hungary and Slovakia, together with the BDCP and with the help of the Technical Assistance Grant had to step up again to cover the participation costs of the third countries at meetings and events to maintain operational capacity within the network (EUSDR PAC 4, 2014, p. 20, 2013, p. 12).
- Priority Area 5 (Environmental Risks): In the area of environmental risks, the PACs soon acknowledged the lack of allocations by stating that an emphasis should be put on the –least costly– strengthening of the coordination and communication process (EUSDR PAC 5, 2012, pp. 4–6). In their assessment, the PACs further noted concerning the state of current project applications, similarly to other PAs, that most calls for project submissions were closed already before PA members could draft any proposals. In 2013 the PACs therefore already concluded that "[…]'there is no left over money' in the system […]" (EUSDR PAC 5, 2013, pp. 3–4). In terms of funding, the PA concentrated its efforts on the project preparation for the MFF 2014-2020 and

emphasized the importance of including environmental risks in the national Operational Programs (EUSDR PAC 5, 2013, p. 5). In this regard, a major issue was the adequate addressing of the macro-region's territorial scope in the project proposals, which was often lacking. However, this limited their chance to attain successful funding through the DTP (EUSDR PAC 5, 2013, p. 4). Already drafted project applications, like the Flood Risk Management Program, were overhauled to use the expected financial momentum more efficiently in terms of prospective implementation activities (EUSDR PAC 5, 2014, p. 10).

- Priority Area 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes): Initial high expectations among non-governmental stakeholders, who expected new and significant funding opportunities for environmental projects in the Danube Area, were faced with very detrimental budgetary conditions. This applied especially concerning the third countries, who were facing difficulties even to attend the PA meetings. In various cases, the result was an absence at SG meetings, leading consequentially to a demobilization within the Policy network (EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, pp. 8–10). In terms of general funding, the PA was widely faced with a depletion of the various potentially available funding programs (EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, p. 13) and a missing alignment with the SEE program's policy issues. Further difficulties unfolded due to the unclear relationships between various budgets and the EUSDR, for example, the ENPI-CBC budgets, whose potential usability in this regard remained unclear for actors and stakeholders (EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, p. 8). The absence of general funding guidelines further forced actors and stakeholders to identify on a case-to-case basis whether funding by a particular grant scheme was even possible (EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, p. 13), which then again limited the potential implementation efficiency. In this limelight, the PA referred to the MFF 2014-2020 as the temporal starting point of actual comprehensive project implementation activities while simultaneously warning of too high expectations concerning the DTP (EUSDR PAC 6, 2014, p. 11).
- Priority Area 7 (Knowledge Society): The issue of Knowledge Society and, in particular, Research and Development constituted in several ways specific framework conditions. While the EU funds showed a general depletion and far progressed project cycles in this policy area, the underfunding of the R&D sector was even in a domestic dimension particularly salient within a large number of Danube states. As a result, the EUSDR actors engaged in talks with the EC to secure adequate funding opportunities for the upcoming MFF (EUSDR PAC 7, 2013, p. 3), while concurrently they struggled,

due to their limited financial capabilities, to participate within the actual project preparations of the PA. As a result, they were, in various cases, not even able to attend the meetings. To prevent the threatening sclerotization of the network, like in the form of broad actor absence and limited implementation activities, the Federal Republic of Germany stepped up as (Financial) Political Promoter. Although the country was not in charge as the coordinator for the area, it provided significant financial and technical support through its Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). In this regard, the government did not only supply help by hosting various SG meetings but also contributed with 5 million EUR to establish a research, innovation, and network-building fund to give the project preparation a new momentum (EUSDR PAC 7, 2013, p. 9). With this support, various workshops were realized, which focused on preparing the project applications for the following MFF and especially towards financing schemes like Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, DTP, and other allocations (EUSDR PAC 7, 2014, p. 8).

- Priority Area 8 (Competitiveness): The governmental financial support to kick-start the implementation in the light of widely non-available funding was also adopted by the province of Baden-Wuerttemberg. The provincial government provided seed capital and supplied technical assistance for project preparation, especially in the area of innovation and technology transfer, development of rural areas, environmental measures, and vocational training programs (EUSDR PAC 8, 2013, p. 4). However, a concentration of financial support on some specific topics was necessary due to the particularly broad thematic scope within the PA. As extraordinarily active PAC, Baden-Wuerttemberg (and also Croatia) issued criticism that despite the provided support by the Technical Assistance measures, the current MFF (2007-2013) and its programs are often characterized by overly complex provisions and very high compulsory co-financing rates (25 %), which prevents actors from the application. Therefore, they emphasized that in the following MFF, a more simple application procedure and reliable financial support are necessary. Otherwise, the EUSDR as such would be "doomed to fail" (EUSDR PAC 8, 2014, p. 7).
- Priority Area 9 (People and Skills): The Priority Area of People and Skills started the implementation activities with strong political support by the EU institutions, who pushed vocational education and training among others as new major policy challenges on the EU level. With recent major mainstream programs like the Erasmus+, various significant financial allocations were created in the area of VET and thus resulting in

rather promising framework conditions for the PA. Despite this beneficial situation, the funding of the PA remained, however, ambivalent in the time-period. While the PACs managed to achieve successful funding for individual projects through the CE program (EUSDR PAC 9, 2012b, p. 4) or received Technical Assistance Funds by the EC, namely 200.000 EUR for 2012-2013 (EUSDR PAC 9, 2012b, p. 10), it soon became obvious that the expected major financial coverage will not be achieved in the ongoing MFF. Especially in terms of the initially promising Erasmus+ funds, which were considered as adequate due to their transnational character, the alignment between the specific Danube Region related challenges and the program could not be realized in a satisfying way (EUSDR PAC 9, 2014, p. 12, 2012a, p. 10). Similar to its counterparts, the PA was therefore forced to focus on project preparation for the upcoming MFF. Besides the general high hopes towards the new general financial framework, the PA emphasized the particular importance of the current and future available small-scale project funding. New initiatives like the "START-Danube Region Project Fund", which was established by PA 10, were considered as an important future financial source among others (EUSDR PAC 9, 2014, p. 13).

- Priority Area 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation): Due to its particular character as overarching PA, which is mandated to strengthen the institutional cooperation and the governance in the EUSDR, the actors within the area were confronted with challenging framework conditions. The above-stated lack of financial support for basically all PAs did put the actors of PA 10 in a very tight spot concerning the fulfillment of their designated tasks. At the same time, insufficient funding also impacted the activity of the PA itself. Various initiatives, especially in the area of governance improvement (e.g., feasibility study on civil society, training projects for project promoters), could not be realized due to the lack of funding, which consequentially constituted a major setback (EUSDR PAC 10, 2013, p. 10). Besides the typical and several times outlined preparation for the upcoming MFF (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, pp. 3–4), the PA engaged in creating further funding opportunities. The "Danube Financing Dialogue", for example, was a major stakeholder network event to exchange information concerning potential funding opportunities outside the Structural Funds and thus create a platform where project partners and financiers (e.g., international financing institutions) could get in touch. These efforts were also framed by the already outlined management of the TAF-DRP budgets and the START-Danube Region Project fund as seed money facility for project pre-financing. The cooperation with the EIB/BDCP also

followed this aim to realize further grants/loans for project applications (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, pp. 6–7).

- Priority Area 11 (Security): The PA was confronted with particular challenges in identifying funding opportunities for the policy area. It is a highly securitized policy domain and is considered a domestic or intergovernmental policy topic by the states. Specific funding for this area on the EU level was particularly limited and was not existing within the Structural Policy funds. Therefore, the PACs were right from the beginning of the implementation phase in need to continuously analyze potential funding opportunities, either through direct support by the EC (ISEC program) or through NGOs' support, like the German Hanns-Seidel-Foundation and Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, who supported various projects financially. Although the financial support by the NGOs were most often comparably small-scale contributions, and only of short-term nature, they nevertheless were of significant added-value for the PA due to its primary focus on establishing new macro-regional networks between the decision-makers (EUSDR PAC 11, 2014, p. 3, 2013, p. 3). While the PACs stipulated that efforts will be concentrated on the MFF 2014-2020, they also noted that the DTP would only be of minor importance due to the specific character of the policy area and thus making it even more important to discover other financial sources (EUSDR PAC 11, 2014, p. 16).

The lack of funding constituted a major problem in general and within the individual PAs in the outgoing MFF cycle regarding the goal attainment. Actors and stakeholders were often forced to put their project implementation on hold and concentrate their efforts on the post-2014 period. Even the PA 10, which was mandated to support the implementation and general governance process by identifying new funding opportunities or assisting with technical assistance, could not fulfill its originally designated role in a satisfying way (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 4). While some governments were originally unable to attend important meetings and events due to their lack of financial capabilities and could only overcome this by reimbursements of the travel expenses by other governments in some of the PAs, others were forced to reduce their participation activities, resulting in a wide demobilization of actors within these PAs. The result was a major dissatisfaction with the current financial framework, which was openly stated alongside the actors' open criticism.

This dissatisfaction was not only very present within the sphere of implementation but was rather an omnipresent mood within the whole strategy. In a survey of the EC in 2013, around 79 % of the questioned stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that there is an evident need for

more funding within the strategy. More than 50 % also stipulated that the alignment between the funding opportunities and the policy goals was not sufficient and successful in general (European Commission, 2013b, p. 6).

In this limelight, high expectations were issued concerning the incoming MFF 2014-2020 not just in the specific terms of the EUSDR, but also regarding the general Structural Policy. The Central European member states especially showed high-level activity to lobby for a beneficial financial framework. This led to the so-called informal "Friends of Cohesion" group. This informal group comprises 15 EU member states, from which seven are EUSDR countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), and had the aim to increase or at least pertain the financial budget within the cohesion, agricultural and regional development funding regarding the upcoming EU budget (Friends of Cohesion, 2012).

Funding and budgetary provisions during the MFF 2014-2020

The new Multiannual Financial Framework in the year 2014 constituted much more beneficial framework conditions for the EUSDR than the previous program cycle. For the first time, the MRS, in general, found their way in the ETC regulation (Art. 8(3)(d) Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013), where MRS projects were explicitly stipulated as being eligible for funding. The most important innovation for the Danube Region was, in this regard, without doubt, the new *Danube Transnational Programme* (DTP), which was created as a new transnational ETC program.[199] The DTP is in contrast to the SEE program in its territorial scope specifically aligned to the EUSDR, which also means a significantly smaller territorial coverage. In contrast to the SEE program, the DTP now covers 14 instead of the prior 16 states. While this on the first sight no major difference, the covered population in the DTP program accounts for approximately 115 million people in comparison to the approximate 200 million of the SEE program, making a difference of 85 million people (Danube Transnational Programme, 2016, p. 14; Interreg South East Europe, 2007, p. 8).

[199] While the DTP was formally not connected to the EUSDR and was officially constituted to "[…]improve only the framework conditions…[…]" (Wulf, 2016, p. 397), it was considered by participating actors and stakeholders in both spheres as the main source of funding, which qualifies it therefore as an integral polity element of the strategy.

Figure 16 The geographic coverage of the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP)



Source: (Danube Transnational Programme, 2016, p. 13)

The new transnational program is constituted with roughly 222 million EUR for the program area until 2020. The total sum comprises of 202,1 million EUR from the European Regional Development Fund, 19,8 million EUR from the Instrument for Pre-Accession and is planned to be complemented by roughly 20 million EUR originating from national funding. This constitutes an EU co-financing rate of 85 % (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, pp. 122–123). While the total available sum provided by the DTP program is considerably lower than by the SEE, namely 222 million compared to the former 246 million EUR, the new geographic scope of the program area constitutes in combination with the new total sum a considerably higher funding per capita. In the SEE program, the average available allocation per capita was approx. 1,23 EUR, while in the new program, the sum is around 1,93 EUR per citizen.

Based on a common agreement between the EC and the 14 Danube countries, the mutual political support of EUSDR and DTP was commonly acknowledged (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, p. 7). This lead to an improved program alignment between DTP and EUSDR, especially in terms of the particular policy goal setting, which should improve the successful financial support of project applications in the Danube Region.

Table 11 Policy alignment of the DTP

Priority Axes of the DTP	Total (ERDF + IPA) Funding for the Priority Axes (national + union funds)	DTP specific objective	Related EUSDR Priority Area (PA) where specific aspects are covered	Thematic Objective of the CPR
(1) Innovative and socially responsible Danube region	72.995.850 EUR	1.1 Improve the institutional and infrastructural framework conditions and policy instruments for research & innovation to ensure a broader access to knowledge for the development of new technologies and the social dimension of innovation	PA 07 | Knowledge Society PA 08 | Competitiveness PA 04 | Water Quality	1 Research & innovation
		1.2 Foster innovative learning systems to increase competences of employees in the business sector, strengthen entrepreneurial culture and learning contributing to better meet social needs and the delivery of services in the general interest	PA 08 | Competitiveness PA 09 | People & Skills	1 Research & innovation
(2) Environment and culture responsible Danube region	83.423.830 EUR	2.1 Strengthen joint and integrated approaches to further develop and implement River Basin Management Plans in the Partner States in line with the overall Danube River Basin Management Plan in order to improve transnational water management and flood risk prevention contributing to the sustainable provision of ecosystem services	PA 04 | Water Quality PA 05 | Environmental Risks	6 Environment
		2.2 Strengthen joint and integrated approaches to preserve and manage the diversity of natural and cultural heritage and resources in the Danube region as a basis for sustainable development and growth strategies	PA 03 | Culture & Tourism	6 Environment
		2.3 Strengthen effective approaches to preservation, restoring and management of bio-corridors and wetlands with transnational relevance to contribute to the better conservation status of ecosystems of European relevance	PA 06 | Biodiversity, landscapes, quality of air and soils	6 Environment
		2.4 Establish and develop a more effective governance system for environmental protection addressing emergency situations and improve the preparedness of public authorities and civil protection organization contributing to the reduction of risks and impact on ecosystem services, biodiversity and human health.	PA 05 | Environmental Risks	6 Environment
(3) Better connected and energy responsible Danube region	54.740.889 EUR	3.1 Improve planning, coordination and practical solutions for an environmentally-friendly, low-carbon and safer transport network and services in the program area contributing to a balanced accessibility of urban and rural areas	PA 1B | Mobility | Rail-Road-Air PA 1A | Mobility | Waterways	7 Transport
		3.2 Contribute to the energy security and energy efficiency of the region by supporting the development of joint regional storage and	PA 02 | Energy	

		distribution solutions and strategies for increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy usage		
(4) Well governed Danube region	33.890.932 EUR	4.1 Strengthen multilevel- and transnational governance and institutional capacities and provide viable institutional and legal frameworks for more effective, wider and deeper transnational cooperation across the Danube region in areas with major societal challenges	PA 10 | Institutional capacity and cooperation PA 09 | People & Skills PA 11 | Security	11 Governance
		4.2 Improve the governance system and the capabilities and capacities of public institutions and key actors involved in complex transnational project development to implement the EUSDR in a more effective way	All PAs	
(5) Ensure the efficient and smooth implementation of the Danube Transnational Programme.	17.932.338 EUR			

Source: Own depiction based on (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, p. 129)

As shown on the above-depicted table, the DTP was realized in the light of a comprehensive mutual alignment. The EC and the Danube states managed to generate for each EUSDR Priority Area an appropriate DTP objective. The DTP's goal-setting was further aligned with the Thematic Objectives framework of the Common Provisions Regulation, which was also carried out during the drafting process of the EUSDR. Compared to the SEE program, a major concentration of policy issues was carried out to improve further the DTP's impact in the Danube Region (Danube Transnational Programme, 2016, p. 21).

In contrast to the major expectations among the actors and stakeholders, who anticipated comprehensive financial support of projects by the DTP, this was not remotely the case. Although Priority Areas like Mobility (PA 1a and b) and Energy (PA 2) were included within the program scheme, for example, which are considered as policy areas being in need of large-scale investments, the DTP constituted already in its program documents that the program will not provide the allocations for such major investments. Instead, the major focus will be put on so-called "soft type interventions", meaning that the provision of allocations will be more of a small-scale nature and should be directed at issues like training of administrative staff, governance capacity building, dissemination and analyses, and other similar measures (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, p. 30). The rejection of large-scale investments by the DTP was again justified with the availability of other financing sources, which would be at

the disposal of EUSDR actors in the MFF 2014-2020.[200]

The intervention logic of the DTP is based on tackling transnational/macro-regional issues and challenges. This should be complemented by the creation of a strong vertical (between the different levels of government) and horizontal (between the program states across administrative boundaries) cooperation framework. This logic is also emphasized regarding the DTP's finance mechanism, which stipulates that general funding should be realized through cross-mobilization of the various potential allocations, resulting in a combined approach between the DTP and other financial sources (Danube Transnational Programme, 2016, pp. 26–28). In this regard, the DTP refers to the generally available EU finds, which theoretically provide in the area of *Regional and Cohesion Policy* of over 351 billion EUR for the time-period between 2014 and 2020 (European Commission, 2014a). Of these designated funds, approximately 100 billion EUR are explicitly allocated for the EU member states located in the Danube Region (Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg excluded). For the third countries, additional funding is allocated through the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA II) and the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI), which additionally provides potential funding between 80 million EUR and 1 billion EUR for each state.

Table 12 Allocations for the EUSDR states within the IPA II and ENI programs

Country		**TOTAL (in million EUR) 2014-2020**
IPA	Bosnia & Hercegovina	165,8
	Montenegro	270,5
	Serbia	195,1
ENI[201]	Moldova	79
	Ukraine	1000

Source: Own depiction based on (European Commission.eu)

[200] In its programming document, the DTP refers to the following funding sources: EU Water Framework Directive (2000), TEN-T Connecting Europe, EU Biodiversity strategy (2011), Prioritized Action Frameworks for NATURA2000, EU 7th Environmental Action Programme, EU Climate and energy package, Energy efficiency plans / SET plans, SME Small Business Act, EU Smart Specialisation Platform, The Danube Innovation Partnership, European Research Area, Strategic Research Agendas developed under the Joint Programming Initiatives, Western Balkan R&D Strategy for Innovation – WISE (drafted with World Bank / RCC to monitor progress) (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, p. 13).

[201] The ENI funds (2014-2020) for Ukraine must be put into context because the total sum of the ENI program is allocated for the area of the whole country. Ukraine is however only participating with the regions Chernivetska Oblast, Ivano-Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast, Odessa Oblast in the EUSDR as such. As a consequence only a small part of the total allocations can be redirected for eventual goal attainments within the macro-regional framework. The EUR 79 million for the Republic of Moldova constitutes only the allocations of 2017. Due to a major fraud case in the banking system of the country the EU suspended its allocations from 2014 until 2017.

The EUSDR Action Plan, as still valid policy document, and the DTP cooperation program for the MFF 2014-2020 refer furthermore to other financing institutions and sources outside the EU framework. The European Investment bank (EIB) with the Budapest Danube Contact Point (BDCP), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the World Bank, or the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), among other financing institutions, were listed as potential project partners (Panaitescu and Trandafir, 2015, pp. 94–95).

While these new funding opportunities, especially the DTP, provided, in general, a more promising financial framework for the strategy, it constituted, however, nowhere near a panacea for solving the general underfunding of the EUSDR. The stipulated high expectations towards the DTP were already before the beginning of the new MFF widely unrealistic in terms of project financing. Although the new program provided a comparably larger budget than the SEE in terms of per capita support, the program's overall budget is still considered small, especially in the limelight of the constituted original goal settings, which should be tackled by the EUSDR. Priority Areas like Mobility or Energy (PA 1 and PA 2) made it already during the prior MFF obvious that they would be in need of large-scale investments, which was again not designated in the financial framework of the DTP program. This constituted again a salient expectations-capability gap, particularly in terms of the DTP's considered role as the most important funding source of the EUSDR. A pertaining issue, which is not a particular DTP problem but applies to all EU funding schemes in general, is the overall program complexity and the accompanying problems regarding cross-funding. While the absorption rate of Structural Funds experienced a significant improvement among the EU member states in the last years (European Commission, 2018), this applies only partially for the third-states within their particular programs. Another general difficulty is the issue co-financing itself. Despite the comparably high share of co-financing by the EU programs, the governmental entities are forced to go through a waiting period of six to eight months until reimbursement. This poses a major problem during the project preparation phase due to the still pertaining struggle of the governments with lacking financial capabilities (Trandafir and Panaitescu, 2015, p. 88). The originally designated usage of cross-budget allocations also unfolds as significantly more difficult than expected. Especially regarding the internal and external dimension of funding, more precisely the Structural Funds and the IPA and ENI funds, a comprehensive cross-budget usage was limited due to restrictions by the programs themselves, administrative hurdles, the timing of calls, and the already outlined lack of qualified and experienced staff within some national administrations among others (Trandafir and Panaitescu, 2015, p. 87). Besides the formal challenges, another factor is to be considered regarding social-capital and the

maximization of funding to the own advantage (keyword: perceived zero-sum game). In contrast to the transnational and interregional strands (Interreg B and C) of the ETC, the cross-border dimension (Interreg A) as well as the IPA and ENI funds are either concentrated on a very specific and comparably small cross-border region or are designated for explicit domestic usage within the regions and countries. In the light of the typical cost-benefit ratio of governments, which is especially in the cross-border dimension primarily based on making the decision to the own advantage (see chapter 2.4.2), a broad and comprehensive cross-border mobilization of Interreg A funding was very unlikely from the beginning.

These rather mixed financial framework conditions within the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020) also affected the Priority Areas as such, who have to a diverging degree success in regard of attaining adequate project funding:

- Priority Area 1a (Mobility – Inland Waterways): With the beginning of the new MFF, the PA successfully managed to achieve considerable more support than before. In the years between 2015 and 2017, four projects were approved for funding through the Connecting Europe Facility with a considerable volume of 166 million EUR (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2016, p. 6). Five projects were additionally approved for funding by the DTP with the financial support of 11,4 million EUR (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2017, p. 22). In comparison to the first reporting period, this constituted a significant step forward. However, problems in terms of comprehensive project financing still pertain. The strongly differing financial capabilities of the individual waterway administrations also result in varying financial contributions for waterway maintenance in the macro-region (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2016, p. 8). While the uneven financial support of projects poses a significant challenge, an even bigger problem is the general lack of predictability and stability in terms of project funding, which aggravated during the two last years of reporting (2016-2017). Although many projects are in the pipeline and waiting for implementation, the CEF's project calls and the DTP are increasingly characterized by major delays or unexpected cancellations, often happening on short-notice. These undesignated setbacks unfold a particularly detrimental effect on the implementation procedure. In contrast to the lengthy and cumbersome planning and permitting procedures (e.g., the fulfillment of environmental regulations, etc.) of infrastructure projects, which need a secure funding framework, this is less and less the case within the PA. Since then, project implementation becomes increasingly unsteady and thus constitutes an increasingly salient problem (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2017, p. 22, 2016, pp. 15–16).

- Priority Area 1b (Mobility – Rail, Road, and Air): The beginning of the new MFF was accompanied by high hopes from the PACs, who were in dire need of financial support, especially after their prior unsuccessful years in terms of funding. The upcoming CEF, ERDF, IPA, ENPI grants, and the DTP program were expected as much more promising by the coordinators in terms of prospective project implementation (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2015, p. 25, 2015, p. 11). Already after one year in the new MFF cycle, these expectations turned out to be not fulfillable. While the cooperation with financial institutions remain widely modest and are realized mainly in the form of joint attendances at PA events (e.g., EIB, WB, EBRD) (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2016, p. 25), efforts by the PACs to attain EU funding turns out again to be widely unsuccessful. Despite the proper identification of potential funding sources, again, no projects obtained comprehensive financial support. Even applications for the DTP program, which were considered as the most promising allocation source, failed in this regard, constituting a major setback for the project implementation. This resulted also in a very negative outlook by the PACs, who stipulate that "[…]contrary to presently accepted and promoted '3x NO', it is necessary to accept that without own funds and strong technical secretariat of each PA much-desired progress will be slow and in many cases negligible."(EUSDR PAC 1b, 2017, p. 12, 2017, p. 19).
- Priority Area 2 (Sustainable Energy): As a Priority Area, which requires extensive financial support due to the often cost-intensive nature of investments in the area of energy policy, the prior lack of allocations during the MFF 2007-2013 also limited the scope of projects significantly. This overall picture also pertains partially to the new MFF cycle. While large-scale financial support for the projects is still not attained by the PACs for the implementation activities and marks a significant pertaining challenge in this regard, the coordinators managed to achieve an ongoing small-scale financial support through various sources. Financial aid is as a result granted among others for research activities (e.g., feasibility studies) or the coordination of networking approaches (e.g., at common events) by the Technical Assistance Grant, the TAF-DRP or the new seed-money facility START (EUSDR PAC 2, 2016a, pp. 23–24). Until the end of the second reporting period of 2016, the financial framework conditions only slightly improved. Projects like the "Danube Region Geothermal Concept" received, for example, successful funding by the DTP. However, this is no particular improvement, but rather a successful transition of funding due to the already achieved financial support of the project during the prior MFF through the START funds. The extent of project

funding additionally remained within the PA in general rather modest (EUSDR PAC 2, 2016a, p. 24, 2016b, p. 17).

- Priority Area 3 (Culture and Tourism)[202]: With the insufficient access to progress reports by the PACs, a comprehensive assessment of the financial framework within the PA is not possible, especially regarding the period between 2016 and 2017. The only available progress reports for the MFF 2014-2020, namely for 2015, show the persisting presence of a 'financial vacuum" for the Priority Area. In terms of project implementation, the PACs were therefore forced to rely mainly on the Technical Assistance Grant while not achieving other significant funding sources (EUSDR PAC 3, 2015, p. 5). Despite this lack of financial support, which already detrimentally affected the implementation process in the prior MFF, the financial framework conditions are further aggravated by an ill-defined alignment between project ideas and funding opportunities. Although stakeholders were, for example, aware of the incoming DTP program as a new and significant potential financial source, they nevertheless concentrated the project preparation on the alignment with the SEE program, whose financial scope proved as not optimal for the Danube Region in the prior phase. A stronger focus on the DTP was only initialized in 2015, thus resulting in a delayed application for funding (EUSDR PAC 3, 2015, p. 2, 2015, p. 7).
- Priority Area 4 (Water Quality): The limited availability of funding led in the area of Water Quality to a distinct deceleration of the implementation process in the MFF 2007-2013 (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016a, p. 11). Project proposals for the following program cycle were, as a result, elaborated in bilateral meetings with representatives of the DTP program to realize adequate program alignment and, through that, successfully attain project funding for the upcoming years (EUSDR PAC 4, 2015, p. 10). The comparably intensive preparation efforts in terms of DTP funding also show the first signs of success. In the reporting period between 2016 and 2017, two major project proposals (JOINTISZA and DANUBE SEDIMENT) attained financial support from the DTP (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016b, pp. 15–16). Subsequent efforts are concentrated on further improvement of the alignment between PA and DTP by the PACs. An additional major asset constitutes the technical assistance funds (TA and TAF-DRP) as well as the seed money facilities (START), which are considered as very helpful not only in terms of

[202] Despite the PACs' obligation to biannually submit implementation reports, this was not carried out for the period of 2016 in the outlined Priority Area. Due to this reporting deficiency by the coordinators, the following assessment must be considered in the light of limited available information for the mentioned period.

project preparation but are also helpful to cover general travel expenses, particularly for the third countries (EUSDR PAC 4, 2015, pp. 26–27). Despite the successful funding of some projects, which marks a significant improvement compared to the prior MFF, the overall financial framework conditions remain still limited, rendering potential large-scale projects still unfeasible.

- Priority Area 5 (Environmental Risks): With the beginning of the new MFF cycle, the PA stipulated that it will concentrate its efforts on the DTP, the START/TAF-DRP, and the Interreg Central Europe (Interreg B) as main prospective funding sources (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 18). As a result, the project preparation focused in the following primarily on the alignment with the DTP. To realize this, the PACs were able to mobilize funding from the START and TAF-DRP grants successfully. As one PAC, Hungary's government supports the preparation activities with its national contributions, which are primarily used to realize joint meetings and workshops for the stakeholders (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, p. 8). These efforts already led in 2015 to a first successful acquisition of funding for three major projects through the DTP program (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, p. 4). The characteristic “soft-type intervention” nature of the PA projects proved as a further asset for successful financial support. Projects like “Danube Sediment” were supported with 3,5 million EUR by the DTP, while the “DriDanube” even managed to attain financial support worth of 6,8 million EUR through a cross-budget acquisition from the ERDF, IPA, and ENI funds (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016a, p. 17).
- Priority Area 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes): Although the new MFF cycle and, in particular, the DTP was anticipated by the stakeholders of the PA with high expectations, these were simultaneously accompanied by openly formulated reservations by the PACs. The coordinators warned of an eventual capabilities-expectation gap, particularly regarding the DTP with the expectable stark competition between the various project applications. Like its counterparts within the Pillar, the PA in the following focused on a comprehensive project alignment with the DTP, namely by realizing various bilateral meetings with program representatives (EUSDR PAC 6, 2015, p. 13). While this approach successfully attained financial support by the DTP for various projects like DANUBEparks Connected and LENA, the PACs stipulated simultaneously that the attainment of funding is in general unsatisfying, especially regarding other EU funds like LIFE, HORIZON 2020 or concerning national contributions (EUSDR PAC 6, 2017, p. 14, 2016, p. 18).

- Priority Area 7 (Knowledge Society): The PA's very broad thematic scope constituted somewhat differing financial framework conditions for the coordinators. While, on the one hand, they were under pressure to mobilize funding for a great variety of issues, the potentially available bandwidth of funding opportunities was significantly larger than for PAs from other Pillars resulting in a less exclusive focus on the DTP as such. The PACs still emphasized the importance of attaining a strong project alignment with the DTP program. With the Technical Assistance Grant's financial support, the PA managed to initialize various projects successfully (EUSDR PAC 7, 2016, p. 17). A particular focus was put on the diversified acquisition of funding across the various potential mainstream budgets. Initiatives like the "Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN)" or the "Programme for Funding Multilateral Scientific and Technological Cooperation Projects in the DR" were in the following established to realize a multilateral network in this regard (EUSDR PAC 7, 2017, p. 19). At the time of December 2016, this approach can be considered as quite successful. From the six depicted flagship projects of the PA's in the last available progress report, four secured funding. The bandwidth of financial support is particularly large with a project budget ranging from large-scale financial support with 69.600.000 EUR (DREAM – Danube River Research and Management) originating from various sources down to small-scale investments with 312.717 EUR (National Authorities for Apprenticeship) from the Erasmus+ budget (EUSDR PAC 7, 2016, pp. 18–19).
- Priority Area 8 (Competitiveness): To attain a successful project implementation, the PACs put a particular emphasis on the importance of the TAF-DRP and START funding, which is considered a valuable instrument. In this limelight, the PACs emphasized several times their uneasiness regarding the ending of TAF-DRP funding, which should be in December 2016 substituted by the new Technical Assistance Grants funds allocated entirely through the DSP. The new allocation structure was criticized as much more complex and bureaucratic and is thus considered to have a prospective detrimental impact on the project implementation as such (EUSDR PAC 8, 2015, pp. 10–11). Although the PA showed a similarly broad range of policy goals in terms of general project funding than its counterpart of PA 7, a comparable diversified cross-budget funding was not attained by the PACs. Despite the criticism towards the DTP, which was also criticized as too complex for stakeholders (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016a, p. 20), the program remained the main funding source for the PA. Among the depicted four flagship projects of the PA (Danube BioValNet, Learning by doing, Made in

Danube), three are supported by the DTP, while only the “National Authorities for Apprenticeship”, a cross-sectoral project with PA 7, is supported by Erasmus+. However, further details regarding the extent of the individual project support were not given within the reports (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016b, p. 18).

- Priority Area 9 (People and Skills): Due to the very extensive range of policy issues, which are embedded within the area of People and Skills, the PACs were in a beneficial position to carry out the project preparation in the light of various potentially available funding sources (e.g., Erasmus+, DTP, or the ESF, etc.). Soon after starting the new MFF cycle, the PACs acknowledged that funding would be challenging regardless of these framework conditions. Access to the Erasmus+ funding, for example, was considered very difficult due to heavy competition regarding the project application, while the label as EUSDR project did not bring any advantage in comparison to other submissions. Further complications occurred in terms of the territorial scope of the Erasmus+ funding, which excluded third countries from the financial support and therefore made comprehensive macro-regional funding in this regard not feasible (EUSDR PAC 9, 2016a, pp. 21–22, 2015, pp. 21–23). Further efforts were put into the project's alignment with the DTP program and a less degree with the Central Europe program (EUSDR PAC 9, 2015, p. 22). However, the project application towards these two programs proved very challenging for some of the countries. Although both programs provided small-scale financial support for project ideas, the states' necessary pre-financing was often a “potential barrier”, preventing the countries from a more active project application. To overcome this barrier, the PACs resorted increasingly to the usage of TA and START funds to improve project applications' success rate, which shows first signs of success (EUSDR PAC 9, 2016a, p. 21).
- Priority Area 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation): As horizontal area of intervention, which is in charge of improving institutional cooperation and governance between the actors and stakeholders of the EUSDR, PA 10 was also facing unique framework conditions concerning funding. Besides the monitoring activities, the PACs were among others responsible for allocating the often mentioned “Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects”, more commonly known as TAF-DRP. They thus were mandated to support project preparations within the EUSDR. This marked a particular challenge for the PA even after the new MFF 2014-2020. Although the absorption rates of national, regional, and local administrations improved significantly since the start of the implementation phase of the EUSDR, actors and also

stakeholders were still facing a major lack of financial and personnel resources to engage more actively (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016b, p. 11, 2015, p. 10). The above mentioned TAF-DRP and the START seed money program were assessed in this limelight as a very beneficial tool not just by the coordinators (EUSDR PAC 10, 2015, p. 27), who are managing the funds, but by basically all PAs as recipients of the funding. The high demand for seed money and technical assistance (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016b, p. 11) led to a further undertaking by the city of Vienna as PAC, which established in 2015 the already mentioned "EuroAccess" online platform. The platform provides the opportunity to give a better overview of potential funding opportunities for actors and stakeholders alike. However, this pilot project was soon put under a comprehensive revision to create a new extended platform, which should not only be available for the EUSDR exclusively but should cover all four current Macro-regional strategies (EuroAccess, 2018). The exceptional alignment of the PA 10 and the DTP, which was taken into account with an own priority axis (4 Well governed Danube Region), also contributed to a beneficial project funding with two of the three strategic projects' financial support. However, due to the major demand for funding in this particular area, the Priority Axis of the DTP program was already depleted in the first call, leaving the budget exhausted for the remaining time-period (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016a, p. 21).

- Priority Area 11 (Security): Like other PAs, the TAF-DRP and the START funds turned out to be an indispensable tool for the implementation process within PA 11 (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 3). This also derived from the PA's unique character, being a typically intergovernmental policy area and thus lacking potential financial support from the ESIF funds. This circumstance, which was already present in the prior MFF, also pertained from 2014 to 2020 and constituted challenging framework conditions despite the initiation of the DTP. As such, the DTP lacked, similar to the SEE as the main former Interreg B program for the EUSDR, a security dimension within its program and was therefore unable to provide funding for the PA (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, pp. 19–20). The result was an ongoing and continuous dependency on external sources. However, this lack of funding was partially overcome by active contributions from the national and non-governmental level. Aside from individual national contributions, like the realization of security contact points in various states, the PA received further financial support from the German Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation and the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation. The financial support of both foundations made it in the following possible to realize various projects and events, foremost in the area of networking and exchange

of experience, which were an integral part of the policy approach of the PA as such (EUSDR PAC 11, 2016a, p. 13).

6.3.3. Politics dimension

The initial euphoria accompanying the EUSDR kick-off event in April 2011 was soon overshadowed by the rapidly deteriorating economic-framework conditions, which hit the middle and especially the lower part of the Danube Region. Against the background of a massive economic recession, the original aim of a successful and active engagement in a Macro-regional Cross-Border Governance framework was soon substituted by a comprehensive economic crisis-management by the EU and the national governments. The EUSDR, as an initially important political issue, soon vanished from the EUropean high-level agenda and experienced in the following a major deprioritization across the whole macro-region (Ágh, 2014, p. 124). Attempts to counteract this trend, for example, by the German government, demonstrating high-level political support through the attendance of the German chancellor Angela Merkel at the Annual Forum in Regensburg in 2012, showed very limited success (Chilla and Sielker, 2015, p. 25).

While the economic crisis was one of the most decisive factors for the general deprioritization of the EUSDR within Brussels and the national capitals, the set of reasons for this trend is much more diverse. Besides the previously outlined problems during the implementation process, which made the general capabilities-expectations gap regarding the policy goal-setting evident, another major factor is the general lack of comprehensive project funding. The absence of both expected "added-values" in terms of policy and the polity dimension soon additionally triggered a demobilization among actors and stakeholders, who show an increasing unwillingness to actively participate in the governance process of the EUSDR (Schneider, 2015, p. 75). The extent of demobilization already led in 2013 to an overall negative picture. In a general survey carried out by the EC, 38 % of the EUSDR survey respondents, comprising governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, stated that the general level of political commitment is not satisfactory (European Commission, 2013b, p. 4). The demobilization materialized in a pertaining and increasing absence from –formally mandatory– events and meetings and a general passivity within the strategy's governance process. The participation rate by some of the countries was in the following reduced and kept to a minimal level, being often only enough to avoid a potential "naming and shaming" by other stakeholders and actors (Ágh, 2016, p. 161). The demobilization further manifested in a broad passivity concerning daily governance tasks. Over the years, some governments even refrained from giving general feedback to drafted policy documents, did not submit governmental position papers or statements to EUSDR policy

issues, or even omitted to request information about ongoing policy developments from the particular Process Promoters like PACs or the Commission (EUSDR PAC 10, 2013, p. 10). The extent of this development already led in 2014 among some academic observers to the assessment that the EUSDR became, due to its losing momentum, a 'sleeping beauty' and would be in dire need of a general relaunch and reinvention (Ágh, 2014, p. 118). Even the Commission, which in its general assessments tends to draw a much more favorable picture concerning the EUSDR, acknowledged this development by stating in its report from 2016:

> *"The political momentum has somewhat decreased at national level compared to the first years of activity. As the strategy is a long-term process, continuity in political support remains vital, in particular through the provision of capacity and resources for implementing the strategy."(European Commission, 2016b, p. 7).*

While the decrease of actor commitment impacted the governance process of the whole EUSDR, the demobilization occurred, however, in a temporal and geographic dimension unevenly. The reduction of governmental activities was not observable in all countries of the Danube Region, but took foremost place among the countries in the lower part of the Danube Region, particularly among the third countries (Trandafir and Panaitescu, 2015, p. 88). Bosnia Hercegovina, Moldova, and Montenegro were, for example, among the countries who showed, as already outlined (see chapter 6.2.3), even prior to the implementation phase evident signs of decreased actor commitment by not submitting the mandatory position papers during the drafting process. This behavioral pattern solidified during the later period in the above-mentioned often exercised absence from events and meetings and daily governance tasks (Aust, 2014, p. 48). A particular case among the third countries marked Ukraine. In comparison to the above-mentioned countries, the government in Kyiv showed in the first initiation phase major commitment and participated actively in the drafting of the policy documents. However, its active approach and engagement rapidly decreased after the kick-off event, resulting in an absence from the Annual Forums for several consecutive years. This demobilization occurred in the early stage of the implementation phase, namely even before the breakout of the so-called "Ukraine crisis" in 2014. After the breakout of the crisis, the already low-level activity deteriorated even more, resulting in Ukraine's broad demobilization as an EUSDR actor (Studennikov, 2015, pp. 63–64). A comparably more positive example among the third countries was the Republic of Serbia. Although the country's attendance rate at meetings, particularly within the sphere of implementation, was overall still lower than the member states' average participation rate (see further below), it still excelled its counterparts of the EU non-members. Despite its comparably limited financial capabilities, the country further engaged

actively as Process Promoter within the sphere of implementation by being the PAC of PA 1b (Mobility – Rail, Road and Air) and PA 7 (Knowledge Society), which both belong to group of the comparably more successful policy networks of the EUSDR.

Among the EU member states, the degree of actor-commitment was unevenly dispersed. While Bulgaria and Slovenia showed rather modest participation rates at SG meetings (see further below), Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and the German province of Baden-Wurttemberg showed a very high mobilization level. Besides a high level of ownership, which manifested in continuous participation in both spheres of the strategy, these states and regions further distinguished themselves from the others through various exceptional contributions to the governance process. These supportive measures comprised financial contributions, such as the already outlined reimbursements of travel expenses for third countries, financial, technical assistance, or the contribution of administrative resources (EUSDR PAC 7, 2013, p. 7).

While the general degree of actor-mobilization proved as often unsatisfying regarding the national actors, mobilization of LRAs is even more limited. A major restricting factor for regional mobilization is in this regard the already outlined governance framework, which creates a strict vertical dependency of LRAs from the national governments and their political "goodwill". Such support concerning the autonomous participation of LRAs within the EUSDR governance process seemed to be very unlikely already from the beginning of the implementation phase. The main issue was the already outlined "top-down" oriented decision making during the initiation and particularly drafting phase, which left the initial calls by LRAs concerning a "bottom-up" oriented governance structure unanswered. Instead, the very hierarchical decision-making pattern persisted and became, over time, even more dominant (Kaiser, 2017, p. 194). While the sphere of strategic decision-making is mainly dominated by either the Commission or the intergovernmental HLG during the implementation phase, the potential involvement of LRAs is even within the individual Priority Areas mainly restricted on case-based invitations, which happens only seldomly. An exception from this detrimental status quo constitutes, as already outlined, the two German provinces Baden-Wurttemberg and Bavaria and the Austrian city-state of Vienna. Based on their already strong formal role as equal actors within the governance structure of the EUSDR[203], they manage to not only maintain this

[203] As already outlined, the governance structure of the EUSDR does foresee formal equality between the two German provinces and national governmental actors within the EUSDR. Some limitations for the provinces persist, however. In the sphere of strategic decision-making, the provinces are empowered to step up as representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany and not as own formal entities. Within the sphere of implementation, the federal government, however, maintains the right to co-represent itself due to a domestic lack of competences by the provinces in the particular areas of intervention (e.g., PA 11). The formal empowerment of the Austrian city-state of Vienna is much more limited in this regard. As such, the provincial

position but are, in the case of Baden-Wurttemberg and Vienna, also able to significantly extend their influence. The province of Baden-Wurttemberg is, in this regard, often even acknowledged as one of the main drivers of the EUSDR.

While the provincial government stepped up already during the (pre-)initiation phase as idea-provider (e.g., "Process of Ulm", the establishment of the "Danube Office" in the city of Ulm in 2002, organization of the "Danube Days" since 2006, etc.), it extended its role as important Political Promoter even further during the implementation phase (Wulf, 2016, pp. 358–360). Significant financial contributions in the following years were originated by the province either through its role as Priority Area Coordinator of PA 8 (Competitiveness of Enterprise), namely by allocating its own sources to improve project preparation or by co-financing the Danube Strategy Point and shelter it within its regional representation in Brussels. As a result, the province was not only able to carry out a massive regional mobilization to its benefit but established through the EUSDR a comprehensive paradiplomatic approach, which also contributed to extending its influence within the EU in general (Gänzle, 2015, p. 10).

Compared to this, the Austrian city-state of Vienna is faced with much more limited room for action. It is mandated to only act on behalf of the federal government within the framework of Priority Area 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation). As coordinator of the already outlined "horizontally" working Priority Area, Vienna and Slovenia were mandated with the cross-sectoral improvement of the governance and institutional cooperation within the EUSDR, which constituted a consequential key-role within the general implementation process. Besides the cross-sectoral cooperation with the various actors and stakeholders of other PAs, a major part of the designated tasks was managing TAF-DRP funds, which were allocated through PA 10. These funds, which became one of the most important financial sources for project preparation over the years, also contributed to a valorization of Vienna's role as a governmental entity and consequently marked a specific form of LRA mobilization.

In comparison to the limited degree of LRA mobilization, the involvement of the non-governmental sphere (NGOs and IOs) is characterized by a strongly varying extent within the sphere of implementation. Some International Organizations, for example, the already mentioned ICPDR, managed to establish a strong role within the strategy and thus become an important partner for the governmental actors and other stakeholders within the sphere of implementation. However, the role of the ICPDR marks a distinct success story. Other IOs

government is only empowered to act on behalf of the federal government within the boundaries of its role as Priority Area Coordinator in the area of "Institutional Cooperation and Governance" (PA 10).

were, in contrast, not so successful and remained rather sidelined within the governance process. Again, the main cause for this is the already outlined lack of structural embeddedness of IOs within the EUSDR framework, leaving them in a similar situation as the LRAs. The institutionalized involvement of non-governmental stakeholders is overall only provided within the sphere of strategic decision-making as participants at the Annual Forums or within the sphere of implementation to the formal case-based invitation by the Steering Groups at their meetings (Chilla and Sielker, 2016, p. 8). Non-governmental actors, therefore, often concentrate on monitoring activities and their participation at events like the Annual Forum (Aust, 2014, p. 50). This, however, contributes to the general asymmetrical involvement of the non-governmental spheres. Although already influential and large transnational organizations can afford such activities, more regional or even local associations are often unable to get involved due to the lack of financial capabilities. This status quo concerning the uneven participation of the various NGO's lead to the question, whether the comprehensive societal representation in the EUSDR is actually attained, especially in the limelight of public legitimacy and accountability (Kern and Gänzle, 2013, p. 14). To counterbalance this uneven representation and to provide some remedy for smaller non-governmental entities, the "Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF)" was established in 2011, which functioned, as already outlined, as an umbrella organization for the NGOs and as an institutional opportunity for networking and coordination of activities (Gänzle, 2015, p. 11).

Procedural steering within the sphere of strategic decision-making

The procedural steering during the progressing implementation phase is characterized by the further solidification of the Commission's role as the central coordinating body of the EUSDR. This formal role as Process Promoter within the sphere of strategic decision-making, which is a product of the continuously enlarged influence by the EC during the drafting process, was in April 2011 reaffirmed by the Council, who invited the Commission to

> "[…]*to play a leading role in the strategic coordination of the key delivery stages of the − Strategy, in partnership with the Member States and in accordance with the subsidiarity principle; to safeguard an involvement of stakeholders concerned from all levels in the − region, for example through an annual forum with the aim of helping the Commission in its tasks" (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 3).*

As the leading coordinator of the governance process, the formal empowerment of the Commission experienced a further extension during the implementation phase. Similarly to the prior drafting phase, the EC does not only act as a neutral "facilitator" (European Commission, 2010c, p. 11) of the EUSDR governance process but also engages actively within the general

implementation process and tries to "put its stamp" on the policy dimension of the strategy. This is realized through a distinct interventionist approach by the EC. Besides its already strong role within the sphere of strategic decision-making, where it steps up as a central coordinating body, it also engages very actively within the individual Priority Areas (outlined further below). As Walsch points out correctly, such an approach by the EC, however, could provoke further reservations and even resistance among more intergovernmental oriented and/or EU-sceptic decision-makers due to the concerns regarding a "silent takeover" of policy agendas by the Commission (Walsch, 2017, p. 100). Based on an interview by Kodrič with an official from the Commission, the representative stated that the general impression among the EU member states is that due to the Commissions´ interventionist approach, the EUSDR is becoming more and more a policy 'by the EU, for the EU' (Kodric, 2011, p. 17).

The very top-down oriented governance approach by the Commission was, however, soon faced with a new major challenge. In contrast to its will to act as a central actor in both spheres of the strategy, it became quickly obvious that a significant capabilities-expectations gap will hinder its efforts. Being only able to provide a limited amount of personnel for these coordination activities, the DG REGIO, as DG being in charge of the internal coordination of the Commission's task concerning the EUSDR, showed distinct signs of an overload. This caused problems regarding the general governance process of the EUSDR. While the states and regions were delegated as PACs with the coordination and implementation of the policy goals within the sphere of implementation and had, as already outlined, strongly diverging success rates, the overstretching of the Commission's capabilities soon caused a general lack of leadership within the strategy. This detrimental state was tried to be counterbalanced by PAC 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation) or the *LabGroup* within the sphere of implementation, who stepped up as horizontal Process Promoters and technical support provider (Ágh, 2016, p. 158; Sielker, 2012, p. 122). The overload of the EC evoked, as a result, open criticism by various actors, who stated that the leadership by DG Regio would not be competent and sufficient in this regard and consequentially called for a strengthening of the actor-ownership within the EUSDR (Wulf, 2016, p. 361).

To overcome this problem within the sphere of strategic decision-making, the Commission resorted to the introduction of a new institutional player, namely the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), which was founded in 2014 and commenced, after lengthy negotiations regarding its status, tasks, and competencies, operations in May 2015. After debating various concepts, the proposal of Baden-Wurttemberg was accepted (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2015, pp. 109–110). The province declared its willingness to provide the DSP office facilities

in its regional representation in Brussels and stated that it would co-finance the office together with the EC. However, the DSP was soon confronted with contrasting expectations from the EUSDR actors and EC concerning its actual role within the strategy. The Commission considered the DSP as institutional support of its work as supranational Process Promoter, while the EUSDR governments emphasized a contradictory plan. According to the vision of the Danube countries, the DSP should not become an 'extended arm of the Commission, but a more intergovernmental hybrid product.' (Gänzle, 2015, p. 10). This statement was specified by a joint statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Danube Region, who stated that the DSP

> *"[…]shall support the political and operational level of the EUSDR. It will serve as a strategic working unit and as a service centre supporting the implementation, communication, monitoring and evaluation of the EUSDR. Furthermore, it will help to ensure the linking of the Strategy to the Danube Transnational Programme and other EU financial resources."* (EUSDR, 2014, p. 2).

The statement again underlined vividly the intention of the Danube governments to create the DSP as a supporting and intermediary entity, which should foremost act as Technical Promoter and not as the Commission's auxiliary Process Promoter.

Soon after establishing the DSP, it became obvious that the new institution could not reach the initial high expectations. Instead of significantly improving the governance process within the EUSDR, it is instead affected by a major capabilities-expectation gap, which also leads to strongly differing assessments by the various EUSDR actors. Although individual PACs, like PA 1b (Mobility – Rail, Road and Air), attributed the DSP a positive impact on the EUSDR governance process (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2016, p. 6), the majority of statements was rather negative. Various Priority Area Coordinators, like PA 8 (Competitiveness of Enterprise), stated that the actual role of the DSP was, in reality, more like a 'coordinator of the coordinators' and would bring no facilitation of the process management, but would instead cause only more "workload and bureaucracy" (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016a, p. 10). A major issue was in this regard the allocation of funds from the Technical Assistance Grant. While the distribution of these funds was carried out by the Commission before and was considered an important financial source for the project preparation activities, the DSP's interposition led to an additional complication of the already complex tender procedure (EUSDR PAC 8, 2015, p. 11). The pertaining disunity regarding the added value of the DSP soon resulted in a significant devaluation of the entity, followed by a withdrawal of political and financial support. The decrease of support finally led in 2018 to a major downsizing of the DSP's staff from six staff members to one employee in less than three years after its establishment. In the limelight of

these significantly diminished administrative capabilities, it is unlikely that the DSP will be able to contribute in a decisive way to the future's governance process.

While, in theory, comprehensive and successful marketing activities are a keystone for generating the necessary political and societal support (see chapter 2.4.2) within a network of RCBG, the EUSDR failed to a large extent to create the necessary awareness. In 2015 the EC carried out within its "Flash Eurobarometer 423" a major survey concerning the "Citizens' awareness and perceptions of ER regional policy". People in 9 out of 14 EUSDR countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Croatia, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia) were surveyed about their particular awareness and knowledge concerning this Macro-regional strategy in the Danube Region. The results were, in general disenchanting. Only 22 %, which equals just around a fifth of the overall respondents, had heard about the existence of the EUSDR, while 76 % stated they do not know anything about the strategy. Among the surveyed countries, Romania and Croatia showed the highest awareness rates of 43 % and 42 %, while Germany had only 11 %, the lowest rate among the surveyed countries.

Despite the obligation of Priority Area Coordinators and National Coordinators to actively promote the EUSDR towards their potential audiences, even in a temporal dimension, the awareness-raising has to be considered as widely unsuccessful. Compared to an earlier Flash Eurobarometer (FL 384) from September 2013, the general awareness concerning the EUSDR was improved by only one percent in more than two years (European Commission, 2015b, p. 22). This failure in terms of external marketing and general visibility marks, however, a particularly worrying tendency, especially in the limelight of the detrimental procedural framework conditions with the progressing actor-demobilization and further decreasing political support (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016a, p. 14, 2015, p. 10, 2014, p. 4).

The procedural steering within the sphere of implementation

The lack of comprehensive procedural steering is also partially observable within the sphere of implementation. In contrast to the above-outlined sphere of strategic decision-making, where the Commission is foremost mandated with the Process Promoter role, this task was carried out by the respective tandems of Priority Area Coordinators, who were mandated to steer the implementation process within their particular areas of intervention. Within their roles as Process Promoters, the PACs have to resort in the absence of any sanction mechanisms to typical procedural steering instruments like mediation, management, and cooperation based motivation of activities between actors and non-governmental stakeholders. While the successful procedural steering is essential for the implementation process within these Priority

Areas, this task is simultaneously depending on a set of various factors, which are either lying within the actor's particular sphere of influence or outside of it.

In the EUSDR and the sphere of implementation, the Priority Area Coordinators were particularly dependent on stakeholders' and actors' individual willingness to actively participate within the specific policy network and initiate cooperation between each other (keyword: ownership). This actor commitment includes in the PAs not just the active attendance at the various events but also active engagement through the allocation of financial resources, personnel, and general administrative capacities. However, in contrast to these theoretical procedural preconditions, in fact, major capabilities-expectations gaps unfolded concerning various factors.

One major issue was the actors' apparent misconception in terms of the expected workloads, which was particularly observable regarding the PACs and their particular duties. While the procedural steering even within the comparably "small" networks of a PA would theoretically demand the above mentioned comprehensive actor-commitment, most countries fulfilled their designated duties with a rather limited dedication. In a conducted survey by Johann-Jakob Wulf and Stefan Gänzle in 2014, the allocation of resources by the PACs was put under scrutiny and confirmed the observation of an often "half-hearted" exercised approach. With an overall response rate of only 50 %, only 10 % of the responding PACs stipulated that they feel a particular commitment towards the Macro-regional strategy. Various reasons were stipulated in this regard. More than 50 % of the respondents say that their selection as PACs was carried out in a strict top-down manner by their government superiors, leading to the situation that only one in four PACs consider their tasks as "attractive". Despite the major expectations towards their role as central coordinating entities within the implementation process, more than 45 % note that work-related duties sum up to no more than 25 % of their daily work. None of the respondents carry out their tasks as a full-time job, making it obvious that the originally expected comprehensive actor-commitment exists, in fact, only on paper and that the actual work of a PAC is more or less only considered as an "add-on" to their daily work. However, more than 54 % of the EUSDR PACs stipulated that 2-3 part-time staff members support their work. Around 91 % further note that they have, when necessary, the opportunity to delegate tasks to additional personnel from their administrations (Gänzle and Wulf, 2014, pp. 9–10). Asked about their opinion concerning the allocation of staff and administrative capacities, the PACs' answer is quite surprising. More than 46 % state that in their view, it would not be necessary to allocate full-time personnel for the role of a PAC, while only 36 % support the idea of an exclusive administration (Wulf, 2016, p. 337). These statements seem very

contradictory, especially when looking at the already outlined implementation process, in which various PACs, especially the ones from the lower part of the Danube Region, are often characterized by administrative overload and consequential insufficient results in terms of policy goal attainment (Bos, 2013, pp. 38–39; EUSDR PAC 4, 2012, p. 8). However, there are also various positive examples, which stand out. Like the above-mentioned sphere of strategic decision-making, various actors contribute extraordinarily with their personnel and administrative resources to the governance process. To enhance the procedural steering, various actors resort to the establishment of additional administrative structures. Because this approach is formally restricted by the "no additional institutions" rule, such "Joint Technical Secretariats" (JTS) are in general established as new departments within the ministry's administrations of the actors, thus circumventing the restraint (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2017, p. 24). Designated exclusively with the task to realize the procedural steering within the respective area of intervention, Priority Areas which were equipped with such structures are often characterized by a beneficial governance and implementation process (e.g., PA 2 or PA 11, among others).[204]

In charge of the coordination of the governance process, which in theory also involves crisis-management and mediation in the absence of legal sanction mechanisms, PACs are designated to step up as non-biased entities and need to gain the trust of its SG members (keyword: social-capital). The trust-building process is, however, often contradicted by the continuously reoccurring fluctuation of personnel within various PACs, which hampers not only the implementation process as such, but also led over the years repeatedly to a resetting of the already established social-capital between the personnel (EUSDR PAC 3, 2014, p. 3; EUSDR PAC 4, 2015, p. 24). Turning back to the survey mentioned above by Wulf and Gänzle: When being asked whether the PACs are being considered as mediators/conflict-managers within the PAs, none of the interviewees regards the coordinators as such actors (Wulf, 2016, p. 339). However, this is actually in stark contradiction to the already outlined role as formal Process Promoter, which underlines our assumption that a lack of social-capital persists with a particularly detrimental impact on the PAC's actor-role.

In the limelight of the aforementioned general demobilization trend and the top-down oriented governance structure, the involvement of LRAs and NGOs remains very limited within the

[204] However, it must be noted that the respective JTS are far from being identical concerning their setup or number of personnel. Even within a PA, differences are observable concerning the particular contribution of staff by the respective government. For example, within PA 2 (Sustainable Energy), Hungary allocated two staff members for the coordinating work, while the Czech Republic contributed only one person.

sphere of implementation. Except for Austria and Germany, the EUSDR actors continue to follow an intergovernmental approach, leaving the LRAs with the limited role of being executing entities of their national governments. Even regional SG members, who should, in theory, step up as autonomously coordinating entities, consider themselves primarily representatives of their national governments, thus contributing overall to a very limited LRA mobilization (Gänzle and Wulf, 2014, p. 10).

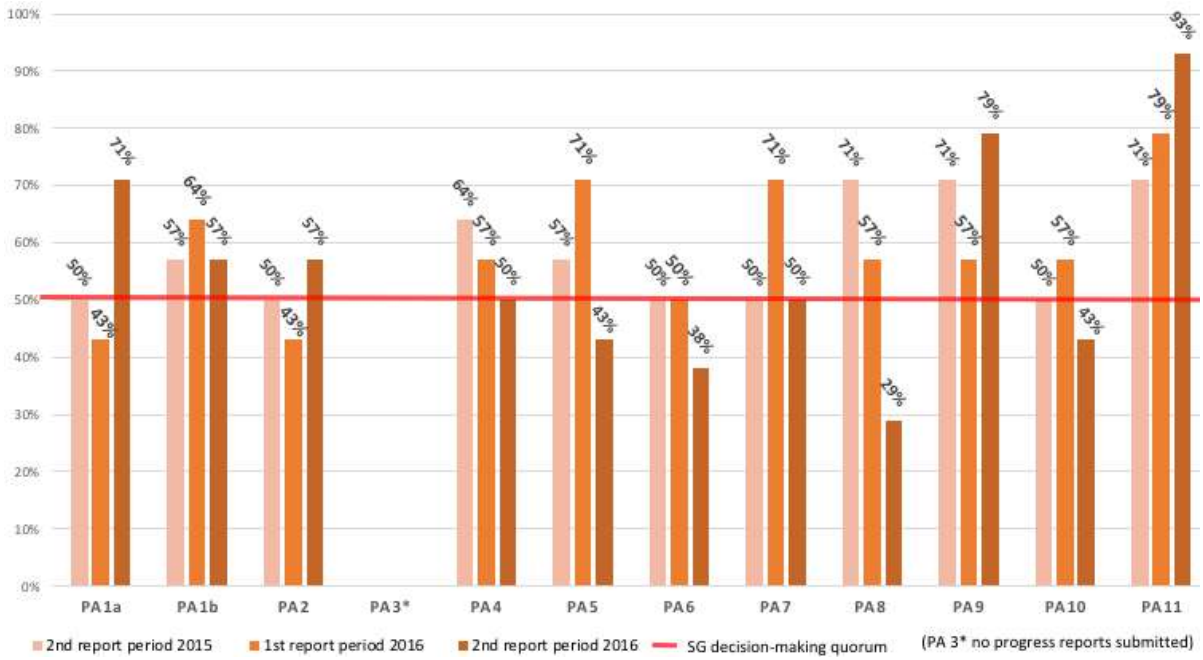
An overall mixed picture also characterizes the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders. NGOs' participation at events and within the daily implementation process is very unevenly dispersed across the individual PAs and even more concerning their place of origin. As already outlined, the participation within the governance process is realized mainly by transnational organizations with comprehensive financial capabilities. In contrast, more regional or local organizations, especially from the lower part of the Danube Region, often lack adequate financial resources. However, more active participation by non-governmental stakeholders is, in general, often only achieved in PAs, in which the coordinators allocate additional resources towards the governance process. An example of such efforts is the organized major stakeholder conference of PA 4 (Water Quality) in November 2015 by the Hungarian PAC in Budapest. In combination with the allocation of travel reimbursements, more than 150 participants from 11 countries attended the event, thus achieving a high participation rate (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016a, p. 17). This, however, is rather the exception than the rule within the EUSDR.

Actor mobilization and procedural steering within the individual Priority Areas

The progressing demobilization of actors had a particularly detrimental impact on the Priority Areas regarding policy goal attainment and the governance process. In contrast to the first years of implementation, a more or less broad mobilization was observable among actors. The active participation turned, however, into the opposite in the following years. Plummeting attendance rates at the mandatory Steering Group meetings and an unfolding passivity concerning the daily implementation process are just some of the negative effects, which affect the procedural steering within the PAs. To illustrate these developments, a comprehensive analysis of the Steering Group meeting minutes and the PAC progress reports will be carried out in the following. While the first part of the assessment concentrates on the quantitative attendance rates of the EUSDR actors at the individual meetings, the second part of the chapter gives a compact assessment of the procedural steering within the individual PAs. The time-scale for the first part of the analysis is set up starting from the second half-year of 2015 to the second half-year of 2016, in which the PACs were obliged to publish three progress reports or SG meeting minutes. Although a larger timespan would have been more beneficial to provide a

comprehensive analysis, the absence of common reporting standards (e.g., in the form of sample forms) until the second half of 2015 leads to strongly diverging contents between the individual PAC documents, particularly in terms of quality, depth, and scope of the reports and thus makes a comprehensive analysis of the whole implementation period not feasible.[205]

Figure 17 Average attendance (in percent) of Steering Group members at the individual mandatory meetings in the reporting period (2nd 2015 to 2nd 2016)



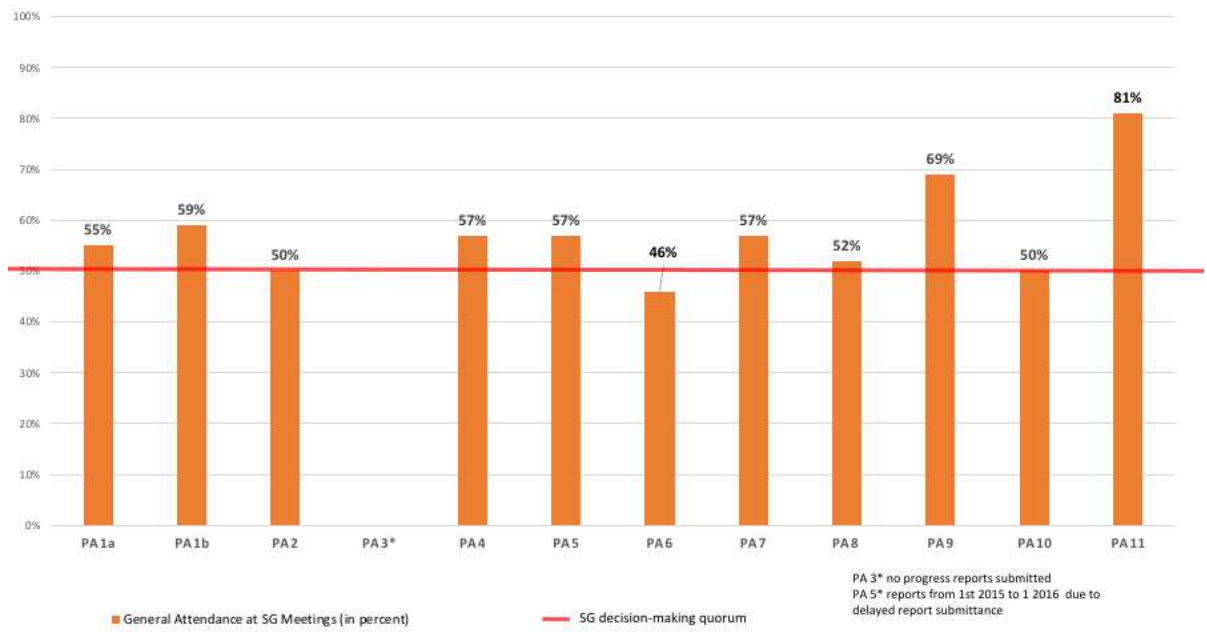
Source: Own calculation and depiction based on PAC progress reports and SG meeting minutes

As shown on the above-depicted graph, a major demobilization of EUSDR actors can be seen in recent years. In terms of attendance rates, the actors of nearly all PA show poor values. The average attendance at SG meetings was for the time-period around 58 % in all PAs combined. This means that, in general, less than three-fifths of all SG members were attending the mandatory meetings. This low attendance is particularly critical, considering that the average value was only 8 % over the 50 % quorum, which is necessary for formal decision-making. While the average value was only somewhat over this threshold, several individual SG meetings were unable to attain the necessary number of participants. In various cases, the

[205] While all PAC progress reports were the object of thorough scrutiny and many PACs managed to give satisfying information regarding the general participation rates, these efforts were often not pursued continuously over the whole period of the implementation phase, leaving an incomplete set of available data. This makes adequate comparability or graphical depiction impossible, due to which I resort to the designated time-scale. While insufficient report activities cause various problems for the analysis, a particular negative case was PA 3 (Culture and Tourism) coordinated by Bulgaria and Romania. Despite the mandatory submission of two reports per year, the two PACs did not fulfill their obligation. Due to the waived submission of progress reports for 2016, (at the time of analysis until 31. December 2017) data is not available, forcing me to exclude the PA from the quantitative assessment.

critical decisions regarding the project implementation could not be carried out, thus resulting in stalling decision-making procedures. The lowest participation rate was reached at the second SG meeting of PA 8 in 2016 ("Competitiveness of Enterprise" with Baden-Wuerttemberg and Croatia being the PACs), where only 28 % of the SG members attended the meeting. This equals the attendance of less than one-third of all EUSDR actors. In an overall view, the formal decision-making quorum was six times not reached, while on eight occasions, the threshold was only barely reached with an exact attendance rate of 50 %. The highest attendance rate was reported at the second SG meeting by PA 11 in 2016 ("Security" with Germany and Bulgaria being the PACs). Except for Slovenia, every country and region managed to participate. When comparing the general attendance rates between the individual PAs, a very mixed picture with strongly diverging values unfolds.

Figure 18 Average attendance (in percent) at Steering Group meetings of the PAs in the reporting period (2nd 2015 to 2nd 2016)



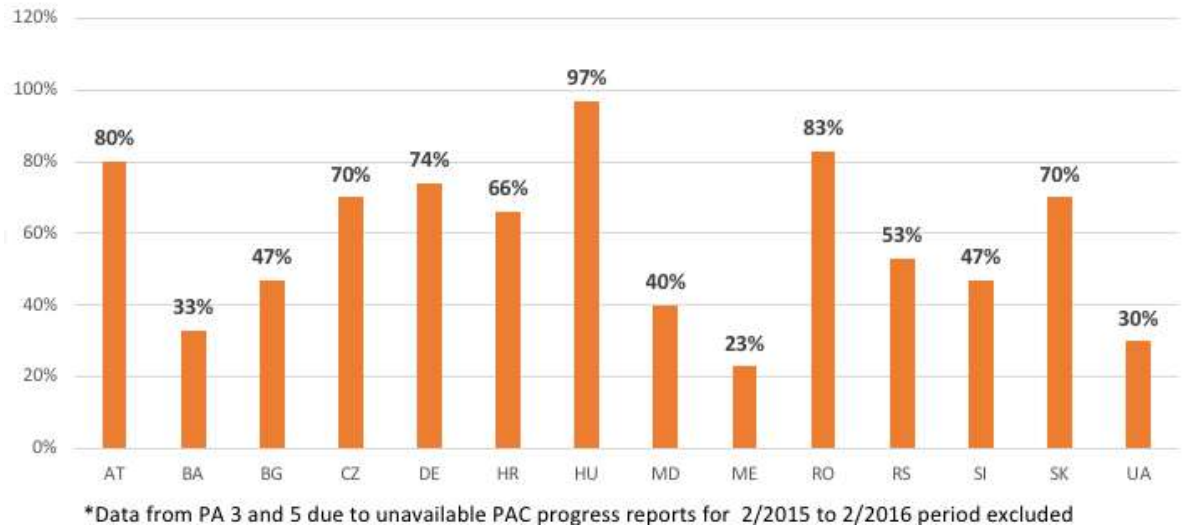
Source: Own calculation and depiction based on PAC progress reports and SG meeting minutes

Among all the Priority Areas, PA 11 (Security) marks in terms of attendance rates the clear top scorer with an advance of a 12 % higher value than PA 9 (People and Skills) with the second-highest attendance. With 81 % general attendance, more than four-fifth of all formal SG members participated on average at meetings of the top-scoring PA. The Priority Area with the lowest average participation rate was PA 6 (Biodiversity with Bavaria and Croatia as PACs) with general participation of 46 %. This PA was not able to even achieve, on average, the minimum quorum for the formal decision-making capacity (50 % attendance), constituting such a degree of actor-demobilization, which even questions its *raison d'être* as Policy Network in

the long-run. However, due to the failure of PA 3 (Culture and Tourism with Bulgaria and Romania as PACs) to even submit any reports for more than 1 ½ year, it is unclear if this PA competed even worse in this regard. All in all, the average attendance rates for the individual PAs settle between 50 and 60 %.

The overall diverging values persist when we look at the average attendance rates of the individual EUSDR actors. In this regard, a clear geographic pattern can be seen, which unfolds in a clear distinction between the group of member states and third countries.

Figure 19 Average attendance (in percent) of EUSDR actors at Steering Group meetings in the reporting period (2nd 2015 to 2nd 2016)



Source: Own calculation and depiction based on PAC progress reports and SG meeting minutes

With the exception of Hungary and Romania, as overall best-performing countries with an attendance rate of 97 % and 83 %, a decreasing mobilization can be seen following the flow direction of the Danube. The weakest performing countries among the EU member states are Bulgaria and Slovenia, with each having a 47 % attendance rate. Within the group of third countries, except for Serbia, as comparably active EUSDR country, all actors show a participation rate around 40 % or below, which means that these countries actually failed to appear more often at these –mandatory– events. The worst performing country among all EUSDR actors is Montenegro, with a participation rate of 23 %, meaning that the country was only one in four times attending an SG meeting on average. This marks a particularly low value when comparing it with Ukraine. While Ukraine is struggling with an armed conflict on its territory, causing a very salient detrimental effect on its governance performance among others, the country still manages to outperform Montenegro by more than seven percent. Broken down to the two groups of EU member states and non-members, the first group's general attendance

rate is 70 % on average, while it is only 36 % by the third countries. As a result, this means that member states managed to participate at the events on more than two-thirds of the occasions, while non-members attended these events only a little more than one-third of the time.

As outlined above, the EUSDR actors' demobilization occurred to a diverging degree and with a strongly varying impact on the particular Priority Areas. This also manifested in a very heterogeneous effect on the procedural steering within the individual areas of intervention, which will be concisely outlined in the following.

To give a more comprehensive insight concerning the governance process and the procedural steering within the EUSDR, each Priority Area will be put under a brief individual assessment. A particular analytical focus will be put on the aspect of the realization of political support by Political Promoters, the general evolvement of attendance rates over the whole implementation phase, the realized efforts by the PACs as Process Promoters, and finally whether a comprehensive non-governmental stakeholder and LRA involvement took place within the network.

- PA 1a (Mobility – Inland Waterways): The implementation process within the PA started with strong political support by the Danube Region governments. As the first formal act of political endorsement, a common declaration ("Declaration on effective waterway infrastructure maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries") was drafted and signed already on 7th June 2012 by the transport ministers of the EUSDR states. Backed by most riparian states, except for Hungary and Ukraine, the document shall emphasize and raise awareness concerning the necessity of a comprehensive approach within waterway infrastructure management. The document's main focus is in this regard the sustainable infrastructural development of the Danube as a waterway while also preserving the river basin as natural habitat (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2013, pp. 2–4). The maintenance of the initial political support by PA(C)s was quite successful. After the submission of various appeals in the following years, the governments reaffirmed their political commitment towards the PA in the form of a ministerial conclusion in 2015 (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2016, p. 8, 2015, p. 2, 2014, p. 4). The formal governmental declaration also underlined the persisting firm actor-commitment. An indicator in this regard is that most EUSDR countries have voluntarily hosted an SG meeting over the years (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2015, p. 9). However, this formal endorsement of the strategy must be put in context when looking at SG meetings' participation rates. While the attendance rate was extraordinarily high (compared to itself) with 78 % at the first SG meeting in 2011, it plunged to an all-time low in 2016 with 43 % and stabilized

finally at 64 % in November 2017 (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2017, 2012). The PAC reports also conclude a strong variation concerning the countries' individual attendance rates, which is strongly influenced by their geographic proximity to the Danube river basin. While riparian states show high-level participation rates, their non-riparian counterparts are significantly less active. Third countries from the lower part of the Danube Region (e.g., Serbia, Bosnia & Hercegovina, Moldova, and Ukraine) are additionally confronted with the typical lack of financial resources, which hinders them from consistent participation (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2016, p. 33, 2016, p. 37). A particular case marks Germany in this regard. Although the country would classify in both terms as a potentially active EUSDR state, namely due to its riparian location, its financial capabilities, and particularly because of the "[…]severe navigational problems encountered on the German stretch of the Danube[…]", the country is characterized by an often observable absence from events (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2016, p. 37). This constitutes a particular setback for the procedural steering due to the country's central location within the EUSDR.

The formal political endorsement of the PA also transforms into a comprehensive stakeholder involvement. Besides the intense coordination with the EC (in particular with DG REGIO and DG MOVE), the PA managed to institutionalize relations with various stakeholder groups from various spheres. This includes, for example, representatives of the industry (shipping companies, etc.), the ICPDR as an International Organization and major representative in the area of environmental protection, or various other –smaller– actors from the non-governmental sphere (EUSDR PAC 1a, 2017, p. 26, 2015, p. 4, 2015, p. 7).

- Priority Area 1b (Mobility – Rail, Road and Air): The attainment of high-level governmental support was much more challenging in this PA than in its Mobility (PA 1a) counterpart. After the initial euphoria among the EUSDR actors regarding the future goal attainment (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2012, p. 1), various attempts of securing formal governmental support proved futile. Major efforts by the PACs, like, for example, to organize ministerial conferences, and by that create political support for the implementation process, turned out to be unsuccessful due to failing responses by the governments (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2016, p. 10, 2015, p. 9). While this meant significantly more detrimental framework conditions for the PA compared to its waterway tandem, the PACs of Serbia and Slovenia undertook continuous attempts to maintain the PA's mobilization. The partial demobilization among actors was identified as one of the major challenges and biggest problems concerning the policy implementation (EUSDR

PAC 1b, 2017, p. 20). This again unfolded as a challenging undertaking due to partially increasingly asymmetrical actor mobilization. In contrast to the intended comprehensive involvement of all EUSDR actors (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2015, p. 5, 2014, p. 5), none of the SG meetings were attended by all 14 actors. However, the average mobilization pertained comparably stable with an attendance rate of around 60 % between 2011 and 2016. Similar to the general tendency, the third countries were only rudimentary active at the SG meetings. For example, Montenegro did not participate in any meeting, while Bosnia Hercegovina took part in only 25% of the SG meeting.[206] Among the non-member states, Serbia stands out in terms of active and regular participation. Its success as PAC was, however, overall rather modest. While the two coordinators managed to establish a Joint Technical Secretariat to realize strong procedural coordination (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2014, p. 2), their efforts were affected by an absence of financial capabilities. As such, the Serbian coordinators could not organize a stakeholder meeting in 2015, which further contributed to an overall lagging implementation process (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2015, p. 9). Prioritized issues like establishing the "common transport vision on the transport system in the Danube Region", which should be realized through various projects, are beginning to lose their momentum (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2017, p. 20, 2017, p. 23).

The lack of capabilities also affected stakeholder involvement as such. While the cooperation with the EC (DG REGIO and DG MOVE) was characterized by an ongoing exchange of information and coordination activities (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2012, p. 3), the involvement of stakeholders, in general, was assessed in the reports with significant room for improvement being left (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2015, p. 9). To overcome this, efforts have been made in terms of "awareness-raising" at the various stakeholder events and especially through the PA's website to keep the stakeholders continuously informed (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2017, p. 8). In terms of external marketing measures, the PA still lacks any specific measures like the realization of TV appearances, interviews, and other activities worth mentioning (EUSDR PAC 1b, 2016, p. 29).

- Priority Area 2 (Sustainable Energy): Although the policy issue of energy security is considered a topic of high-level importance and experienced a significant prioritization over the last years on the EU agenda, the PA as such was backed by a mixed degree of

[206] 10 out of 13 meetings were adequately noted within the PAC progress reports or the Meeting Minutes of PA 1b

political support. In contrast to the major political promotion by the two PACs of Hungary and the Czech Republic, the general actor-mobilization was rather modest and was characterized especially in the first period by low attendance rates. While the kick-off SG meeting was backed by a promising attendance rate of 78 % by the EUSDR actors in 2011, the following meeting only reached 50 %. The participation only slightly improved at the third event with 57 % attendance. Several EUSDR actors did during these events not attend with their appointed SG members, but only formally through their embassies (EUSDR PAC 2, 2012, p. 110), who were officially not empowered to participate in the decision-making process, constituting an even more detrimental picture. Continuous efforts to improve the actor-mobilization by the PACs, like the already mentioned reimbursement of travel costs for third countries by the two coordinators (EUSDR PAC 2, 2014, p. 12), started to improve the overall situation and led to increasing participation rates with all-time peaks with 12 and 13 attending actors at the 6th and 9th SG meeting in 2013 (EUSDR PAC 2, 2015, p. 11, 2013, p. 10). The achievements constituted, however, only a short-term success. The attendance rates dropped again in recent years. Between 2015 and 2016, it plunged to an average rate of around 50 %. Therefore, the very volatile actor-mobilization was assessed by the PACs as one of the largest challenges in terms of policy goal attainment (EUSDR PAC 2, 2016a, p. 27). As very active coordinators Hungary and the Czech Republic allocated significant resources to improve the governance within the PA despite these framework conditions. Besides the already mentioned financial contributions, both countries already decided in 2012 to establish an own JTS in Budapest. Hungary's particularly proactive stance soon led to an increase of personnel from two to four staff members after approximately one year, while the Czech side also carried out administrative relocations, namely shifting from *Ministry of Industry and Trade* to the *Office of the Government of the Czech Republic* as ministry being in charge, which constitutes a significant administrative valorization (EUSDR PAC 2, 2014, p. 10, 2013, p. 10, 2012, p. 11). To improve coordination and communication within the PA, further efforts were concentrated on holding strategic meetings between the two PACs on a constant basis to improve procedural steering (EUSDR PAC 2, 2015, pp. 10–11). Efforts were put into the realization of comprehensive stakeholder involvement by the PACs. The first step in this regard was made with the participation of the so-called "Energy Community" as IO and granting it formal observer status in 2012 (EUSDR PAC 2, 2012, p. 11). This was complemented by intense coordination with the EU institutions, foremost the EC

(DG ENERGY) and also the EP in the form of joint meetings with various MEPs, namely to increase political promotion regarding the PA (EUSDR PAC 2, 2012, p. 16). To further enlarge the stakeholder involvement, the PACs developed in 2013 a contact list of various non-governmental stakeholders. The list comprised experts from companies, associations, national institutions, or other formal authorities, who will be regularly updated about ongoing developments within the PA (EUSDR PAC 2, 2013, p. 15) and will additionally be invited to joint workshops (EUSDR PAC 2, 2016a, p. 26). Specific measures concerning external marketing were also carried out particularly by the Czech PA, who initiated various marketing activities, like the creation of a new homepage, creation of leaflets and other publications to increase the PA's publicity. The overall extent of measures remained however limited concerning the awareness raising (EUSDR PAC 2, 2015, p. 12, 2013, p. 15).

- Priority Area 3 (Culture and Tourism)[207]: The Priority Area of Culture and Tourism faced a significant actor-demobilization right from the beginning of the implementation phase. As an area of intervention, which is often the object of governmental budgetary cuts in times of fiscal crises, these detrimental framework conditions also affected the procedural dimension of PA negatively. The most apparent indicator in this regard was the low attendance rates of actors, namely 57 % and 64 % already right from the beginning of the implementation phase (EUSDR PAC 3, 2012, p. 10). Especially the third country delegations remained largely absent from the SG meetings (EUSDR PAC 3, 2013, p. 4). A major challenge was beside the actor demobilization also the weak procedural steering within the PA. Assigned to be the PAC, Romania, and particularly Bulgaria, had major problems satisfyingly fulfilling their roles. The Bulgarian steering team's inability to carry out its tasks as PAC reached even such a degree that its Romanian counterpart was forced to take over its tasks to maintain operability. Initial plans of establishing a JTS were after repeated considerations not realized due to the lack of funding, the inability to choose an adequate location, and the incapacity to align the office's tasks with the respective national legislation (EUSDR PAC 3, 2014, p. 4). After several failed attempts, the plans were finally put back on the agenda in 2015 and were in the following formally adopted by the two countries. However, due to the missing PAC reports for 2016, it cannot be said whether this undertaking succeeded. A

[207] Despite the PACs' obligation to biannually submit implementation reports, this was not carried out for the period of 2016 in the outlined Priority Area. Due to this reporting deficiency by the coordinators, the following assessment must be considered in the light of limited available information for the mentioned period.

further measure to improve the procedural steering was the major substitution of personnel in 2015 (EUSDR PAC 3, 2015, pp. 3–4). This measure and the plan to build a JTS were, however, carried out at a comparably late stage of the implementation process. The general interest towards the PA was significantly weakened among the EUSDR actors and the non-governmental stakeholders. The initial active participation of the stakeholders in 2013 (EUSDR PAC 3, 2012, p. 10) with some presentable stakeholder events (e.g., Danube Forum at ITB Berlin 2013) was at this time already to a large degree vanished, resulting in weak overall participation in the later stage of the implementation process (EUSDR PAC 3, 2015, p. 3).

- Priority Area 4 (Water Quality): The policy issue of Water Quality received since the early phase of the implementation process considerable political promotion from the Danube governments' side. Besides the Slovakian and especially the Hungarian government, Romania, Croatia and Germany emphasized already in December 2012 at a stakeholder seminar the PA's political importance for the EUSDR (EUSDR PAC 4, 2013, p. 5). Despite the symbolic commitment of these states and the repeated efforts by the PACs to mobilize actors, like through the sending of several invitations and reminders before an SG meeting, especially the third countries showed poor participation rates in contrast to the EU members (EUSDR PAC 4, 2012, p. 5, 2012, p. 8). As a reason for the broad absence of the non-member states, the lack of financial capabilities was highlighted by the countries, which was also acknowledged by the PACs (EUSDR PAC 4, 2013, p. 3, 2012, p. 6). While the average participation rate over the years concurred with the already depicted values for 2015/2016, namely between 50 and 60 %, the PACs undertook in the meanwhile major efforts to improve these rates. The weak participation rate of non-member countries was tried to be overcome by the PACs through the establishment of a financial mechanism, in which National Coordinators (NCs), the Danube Contact Point, as well as the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, granted financial sources or provided new cooperation platforms to improve the attendance rate (EUSDR PAC 4, 2014, p. 13, 2014, p. 20). Although these measures contributed to slightly improved attendance rates in 2015 (EUSDR PAC 4, 2015, p. 27), this more positive picture was contradicted by a distinct demobilization in terms of daily governance participation. In 2015 a major survey was carried out by the Slovakian PAC concerning the realization of various relevant projects. Among the 14 questioned

countries, however, only five (AT, CZ, SK, BG, MD) replied, constituting an exceptionally poor response rate (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016a, p. 11).

While the cooperation between the two PACs was assessed by both as fruitful, each of them was confronted with its own challenges, namely in the form of reoccurring substitutions of their staffs. This discontinuity among the respective personnel affected the overall coordination in general rather negatively (EUSDR PAC 4, 2015, pp. 24–25).

In terms of stakeholder involvement, the PACs were able to achieve some success. As policy area with typically strong participation of NGOs, major organizations like the World Wide Fund, Global Water Partnership, or the Regional Environmental Center participated very actively right from the beginning of the implementation phase (EUSDR PAC 4, 2012, pp. 8–9). This involvement manifested already in September 2013 in a major conference in Budapest, where more than 300 participants attended the event, at which organizations like the ICPDR, the Sava Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and various other organizations were present (EUSDR PAC 4, 2014, p. 20). This event was followed in the upcoming years by other stakeholder events, for example, the stakeholder conference in Budapest on 19-20 November 2015 and various other more small-scale workshops and meetings (EUSDR PAC 4, 2016a, p. 17, 2016a, p. 22, 2016b, p. 5). The cooperation with these organizations also resulted in increased marketing activities, such as joint publications with the ICPDR (ICPDR Danube Watch issue 2015/1) and own published studies during the years (EUSDR PAC 4, 2015, p. 7).

- Priority Area 5 (Environmental Risks): Procedural governance within the PA is strongly impacted by the historic floods of 2013. Leaving a path of severe destruction within all the riparian states of the Danube Region, the issue of Environmental Risks experienced a major valorization among the political decision-makers. Between May and June 2013, several high-level initiatives were put in place. They were promoted by Commissioner Johannes Hahn (DG REGIO), Austria's vice-chancellor Michael Spindelegger, or Hungary's President János Áder, among others (EUSDR PAC 5, 2014, p. 2). In the following years, the need for action was also repetitively endorsed and emphasized by various political leaders (EUSDR PAC 5, 2015, p. 6). This comprehensive political promotion also contributed to a significant revival of actor mobilization concerning SG meeting attendance. While in the first years (2011-213), the SG meetings were particularly poorly attended by the SG members with a general average attendance rate

below the 50 % threshold[208], these values improved in the following. EUSDR actors who did not or only seldomly attended events until the 5th SG meeting signaled their interest in taking part in the governance process more actively (EUSDR PAC 5, 2013, p. 4). As a result, the participation rate improved in the following two meetings to 64 % in 2014 (EUSDR PAC 5, 2014, p. 9). This boost persisted, however, only for a short duration. In February 2016, the rates plunged again to 42 % and were once more below the critical quorum for decision-making threshold (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 21). This detrimental framework condition was even aggravated by the situation that SG members and NCs often failed to inform about the change of personnel or did not signal their absence before the meeting, making the coordination efforts by the PACs even more difficult (EUSDR PAC 5, 2014, p. 12, 2013, p. 6). The PACs thus identified the general demobilization as the main obstacle concerning a successful policy goal-attainment. (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 24). The lack of activity by the EUSDR actors was accompanied by difficulties of the PACs to organize the SG meetings, which led in several cases to the postponement of these events and thus probably enhancing the demobilization of the actors (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 21, 2016a, p. 19). The lack of financial capabilities forced the PACs further to limit their coordination activities. While according to their report, this reached such a degree that they were forced only to carry out cost-friendly external marketing measures in the beginning (EUSDR PAC 5, 2012, p. 7), a change within the Hungarian PAC brought significant changes in this regard. Similarly to PA 4 (Water Quality), the Hungarian government supports since 2014 the coordination process with significant financial and administrative support (EUSDR PAC 5, 2014, p. 2, 2014, p. 9).

The PACs carried out the stakeholder involvement within the PA in a similar way as in the before-mentioned PA 4 (Water Quality), where a broad range of institutions (GWP, ICPDR REC, WWF, etc.) participated, debating and endorsing a variety of measures (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 22, 2012, p. 5). As such, various stakeholder events, like in Budapest with 40 participants in November 2015, were realized (EUSDR PAC 5, 2016b, p. 21).

The initial efforts by the PACs to realize external marketing activities remain modest overall. While the majority of the PAC's activities were concentrated on agenda setting

[208] 1st SG meeting 57 % attendance, 2nd meeting 42 % attendance, 3rd meeting 50 % attendance, 4th meeting 28 % attendance 5th meeting 42 % attendance (EUSDR PAC 5, 2013, p. 2).

within the EUSDR framework, like the realization of an own homepage among others, the external awareness-raising is carried out since 2013 primarily by the political decision-makers (EUSDR PAC 5, 2012, p. 7).

- Priority Area 6 (Biodiversity & Landscapes): The start of the implementation process was in the area of Biodiversity backed from the beginning by comprehensive political support. In comparison to other PAs, the main driver was, in this case, the European Commission, more precisely Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner of DG Regio, who attended first meetings in Croatia in June 2012 and emphasized the importance of the policy issue towards high-level government representatives of the Croatian PAC (EUSDR PAC 6, 2013, p. 4). General political endorsements also backed these efforts by high-level governmental leaders of the Danube countries. Although the endorsements were not exclusively focused on the PA as such, and more concerning the cross-sectoral cooperation within the second Pillar (Protecting the environment), it constituted a noteworthy initiative (EUSDR PAC 6, 2012, p. 2) nevertheless. However, the initial political support for PA 6 diminished over the years and was already in 2015 criticized as not sufficient by the PACs (EUSDR PAC 6, 2015, p. 8). Poor performance could be observed in terms of actor-mobilization at the individual SG meetings. Particularly low attendance-rates characterized the period between 2011 and 2014. From eight total SG meetings in the period, the 50 % quorum was only reached three times with the exact necessary 50 % value. The all-time low was hit at the 5th meeting in April 2014, where besides the two PACs (Bavaria and Croatia), only two additional countries did attend the event (EUSDR PAC 6, 2014, p. 6). While the PA was struggling with already low attendance rates, this detrimental situation was even more aggravated due to the PACs' often-occurring postponement of SG meetings. The first cancellation of an SG meeting was already made in December 2012 and was justified by the PACs with the argument of a too ‘tight schedule’ (EUSDR PAC 6, 2013, p. 6). Such cancellations occurred several times during the implementation period, resulting in only eight SG meetings in total, while, for example, PA 1a is already at 13 organized SG meetings in comparison. A further negative aspect regarding the procedural steering is the failure to establish a more institutionalized platform for mutual exchange of information between the two PACs (EUSDR PAC 6, 2013, p. 10). This irregular and insufficient communication between the two actors, together with unfavorable procedural steering, widely pertained until October 2015, where an improvement of this setting was agreed upon by the PACs (EUSDR PAC 6, 2016, p. 19). These detrimental

framework conditions also result in stakeholder involvement in a missing interconnection between the policy network and the non-governmental sphere (EUSDR PAC 6, 2015, p. 6). In comparison to the other PAs of the second pillar, the involvement of NGOs is rather weak (EUSDR PAC 6, 2014, p. 4, 2013, p. 6, 2012, pp. 7–11). Since 2015 the PACs, therefore, concentrate their efforts on stabilizing and further extending the stakeholder network through workshops and other events (EUSDR PAC 6, 2016, p. 7, 2015, pp. 7–9).

- Priority Area 7 (Knowledge Society): The lack of additional funding due to the "three noes" rule evoked strong criticism within the PA among several actors and non-governmental stakeholders, who considered the unavailability of resources as particularly detrimental for the governance process (EUSDR PAC 7, 2012, p. 3). At the 5th Annual Forum of the EUSDR, the political leaders expressed, as a result, their commitment to put further emphasis on the issue of R&D within the EUSDR, and thus reinforce funding, transnational cooperation, and coordination in this area as well as promote the issue of investing in human capital (EUSDR PAC 7, 2016, p. 7). However, despite these public calls by governmental representatives, the actor-mobilization among the EUSDR actors was rather limited. The main issue was in this regard to the asymmetrical distribution of actor-commitment. While countries like Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, and the province of Baden-Wuerttemberg proved to be very active (EUSDR PAC 7, 2013, p. 7) not just in terms of participation, but also concerning intra-network communication and coordination of the governance process, others, particularly the third countries, stood out negatively through continuous passivity (EUSDR PAC 7, 2014, p. 3). This lack of participation was also openly criticized by the PACs. They pointed out that due to the failure to attain the necessary voting majorities, they were forced to introduce electronic voting within the SG to compensate for the absence of these actors (EUSDR PAC 7, 2014, p. 6). Despite this remedy measure, the lack of ownership among the third countries was so distinct that they did not even participate in the newly introduced digital meetings or even responded to general requests (EUSDR PAC 7, 2015, p. 6). Additionally to the lack of actor-commitment on the national level, their LRAs, who were in some cases mandated with the policy implementation, often lacked the legal empowerment to take part in decision-making, which made it even more difficult to reach binding decisions within the PA (EUSDR PAC 7, 2016, p. 7). While the PACs noted out consequentially that a balanced governance process within the PA is out of reach with the current setting, their efforts,

in general, were of very limited success and could not significantly improve the demobilization of the EUSDR actors (EUSDR PAC 7, 2016, p. 8, 2014, pp. 4–6). Even the major institutional valorization of the PACs, particularly in the Slovakian case with Dr. Štefan Chudoba, State Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic being newly in charge of the coordination, did not lead to a successful overcoming of these problems (EUSDR PAC 7, 2013, p. 6). The discrepancy between the demobilization of governmental actors and the simultaneously very active stakeholders from the non-governmental sphere was very distinct in some countries. For example, countries like Bulgaria, Bosnia and Hercegovina, or Ukraine were absent from most of the SG meetings, stakeholders from these countries managed to actively participate within the various Working Groups (EUSDR PAC 7, 2017, pp. 20–21). This active participation also contributed to increased external visibility of the EUSDR and its PA within the respective countries (EUSDR PAC 7, 2015, p. 6).

- Priority Area 8 (Competitiveness): The procedural steering within the PA by Baden-Wuerttemberg and Croatia was characterized by a particularly active approach, especially from the German side. The main focus of the PACs was on the generation of political promotion. During the first years, a strong political endorsement was observable concerning the implementation activities. High attendance rates at SG meetings (EUSDR PAC 8, 2013, p. 3) and active participation at these various events (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016b, p. 9) characterized this PA. However, the actor-commitment soon started to deteriorate significantly. The exceptionally high attendance rates from the beginning of the implementation phase soon plunged and reached a value, which was even compared to other PAs below average (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016b, p. 19). The PACs, as a result, noted in 2015 that "[…] the overwhelming majority of SG members and PACs, especially in the business-related field, still do not receive the necessary support for them to fulfill their EUSDR tasks, neither from the administrative hierarchy and nor from the policy in their own home institutions/organizations." (EUSDR PAC 8, 2015, p. 9). The PACs further concluded that without a significant watershed the PA, as well as the whole EUSDR, would be 'doomed to fail' (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016a, p. 11). While the decreasing level of actor-commitment posed a major challenge for the procedural steering (EUSDR PAC 8, 2015, pp. 6–9), especially Baden-Wuerttemberg continued to concentrate its efforts on remobilizing the EUSDR actors. Besides the repeated calls to action to revive the actor-commitment, the cooperation process continued to lack political support by the governments (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016a, p. 10).

This unfolded recently in a further declining number of attendees at the SG meetings and finally led to major problems to even organize the SG meeting (12th SG meeting from 15th to 16th November 2016 in Vienna) due to the lack of commitment by the hosting country of Austria (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016b, p. 9).[209] Even despite available so-called "start-up funds", which were provided by the PAC Baden-Wuerttemberg, as well as further Technical Assistance (TA) grants by the Commission did not generate the hoped stimuli in terms of actor-mobilization (EUSDR PAC 8, 2014, pp. 4–6).

The lack of comprehensive funding also affected the participation of non-governmental stakeholders. The PACs correctly noted in this regard that "[…]economic organizations for obvious reasons, are not welfare organizations, they are therefore primarily active if it proves rewarding for them or for their clientele[…]"(EUSDR PAC 8, 2013, p. 3). With the lack of comprehensive financial allocations, many stakeholders, therefore, decided not to take part in the PA's implementation process

Efforts to improve stakeholder activation, like through various stakeholder events (e.g., workshops, seminars, and conferences, etc.), turned out to be of limited success (EUSDR PAC 8, 2016b, p. 8, 2014, p. 6). While not achieving the anticipated results participation, the PA nevertheless managed to create public awareness in some countries with accompanying media coverage. For example, the 7th SG meeting in the Moldavian capital Chisinau was covered by national TV-broadcast and several articles from the national newspapers (EUSDR PAC 8, 2014, p. 5).

- Priority Area 9 (People and Skills): The implementation phase was characterized since its beginning by symbolic acts of endorsement by actors to underline their commitment towards the PA(EUSDR PAC 9, 2013, p. 5). In comparison to other PAs, the political promotion of the PA was maintained by actors and stakeholders over the years (EUSDR PAC 9, 2014, p. 6, 2014, p. 9). Backed by such political support, the PA showed attendance-rates in terms of SG meetings, which were very stable and continuously above average in general. Although the PA was also struggling by decreasing the number of attendees at the SG meetings, particularly in a comparison between the initial and last years, the PA has not fallen once below the decision-making quorum of 50 %. Recent reports showed more promising developments again in this regard (EUSDR

[209] After being three times postponed the SG the Federal Chancellery of Austria suggested holding the meeting in Vienna at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, despite the proposal from its own chancellery, neither the ministry's economic department nor the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO), who canceled its attendance last-minute, did participate at its own event.

PAC 9, 2016a, p. 22, 2016b, p. 18, 2015, p. 9, 2014, p. 8, 2013, p. 7, 2012b, p. 8). To maintain the momentum, the Austrian PAC was particularly active and allocated two representatives of two different ministries, namely from the Federal Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, and the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs for the coordination of the PA (EUSDR PAC 9, 2015, p. 19). The efforts of the PACs translated in terms of non-governmental involvement into beneficial results. The characteristic active engagement of NGOs in this policy area also contributed to active cooperation with organizations like the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), Central European Cooperation in Education (CECE), International Organization for Migration (IOM), or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) among others (EUSDR PAC 9, 2012b, p. 2). After the first stakeholder Conference in June 2012, which was attended by more than 160 participants from 13 EUSDR countries, a first contact-list with more than 500 organizations was constituted for realizing a stakeholder network for daily operations (EUSDR PAC 9, 2013, p. 7, 2012b, p. 8). The active stakeholder participation pertained in the following years. At subsequent stakeholder events in 2014 and 2015 115 and 140 attendees from 13 EUSDR participated (EUSDR PAC 9, 2015, pp. 19–20, 2014, p. 9).

- Priority Area 10 (Institutional Capacity & Cooperation): Despite the particular set of policy goals, the network coordinators were faced with similar governance challenges as their counterparts in other PAs. Regarding actor-commitment, the PACs noted already in 2013 that the EUSDR actors often fail to participate at the various meetings, do not give adequate feedback during the drafting process of documents and/or refrain from responding to information requests. Further problems often lack the capacity – especially among LRAs– to provide their governments' official and binding position at these meetings (EUSDR PAC 10, 2013, p. 10). With the progressing demobilization of the actors already in 2014, the PACs highlighted the issue of how to ensure governmental long-term actor commitment. They called upon the respective political sphere to become active in this regard (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, pp. 10–12). To gain further insight and identify the reasons for the demobilization, various questionnaires were addressed towards the EUSDR actors. In a survey in 2015, the general impression was confirmed by the actors that the available time and administrative capacity concerning the implementation of EUSDR goals are very limited and ranges in the respective state in general from 140 hours down to 2 hours per month. More than two-

thirds of the respondents (10 out of 14 countries) stated that they spend less than 30 % of their general workload on the EUSDR. The majority of SG members further responded that they did only attend SG meetings three times or less in total (EUSDR PAC 10, 2015, pp. 26–27). A further factor regarding attendance rates is the very asymmetrically shaped participation pattern at the SG meetings. While some of the countries participated very actively in the governance process, others were characterized by a continuous absence. The PACs focused on cooperating with the active actors while trying to keep the others regularly informed about the ongoing implementation progress, however, without any further significant efforts to remobilize them (EUSDR PAC 10, 2013, pp. 6–7). To oversee the broad range of tasks, the PAC of Vienna established an own secretariat with one project manager and one part-time assistant. The PAC further also involved external service providers (e.g., consulting agencies) to cope with the workload (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 10, 2013, p. 6). The Slovenian side carried out major substitutions of its personnel, namely by switching from the so-called "Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF)", to the "Center for European Perspective" being in charge of coordination, which constitutes in terms of personnel a major change. (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016a, p. 23). Due to the importance of the PA as a responsible network overseeing the allocations of TAF-DRP funds, the stakeholder involvement was in comparison to other policy areas exceptionally broad. Already at the first stakeholder event, namely the so-called "Danube Financing Dialogue", which took place in March 2012, more than 200 stakeholders attended (80 EUSDR stakeholders, 110 project promoters and 40 financial institutions) (EUSDR PAC 10, 2012, p. 23). Due to the dire need for funding by the stakeholders, the second Danube Financing Dialogue, which was focusing on the identification of specific funding outside the Structural Funds, was attended by even more stakeholders, namely more than 230 participants in total (EUSDR PAC 10, 2013, p. 4).

While the awareness-raising has shown promising among local non-governmental organizations and even among members of the European Parliament (EUSDR PAC 10, 2016a, p. 26), the lack of overall funding often led to major problems to create cooperation between stakeholders and the governmental levels of the EUSDR countries, which often resulted in incomplete project networks (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 4). The lack of financial incentives also impacted the external marketing of the EUSDR quite detrimentally. Despite the reported mentioning of the EUSDR in newspapers and online journals at a "high frequency" (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 6), public knowledge about

the strategy remained overall limited (EUSDR PAC 10, 2015, p. 10). While some of the EUSDR actors were quite active in terms of external marketing (EUSDR PAC 10, 2014, p. 5), they stated that more financial resources would be necessary to improve the efficacy of their measures (EUSDR PAC 10, 2015, p. 27).

- Priority Area 11 (Security): The PA was backed by exceptional political promotion from the beginning not only by its German/Bavarian and Bulgarian PAC, but it was also continuously endorsed by other EUSDR actors. Shortly after the kick-off event, the first ministerial conference was organized in the Austrian city of Salzburg in November 2011, in which the EUSDR actors formally confirmed their commitment (EUSDR PAC 11, 2012, p. 5). The visible high-level governmental support was also maintained in the following years, like at the "Danube Security Conference" in Munich in May 2013 (EUSDR PAC 11, 2013, p. 5) or at regular SG meetings, for example, at the 7th SG meeting in Bucharest in October 2013. This was accompanied by a constant exchange of information and coordination between the involved ministers of interior about the implementation progress (EUSDR PAC 11, 2014, p. 13). The active political promotion was also reflected in terms of general actor-attendance at the various SG meetings. As PA with the highest average numbers of participants, the SG meetings show an exceptionally high degree of actor-mobilization, which is significantly above the EUSDR average. During the above-outlined reporting period between 2015 and 2016 except Slovenia and Croatia, a complete attendance was observable even including the third-states, which are in other PAs often absent from these kinds of meetings. Due to the high political relevance of the PA, both PACs focused on a continuous exchange of information not just between the individual countries but also within the vertical dimension between the supranational (EC DG HOME and DG REGIO) and national level (EUSDR PAC 11, 2016b, p. 14, 2016a, p. 16, 2012, p. 1). In regards to involving LRAs, this task proved to be significantly more difficult. As an area of intervention, which is considered highly "securitized" and thus treated as foremost national/intergovernmental policy issue (EUSDR PAC 11, 2013, p. 7), the involvement was limited from the beginning. The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders was significantly more intense. As such, the PACs strived for cooperation with various organizations, institutions, and agencies, like the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the South-East Law Enforcement Center (SELEC), EuroVienna, EUROPOL, or with various experts from the academic sphere, who were very active cooperation partners at the various SG meetings (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 19). Two particularly active non-

governmental stakeholders were the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation and Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, who not only supported the PA with significant financial contributions but also assisted the PA with expert knowledge (EUSDR PAC 11, 2014, p. 7).

To create public awareness, the PACs concentrated their efforts, besides the continuous updating of the homepage, also on external marketing activities in collaboration with the above-mentioned stakeholders, who were considered as amplifiers towards the public (EUSDR PAC 11, 2015, p. 20, 2013, p. 7).

6.4. SWOT analysis of the EUSDR

To give an overview of the above-outlined findings of the EUSDR, a compact summary of the strategy's main aspects will be given in the following. This will be carried out in the form of a SWOT analysis. The strengths and weaknesses shall be categorized in the three dimensions (Policy, Polity, Politics) to depict the main added-values and the primary deficiencies of this Macro-regional strategy. The potential opportunities and threats, on the other hand, will be carried out in a more general form, highlighting the most problematic or most promising developments concerning the strategy, including an outlook on the future development of the EUSDR.

Strengths

Policy dimension: As a new innovative approach of Regional Cross-Border Governance, the EUSDR constitutes a significant step towards a differentiated territorial integration in the European Union. The strategy marks a departure from the long-time persisting "one size fits all approach", which was the predominant premise within the EU integration process for a long time. With its particular territorial alignment around the Danube River, the entailing actor-constellation of the EUSDR predetermines and narrows down the embedded goal setting to a large degree and thus creates a place-based added-value for the involved EUSDR actors. Although the fragmentation is still a persisting factor within the macro-region, which materializes among others in the political, social, economic, and structural dimension, the countries nevertheless face, regardless of whether they are actual members of the EU or third countries, similar challenges. The presence of such challenges facilitates and boosts the need for place-based problem-solving. This consequentially also contributes to the multidimensionality of the policy approaches and, in the long run, facilitates the development of the EU towards a territorially differentiated system of Multi-Level Governance. In the vertical dimension, this is carried out through actors' structural involvement, where they stem from all three major institutional layers. This approach obliges the participating entities to

realize policy goals in a comprehensive vertical multi-level approach, namely across each of these layers. Third countries, who are legally not integrated into the EU, face familiar challenges than the member states and will be integrated within the actor-constellation, creating an innovative external governance approach.

The objective of developing place-based improvements is to establish its manifestation within the policy goal setting to establish the various Priority Areas. The aim of primarily addressing challenges and policy issues, which are located in geospatial proximity to the river basin and impact the states and regions, is to a considerable degree taken into account. Although the EUSDR was drafted with a particularly wide array of policy goals, individual intervention areas were compartmentalized in groups, the so-called Pillars. This structure is constituted to create strategic policy cornerstones while also providing the opportunity to create cross-sectoral policy coordination within and across these Pillars to increase the overall implementation efficiency. Although several PAs have to some degree contradictory policy objectives, which makes such a cross-sectoral approach in some cases very difficult, if not impossible, a considerable number of PAs managed to create success stories worth mentioning. Especially the second Pillar, "Protecting the environment", achieved dense cross-sectoral implementation results not just among the PAs embedded in the own structure (PA 4-5-6) but also with PAs from other Pillars (e.g., PA 1a). Another benefit is the policy goals' constitution in the limelight of a "Rolling Action Plan". This principle provides the opportunity to carry out adaptions and reforms in the policy dimension if deemed necessary. Over the last years, this option was already exploited in 2015/2016 when a major overhaul of the initially ill-defined target-setting was carried out.

Polity dimension: The structural setup of the EUSDR follows the typical pattern of a network of Regional Cross-Border Governance with a distinct horizontal dimension. This implies the extension of the network across jurisdictional boundaries of regions and nation-states and the comprehensive involvement of non-governmental stakeholders. For this purpose, a highly differentiated governance structure with two separated spheres was constituted. One sphere consists of strategic core decision-making networks (High-Level Group) while the other comprises various implementation networks (Priority Areas, Steering Groups, Working Groups). Through the structural differentiation, potential threats in terms of network-sclerotization or network-failure, which occurred to some degree in the individual PAs, were successfully confined, thus reducing the risk of detrimental domino-effects. The governance structure of the EUSDR follows the premise of the aforementioned "Rolling Action Plan", which also provides in the polity dimension the option to adapt the structural governance setup in case of necessity. Adaptions in this regard were indeed carried out during the implementation

phase, namely by establishing the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), which was designated to provide leverage for the EC concerning the strategic procedural steering. The flexibility of the EUSDR network also applies in terms of financial support. While the EUSDR is limited by the "three noes rule", thus excluding the opportunity to create one exclusive budget for the strategy, the Danube Transnational Program (DTP), as Interreg B program, was to a large degree aligned to some of the manifold financial requirements by the EUSDR. Since its establishment, the DTP became the most important financial support source for the EUSDR and its project implementation.

Politics dimension: The multidimensional approach of the EUSDR with its procedural steering in vertical and horizontal dimensions is a further significant step regarding functional differentiation of the EU towards a system of Multi-Level Governance. In contrast to the long-time pertaining premise of straight hierarchical decision-making, the EUSDR seeks a more heterarchical actor- and stakeholder constellation. Although this setup is far from the initially emphasized comprehensive bottom-up approach and is instead strictly realized within the "shadow of hierarchy" of national governments, the decision-making and implementation of the policy goals are carried out in individual, more or less, heterarchical sub-networks. The participation within these networks is primarily based on the principle of voluntariness of actors, which also shapes the decision-making procedure in the form of a consensus-oriented approach that is steered and coordinated by process promoters. The absence of legal sanction-mechanisms or other coercive measures results consequentially in the necessity that each actor realizes its actions based on individual ownership and commitment. In the case of successful cooperation, this leads to establishing mutual trust and so-called "social capital" between the actors, which vice versa improves the cooperation in the networks. The EUSDR achieved various successes in these areas, especially regarding its external governance dimension. Areas of intervention like PA 10 (Security) are considered an intergovernmental or even exclusively domestic issue by the EUSDR countries. The actors within the PA, however, managed to establish a broad deliberation process with the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders and even realized the implementation of various macro-regional projects in such approaches successfully. While the above-mentioned Priority Area is considered one of the most successful intervention areas, various other examples of such a comprehensive mobilization of non-governmental stakeholders were successfully achieved. In various PAs several NGOs or IOs

became decisive partners of the EUSDR actors and contributed substantially to the implementation process's success (e.g., PA 4, PA 5).

Weaknesses

Policy dimension: While the EUSDR was constituted under the premise of creating a place-based and efficient RCBG network in terms of goal attainment, the network struggles until today with a major capabilities-expectation gap, which persists in various areas of the policy dimension. A major factor is the excessive inflation of the actor-constellation. Despite the objective to create a network, which is strictly aligned around exclusively the Danube related policy challenges, various countries are formal members of the EUSDR, which have either a diminishingly small territorial share of the river basin or are completely non-riparian states. This actor-constellation results in various detrimental effects on the strategy. Due to the very asymmetrical impact of the geospatial challenges, actor ownership within the policy dimension is unevenly distributed concerning certain issues. This, however, contributes to a partial demobilization of some actors within the strategy. The oversized actor-constellation also complicates the procedural steering within the EUSDR and leads to an overload of various process promoters (e.g., EC and some PACs) within both spheres of the strategy. The strong focus on the external governance with the comprehensive involvement of third countries from the lower Danube Region aggravates the detrimental actor-constellation even further. Facing a particular socio-economic, institutional, and structural fragmentation with additional large differences between the group of EU member states and third countries within the Danube Region, the implementation process is confronted by major challenges to reach equal results in all parts of the area. However, the policy dimension's inflation occurs to a certain degree also within the policy goal setting. While the overarching policy goals of the EUSDR, more precisely the Pillars and Priority Areas, show an alignment around the Danube region's underlying policy challenges, this is only to a limited degree the case concerning the embedded actions, projects, and the target setting. Instead of a distinct place-based setup, all of the three factors are often overly generalist in their setup. The designated place-based nature of actions, projects, and targets will be further diluted due to the requirement of the EUSDR's policy dimension to be strongly aligned with the EU's mainstream policy documents', like the Europe 2020 strategy, where territorial cohesion plays a subordinated role. Especially the third Pillar (Building Prosperity) with its three PAs (PA 7-8-9) is characterized by a very generalist setup with a partial lack of placed-based goal setting. Another issue is the often ill-defined setup of the target-setting. The often perceived capabilities-expectation gap in the policy dimension of the strategy often led to the definition of targets, which were either characterized by a lack of

measurability or were based on indicators, which were regarding their temporal or qualitative achievability unrealistic to attain. In 2015/2016, therefore, a major overhaul of the EUSDR's target-setting was carried out. However, it is still too early to say whether the new targets will prove beneficial in terms of a proper goal-attainment. Another issue within the policy dimension is the excessive number of projects. Actors within the individual PAs tend to submit an excessive amount of project proposals. However, these vast number of projects are characterized by poor drafting, for example, due to a lack of alignment with the EU programs' requirements as potential funding opportunities, thus leading to often limited (e.g., at the DTP) or vanishingly small success rates (e.g., other mainstream EU programs) at the respective tenders. Therefore, the consequential failure to acquire the necessary project funding often leads to very modest success or total stagnation regarding the general goal-attainment.

Polity dimension: The stipulation of the general "three noes rule" marks, since the beginning of the implementation phase, one of the largest challenges within the EUSDR. The restraint concerning adopting new EU law also implies the inability to establish coercive measures towards participating actors. While non-governmental stakeholders can be easily excluded from the implementation process due to their invitation-based participation, this does not apply to the formal EUSDR actors. The increasing demobilization of actors, in the form of absence from mandatory events, the lacking realization of daily governance tasks, or even basic communication with PACs cannot be sanctioned by the EC or the PACs due to the lack of an effective legal instrument. The result is an accumulating network-sclerotization in a substantial number of networks, leading to a diminishing overall impact of the PAs and the strategy in the policy dimension.

The restraint concerning the establishment of new institutions is upheld, for example, regarding the establishment of an EGTC for the EUSDR. However, minor exceptions concerning this guideline were approved. This applies to several measures like establishing the Danube Strategy Point or the constitution of –formal or informal– Joint Technical Secretariats by the PACs in their particular areas of intervention. Both kinds of institutions were created due to the Process Promoters' major overload within both spheres of the strategy (explained further below), which contributed to an often inefficient procedural steering. These minor institutional innovations are, however, far from being a gamechanger. While the DSP already faces a withdrawal of resources due to its lacking positive impact, the establishment of the JTS are very unevenly dispersed across the various PAs. The secretariats are significantly diverging concerning their

size, personnel, legal status, competencies, and general activities, making a general assessment concerning their overall added value hardly feasible.

The absence of its own substantial budget constitutes the most significant problem in the EUSDR, which affects the goal attainment severely. During its initiation, the strategy faced the situation of a far progressed Multiannual Financial Framework (2007-2013). Actors and stakeholders were thus, since the beginning, confronted with widely depleted funds or with overwhelming competition by other projects at tenders of EU mainstream programs. The unwillingness or incapability among many EUSDR actors to contribute with their own funding to the project implementation left many projects, as a result, in a state in which they were "doomed to fail". This situation could also not be overcome by the technical assistance funds (TAF-DRP and TA). Although the budgets, which were allocated by PA 10 and the EC/DSP, constituted important financial assistance for the PAs during the project preparations, the contributions were very small-sized. They were, therefore, no adequate instruments to bridge the pertaining underfunding of the EUSDR.

The new Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020) presents a partial improvement compared to the prior cycle. Besides the newly "refilled" mainstream budgets, the establishment of the Danube Transnational Program (DTP) constituted a considerable improvement compared to the preceding South-East Europe program. The DTP, however, is far from being the anticipated "financial salvation". With a still comparably modest budget and a programmatic guideline to only support "soft-type interventions", various PAs are still struggling with a substantial lack of financial resources, enhancing the demobilization among actors and stakeholders.

While the "three noes rule" had a severe impact on the goal attainment within the EUSDR, the governance structure also provided very limited mobilization capabilities for the Local and Regional Actors (LRAs) and also the non-governmental stakeholders. While the actor-constellation presented with the involvement of only two provinces (Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg) already a very intergovernmentalist framework complemented by only one additional province as PAC (PA 10 city-state of Vienna), LRAs are structurally excluded from strategic decision-making. They are only allowed to participate with the national governments' explicit approval, namely as co-representative of the National Coordinators within the HLG. Even within the individual PAs, subnational actors are only seldomly empowered as full representatives with equal competencies to the national governments. LRAs are therefore forced to depend on their domestic mobilization potential, which is often very limited due to the predominant presence of a centralized unitary administrative structure in the Danube

Region. The non-governmental stakeholders face an even more detrimental situation. Their involvement in the sphere of strategic decision-making is widely limited to participation at the Annual Forums, thus constituting a significant deficit in regarding a continuous exchange of information with civil society. Within the sphere of implementation, the NGOs formal participation right is even more limited. A structurally guaranteed participation is not designated but depends on a formal invitation by the Steering Group members. Despite these very narrow boundaries, many PAs pursued NGOs' active involvement and realized active and dense cooperation with these stakeholders (see further below).

Politics dimensions: The EUSDR depends on a comprehensive and continuous political promotion by the high-level governmental decision-makers, which is necessary to stimulate financial and administrative support. This, however, turned out to be a major problem within the strategy. With the rapidly aggravating fiscal and economic crises, the issue of a Macro-regional strategy for the Danube Region soon vanished from the top agenda of the EU institutions and national governments in 2010, who instead were primarily focusing on a continuous crisis-management. While several actors tried to revitalize the political momentum for the EUSDR, a continuous ongoing actor-demobilization is observable within the various areas of the strategy. Within the sphere of strategic decision-making, this manifested, for example, already before the actual kick-off in repeated or constant absence from the mandatory events or a general lack of participation at the EUSDR drafting process by the various governments (e.g., BA, MD, ME). This demobilization even increased during the following implementation phase. Especially within the various Priority Areas, more specifically within the Steering Groups, a decisive demobilization-induced network-sclerotization can be observed. Although there are some positive exceptions, like PA 10 (Security) with comparably high attendance rates, most PAs struggle severely with their SG members' average participation rates, which are often hardly over the necessary 50 % decision-making threshold. Several Steering Groups repeatedly do not manage to reach this attendance-quota, leaving the PAs repeatedly without decision-making capabilities. Governmental actors from the lower Danube Region, especially the third countries, justify their often observable endemic passivity with the lack of financial capabilities, which prevents them from attending the various mandatory events. This argumentation must be, however, partially questioned. The lack of actor-commitment can also be observed regarding the absence from daily governance tasks, like the failure to respond to written inquiries, the absence from online meetings, or the non-response to a general internal survey. Although various EU member states maintain a comparably active stance, the increase of actor-demobilization nevertheless impacts the overall goal attainment

very significantly. Several observers and researchers, therefore, assess the EUSDR as already being in a dormant state. As a process promoter, the Commission is furthermore confronted with a major capabilities-expectation gap concerning the fulfillment of its duties during the implementation phase. This constitutes a remarkable situation. In the initiation phase, the EC was significantly pressuring the extension of its role beyond the originally designated function of being a sheer facilitator and coordinator of the processes. Due to its own advocacy, the EC has consequentially become the central entity within the EUSDR. While it managed to attain this objective, a major EC overload was soon observable after the kick-off event. Faced with an overstretching of its administrative capabilities, the EC showed insufficient coordination activities and a lack of strategic leadership, despite being the central process promoter of the EUSDR, which evoked open criticism by the other actors. The consequential establishment of the Danube Strategy Point as a complementary coordination entity, however, failed to bring the anticipated remedy, resulting in a persisting insufficient procedural steering. Besides the EC's overload in its role as Process Promoter, various PACs struggled with similar problems in the sphere of implementation. Confronted with a general lack of financial and administrative capabilities, the PACs were in several cases unable to ensure comprehensive procedural steering, resulting in unsatisfying project implementation. The third countries showed a distinct overload in particular, which unfolded in often insufficient activities and led in some cases even to the total failure to fulfill the designated tasks (e.g., Bulgaria in PA 3). The strongly top-down oriented decision-making structure left over the years also very limited room for action for non-governmental stakeholders and LRAs to get involved within the EUSDR. Within the governance process, this manifested in several forms. While LRAs were strictly bound by the predetermined setup and were, except the three provinces mentioned above, only allowed to mobilize through their countries' domestic institutional channels, non-governmental stakeholders possessed somehow better leverage. While the structural limitation was very severe for the stakeholders, their actual degree of involvement is strongly dependent on their mobilization potential and the financial capabilities of the respective organization. This, however, results in a significant overrepresentation of multinational associations and International Organizations. Simultaneously, local or regional NGOs, particularly located in the lower part of the Danube Region, lack the necessary resources to participate. However, the very asymmetrically developed stakeholder involvement constitutes a significant problem in terms

of democratic accountability and comprehensive coverage of the whole non-governmental sphere within the macro-region.

Opportunities

Despite a major capabilities-expectation gap within the EUSDR, which can be assessed in each of the above-outlined dimensions, the strategy still features some promising developments and considerable opportunities in goal attainment. Since the kick-off event, the EUSDR showed the first small steps towards overcoming the persisting fragmentation within the Danube Region. Even despite the DTP's financial limitations to carry out mainly "soft type interventions", the actors and stakeholders managed to initiate a broad deliberation process concerning the identification of major challenges and pressing policy issues all across the Priority Areas. They also initiated first tangible joint approaches in various policy fields (e.g., PA 1a, PA 2, PA 5, PA 11, etc.). This also resulted in an adaption of the initially ill-defined target setting, leading to a policy improvement towards an overall more place-based goal setting. In the limelight of the rapidly changing framework conditions, which made the need for action obvious (e.g., floods in the Danube Region 2013, Ukraine crisis in 2013, etc.), various PAs benefited from new or regained political momentum, resulting in an improved implementation process. The cross-sectoral policy approach turned out in a significant number of Priority Areas as an encouraging instrument to create implementation synergies within the EUSDR. While thematically near PAs, like within Pillar 2 (Protecting the environment), were considered as networks with potential synergies right from the beginning and fulfilled the anticipations in this regard. Successful cooperations were also established in PAs, which were initially considered quite contradictory concerning their goal-setting (e.g., PA 1a Mobility-Inland Waterways and PA 6 Biodiversity). Achievements in this area are of particular value in the limelight of further pursuance to establish a Multi-Level Governance system with its basic premise of combining sectoral and territorial policy approaches. Another factor is the opportunity to create social capital between the participating EUSDR actors. Although the EUSDR is far away from attaining the ideal and comprehensive level of mutual trust within the whole Danube Region with various states continue to have rather tense bilateral relations (e.g., Croatia and Serbia, Hungary and Ukraine, etc.), within the EUSDR framework, several achievements were attained in this regard. The case of Slovakia and Hungary is such an example. While the bilateral relations were characterized as strained due to the issue of Hungarian minorities located in Slovakia in the past three decades, both countries managed to realize extraordinarily successful cooperations in their role as PACs of PA 4 (Water Quality). This cooperation was characterized by constant bilateral consultations and exchange of information, which materialized in the

network's well functioning procedural steering. The EUSDR, as such, proves that it can be a structural window of opportunity to create a certain degree of social capital among its member countries and thus contribute to the political and social cohesion within and across the EU's borders.

Threats

The issue of actor-demobilization constitutes the main and most comprehensive threat for the EUSDR. While demobilization is already a major problem and a weakness within the strategy, it poses an even more dangerous threat to the future development of the EUSDR. Decreasing actors' participation triggers a negative spiral in various aspects, which can even lead to the menacing point of a full network failure. As such, the absence of actors from events and daily governance tasks diminishes the implementation activities also the results in terms of goal attainment. While actors (and of course stakeholders) base their participation within the network on the typical cost-benefit ratio, the ongoing development in this detrimental direction can cause a broad withdrawal by formerly active actors at a certain point. This can manifest either in a withdrawal of financial resources and/or administrative capacities in the form of reallocation of personnel or the general absence from important events. The continuous diminishment of the social capital, caused by the negative spiral, can finally reach its low-point in the form of a full demobilization of the network, manifesting either in complete inactivity by all actors or the formal dissolution of the network as such. Although the EUSDR is still far from reaching this point and features several success stories in policy implementation and attendance-rates, various 'red flags' are already clearly observable. In terms of actor-attendance, the EUSDR struggles within the sphere of implementation with an already significant actors' demobilization. Although the values between the individual PAs still differ significantly, and there are PAs with exceptionally high attendance rates, a considerable number of networks struggle to attain even the 50 % decision-making threshold. The lower part of the macro-region, consisting of the third countries, shows particularly persisting inactivity. The complementary lack of implementation success within various PAs resulted in the last years to the aforementioned first signs of a decreasing actor-commitment and accompanying withdrawal of resources. Repeated substitution of personnel and the generally limited allocation of administrative resources within the PAs are further first signs of this threatening development.. While the actors realized, especially in the last two years (e.g., new TA grants, revision of the target settings, etc.), distinct measures to counter these detrimental developments, these were not halted. Instead, the threat of a further demobilization of the EUSDR, which some observers

already depict as 'sleeping beauty', is present as never before and demands comprehensive reforms to stop this progress.

7. The European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)

7.1. The Alpine Region: A contiguous space in the limelight of heterogeneity

Centered in the heart of continental Europe, ranging from the Ligurian Sea to the Pannonian Basin with a length of 750 kilometers from East to West and 400 kilometers from North to South (Staudigl, 2013, p. 73), the Alps constitute one of the most dominant natural entities in Europe. Due to its sheer size, the mountain range of the Alps is in its character not just transnational by extending over the territory of various EU member states and non-member states, but it also has as natural habitat a dominant impact on the daily life of the people who are living in its adjacent area. The surrounding area, which is generally referred to as "Alpine Region", is characterized by various geographic and territorial characteristics. This provides the people living in the area various possibilities of managing a prosperous life, but simultaneously poses various challenges as a region with harsh environmental conditions, which are to be tackled.

Before turning to the specific immanent characteristics of this region, it is, however, first necessary to outline the territorial scope of the Alpine Region as such. While there are vast numbers of definitions concerning the geographic range of the area, which are strongly varying regarding their specific purpose, such as whether they are constituted from a geographical, economic, or political perspective, the three most common definitions shall be outlined. Each of the three territorial delineations varies in terms of its perimeters, for example, concerning its territorial extent, the included number of states/regions, or the size of the located population being accounted as living in the Alpine Region. To give a short illustration, we shall therefore briefly outline the three most common territorial delineations:

The first outlined and territorially most narrow definition of the Alpine Region is constituted and used by the Alpine Convention (outlined below). According to this definition, the Alpine Region is aligned strictly around the Alpine arc, forming the Alps' core-area. The territorial scope spans over 190.600 km2 and is the home of approximately 15 million people, enclosing the territories of France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. In comparison to other definitions, the geographic scope of the definition is based largely on the biogeographic delineation of the Alpine massif (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 28; Kauk, 2015, pp.

37–38), which is characterized by a low population density and a rural settlement pattern due to the given harsh environmental conditions.[210]

A significantly larger territorial scope is applied by the Alpine Space Program, a transnational program (Interreg B) within the ETC. With an area of 390.000 km², the territorial coverage of this definition is two times the size of the Alpine Convention's delineation. It comprises a much larger peripheral area, extending well beyond the Alpine massif by covering major parts of the adjacent countries or even their whole national territory (e.g., Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland).[211] In contrast to the outlined rural area within the first definition, which is rather scarcely populated, this covered peripheral area is much more densely populated, resulting in a significantly larger total population. By involving metropoles as Lyon, Milan, Munich, Vienna with at least 750.000 citizens, or Alpine cities with more than 50.000 inhabitants like Bozen/Bolzano, Innsbruck, Salzburg, St. Gallen, Konstanz, Annecy, or Grenoble, the whole Alpine Space comprises of almost 66 million people (Interreg Alpine Space, 2014a, pp. 7–8). While this definition of the Alpine Region is already 3.4 times more densely populated than the territorial delineation of the Alpine Convention (Bätzing, 2014, pp. 13–14), the largest of the three outlined definitions is given by the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), which is also our case study. Following this definition, the Alpine Region will be defined with a territorial scope of over 450.000 km^2 with a total population of nearly 80 million people. In contrast to the already large Interreg definition, this delineation excludes parts of the French Alsace region, while at the same time including the two German provinces entirely, namely the states of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria (EUSALP, 2017a, p. 2017). This contributes to a significantly larger territory and thus also a substantial increase regarding the included population.[212]

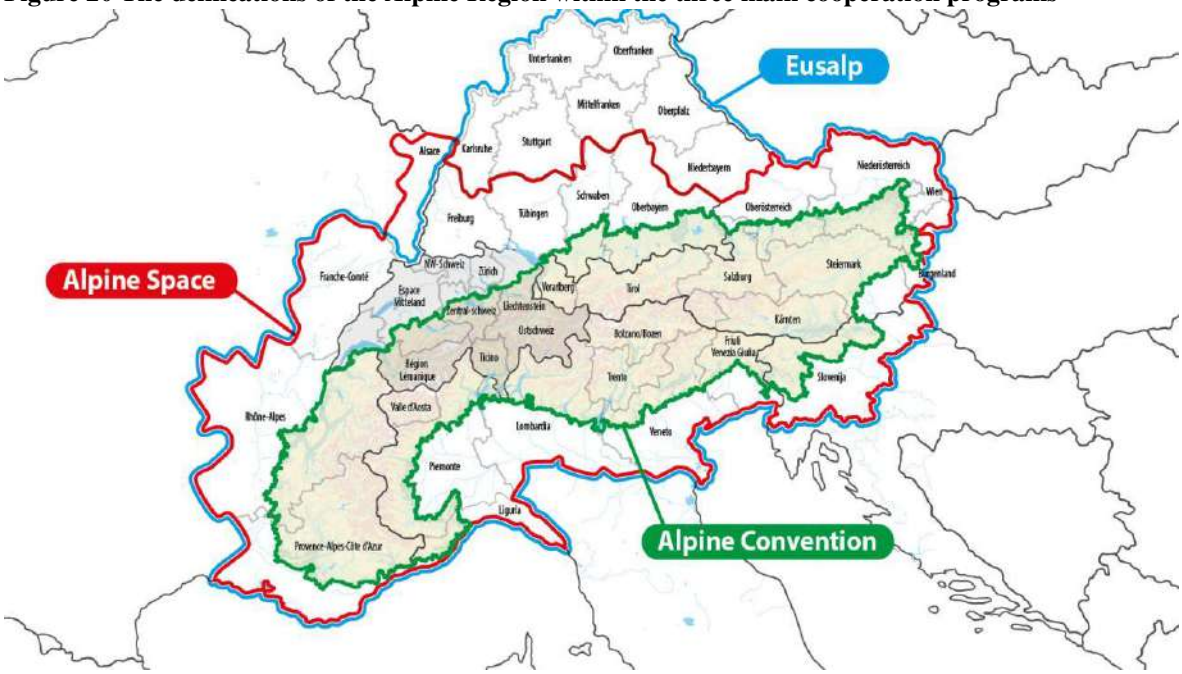
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[210] The core area of the Alpine Region was throughout history, characterized by a strong agricultural economy. Due to harsh weather conditions, land cultivation was foremost practiced in the valleys or the mountains' lower parts. As a consequence, only 60 % of the overall surface in the Alps is populated, while 40 % is not inhabited at all or only used in the summer as a living area (Staudigl, 2013, p. 74).

[211] This definition includes following territories in particular: Austria: whole country; France: Rhône-Alpes, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Franche-Comté, Alsace; Germany: districts of Oberbayern and Schwaben (in Bayern), Tübingen and Freiburg(in Baden-Wuerttemberg); Italy: Lombardia, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige, Valle d'Aosta, Piemonte and Liguria; Liechtenstein: whole country; Slovenia: whole country; Switzerland: whole country (Interreg Alpine Space, 2014a, p. 3).

[212] The Alpine Space includes by the definition of its eponymous Interreg program only parts of both federate states, namely the districts Tübingen, Freiburg, Schwaben, and Oberbayern. Within the definition of the EUSALP, the Alpine Region further includes six additional districts with several major cities like Nuremberg, Stuttgart, or various larger towns like Würzburg or Bamberg.

Figure 20 The delineations of the Alpine Region within the three main cooperation programs



Source: EUSALP

While each of the definitions possesses a broadly funded legitimation concerning the respective territorial scope, a pertaining dissent and vehement debate between the various policy initiatives and academic scholars is strongly present concerning the Alpine Region's territorial delineation. This derives from the distinct geospatial impact of the Alpine massif on its adjacent territory and the whole European continent.

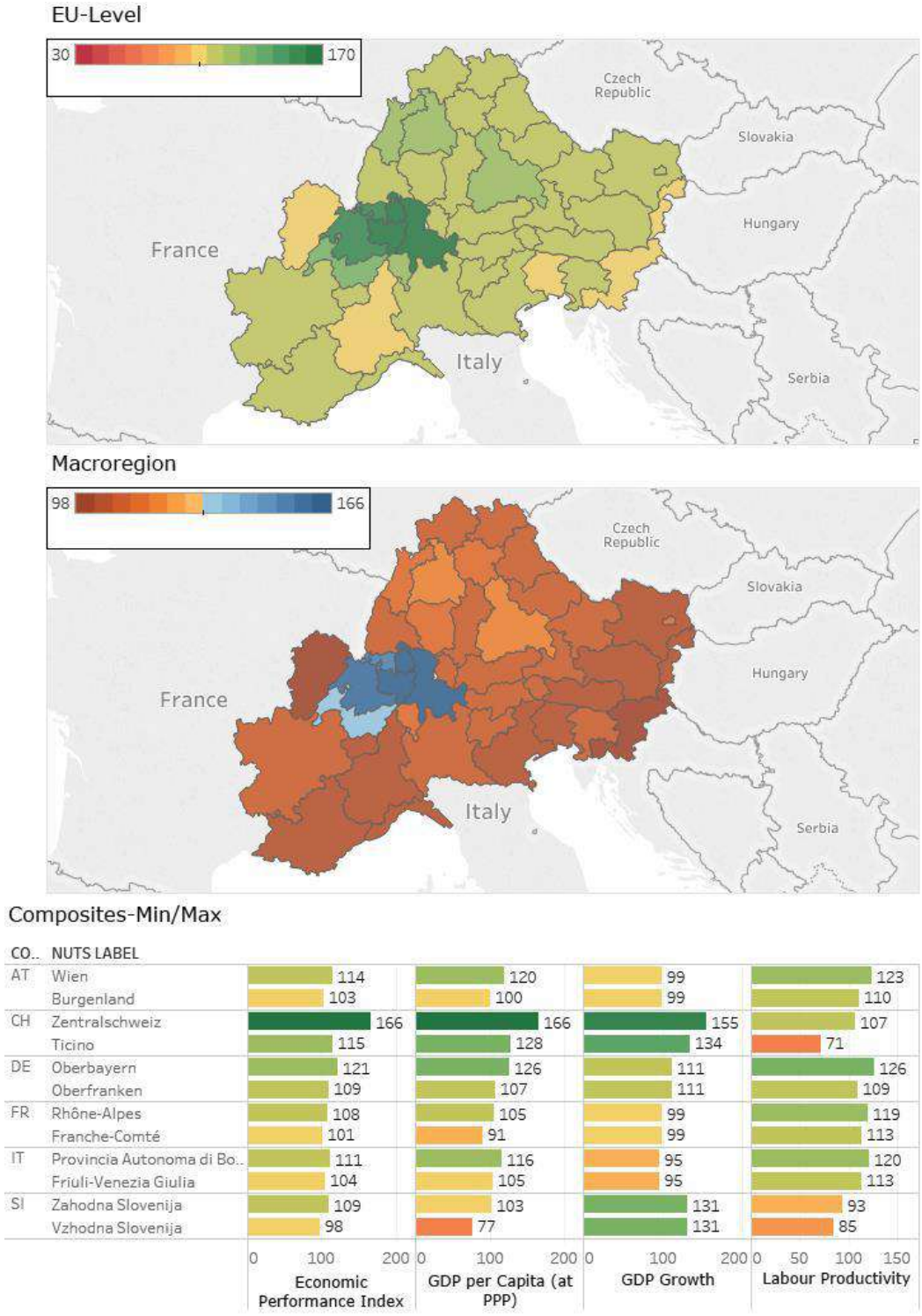
Due to its sheer size and its presence as a natural barrier between the northern and the southern part of Europe, the Alps posed for thousands of years, especially during the winter months, an often insurmountable natural obstacle for the populations in terms of mobility. Although major political efforts were put into building infrastructural connections across the Alpine ridge during the last century until today, many parts of the Alpine Region are still faced with difficult and/or partial accessibility (Gloersen et al., 2013, pp. 31–32). In many cases, these topographic framework conditions led to very decentralized and heterogeneous administrative, socio-economical, and political structures. They also benefited the evolution of ethnocultural diversity among the Alpine communities (Gsodam, 2013, p. 3). Even within the given small-scale territorial delineation of the Alpine Convention, the region comprises a great variety of languages and dialects, ranging from the Alemannic German over the Rhaeto-Romance to the Slavonic languages (Kauk, 2015, pp. 50–52). Throughout history, these topographic conditions contributed not just to the emergence of strong regional identities and the constitution of ethnic minorities (e.g., Ladins in South Tyrol) among the Alpine communities, but benefited until today the preservation of the particular minority cultures and ethnocultural pluralism in general (e.g., Switzerland). This, however, went hand in hand with a rather wide absence of a "pan-

Alpine identity", which is often postulated as a political objective by supranational and national government representatives nowadays (Del Biaggio, 2015, pp. 45–46). However, in comparison to other macro-regions, which were often faced with an externally imposed internal political, cultural, or political isolation due to the geopolitical circumstances (e.g., Danube Region, Baltic Sea Region), the societies in the Alpine Region nevertheless were in the position to develop long-lasting traditions of economic, political and cultural cooperation (Alpine States and Alpine Regions, 2013, p. 6). This was realized even in the limelight of the often very difficult topographic conditions (see further below).

Compared to other macro-regions, the Alpine Region's macroeconomic and socioeconomic state, based on the territorial delineation of the EUSALP, distinguishes itself significantly in many aspects from its counterparts. While most other macro-regions are characterized by an asymmetrical economic development between participating regions and countries, the Alpine Region shows a high overall performance significantly above the EU average. The individual regions in the macro-region (NUTS 2) show in comparison to the EU-28 a comparable homogeneous economic development, where even the economically weakest performing region, Vzhodna Slovenija (Slovenia), is with 98 % concerning its *Economic Performance Index (EPI)*[213] performing only slightly below the EUropean average. This particular region is simultaneously catching up rapidly to the rest of the group, with a GDP growth of 131 % since 2015 (see figure below). As the highest performing region, Zentralschweiz (Switzerland) outperforms its Alpine neighbors with an EPI of 166 % compared to the EU level and is even 51 percentage points higher than the second-highest performing region, namely Oberbayern (Bavaria, Germany) with an EPI value of 121 %. Even Tessin (Switzerland), which constitutes the weakest performing region in Switzerland, is in the overall comparison in the third place among all Alpine Regions. Switzerland as a country not only outperforms all other Alpine Regions but is also accountable for the only significant asymmetry on the NUTS 2 level concerning the macro-region's general economic development.

[213] The Economic Performance Index is a composite indicator consisting of regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (at purchasing power parity), Real GDP Growth, and Labor Productivity.

Figure 21 Economic performance of the Alpine Regions (NUTS 2) in 2014

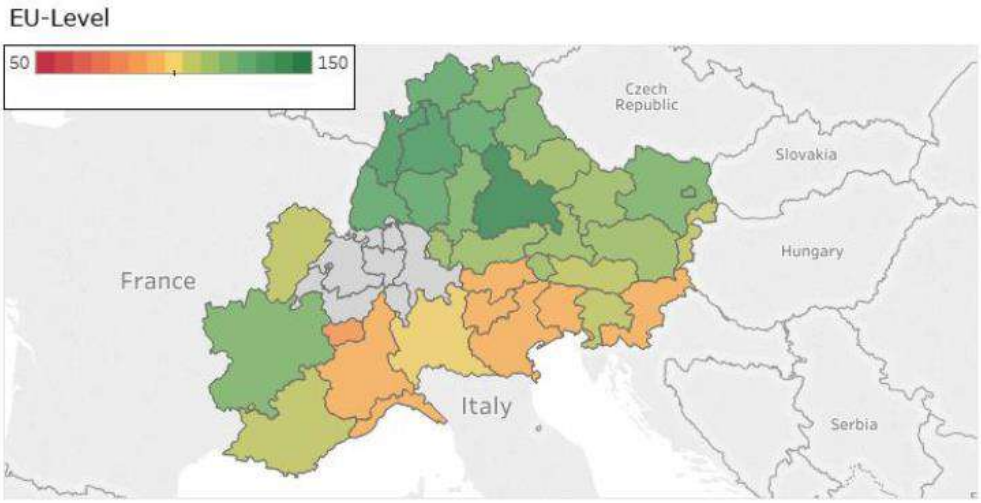


Source: (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, p. 23)

The economic performance and the prosperity of the Alpine Region derives foremost from two major developments. Its core-region was characterized for centuries as an area with a predominant agricultural sector. During the 20th century, this area underwent significant economic diversification and transformation. With the building of infrastructural

interconnections, the former remote regions were more easily accessible for larger populations for the first time. This led to the emergence of tourism as a new economic sector in the Alps in the late 1950s / early 1960s. Since then, the tourism sector has continuously expanded and brought significant wealth to the former comparably poor regions. Tourism as an economic factor is nowadays considered essential for economic prosperity. It is often the only main source of income in various parts of the Alps, especially within these particular parts of the core-region in the Alpine massif (Staudigl, 2013, p. 77)

Figure 22 Arrivals at tourist accommodation establishments in comparison to the EU average



Source: (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017, p. 66-67)

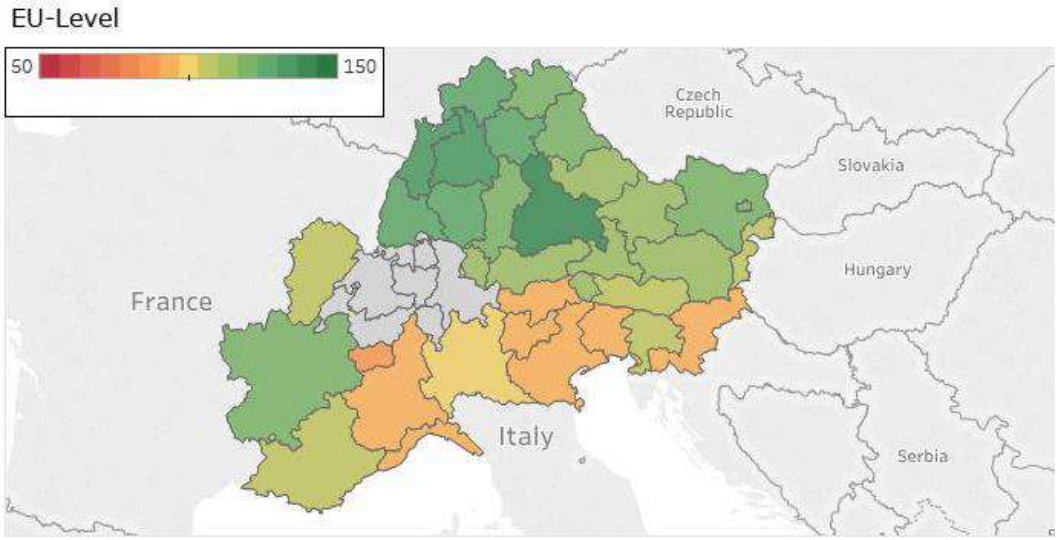
The dynamic economic development of the Alpine Regions was in the second half of the 20th century further enhanced by the increasing economic importance of the surrounding metropolitan cities. While capital-cities like Vienna or Ljubljana had a long history being of central economic importance for their national economies, other various cities emerged as new "players", even in global comparison, and evolved to "motors" of economic development. This materializes in continuously increasing agglomeration effects and the development of diversified economic clusters around these metropolitan regions. A major influx of high-skilled and young employees further transforms these metropoles into hot-spots of capital allocations by multi-national companies. These metropolitan regions, which are dispersed all over the peripheral Alpine Region, are characterized by high living standards, a constant high economic innovation capacity, the presence of a large number of enterprises, and various well-known institutions of higher education and research. These cities, as well as their surrounding areas, are furthermore characterized by a rapidly growing population while offering at the same time a comprehensive supply of labor in various industrial sectors (Alpine States and Alpine Regions, 2013, p. 6; Interreg Alpine Space, 2014a, p. 13). The major R&D allocations in these

peripheral Alpine Regions also translate into a generally outstanding high innovation capacity for the whole macro-region, which is significantly above average compared to the EU-28. Except the Italian and one of the Slovenian NUTS 2 regions, all entities (Liechtenstein and Switzerland are excluded due to the unavailability of data-sets) are showing either exceptionally high or above-average innovation scores in terms of R&D (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, pp. 49–50). The strong competitiveness of the Alpine Regions can also be observed in various other various important policy sectors. Based on the Regional Competitive Index for the Alpine Regions[214] (NUTS 2), a composite index of the EU for the measurement of the overall competitiveness of the regions and states (which unfortunately again does not involve Switzerland and Liechtenstein as third countries), the majority of Alpine Regions show values, which are significantly above EU-28 average.

In terms of institutional quality, the development of the health and education sector, the general labor market, macro-economic stability, and technological readiness or business sophistication, among others, the majority of the Alpine NUTS 2 regions perform outstandingly in EU comparison. Only the Italian regions and one region in France and Sloveniaeach perform around the EU average or slightly below (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, pp. 47–48).

[214] The Regional Competitive Index (RCI) of the EC bundles 11 individual factors as a composite index, assessing the general long- and short-term performance capabilities by the regions. This RCI comprises of following indices: (1) Quality of Institutions, (2) Macro-economic Stability, (3) Infrastructure, (4) Health, and the (5) Quality of Primary and Secondary Education. (6) Higher Education and Lifelong Learning (7), Labor Market Efficiency, and (8) Market Size (9), Technological Readiness, (10) Business Sophistication, and (11) Innovation. RCI aims at showing the short and long-term capabilities of the regions (European Commission, DG Regio).

Figure 23 Regional Competitiveness (RCI) of the Alpine Regions (NUTS 2) in comparison to the EU average



Source: (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017, p. 47)

As mentioned above, an important basis for the Alpine Regions' evolution was the realization of large infrastructural investments over the last decades. Increasing tourist flows and the continuous growth of the metropolitan regions made Alpine roadways' ongoing extension necessary. The increasing demand for the Alpine Region as a tourist destination and an industrial hub, which was also accompanied by a starkly rising daily commuter traffic, was, however, only one side of the coin. Another important factor was the rapid increase of trade flows between the European states, resulting in a continuously increasing transport of goods across the Alps. Due to the geographic framework conditions, political decision-makers concentrated the allocation efforts increasingly on the extension of traffic interconnections (e.g., transnational motorways) to connect the southern part of the continent with its central and northern parts (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 30). A negative side-effect of these major investments was the significant rise in traffic load on the Alpine roads, which led to a strong increase in environmental pollution alongside these routes.[215]

While the infrastructural accessibility of particular areas of the Alpine Regions, especially in the core-region, still presents a major challenge, the macro-region is nevertheless one of the highest integrated economic areas in terms of labor and trade integration. While the Alpine Region is also characterized by a substantial inflow of workforce from outside the macro-

[215] Between 1995 and 2005 the heavy goods traffic increased on the most congested motorways by 30 %. This is a particularly salient problem due to the caused external costs (including costs like environmental pollution) by heavy goods traffic on motorways. These external costs are assessed in the Alpine Region as being two to five times higher than in the plane areas (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 71).

region, a considerable share regarding labor mobility takes place within the area. Besides transnational commuting flows, many employees and also students migrate between the respective countries. This will be facilitated by a historically strong presence of multilingualism in these regions, which enables people to be more mobile.

While except for France, all regions show high transnational labor integration levels, which are above the EU-28 average. A particularly high integration level can be seen between the German-speaking regions (e.g., Germany, Austria, parts of Switzerland, and South Tyrol in Italy). The extraordinarily high values also apply to the factor of trade integration. Despite the highly globally internationalized economies of each Alpine state, the total export share to the macro-region accounts from 23 % (France) up to 45 % (Austria and Slovenia), which classifies the Alpine Region as one of the best-integrated areas in the EU. However, the degree of mutual energy exports remains, in comparison, still particularly low in the macro-region. Due to their high energy independence, the Alpine countries export only 6 % of their total energy production to their neighboring countries in the macro-region. While Slovenia is leading by far with an export-share of 22 %, followed by Austria and France with 15 and 10 % each, Germany and Italy export only 3 % and 2 % of their energy production to the macro-region, although both countries are considered as the largest energy exporters in the whole EU (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, pp. 32–41). While this detrimental fragmentation of the energy sector poses a challenge, it also poses a prospective chance for the Alpine Region. As the so-called "water tower of Europe" (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 29), the Alps pose huge potentials in hydropower production, which could be even more increased through the synergetic interconnection of the energy networks. However, it has to be seen if prospective approaches, like the below outlined EUSALP, will deliver a successful solution for creating an added value in terms of sustainable energy production (Interreg Alpine Space, 2014b, p. 12).

The overall economic framework conditions show overall a widely positive picture. However, a more detailed look into the Alpine Region unveils a much more heterogeneous situation of the macro-region regarding its geo-economic setting. While the economic disparities between NUTS 2 regions often seem to be rather balanced, the economic situation within these boundaries can strongly diverge. There is a particularly salient dichotomy observable between the rural areas, which are often located directly around Alpine massif and are confronted with a generally aging population, a comparably low general income, and a strong out-migration, while the metropolitan/urban areas show to the contrary very strong economic agglomeration effects. These contrasting economic poles can be further differentiated in various sub-areas.

Therefore we shall use the typology used by the Alpine Space Program (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 56), which differentiates the Alpine Region into five spaces:

1. **Metropolitan regions:** Metropolitan regions can be found in the foremost peripheral region of the Alps (outside the defined perimeter of the core-area). Each metropolitan area has a population of at least 750.000 people. The metropoles are leading in EU comparison concerning the infrastructural accessibility with distinct commuting flows from the surrounding area and a continuous increase of the population. They possess a very diversified economy with a strong service sector and a globally relevant R&D sector, which contributes to a high-level economic innovation capacity (e.g., Lyon, Milan, Zurich, Geneva, Bern, Ljubljana, Turin, etc.).
2. **Alpine cities:** Alpine cities are classified as urban areas with at least 50.000 inhabitants, a very beneficial level of infrastructural accessibility, and still dense commuting flows. They are often located in the surroundings of the Alpine core-region or in easily accessible valleys within it. While their economic impact is not necessarily of national importance, they are important regional economic actors. Their R&D sector is not as diversified as in metropole regions. Still, they often feature a strong specialization in specific economic areas, in which they are very competitive even on a global scale (e.g., Bozen/Bolzano, Innsbruck, St. Gallen, Constance, Annecy, Grenoble).
3. **Stable or growing rural areas:** These are areas with consistent or growing populations, which provide commuting workforces for the adjacent cities or metropoles. A major attribute in this regard their good infrastructural accessibility. These suburban areas often profit from the general agglomeration effects, which generate a relatively high GDP per capita. (e.g., parts of the Allgäu, Valle d'Aosta, Chablais, Vallée de l'Ain, Außerfern, etc.).
4. **Declining rural areas:** These are areas that are faced with a declining and aging population. They only provide low infrastructural accessibility and/or are located too far away from the cities/metropole regions for its working population's daily commuting. They can be found in the lowlands, pre-alpine, or high-alpine areas. The general population has a low average income and is employed in very weakly diversified economic structures, located predominantly in the agricultural sector. Out-migration and over-aging of the population are often accompanied by further infrastructural decline, which causes a vicious cycle of economic deprivation (e.g., parts of the Bavarian Alps or Carinthia, Tyrol Hautes Alpes, Hautes-Provence, etc.).
5. **Tourist areas:** These are regions where tourism is one of the main economic sectors. While often located within the Alps' core-region, they have relatively good infrastructural

accessibility, which is a key enabling factor for the region's economic success. High-cost infrastructural investments and construction projects are therefore considered as a key political priority by political actors. However, environmental organizations often heavily criticize such measures, thus leading to very heated debates concerning the future development of particular regions. The strong dependency on tourism also affects economic activities. Depending on the specific season, the particular settlements' revenues strongly vary, accompanied by a strongly varying composition of the population (e.g., in- and outflow of seasonal workers). This, however, makes the regions particularly sensitive to increasingly volatile environmental conditions (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 56).

7.2. Drafting and initiation of the EUSALP

The adoption of the Action Plan and Communication for the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) in July 2015 marked the continuation of the "macro-regional fever" in the EU. As the fourth and latest Macro-regional strategy, again high expectancies were communicated by the EU, the national governments, but especially by the local and regional authorities and the non-governmental stakeholders. In comparison to its macro-regional predecessors, the EUSALP could constitute its strategic focus on partially different objectives. By being a macro-region, which is characterized by relative economic homogeneity and shows a very beneficial economic overall performance, the objective of a balanced socio-economic development plays a comparably less pressing issue than in other strategies. This particularly applies regarding the external governance dimension. While Switzerland and Liechtenstein are both third countries, their relations are constituted on a widely different basis than, for example, in the EUSDR. As economically high-performing countries, which are not having a political interest to join the EU, the relations are not based on the premise of prospective membership. Instead, the common interest is aligned around the objective to further develop the principle of "good governance" through coordinated geospatial approaches. This aim of realizing "good governance" within the Alpine Region can be based on various beneficial framework conditions.

The Alpine governments can, as such, look back on a comparably long history of institutionalized cross-border cooperation. Transnational and intergovernmental cooperation initiatives inside (e.g., Alpine Space Program) and outside (e.g., Arge Alp or Alpine Convention) the EU framework, but also the existence of macro-regional non-governmental NGO networks (e.g., CIPRA) constituted from the beginning a solid foundation for the initiation of the EUSALP. Even in the light of the generally valid and already outlined "three noes rule", the starting conditions were for the EUSALP from the beginning far more beneficial

than for the EUSDR. A major beneficial factor is the strong position of the Alpine Regions. Due to their location in often highly federalized or regionalized states, the regions have substantial cross-border cooperation experience. They are thus able to carry out comprehensive horizontal coordination activities. Because of their comparably strong administrative position within the nation-states, they can further realize comprehensive vertical coordination across the institutional layers. Both dimensions are, as already outlined, essential dimensions to realize a system of Multi-Level Governance. Within the EUSALP, this led to a comprehensive involvement of regional actors, who participated alongside the national counterparts as formally equal members. Although the EUSALP resembles its macro-regional counterparts in many aspects, like through the Commission's empowerment with major competencies during the initiation and implementation process or the structural separation in two spheres, the strategy constitutes a new innovative approach which is in many ways unique. Therefore, it is necessary to put this strategy also under the previously realized three-dimensional analysis (Policy, Polity, Politics). The temporal development of the strategy should also be put under differentiated scrutiny. However, due to the shorter period of the strategy's development, especially with an implementation phase still under the two-year mark, the focus of analysis shall be foremost concentrated on the phase of initiation. However, due to the already first available reportings and general documents, the implementation phase will also be analyzed, accompanied by an outlook on the further evolution of the implementation phase.

Temporal milestones within the phase of initiation: From the idea to the launch of the EUSALP implementation

While the EUSALP constitutes the latest of the Macro-regional strategies (MRS) in the EU, the first debates and efforts concerning such an approach for the Alpine Region can be dated back to the 1990s. The foundation of the Alpine Convention (AC) in the year 1995 marked the first major project in terms of realizing a broad transnational policy approach. Based on an international treaty between eight Alpine states and the EU (see chapter 7.2.1), the AC's territorial scope was strictly limited to the Alpine ridge as core-region. The thematic objectives are mainly based on the area of environmental protection. The AC marks in this regard the first active intergovernmental approach to tackle some of the specific geospatial challenges in the Alpine Region and thus constituted also the prelude for the later efforts by the EU. However, despite the AC's promising start, a clear and concrete concept concerning a comprehensive macro-regional cooperation approach lacked during the next years. It led to the disappearance of the initial political momentum. A partial revival constituted the Alpine Space Program (ASP) initiation by the EU, which was created as a pilot project between 1997 and 1999 and is since

2000 constituted as a full Interreg B program. Although being limited by the program guidelines to primarily to fund "soft type interventions" and networking activities (Gloersen et al., 2013, pp. 105–106), the program contributed to an exceptionally large degree to the shaping of the later EUSALP in all three of its dimensions (Policy, Polity, Politics). Despite these milestones, the "dormant state" concerning the establishment of a comprehensive macro-regional cooperation approach pertained until 2009, when the initiation of the EUSBSR, as the first MRS, posed as a "wake-up call" and led to a reanimation of the debate (CIPRA Österreich, 2014, p. 7).

Accompanied by the general "macro-regional fever" among the EU institutions and national governments, the political debate soon gained significant momentum at the conference of the Alpine Regions in February 2009. The first considerations manifested in less than a year in a clear call for a Macro-region Strategy for the Alps by the environment ministers of various Alpine Regions ("Declaration of Mittenwald"). The initiative was also endorsed by a resolution of the *ARGE ALP* [216] in July 2011 (Alpine Regions, 2010a; ARGE ALP, 2011). The support for a strategy for the Alps was further underlined by the ARGE ALP at the conference in Bad Ragaz (Switzerland) through the drafting of an initiative paper in June 2012, which contained an assessment of the main challenges for the Alpine Region (ARGE ALP, 2012). In October, this was followed by an open call upon the EC to support the initiation process and the later implementation of the EUSALP. The political momentum, which at that time was still evolving primarily outside the EU framework, was further boosted by the initiation of a working group by the Alpine Convention, which aimed to support the upcoming drafting process. This also led to a mobilization of the Alpine Space Program and the European Parliament in May of the following year. While the ASP submitted an expert report concerning the feasibility of the potential strategy (Gloersen et al., 2013), the EP signaled in its resolution its will to support the initiation of the strategy by also calling upon the EC to become active regarding the EUSALP's realization (European Parliament, 2013, p. 3).

Two further resolutions also accompanied the document of the EP. The first was from the ARGE ALP in June at the conference in Galtür (Austria), where the potential areas of interventions were outlined again (ARGE ALP, 2013). The second resolution was drafted by an informal formation of representatives from the States and Regions of the Alpine Region

[216] The ARGE ALP is a cooperation initiative consisting of various Alpine Regions of Germany, Italy, Austria, and Switzerland. The cooperation has the objective to tackle various specific challenges located in the Alpine Region (e.g., traffic, environmental protection, etc.), which should be attained through a joint coordinated approach.

("Grenoble Declaration"). The latter document was then presented officially in Brussels to highlight the intended cornerstones of cooperation (States and Regions of the Alpine Region, 2013) and underline the high-level political support through the joint declaration.

A major milestone marked the constitution of the so-called "Steering Committee". This committee, which was constituted as preliminary institutionalized drafting and decision-making body for the EUSALP, comprised representatives from the national and regional governments and further included the ASP and the AC as observers (EUSALP, 2017a, p. 1). This committee's multilateral nature provided further political momentum, which finally led to the official invitation of the EC by the Council to draft an Action Plan and a Communication in December 2013. These two documents, which should constitute the basic documents, shall be according to the Council realized in collaboration with the Alpine states' governmental representatives and also involve the representatives of the regions.

Like the EUSDR, the drafting of the documents triggered in the following an online public consultation between July and December 2014, followed by a major stakeholder conference in Milan (IT) between 1st and 2nd December (CIPRA Österreich, 2014; EUSALP, 2017a, p. 2). The positions by the stakeholders were also accompanied by statements of the various EU institutions. The Council submitted its position in the form of a Council Conclusion in October 2014. The Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee followed by issuing their opinion in December 2014. The final stage of the formal initiation phase was marked in July 2014 with the Action Plan and Communication's adoption. The Council finally endorsed the documents in November 2015 (Council of the European Union, 2015; European Commission, 2015c).

With the closing of the strategy's drafting, the implementation process's launch took place at the conference in Brdo (Slovenia), as a kick-off event, in January 2016. It was soon followed by the Action Groups' first meetings and the Executive Board of the EUSALP between June and July 2016. Although the first Action Groups already started with their implementation activities, the European Council's final endorsement of the EUSALP took only place in the same month. The last formal action in the drafting phase occurred even later, namely with the EP's resolution in 2016, where the institution endorsed the EUSALP.

Table 13 Timeline and main milestones of the EUSALP's drafting process	
February 2009	Conference of the Alpine Regions under the leaderships of the French Rhône-Alpes region
March 2010	Call for a macro-regional strategy for the Alps in the "Declaration of Mittenwald" (DE) by the ministers of environment of the regional governments
July 2011	Resolution of the Arge Alp at the conference in Zell am See (AT) with the agreement to support the establishment of the EUSALP
June/October 2012	Initiative Paper and political meeting in Innsbruck (AT) by the representatives of Arge Alp with call on the EC to support and accompany the initiation and implementation of EUSALP
September 2012	Initiation of a working group by the Alpine Convention to support the drafting process of the EUSALP
May 2013	Expert report by the Alpine Space Program (ETC) to support the drafting process of the EUSALP
May 2013	Resolution by the European Parliament
October/November 2013	Conference of the "States and Regions of the Alpine Region" in Grenoble (FR) with draft of a political resolution, which was presented in Brussels (BE) containing the main perimeters of the strategy
November 2013	Constitution of a "Steering Committee" with governmental representatives from states and regions of the Alpine Region, while the Alpine Space Program and Alpine Convention functioned as observers
December 2013	Invitation of the EC by the Council to elaborate a draft for the EUSALP in collaboration with the Alpine Regions and states
June 2014	Conference of the heads of states of the Alpine Region in Trento with resolution regarding the EUSALP
July – December 2014	Public online consultation between July and December with stakeholder conference in Milan (IT) (1-2 December)
December 2014	Adoption of Opinions by the Committee of Regions and European Economic and Social Committee

June 2015	Resolution of ARGE ALP to the EC and Council concerning the EUSALP
July 2015	Adoption of the EUSALP Action Plan and the Communication of the EC
November 2015	Endorsement of the EUSALP by the Council of the EU
January 2016	"Kick-off" event of the EUSALP at the conference in Brdo (SI)
June - July 2016	Final endorsement of the EUSALP by the European Council in June 2016 followed by first meetings of the EUSALP Executive Board and Action Groups constituting the beginning of the implementation phase
September 2016	Resolution of the EP on the EUSALP

7.2.1. Policy dimension

The European Commission describes the Alpine Region as territorial space with the "[…]richest areas in the world and among the economically most dynamic, innovative and competitive areas in Europe with unique geographical and natural features[…]" (European Commission, 2015d, p. 2). While this area provides very beneficial framework conditions, the geospatial factors also constitute various economic, environmental, and social challenges, which define the need for Action within the strategy.

The first effect concerns the territorial scope of the strategy. As a network of Regional Cross-Border Governance, the selection of EUSALP actors, who are in geographic proximity to the Alpine massif, and are thus impacted by the Alps as a geospatial factor, also defines the character of the network to a large degree. While this obligatory vicinity already limits the potential group of participating actors, the macro-region's geographic perimeters also define the functional dimension of the strategy. This unfolds as a second effect in the specific selection of policy goals. Therefore, the goal-setting must be constituted to tackle specific geospatial challenges in the macro-region, which cannot be overcome by a single or few governmental actors alone. TTo succeed in this regard, challenges often demand a tailor-made and place-based approach. The actor constellation as well as the policy goal setting are consequentially decisive elements within the policy dimension and the drafting process. In the EUSALP they are addressed in the main policy documents of the strategy, namely the Communication and the so-called "Action Plan".

Actor-constellation

Based on the premise that the EUSALP should tackle specific geographic challenges that affect the whole macro-regional territory, the involvement of governmental actors being in direct proximity to the Alpine massif was from standing to reasons. However, in comparison to its macro-regional counterparts, which are mainly consisting of national governments and involve some few LRA's as s as equal actors (e.g., EUSDR, EUSBSR), the EUSALP constitutes in this regard a new approach. Being widely predetermined by the strong presence of federalized and regionalized administrative structures, the regions' involvement within the strategy presented itself as a reasonable consideration concerning the actor-constellation. This approach was feasible even with the involvement of two-third of the countries. Liechtenstein participates as a country whose population and territory is smaller than most participating regions and thus constitutes no particular distortion. On the other hand, Switzerland is the country with the most federalized administrative structure among all Alpine countries (see chapter 7.2.2).

Therefore, the final actor-constellation of governmental actors comprises five EU members, two non-members, and 48 regions.

Table 14 List of participating governmental actors of the EUSALP

Country	National authorities	Regional authorities
Austria	• Federal Chancellery • Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs	• Burgenland • Kärnten • Niederösterreich • Oberösterreich • Salzburg • Steiermark • Tirol • Vorarlberg • Wien
France	• Cabinet du Premier Ministre – Direction Du Développement des Capacités des Territories	• Franche-Comté • Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur • Rhone Alpes
Germany	• Auswaertiges Amt (Department for Middle and Eastern Europa - Federal Foreign Office)	• Baden-Württemberg • Bavaria
Italy	• Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale Direzione Generale per l'Unione Europea • Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri	• Bozen (Autonomous Province) • Friuli Venezia Giulia • Liguria • Lombardy • Piedmont • Trento (Autonomous Province) • Valle d'Aosta • Veneto

Liechtenstein	• Unit for Environment and Sustainable Development Office for Foreign Affairs - Principality of Liechtenstein	
Slovenia	• Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Republic of Slovenia	
Switzerland	• UVEK Eidgenössisches Departement für Umwelt, Verkehr, Energie und Kommunikation • ARE Bundesamt für Raumentwicklung	• Aargau • Appenzell Ausserrhoden • Appenzell Innerrhoden • Bern • Basel-Landschaft • Basel-Stadt • Fribourg • Geneva • Glarus • Graubünden • Jura • Lucerne • Neuchatel • Nidwalden • Obwalden • Schaffhausen • Schwyz • Solothurn • St. Gallen • Thurgau • Ticino • Uri • Valais • Vaud • Zug • Zürich

Territorial delineation of the program area

With the above-depicted actor constellation, the Alpine Region is delineated with the largest territorial scope from the above outlined three major definitions. With a territorial coverage of 450.000 km2 and a population of around 80 million people, the strategy of the strategy includes the above outlined whole peripheral region with all the adjacent metropolitan regions and larger cities. In comparison to the other strategies, this actor-constellation, and with it the territorial delineation, was not constituted in a top-down manner. Instead, it was preceded by an intensive deliberation process accompanied by a variety of contrasting opinions (Klotz and Trettel, 2016, p. 25). As such, the largest territorial delineation supporters, foremost the EC and regional governments, were faced with open reservations and partially even a strong opposition. This opposition was formed foremost by the Alpine Convention and various major non-governmental stakeholders from the Alpine Region. The opposing group's opinion derived from their traditional promotion of a much more narrow delineation of the spatial Alpine perimeters and their environmental focus on the core-region of the Alpine ridge (Balsiger, 2016, p. 201). The Alpine Convention in particular, whose area of engagement is since its establishment strictly focused on this core-area of the Alps[217], considered the territorial coverage of the

[217] The Alpine Convention was founded in 1991 as an International Organization on the basis of an intergovernmental treaty among the Alpine States (Germany, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Austria,

EUSALP as a dilution of the place-based policy approach, due to the involvement of the peripheral area with the metropoles, which are considered as non-genuinely Alpine territory. While the AC finally agreed to the territorial delineation of the EUSALP, the AC began to highlight the structural interdependencies between the core and peripheral region. In this regard, the AC highlighted the importance of strong cooperation between the AC and the EUSALP, which would be beneficial for these two sub-regions and contribute to the whole macro-region's sustainable development (Alpine Convention, 2012, pp. 8–10).

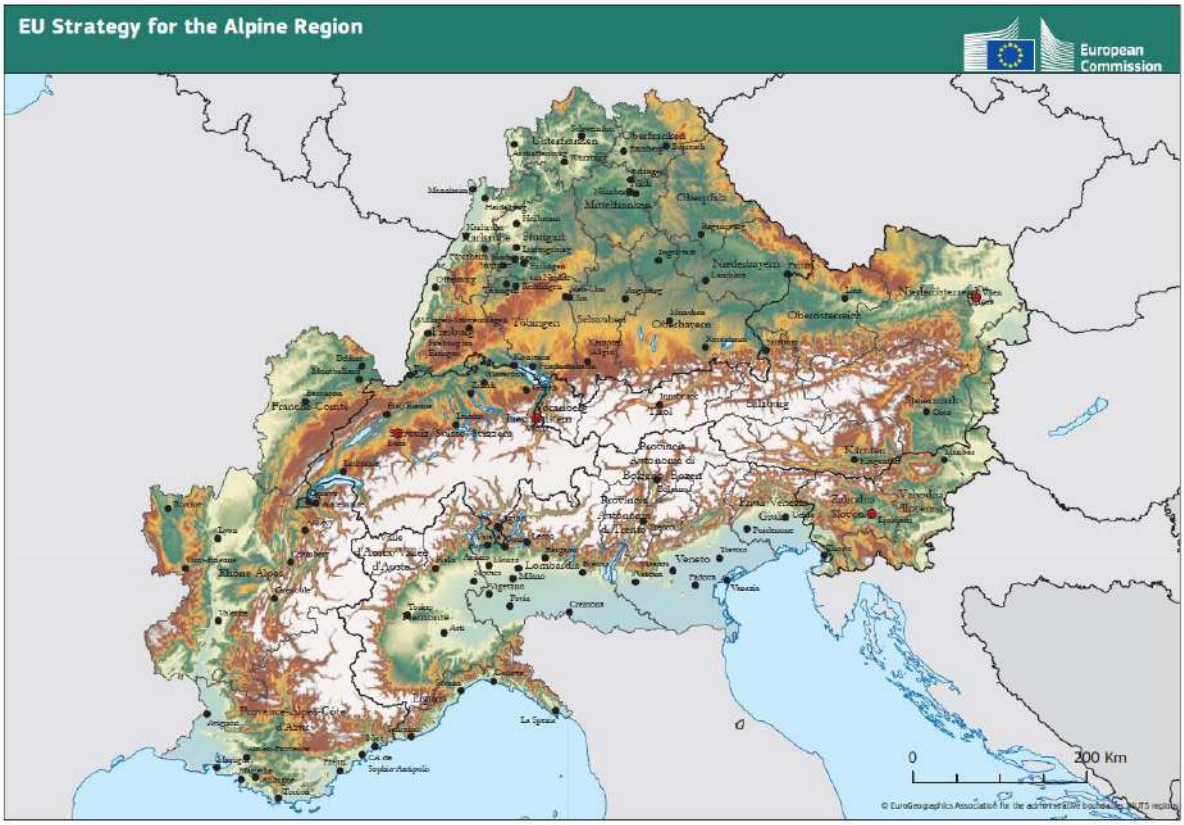
In the meantime, the open critique was issued towards the spatial perimeters of the EUSALP non-governmental stakeholders. CIPRA and Club Arc Alpin,[218] accompanied by some academic researchers, were widely dissatisfied with the territorial scope (Bramanti and Teston, 2017, p. 9). The main point of critique was among the NGOs the prevalent economic asymmetry between core and peripheral areas in the Alpine Region. Especially the size of the metropolitan populations, more than 80 million people in total, and the economic performance of these urban areas were seen as a potential threat regarding a balanced and sustainable development of both sub-regions (Club Arc Alpin, 2011, p. 1). The accompanying political dominance of the metropolitan cities, for example, Munich, Milan, Vienna, or Zurich, was regarded as a potential danger, enhancing one sided-spatial approach with an allocation focus on the urban areas and their adjacent regions while neglecting the core-region of the Alps. These concerns were justified with the argument that even in current times, the metropolitan regions often consider the core area of the Alpine Region primarily only as a recreational area for their urban population. According to the critics, such a mindset would result in a lack of comprehensive and balanced geospatial approaches by the metropolitan administrations, leaving the core-region in a state of being a diminished "backcountry" of these cities. Further concerns were issued regarding the missing traditions of cooperation between the two sub-regions, which materialized in the absence of an overarching geospatial policy vision for the whole area. This criticized lack of a common approach was thus identified as a significant obstacle concerning the strategy's successful initiation (Bätzing, 2014, p. 10).

Switzerland, and Slovenia) with the purpose to contribute to sustainable development and environmental protection of the Alps.

[218] CIPRA (International Convention for the Protection of the Alps) is a transnational umbrella organization with over 100 member NGOs. Founded in 1952 and with its main office in Liechtenstein, CIPRA is one of the most significant non-governmental actors in the area of environmental protection in the Alpine Region. Club Arc Alpine was founded in 1995 and represents all major Alpine sports associations. Besides representing over 1,7 million members (in comparison: the whole region of the Alpine ridge comprises 15 million people), the Alpine associations have traditionally a strong social position within the Alpine communities, which makes the CAA also an influential organization.

However, despite the issued critique points by the NGOs concerning the territorial scope of the strategy, the drafting progress was undeterredly continued by the actors. The originally designated territorial delineation of the macro-region, including the peripheral sub-region, was maintained by the governmental actors and the EC. The insight of being unable to achieve a territorial limitation of the strategy triggered, as a result, also a strategic reorientation by various NGOs, which wanted to avoid being sidelined during the following drafting phase. A good example in this regard was CIPRA and Club Arc Alpin. Although the organizations upheld their critique concerning the inclusion of the metropolitan region, the organizations nevertheless emphasized the importance of becoming more strongly involved within the governance structure and the strategy's implementation process. This was justified with the self-declared importance of their role in overseeing the implementation of the policy goals and thus ensuring sustainable development within the whole Alpine Region (CIPRA Österreich, 2014, p. 12; Club Arc Alpin, 2015, p. 1).

Figure 24 Territorial Scope of the EUSALP



Source: European Commission

In contrast to the reservations by the AC and foremost the non-governmental sphere, the representatives of the regional and national governments emphasized since the beginning of the initiation process the necessity of a broad territorial coverage. In this regard, the main advocate

was the ARGE ALP, a governmental initiative by the Alpine Regions, which covers large parts of the Alpine Territory. In its resolution from 11th July 2011, the ARGE ALP acknowledged the stark heterogeneity between the two Alpine sub-regions and emphasized the necessity of a specific political focus on the Alpine ridge. Within the document, the representatives, however, also point out that both regions from both Alpine sub-regions are facing, despite their heterogeneity, common globalization induced challenges, which demand a joint approach. In the following, the ARGE ALP emphasized the importance of considering the strategy as a balanced approach with a geographic focus on the Alpine massif. Simultaneously it also underlined the necessity to consider the Alpine Region as a functional space with varying policy goal-related boundaries (ARGE ALP, 2011, pp. 1–2). During the evolving initiation process, this consideration was also picked up by the EU institutions. The CoR underlined in its opinion the necessity to particularly focus on the core-region of the Alps with its salient environmental and economic challenges.

Similar to the Arge Alp, it highlighted the issue of giving adequate consideration to the surrounding peripheral regions to establish comprehensive political synergies. Therefore, the CoR also supported the idea of a variable area concerning the policy implementation, which should be determined on a case-by-case basis (Committee of the Regions, 2014c, p. 1, 2014c, p. 5). In the so-called "Milan Declaration", which was drafted by the heads of Alpine Regions and states at the general stakeholder meeting between 1st and 2nd of December 2014, this flexible territorial approach between the core and peripheral area was declared as a joint position by the actors. The actors further justified this approach with the premise of realizing a place-based policy approach with a specific added-value for the whole Alpine Region, which also corresponds with the general principle of subsidiarity. Especially the regional governments were particularly active in promoting this variable approach (EUSALP, 2014, pp. 1–2). During the following drafting and adoption of the Communication and Action Plan, the "College", consisting of Council, EP, CoR, ECSC, fixed the final territorial delineation in June 2015. This territorial scope was, however, in its final form even bigger than the program area of the Alpine Space Program by including, as already outlined, additionally several German NUTS II regions. The finally enlarged spatial perimeters were constituted under the premise of including the provincial capitals of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg, thus generating further political

momentum and support by the two economically strong performing provinces strategy (Kauk, 2015, p. 39).

Goal setting

In contrast to its other macro-regional counterparts, the setting of the EUSALP's policy goals was characterized by a very broad and comprehensive deliberation process within the strategy. While other strategies are equipped with a goal-setting, which is constituted in a rather strict top-down manner (e.g, EUSDR), the EUSALP involved the LRAs and the non-governmental sphere within this process. This also impacted the final goal setting to a large degree.

In the run up to the beginning of the initiation phase, the Alpine Region's policy initiatives were often characterized by duplications and fragmentations, which did have only a limited amount of impact on the whole macro-region (see above). Although the Alpine Convention marked a decisive step towards generating a transnational cooperation scheme in the area, its policy goals were mainly focused on the Alpine ridge and on distinct environmental protection issues. While the AC formally does also include areas of intervention like the aim to improve the infrastructural interconnection of both sub-regions, the improvement of the education opportunities for people living in the area, or the tackling of problems like aging population and out-migration, these objectives play a rather subordinated role in comparison to its main priorities (Alpine Convention, 2012, pp. 6–8). This also impacted the stance of the AC during the drafting phase. It underlined its aim to assist the EUSALP with expert knowledge and administrative support to create potential synergies for the peripheral and core Alpine Region. The AC simultaneously emphasized its point of view, namely, to shape the strategy with a strong policy focus on sustainable development (Alpine Convention, 2014). The promotion of an ecoregional approach within the EUSALP was particularly endorsed by the non-governmental sphere, which, similarly to the debate concerning the territorial delineation of the strategy, initially rejected a broad policy approach in the EUSALP. The stakeholders openly called for a non-inclusion of various policy topics, which were not genuinely located within the area of environmental protection (Balsiger, 2016, p. 201).

The ongoing development of the EUSALP led, however, also in this regard to a strategic repositioning. In 2013 CIPRA already acknowledged and supported a more flexible approach. While the policy goal setting of the EUSALP was designated to include areas of intervention, which are not genuinely located in the area of environmental protection, CIPRA called that the goals should be implemented under strict and continuous consideration of environmental protection issues. In its position paper, CIPRA proposed that, for example, the area of energy policy should be carried out under the consideration of environmental aspects, namely by

waiving the construction of any additional hydroelectric power stations. Various other policy proposals by the organization, like for example, the call for a "near-natural" tourism or transport policy in the light "soft mobility", followed a similar argumentation pattern and showed thus a rather one-sided approach (CIPRA, 2013).

In a common position paper by the College of Alpine NGOs (CIPRA, CAA, ISCAR, Alliance in the Alps, Alpine Town of the Year, WWF, proMONT-Blanc, and IUCN), the necessity for "sustainable development" was also emphasized. However, this statement's wording was much more open and less rigid than CIPRA's previous position paper. Instead of issuing a list of ecological claims, the organizations foremost pronounced their will regarding a generally strong non-governmental stakeholder involvement within the EUSALP (Alliance in the Alps et al., 2014).

In contrast to the non-governmental stakeholders' demands for a predominantly environmental protection-oriented strategy, the looming elaboration of policy goals did cover a much larger range of policy issues. As noted by the NGOs and the AC, this posed a significant challenge to overcome partially persisting contradictory framework conditions between the various regions inside the EUSALP territory. The above-outlined pertaining friction between rapidly growing metropolitan regions, which are characterized by a prospering economy, and the depopulation struck isolated regions, which are becoming socioeconomically deprived "no man's land", was just one of the more salient issues concerning the prospective goal attainment. Very difficult framework conditions also characterized other policy objectives. An example in this regard is the strategic management of Alpine tourism. While tourism is an important economic sector across all regions and certainly needs comprehensive political support, each tourist region, especially across national borders, is in constant competition to increase their overnight stays, which starkly complicates the finding of joint solutions.

The tourism sector's economic success is particularly salient for the mentioned "no man's lands" within the Alps' core region. These regions are often substantially dependent on tourism, often constituting the predominant economic sector, which often leads to unwillingness or inability to make any concessions regarding a joint macro-regional approach (Bätzing, 2014, p. 15). Taking these individual regions' highly differentiated framework conditions into consideration, the Alpine Regions' governmental representatives acknowledged the necessity of a highly differentiated approach right from the beginning of the drafting phase. In 2010 the ARGE ALP, as a very influential political promoter of the EUSALP (see chapter 8.2.3), highlighted in its "Mittenwald Declaration" the salience of this situation and stipulated the solution of this problem as one major policy goal within the future strategy (Alpine Regions, 2010a). In its

following initiative paper, the Alpine Regions again underlined the importance of not considering the Alps as a homogenous region (ARGE ALP, 2012, pp. 18–25). Therefore they outlined five policy cornerstones, which should provide the foundation for creating a place-based approach.: 1) Research and development 2) Increasing the attractiveness of the economy and labor market 3) Secure the sustainable development of agriculture and forestry 4) Integrated tourism, health system and service sector quality 5) Brand awareness of the macro-region (ARGE ALP, 2012, p. 4).

A joint intervention document followed this by the Alpine states and regions, in which the principle of equity between peripheral and core regions was again underlined. For the successful realization of the equity principle, again, the importance of a flexible territorial and functional approach between these sub-regions was stressed. A particular emphasis was further put on the necessity of defining a clear set of concrete policy goals, which should be prioritized concerning goal attainment. This call was justified with the aim to prevent any potential dilution of the place-based approach by the strategy. However, in contrast to the non-governmental stakeholders with their heavy focus on the environmental protection agenda, the prospective governmental EUSALP actors highlighted the importance of also putting a strong focus on the industrial sector, more specifically on the emerging industries in the macro-region (Alpine States and Alpine Regions, 2013, p. 7).

In 2014 the Alpine Space Program (ASP) also became active and took part in the debates accompanying the drafting process. The ASP was considered a valuable entity due to its significant administrative capacities, and its already gained broad program experience over the years (Evrard, 2013, p. 117). The program published in the same year a comprehensive and very detailed study concerning the strategic feasibility of the EUSALP. The constituted expert group of the ASP identified various major potential policy challenges. A particular emphasis was placed on the importance of a strong place-based approach, accompanied by the expert group's warning not to imitate general Cohesion Policy goals without any comprehensive reflection and adaption of the objectives regarding their specific added value for the macro-region. To achieve this target, the ASP report proposed that a thorough "stringent and logical analysis" would be necessary for identifying particular regional attributes and challenges to increase the strategy's potential success (Gloersen et al., 2013, pp. 37–39). The expert group further stated that among the other Macro-regional strategies, a general tendency towards a

dilution of this specific place-based approach could be observed, which contradicts their added value and should be prevented by any means (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 44).

Therefore, the following report presented a selection of 20 "strategic fields of intervention" for the policy dimension. These fields were put under an extensive SWOT-analysis and were additionally ranked regarding their relevancy/importance concerning the Alpine Region (Gloersen et al., 2013, pp. 82–86). To prevent fragmentation of the policy objectives, these intervention areas were further bundled in seven policy clusters. The policy clusters were based on the premise of thematic proximity to facilitate the designated cross-sectoral approach, which would also be a basic functioning principle of the strategy.

While the document of the ASP was still far from constituting the final set of policy goals, the detailed and clustered elaboration of potential areas of intervention constituted a major advancement in the drafting process. Also, it influenced the final policy framework to a large degree (Gloersen et al., 2013, pp. 88–104). The role of the ASP was also important concerning the later monitoring of EUSALP implementation. Due to the parallel progress of the EUSALP's initiation phase and the beginning of the new program period of the ASP (Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2014-2020), the transnational program allocated financial resources to improve the implementation of policy goals and to support the monitoring procedure among others (Interreg Alpine Space, 2014a, p. 59).

The policy goal setting was further influenced by the following intervention document drafted by the so-called “Alpine Regions and States”. Compared to the ASP’s publication, which was already very detailed concerning the policy goals, this document mainly concentrated on outlining the basic strategic guidelines, which should function as a policy framework for the final drafting process. These three guidelines were aligned around the policy issues of 1) economic growth, full employment and competitiveness 2) development of mobility, service, and infrastructure 3) protection of the environment and preserving biodiversity (States and Regions of the Alpine Region, 2013, p. 5).[219]

In December 2013, the various policy proposals were finally followed by the Council's invitation of the EC to carry out the drafting of the Communication and Action Plan as basic policy documents of the strategy. The Council underlined in its invitation that this mandate

[219] In detail, these three guidelines were elaborated as follows: 1) Ensuring growth, promoting full employment, competitiveness and innovation by consolidating and diversifying specific economic activities; 2) Promoting a territorial organization that is focused on environmentally friendly mobility, development of services and infrastructures; 3) Protecting the environment and preserving biodiversity by promoting sustainable management of energy and natural and cultural resources.

should be carried out together with the national and regional governmental actors. To comply with the provision, a so-called Steering Committee (the structural predecessor of the Executive Board) was established, which comprised representatives from the Alpine states and regions and was chaired by the EC. Due to their prior valuable contributions to the formulation of the strategy's policy goals, the Alpine Convention and the Alpine Space Program, were also involved in the Steering Committee (SC). Their role was, however, limited to sheer observer status.

The overall activities of the Steering Committee concerning the final development of the policy goal setting were of major relevance. Although the EC was formally in charge of the drafting, the consultation documents of the Steering Committee's meetings in Luzern on the 28th April 2014 as well as the later meetings, paved with regards to the EUSALP's policy goals the foundation for the following drafting procedure by the EC (EUSALP Steering Committee, 2014a, p. 1). At the three meetings of the SC's Working Groups, the later basic goal setting was constituted, namely with the differentiation in Actions and Action Groups. The goal-setting by the Steering Committee had already at this stage such a high degree of maturity that compared to the final policy framework, only minor differences can be identified. To illustrate the very limited extent of the later adaptations, some examples shall be given: The issue of digital accessibility, which was assigned to Policy Area 2 in the final Action Plan, was originally embedded in the first Policy Area of the SC's document (Economic Growth and Innovation), however without any decisive alteration of the content (EUSALP Steering Committee, 2014b, p. 3). Within Policy Area 2 (Mobility and Connectivity), a merger of the previous alone-standing policy goals, namely the aim of "better common management of transport and mobility" and "enhancing and promoting intermodality for passengers and the use of common and public transports", was carried out (EUSALP Steering Committee, 2014a, p. 2).

Both objectives were integrated within the final Action Plan into one joint policy goal, namely in Action Group 4.

In Policy Area 3 (Environment and Energy), the continuous agenda-setting by various involved stakeholders (e.g., AC, CoR, CIPRA etc.) concerning environmental protection in the Alpine core-area led to a valorization of the issue and a prominent role within the strategies's goal setting. The issues of "ecological connectivity" and "preservation of natural resources" were split up into two autonomous areas of interventions, namely Action Group 6 and 7 (EUSALP

Steering Committee, 2014a, pp. 2–3). As an integrated Policy Area (combined with renewable energy), it presented the strategy's largest intervention area.

Although the Steering Committee's meeting in Luzern was 2014 followed by four meetings in Brussels (7th May), Chambery (12-13th June), Brussels (8th October), and Zurich (13-14th November), the agreed goal-setting was overall to a large degree directly transferred into the final policy documents (see the table below).

Table 15 Policy goals and target setting in the EUSALP

	Policy Area	Action Group		TOs of the CPR (Art. 9 (EU) No 1303/2013)	
	(1) Economic Growth and Innovation	**AG 1**	**To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem**	(1)	"strengthening research, technological development and innovation;"
		Target & Indicator	1) Joint EUSALP research and innovation agenda 2) Joint Alpine Region research actions related to specific Alpine development fields		
		AG 2	**To increase the economic potential of strategic sectors**		
		Target & Indicator	1) Support to trans-border cooperation structures aiming to enhance the innovation capacity of SMEs 2) Established Alpine Region brands 3) Youth entrepreneurship – individual business owners younger than 30 years	(3)	"enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, of the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and of the fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF);"
		AG 3	**To improve the adequacy of labour market, education and training in strategic sectors**		
		Target & Indicator	1) Joint Alpine Region job-centers 2) Joint Alpine Region training sessions provided (or participants in these sessions) related to specific Alpine development fields	(8) (10)	„promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility;" "investing in education, training

					and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning”
	(2) Mobility and Connectivity	**AG 4**	**To promote inter-modality and interoperability in passenger and freight transport**		
		Target & Indicator	1) Internal and external connectivity in the Region including travel time (km of railway lines complying with TEN-T criteria and guidelines) 2) Strengthening regional transport systems by linking peripheral regions to TEN-T networks and secondary 3) Streamlining of connections n° bottlenecks through of identified eliminated small-scale interventions 4) Improvement of the interoperability procedures of rail public transport at transnational and cross border level 5) Use of public transport compared to private means 6) Common management, ticketing and information systems 7) Optimal interconnection of national transport networks 8) Annual use of main networks of collective passenger transport at cross- border level 9) Increase potential capacity trains/day, reduction of travel time 10) Tons of goods loaded/unloaded in interchange nodes 11) Rail passenger traffic generated by ports, logistic centers and airports 12) Coverage of basic services (medical, postal, grocery) for local communities 13) Quality of transport	(7)	„promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures;”
		AG 5	**To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services**		
		Target & Indicator	1) Coverage of households by broadband with minimum 30 Mbps download speed 2) Coverage of households by broadband with minimum30 Mbps download speed in the most remote areas 3) Coverage of enterprises and public buildings covered by broadband with minimum 30 Mbps download speed 4) Rate of e- health users 5) Rate of e-commerce users 6) Rate of e- government users 7) Rate of population close to minimum services (less than 20 min drive) 8) N° of developed innovating cross-border services solutions (cross border and e-services) 9) Percentage of people using Internet 10) Building of a composite indicator for assessing/comparing the quality of e-services of general interest 11) Use of the common 112 dial emergency number	(2)	“enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT;”

	(3) Environment and Energy	**AG 6**	**To preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources**		
		Target & Indicator	1) Unlocking creative potential in the development of products and services, building on natural and cultural resources through the development of an 'Alpine innovation label' for products from the 'green economy sector' building on natural and cultural resources including bio-based products in the bio-economy sector 2) Improved valorisation of the Alpine resources at an international level through improved representation of the Alpine Sites within the UNESCO world list23 3) Guaranteed long-term access to drinking water through public water supply is (completely) organised by public institutions in order to ensure equal accessibility 4) Watershed management systems are established at transnational and cross- sectorial level through the establishment of an international stakeholders' network for integrated water management for the Alpine Region 5) Joint integrated 'identity' plan for a sustainable development attractiveness of the Alpine Region based on richness of different natural, bio-based, cultural values and typical products 6) Investments in valorisation of cultural and natural heritage, in ecosystem services and green infrastructures 7) Protect and enhance agricultural and forestry systems of high natural value	(4)	"supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors;"
		AG 7	**To develop ecological connectivity in the whole EUSALP territory**		
		Target & Indicator	1) Alpine States and Regions are sharing cross-border harmonised information and methods on ecological connectivity through the implementation of an Alpine- wide standardised publicly accessible software tool 2) Alpine States and Regions are sharing cross-border harmonised information and methods through a joint monitoring of landscape fragmentation using European-wide indicators e.g. effective mesh size, effective mesh density, weighted urban sprawl, indicator species) and implementation of results into other monitoring systems (e.g. biodiversity monitoring or monitoring of sustainable development) 3) Development of a trans- sectorial strategic landscape vision to improve ecological connectivity between and outside protected areas and between surrounding mountainous regions 4) Connectivity is integrated into spatial planning and coordinated with all relevant sectors through consideration of the trans-sectorial strategic landscape vision in regional and national spatial planning instruments		

			5) Adoption of plans and/or programmes exploiting synergies at international level between protected areas, such as the NATURA 2000 or Emerald network sites, in view of improving ecological connectivity in the whole Alpine Region		
		AG 8	**To improve risk management and to better manage climate change, including major natural risks prevention**		
		Target & Indicator	1) Development of a strategy for observation and modelling of climate change impact and vulnerability assessments. 2) Creation of an Alpine network of climate change observatories 3) Develop of an Alpine adaptation strategy and accompanying action plan based on a comprehensive vulnerability assessment and in line with the existing national adaptation strategies 4) Implementation of risk management information systems and early warning systems (EAS) at regional level 5) Coordination mechanisms between disaster risk management and climate change adaptation established	(5)	”promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management;”
		AG 9	**To make the territory a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy**		
		Target & Indicator	1) Establishment of a cluster on Alpine Energy Efficiency (e.g. for buildings) 2) Renewable energy production in the Alps 3) ‘Greening the Alpine infrastructure’ through the development and implementation of joint energy efficiency indicators 4) Organisation of a continuous energy dialogue with the public 5) Development of a set of sustainability criteria for electricity grids 6) Strengthen transnational cooperation when planning and evaluating energy infrastructure 7) Development of smart energy monitoring and management systems 8) Set up of sustainable bioenergy supply chains 9) Integrated plans for local waste management for energy use	(6)	“preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency;”

(4) Cross-cutting Policy Area : Governance, including Institutional Capacity			
Targets & Indicator	1) Organise Alpine ministers meetings on a regular basis 2) Deliver a clear mandate and appropriate time and resources to key partners (coordination and implementation level) 3) National Coordinators to ensure sectorial dialogue; plan and organise cross-sectorial meetings 4) Continuous monitoring of progress. Alert governance body of risks of deviation in targets or the emergence of a problem or a bottleneck 5) Providing conflict management mechanisms; Providing solutions or procedures to deal with 'competing demands' among different areas or actors 6) Ensuring the embedding of EUSALP into the programmes for the 2014-2020 financial cycles and the mobilisation of the relevant EU funds and of other national/regional/local available resources to support the implementation of the Strategy and the achievement of its objectives 7) Constantly raising awareness; organise publicity and divulgence actions; create a stakeholders' platform to structure debate	(11)	"enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration."

Source: Own depiction based on (European Commission, 2015c)

The final policy goal setting of the EUSALP is aligned around a comparably broad range of macro-regional topics. The various policy goals are bundled in four Policy Areas, which are in their setups similar to the Pillars of the EUSDR. Three of these Policy Areas have thematic spatial development objectives, while the fourth is constituted as a horizontal objective to supervise and improve the governance structure and the institutional capacity of the EUSALP. Each area of intervention, which in the EUSALP are named Action Groups (AGs), can be qualified as strategic goals addressing particular place-based challenges in the macro-region. The numerical limitation to only nine Action Groups is compared to the other MRS, the smallest number of intervention areas. This concentration on fewer objectives contributes to a more specific policy focus and can thus prevent an eventual fragmentation, which partially turned out to be a problem within other strategies. Policy issues, which are certainly also present in the Alpine Region but to a lesser degree a pressing problem on this particular macro-regional scale, were intentionally left out of the goal-setting to prevent a dilution of the strategic impact. Such an example is the Thematic Objective 9 of the CPR (Art. 9 (9) (EU) No 1303/2013). The TO 9 of the CPR addresses the issue of promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination. While this is without a doubt an important topic, however, it is not a macro-regional-specific challenge and was therefore not addressed by the EUSALP in the form of an alone-standing Action. A further concentration of policy goals was also carried out within Action 3 ("To improve the adequacy of the labor market, education, and training in strategic sectors"). The Action is constituted as a thematic merger of the CPR TO 8 ("promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labor mobility;") and CPR TO 10

("investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning"). This concentration seems reasonable in the limelight of the partial thematic overlapping of the two objectives, which are also within the EU mainstream politics often addressed together as "two sides of the same coin".

On the other hand, the EUSALP Action 7 (“To develop ecological connectivity in the whole EUSALP territory”) constitutes a policy goal, which is not aligned to a specific Thematic Objective of the CPR. The constitution of this Action can be considered as the result of the above-outlined deliberation process with the non-governmental stakeholders. In their written contributions, the NGOs and the Alpine Convention emphasized the heterogeneity and mutual dependence between the Alps' peripheral and core areas, which demands a flexible and territorial approach. This was taken into account by creating an Action, which is foremost based on strengthening the exchange of information and coordination, thus increasing the collaboration efforts between the actors in the whole macro-region.

In addition to the considerations of addressing cross-jurisdictional challenges on a macro-regional scale, the policy goal setting of the EUSALP also pursues a strong cross-sectoral approach. Nearly all Action Groups are coordinated by a tandem of governmental representatives, so-called Action Group Leaders (AGLs), who are obliged to coordinate the implementation efforts not only within the own policy network, in this case, Action Group, but also to establish cooperation with other networks. Due to this approach, new policy synergies between the networks shall be identified and utilized. Such a cross-sectoral approach should, in the long run, contribute to the detection of new functional spaces across boundaries and the vertical and horizontal integration within the macro-region (keyword: differentiated territorial integration). Each of the Actions implies short-term and long-term targets, which are directed towards a sustainable improvement of environmental, economic, infrastructural, or social conditions in the Alpine Region.

Although this general aim of the Macro-regional strategies can be assessed as very ambitious and is even in case of eventual success depending on a long-term engagement by all involved actors, the success of the EUSALP also depends on effective goal attainment and an adequate target setting. Under optimal framework conditions, this target setting should follow the already outlined SMART scheme by being **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ccepted, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-**B**ound.

However, a comprehensive assessment regarding the EUSALP’s target settings cannot be made at this stage. This derives from the still not published progress reports of the AGLs concerning their implementation efforts and the attainment of the designated goals and targets (European

Commission, 2015c, p. 54). As a result, the following observations should be seen as preliminary.

The constituted strategic targets and indicators of the Action Groups in the EUSALP (listed on the table above) show a mixed picture concerning the SMART principle's realization. At the time of the Action Plan's adoption, various target values were still not set due to missing baseline values. This applied to the Action Groups from 2 to 5 (European Commission, 2015c, pp. 12–27), making it impossible to assess them in terms of their measurability, feasibility, or time-boundedness.[220] The rest of the targets, namely the targets of Action 1 and 6 to 9, show to the contrary a promising setup. The latter group of Actions is further complemented by well measurable quantitative target value and indicators.

There are, however, differences between the individual Action Groups in this regard. While it is self-evident that some of the Actions demand a more strategical approach than others, specific target settings within some of the Actions were defined in a significantly more "intangible" way than others (e.g., AG 4 in comparison to AG 5). This intangibility could, however, in the future evoke similar problems than, for example, within the EUSDR, where the disadvantageous target-setting resulted in several distinct problems regarding goal-attainment (see chapter 6.3.1). The Action Plan, which is constituted similarly to the EUSDR as a "rolling" document (European Commission, 2015c, p. 7), provides, however, the opportunity for a general overhaul if necessary.

7.2.2. Polity dimension

During the initiation process, the structural setting is of key importance for the successful development of an RCBG network. In the case of the EUSALP, the structural setting is similar to its macro-regional counterparts strictly realized in the "shadow of hierarchy" with the application of the outlined "three noes rule". During the initiation of the EUSALP, the actors were thus obliged to refrain from any distinct institutionalization process. Consequently, no new EUSALP-specific funding was constituted, no new institutions were established, nor any specific regulations were adopted on the EU level. While this also constitutes within the EUSALP a significant challenge in providing a sufficient structural framework for the implementation of the policy goals, the strategy is nevertheless based on some more advantageous premises than its other macro-regional counterparts. Besides the already

[220] This also derives from the fact that the Action Groups' implementation reports, which generally elaborate on the target setting, were not publicly available and made thus a comprehensive assessment of the target setting not feasible.

mentioned existing traditions of cross-border cooperation in the Alpine Region, which manifested in various institutional predecessors, the states and regions have more beneficial economic capabilities and can contribute with more adequate administrative resources to realize a comprehensive geospatial approach. These factors shall be outlined in the following.

Institutional predecessors

To understand the structural governance approach by the EUSALP, it is first necessary to give a short overview of the institutional predecessors in the Alpine Region, who paved the way for a comprehensive macro-regional network approach. Several of these institutional predecessors are currently involved as stakeholders contributing to the governance process of the EUSALP by providing necessary experience and expert knowledge.

One of the most prominent organizations is the Alpine Convention (AC). The AC is based on an international multilateral treaty between the Alpine states (Germany, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Monaco, and the EU). The intervention area of the AC is particularly aligned around the issue of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Alpine Region. The so-called “Alpine Conference” is the main decision-making body of the AC and consists of the states' respective ministers. Every two years, a meeting is held for strategic decision-making, while the “Permanent Committee” is the executive body to oversee the strategy's executive operations. A permanent secretariat was established for the daily operations in 2003 in Innsbruck (AT) and Bozen/Bolzano (IT). Although its year of foundation was in 1991 and it is, therefore, younger than many political initiatives by governmental entities in the region, the roots of the AC as an organization can be traced back to the year 1952, which also marks the year of birth of the Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA). While CIPRA is an umbrella organization for non-governmental organizations dedicated to advocating environmental issues, its cross-jurisdictional engagement paved the way for the Alpine Convention’s institutionalization as an organization. Due to its engagement, CIPRA was substantially involved in the drafting process of the Alpine Convention and was able to manage to incorporate significant parts of its agenda into the final treaties (Kauk, 2015, p. 31).

The AC as such started initially with a broad governmental and non-governmental support. However, the actual capabilities of the AC soon proved to fall short of the very high expectations. The strong intergovernmental decision-making procedure in the AC was affected from very early on by an increased demobilization of its member states. For example, Switzerland and Italy both rejected the political implementation of the protocols, leading to a stalling of the implementation process and overall in a rather modest policy impact of the AC.

Attempts to extend the policy scope through the ratification of new protocols were, in this regard, not successful. The only exception in this regard marks the ratification of the traffic protocol in 2013, where the AC members managed to find a commonly accepted policy ground (Balsiger, 2016, p. 200; CIPRA Österreich, 2014, p. 17).

The general need for action concerning various geospatial challenges in the macro-region was also emphasized and put on the agenda by several Alpine Regions since the early 1970s.

The start was marked by the ARGE ALP, which is, until today, the most prominent initiative and was also during the EUSALP initiation process one of the most active political promoters. In comparison to the AC, the ARGE ALP is not based on any international treaty, but it is a political initiative, which was established at the initiative of the governor of Tyrol (AT). Founding members of the ARGE ALP are the Alpine regions from Austria (Salzburg, Tyrol, Voralberg), Germany (Bavaria), Italy (Lombardy, South Tyrol, Trentino), and Switzerland (Canton of Grisons, St. Gall, Tessin). The ARGE ALP aims to create a new structure of coordinating the political approaches in a cross-border dimension within the Alpine Region. A primary focus of the initiative is in this regard the development and protection of the Alpine Region from an environmental perspective. Another key aim is also the sustainable economic development of this macro-region (Klotz and Trettel, 2016, p. 22). As already outlined, the ARGE ALP showed over the years continuous activity. Its activities also triggered the establishment of various other Alpine initiatives like *ARGE Alps-Adria* in 1978[221], or the *Communauté de Travail des Alpes Occidentales* (COTRAO; transl.: Western Alps Working Community) in 1982[222] just to name the two most prominent examples (Staudigl, 2013, p. 80). The governmental initiatives were also accompanied by various approaches within the EU framework.

Besides various bi- or multilateral ETC or EGTC networks (e.g., EUREGIO EGTC Senzaconfini, European Region EGTC Tyrol-South-Tyrol-Trentino, etc.), the main undertaking in this regard was the Interreg Alpine Space Program (ASP). The ASP operates since 2000 and constitutes a major step towards putting the issue of macro-regional/transnational geospatial approaches on the EU's agenda (Committee of the Regions, 2014c, p. 4). Additionally to the

[221] The ARGE Alps-Adria was re-established in 2013 and operates under its new name "Alps-Adriatic-Alliance", which consists of following regions: Baranya (Hungary), Bavaria (Germany), Burgenland (Austria), Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Italy), Györ-Moson-Sopron (Hungary), Hrvatska (Croatia), Carinthia (Austria), Lombardy (Italien), Upper Austria (Austria), Slovenija (Slovenia), Somogy (Hungary), Styria (Austria), Ticino (Switzerland), Trentino-South Tyrol (Italy), Vas (Hungary), Veneto (Italy), Zala (Ungarn).

[222] Members of COTRAO are from Switzerland (cantons Geneva, Valais and Vaud), France (Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), and Italy (Valle d'Aosta, Piemont and Liguria).

allocation of considerable EU funding to the Alpine Region, this Interreg B program also provided a broad structural framework for the first time, which encouraged the transfer of expertise and experience between actors and stakeholders. Furthermore, the program made the realization of the first "soft interventions" across the whole program space, including the peripheral regions, feasible. The already mentioned 14 years of program experience was an additional added value during the initiation and following the implementation process of the EUSALP. This resulted in a comprehensive alignment between the policy goals of the EUSALP and the ASP to optimize the program's potential funding (Interreg Alpine Space, 2014b, p. 8).

Embeddedness in the "shadow of hierarchy" and differentiation of the network structure

The limited room for action in terms of institutionalization due to the "three noes rule" was soon politically acknowledged by the Alpine Regions. At the second conference of this governmental format in 2010, this premise was underlined by the governmental decision-makers, which stipulated that instead of any institutionalization efforts, the actors should concentrate on establishing a permanent network-structure. The exchange of good practices and the realization of joint projects should, as a consequence, contribute to the "activation" of this regional network and further promote the coherent idea of the Alps as a macro-region (Alpine Regions, 2010b). In its resolution, the premise was also underlined by the ARGE ALP.

The grouping emphasized that the waiver of new formal institutions should be compensated by further utilizing existing structures, competencies, and experiences based on the principle of a mutual partnership (ARGE ALP, 2011, p. 2).

The ASP's expert report took a contrary stance in this regard and suggested that establishing an EGTC in the Alpine Region should be put under consideration. The report argued that such a highly institutionalized framework would promote the operability of the strategy. This proposal received however no further political attention by the governmental actors (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 12). One of the most obvious reasons for the lack of political support concerning this idea was the potential breach of the EGTC with the "three noes principle", which is clearly defined as an overall valid guideline within the strategy's Communication and the Action Plan. As a consequence, the EUSALP is regarding its structural setup carried out in a similar distinct "shadow of hierarchy" than its macro-regional counterparts.

Despite this premise, the EUSALP's functioning is based on more beneficial framework conditions than the other Macro-regional strategies. The participating countries of the EUSALP are characterized by a very high degree of administrative decentralization. Among the seven

Alpine countries, three (Austria, Germany, Switzerland) are classified as federal states. Italy is classified as an asymmetrical regionalized state.

The Italian regions show strong deviations concerning their individual legal competencies, resulting in a differentiated mobilization capacity of the regions. Three of the eight regions, namely the province of Bozen and Trento, as well as Vale d'Aosta, are based on an autonomy statute. Being equipped with a wide range of competencies in various decisive areas of intervention (e.g., energy policy), the regional entities have wide room for action and significant mobilization potential regarding their decision-making within the strategy.

The remaining five regions have, on the other hand, much more limited competencies, which makes them more dependent on the central governments and thus less free concerning their actions within the network. France, Liechtenstein, and Slovenia have an administrative-territorial structure, which can be categorized as unitary states. It is, however, necessary to differentiate between the countries. Slovenia has only 2,06 million citizens (World Bank 2016) with a territory of 20.273 km^2 and is, for example, in comparison to the province of Bavaria only one-sixth the size concerning its general population. Liechtenstein has a population of 37.666 citizens (World Bank 2016) with a territory of 160 km^2, which classifies it as a microstate with a population that is even smaller than most of the Alpine cities. Therefore, both countries' centralized administrative structure is not only standing to reasons due to their actual size, but their administrative structure is not expected to unfold disadvantageous effect on the bottom-up oriented structure of the EUSALP. On the other hand, France marks a distinct exception, constituting the only unitary state with a large territory and population within the Alpine Region. As federal states, the participation of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland contributes to a large degree to the strategy's bottom-up orientation. The provinces of each three states can base their activity on a comprehensive and wide-ranging set of competencies. In various policy areas, the provinces are sole-decision makers, which provides them a major mobilization potential within the EUSALP.

Table 16 Administrative territorial structure of the EUSALP countries			
1) Unitary state	**2) Asymmetrical Regionalized State**	**3) Symmetrical Regionalized State**	**4) (Con-)Federal State**
(3)	(1)	(0)	(3)
France Liechtenstein Slovenia	Italy		Austria Germany Switzerland

Source: (Committee of Regions.eu, 2018, Divisions of Powers)

Due to the decentralized administrative structure in the overwhelming majority of states or because of the particular framework conditions in the unitary countries, with the exception of France, which, however, do not actively contradict the bottom-up oriented policy approach of the governance structure, the EUSALP was able to be initiated on very beneficial premises. Longstanding traditions of cross-border cooperation, which were often realized by the regional governments autonomously, provided the opportunity to include LRAs in the strategy's implementation process and make them equal actors within the overall governance structure. The actors' broad mobilization potential also resulted in a differentiation of the governance structure of the strategy. Compared to other MRS, new structural elements were introduced within the strategy to provide a comprehensive involvement of the sub-national actors.

Differentiation of intra-network structure

The drafting of the governance structure of the EUSALP was determined from its beginning by the “three noes rule”, which limited the room for action within the polity dimension significantly. Thus, the network structure was carried out in the following under the premise of compartmentalizing the general strategic network in several sub-networks, where each sub-network followed a distinct operating principle. Similar to the theoretical concept of a Regional (Cross-Border) Governance network, a differentiation between a core-network and peripheral networks is to be found within the EUSALP, however, in a significantly more complex setting. Due to the pertaining asymmetries between the core and peripheral region within the Alpine space, the EUSALP needed to find a genuine approach concerning the setting of its network structure to overcome the internal fragmentation between these two sub-regions. Both sub-regions had to be, therefore, equally structurally represented within the setup. Furthermore, this should provide a comprehensive opportunity to realize an adequate cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional policy implementation and thus attain the intended territorial cohesion within the macro-region.

The demand for a highly differentiated governance structure of the EUSALP –even higher than in other Macro-regional strategies–, which was not only realized in a territorially defined bifurcation of the overall network but in a strong emphasis on the vertical and horizontal coordination of the strategy (Bätzing, 2014, p. 18; European Commission, 2016d, p. 1).

For better comprehensibility of this governance structure, we differentiate the network again into two spheres, namely the *sphere of strategic decision-making* and the *sphere of implementation*, outlined in this chapter based only on the fundamental principles of functionality.[223]

The sphere of *strategic decision-making* includes all governmental and supranational stakeholders in this core-network, who decide over the strategic perimeters within all three dimensions (Policy, Polity, Politics) of the strategy. The sphere's overall structure is further characterized by a broad vertical and horizontal involvement of various governmental and non-governmental actors. In comparison to other MRS, the decision-making mechanism is not carried out by alone-standing actors like the EC, but it is embedded in structures of co-decision making, where all three governmental levels (supranational, national, and regional) are obliged to realize their strategic steering based on a broad prior consensus.

The *sphere of implementation* functions as a level of operation and implementation. For the attainment of the designated policy goals, this subordinated sphere also comprises embedded policy (Action Groups) and project networks (Working Groups). Besides their function to realize projects and attain the designated targets within the EUSALP, these networks are characterized again by a strong horizontal and vertical coordination. Within the horizontal dimension, these networks align their goal attainment with each other to realize the originally stipulated cross-sectoral policy approach. While being obliged to comply with the core-network decisions, the policy networks within these boundaries significant leverage concerning the actual definition of the goal attainment (targets) and the implementation of these goals. Members of the project networks can further decide over the establishment of the project networks. The whole sphere is also characterized by a structural openness and bottom-up orientation, especially towards the regional and non-governmental actors.

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[223] A further elaborated depiction of this setting can be found in the politics chapter (see chapter 7.2.3), which also includes the particular functioning of the individual networks as well as the intra-network actor-roles. The splitting of the issue over two chapters was carried out due to the varying focus of analysis. While the above-outlined chapter focuses strictly on the general structural setting of the network, the other chapter carries out the analysis with an emphasis on the embedded actor-roles within the individual sub-networks.

A strong further emphasis is put on the vertical coordination mechanisms. This manifests in a structural entanglement of both spheres, which is also enhanced by governmental actors' double membership. Each governmental level is, as a result, represented in all decisive decision-making, coordination, or implementation networks. Through this entanglement of the two dimensions, namely by vertical governance across territorial levels and also by horizontal governance across governmental jurisdictions with additional involvement of non-governmental entities, a complex system of Multi-Level Governance, and more specifically Regional Cross-Border Governance, will be realized by the EUSALP.

Funding and budgetary provisions

The presence of self-sustaining and diversified funding is, as already outlined, of decisive importance for the establishment and evolvement of an RCBG network. Although the often cost-intensive measures within spatial development, especially with the cross-border dimension, can be overcome in the beginning phase of the network through external funding, like from the Structural Policy funds, the diversification of allocation resources is important for the successful development of a network. In contrast to this theoretical premise, the EUSALP was bound by the "three noes" rule, which prevented the creation of any additional funding or the creation of an own institutionalized budget (e.g., in the form of an own EGTC budget). This restraint was again accompanied by the stipulated premise –similarly to other macro-regional counterparts– to improve the financial allocation of existing funds by comprehensive alignment and coordination of the various budgets within the MFF 2014-2020. Besides the Alpine Space Program as the main funding source (see below), the EC further referred in its various documents to the HORIZON 2020, LIFE Program, Connecting Europe Facility as potential budgets as well as various other funding opportunities (European Commission, 2014c, p. 4, 2015d, p. 8; European Parliament, 2016a, p. 6).

However, this reference to the cross-budgetary allocation of funds and their potential synergies has to be seen in the limelight of the already established strategies. Macro-regional strategies like the EUSDR are for several years in their implementation phase. They show distinct difficulties in mobilizing funding for their goal attainment due to often insufficient alignment with the EU mainstream programs or because of overwhelming competition by other (intergovernmental) project applications (see chapter 6.3.1).

While the EUSALP is thus facing similar detrimental framework conditions regarding the EU mainstream program's funding than other MRS, a major advantage is the economic performance and, through that, the financial capabilities of the states and regions in the Alpine Region. Based on the principle of actor-ownership, which also involves the mobilization of own

financial resources by the regions and states, the EUSALP is in a more beneficial situation to eventually receive financial support or reimbursements for project implementation by the participating actors (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 106).

This consideration is not unreasonable due to the already outlined long tradition of cross-border cooperation schemes in the macro-region. An example in this regard is the established EGTCs between Austria and Italy (EGTC South Tyrol – Tyrol – Trentino, EGTC Euregio Senza Confini/Euregio ohne Grenzen), which were carried out with an accompanying high level (financial) commitment by the involved regional actors, who were in both cases willing to submit significant resources for the creation of a common budget. However, it must be seen whether the generally observable high level actor-commitment among the states and regions will also translate into the macro-regional framework and manifest in high-level financial support by the governmental actors.

The main source of funding for the EUSALP will be provided by the Alpine Space Program (ASP) as Interreg B program. Its program space shows a high degree of alignment with the strategy's territorial scope; however, these are not congruent. In comparison to the ASP, the EUSALP consists of a larger territory by also including the NUTS II regions of Bavaria (Niederbayern, Oberpfalz, Unterfranken, Mittelfranken, Oberfranken) and two NUTS II regions of Baden-Wuerttemberg (Stuttgart, Karlsruhe). As already outlined, these regions' inclusion was primarily based on political considerations, namely to involve the capitals of these provinces and thus secure a more comprehensive high-level political support from the German actors. At this point, however, it is not clear whether this territorial incongruency will cause particular problems for project implementation, especially regarding the application of EUSALP projects at tenders.

For the programming period until 2020 (MFF 2014-2020) the ASP is equipped with an overall budget of 139.751.456 million EUR, which includes ERDF and national contributions. Based on the included population of the ASP with approximately 66 million citizens, the available funding per capita is around 2,12 EUR. This constitutes a considerably higher financial support than, for example, the SEE/DTP budget for the EUSDR, which had/has a per capita funding of 1,23 EUR (MFF 2007-2013) and 1,93 (MFF 2014-2020) in comparison. However, as the main funding source for spatial development initiatives within the whole Alpine Region, this constitutes a very moderate budget, mainly providing financial support for small-scale interventions (Bramanti and Teston, 2017, p. 20).

Table 17 Policy alignment and budget of the ASP program (2014-2020)					
Priority Axes of the ASP	**Total Funding for the Priority Axes (national + union funds)**	**ASP specific objective**	**Related EUSALP Actions Groups (AG) where specific aspects are covered**		**Thematic Objective of the CPR**
(1) Innovative Alpine Space	43.909.823 EUR	1.1 Improve the framework conditions for innovation in the Alpine Space	**AG 1**	**AG 3**	**1**
		1.2 Increase capacities for the delivery of services of general interest in a changing society	**AG 5**		
(2) Low Carbon Alpine Space	37.048.913 EUR	2.1 Establish trans-nationally integrated low carbon policy instruments	**AG 9**		**4**
		2.2 Increase options for low carbon mobility and transport	**AG 4**		
(3) Livable Alpine Space	37.048.913 EUR	3.1 Sustainably valorize Alpine Space cultural and natural heritage	**AG 6**		**6**
		3.1 Enhance the protection, the conservation and the ecological connectivity of Alpine Space ecosystems	**AG 7 AG 8**		
(4) Well-Governed Alpine Space	10.977.457 EUR	4.1 Increase the application of multilevel and transnational governance in the Alpine Space	**PA 4**		**11**
(5) Technical Assistance	10.766.350 EUR				

Source: Own depiction based on (Interreg Alpine Space, 2014a, pp. 77–78)

The initiation of the EUSALP constitutes as a result of major challenges for the ASP as the main funding source of the strategy. This derives from the program character of the ASP as such. While in former program cycles, the ASP functioned primarily to enhance the creation of "soft-type" added-value in the region, like the establishment of social-capital through the exchange of expertise and networking (Metis GmbH, 2010), new expectations evoked concerning the EUSALP. As such, the ASP is expected to provide considerable financial support for projects and also support the policy implementation programmatically within the strategy (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 35). This, however, poses the risk of constituting a financial capabilities-expectation gap, which is already observable within other strategies. Another issue

is also the strategy's over-dependency on the ASP. Although the Alpine actors show strong economic performance and can thus contribute to the project implementation's financial support, the lack of comprehensive funding through the ASP constitutes a potential obstacle and threat to realizing a sustainable network of RCBG (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 107).

In terms of programmatic alignment, the ASP and the EUSALP are characterized by a high degree of congruency. While other Interreg B programs and Macro-regional strategies show "only" a high degree of programmatic alignment concern their joint objectives, the ASP was comprehensively involved in the drafting process of the EUSALP. By being initially created as a pilot project between 1997 and 1999 and since 2000 finally constituted as formal Interreg B program, the ASP brought the many years of program experience into the drafting process (Balsiger, 2016, p. 195). The several times cited expert report, which was drafted by the ASP, did not only shape the final policy goal setting of the strategy to a large degree, but it contributed to a particularly high programmatic congruency. As a result, every EUSALP Action is comprehensively reflected within the ASP's specific objectives (see table above).

This alignment was achieved even despite the temporal overlapping between the finish of the EUSALP's drafting phase in 2015 and the prior mandatory submission of the ASP cooperation program to the European Commission, approved by the EU institution on the 17th December 2014. To compensate for this temporal overlapping, the prospective EUSALP actors received permission to refer within their program documents and Partnership Agreements to the EUSALP as a potential area of intervention, even before the actual beginning of the strategy's implementation phase. The labeling of prospective measures as EUSALP activities was allowed to facilitate the project preparation and increase the probability of problem-free financial support by the ASP (Staudigl, 2013, p. 84). Despite these comprehensive preparatory efforts, which first seemed to create favorable financial starting conditions in terms of an efficient implementation process (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 6), the asynchronous start of the ASP and EUSALP unfolded as a challenge concerning the provision of financial support for projects in the following implementation phase (see chapter 7.3).

7.2.3. Politics dimension

High expectations accompanied the drafting of the EUSALP of realizing a comprehensive policy goal attainment on a macro-regional scale and concerning the further development of cross-border cooperation in the Alpine Region. The Council stated this expectation that the EUSALP shall be

> *"set up, in partnership with the Commission and the non-EU countries participating in the Strategy, an effective multilevel governance system and effective and efficient procedures and modalities enhancing continuity, ownership and visibility for the implementation of the Strategy[…]"* (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 9).

The Council's aim, which was also shared by the governmental actors and the non-governmental stakeholders, faced very promising starting conditions. As outlined in the previous chapter, the Alpine Regions and states are not just characterized by distinct decentralized administrative structures (strong MLG 1 dimension) but can, more importantly, rely on a long-lasting tradition of cross-border governance within the EU framework (e.g., ETC/EGTC and Interreg B) as well as outside of it (e.g., AC, ARGE ALP, etc.). Especially within the geographic scope of cross-border cooperation between adjacent border-regions, most of the Alpine Regions showed a high degree of activity over the last decades. Some of these stand out through extraordinary engagement (e.g., Tyrol (AT) - South-Tyrol (IT) – Trentino (IT), which manifested in deepened bi- or multilateral cooperation structures and the ongoing realization of cross-border lighthouse projects (e.g., Brenner Base Tunnel). While such a proactive engagement applies not to all of the cross-border regions within the EUSALP, the regional actors nevertheless show an overall activity, which is above the EU average. This applies not only to the CBC within the EU territory but also to the external dimension across the EU's external boundaries. As such cross-border cooperation schemes were realized in various formats with Switzerland as a third country, characterized by distinct success (e.g., EGTC Rhine-Alpin, and Interreg Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein).

Due to this vast number of cooperations, the Alpine Region is characterized by an evident presence of a certain degree of social capital between the governmental entities. Joint cooperation experiences and the mutual knowledge of the governmental administrations result in a reduced presence of moral hazard, lower transaction costs, and potentially more successful procedural steering within the EUSALP framework. However, the downside of the vast numbers of CBC schemes was prior to the EUSALP the already existing overlap of cooperation areas and initiatives, which have even duplicated policy aims and goals. This contributed to an overall lack of transparency and inefficient and overlapping structures across the regions, which

would eventually use up important capabilities by the Alpine actors. Governmental actors also acknowledged this detrimental situation. They underlined their intention to prevent duplication of the aims or structures of existing cooperation forms like the Alpine Convention, Alpine Space Program, or the ARGE ALP (Klotz and Trettel, 2017, pp. 217–218).

A further detrimental condition is the already outlined fragmentation in the Alpine territory's core and peripheral sub-region. Regions, which are located in the more remote areas of the Alps, are only able to participate in a significantly more limited number of RCBG schemes. Their more limited experience in terms of CBC often results in the situation that these regions have problems keeping up with their more active regional counterparts (Alpine Regions, 2010a, p. 2). Regions, which are characterized by a comparably easy geographic accessibility, benefit further from the more favorable and diversified source of incomes than the remote regions, which often depend on one profitable income source and/or are in general suffering from a socio-economic deprivation. These strongly divergent starting-conditions can also significantly impact the actor-behavior within the strategic RCBG network. Besides eventually occurring strongly diverging social identities of the regional actors, this can also affect the particular geospatial vision of the actors, who eventually consider the potential network-building more as a zero-sum game and approach it from a more competitive point of view due to their lack of resources (Evrard, 2013, p. 118).[224] This lack of a common geospatial vision was also identified from various sides as a potential obstacle for the EUSALP regarding successful goal attainment. As a consequence, it was several times emphasized, among others by the expert group of the ASP in its report that it would be of key importance to strengthen the consensus on policy issues not just on the level of experts, but also among all of the political decision-makers (Gloersen et al., 2013, p. 33, 2013, pp. 114–116). The consensus-oriented approach would be of decisive importance, especially in the limelight of the constituted principle of unanimous decision-making in key bodies of the strategy like the Action Groups as central networks of implementation (EUSALP, 2016a, p. 4; Art. 8 (1-3) EUSALP AG-RoP).[225]

[224] The economic divide between lower and higher competing regions within the core-and peripheral region constitutes a perceived moral-hazard for regional actors. As already outlined, regions with a low level of infrastructural accessibility often depend on tourism as the only source of income, which leads to a high prioritization and even politicization of this issue within the region. This can negatively affect the willingness to make necessary compromises within the EUSALP framework. The macro-regional approach with its plan to balance the geospatial measures between economically advantageous decision-making and actions to ensure ecological sustainability can eventually result in an open refusal or lack of participation by these actors.

[225] Some observers saw the strong emphasis on a comprehensive consensus-based approach as the fundament for a prospective 'partnership of trust' (Staudigl, 2013, p. 85) between the entities in the Alpine Region.

Governance process during the initiation phase

At the conference in Trento (IT) in March 2010, the regional actors underlined that the EUSALP should be realized in the limelight of extensive involvement of non-governmental stakeholders. Using the given governance structure, these initiatives and organizations should further contribute to the mobilization of endogen potentials located in the Alps (Alpine Regions, 2010b, p. 1). Besides the interest to realize this through intensive cooperation across all vertical governmental levels (EUropean, national, regional), which should also manifest within the procedural steering (Alpine Regions, 2010a, p. 3), this was accompanied by a strong emphasis that the EUSALP is in need of a place-based and tailored approach to represent the interests of the local populations (Alpine States and Alpine Regions, 2013, p. 10). The CoR, as an institutional representation of regional interests on the EU level, acknowledged not only this standpoint but further endorsed it by stating that this bottom-up orientation is necessary to improve the general efficiency of the EUSALP as such (Committee of the Regions, 2014c, p. 4).

These initiative statements soon transformed into a broad mobilization and political promotion by the EUSALP actors. The ARGE ALP and a non-institutionalized format of the Alpine Regions and states became one of the leading collective governmental formations, pushing the agenda concerning the realization of a strong bottom-up approach within the prospective Macro-regional strategy (Kauk, 2015, p. 34; Klotz and Trettel, 2017, p. 220). The overall engagement of the regions within the drafting process was characterized in the following by a comprehensive involvement of all prospective EUSALP actors, which was additionally accompanied by a distinct united approach within the agenda-setting and political communication (Klotz and Trettel, 2016, p. 25; Staudigl, 2013, p. 65). This resulted in 2013 in the already mentioned Steering Committee (SC), which comprised national and regional actors and the EC. The SC's main objective was to carry out the preparatory work as the main coordinating and decision-making body during the initiation phase of the EUSALP (ARGE ALP, 2013, p. 2, 2011, p. 4). The installation of the SC constitutes a significant innovation in comparison to other MRS. While the aforementioned tasks were carried out in other MRS primarily by the EC and were complemented by occasional intergovernmental meetings or consultations, all governmental actors' comprehensive involvement in an institutionalized body with a heterarchical actor-constellation constitutes a continuation of the bottom-up oriented governance approach.

The bottom-up oriented comprehensive participation of national and sub-national governmental actors was not just formally acknowledged by the Commission, but also indirectly endorsed by

it. The EC underlined this in its Communication in 2015 that it will act as an […]"independent facilitator in the overall coordination of the Strategy[…]" (European Commission, 2015d, p. 8), and thus indirectly confirming the governmental actors as central Political Promoters and decision-makers within the EUSALP. However, its actual approach deviated strongly from the formal stance and was instead characterized by a rather distinct interventionist and top-down driven attitude. Already during the Steering Committee's establishment in 2013, the behavior of the EC, who was co-chairing the meetings within the body, triggered open criticism by the heads of states of the Alpine Regions and the ARGE ALP. In their resolutions, the regional actors in both formats stipulated that the EC would not "[…]adequately take into account the decision-making role of the Regions." (Alpine Regions, 2014, p. 2). They further stated that proposals, especially concerning the intended bottom-up oriented governance approach, would not be appropriately taken into consideration and realized. Furthermore, ARGE ALP also stated that common standpoints, which were agreed upon at the major stakeholder conference and signed in the form of the "Milan Declaration (1st December 2014) would also not be sufficiently taken into account by the EC (ARGE ALP, 2015, p. 2). This point of view was also shared by the Committee of Regions, who also criticized that the role of regions was insufficiently considered within the EC's report on the governance of Macro-regional strategies (Committee of the Regions, 2014c, p. 6).

The criticized top-down orientation by the EC, however, even increased in the following period. After the last meeting of the SC in April 2015, the final drafting of the Communication and the Action Plan, as basic documents of the EUSALP, was carried out by the EC, excluding all governmental actors. Although this constituted nothing extraordinary compared to other MRS, it was in sharp contradiction to the prior comprehensive involvement of all actors and the stipulated bottom-up oriented character of the strategy. This caused unease and 'insecurity' among the regional actors, who were worried that this increasing top-down orientation by the EC, especially in such a critical phase of the initiation process, which is decisive for the final setup of the strategy, would have detrimental consequences for their role (Kauk, 2015, p. 44).

Compared to the mobilization of governmental actors, the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders, including also the Alpine Convention as an international organization, was characterized from the beginning by a more mixed picture of reactions. While governmental actors only planned to concede a partial involvement of the stakeholders by mainly limiting their role to an advisory function, the NGOs and the AC formulated a proactive stance. They called for broad cooperation concerning the drafting and subsequent implementation process. While the Alpine Convention and the various NGOs both pursued the particular aim of a strong

involvement within the strategy, their particular approach to achieve this objective differed significantly. The Alpine Convention stipulated, for example, already at a very early point that its main goal concerning the EUSALP is to overcome the fragmentation among the policy initiatives in the Alpine Region.The AC constituted in the following an own EUSALP Working Group to step-up as firm governance supporting entity and influence through that the drafting process (Alpine Convention, 2013, pp. 1–2). Besides the provision of institutional support and its expert knowledge, the AC also called for its structural inclusion within the governance structure, particularly for the third Policy Area aligned around Environment and Energy (Alpine Convention, 2014). Its call for a comprehensive involvement was partially fulfilled. Despite being excluded from formal decision-making within the Steering Committee and later also from the final bodies of the Executive Board and General Assembly within the sphere of strategic decision-making (see below), the AC was incorporated in all these structures as an advisor. The AC also achieved to be integrated within the sphere of implementation. Although its call for overall responsibility for the third Policy Area was not meet, the AC was mandated with the role of an Action Group Leader in tandem with the Austrian region of Carinthia in Action Group 6. This constitutes a unique approach by the EUSALP, namely by empowering an International Organization as a process promoter within a Macro-regional strategy for the first time.

The willingness towards a broad integration within the EUSALP was also strongly emphasized by the NGOs[226]. They, among others, called for the establishment of open co-decisional mechanisms within the Alps. Another issue was the already mentioned strong policy focus on their areas of engagement, namely, foremost on sustainable development and environmental protection within the Alps (Alliance in the Alps et al., 2014). In this light, the NGOs also warned against a potential marginalization of the AC and highlighted the importance of the international organization's strong role within the drafting and decision-making process (Alliance in the Alps et al., 2013, p. 2; CIPRA, 2013, p. 3).[227] However, while the EUSALP actors largely fulfilled the request concerning the AC's involvement, the gap between the non-governmental stakeholders' expectations concerning their involvement and their actual role was significant

[226]Especially in the early phase of the drafting process, the non-governmental stakeholder involvement was characterized by a diversified setting. Besides CIPRA and CAA, who pertained a very active and very visible role in the later process, first position papers were drafted among others by ISCAR, a scientific committee, Alliance in the Alps, an umbrella organization of Alpine municipalities, WWF and various other organizations.

[227] While this approach seemed to be two-folded the first sight, it can be assumed that this call for the broad involvement of NGOs and the AC was formulated to push the agenda of environmental protection and sustainable economic development as policy goals within the EUSALP. This assumption can be made when looking at the policy goals of the AC, which has a strong policy focus on the above-mentioned issues, while NGOs like CIPRA and CAA among others were also stipulating repeatedly in their position papers that the drafting of the EUSALP documents should be realized with a predominant focus on these issues.

and thus triggered open criticism in the following period. First signs of limited participation were already observable at the meeting in Grenoble in October 2013, where the designated official observers of the Alpine Convention, which were actually representatives of NGOs, were in comparison to regional experts excluded from the drafting of the "Grenoble Declaration" as policy intervention document (Balsiger, 2016, p. 198). The dismay further grew with the Steering Committee's establishment, where the NGOs were not admitted to participate in the main body of the entity due to an intervention from France and Italy. Only during the subsequent establishment of the subordinated Working Groups, which were aligned around the three thematic Policy Areas of the strategy, this restraint was lifted. While organizations like CIPRA were admitted to join the project networks, their competencies were strictly limited to participate as sheer observers (Bätzing, 2014, p. 13).

These actions were considered by CIPRA as insufficient involvement of the non-governmental sphere, due to which the organization stipulated that the consequence of these measures would be a persisting governance failure regarding the attainment of a bottom-up approach. In its position paper, CIPRA further stressed that NGOs' underrepresentation should be in the final governance structure corrected. It called further for a more balanced and a significantly more open and active dialogue process regarding the non-governmental actors within the EUSALP (CIPRA Austria, 2014, p. 8; CIPRA Österreich, 2014, pp. 39–40).

Within the final governance setting, the involvement of NGOs was finally fulfilled to a considerable degree. While the exclusion from the strategic-decision making bodies was maintained, the non-governmental stakeholders' role was within the sphere of implementation in some areas significantly enhanced. Compared to other MRS, where NGOs' role is limited mostly on case-based involvement and prior formal invitation by the permanent members, they are mandated either with full membership-rights or formal observer status within four Action Groups of the EUSALP. This constitutes a significant innovation again in terms of the bottom-up orientation by the strategy. When we take a closer look, a strong asymmetry between the AGs can be observed between, however. While AG 4 (Passenger and freight transport) lists only one NGO as a full member and AG 1 (Research and Innovation) also only one as observer, AG 6 (Natural and Cultural Resources) comprises of six non-governmental full members and AG 7 (Ecological Connectivity) even of ten full members and two observers.

Table 18 Officially listed NGOSs as permanent members within the AGs of the EUSALP										
	AG 1	**AG 2**	**AG 3**	**AG 4**	**AG 5**	**AG 5**	**AG 6**	**AG 7**	**AG 8**	**AG 9**
Full member	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1** CIPRA	**0**	**0**	**6** 2x CIPRA WWF All. Alp. Convention blue! EURAC	**10** WWF CAA 2x IUCN 2x Alp.Metropoles CIPRA EURAC ALPARC ISCAR	**0**	**0**
Observer	**1** ISCAR	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2** CAA WWF	**0**	**0**

Source: Depiction based on (Alpine-region.eu)

The strong involvement of non-governmental actors in the two AGs, which are foremost aligned around environmental protection issues, is not surprising. This derives from the generally observable intensive NGO involvement within these policy areas already during the EUSALP's drafting.

However, the overall strong presence of NGOs, which are engaging primarily within the area of environmental protection, underlines the already stated asymmetrical stakeholder involvement. Like chambers of commerce or economic interest groups, economic actors play no role within the actor-constellation of the AGs. This is, however, in two dimensions, problematic.

The absence of these stakeholder types is in sharp contradiction to the premise of a broad and comprehensive involvement of the non-governmental sphere, which is actually constituted to provide a more holistic involvement of societal groups. The potential overemphasis of environmental protection consequentially runs the risk of contradicting the original premise of creating a balanced policy approach.

Another potential problem can unfold by the wide absence of private economic actors concerning the efficacy of policy decision-making. Due to the absence of private economic

actors, the strategy lacks an important structural feedback mechanism in the area of economic policies, leading probably to sub-optimal results.

However, despite this absence of economic actors, it must be seen whether their involvement as non-governmental actors will be carried out during the evolving strategy, thus realizing another step towards the initially stated premise of a comprehensive involvement of the non-governmental sphere.

Procedural actor-roles within the strategy

The drafting process with its emerging actor-roles also affected the final setup within the network. Following the premises of the RCBG theory, this setting can be distinguished in three actor-groups:

1) **General participants** with no specific detrimental or beneficial actor-behavior for the network
2) **Procedural opponents**[228] with active detrimental behavior (e.g., through obstruction or free-riding)
3) **Group of Promoters**, which can be subdivided in
    a. **Political Promoters** as political representatives of the involved governments
    b. **Technical Promoters** as experts from the administrative level of the governments or non-governmental stakeholders
    c. **Process Promoters** who are also called regional managers (see chapter 2.4.3.1.).

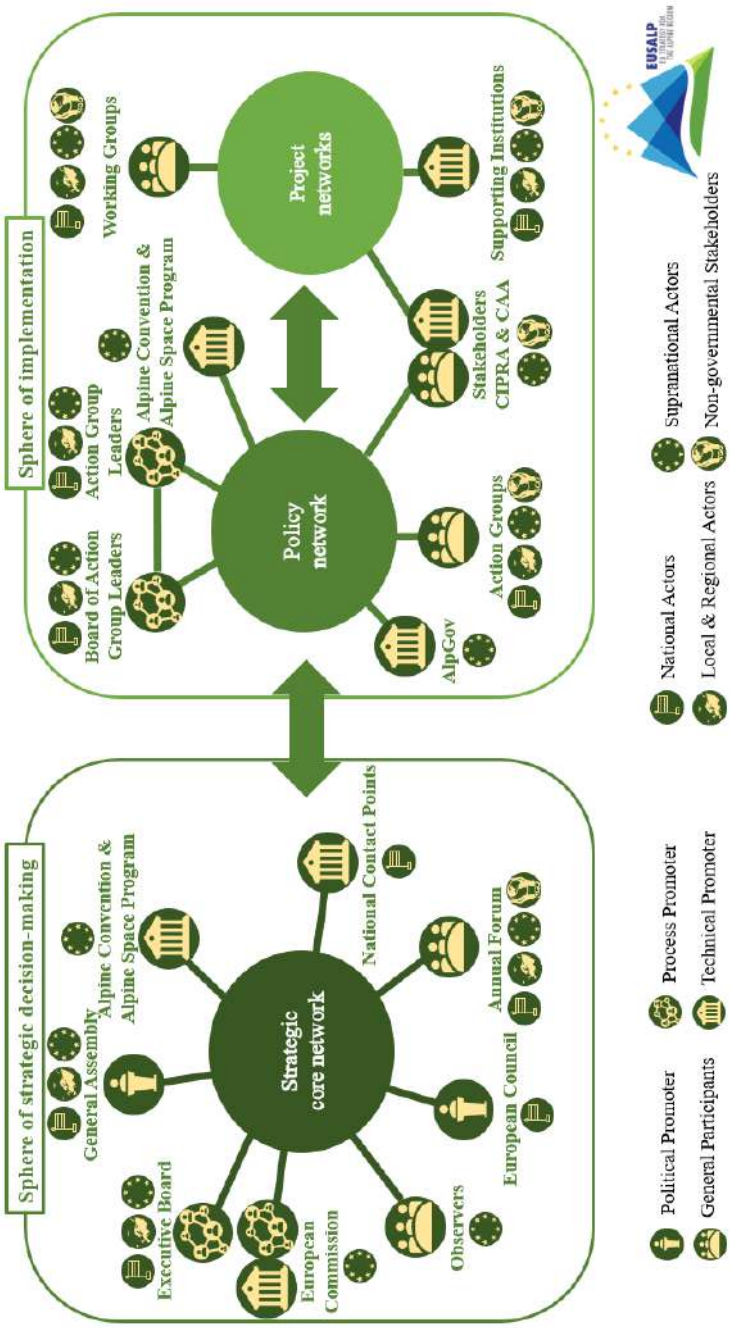
When applying these outlined procedural actor-roles to the perimeters of the EUSALP, it is necessary to recall the general network structure of the strategy, which predetermines the actual actor roles to a significant degree.

The differentiation into the sphere of strategic decision-making and the sphere of implementation resulted not just in an even more complex setup of actor-roles than, for example, in "regular cross-border networks" (e.g., Interreg A), but also led to a more differentiated procedural steering within the network. Due to its size and its particular genuine structural setup, actors are either mandated to carry out particular intra-network roles together (e.g., the role as an Action Group Leader) or have a diversified/multidimensional role depending on their membership within the spheres and sub-networks (the strategic core-network, the policy networks, and the project networks). However, as outlined above, actors can deviate from this given framework through their activity and extend their influence and role

[228] The group of procedural opponents can be neglected in this chapter. Although a detrimental actor-behavior can eventually occur already in the initiation phase, this is for RCBG networks comparably seldom due to the possibility of excluding. However, this option gets in later phases of the network evolution increasingly difficult, which basically increases the threat of potential free-riding or obstruction.

to a distinct degree. Therefore it is necessary to put the individual actor-roles and their particular structural embedding within the EUSALP under thorough scrutiny.

Figure 25 Intra-network actor-roles within the EUSALP



Source: Own depiction

Actor-roles within the sphere of strategic decision-making: The adoption of strategic guidelines within the EUSALP is carried out by a diversified constellation of actors, including the typical supranational and national level and additionally with the involvement of regional actors and also non-governmental stakeholders. As aforementioned, this constitutes a unique feature compared to its macro-regional counterparts, which are either operating with a full structural exclusion of these latter two groups or limiting the potential participation opportunity to informal and ad-hoc involvement.

The European Commission, which plays a central role in all of the MRS as main process promoter, is also characterized by a strong structural embedding in co-decision mechanisms. As a result, its role within the strategic decision-making is still distinctive but not predominant compared to the regional and national governmental actors. This more symmetrical role allocation was already observable during the drafting process with the Steering Committee (SC) establishment in November 2013, which operated as the institutional predecessor of the current operating Executive Board (EB).

Both bodies were and are mandated to carry out the horizontal and vertical coordination of the strategy. They qualify, therefore, as the main process promoters of the strategy. The vertical coordination is carried out within the EB between the actors stemming from the various administrative levels (supranational, national, and regional). Concerning the horizontal dimension, the coordination is carried out by cross-network coordination between the EB and other networks or individual actors/stakeholders within the strategic sphere. As the main process promoter, the EB is in charge of acting as coordination knot between the implementing and strategic decision-making sphere. Thus, it is the main contact point for the Action Groups (AGs) (see further below), who are obliged as as process promoters within the sphere of implementation to draft and submit implementation progress reports to the EB. The EB's tasks further involve the decision-making competency concerning the endorsement of Action proposals within the Action Groups, which is decisive for their subsequent implementation. The EB's responsibility also includes the task to assist the AGs during the constitution of project criteria. Support by the EB will also be provided for the AGs during their drafting of the work plans concerning the implementation activities' realization (European Commission, 2016d, p. 6).

The former SC and the current EB were/are co-chaired by the EC, which thus plays a particularly important role within this process promoting body. Formally seven national delegations are participating as full members within the EB. Each of the national delegations consists of representatives from the regional and national governments as equal partners. To

provide structural leadership within the delegations, each one is formally chaired by a National Coordinator (NC).

The National Coordinators are representatives of either the national or regional administrations of each EUSALP country. They operate foremost as technical promoters and are mandated with the task of transmitting information in two directions. Within the vertical dimension, the NCs are obliged to provide a continuous flow of information across the various territorial administrative levels (including the EB), while within the horizontal dimension, they are in charge to secure this flow of information also in cooperation with other NCs across the whole macro-region (European Commission, 2016d, p. 3). Further EB members are the Alpine Convention and the Alpine Space Program, whose membership is limited to a sole advisory function without any formal voting right (EUSALP, 2014, p. 2).

As a central political promoter, the General Assembly (GA) is in charge of establishing and maintaining political mobilization among the EUSALP actors, while it is also the central strategic decision-making body within the strategy. For example, the GA can determine the general political guidelines and introduce any revisions or reforms within both spheres of the EUSALP. The General Assembly also embodies, regarding its membership structure, a strong and comprehensive bottom-up approach. The GA thus comprises high-level representatives from the participating states, as well as from their regional counterparts. As a non-governmental stakeholder, the Alpine Convention is also involved as an observer, however, without formal voting rights, which constitutes a significant innovation, nevertheless in terms of stakeholder involvement. To create further political momentum for the EUSALP, members of the European Parliament can optionally be invited to the GA meetings. Additionally, the GA also is equipped with the option to initiate a high-level ministerial meeting to generate significant political momentum (EUSALP, 2017a, p. 5). Meetings of the GA should be held regularly, but at least once a year. The GA meetings are, in general, co-chaired by the EC as internal process promoter for facilitating the coordination of the Assembly's work. However, the EC's role is limited to sole coordination activities because it does not have any formal voting rights at the meetings. The format of the GA meetings can be further extended by combining it with the event of the *Annual Forum* and opening it to all eventual stakeholders as observers (European Commission, 2016d, p. 2).

To maintain a consistent political promotion of the EUSALP, the GA, as well as the overall strategy, is presided by one EUSALP region or state based on a rotating annual presidency. The acting presidency is obliged to provide the necessary political leadership and maintain political links with the institutions on the EUropean, national, or regional levels. Mandated with this

central role, the presidency is further responsible for the organization of the Annual Forum/General Assembly meeting and is co-chairing with the Commission the Executive Board's meetings. Due to the opportunity to step up as central coordinating and political promoting entity besides the EC, the presiding states and regions (Slovenia 2016, Bavaria 2017, and Tyrol 2018) are provided with a significant agenda-setting competency aligning their presidency around a specific set of topics. This provides a considerable mobilization potential for the presiding actors, who are not just able to emphasize specific political matters but can also contribute to a further strengthening of the regional level by highlighting specific issues and challenges within the strategy (Bavarian State Chancellery and Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection, 2017, p. 37; EUSALP, 2017a, p. 6).

Actor roles within the sphere of implementation: The implementation process within the EUSALP is carried out by the nine Action Groups (AGs). The actor-constellation within these policy networks are strictly defined by the "Rules of Procedure" (EUSALP, 2016a, p. 2), which was drafted as an accompanying document during the already started implementation process in 2016. The individual membership of states/regions within the Action Groups depends on their particular domestic legal governance framework. In this regard, a deciding factor is the respective actor's equipment with a domestic Decision-Making Capacity (DMC). Although the DMC is necessary for taking part in the active decision-making process[229], the participation of entities without such competency is also possible, but however, in this case, limited to a sole advisory role.[230] The Action Groups have further the competency to invite other (non-governmental) stakeholders to their –at least– bi-annually organized meetings if the members deem it as necessary. The European Commission, the Alpine Convention, and the Alpine Space Program are generally entitled to participate as permanent advisors within the Action Groups (EUSALP, 2016a, p. 2). All Action Groups are led by the already mentioned Action Group Leaders (AGL), who are in charge of coordinating the implementation process. Their specific tasks range over a variety of areas. Besides being the main driver of the implementation process by animating the AG members to carry out the policy implementation within their region/state, the AGLs are also obliged to draft the AG's working plan/program. This includes also the

[229] Governmental actors who have DMC but are formally not entitled to participate within the AG can overcome this obstacle by applying for a formal nomination by their national/regional governments to represent them within the AG (EUSALP, 2016a, p. 1).

[230] For an actor's participation as an advisor, its particular National Coordinator must submit an official nomination proposal. This has to be followed by a so-called "formal letter of commitment" to the AGL, in which the actor stipulates that it will contribute with an appropriate amount of time and resources to the implementation process within the EUSALP (EUSALP, 2016a, p. 1).

identification and supervision of action and project implementation. The AGLs are further in charge of coordinating the network activities with external Technical Promoters, like the Alpine Space Program or other financing instruments. As central coordinators, the AGLs are also obliged to monitor and draft reports concerning the implementation process. A particular focus of the AGLs is on the general attainment of predefined targets and indicators within the Group. The AGL's reports should further contain information about whether the implementation progress aligns with the overall strategic policy goals of the EUSALP. The results have to be summarized in biannual progress reports, which then have to be submitted to the Executive Board as the strategy's main process promoter. In case of an inadequate target setting, the AGLs are further entitled to initiate in collaboration with the EB a revision of the particular AG targets to enhance the implementation process's success (EUSALP, 2016a, p. 7).

Four of the nine Action Groups have one AGL, while five are coordinated by a tandem of actors. Except for AG 7 (Ecological Connectivity) and AG 8 (Environmental Risk Prevention), where the AGL is carried out by Slovenia and Austria as national actors, all other Groups are managed by the regional level.

This classifies the implementation sphere of the EUSALP as most bottom-up driven among all of the Macro-regional strategies. The internal structure of the AGLs provides another unique characteristic. By mandating the "EGTC: EUREGIO Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino" (AG 4) and "Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Berggebiete" as AGLs of AG 5 (Connect People and Accessibility to Public Services), the EUSALP realizes a new innovative approach of integrating existing RCBG networks within its governance structure. In case of successful procedural steering, this can further contribute to a territorial integration on two territorial levels. The first level is on the macro-regional scale through successful procedural steering within the AG, while the second is the regional level where this actor-constellation facilitates the development of social capital between the actors resulting from the accompanying coordination activities within the EGTC/SAB.

By integrating two different approaches, namely the institutionalized cross-border governance scheme in the form of the EGTC and the "three noes" complying EUSALP, the strategy is the first of the strategies, which implements –partially– an EGTC structure within its governance structure, however, without breaching the underlying guidelines of the above named rule.

Table 19 The Action Groups and their Action Group Leaders within the EUSALP					
	Policy Area	**Action Group**		**Action Group Leader**	
	(1) Economic Growth and Innovation	AG 1	To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Lombardy	
		AG 2	To increase the economic potential of strategic sectors	Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	Baden-Württemberg
		AG 3	To improve the adequacy of labour market, education and training in strategic sectors	Trento	
	(2) Mobility and Connectivity	AG 4	To promote inter-modality and interoperability in passenger and freight transport	EGTC: EUREGIO Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino	
		AG 5	To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services	Valle d'Aosta	Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Berggebiete (SAB)
	(3) Environment and Energy	AG 6	To preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources	Alpine Convention	Carinthia
		AG 7	To develop ecological connectivity in the whole EUSALP territory	Bavaria	Slovenia
		AG 8	To improve risk management and to better manage climate change, including major natural risks prevention	Austria	Bavaria
		AG 9	To make the territory a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy	South Tyrol	
	(4) Cross-cutting Policy Area : Governance, including Institutional Capacity				

Source: Own depiction

Additionally to the coordination activities within the AGs, the coordination across these subordinated networks is realized through the establishment of a new body, which is called the Board of Action Group Leaders (BAGL). The BAGL constitutes an additional process promoter

within the sphere of implementation. Its main task is to secure the continuous flow of information vertically between both spheres, in particular between the EB and the AGs. Another important task is to enhance the horizontal cooperation among the AGs to comply with establishing a cross-sectoral approach within the strategy. The BAGL is also obliged to steer the deliberation process between the AGLs to harmonize their monitoring activities and enhance the general comparability and measurability of the implementation progress regarding the general policy goal attainment (European Commission, 2016e, p. 48). The BAGL is composed of all AGLs, the EC, and additionally the EB members. The body also does possess the option to invite additional experts and non-governmental stakeholders, who can participate at the board meetings as advisors.

Outside of these depicted various sub-networks, various supporting institutions can be found within the EUSALP governance. These technical promoters are formally not embedded within the networks but play an important role nevertheless during the implementation process. A major technical promoter is the AlpGov project, which was established within the Alpine Space Program framework. The project aims to support the AGs regarding their coordination tasks to improve the general implementation process within the strategy. A particular emphasis is put within the project on the institutional support of the governance mechanisms and structures. This will be attained by financial support, namely through the budget of the ASP, and through supporting monitoring activities, which concentrate on the strategy's governance structure. The AlpGov project, therefore, publishes on an annual basis – non-public – reports for all EUSALP stakeholders, in which it gives disclosure about the assessed strengths and weaknesses of the implementation progress (Bavarian State Chancellery and Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection, 2017, p. 14; EUSALP, 2017a, p. 8, 2017b, p. 4).

While various Action Groups realized the involvement of non-governmental actors by including them as permanent members (e.g., CIPRA International or CAA) of the AGs, the EUSALP in general limits the involvement of non-governmental entities mainly to the participation at certain events or to the ad hoc invitation within certain sub-networks (e.g., Executive Board etc.). The main opportunity for stakeholders is the already mentioned Annual Forum, held by the EB on an annual basis and is open to all organizations. The initially planned permanent online Stakeholder Platform, (EUSALP, 2016a, p. 8), which was based on the idea

of giving the stakeholders a permanent and general structural opportunity for getting involved within the EUSALP on a day-to-day basis, is not realized until today.[231]

7.3. Implementing the EUSALP in the phase of evolvement. An outlook

The "kick-off event of the EUSALP at the conference in Brdo (Slovenia) in January 2016 marked a decisive watershed for the development of the strategic network by closing the phase of initiation, which lasted approximately seven years. Despite the advantageous starting conditions in all three dimensions (Policy, Polity, Politics) of the strategy, the transition to the implementation phase reveals new challenges for the actors and stakeholders. As such, the Action Plan and the Communication of the EUSALP, and with it each dimension, will be put for the first time under an actual "stress test" during the implementation process, which will unveil actual strengths and weaknesses of the macro-regional approach in the upcoming years. However, with the end of the assessment period on the 31st December 2017 of this work, a comprehensive analysis concerning the implementation phase's development cannot be realized. This is due to several factors:

The first and most important reason is the still short period since the beginning of the implementation phase. As aforementioned, the conference in Brdo, which took place on 25th January 2016 and marked the beginning of the first EUSALP annual presidency represented by Slovenia, was the formal start of implementation. However, this phase's first year was carried out under the premise to set up the necessary working conditions for the prospective policy goal attainment. This used up a significant amount of time, which left a comparably short amount of time for actual policy implementation activities. This consequentially also further shortened the potential assessment time-period.

The second factor is the limited number of scientific publications within the assessment period and, more importantly, the very poor accessibility to internal reports and assessments of the strategy. In comparison to the EUSDR, where general accessibility to all progress reports of the Priority Areas, which are furthermore accompanied by other internal available internal documents, the EUSALP refrained from such a comprehensively transparent approach. Despite the already carried out submission of the first AG progress reports, a publication of these did not happen until now. Additional progress reports of the already mentioned AlpGov project, which have a monitoring focus on the implementation progress of projects and the governance

[231] While the AlpGov, as well as the EUSALP as such, were considered as leading collaborating actors within this project, no particular news on the homepages of entities were published about the progress of this project recently. As a result, it can be considered a postponed project until further notice.

structure of the EUSALP, are according to two contacted stakeholders, not intended to be published either. This significantly limits the publicly available material concerning the EUSALP. It is to be hoped that with the further evolution of the strategy, a more transparency-oriented reporting activity will be realized to provide opportunity structures further for academic assessments. Nevertheless, in this chapter, a preliminary analysis of the implementation phase will be carried out to constitute a research framework for later evaluations.

Policy Dimension

The kick-off event in Brdo was accompanied by high expectancies among the various stakeholders in anticipated goal attainment (Republic of Slovenia, 2017, p. 8). The beginning of the implementation phase was in the following, led by Slovenia as first acting EUSALP presidency. The selection of Slovenia was of particular relevance regarding the goal attainment activities as such. As a country involved in three out of four Macro-regional strategies, the country was able to utilize its actor experience and thus realize a very coordinated and structured approach within the policy dimension (EUSALP, 2016b, p. 3). Being of particular importance for a successful goal attainment, the Slovenian presidency focused on developing a comprehensive strategic approach by elaborating work plans and road maps for the following implementation (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, pp. 135–136). The realization of working methods was carried out in cooperation with all actors and stakeholders, accompanied by a broad deliberation process across the whole macro-region and explicitly within the Action Groups to discuss the particular targets and indicators. This marked a significant success regarding the stipulated will of realizing a broad cross-sectoral approach in the strategy. The Commission further highlighted the importance of a joint policy approach concerning the elaboration of a comprehensive monitoring of the policy goal attainment (European Commission, 2016e, pp. 47–48). Based on the premise of the "rolling Action Plan", which foresees continuous monitoring, the Council of the EU stipulated already in 2015 that reports regarding the governance of the EUSALP shall be submitted by the EC on a biennial basis (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 11). The included option of the Action Plan to revise the constituted policy goals is also considered. As such, the first overall revision of the Action Plan is scheduled for 2019 (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, p. 12) and should be carried out based on the aforementioned insights of the EC's governance reports as well as the AG and AlpGov progress reports.

As mentioned, the Slovenian presidency's main policy focus was put on the establishment of working procedures. This lasted until the summer of 2016 when the strategy did become fully

operational and paved the way for the commencement of the actual implementation process. The Bavarian Presidency put with the beginning of 2017 a strong emphasis on the further identification of political priorities regarding the implementation activities. These optimization efforts within the policy dimension included the intended improvement of the cross-sectoral implementation activities and the better embedding of the MRS policy objectives within the general EU structural policy framework. Efforts by the presidency also included already first preparations for the 2020-2026 Multiannual Financial Framework to improve the financial support of EUSALP projects in the future (EUSALP Bavarian Presidency, 2018). Another priority of the EUSALP presidency was to further enhance the involved actors' and stakeholders' deliberation process to optimize the policy goal attainment. This should also strengthen the awareness for specific Alpine challenges and serve as a basis for a joint Alpine policy approach (Bavarian State Chancellery and Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection, 2017, p. 35). During the presidency, the Free State of Bavaria further emphasized the importance of implementing lighthouse projects within the EUSALP framework, which should enhance the visibility of the strategy and thus maintained the political momentum within the EUSALP (Bavarian State Chancellery and Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection, 2017, p. 9; European Commission, 2016d, p. 4).

A significant study series about the Macro-regional strategies published in December 2017, which was commissioned by the EC and carried out by various external scientific institutions and experts, a comprehensive assessment of each strategy was carried out. Besides the evaluation of the available reports and documents, a major survey of a total of 6000 stakeholders – however, only 999 answered, which equals 16 % – was carried out, who were asked to assess the success of the strategies regarding the policy goal implementation among others. In the case of the EUSALP, this also marks the first comprehensive survey and source-based analysis, which also includes information from the publicly non-accessible progress reports of the AGLs and AlpGov (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b).[232]

In the report, the implementation process will be assessed positively by the surveyed actors and stakeholders. In terms of the goal-setting, the respondents note that a satisfying identification of policy challenges was realized within AG 6. The statement that 'major challenges for the macro-region are reflected in the Action Plan' will be 'somewhat agreed' by 57 % of the

[232] It must be however noted that the survey was only carried among the stakeholders within AG 6 (Cultural Resources). The following interpretation of the results must therefore be considered with reservations regarding its general validity for the whole EUSALP. This applies also for the following Polity and also Politics dimension.

respondents, while 31 % strongly agree with this assertion. The added-value of the EUSALP concerning the identification of future global challenges, which will particularly affect the Alps, is also widely acknowledged by the actors and stakeholders as satisfying. Respondents "agree strongly" or "agree somewhat" with 43 % respectively with this added-value, while only 14 % somewhat disagree. This positive assessment derives, among others, from the broad involvement of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders alike, who were able to shape the drafting process of the EUSALP to a large degree and are thus satisfied with the goal-setting (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, p. 135).

However, compared to the widely positive assessment of the designated policy goal setting, the implementation progress will be characterized as being too early to make sufficient feedback. The extensive concentration on the establishment of the working structures, which, as aforementioned, dominated the main phase of the past implementation phase and was realized under the premise to enhance the cooperation among actors and to develop additional tools and structures for improving the prospective implementation process. Survey respondents stated that the measures in this regard could be assessed as positive. However, compared to the aforementioned alignment of policy goals and the identification of macro-regional challenges, the respondents were considerably more critical regarding the added value. While 24 % "strongly agreed" and 35 % "somewhat agreed", 42 % combinedly disagreed with the beneficial character of these measures (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, pp. 136–137).

Polity Dimension

Since the beginning of the EUSALP's implementation phase, only minor alterations and changes were carried out concerning the governance structure. The compliance with the "three noes" rule was maintained and further emphasized by the Slovenian as well as the Bavarian presidency, who stated that the continuation of the political momentum and the sustaining actor-ownership would be deciding the factors in terms of success and not eventual structural alternations (Republic of Slovenia, 2017, pp. 7–8). The Bavarian presidency even underlined in its report that first visible results should not only be attained in a short amount of time, but they should be further "[…]accomplished without major financial expenses or time-consuming preparation[…]" (Bavarian State Chancellery and Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection, 2017, p. 16). This objective, namely to achieve successful goal attainment without significant and comprehensive project funding, is in direct contradiction to the other Macro-region strategies' experiences, whose general network activities and especially the implementation process were significantly hampered by insufficient financial allocations.

As a result, the presence of an underfunding of the strategy can also be stipulated for the EUSALP. Although the potential projects are covered by a larger per capita allocation from the Alpine Space Program than in comparison within the EUSDR through the Danube Transnational Program, financial difficulties nevertheless pertain.

This underfinancing of the EUSALP is acknowledged not just by the already cited stakeholder survey, who state with an overwhelming aggregated majority of 78 % that it is difficult to find adequate financing (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, p. 150), but is also stated by the EC. The institution stipulates that the alignment between the EUSALP goals and EU funding programs shows apparent deficiencies. This also applies to other potential funding opportunities, like the European Investment Bank or other non-EU institutions (European Commission, 2016e, p. 49).

The noted ill-defined alignment with the EU programs, which also applies to the alignment between ASP and EUSALP, marks an unexpected conclusion, especially in the limelight of the significant prior efforts to prevent such insufficient funding accessibility. Even the establishment of the outlined AlpGov project in June 2016, which monitored the governance process of the EUSALP particularly to ensure a good alignment between ASP and EUSALP, apparently still not managed to attain the necessary results. More than 29 % of the survey respondents stipulated that there would be, in general, no improved alignment between the ESIF (including the ASP) and the EUSALP. In comparison, 28 % on the other hand observed such an added value. More than 42 % responded that they don't know whether there is a significant improvement or not. In terms of improved accessibility of general EU funding, 49 % stipulate that there is, in general, an added-value through the EUSALP, while 33 % object to this statement.

Meanwhile 18 % were not able to answer that question. This disadvantageous picture concerning the financial allocations continues when we look at the survey responses in more detail. Over 80 % of the respondents stated that additional provision of funding for the administration, particularly the procedural steering, is either difficult or not possible at all. The already stated issue regarding significant difficulties at applying for mainstream EU programs (Horizon 2020, Life, etc.), foremost due to high competition with other mainstream projects, is also acknowledged by more than 84 % of the actors and stakeholders.

Despite this rather disadvantageous financial framework conditions for the EUSALP, stakeholders managed to obtain funding from various other resources than the EU programs. More than 41 % of the stakeholders managed to receive financial support from the

particular/regional governmental level. In comparison, 13 % achieved funding from the private sphere (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, pp. 150–151).

Although the current overall financial support is still not sufficient for a comprehensive realization of the intended comprehensive macro-regional policy approach, it must be seen whether this current detrimental financial framework condition will improve in the future and thus increase the effectiveness of policy approaches in the Alpine Region. This, however, depends not only on the upcoming Multi-Annual Financial Framework (2020-2016), but also on the individual financial actor-commitment by states and regions within the macro-region.

Politics Dimension

After the initial unfolding dissent between the EC on the one side and the national/regional actors on the other concerning the procedural steering within the EUSALP (see chapter 7.2.3), this issue became less salient with the beginning of the implementation. Particularly the criticism towards the EC regarding its single-handed drafting of the Communication and Action Plan, which took place during the final stage of the initiation phase, led to more and more consensus-oriented statements by the actors.

This derived partially from the clear conditions, which were materializing at the beginning of the implementation phase. In its Conclusion, in November 2015, the Council of the EU – actually already three months before the kick-off event– stated that the ownership and the leadership by the governmental actors are of decisive importance within the EUSALP. Therefore a clear and –uncontested– delegation of tasks and roles should be carried out (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 6). The Council's statement underlined again the central role of the national and regional governmental actors and the premise of a co-decisional governance structure, which should be carried out within the governance structure. The European Parliament also emphasized this. While paramount importance of the EC as a central actor within the monitoring, implementation, management, and steering process of the EUSALP was stressed by the institution, it also noted that this should be carried out in cooperation with the governing bodies of the strategy (European Parliament, 2016a, pp. 6–7). The realization of procedural steering with various actors' broad involvement was also underlined by the General Assembly. In the first statement of the body, which was issued at the kick-off event in Brdo, the GA highlighted the principle of co-decisional steering by underlining the decisive importance of strengthening states’ and regions' ownership of the EUSALP. The GA further stated that this should be realized during the implementation process through the full commitment of the two governmental actors within the Executive Board and Action Groups as central bodies of procedural steering (EUSALP, 2016b, pp. 2–3). The designation of the

Commission's role as *primus inter pares* within the EB as the main network of Process Promotion was a year later again endorsed by the governmental actors. In their joint declaration as General Assembly in February 2017 ("Declaration of Rottach-Egern"), they stated that the EC's role should be considered the facilitator of the governance process. While this alone poses no deviation from other MRS policy documents' wording, this reference was embedded in a general call for the realization of a strong "bottom-up" approach. According to the GA, this should be attained through the extensive involvement of all actors and stakeholders within the EUSALP and by coordinating vertically and horizontally across the national, regional, and local level, as well as between NGOs, enterprises, and other associations (EUSALP, 2017b, p. 4). This aim by the GA resulted in the establishment of the Board of Action Group Leaders (BAGL), which has the task to ensure a permanent exchange of knowledge and experiences between the Action Groups and the Executive Board and thus enhance the coordination process as such. The establishment of the BAGL proved beneficial for the implementation process, namely by ensuring a mutual flow of information between the Action Groups in the first year of implementation, which was characterized by a significantly varying advancement in their goal attainment. While the Action Group members could already rely on some pre-EUSALP cooperation experience and showed already some degree of social capital, they could in the following establish a more comprehensive cross-sectoral coordination with the additional information basis provided by the BAGL.

For the necessary external marketing activities in 2016, the AlpGov additionally started to work out a communication strategy to maintain continuous ownership among the actors and create further public and political support within the EUSALP regions/states (European Commission, 2016e, pp. 48–50). The prioritization of active political promotion through external marketing measures was not just shared but particularly emphasized by the Bavarian presidency in 2017. The presidency realized in the following various high-level stakeholder events in Bavaria (e.g., Annual Forum in November 2017) or Brussels at their regional representation (e.g., presentation of the annual program in November 2016) in order boost public political awareness.

Although it is still too early to say whether the broad mobilization of actors and stakeholders is successfully attained and can be maintained, the first indicators show a rather positive picture. The political momentum led to a distinct interest by the European Parliament on the supranational level, which addressed the EUSALP in an independent resolution and formed a Parliamentary Intergroup called "Friends of EUSALP" (European Commission, 2016d, p. 4). This group of parliamentarians from the Alpine Region monitors and politically supports the

implementation progress as a Political Promoter. Following the "Bresso report", the EP already contributed to the implementation efforts with a comprehensive assessment concerning the geospatial challenges, governance structures, and other various aspects of the EUSALP (European Parliament, 2016b). At the Intergroup's meeting in Brussels on 10th May 2016, the body further stated, for example, the necessity of an improved project funding within the strategy and identified this deficiency as one of the main challenges of the EUSALP (Alpine-region.eu). Beside the content-based contributions by the intergroup, the EP also invoked in its resolution from September 2016 that in the limelight of broad stakeholder involvement, the legislative level should be more included in the strategy's implementation (European Parliament, 2016a, p. 6) and thus emphasized again the principle of broad stakeholder involvement.

At the end of 2017, the procedural mobilization of actors was, as a result, overall positively assessed by the survey respondents of the already cited EUSALP study. The cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional mobilization of actors was acknowledged as very successful by 98 % of the actors and stakeholders. The attainment of a system of Multi-Level Governance through increased cooperation within the vertical and horizontal dimensions is also considered as successfully realized. In total, over 82 % of the stakeholders share this opinion, while only 17 % somewhat disagree regarding the attainment of a system of MLG within the EUSALP. The improved cooperation with third countries is also considered as relatively successful. Around 70 % of the respondents consider the external governance of the EUSALP as positive, while in contrast only 20 % "somewhat disagree" and only 7 % "strongly disagree" with the success of the governance approach. The survey respondents further constitute that the procedural network approach contributed to increased recognition of common challenges in the Alps (17 % strongly agree, 59 % somewhat agree). This also helped create synergies within the macro-region according to 85 % of the stakeholders (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, p. 140).

The positive assessment of the procedural processes within AG 6 also extended to its procedural innovation capacity. Through the broad involvement of new actors, the stakeholders stated with an overall rate of 75 % that they were generally able to generate innovative new policy concepts for tackling macro-region issues. However, the improvement applied not just for the policy approaches but also led to the development of new skills among the actors. This statement was agreed with by overall 69 %, while 25 % rather or strongly disagreed with it (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, p. 143).

Although these results show a positive and promising evolvement of the procedural dimension, they have to be considered with some reservations. Keeping in mind the already outlined limited validity of the survey results, which were only carried out in one of nine Action Groups, individual stakeholders further noted that even in the particular Action Group 6, an uneven mobilization of actors could be observed. For example, Switzerland is generally described as a very active AG participant, France, on the other hand, was absent from meetings in the monitoring period. This observation also applies to various regions, whose activity and participation is strongly dependent on the particular policy topic. While the cause for this absence can be the consequence of potentially limited administrative capacity issues, the general degree of mobilization has to be kept under thorough monitoring in the future. It must be seen whether a further de-mobilization takes place among the actors, which could trigger similarly severe consequences than in other MRS (Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna et al., 2017b, p. 144).

7.4. SWOT analysis of the EUSALP

To give an overview of our above-outlined findings concerning the EUSDR, we shall provide a compact summary of the strategy's main aspects. This will be carried in the form of a SWOT analysis. The strengths and weaknesses shall be compartmentalized in the three dimensions (Policy, Polity, Politics) to depict the main added-values and the main deficiencies of this Macro-regional strategy. On the other hand, the potential opportunities and threats will be carried out in a more general form. It must be emphasized again that the following SWOT analysis has to be considered as preliminary due to the unavailability of progress reports.

Strengths

Policy dimension: Like the most recent Macro-regional Strategy, the EUSALP marks not only a further significant step towards a differentiated territorial integration in the European Union but incorporates additionally various new characteristics in comparison to its counterparts. Regarding the territorial scope and actor-constellation, the EUSALP is similar to its macro-regional peers aligned around the Alpine massif. The particular territorial alignment of the strategy includes the so-called core region with the territorial inclusion of the Alpine arch and its directly adjacent regions and the peripheral sub-region, including the urban and metropolitan regions in the pre-Alpine area. Although this territorial approach was not uncontested during the initiation phase, this approach's selection is carried out in the limelight to provide a comprehensive policy approach, including a broad range of policy issues, which affects all of the Alpine communities in both sub-regions. This also manifests in the specific actor-constellation. Despite warnings of a territorial overextension, the EUSALP constitutes the

smallest actor-constellation among the Macro-regional strategies by far with only seven countries, resulting in a significantly smaller strategic RCBG network granting better feasibility regarding network-coordination and procedural steering. Another advantageous factor is the underlying economic and institutional framework conditions of the national actors.

There are significant economic, infrastructural, and societal differences between the core and peripheral regions, which were acknowledged and highlighted by stakeholders and actors alike. However, these differences are considerably smaller than in other Macro-regional strategies (e.g., EUSAIR, EUSDR), thus resulting in a substantially lower fragmentation of the macro-region as such. This also applies to the external governance dimension. While the EUSALP also includes two non-member states, namely Liechtenstein and Switzerland, the accompanying conditions concerning their participation are widely different than in other MRS. Besides not being interested in a prospective EU-membership but solely looking for a realization of "good governance" in the Alpine Region, they are further characterized by institutional and economic performance indices, which surpasses the Alpine EU member states significantly. A further major innovation is the involvement of all 48 regional governmental entities as equal actors within the EUSALP framework. This marks a unique measure to realize the stipulated bottom-up approach within the strategy. The premise is applied not only in terms of formal actor constellation but also within the goal setting. Instead of a strictly top-down oriented goal setting, which was carried out in other MRS, a broad deliberation process took place, which comprised of the supranational (EC, CoR, ASP), national level (Alpine states), regional level (ARGE ALP) and also included the non-governmental sphere (AC, CIPRA, etc.). The elaboration of the policy goals is thus shaped by the various contributions of each of these actors. Based on their particular field of expertise and their aims, the policy dimension comprises a diversified set of goals, including financial and environmental protection issues. A principal objective in this regard is the realization of place-based policy approaches. Although this is an objective pursued by all MRS and is realized with a varying level of success, the EUSALP shows a remarkably high policy alignment around specific geospatial challenges, manifesting in Acts of genuine nature and address place-based challenges.

Additionally, to the concentrated and specific goal setting, the EUSALP is also equipped with a more sophisticated –compared to other MRS– monitoring approach within the policy dimension. Furthermore, entailing the biannual submission of implementation reports by the AGLs and the biennial governance reports by the EC, the AlpGov project of the ASP is constituted explicitly to supervise the activities from an outsider's view. This can potentially contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of the strategy as such.

Polity dimension: While the EUSALP also constitutes in terms of its structural setup a new and innovative governance framework, the macro-region is characterized by various preceding institutional approaches (e.g., AC, ARGE ALP, ASP, COTRAO, etc.), who addressed the underlying geospatial challenges in differing institutional formats and with varying territorial scopes. This results in a valuable presence of institutional experience, which, to some degree, is also transferred to the governance structure of the EUSALP. While maintaining the basic and general macro-regional framework with the differentiation of the strategy in two spheres with embedded sub-networks, a significant focus was put on the provision of additional networks (e.g., BAGL, EB). This aimed to ensure improved vertical coordination across the two spheres and provide enhanced horizontal coordination across implementation networks. This is among others realized with double memberships for the actors and –a less degree– stakeholders, who are entitled to participate within these bodies and participate actively within the coordination. Simultaneously each implementation network functions more or less in an autonomous setup to prevent a spreading of eventually occurring network-sclerotization or network-failure.
Furthermore, the governance structure functions under the pending principle of the "Rolling Action Plan", which empowers the EUSALP actors to carry out adaptations and reforms of the setting if necessary. A unique attribute of the EUSALP is its particular "shadow of hierarchy". While the strategy is naturally limited in its structural independence due to the "three noes rule" on the EU level, most participating Alpine states are characterized by decentralized administrative structures, providing a significant room for action and thus increasing the mobilization capacity for the regional actors in general. In accordance with their formal equality within the governance structure of the EUSALP, the regional actors have thus the possibility to engage –more or less– autonomously within the various areas of interventions and shape the implementation process, which underlines the strong focus on the intended bottom-up orientation of the strategy again.

Politics dimension: The comparably long-lasting traditions of cross-border governance within the Alpine Region are also an added-value for the governance process within the EUSALP. Through the various institutionalized or non-institutionalized formats, which involved regional or national governmental actors and non-governmental organizations, the EUSALP is facing beneficial framework conditions regarding already established social capital between the entities. This affects the strategy's governance process within the initiation and implementation phase alike. In both phases actors and stakeholders are participating and contribute considerably to the decision-making and procedural steering of the strategy. As such, they are formally embedded within strategic networks of decision-making (e.g., General Assembly), as well in

networks located in both spheres of the EUSALP in charge of the procedural steering (e.g., former Steering Committee, Executive Board, Board of Action Group Leaders, Action Groups, Working Groups). In this regard, regional actors are fully integrated and are thus empowered to act as Political Promoters and Process Promoters. This constitutes a major step in terms of regional mobilization and in regard to a procedural bottom-up orientation. This premise is also further pursued in relation to the EC's role.

In contrast to other MRS, where the EC plays a central and overarching role as sole strategic process promoter, its position within the EUSALP is limited to a large degree to be a primus inter pares within the various coordinating bodies. The EC is obliged to carry the procedural steering together with national and regional, resulting in a more comprehensive vertical coordination approach. In terms of horizontal coordination, the EUSALP also presents a genuine approach. An example is the establishment of the Board of Action Group Leaders (BAGL). The particular AGLs, comprising national and regional actors, are in charge of coordinating the cross-sectoral procedural steering. The additional inclusion of the "EGTC EUREGIO Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino" and "Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Berggebiete" as Process Promoters in the Action Groups (AG 4 and AG 5), entitling them to membership within the BAGL. This inclusion constitutes another major innovation by incorporating two networks of RCBG in the procedural steering of the strategy, thus creating a territorial integration on two territorial scales (EGTC and macro-regional scale) simultaneously.

A further significant added value is the empowerment of regional actors as political promoters due to their involvement within central decision-making bodies (General Assembly). This underlines the regional level's equal participation within the strategy formally and strengthens the actor-ownership through these actors' accompanying obligation to promote the EUSALP politically and contribute with their resources. This ownership is of particular relevance because of the general lack of a comprehensive EU budget allocated for the strategy. The emphasis on the vital role of regional actors also materializes in the form of the EUSALP annual presidency, carried out either by national or regional actors. Besides various management tasks, national and regional actors are entitled to align their presidency around a specific issue, which can be a central topic within the annual plan of the EUSALP. With this opportunity, both actor groups, especially the regional governments, can emphasize specific issues and challenges for the regional level within the EUSALP. The mandate as acting EUSALP presidency simultaneously

also strengthens the actor-ownership by the presiding government. Both factors contribute to the result of a strengthening of the bottom-up orientation of the governance process.

In contrast to this, non-governmental stakeholders' involvement is, in general limited to an advisory role. However, the EUSALP also ensures a structural membership for some non-governmental representatives within central bodies of decision-making (e.g., GA) and procedural steering (e.g., EB, AG). This again constitutes a novelty among the MRS, where stakeholders were only allowed to participate within the implementation networks on case-based formal invitations by the network participants. At the same time, they were completely excluded from strategic decision-making networks. Thus, this structural involvement contributes to a more comprehensive and diversified implementation process by continuously involving these organizations within the governance process.

Weaknesses

Policy dimension: The comprehensive and comparably long-lasting elaboration of the policy goals constitutes a major advancement in the policy goal setting, which materializes among others in a particularly strong alignment around place-based challenges. While the overarching goals show favorable framework conditions, various targets, and indicators within the Action Groups are characterized by an overly strategic and intangible target setting. However, this is in open contradiction to the SMART principle, which says that targets should be specific, measurable, accepted, realistic, and time-bound. As observed in other macro-regional strategies, this often has a detrimental impact on the implementation process due to the unfeasibility of realizing adequate monitoring activities. Still, they often also hamper the implementation process as such. Unfortunately, this assessment has to be strictly considered preliminary due to insufficient information concerning the implementation progress. The non-publishing of implementation and governance reports by the AlpGov and by the Action Group Leaders results in a lack of transparency concerning the evolution of the implementation of the process for scholars, which consequentially prevents us from carrying out an adequate analysis of the recent three years of ongoing goal attainment within the EUSALP.

Polity dimension: The stipulation of the general “three noes rule” (no new funding, no new EU law, no new institutions) marks one of the most considerable challenges within the EUSALP framework. The restraint concerning adopting new EU law also implies the inability to establish coercive measures against participating actors. Free-riding or de-mobilization, in the absence of mandatory events and daily governance tasks, can be a result of not being sanctioned due to the lack of an adequate legal basis. While this constitutes a potential risk, namely decreasing actor-commitment, the absence of any specific additional funding for the EUSALP presents a

major problem since the beginning of the implementation phase. The again stated principle within the program documents, namely of using already available funding through cross-budget mobilization, turns out again as widely unfeasible. This is also noted by the actor and stakeholder survey, in which the respondents stipulated that the current general financial framework is insufficient, resulting in challenging project financing. Due to the lack of preferential selection of EUSALP projects compared to mainstream projects, the strategy is confronted with significant competition during the application process at tenders, which often results in very modest success-rates.

In this regard, the Alpine Space Program constitutes a major asset for the EUSALP and a valuable source of funding. With financial per-capita support, which is significantly higher than in other Interreg programs, the ASP can provide allocations for nearly the whole EUSALP territory, excluding the already mentioned NUTS II regions of the German provinces of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria. However, the overall budget has to be considered in its whole perspective as still relatively modest. It is far from providing an adequate financial framework for large-scale geospatial policy measures. This is also unfeasible due to the underlying program logic of the ASP as Interreg B program, which foresees the financial support of "soft type interventions", comprising primarily of networking activities (e.g., joint workshops, exchange of expertise and experience, joint drafting or program documents, etc.).

Politics dimensions: In the limelight of the broad non-governmental stakeholder involvement, an unbalanced representation of organizations can be observed. During the initiation and in the current implementation phase, the overwhelming majority of organizations are active in environmental protection. Starting from the Alpine Convention, Club Arc Alpine, Alliance in the Alps, to other non-governmental formats, each has a policy focus on environmental protection and the self-declared "sustainable development" in the Alpine Region. Although the strong presence of such an agenda within the goal setting and governance process is not a weakness, an important issue, which needs significant political attention, the EUSALP is characterized simultaneously by an absence of other stakeholder groups. Economic actors like enterprises or chambers of commerce are widely not active within the governance process. However, this contradicts on the one hand to some degree the objective of balanced goal attainment and is also disadvantageous regarding comprehensive democratic accountability, based on the principle of a holistic representation of civil society.

Opportunities

Due to the lack of information concerning the implementation phase, it isn't easy to adequately assess potentially revealing opportunities within the EUSALP framework. In the limelight of

the difficult financial framework conditions, a major opportunity can, however, unfold from the strong actor-commitment by the regions and states in the macro-region. Based on the insights from the first major stakeholder survey in 2017, actors within the EUSALP show the first measures to contribute to the implementation process with their financial resources. Due to the situation that an expansion of the EU budget in the short and mid-term cannot be expected but will quite on the contrary probably be more limited within the area of Structural Policies for the MFF post-2020. Therefore, financial actor-ownership will be of decisive importance for a successful implementation process as such.

Threats

Policy dimension: The fragmentation between the core and peripheral region within the Alpine territory was acknowledged in a very early stage of the initiation phase. National and regional actors in the following emphasized the principle of a flexible approach, which should be applied not only in a territorial dimension but also in terms of goal attainment when considered as necessary. Although this constitutes an important measure to overcome such a persisting geospatial and socioeconomic fragmentation, the status quo constitutes a major obstacle to successful goal attainment. LRAs are, despite the intended comprehensive approach, faced with these significantly diverging economic framework conditions, which also affects their actor-behavior as such. Being in a remote and hard to access location with an often non-diversified and struggling economy can significantly limit the capability or willingness to compromise regarding overarching macro-regional approaches. While such geospatial approaches are often in need of precisely such concessions, this situation can substantially hamper the goal attainment. Detrimental actor-behavior can, however, also occur among the economically high-performing urban and especially the metropolitan regions. While these actors can allocate necessary capabilities to the macro-regional framework, the threat pertains to whether they will comply with such comprehensive approaches and make on their behalf socioeconomic compromises to these often considered “recreational areas” within the Alpine core-region.

Polity dimension: The lack of a comprehensive financial framework is also a major threat to the EUSALP. Although the economic conditions are to some degree better than in other MRS, like, for example, in the EUSDR, the strategy still lacks the financial capabilities to realize large scale geospatial approaches, which are actually necessary regarding various designated policy goals. The consequential expectations-capabilities gap contains the threat of triggering a wide disillusionment among actors. Although the actor-commitment comprises more than just the anticipated financial added value within the strategy, these entities are nevertheless faced with a limited amount of resources and thus base their participation within RCBG networks on a

cost-benefit calculation. The lack of financial capacities and hence little project success can lead to a de-mobilization, which can either manifest in an absence from mandatory events and daily governance tasks, or even the formal withdrawal from the network.

Politics dimension: Despite the limited accessibility of information concerning the implementation process, first signs of a partial actor de-mobilization can be observed within the strategy. Based on the analyzed stakeholder survey with the accompanying assessment of AG 6, the authors of the publication noted that a strongly varying degree of actor participation at AG meetings could be observed. Some regional actors, for example, already showed repeated absence from mandatory events. The authors stated that this de-mobilization is probably caused by these actors' limited capabilities, forcing them to concentrate on a selected group of individual areas of interventions (AGs), which are considered important. While this seems reasonable, it is nevertheless a distinct threat to the respective policy networks' operability. Especially the potential expansion of such an actor-demobilization can result in a strongly decreasing efficiency of the implementation activities as such, which vice versa enhances in most cases the de-mobilization effect, leading to a downward spiral. With the above-outlined lack of an adequate financial framework within the EUSALP, which can trigger a comprehensive de-mobilization, such a scenario is a real threat and has to be tightly monitored to make counteractions if necessary.

8. Conclusion: Regional Cross-Border Governance in the EU. A promising approach in the limelight of a persisting capabilities-expectations gap

With the United Kingdom scheduled to leave the European Union in 2019, the decision-makers in Brussels and the member states are faced with an unprecedented situation. For the first time, a member state has decided to leave the EU and substantially loosen its mutual institutional relations. As a result, the "Brexit" spiked a very heated debate about the European Union's future, where the long-time lasting premise of the "ever closer union" is openly discussed and increasingly questioned. Even the European Commission, who was always firmly endorsing the premise of a comprehensive integration for all member states, contributed in the last years with its own papers to the debate, where it outlined alternative scenarios of differentiated integration. While this issue has gained new momentum on the political stage in the previous years, it also triggered an increasingly dense academic debate with a considerable growing number of publications.

However, despite this growing academic attention, the state of research regarding differentiated integration is still characterized by a distinct fragmentation between the various theories, concepts, and typologies. With scholars often applying a nearly exclusive focus on some

particular aspects of the EU and its integration process, most works often fail to provide the very important interlinkage between several analysis areas. While most publications offer many valuable insights on differentiated integration, they mainly focus on the interplay between the intergovernmental and supranational levels. The implications for the subnational levels are either considered of secondary importance or neglected as a whole in the debate.

However, similar shortcomings can also be observed for concepts addressing the impact of the EUropean integration on subnational territorial levels, for example, the Multi-Level Governance concept, where scholars often widely disregard the intergovernmental aspect of policymaking.

To fill this research gap, this work carried out a new approach. As a theoretical basis, the concept of *Differentiated Integration* by Schimmelfennig and colleagues was selected and integrated into the model of Multi-Level Governance. This proceeding was carried based on the conviction that both concepts provide valuable and substantial insights on their own and can furthermore complement each other in the respective areas of analysis, where the individual theories fall short of giving an adequate assessment.

In this work, the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) concept is therefore used as the theoretical basis. Based on this concept's premises, the European Union's institutional setup is considered to be differentiated in a vertical and horizontal dimension. In the vertical dimension and from an institutional point of view, the EU comprises a limited number of territorially defined levels of authority, ranging from the municipal, regional, national, to the European Union as the supranational level. A minor deviation from the mainstream MLG concept was carried out for the area of analysis regarding the *intragovernmental vertical dimension* or, in other words, the institutional setup within the member states. The original MLG concept was, however, only slightly adapted in this regard. The original depiction of the institutional encompassment between the institutional and administrative levels as "Russian doll-like setup" was negated in this work and was instead substituted by Kohler-Koch's narrative of a 'penetrated system of governance'. This adaption was essential due to the issue of actor-mobilization, which was elaborated in a later part of this work.

While these deviations can be considered minor, the *intergovernmental vertical dimension* was substantially extended through, as mentioned above, incorporating the differentiated integration concept. As a fundamental premise, the concept stipulates that the EU has undergone a "piecemeal revolution". The long-time firmly maintained principle of the "permissive consensus" concerning a homogenous application of EUropean law ("one size fits all") was in the last three decades increasingly substituted through a "constraining dissensus". An increasing

number of (governmental) actors insist on a differentiation of the integration process and show a growing unwillingness to endorse a homogenous integration. The EU is, as a result, substantially differentiated within the primary law and its secondary law. This has naturally also a substantial impact on the EU's membership structure. Instead of the long-time persisting two-dimensional club-like setup, the institutional relations between member states and the EU can be distinguished in over ten "grades of EU membership". While the formal accession to the EU still marks a decisive grade of integration, there are several association levels before that. Countries initialize an institutional relationship with the EU through bilateral treaties, participation in free trade zone, and various other vertical integration forms. After formal accession, the EU members also have several further levels of integration, for example, through participation within the European Monetary Union.

Based on the premise that the member state governments are vital in initiating a differentiation of the integration process, this also has decisive implications for the institutional intragovernmental vertical dimension of the Multi-Level Governance system. In this work, I concur with MLG scholars' basic assumption, namely that the EU is, in general, characterized by a dispersion of competencies. The decision-making power, which national governments exclusively exercised in former times, is increasingly shared across different jurisdictional levels, including the supranational and subnational levels. However, the majority of MLG scholars apply the basic premises of neo-functionalism. They argue that the dispersion process is the consequence of an erosion of state power in which the national governments are unable to maintain firm control over the dispersion process and are thus even 'doomed to disappear' in the long run.

In contrast to this assumption, the approach of *rationalist institutionalism* was applied in this work. I, therefore, argue that the integration process, and with it, the dispersion of competences, is based on a distinct cost-benefit rationale of the states, where national governments remain not only the "gatekeepers" of political power but approve of the reallocation of competences under the premise of economic and political utility. Each state's perceived cost-benefit ratio is strategic and is based on a complex consideration process.

In the last decades, member states in the EU proved that they are willing and able to enforce opt-outs from EUropean law or loosen their institutional rations with the EU through a leave as "ultima ratio". Towards their subnational counterparts, they can also "claw back" competencies through comprehensive administrative (re-)centralization.

This particular assumption is verified when we look at the various policy areas, institutional channels, or legal instruments, which are typically considered opportunities for local and

regional actors (LRAs) to mobilize and influence the EU's decision-making to their benefit. While the potential room for action and thus the capability to mobilize has particularly in the last three decades substantially increased for LRAs, the actual power of each actor depends to a large degree on the approval of governments as gatekeepers. Regardless of whether it is the Cohesion Policy, the activity of interregional associations, the realization of paradiplomacy, or the activity in the various EUropean institutional bodies (e.g., CoR, EP, EC, etc.), the LRA's engagement is carried out in a distinct "shadow of hierarchy".

In EUrope, a very asymmetric mobilization of local and regional actors has thus been unfolded. In countries where the national governments have a more favorable position towards regional and local mobilization, especially the federal states, LRAs are provided with significant political, administrative, and financial capabilities. On the other hand, their counterparts in centralized unitary states are still often limited to function as sheer executive agencies of the national administrations. Another decisive factor is the aforementioned degree of EU membership, which also substantially impacts the potential mobilization capability of LRAs in the MLG system. With an increased vertical integration level, the LRAs can utilize an increasing number of instruments and structural mobilization opportunities. Some policy areas, institutional channels, or other representation opportunities explicitly require the EU membership as a precondition, consequentially limiting the options for third-country regions. Based on the developed model, which was elaborated in this work, we can state that the vertical mobilization of LRAs within the EUropean framework is intrinsically connected to their countries' integration level.

This is, of course, also valid for the horizontal dimension of the Multi-Level Governance system. However, in contrast to its vertical counterpart, the state of research for the horizontal dimension is significantly less developed and additionally characterized by a substantial fragmentation. Despite the steep increase of network-like cooperation in the EU, which were established over the last decades (e.g., Comitology procedure, OMC, etc.), the academic debate still failed to complement the MLG concept with a comprehensive typology, which includes the wide variety of horizontal cooperation formats. An even more substantial shortfall is the widely persisting lack of a territorial reference within these typologies. The MLG concept lacks, especially regarding regional cooperation, an adequate analytical framework, and instruments of analysis. To close this research gap, I resorted in the following work to the Regional Governance approach. This approach was used to provide a complementary theoretical approach for the horizontal dimension of the MLG concept. Due to this approach's

operationalization, it furthermore served as an analytical instrument for the empirical part of this work.

For this purpose, the Regional Governance approach was substantially adapted in several decisive aspects. In comparison to the overwhelming majority of Regional Governance publications, which focus on territorial cooperation within national jurisdictions, the approach was substantially adapted for the analysis of collaboration across national borders within the EU's MLG system. Aspects like the typical border-effects, which affect the cooperation in an economic, political, sociocultural, and institutional form, are just one of the various distinct factors that impact and lead to a necessary distinction from their domestic counterparts. For the following empirical analysis, it was further required to operationalize the approach.

Starting from the premise that the various cooperation formats should be considered as networks with an explicit territorial reference, the RCBG approach was differentiated into several analytical categories. This was done by differentiating the factors in the three dimensions of political interaction, namely the policy, polity, and politics dimension. Due to the natural development and evolvement of such cross-border networks, further differentiation was carried out. Individual RCBG networks can thus be differentiated into three distinct stages, namely the phase of initiation, the phase of implementation and evolvement, and as last stage, the phase of consolidation.

Regional Cross-Border Governance within the EUropean framework

The empirical part of the work can be distinguished into two major parts. The first part comprises an overview analysis of the numerous existing Regional Cross-Border Governance networks, which have been established explicitly within the European Union's institutional framework. The cooperations, which are since the 1990s supported by the three strands of the ETC/Interreg, or the IPA and ENP programs, constitute the first group of RCBG networks, which account for more than 187 cooperation in total. The second group of networks is the cooperations based on the legal instrument called the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), which account for 68 cooperation in total. Due to the sheer number of cooperation-networks, a deductive approach was carried out, in which the cooperations were analyzed and assessed based on the adapted and operationalized RCBG approach.

Although many publications exist concerning these RCBG networks' analysis, the overwhelming majority of works focus on one or a few specific case examples. These works provide valuable insights and contribute significantly to the state of research. However, their informative value for the general assessment of cross-border cooperation in the EU and functional differentiation of governance is limited. This derives from the substantial challenges,

which came with an overview assessment of these RCBG networks. Besides a large number of existing RCBG networks, each cooperation is characterized by strongly deviating features and framework conditions. However, despite these challenging framework conditions, several findings can be stated.

In the policy dimension, the community-funded RCBG networks are provided with the opportunity to adapt the actor-constellation and territorial scope of the cooperation to the particular challenges and requirements. In most networks, especially with a cross-border and interregional scope, a distinct predominance of public local and regional actors is observable, while in the transnational formats, national actors are the most present actors. The possibility of involving non-governmental actors is utilized by various cooperation, however in most cases confined to partial or procedural ad-hoc involvement. Participating actors have further a considerable leeway regarding the definition of the policy goals. While actors within these networks can theoretically select from a wide range of policy goals, most networks are characterized by similar setups. Concerning the cooperation objectives, most networks pursue a mixed approach, namely by combining sectoral aims with a distinct territorial approach. The majority of cooperations, especially the ERDF funded networks, focus on environmental protection, research and development, transport, tourism, and preservation of the cross-border cultural heritage. However, despite three decades of ongoing program development, most EU-funded cooperations still fail to create a substantial policy impact. In particular, interregional and transnational RCBG networks often pursue a "soft" policy approach, where actors primarily focus on exchanging information, experiences, and expert-knowledge. Only the cross-border cooperation with a narrower territorial scope realize in terms of their cooperation objectives more "hard" policy approaches, which materialize in more tangible results (e.g., the building of infrastructure). A widely persisting problem is the overemphasis of sectoral policy issues to the detriment of place-based challenges. This is a the side-effect of the over-alignment with mainstream policy strategies of the EU. Due to generally ill-defined and fuzzy policy goals, some cooperations have become "fair weather" cooperations, where the actual added-value of the networks play to some degree a subordinated role.

In terms of the polity dimension, the RCBG networks are embedded within a firm "shadow of hierarchy", which also shapes, to a large degree, the internal network structure. Despite the continuous valorization of the ETC/Interreg programs, as the most important programs in this area, the establishment of such governance structures is not only depending on a strong approval by the respective member state governments, but the RCBG networks are firmly embedded within the institutional framework of these countries. Before the EGTC regulation, actors were

forced to either create domestic legal bodies under public law, base the cooperation on an international treaty between the national governments, or create private law-based twin associations with limited legal liability. These narrow legal and institutional boundaries thus had a constraining effect on the cooperation itself.

The insufficient availability of funding constitutes a problematic issue. Although the ETC/Interreg budget experienced since its constitution a tenfold increase, the generally available funds for RCBG cooperation are still exceptionally small compared to other EU mainstream budgets. This creates a particularly challenging situation for regional and, in particular, local public actors. Due to their often exceptionally constrained financial capabilities LRAs are often unable to co-finance projects despite massively increasing co-financing rates by the EU programs.

Regarding the politics dimension, the presence of the so-called social capital is also an important factor for cooperation. However, in most RCBG networks, such a strong presence between the public actors is not present in most cases. While the cooperations create some kind of feeling of togetherness, the often proclaimed cross-border mentality and consequential high social capital level is not achieved within most cooperation. The institutional limitations often lead to a lack of a common geospatial vision in the cross-border dimension, where individual actors are either unable or unwilling to put themselves into their foreign counterparts' position. The long-time persisting lack of a common EUropean legal and institutional basis also contributed to quite fuzzy actor-roles within these RCBG networks. The process promoter's exemplary role, as important and central actor with coordinating, managing, and mediating duties, was realized from case to case differently. This also affected the procedural steering within the RCBG networks, where the cooperation processes are from case to case characterized by a different degree of cooperation intensity. In the overwhelming majority of cases, external marketing activities were very shallow or not carried out at all. The majority of people are, as a result, in general unaware of such cooperations in their respective areas.

The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation as advancement of the RCBG approach

The very mixed results of the existing RCBG networks also led over the years to increasing demands to constitute a supranational legal basis for such cross-border cooperations. This claim was eventually fulfilled under the Austrian and German council presidency in 2006. With the adoption *European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation* (EGTC) and its revision in 2013, the regulation constitutes a landmark and an important advancement regarding Regional Cross-Border Governance within the EU. With the provision of a legal instrument, the public actors

can create a governance structure with a substantially higher degree of institutionalization and establish beyond that a cooperation based on EUropean law. In the past years of existence, the EGTC has thus yielded several distinct added-values in all three dimensions of analysis, which need to be highlighted.

In the policy dimension, the EGTC provides similar flexibility than regular ETC/IPA/ENP supported cooperation. Regarding the actor-constellation and the cooperation's territorial scope, the participating actors have a wide selection of potential options. The majority of EGTC networks, namely 59 out of the total 68, are based on cross-border cooperation with a smaller territorial scope in the proximity of the borders (Interreg A) with a limited number of actors. The regulation also provides the opportunity to create a cooperation area across the external borders of the EU. Such cooperations are, however, still an "exotic exception". The EGTCs are characterized mostly by a one-dimensional actor-constellation, where actors stem from the regional or local levels. Although the EGTC provides the opportunity to give full membership to public law bodies or involve non-governmental actors through extended partnerships, this opportunity is seldomly used. The provided opportunity by the EGTC regulation to extend the actor-constellation, which should help to prevent any over-inflation of the network, is increasingly used by the cooperating actors, thus constituting an actual added-value for the cooperation.

Concerning the policy goal-setting, the EGTC provisions follow to a large degree the approach of the regular community-funded RCBG networks, namely by constituting the ERDF, CPR, and other provisions as the basis, from which the actors can select the potential array of cooperation objectives. However, a unique characteristic is the opportunity to create specific objectives, which are not covered by these regulations. This should help to increase the place-based added-value of the cooperation even further. One obligation is', however, that the objective must be in strict accordance with the overarching cohesion objectives of the EU. Cooperation objectives that touch upon policy and regulatory powers, justice and traditional foreign policy, or areas that safeguard the respective state's general interest are excluded as potential policy goals. Policy goals covered by the provisions of the above-mentioned EU regulations and programs can be selected for cooperation without concerned national governments being able to issue their veto. However, if these regulations do not explicitly cover a policy goal, the national governments possess the right to veto these *ex ante* by the national governments. Any infringement with this principle can further lead to the EGTC's dissolution by the concerned countries.

In terms of the polity dimension, the EGTC regulation provides the most significant added-value for RCBG in the EU. While the lack of a common institutional and legal basis often constituted a nearly insurmountable obstacle for actors before the regulation and led to ineffective or unsuccessful cooperation in many cases, the EGTC provides the dearly needed common legal basis in this regard. Member states must explicitly agree upon a joint convention and statute, which serves as a legal framework and determines the actors' modus operandi. Due to the typical hierarchy of legal norms, which gives the EUropean law primacy over the national laws, each concerned member state's explicit approval is, however, still necessary. This strict provision also ensures firm maintenance of the "shadow of hierarchy" by the national states, who have even the power to initiate the RCBG network's dissolution if an evident infringement with this provision occurs. Within the legal boundaries of an already established EGTC, the subnational actors possess a substantial leeway and can, to some degree, act autonomously from their national government. The obligation of establishing a joint office on the territory of one of the participating actors constitutes in several aspects an added-value. Due to the commitment to acquire a legal personality for the office under the sheltering country's respective domestic law, the joint office underlies distinct legal liabilities. This facilitates the application attenders and thus improves the rate of success to acquire financial support. In basically all EGTCs, the joint offices carry out the process promoter's role by being in charge of the procedural steering. The EGTCs in general, follow the premise of being "as specific as it must be and open as it can be". The provisions of the regulation stipulate the establishment of only two mandatory organs within an EGTC network. The *assembly* functions as a central decision-making core network, consisting of all involved full members. The director, on the other hand, is formally in charge of the procedural steering. While the regulation only outlines the two bodies' tasks on a rudimentary basis, the actors are free to establish additional formal bodies if they deem it necessary. The EGTCs, therefore, preserve structural flexibility, while they have simultaneously a significantly higher degree of institutionalization than the average ETC/IPA/ENP supported RCBG networks.

Due to the persisting threat of network-sclerotization, the regulation has further introduced fail-safe mechanisms. Actors can initiate the network's dissolution if the cooperation is affected by general demobilization and consequential network-failure. Another major added-value is the opportunity to create their own autonomous budgets within the EGTC framework. While this was hardly feasible in the regular community-supported RCBG networks, actors resort more and more to this new opportunity by introducing membership fees. Although there are large

differences in terms of the respective budget sizes, the creation of own additional funding positively impacts the cooperation and leads to an increased sense of ownership among actors. Regarding the politics dimension, the legal and financial liabilities in an EGTCT can substantially decrease the potential risk of free-riding by individual actors. This also contributes to a general decrease of the moral-hazard and can thus reduce the transaction-costs within the network.

Although the EGTC's formal actor-constellation only seldomly includes non-governmental actors as full members, these will, in many cases, be involved through the aforementioned extended partnerships, more precisely in ad-hoc established consultation bodies or in the form of working groups as formal organs of the EGTC. The establishment of the assembly and the director as the two mandatory organs also shape the actor-roles within the RCBG networks to a large degree. The overwhelming majority of cooperation does not deviate from these provisions but stick to the minimum mandatory establishment of the assembly as the organ of political promoters, while the director is in most cases in charge of the procedural steering. In this regard, the available financial and administrative capabilities play a significant role. While in smaller and financially less capable EGTCs, the process promoter's role is carried out by one person, in more competitive setups, this role is fulfilled by several full-time employees, leading naturally to increased success in terms of procedural steering.

The EUSDR and EUSALP. An innovative new RCBG approach facing a capabilities-expectation gap

The "hour of birth" of the Macro-regional strategies (MRS) constituted a few years after the EGTC regulation again a decisive landmark within the EUropean framework. While RCBG networks existed with similar territorial scope in the form of the Interreg B strands, the MRS constitutes a new and more comprehensive policy approach with a potentially larger policy impact for the particular territories. Since the initiation of the *EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region* in 2009, as the first of its kind, three additional strategies were initiated. Two of these strategies, namely the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), were analyzed and assessed in this work.

In contrast to the previous assessment of RCBG networks in an overview-analysis, these were analyzed as two individual case studies, however, again with the operationalized Regional Cross-Border Governance approach.Based on an inductive approach, the analysis gave valuable insights into our overarching research questions.

As Macro-regional strategies, both case examples have various commonalities. They are based on the same basic premise, to realize a policy approach to tackle specific geospatial, political,

and economic challenges in the given area of cooperation. The strategies' territorial scopes are aligned around a specific natural entity, in this case, the Alps and the Danube. This is accompanied by the generally valid overarching guideline ("three noes" rule), which prohibits adopting new EUropean laws for the strategies, the constitution of new specific budgets, or establishing new institutions on the EUropean level.

Both strategies are constituted to realize a "bottom-up" oriented RCBG approach, which should be achieved among others through procedural steering between the public actors and non-governmental stakeholders' involvement. The vertical and horizontal involvement of actors should, in the long run, contribute to the further development of the EU towards a comprehensive system of Multi-Level Governance. However, when taking a closer look at the two strategies, they show substantial differences in nearly all analysis areas.

This applies first and foremost regarding the different stages of the strategies' evolvement with EUSDR being more than five years further advanced than the EUSALP, thus being at a relatively far advanced implementation phase, while its counterpart is at the start of its implementation activities. The two strategies show further substantial differences when looking at the geospatial, economic, and political framework conditions.

The Danube Region is characterized in general by stark heterogeneity and fragmentation. In the sociocultural dimension, this materialized as follows: While the Habsburg Empire, which was also called "Danube Monarchy", is considered a prime example of a multi-ethnic empire, after its breakdown, geostrategic and ethnocultural conflicts led to the increasing fragmentation of the societies. The Danube Region is characterized during the 20th century by a long-time persisting geostrategic dismemberment of the area, namely in a capitalist and democratic upper-region, a socialist block of states in the mid-region (Warsaw Pact), and a lower part likewise under communist rule (SFRY or the USSR). This contributed to a challenging socio-economic heritage even after the democratic transition, which is still hampering the region's potential integration. Until today the region is still characterized by an economic situation, where the regions in the upper area of the Danube Region outperform the lower part several times. This results in the typical accompanying agglomeration effects in the regions of the upper part of the Danube. In contrast, the lower part is faced with outmigration ("brain-drain"), high unemployment, poor infrastructural, and administrative capabilities. The large differences between the regions had made a comprehensive territorial approach already from the beginning quite challenging.

In contrast to this, the Alpine Region is faced with significantly different challenges. While the regions in the Alps are all faced with difficult infrastructural accessibilities, the macro-region

was throughout history, to a less degree, faced with geopolitical segregation than the EUSDR. Characterized by a unique ethnocultural diversity, the regions managed to widely maintain long-lasting traditions of economic, political, and cultural cooperation. A considerably homogenous socio-economic development also characterizes the area. With the transformation of the respective economies from agriculture to tourism and modern industrial production, the Alpine metropoles and cities and a significant share of the rural areas managed to realize a consistent positive economic development. The Alpine Region is thus characterized by a high innovation capacity, especially in terms of research and development, good institutional and administrative capabilities, and a high degree of economic integration.

Substantial differences between the two strategies can be also stated regarding the policy dimension. Concerning the actor-constellation, the EUSDR consists of actors from all major administrative levels, including LRAs. Besides governmental actors from within the EU, the EUSDR also includes a significant number of third countries, thus creating a significant external governance approach. With nine member states, two regional entities, and five third countries, the EUSDR struggles overall with an oversized actor-constellation, which detrimentally affects the procedural steering and thus the goal implementation. Furthermore, several of these countries have a diminishingly small territorial share of the river basin or are completely non-riparian states. This materialized during the ongoing implementation phase in a quite rudimentary actor-ownership of these governments and thus their early demobilization. The policy goal-setting, more precisely the Pillars and Priority Areas of the strategy, is only to a certain degree aligned around the region's specific challenges. While the overarching objectives are strongly aligned around the objectives of mainstream EU strategies (e.g., Europe 2020), the originally intended place-based approach is often poorly translated into the actions and projects. As policy networks, various Priority Areas were also struggling with insufficiently prepared projects that were accompanied by ill-working monitoring mechanisms. Therefore, project applications often had a particularly low success rate at tenders of the EU programs, which often aggravated the implementation process. Due to the lack of success in many Priority Areas, a comprehensive overhaul of the goal-setting was carried out in 2015/2016. Despite achieving success stories in a few policy areas, the EUSDR is overall continuously struggling with a major capabilities-expectation gap in the policy dimension.

Despite the limitations of the analysis, which derive from the short implementation period of two years, the EUSALP shows a significantly different picture concerning the policy dimension. With a territorial scope that includes the core Alpine Region and the peripheral sub-region, the EUSALP's cooperation area was, during its drafting phase, a contested issue among

the actors. A particular concern was the potential dominance by the metropolitan regions and cities during the policy implementation. Many actors feared that it would influence the policy implementation to the detriment of the less powerful rural areas. Despite the persisting debate, the EUSALP constitutes with only seven participating countries the smallest actor-constellation among the MRS. The smaller size of the RCBG network results in less complicated and more effective procedural steering and benefits the implementation process. Due to the high-performing economies of the states and regions in the Alpine Region, the macro-regional strategy functions based on less fragmented framework conditions than its counterpart in the Danube Region. A unique characteristic in terms of the actor-constellation is the involvement of 48 regional public entities as widely equal partners of the national governments in the network. The strong involvement of the regional level has also contributed to a quite bottom-up oriented drafting of the goal-setting. In contrast to the EUSDR the drafting of the cooperation objectives was carried out in the form of a broad deliberation process in the Alpine Region, which also included the nation-states and the regional level and even several stakeholders from the non-governmental sphere. The EUSALP, as a result, shows a high degree of policy alignment around the specific geospatial, political, or economic challenges in the region, which materializes, among others, in actions that tackle genuine Alpine-specific problems. The EUSALP is also equipped with a comprehensive monitoring mechanism. This is realized through internal periodical reports like in most MRS and external institutions like AlpGov, who also publish consistent implementation reports.

Various constituted targets and indicators are characterized by an overly strategic setting or are based on a voluntary "normative vision". This, however, made during the implementation phase, in several cases, the achievement of these targets impossible, thus affecting the goal attainment detrimentally. Another major shortfall is the lack of transparency. While the EUSDR-related reports are generally available for the public, the EUSALP is not providing such insights, making the evolution of the strategy less transparent and an adequate assessment less feasible.

The EUSDR has, in terms of the polity dimension, a highly differentiated network structure. It is separated into two spheres, one consisting of sub-networks for strategic decision-making (e.g., High-Level Group), while the other networks are established for the actual goal-attainment and project implementation (Priority Areas, Steering Groups, Working Groups). The structural differentiation aims to prevent or reduce potential spillovers if a network-sclerotization and/or network-failure is happening in the sub-networks. The network is based on the principle of a so-called "Rolling Action Plan", which allows the participating

governmental actors to adapt the governance setup if necessary. However, the "three noes rule", as the most crucial provision of this "soft governance" approach, constitutes a significant problem. With the inability to create standalone institutional structures that form to some degree legal or financial liabilities for the actors, the network lacks –in contrast to the EGTCs– any coercive measures to prevent/reduce free-riding or demobilization of individual actors. The requirement to refrain from high institutionalized governance structures also often results in inefficient procedural steering. The public actors tried to counteract this development by establishing the Danube Strategy Point and Joint Technical Secretariats in the individual Priority Areas. However, these measures proved to be widely unsuccessful, not least because of the limited financial capabilities of these structures, leading already after a short time to their apparent dismantling (e.g., DSP).

While the EUSDR was initially intended to be a bottom-up oriented governance approach, the strategy is strongly dominated by intergovernmental decision-making. Except for the two German provinces of Bavaria and Baden-Wurttemberg, local and regional actors are widely excluded from strategic decision-making. Even within the Priority Areas, as sub-networks for implementing the policy goals, the LRAs are only very seldom empowered to be equal actors within the decision-making.

The lack of adequate funding was for the EUSDR already from the beginning one of the most substantial problems. With the strategy's initiation in 2010, the actors were faced with widely depleted funds in the Multi-annual Financial Framework (2007-2013). External funding by governmental actors was, in the overwhelming majority of cases, not provided. Therefore a large number of projects was in the first MFF period 'doomed to fail'. The new funding period (2014-2020) presented an improvement in this regard, especially due to the newly established Danube Transnational Program (DTP). The DTP is an Interreg B program, which constitutes in comparison to its predecessor a more or less tailor-made financial framework for the Danube Region. The DTP has become, over the years, the main source of funding. However, due to its still comparatively modest budget and the programmatic guideline to only support "soft-type interventions", the EUSDR overall still struggles with a lack of sufficient financial support.

The EUSALP shows, in contrast, in its polity dimension, a mixed picture. A unique advantage compared to the EUSDR –and other MRS– is the comparably long-lasting institutional heritage. Specific geospatial challenges in the Alpine Region were addressed in various governmental formats (e.g., AC, ARGE ALP, ASP, COTRAO etc.) already before the EUSALP. These formats contributed valuable expert knowledge to the EUSALP's drafting process.

The network structure of the EUSALP is nevertheless in many aspects similar to the EUSDR. It has a similar differentiation of the governance structure than its macro-regional by having a core decision-making sphere and one sphere for the implementation activities. However, a significant difference is its even more nuanced setup of additional networks (e.g., Executive Board, Board of Action Group Leaders), which were established to improve the general coordination of activities. This constitutes an improvement, especially in the limelight of the often insufficient horizontal coordination of activities in other MRS.

The bottom-up oriented approach will be further enhanced by the general decentralized administrative structure of the participating countries. Although the "shadow of hierarchy" is unconditionally valid in this particular MRS, the 48 regional actors in the EUSALP enjoy a substantially increased leeway, allowing a bottom-up and place-based implementation of projects.

In terms of the governance structure, the EUSALP resembles, nevertheless, in many aspects, the EUSDR. A decisive issue is again the persisting "three noes rule", which also causes in this particular Macro-regional strategy considerable problems. Due to the limitations of the comparably short assessment-period, no significant free-riding or general detrimental actor-behavior could be observed, however the lack of coercive instruments is nevertheless a persisting threat in terms of ensuring successful procedural steering.

The lack of adequate funding also constitutes in regard of the EUSALP a challenge. The Alpine Space Program has a considerable life-span of several program cycles and thus has valuable experience in allocating funding effectively in the region. It is additionally equipped with a budget that is in terms of per-capita funding substantially higher than other Interreg B programs. However, it nevertheless remains the only major source of funding, constituting a substantial financial shortfall. The guideline to only support "soft type interventions" further limits the program's impact. The application for project funding at tenders of other EU mainstream programs was also often not successful. This leads to the question, whether the EUSALP will face similar problems in terms of project financing than the EUSDR. Although governmental actors are equipped with significantly better financial capabilities than in the Danube Region and could, in theory, contribute with their resources to the EUSALP, it remains to be seen if this will happen in the future.

The procedural steering in the politics dimensions of the EUSDR was already from the beginning faced with a major capabilities-expectation gap. With the strategy's initiation in 2010, a new approach of RCBG was introduced, which was based on comprehensive vertical and horizontal coordination. This approach was expected to create in the long-run social capital

between the actors and beyond that promote the EU's functional differentiation. However, these high expectations were already from the beginning faced with the harsh reality of the rapidly aggravating fiscal and economic crises that were particularly severe in the Danube Region. Macro-regional strategies did soon vanish from the agenda of the EUropean institutions and national governments. The public actors focused in the following years, primarily on economic crisis-management. This materialized before the EUSDR's actual kick-off in a demobilization of some public actors who did not participate in the drafting processes. The demobilization increased over the years continuously. Although there are still some areas in which actor-participation is high, the implementation process is characterized by many actors' endemic passivity. They fail to participate in mandatory events and do not even take part in basic communication activities. Some scholars, therefore, already describe the EUSDR as being fallen into a dormant state.

The aim to realize comprehensive procedural steering by the process promoters turned out to be quite a challenging issue. Within the core decision-making network, the EC and the DSP showed distinct signs of being overstrained by the workload, not least because of their limited administrative capabilities. The same applies to the Priority Area Coordinators as process promoters in the sub-networks, who are often faced with even more severely constrained resources. This resulted in some cases, even in a total failure of the PACs fulfilling their designated tasks (e.g., Bulgaria in PA 3). Some of the other Priority Areas (e.g., PA 10 Security) managed despite these challenging framework conditions to realize a successful implementation process characterized by a broad involvement of public and private actors.

However, due to the top-down driven policymaking, the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders has shown mixed results. The opportunity to participate in the implementation activities was formally only provided within the Priority Areas or the subordinated Working Groups, which was actively carried out in some particular cases (e.g., PA 4-5, PA 11). Because the participation of a non-governmental actor in the MRS requires a substantial amount of financial resources, most non-governmental stakeholders were either International Organizations or multinational interest associations. Local or regional NGOs were only seldom involved.

The EUSALP constitutes, regarding its politics dimension, a particularly promising approach. In contrast to other Macro-regional strategies, where the relationship between the actors is characterized either by mutual unknowingness or tense relations, the actors of the EUSALP work together based on manifold institutional cooperation experiences, which contributes to the reduction of the moral hazard. Furthermore, the cooperation process within the EUSALP is

characterized by a particularly comprehensive involvement of LRAs and private actors. LRAs are not only entitled to participate in the implementation of projects (e.g., Action Groups, Working Groups), but they take part also within the strategic decision-making networks (e.g., General Assembly) and were beyond that involved in the drafting of the MRS (e.g., Steering Committee). The LRAs and the private actors are also involved in the procedural steering of the EUSALP (e.g., Executive Board, Board of Action Group Leaders), which constitutes a unique innovation and underlines the general strong bottom-up oriented character of the strategy.

The broad involvement of actors also leads to a more symmetrical power-constellation than in other strategies. The European Commission, which has in the EUSDR a particularly strong role as process promoter, acts within this MRS more as a *primus inter pares*. The involvement of the "EGTC Tyrol-South-Tyrol-Trentino" and "Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Berggebiete", as process promoters within the implementation process (AG 4 and AG 5), constitutes another promising innovation regarding the incorporation of two standalone RCBG networks into the procedural steering of the network. The introduction of an annual presidency, carried out by either national or regional actors, further provides the opportunity to highlight specific issues that are of particular concern, thus contributing to a place-based policy approach in the long run. While the EUSALP ensures some non-governmental representatives, as before mentioned, a membership in central bodies of decision-making and procedural steering, the non-governmental sphere's representation is very uneven. During the initiation and in the current implementation phase, the overwhelming majority of organizations are primarily active in the area of environmental protection. In contrast to this, economic actors like enterprises or chambers of commerce are hardly active within the governance process, thus making the representation of the whole "civil society" to some degree unbalanced.

Chances and challenges of Regional Cross-Border Governance in the future

Regional Cross-Border Governance has come a long way since its first appearance in the EU. Beginning with the Interreg programs, cross-border cooperation has come a long way and underwent some particular innovations in terms of its setup. While the Interreg and later ETC programs marked a gradual but important evolvement of the RCBG approach, they did have only a rather limited impact on the Multi-Level Governance system. The introduction of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation and the Macro-regional strategies marked on the other hand, also two decisive landmarks regarding RCBG. Like the EGTC Cerdanya, several distinct success stories showed that governance in the MLG system's horizontal dimension can have a significant added-value for the people in EUrope and constitute a serious

alternative to the top-down oriented vertical decision-making. Especially regarding the increasingly comprehensive territorial coverage of the EGTC, this legal instrument proves to be for more and more LRAs a valuable approach to creating place-based policy results.

The Macro-regional strategies are far less in numbers than the EGTC. However, after nearly a decade of existence, these policy approaches showed that they can also create a unique and substantial impact in some distinct policy areas. Both strategies provide distinct added-values in terms of the exemplary cross-border cooperation of security forces (EUSDR) or the advancing interconnection of passenger transport (EUSALP). Despite these indisputable achievements, a distinct capabilities-expectation gap unfolds in regards to the strategies. While some even projected enthusiastically a future comprehensive "macro-regionalization of EUrope", similarly to the former "EUrope of Regions", the EU falls quite short regarding such expectations. Regardless of whether being the MRS or the EGTCs, both types of RCBG networks show internal inconsistencies in their success. While the EUSALP, to some degree, promises attributes in the policy, polity, and polity dimension, the EUSDR is widely struggling with various shortcomings that increasingly cripple the network's goal-attainment, making the future success of the strategy quite questionable.

Therefore, the overall conclusion regarding the impact of Regional Cross-Borrder Governance on the Multi-Level Governance system is quite mixed. The EGTC's and the Macro-Regional strategies provide some distinct added values for the EU's institutional and procedural setup. From an institutional perspective, the policymaking is differentiated today more than ever before. Decision-making can be carried out with subnational actors' involvement at new territorial levels, creating more place-based and tailor-made policy solutions. The network-based involvement of these subnational actors and non-governmental stakeholders contributes to the further diversification of policy solutions. The cross-jurisdictional approach, through which the networks can operate in a diversified actor-setting based on the particular territorial challenges, makes RCBG overall a highly promising policy approach.

However, as already mentioned, RCBG falls substantially short of being a gamechanger regarding the differentiation of the Multi-Level Governance system. While it brings new facets and "windows of opportunity" into the game, it must be considered foremost as a valuable complementary development. Therefore, it is to be seen whether a further political endorsement of these RCBG approaches will lead to RCBGs further continuous valorization and, through that, to a comprehensive mobilization of local and regional actors and finally to the anticipated '(macro-)regionalization of EUrope'.

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