

The Determinants of Transnational Cooperation Within the Framework of the Interreg Programme

A Mixed Methods Analysis of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the Interreg North Sea Region

Master thesis

presented by

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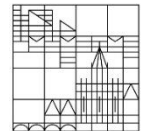
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Abstract

This master thesis investigates the determinants of partnerships of European transnational cooperation projects within the framework of the European Union (EU) funding programme Interreg B. It specifically focuses on two cooperation programmes: the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Based on the multi-level governance concept and the Europeanization approach, it examines reasons for and challenges of actors to cooperate in transnational project teams. The empirical investigation is based on a network analysis on existing transnational connections between the participating countries within the Interreg IV period (2007-2013) and the first call of the Interreg V period (2014-2020) as well as on semi-structured expert interviews. On an aggregated level, the findings suggest that countries are interconnected to varying degrees within the framework of the Interreg programme. With specific regard to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region for instance, there seems to be an east-west divide regarding the degree centrality of the countries and the share of project lead partners. It is shown that the administrative and financial capacities of the lead partners as well as pre-existing social connections and individual competences are of great relevance already during the application process – where actors from ‘Western Europe’ seem to have competitive advantages. In light of the specific requirements of the funding instrument, the findings suggest a mixed picture about the primary motives of actors to cooperate in Interreg projects.

Keywords: European Union, European territorial cooperation, Interreg, transnational cooperation, network analysis, lead partners, project partners, project partnership, North Sea Region, Baltic Sea Region.

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List of Abbreviations

BE	Belgium	LP	Lead partner(s)
BSR	Baltic Sea Region	LT	Lithuania
BY	Belarus	LU	Luxembourg
CF	Cohesion Fund	LV	Latvia
CH	Switzerland	NL	The Netherlands
DE	Germany	NO	Norway
DK	Denmark	NSR	North Sea Region
EE	Estonia	NUTS	Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund	PL	Poland
ESF	European Social Fund	PP	Project partner(s)
EU	European Union	PT	Portugal
FI	Finland	SE	Sweden
FR	France	UK	United Kingdom
JS	Joint Secretariat		

1. Introduction

In the early decades of the 21st century, European cohesion appears to be increasingly under pressure. Financial instabilities and controversial debates on the distribution of the increasing number of refugees seeking shelter in Europe challenge key values such as solidarity among member states of the European Union (EU) (Schimmelfennig, 2015, p. 650; Tosun et al., 2014). In this context, the result of the referendum in the United Kingdom in June 2016, to leave the EU symbolizes a further threat to European cohesion (Barber, 2016; Wheeler & Hunt, 2016). Current developments, not only in the context of the ‘refugee crisis’ and the ‘debt crisis’, but also with respect to topics such as demographic change or climate issues, however, illustrate that nation-states and regions across Europe face similar problems. In September 2015, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, therefore appealed for “more Union in our Europe” (Juncker, 2015, p. 15). In light of those challenges, the European territorial cooperation programme Interreg aims at diminishing “the role of borders as a place of tension” (Wassenberg et al. 2015, p. 35). As part of the EU’s structural funding policy, the Interreg programme “provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges” to address problems as the ones mentioned above (BBSR, 2016a; Commission, 2015b).

Compared to other EU structural funding programmes, the Interreg programme seems to stand out. In general, “the allocation of the European Union structural funds is subject to fierce regional lobbying” (Chalmers, 2013, p. 815). Within the framework of the Interreg programme, however, actors from multiple levels of governance – local, regional and national – need to cooperate in project teams in order to apply for financial support instead of lobbying just for themselves (cf. Commission, 2015b). Moreover, a central condition in order to receive funding is to form project partnerships between at least two actors from no less than two different European countries – regardless of possible ethnical or cultural differences – (Colomb, 2007, p. 375; Nadalutti, 2014, p. 180; Regulation No 1299/2013). In total, the Interreg programme consists of three so-called strands, with varying geographical focuses. This master thesis explicitly concentrates on ‘strand B’, with its main objective to support transnational cooperation within 15 cooperation areas, each of them covering several countries (Dühr, Stead, & Zonneveld, 2007, p. 294). Out of these, I will explicitly shed light on two specific cooperation programmes: the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region.

With respect to their geographical coverage, these two areas differ considerably from each other. While the Interreg North Sea Region only covers countries from ‘Western Europe’, the Interreg Baltic Sea Region consists of countries from ‘Western’, ‘Central’ and ‘Eastern Europe’ (2014TC16M5TN001, 2014; 2014TC16RFTN005, 2014). Concerning the central aim of the Interreg B programme – to overcome problems by means of temporal projects (Commission, 2015c) – the compositions of these two cooperation programmes are, however, all the more remarkable. In light of economic and political diversities across Europe that are reflected by a “highly fragmented setting”, scholars such as Minniberger argue that “the advancing of the macro-processes of European integration is challenging” (Minniberger, 2016, p. 19).

Against this backdrop, I explicitly aim at analysing the position of the participating countries within the networks of these two cooperation areas as well as the underlying reasons for actors to take part within the Interreg programme. The scientific as well as societal reasons for this research objective are various. Looking at the current state of the art, analyses of other cooperation programmes serve as useful point of departures. With respect to regional cooperation in the so-called “Danube” macro-region for instance, Sielker claims that “[...] despite institutional interests, actor constellations, particularly in informal governance contexts, depend on relationships between individuals and their cultural backgrounds” (Sielker, 2016, p. 90). Simultaneously, Luukkonen and Moilanen argue with respect to European spatial policies that regional actors are “mostly bound to the territorial realities of the nationally determined administrative units and their functions” (Luukkonen & Moilanen, 2012, p. 497). In light of such controversies, Colomb argued already in 2007 that “deeper investigations into the cooperation and learning processes taking place within the Interreg projects [...] can help us to unpack the ultimate rationale of territorial cooperation in a competitive European economy” (Colomb, 2007, pp. 367-368). As the current funding period 2014-2020 is still at the very beginning, I aim to contribute to this ambitious goal by posing the following main research question:

What determines the partnership of European transnational cooperation projects within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region?

As described in the following in more detail, I intend answering this research question by means of a mixed methods analysis. In brief, the empirical analysis combines a network analysis of the aggregated connections of countries based on approved projects within the Interreg IV period (2007-2013) and the recently started Interreg V period (2014-2020) with semi-structured expert-interviews. By doing that, this master thesis enables a comparison of up-to-date data from the Interreg V period with data on the concluded 2007-2013 funding phase. Simultaneously the in-depth research allows for a scrutiny of current developments and particularities within the 2014-2020 funding period. In this context, the complex application procedure, the role of individuals and the underlying values to cooperate transnationally will be in the foreground of the analysis.

In order to analyse the determinants for the partnership of European transnational cooperation projects within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region in a comprehensible manner, the main research question is subdivided into two ancillary questions. The first sub-question mainly aims at providing an overview of the transgovernmental connections. Therefore, it serves as a basis for the answer to the second sub-question which aims at figuring out reasons and obstacles that explain transnational cooperation of governmental and non-governmental actors within the framework of the two cooperation programmes of interest.

Before taking a closer look at these ancillary questions, it is worth noting that the total budget of the whole Interreg programme only accounts for about three percent of the overall EU structural funds resources, consisting of the European Regional Development fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and Cohesion Fund (CF) (Commission, 2015a). By means of the ERDF which is the main financial source for the Interreg programme, the current Interreg V period encompasses a budget of about 10.1 billion euros (Regulation No 1299/2013, Art. 2; Wassenberg et al., 2015, p. 32). Within the 2014-2020 funding period, the Interreg Baltic Sea Region receives about 263.8 million euros¹ (2014TC16M5TN001, 2014, p. 17). In comparison to that the ERDF funds for the Interreg North Sea Region amounts for about 167.3 million euros² within the same period of time (2014TC16RFTN005, 2013, p. 111). With respect to the

¹ Including own contributions by project partners, the total budget is 323 million euros (BBSR, 2016c). Retrieved from: http://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/EN/INTERREG/SixProgrammeAreas/BalticSeaRegion/balticsearegion_node.html (last access: 28 June 2016).

² Including own contributions by project partners, the total budget is 328.7 million euros (BBSR, 2016b). Retrieved from: http://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/EN/INTERREG/SixProgrammeAreas/NorthSeaRegion/northsearegion_node.html (last access: 28 June 2016).

topic of this master thesis, these limited financial resources are in so far of relevance as their distribution, by means of approved project partnerships, has an impact on how actors that applied for funding within the framework of the Interreg programme are connected to each other. This leads to my first ancillary question:

1. *How are the countries connected to each other within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and which actors make most use of it?*

The societal and scientific relevance for this sub-question is two-fold. As previously indicated the Interreg B programme is specifically oriented towards local, regional and national actors from several countries within a large territorial area (Commission, 2015d, p. 389). At first sight, the programme therefore appears to be an ideal instrument to support European integration within the Baltic Sea Region and the North Sea Region in light of common societal challenges that are for instance resulting from the countries' geographical location. Simultaneously, scholars highlight the heterogeneity with respect to the states' responses to such challenges due to path-dependencies. According to Stead and Kovács this diversity of territories in Europe "is still very much apparent und seems unlikely to disappear" (Stead & Kovács, 2015, p. 22). Apart from shedding light on the transgovernmental network constellation that result from the partnerships of approved projects within the two funding periods of analysis, I will scrutinize which actors make the most use out of the limited funding. In order to this, I will especially consider the so-called "lead partner principle" (cf. chapter 2.2). Each project partnership that applies for funding has to be represented by one leading actor that is responsible for the overall application process and the project formation (JS BSR, 2015, p. 8). Day-to-day experience during the research internship³ implied that those lead partners play a decisive role within the application process that determines whether a project was approved for funding or not. The above-mentioned sub-question therefore also aims at scrutinizing that.

Against the backdrop of existing differences among actors that are entitled to take part within the framework of the Interreg programme, the underlying reasons and obstacles regarding transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme are all the more of interest. In her article, Colomb assumes that "[...] territorial cooperation across national borders

³ The research internship is a compulsory component of the master's programme "European Governance" at the Utrecht University School of Governance. It took place from 15 February - 15 June 2016.

is expected to bring about a real European added value in pursuing the goal of territorial cohesion” (Colomb 2007: 347). Simultaneously she criticised the lack of primary materials “upon which academic researchers can build their empirical analysis and an adequate conceptual framework” (Colomb 2007: 353). This leads to the second ancillary question:

2. *What explains transnational cooperation of governmental and non-governmental actors within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region?*

The relevance of this sub-question became, inter alia, visible in the context of the 25th anniversary of the Interreg programme in September 2015. In this context, Corina Crețu, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, not only highlighted that “many achievements” could be celebrated, but also emphasized the fact that “there are still many obstacles, often of a legal or administrative nature, which put an additional burden on cross-border activities” (Crețu, 2015). This master thesis therefore not only aims at scrutinizing reasons for transnational cooperation, but also at identifying determinants that hamper project partners from cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme. Thus, as I will point out in the following, I argue that qualitative research is required in order to evaluate information that is only to a limited extent visible from the data on which the network analysis is based on.

The theoretical perspective of this master thesis refers to two approaches. First, in light of the varying actors that cooperate transnationally, I start at introducing my theoretical considerations by means of the concept of multi-level governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2001b). By referring to scholars such as Bache (2008), Piattoni (2009) or Dühr and colleagues (2010), I argue that this concept serves as a practical approach to analyse how the various actors involved within the framework of transnational cooperation “mobilize at the EU level“ (Piattoni, 2010, p. 102) through the Interreg B programme. In this context, I argue that the centrality of the countries within the transgovernmental networks reflects on an aggregated level the connectivity of the sum of actors from these countries in the context of transnational cooperation. Second, considering the contentious role of the multi-level governance concept as a theory (cf. Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010; Faludi, 2012; Knodt & Hüttmann, 2012) and with respect to the focus of this master thesis, I expand the theoretical framework by means of the Europeanization approach (Radaelli, 2003). In this context, I especially refer to Dühr and colleagues who argue

that the Europeanization approach is characterized by an “uploading of ideas to the EU-level” (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 103).

In order to make the theoretical framework applicable to the empirical research with respect to the practical topic Interreg B, I elaborate three dimensions that serve as points of departure for the set of hypotheses. The first dimension sheds light on the administrative capacities and mainly refers to the multi-level governance approach. Regarding this dimension, the results from the network analysis and the first sub-question will serve as basis for further elaborations. The second dimension, which focuses on social issues and the third dimension, which sheds light on ‘soft values’ and ‘hard values’ that might determine transnational cooperation, mainly refer to the concept of Europeanization and the second sub-question.

In order to test the hypotheses deduced from the theoretical framework, I apply a mixed methods analysis. In the first instance, I conduct a network analysis based on data on projects that were approved within the framework of the Interreg IV and the Interreg V periods in both cooperation programmes of interest. As further outlined in chapter 4, I retrieved the data from the Joint Secretariat Interreg North Sea Region in Viborg, Denmark and the Joint Secretariat Interreg Baltic Sea in, Rostock, Germany⁴. By means of the network analysis, I identified the degree centralities of the participating countries based on the transnational connections resulting from 215 Interreg projects. Moreover, this master thesis bases on qualitative research. Especially with respect to the hypotheses and the second ancillary question, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with eleven experts in total. By means of these two methods, I aim at contributing to the answer of the main research question. In this context, the hypotheses served as useful points of departure to evaluate determinants for transnational cooperation that were not necessarily foreseeable from the outset of the research process and the theoretical basis.

The empirical investigation is structured along the three dimensions that were elaborated within the theoretical framework. With respect to the administrative dimension, I shed light on the transgovernmental networks in the first instance. Since I focus on two cooperation programmes as well as on two funding periods, I depict four networks in total. Using these results, the qualitative analysis is focuses on three aspects that were figured out as being of relevance by

⁴ Please note: for confidentially reasons the data sheets are not enclosed with the appendix of this digital version. Further information cf. bibliography.

means of the interviews: the two-step application procedure, the involvement of external management consultancies and alternative funding instruments. The social dimension mainly draws on the findings from the expert interviews. In light of the literature I referred to in the theoretical chapter, this part mainly focuses on three aspects in total: pre-existing connections, type of issue and individual competences. Lastly, the value dimension distinguishes between the two types of experts that were interviewed for this master thesis: project and lead partners on the one hand, and advisory partners from public authorities on the other hand. Based on the theoretical literature it especially sheds light on the underlying reasons for actors to take part in transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme by differentiating between ‘soft values’ and ‘hard values’ (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 375). The results of the findings are, with specific reference to the hypotheses, discussed in the chapter following the empirical investigation part.

Regarding the scientific purposes of this master thesis, the internship at the Senate Chancellery of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg⁵ turned out to be an ideal starting point for getting access to important stakeholders within the Interreg North Sea and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Considering the number of projects with partners from Hamburg, Dühr and Nadin classified the city-state already in 2007 as a place where “cooperation across borders has become a major and routine component of planning work” (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 373). Thanks to this long-standing network, I could profit from direct access to important actors and project partners for instance at conferences or meetings. Using the experience from the day-to-day work during my internship as a point of departure, laid valuable foundations for the research process. Therefore, the focus of the present master thesis on the determinants of transnational cooperation also aims at contributing to the state of knowledge of unexperienced but also experienced stakeholders within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Against this backdrop, it highlights recommendations for improvement of the policy instrument and briefly discusses the future of the Interreg programme in the context of the ‘Brexit’.

In brief, this master thesis consists of seven chapters in total. Following this introduction, chapter 2 clarifies the Interreg programme in general and transnational cooperation within this

⁵ As one of in total 16 federal states in Germany, Hamburg, which is also called a “city-state”, has a strong interest in “profiting from Europe”. In their coalition agreement, the two governing parties of the federal state Hamburg, “SPD” and “Grüne”, emphasize their willingness to acquire EU spending: „*Gleichzeitig wird der Senat dafür sorgen, dass Europäische Fördermittel nach Hamburg und in die Metropolregion fließen*“ (Coalition agreement Hamburg, 2015, p. 111).

policy instrument in specific by considering programme manuals, the legal framework and particularities with respect to the Interreg Baltic Sea and the Interreg North Sea Region. In consideration of this, it reviews existing research and identifies research gaps. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework. Based on the multi-level governance approach that will be expanded by the concept of Europeanization, the empirical investigation will be structured along three dimension that shed light on the administrative capacities, social conditions and underlying values that are attached to collaboration. Chapter 4 describes the research design of this master thesis by especially focusing on the network analysis and the expert interviews and clarifies how the data for this study was collected. Chapter 5 aims at analysing the empirical findings by testing the hypotheses and exploring further determinants for transnational cooperation. Chapter 6 consists of several important subchapters. First of all it aims at answering the findings by focusing on the hypotheses and discussing theoretical and empirical implications. Furthermore, it critically reflects limitations of this study, followed by policy recommendations, a brief discussion of future developments in light of the ‘Brexit’ and suggests implications for further research. Chapter 7 provides brief concluding remarks on the thesis.

2. Transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme

The following subchapter introduces the policy instrument of interest: transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme. By taking the legal foundations, the programme manuals and the current state of the art into consideration, it sheds light on the Interreg programme in general and transnational cooperation in specific before pointing out the scientific state of the art and existing research gaps

2.1 The Interreg programme in general – an overview

Regarding the policy area of interest, the Interreg programme can be classified as a part of the EU’s “structural and investment policy” (BBSR, 2016a). The main objective of this policy instrument, which has the official designation “European territorial cooperation” (Commission, 2015b), is to support actors from varying countries in order to develop common solutions on transnational problems and challenges. By providing financial support through the ERDF, it

enables the implementation of temporary projects⁶ which, according to Minniberger (2016), “mainly rely on interaction through soft exchange and communication” (Commission, 2015a, p. 2; Commission 2015b; Minniberger, 2016, p. 89; Interreg BSR, 2015a). In general, the Interreg programme comprises three so-called strands of which each has a specific strategic focus and varying underlying conditions: cross-border cooperation (Interreg A), transnational cooperation (Interreg B) and interregional cooperation (Interreg C) (Dühr, Stead, & Zonneveld, 2007, p. 303; Regulation No 1299/2013, Art. 2; Commission 639 final, p.2). At first, the following subchapter elaborates on the Interreg programme to enable a better understanding of transnational cooperation in general (cf. chapter 2.2). It briefly sheds light on the underlying point of departure and objectives of the policy instrument, its legal basis, the main financial mechanisms and the state of the art regarding the 2014-2020 programming phase.

Controversial debates that made the headlines in newspapers in recent years, as on climate change, refugee flows or financial crises increasingly illustrate that such topics do not necessarily stop at national borders within Europe (cf. Hooghe & Marks, 2001b, p. 4). On the one hand, nation-states and regions are confronted with similar challenges, for instance related to environmental developments, natural resources, transportation or demographic change (cf. (2014TC16M5TN001, 2014; 2014TC16RFTN005, 2014; BBSR, 2016a). On the other hand, as a consequence of heterogeneity and diversification, the countries’ and regions’ economic and scientific performance partly differs from each other (ibid, 2014; ibid, 2014; ibid, 2016a). This rough comparison highlights a perceived “self-evident” need for regional and national actors from all over Europe to cooperate on “issues that stretch across administrative boundaries” (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 374).

Referring to the European Commission, the Interreg programme aims at contributing to this goal by providing a “framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different member states” (Commission, 2015b). The policy instruments’ underlying legal basis is, inter alia, set up in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). According to article 174 “[...] *in order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion*” (TFEU 2012: Art. 174). While this (ambitious) aim might be obvious at first sight, the exact terminology in conjunction

⁶ The general project duration is about three years (Interreg BSR, 2016b; Retrieved from <https://www.interreg-baltic.eu/news-detail/news/details-about-the-35-projects-approved-in-the-first-call.html>; last access: 28 June 2016).

with the Interreg programme is, however, partly confusing. Official notifications mostly refer to the term “European territorial cooperation” (Commission, 2015b). Personal experience from day-to-day cooperation gained during the research internship however, confirm the information indicated by the European Commission on its website, according to which the policy instrument is “better known as Interreg” (ibid, 2015b). This is I will mainly refer to the term “Interreg” in the following chapters of the present study.

The main financial resources for the Interreg programme stem from the ERDF (Regulation No 1299/2013, Art. 2).⁷ Since its official introduction in 1990 (Minniberger, 2016, p. 89), the policy instrument was continuously expanded. In 2014 the fifth funding period, Interreg V, started. Simultaneously the allocation of funding constantly increased (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010, p. 232 ff.; Wassenberg et al., 2015, p. 33 ff.). Within the first programming phase (Interreg I) from 1990 to 1993, about 1.1 billion euros were assigned to the programme. In comparison, the funding budget allocated to Interreg V increased by nearly tenfold. Between 2014-2020 about 10.1 billion euros are at disposal (Commission, 2015, p. 2; Wassenberg et al., 2015, p. 32).

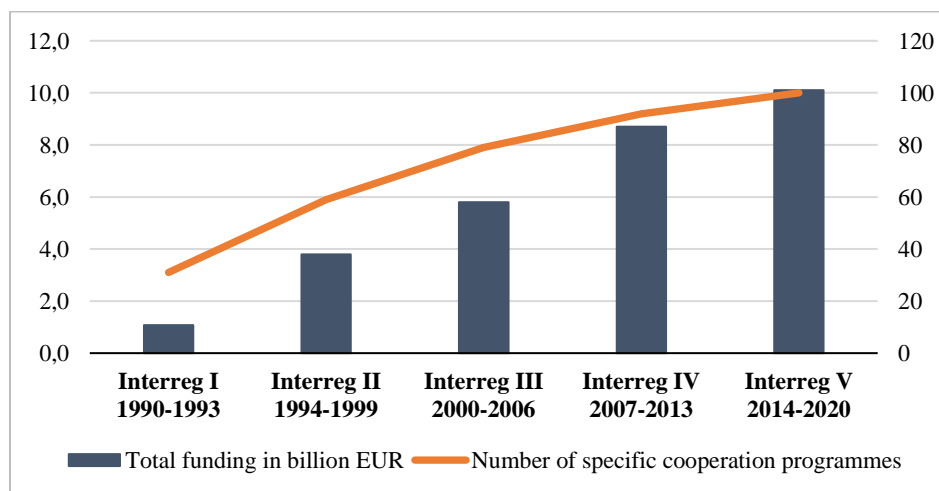


Figure 1. Overview – development of the Interreg programme (1990-2020).

Source: Commission, 2015b; Wassenberg et al., 2015, p. 32 (Own illustration).⁸

⁷ Besides the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is one of in total three components of the structural and investment funds of the EU. Within the so-called “2014-2020 programming period”, their total budget amounts for more than 350 billion euros (Regulation 1303/2013; Commission 2015e; Lelieveldt & Princen, 2015, p. 186; BMWI, 2016). While the ESF primarily aims at strengthening employment opportunities for instance by promoting social inclusion and education, the ERDF’s main objectives are to improve economic and social cohesion by stimulating the economic development (Regulation 1304/2013; Lelieveldt & Princen 2015: 187).

⁸ The budgetary figures are retrieved from the following source: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/de/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/ (last access: 26 June 2016). According to this source, “this budget includes the ERDF allocation for Member States to participate in EU external border cooperation programmes supported by other instruments (Instrument for Pre-Accession and European Neighbourhood Instrument)” (Commission 2015b). This is why the above illustrated budget figures slightly differ from the budget indicated in Regulation 1299/2013: Art. 4(1).

On the one hand, one could assume that the enlargement of the EU decisively influenced this increase in funding between 1990 and 2014. While in the first period only twelve EU member states got financial support through the ERDF within the Interreg programme, the current funding period involves 28 member states⁹. Simultaneously the number of funded projects steadily increased. In the 2014-2020 period about 100 cooperation programmes will be financially supported within the framework of Interreg, while it were only 14 between 1990 and 1993 (Wassenberg et al., 2015, p. 32). On the other hand, however, scholars highlight the fact that one can observe “[...] a stronger awareness among planners and decision-makers of the need for improved horizontal, vertical and geographical coordination in an integrated Europe” (Dühr et al., 2007, p. 293). This is, inter alia, reflected by the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) defined territorial cooperation as a goal of European cohesion policy (Commission 2015b; Wassenberg et al. 2015, p. 21). The structural funds are especially deployed to pursue the Europe 2020 strategy (Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 379). Therefore, the 2014-2020 period aims at achieving the strategy’s underlying objectives: smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Commission, 2010, p. 10; Commission, 2015d, p. 389; Wassenberg et al., 2015, p. 33) Wassenberg et al., 2015: 33; European Commission 2015d, 389). The specific thematic orientation of the cooperation programmes themselves are shaped by the participating countries within the framework of the general guidelines given by the European Commission (Minniberger, 2016, p. 92).

In light of these financial mechanisms, a central objective of the Interreg programme is to realize territorial cooperation projects across borders, which would probably not exist in the absence of such a policy instrument (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 234). In order to receive financial support within the framework of the policy instrument, however, project partners have to meet specific requirements. In the context of the research question, the co-financing rate should be highlighted. Depending on the specific strand and on the region where the participating governmental or non-governmental project partners are coming from, they only receive a funding between 50 and 85 percent. The remaining share has to be paid by an own contribution (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 234; Wassenberg et al., 2015, p.30).

⁹ Including the United Kingdom.

2.2 Interreg B in specific – legal foundations, objectives and particularities

Among the three so-called strands of which the Interreg programme is comprised, this master thesis especially focuses on transnational cooperation. As previously outlined, this component is called ‘Interreg B’ (cf. chapter 2.1; Commission, 2015c). Within the 2014-2020 programming period, it consists of 15 cooperation programmes (Commission, 2015c), out of which I will especially focus on two in specific: the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region¹⁰. Against the backdrop of the quite complex and partly individual legal, financial and thematic features of the Interreg programme (Zäch & Pütz, 2014, p. 29), explaining all details of this policy instrument would go beyond the scope of this master thesis. However, in order to facilitate the understanding and classification of the analyses, I consider a brief outline of the most relevant aspects of the Interreg B programme concerning the legal foundations and objectives, the involved stakeholders and specific particularities as important.

First, regarding the legal framework, Regulation No 1299/2013 sets out the specific foundations for transnational cooperation by differentiating it from ‘pure’ cross-border cooperation and interregional cooperation:

“Transnational cooperation should aim to strengthen cooperation by means of actions conducive to integrated territorial development linked to the Union's cohesion policy priorities, and should also include maritime cross-border cooperation not covered by cross-border cooperation programmes”
(Regulation No 1299/2013).

While the term “means of action” within this paragraph is rather general, especially the above-cited article’s reference to “maritime cross-border cooperation” is of relevance for the cooperation programmes of interest in this master thesis – especially due to their geographical position. The underlying reasons why the maritime aspect is explicitly pointed out by this regulation, is more precisely defined in article 2 of the regulation, on the components of European transnational cooperation which shall be supported by the ERDF:

“[...] transnational cooperation over larger transnational territories, involving national, regional and local partners and also covering maritime cross-border cooperation in cases not covered by cross-border

¹⁰ In comparison to that, the 2007-2013 funding period was composed of 13 cooperation programmes. The Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, however, were part of these cooperation programmes within both funding periods of interest for this master thesis – in Interreg IV as well as in Interreg V (Commission, 2015c).

cooperation, with a view to achieving a higher degree of territorial integration of those territories [...]
(Regulation No 1299/2013, 2013 Art. 2(2))¹¹.

Additionally, without going into detail, article 2.2 therefore refers to two important aspects, which are of importance in the further course of this thesis. One of these aspects is, that the article highlights the fact that cooperation programmes within the Interreg B strand cover large areas including regions from several countries (cf. Commission, 2015b). The countries from which actors are entitled to take part as project partners within the framework of the Interreg B programme are determined by the European Commission (Commission, 2014). The relevance of this country-coverage with respect to the composition of the project partnerships will be further analysed in the quantitative and qualitative parts of this thesis (cf. chapter 5.1).

The second of the above-cited regulation articles refers to a multi-level governance approach, since it emphasizes the involvement of “national, regional and local partners” (Regulation 1299/2013, Art. 2(2)). This leads to the second important aspect that briefly needs to be highlighted within this section: the eligible project partners (here defined as group A) and advisors respectively key decision-takers (in the following defined as group B) within the framework of the Interreg B programme. Regarding the target actors (group B), the policy instrument allows for the involvement of partners with varying roles and backgrounds in differing disciplines (Sousa, 2012, p. 681). Governmental actors such as public authorities as well as non-governmental actors such as universities, enterprises or NGOs may form project partnerships and apply for funding (2014TC16RFTN005, 2014, p. 21; JS BSR, 2015, p. 3).

In this context, with respect to the following analyses (especially chapter 5.1) the so-called “lead partner principle” is of crucial importance. According to this regulation each project determines a “lead partner”¹² among the whole number of partners, that has the overall responsibility, for instance with respect to the application (JS BSR, 2015, p. 8). Regarding the selection process itself, the final decisions on the approval of project applications are taken from representatives of each country, who come together in so-called monitoring committees¹³.

¹¹ The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, as a city-state is not entitled to ERDF allocations within the framework of Interreg A, as it does not meet the criteria of an “adjacent region” (Regulation No 1299/2013, 2013 Art. 2(2)).

¹² In contrast to the programme manual of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, the programme manual of the Interreg North Sea Region mostly refers to ‘beneficiaries’ instead of project partners and to “lead beneficiaries” instead of ‘lead partners’ (2014TC16RFTN005, 2014). In order to avoid confusion, this master thesis considers these terms as synonyms and will consistently use ‘project partner’ and ‘lead partner’.

¹³ While the decision-taking body in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region is called “monitoring committee”, its counterpart in the Interreg North Sea Region is called “steering committee” (2014TC16M5TN001, 2014; 2014TC16RFTN005, 2014). In order to ensure consistency, this master thesis will mostly refer to the previous term.

National sub-committees, that often comprise actors from public authorities with coordinative and consultative functions, and the Joint Secretariats of the cooperation programmes support the members of the monitoring committees in turn (group B) (JS BSR, 2015, p. 7; Minniberger, 2016, p. 92).

Third, in line with the application and selection process indicated before, three specific particularities of the Interreg B programme demand special attention as they are of great relevance with respect to the following empirical investigation:

- (1) Application procedure: In contrast to the previous funding periods, the current funding period (2014-2020) consists of a “two-step application procedure” (Interreg BSR 2016) within the framework of the cooperation programmes of interest. As a first step the decision-taking body decides on a project idea, called ‘concept note’ in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and ‘expression of interest’ in the Interreg North Sea Region; if this was successful a full application can be submitted (Interreg NSR, 2016c; Interreg BSR, 2016c).
- (2) Variety of project partnership: A suitable project partnership requires the cooperation of project partners from different countries of the area covered by the programme (Colomb, 2007, p. 357). In the Interreg North Sea Region at least two project partners from at least two countries need to work together (Interreg NSR, 2016d, p. 4); in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region the minimum requirement is three partners from at least three countries (Interreg BSR, 2016d).
- (3) A specific characteristic of the programme is, that approved Interreg projects are only partly financed by the ERDF. Depending on the cooperation programme and the origin of the participating project partners, the co-financing is between 50 percent (Interreg North Sea Region) and 75 percent for actors from ‘Western Europe’ respectively 85 percent for actors from ‘Eastern’ or ‘Central Europe’ (Interreg Baltic Sea Region). Therefore, the project partners’ willingness as well as their ability to pay a financial contribution is a necessary condition for the approval of Interreg project ideas and their implementation (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 234)

In sum, transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg B programme is associated with several specific requirements. This subchapter aimed at providing an overview of the most important aspects regarding the legal foundations and the relevant actors, with special reference to the two cooperation programmes of interest.

2.3 Existing research and scientific gaps

In her article “The added value of transnational cooperation: Towards a new framework for evaluating learning and policy change”, Colomb states, that “evaluating the impact of Interreg on domestic planning practises as well as assessing its European added value is a difficult task” (Colomb, 2007, p. 348). According to Colomb this explains the fact that only a small number of studies suggested “a concrete methodological approach” that provides empirical evidence (ibid, 348). Since the publication of this article in 2007, however, one can observe several progresses regarding that. In sum, the following subchapter on existing research and scientific gaps distinguishes between two types of investigation on European territorial cooperation in general and transnational cooperation in specific. On the one hand, there are evaluation reports commissioned by the Joint Secretariats of the cooperation programmes. Given that they almost exclusively pursue a rather practical approach, I argue that their additional benefit with respect to the theoretical approach of this master thesis is limited. Regarding this, the master thesis aims at filling a gap with respect to the Interreg B programme in specific. On the other hand, numerous contributions were published in recent years that shed light on transnational cooperation from a social science perspective. In this subchapter the literature will be especially reviewed in consideration of the added value with respect to the questions raised in this thesis. While the two types of research partly served as a useful starting point to grasp the topic, I argue that there is still room for further research on the underlying determinants of transnational cooperation especially with respect to the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region.

With respect to the first ‘type of research’, it is visible that the stakeholders, being active in transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme, have an increasing interest in analyses on the strengths and weaknesses of the policy instrument. Both, the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg North Sea Region for instance have commissioned management consultancies to evaluate and assess past

cooperation programmes and implemented projects (Interreg NSR, 2013; Interreg, 2015b)¹⁴¹⁵. In addition, there exist numerous studies commissioned by the so-called German ‘Bundesinstitut für Bau- Stadt- und Raumforschung’ (BBSR, 2016d)¹⁶, which especially focus on the impacts and implementation of transnational cooperation programmes in which German stakeholders are participating (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 250). In contrast to the rather practical style of those reports, this master thesis aims at approaching transnational cooperation from a more theoretical angle. In addition, most of those reports are not entirely up-to-date with respect to the current funding period. The previously mentioned evaluation reports mainly deal with the past programme periods until 2013. Considering the recently started funding period, comparable comprehensive studies do not exist yet and research appears to be quite scarce. According to the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg North Sea Region for instance, “[...] no evaluations have yet been conducted for the 2014-2020 programming period” (Interreg NSR 2016b).

At this point, this master thesis aims at contributing to fill a gap. Against the backdrop of the fact that transnational cooperation within the current funding period of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the Interreg North Sea Region is constantly ongoing, it mainly aims at contributing to the existing state of knowledge by providing actual scientific findings regarding the current development. This is why I attached great importance to receive and collect the relevant data for this master thesis directly from the Joint Secretariats. As specified in more detail in chapter 4, the Joint Secretariats in Viborg, Denmark (Interreg North Sea Region) and Rostock, Germany (Interreg Baltic Sea Region), were asked to provide data of the past and especially the recently started cooperation programme for this master thesis. This enabled first cautious comparisons between Interreg IV and V, which will be illustrated by the network analysis and the in-depth research. Regarding the latter aspect, I attached great importance to meet stakeholders in-person that are involved in the current funding period 2014-2020. In sum, while the evaluations reports were of limited value with respect to this master thesis, I argue that it is nevertheless of relevance to mention them as they a part of existing research on the Interreg programme.

Regarding the second ‘type of research’, literature that approaches transnational cooperation from a social science perspective and a more theoretical angle, a number of studies has been

¹⁴ Interreg NSR (2007-2013): <http://archive.northsearegion.eu/ivb/content/show/&tid=178> (last access: 26 June 2016)

¹⁵ Interreg BSR (2007-2013): https://www.interreg-baltic.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/about_programme/Main_documents/2015.07.Final_report_Strategic_Evaluation_by_RMC.pdf (last access: 26 June 2016)

¹⁶ Further information: http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/MORO/Studien/studien_node.html (last access: 26 June 2016)

published in recent years. With respect to the ambitions of this master thesis, it is of interest, that the opportunities and difficulties actors have to face when being involved in transnational cooperation are subject of various scientific articles (e.g. Dąbrowski 2014; Zäch & Pütz 2014; Minniberger 2016; Sielker 2016). Regarding the empirical investigation of this master thesis, it is striking that several recently published contributions are in so far linked, as they analyse territorial cooperation by means of network approaches. In this context, the combination of a quantitative network analysis with qualitative research methods by Minniberger are of great interest. Minniberger scrutinizes the learning processes and the extent of cooperation of one specific Interreg Europe project called “Know Man” which was implemented during the 2007-2013 funding period. In her study, the author identifies inter-regional networks as “Micro Europes” by arguing that they “comprise similar diversities of interests and structures as observed on the level of the member states” (Minniberger, 2016, p. 20). In this context, Frangenheim provides another remarkable network analysis. By developing an extensive cartography of network structures of the Interreg B Central Europe programme area within the 2007-2013 funding period, the author is able to localize the “hot spots” of cooperation activities (Frangenheim, 2013). Furthermore, by focusing on the European Strategy for the Danube River (EUSDR), Sielker argues that this macro-regional strategy “is a network that uses the horizontal and vertical dimension of the multi-level governance system to influence both strategic decision-making as well as implementation activities” (Sielker, 2016, p. 94).

In the conclusion of her article about the “added value of transnational cooperation”, Colomb highlights the need for “deeper investigations into the cooperation and learning processes” that characterize Interreg projects (Colomb, 2007, p. 367). Taking this into account the dissertation by Minniberger serves as role model. Her examination of long-term learning processes of projects within the framework of interregional cooperation is without doubt a big step forward (Minniberger, 2016). Thus, the previously mentioned scientific articles serve as a suitable basis for further research. However, as outlined above, their findings mainly refer to specific cooperation programmes. By examining the Alpine Space region, for instance, Zäch and Pütz (2014) claim on the one hand, that an elimination of the Interreg funding would not result in “serious consequences” (Zäch & Pütz, 2014, p. 39). On the other hand, the authors admit that in the “Bodensee region” – in contrast to other eligible transnational cooperation areas – a network of transnational cooperation was already existent before Interreg has been introduced (ibid, 39). Because this policy field is quite diverse – not just because of its various strands but also due to the numerous cooperation programmes (cf. chapter 5.2) – I argue that there is still

need for further research and clarification with respect to European transnational cooperation the underlying networks and motivations. The following analysis aims at specifically addressing this research gap.

In view of the second ancillary question raised in the introduction of this study, it is striking that scholars such as Stead (2014) doubt the freedom of choice with respect to the participation of actors in Interreg projects. By referring to Luukkonen and Moilanen, Stead claims that “regional actors often feel obliged to operate in these new policy spaces” (Stead, 2014, p. 689). In the conclusion of their examination of “territorial challenges in implementing ‘soft planning’”, Luukkonen and Moilanen (2012) argue that “regional actors are, on the one hand, ‘forced’ to build a parallel reality to stay on the map of European spatial policies, but, on the other hand, they are still mostly bound to the territorial realities of the nationally determined administrative units and their functions” (Luukkonen & Moilanen, 2012, p. 497). However, neither Luukkonen and Moilanen nor Stead specify the determinants to participate in ‘soft planning’ such as Interreg B cooperation programmes in more detail. Apart from that, it remains unclear, which of those “regional” actors tend to either cooperate or not. Regarding this, by focusing more on theoretical literature, the following chapter not only sheds light on the theoretical angle but will also use it as a point of departure for the empirical investigation.

In sum, this subchapter identified two ‘types of research’ in the context of transnational cooperation within the Interreg programme. Even though the Joint Secretariats partially command their own studies to management consultancies, I argue that this master thesis provides the opportunity to widen the knowledge on the determinants for project partnerships within the framework of transnational cooperation in the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Thanks to the fact that data on the first calls for funding and approved projects within the Interreg 2014-2020 period was provided by the Joint Secretariats and that the relevant experts agreed on interviews, it was possible to address Colomb’s critique according to which there is “a scarcity of primary materials” regarding territorial cooperation (Colomb, 2007, p. 352). Thus, this master thesis aims at contributing to the previously mentioned reports and scientific articles by not only approaching transnational cooperation from a theoretical angle but also by considering up-to-date data and recent developments in the cooperation programmes of interest.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical considerations of this master thesis are based on two fields of research that are partially overlapping. At first, I introduce the theoretical framework on the basis of the multi-level governance approach, which refers to the “sharing of responsibilities in a multi-level polity” (Faludi, 2012, p. 197). In a second step, I will expand this theoretical foundation by including the concept of Europeanization (Radaelli, 2003). I will justify this combination by considering this concept as a suitable complement to understand the reasons of actors to cooperate transnationally. Against the backdrop of the main research question respectively in order to enable a precise empirical analysis, I identify three dimensions, based on the theoretical framework: an ‘administrative dimension’, a ‘social dimension’ and a ‘value dimension’. The set of hypotheses relates to these dimensions.

According to Dühr and colleagues the European spatial planning agenda “has been strongly influenced by intergovernmental cooperation” (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 97). In light of this, the Interreg programme is described as a stimulus that encourages the implementation of spatial planning projects by member states and regions (Dühr et al., 2007, p. 303). Therefore, in a first instance, I argue that it is necessary to refer to intergovernmentalism in order to contribute to a general understanding of transnational cooperation. Intergovernmentalism as a so-called ‘grand theory’ highlights the central role of nation-states with respect to European integration (H.-J. Bieling, 2012; Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2009). Following the liberal intergovernmentalism approach, interdependence and similar national preferences are key drivers for integration in ‘low politics’, provided that national governments expect economic advantages (H.-J. Bieling, 2012, p. 86; Leuffen, Rittberger, & Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 123). In this context however, Scharpf argues, that “the European polity is a complex multi-level institutional configuration which cannot be adequately represented by theoretical models that are generally used in international relations or comparative politics” (Scharpf, 2010, p. 75). Therefore, the author recommends to apply a “modular approach using a plurality of simpler concepts representing different modes of multi-level interaction that are characteristics of subsets of European policy processes” (ibid, p. 75). What does this imply for the theoretical approaches in the context of the following analysis of the partnerships of European transnational projects within the framework of the Interreg programme?

3.1 Multi-level governance

Referring to Scharpf's line of argumentation, I follow Dühr and colleagues by arguing that intergovernmentalism mainly serves as a valuable theoretical background to understand European integration and spatial planning from a macro-level perspective (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 101). Considering day-to-day operations of the various actors within the framework of Interreg and the composition of project partnerships, however, I assume that a practical approach would be more suitable. In his article on the examination of the EU structural fund system and democracy paradoxes, Olsson argues that "using the concept of multi-level governance may help us to understand the operation of different types of mechanism within this area" (Olsson, 2003, p. 285). This is why this theoretical chapter refers to the multi-level governance concept as a theoretical basis. As I will explain in chapter 3.2, by taking the main line of argumentation into consideration, the theoretical foundation will be expanded by the Europeanization approach as a so-called 'middle-range' theory.

From a rather abstract point of view, 'governance' describes a society's capacity to jointly implement collective choices (Peters & Pierre, 2009, p. 91). By taking public as well as non-public actors into consideration, it allows for the identification of the manner how a "fundamental steering function is performed in any society, and about who performs it" (Peters & Pierre, 2009, p. 92). Hooghe and Marks identify the EU as a multi-level governance system (Sielker 2016, p.89; Hooghe & Marks 2001a). Against this backdrop, the authors plead for an analysis of the specific roles and positions the various actors have, in order to enable an explanation of policy making in Europe (Hooghe & Marks, 2001a, p. 3). The fundamental intuition of the approach is characterized by a dual emphasis, namely two key aspects: on the one hand, the 'multi-level' dimension reflects the interdependence of governments at a sub-national, national and European level. On the other hand, the 'governance' aspect refers to networks that involve governmental as well as non-governmental actors and transcend all these levels (Dühr et al., 2010; Wallace, Pollack, & Young, 2015, p. 36).

In sum, by opposing the state-centric intergovernmentalist point of view, the multi-level governance models assumes that national governments are not the only crucial players within the European integration process (Knodt & Hüttmann, 2012, p. 190). Among other things, the approach claims that "complex interrelationships in domestic politics do not stop at the national state but extend to the European level" (Bache, 2008, p. 25; Hooghe & Marks, 2001a, p. 4). Simultaneously it is argued that the "[...] EU has, however, little implementation capacity of

its own” (Peters & Pierre, 2009, p. 96). As a consequence the EU is, according to the authors, to a large extent dependent on the member states respectively the various actors from varying levels with respect to the implementation of policy choices (ibid, p. 96).

At this point, at the latest, the theoretical relevance of the multi-level governance concept for this master thesis becomes apparent. Numerous social scientists such as Hooghe and Marks (2001), Bache (2008), Faludi (2012) or Stead (2014) highlight the linkage between EU structural funds and the multi-level governance concept especially with respect to the specific partnerships consisting of multiple layers. According to Allen, most scholars classify structural funds as “[...] a policy made for the regions and by the regions in that potentially it encouraged not only (administrative) regionalization but also (political) regionalism and regional devolution” (Allen, 2010, p. 241). As highlighted by Bachtler and Mendez (2007), the classification by Marks (1993) probably belongs to the most prominent examples among those scholars. Marks argues that structural funds can, due to the shared influence by European, national and regional actors, be identified as a central feature of multi-level governance (Bachtler & Méndez, 2007, p. 537). To be more concrete it is indeed striking that the European Commission identifies Interreg as an example of multi-level governance since actors that are situated at the local, regional and national level can take part in projects (Wassenberg et al., 2015, p.33). This is in line with Dühr’s and colleagues’ classification of the introduction of Interreg as “the first steps towards multi-level governance” (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 234).

With respect to its theoretical implications however, it is striking that the multi-level governance concept is subject to fierce criticism (Dühr et al., 2010; Faludi, 2012; Knodt & Hüttmann, 2012). Various scholars scrutinize the multi-level governance approach – especially regarding the dissent of whether it can be classified as a theory or not (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 99). By highlighting its metaphorical rather than theoretical character, Dühr and colleagues for instance raise the question whether it sufficiently explains “the dynamics of European integration” (ibid, p. 99). Furthermore, by referring to several scholars such as Jordan (2001) or Rosamund (2000), they criticize the concept’s weakness to clarify the role of the various levels and the underlying reasons for relationships (ibid, p. 99).

However, by being aware of its weaknesses, I argue that the inclusion of the multi-level governance as a theoretical basis can be justified due to the following two reasons: first, despite their comprehensible critique, Dühr and colleagues acknowledge the “added value of the

concept of multi-level governance for spatial planning research” that, according to them, justifies its use as an “explanatory framework planning research in the EU” (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 99). Against the backdrop of the real-life relevance of the multi-level governance aspect (Dąbrowski, Bachtler, & Bafoil, 2014) as well as day-to-day operations within the framework of transnational cooperation, it is striking that the involvement of multiple actors is frequently mentioned by the European Commission itself respectively in official regulations in conjunction with structural funds and territorial cooperation (cf. chapter 2.2). Taking this as well as Dühr’s and colleagues’ line of argumentation into account, the concept not only serves as a “catchy metaphor” (Dühr et al., 2010; Knodt & Hüttmann, 2012, p. 196) but as a useful approach to describe and analyse the partnership within the framework of transnational cooperation.

Second, the thesis’ focus on the partnership constellation and the underlying motives for transnational cooperation of multiple actors, provides a basis to test “empirically the capacity of multi-level governance to capture real-life developments and to describe existing structures of governance” as proposed by Piattoni (Piattoni, 2009, p. 176). By highlighting the need to discuss the legitimacy of multi-level governance arrangements, Piattoni (2009) suggests a debate on whether the multi-level governance concept “captures equally well governance structures that involve different types of sub-national authorities as well as different types of NGOs“ and whether the empirical meaning is the same regardless of the geographical origins of the various actors (Piattoni, 2009, p. 173). The author illustrates the association of the concept of multi-level governance and cohesion policy by means of the following model.

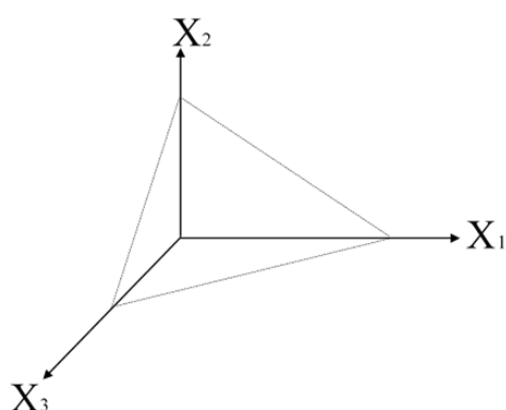


Figure 2. Cohesion policy (Piattoni, 2010).

X1 = centre-periphery dimension; X2 = domestic-international dimension; X3 = state-society dimension¹⁷
(Source: Piattoni, 2010, p. 103).

¹⁷ The ‘dimensions’ in Piattoni’s model are not to be confused with the dimensions along which chapter 3.3 is structured.

Considering this model, Piattoni (2010) argues that there should be, for a precise description of cohesion policy, a confirmation of inter alia the following assumption: “Regions should mobilize at the EU level (outward movements on the X1X2 plane)” (Piattoni, 2010, p. 102). Thus, the first ancillary question sheds light on this X1X2 plane by taking the partnership principle within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the Interreg North Sea Region into consideration. This principle is for instance reflected by the programme’s demand to include actors from at least two different countries, as outlined in chapter 2.2 (Colomb, 2007, p. 357, cf. chapter 2.2). According to Dąbrowski and colleagues, the partnership principle and its underlying requirement for close cooperation at various levels of government, is the “cornerstone of cohesion policy and its distinctive system of multi-level governance (Dąbrowski et al., 2014, p. 356).

With respect to a comprehensive argumentation of causal relations and explorative assumptions the multi-level governance concept is, however, not sufficient. Following Dühr and colleagues (2010), I contend that the expansion of the theoretical foundation by the inclusion of “Europeanization” as a middle-range theory is of benefit in order to analyse the partnerships and the underlying reasons for transnational cooperation in an appropriate manner.

3.2 Europeanization

Regarding the research question and the ancillary questions, the inclusion of the concept of Europeanization within the theoretical foundation is insofar considered as a suitable complement as it calls attention to the influence, EU policy has on the processes, actors and politics in its member states (cf. Dąbrowski 2014, p. 366). Simultaneously it sheds light on the interrelationships between the EU level and the national levels in form of the “‘uploading’ of national discourses to the European level” (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375).

Pollack identifies Europeanization as an “offshoot from the multi-level governance tradition” (Pollack, 2005, p. 384). Numerous scientific scholars such as Bachtler and colleagues (2014) or Tosun (2014) who ground their studies on structural funds and cohesion policy on the concept of Europeanization refer to a definition suggested by Radaelli who describes Europeanization as the “(a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated

in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli, 2003, p. 30).

At this point, the theoretical conceptualisation of Europeanization becomes relevant with respect to the empirical analysis on the determinants of the project partnerships within the framework of the Interreg programme. The following aspects are therefore of interest particularly with respect to the second ancillary question. Especially against the backdrop of the partnership principle, the extent to which these formal and especially informal “rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles” (Radaelli, 2003) are decisive in order to explain transnational cooperation. Dühr and colleagues stress the significance of top-down Europeanization for getting insights into the impact transboundary cooperation has on policy transfer and institutional change. Following this line of argumentation, Europeanization can be classified as a change in action of EU member states (Dühr et al. 2010, p. 105; Auel 2012, p. 251).

From a bottom up perspective, however, Dühr and colleagues emphasize the emergence of research on horizontal Europeanization due to the involvement of local or regional governance in the context of structural funds and cohesion policy (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 105; Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375). By referring to Knill (2005), Dühr and Nadin claim that a sole top-down perspective would be limited since it “underplays the interactive measure of Europeanization through mutual influence between EU and domestic institutions and horizontal relationships between member states in affiliations” (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 376). In this respect the bottom-up perspective completes the circle of Europeanization: according to that the approach is also characterized by an uploading of “national ideas to the EU level” (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 103).

Therefore, regarding the examination of the project partnerships and the motives for transnational cooperation, I argue that a combined application of the Europeanization concept in conjunction with the multi-level governance approach serves as a valuable theoretical foundation to investigate empirically day-to-day operations of institutions such as regional public authorities that relate to transnational cooperation within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the Interreg North Sea Region. Based on the theoretical foundation of Europeanization – which will be further elaborated in chapter 3.3.2 and chapter 3.3.3, I assume that the determinants for transnational cooperation and the functioning of project partnerships within

the framework of the Interreg B programme is in the end a ‘causal conjunction’ where “multiple conditions work together” (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 94).

3.3 Three explanatory dimensions

Built upon the theoretical foundations outlined above, the following subchapter is structured along three dimensions that were identified in order to make the theoretical framework applicable to the research on the determinants of the project partnership within transnational cooperation¹⁸. While the administrative dimension refers more to the multi-level governance approach, the social dimension and the value dimension refer to the concept of Europeanization. Based on this, I will propose a set of three hypotheses.

3.3.1 Administrative dimension

The linkage to the empirical part of this thesis and the operationalisation of the multi-level governance concept base on an assumption by Hooghe and Marks: the authors estimate cooperation to be “difficult when regions and local authorities in different countries have dissimilar competencies and resources” (Hooghe & Marks, 2010, p. 25). According to them, especially Interreg (ibid, p. 25) illustrates this assumption. Against the backdrop of the classification of the Interreg programme as a governance instrument, the underlying partnerships show characteristic features of transgovernmental networks, for instance illustrated by their ambition to overcome transnational challenges (Slaughter & Hale, 2010, p. 359). By highlighting that “networking is a form of creating and storing relational capital”, Slaughter and Hale argue that those transgovernmental networks are highly relevant with respect to the understanding of multi-level governance (Slaughter & Hale, 2010, p. 365). Therefore, a special regard on the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and a comparison to the Interreg North Sea Region can contribute to an understanding of whether and to what extent “the long-standing east-west divide” (Epstein & Jacoby, 2014, p. 12) is reflected by this funding instrument and the constellation of the transnational partnerships respectively networks.

Following Dąbrowski and colleagues, the success of cohesion policy is strongly determined by an effective multi-level governance and especially by mechanisms “for ensuring genuine

¹⁸ The initial idea, that such an elaboration along three dimensions could be of benefit for this study in order to facilitate the applicability of the theoretical framework to the research itself, based on an article by Dąbrowski (2014). There, the author sheds light on three variables in order to examine “the mechanisms and depth of adjustment to EU cohesion policy framework”: motivation, perceptions of partnership and spill-over effects (Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 367). The three dimensions within the framework of this master thesis, however, were identified with specific respect to the focus of this master thesis.

participation of the local stakeholders” (Dąbrowski et al., 2014, p. 360). In their article on multi-level governance challenges and partnerships within the framework of the cohesion policy of the EU, the authors argue that “there are still many barriers to such cooperation and a lack of administrative capacity in many countries and regions, particularly among the Southern and Central and Eastern European EU member states” (Dąbrowski et al., 2014, pp. 360–361). This is in line with Epstein’s and Jacoby’s way of argumentation according to which the EU has “not yet” transcended the above mentioned east-west divide¹⁹ (Epstein & Jacoby, 2014, p. 12; Langbein, 2014).

Accordingly, I hypothesize that the composition of the transgovernmental networks within the framework of the Interreg programme should reflect the overall abilities and capacities of the various actors from ‘old’ and ‘new’ EU member states to take part in the cooperation programmes. Thus, the following hypothesis also relates to the actors’ centrality within the network of transnational cooperation.

H1: Actors from states that became an EU member in 2004 or later are expected to face more administrative difficulties and are therefore transnationally less connected within the overall networks of the Interreg B programme compared to states that joined the EU earlier.

With respect to the connectivity within the transgovernmental networks, the previous mentioned intergovernmentalist theory regains in relevance. Referring to structural funds as an underlying financial source of cohesion policy, Piattoni argues that “fights over financial resources are a classic in intergovernmentalist relations” (Piattoni, 2010, p. 99). According to Minniberger “especially the territoriality and functionality of networks deserve consideration when analysing interregional-networks within the European Union” (Minniberger, 2016, p. 84). Based on the previously mentioned model by Piattoni and with special respect to Interreg as a governance instrument, I therefore argue that, in the end, nation-states illustrate the aggregation of connections resulting from transnational cooperation within the Interreg network. From a governance perspective this refers to the capacities to jointly implement collective choices within the framework of cohesion policy (Peters & Pierre, 2009, p. 91).

¹⁹ Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia (Interreg Baltic Sea Region) joined the EU as member states within the so-called ‘eastern enlargement’ in 2004. Similar to scholars such as Epstein & Jacoby (2014), Hix & Noury (2009) or Lindstrom (2010) I will refer to them by using the attributes ‘new’ member states or countries from ‘Central and Eastern Europe’. In turn, countries that joined the EU before 2004 will be called ‘old’ member states respectively countries from ‘Western Europe’ (including the United Kingdom and Norway).

The hypothesis therefore considers all players within the European integration process, as outlined by the multi-level governance approach. Apart from local, regional and national actors, which can be assigned to the governmental level, it also takes into account that non-governmental stakeholders can take part within the Interreg programme (cf. chapter 2.2 and 3.1.1). Based on the theoretical framework of the multi-level governance concept, I therefore assume that the centrality of a country within the network of transnational cooperation symbolizes on an aggregated level how well-connected the sum of actors from this country are. In case that all countries have the same degree centrality, one can assume that their actors are equally well connected. If however, the degree centralities of the countries differ, it can be assumed that transnational cooperation within the framework of the cooperation programmes is unequally distributed.

3.3.2 Social dimension

As a useful point of departure to understand the cooperation mechanisms, serves the consideration of practical assumptions with regard to the allocation of structural funds. By taking the ERDF as the main financial source of the Interreg programme and the EU enlargement in 2004 into consideration, Tosun highlights the relevance of the capacity, administrations and governments have. With respect to the absorption of EU structural funds, the author argues in specific terms, that this process “requires the existence of appropriate organizational structures and resources” (Tosun, 2014, p. 367). Regarding the extent to which transnational cooperation has contributed to an Europeanization of spatial planning, Dühr and Nadin highlight the critical role of actors especially in terms of their preferences and strategies (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, pp. 374, 376). In this context, they state that the point of departure for actors to cooperate in such projects are regional and national issues to which transnational cooperation could contribute in the end (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 383).

The so-called partnership principle is seen as “one of the most important sources of added value generated by cohesion policy” (Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 365). Therefore, the organizational structures and resources appear to play a key role with respect to the “uploading” of those ideas to the European level. Since funding within the framework of the Interreg programme is only at the actors' disposal if they cooperate in transnational partnerships, their relationship and openness towards actors from other countries is a basic requirement for the application and implementation phase. Regarding this it is all the more of importance to take a closer look at the connections between the actors themselves, since their adaption to the partnership principle

and therefore transnational cooperation “varies greatly depending on the administrative capacity of the sub-national authorities” (ibid, p. 378). By taking the “Bodensee region” as an example, Zäch and Pütz (2014) argue that transnational cooperation among the actors already existed even before the introduction of the Interreg programme (Zäch & Pütz, 2014, p. 39). Vice versa, in his article on the EU cohesion policy, Dąbrowski contends that “in the absence of traditions of cooperation, the existence of incentives for cooperation is vital to overcome the reluctance to engage in partnerships” (Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 378). While the second aspect within Dąbrowski’s statement, ‘incentives’, will be subject of analysis within the following ‘value dimension’, the first one, ‘traditions of cooperation’, will be investigated by means of this hypothesis. By transferring these ‘traditions of cooperation’ on a transnational level and interpreting them as a description for how good actors are connected to each other across borders, – regardless wheter due to the Interreg programme or not – I therefore hypothesize:

H2: The better actors are connected to other potential partners even before the project implementation, the higher are the chances for transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme.

With respect to the social dimension, this hypothesis mainly refers to the bottom-up category of the Europeanization concept. Colomb points out two factors that have an impact on the manner how project partners interact, how intensive this transnational cooperation is and to what extent they learn from each other: the “types of issues dealt with” and “the geography of the project partnership” (Colomb, 2007, p. 356). Regarding the type of issues, she highlights the distinction between so-called “‘common’” issues and “‘transnational’ issues” (Colomb, 2007, p. 357). The first one refers to challenges for which transnational cooperation is not necessarily required since they could be met at a local, regional or national level. In contrast to that, transnational issues such as environmental problems can only be solved at a transnational level (ibid, p. 357). At first sight, the fact that all countries within the cooperation programmes border on a common sea, suggests that transnational connection might be required from the outset – regardless of the Interreg programme. Given, however, that actors from various countries might face different prerequisites with respect to transnational cooperation (cf. chapter 3.3.1), one might assume that so-called ‘common’ issues also play a significant role. Based on Colomb’s definition, a ‘common’ type of issue would not necessarily require a connection between the participating actors even before the project application. With respect to ‘transnational’ types of issues, however, such as it is the case with respect to environmental

pollution for instance, one might assume that the actors already can build upon pre-existing networks and connections (cf. Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 366).

Regarding this, especially with respect to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, the geographical origin of the actors might be of great interest with respect to causal relation between Europeanization and transnational cooperation. The project partnerships within this cooperation programme may consist of actors from states that have more experience with European policy instruments such as Interreg due to their comparatively longer EU membership. This implies a heterogeneity. In contrast to the Baltic Sea Region, however, the Interreg North Sea Region is solely composed of countries that, apart from Norway, already had an EU membership status before the enlargement of the EU in 2004 (cf. chapter 4.1). In this context, apart from historical path dependencies, such as a tradition of centralization for instance, Batory and Cartwright identify the political styles, whether it is “consensual versus adversarial”, as decisive factors that might facilitate the project partnership (Batory & Cartwright, 2011, p. 704).

Thus, the “ways of doing things” as pointed out by Radaelli in light of the concept of Europeanization (Radaelli, 2003, p. 30), not only become of interest with respect to actors that apply as or are approved as partners within the Interreg programme. It also refers to individuals that are representing these organizations in the project partnerships (Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 366). Regarding this, Sielker argues that “despite institutional interests, actor constellations, particularly in informal governance contexts, depend on relationships between individuals and their cultural backgrounds” (Sielker, 2016, p. 90). With respect to the Interreg programme, this statement sheds light on a factor that was omitted so far in this theoretical chapter: the linkage between actors within the partnership principle and the individuals that are representing them. Assuming that the organizational and administrative capacities not only differ in the various regions of these countries but also depend on the actor constellations and the relationships of individuals, demands an examination on how these differences, for instance regarding the EU membership status, are of relevance. This is especially of relevance concerning the chance to cooperate in a transnational setting within the Interreg B programme. The significance of individual behaviour becomes apparent with respect to the relation between individual learning and organizational learning. By referring to other scholars such as Dabinett (2006) and Zetter (2005, 2006) Colomb points out that there are often limitations and disparities with respect to the organizational learning as a result of Interreg projects. By ascribing that to the fact that individuals do not share their knowledge they gained from transnational cooperation with the

organization they are representing, Colomb highlights the essential role of those individuals within the framework of transnational cooperation (Colomb, 2007, p. 361). This overlaps with De Sousa's line of argumentation according to which "cross-border cooperation depends, to a large extent, on individual political entrepreneurs, their continued interest and ability to mobilize local support to these initiatives" (Sousa, 2012, p. 682)

3.3.3 Value dimension

The Interreg programme ranks among the "prime example" with respect to the Europeanization of spatial planning (Stead, 2013, p. 23). Due to the fact that the programme can lead to a simplification of territorial cooperation across borders, Stead calls the policy instrument a "stimulus for Europeanization" (Stead, 2014, p. 23). In general, literature on Europeanization in association with cohesion policy distinguishes between "rationalist and sociological mechanisms of adjustment to EU norms" (Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 367). According to the sociological dimension, the behaviour of the participating actors can be explained by the so-called "logic of appropriateness" (ibid, p. 367). Considering the Interreg B programme, this could mean that the underlying motives for cooperation with project partners from other countries are the result of a change of preferences or social respectively policy learning (ibid, p. 367). According to the rationalist dimension, however, the adaption of EU norms is a deliberate decision of the relevant actors. Transferred to the underlying reasons for governmental and non-governmental actors to take part in Interreg projects, their underlying motives for transnational cooperation with actors from other European countries would be a consequence of a "cost-benefit calculation" and the (urgent) requirement to receive EU funding (Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 367). With respect to cross-border cooperation, meaning Interreg A, De Sousa claims that it would be erroneous to assume that local political actors cooperated with project partners from other countries "without economic considerations" (Sousa, 2012, p. 681).

However, from a general perspective, following the concept of Europeanization and how it relates to spatial planning, Dühr and colleagues point out that "the initial impact of such initiatives has been to encourage domestic planning actors to 'think European'" (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 362). In the context of the before mentioned multi-level governance approach as an underlying asset of the Interreg programme and the multitude of different actors within the project partnership, however, the incentive scheme that should encourage this 'European thinking' needs to be investigated. This relates to notion of the 'added value' of transnational

cooperation²⁰ as well as the “contribution of Interreg to the ‘Europeanization of spatial planning’ through horizontal cognitive mechanisms” (Colomb, 2007, p. 367). In this context, Dühr and Nadin distinguish between “soft” and “hard values” (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375). While the former term refers to “more qualitative, learning outcomes”, the latter is understood as “infrastructure investments” (ibid, p. 375). Due to the fact that the funding programme only provides limited financial support (cf. chapter 2.2), the two scholars expect that the “main value” of transnational working is determined by “soft outcomes” (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375; Minniberger, 2016, p. 239). In light of the concept of Europeanization and with special regard to the Interreg North Sea respectively the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, it can therefore be assumed that the significance of informal networks resulting from the project partnerships are of greater relevance for taking part in the Interreg programme than the provided financial support through the ERDF co-financing. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: *‘Soft values’ outweigh ‘hard values’ as the actors’ main motives for participating in the Interreg programme.*

This hypothesis is based on the prior one, since it mainly considers actors that are part of a project partnerships – either within the application phase or in an Interreg project that is approved for funding. In light of the concept of Europeanization, the hypothesis test follows a bottom up perspective to figure out the main motives of actors for participation. Assuming that ‘soft values’ such as informal networks outweigh hard infrastructure investments by means of the reimbursement principle as the main incentives for transnational cooperation, the underlying test will also shed light on the actor’s perception of the added value of transnational cooperation. Simultaneously it will partly take the before mentioned multi-level governance approach into account by considering the varying roles of the project partners. With respect to the ERDF co-financing, this assumption would also imply that the share of the own contribution, each project partners has to finance according to the payment scheme of the Interreg programme (JS BSR, 2015, p. 8), was of minor relevance.

²⁰ In her speech on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Interreg programmes in September 2015, Camille Gira, Secretary of State at the Luxembourgish Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, highlighted her perspective on the ‘added value’ of Interreg: “It significantly widened and intensified political and administrative exchange relations across Europe. This introduced a European perspective into the day-to-day activities of public administrations and the delivery of many public policies at all levels. Furthermore, also a new practice of cooperative self-organisation was initiated between regions and local authorities from different countries which would not exist at this scale without Interreg.” (Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/conferences/interreg25/conclusions_camille_gira.pdf, last access: 19 June 2016)

To conclude, the multi-level governance concept serves as basis to analyse the actors' underlying administrative capacities with respect to transnational cooperation in both cooperation programmes, in the first instance. Second, based on the expansion of the theoretical framework by the concept of Europeanization approach, the “ways of doing things” (Radaelli, 2003, p. 30) will be examined from a bottom-up perspective. Aiming at shedding light on the determinants for recent and current project partnerships within the framework of the Interreg programme, the choice of the theoretical foundations mainly followed practical reasons. This is especially reflected by the three dimensions on administrative, social and value features that were identified in light of the theoretical foundations. In order to balance a certain fuzziness of the deduced hypotheses resulting from this rather practical approach, the following hypothesis testing and empirical investigation aim at contributing to an advancement of the theoretical framework by especially shedding light on transnational cooperation in Europe within the framework of the Interreg programme.

4. Research Design and methodological approaches

Aiming at answering the main research question²¹ and the underlying ancillary questions in a coherent manner, the research design of this master thesis is based on a mixed methods approach (cf. Hollstein, 2010; Minniberger, 2016, p. 116). In order to examine the determinants of the partnership of European transnational cooperation projects within the cooperation programmes of interest – the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region – the empirical investigations combine insights from a network analysis with the in-depth information gained from ten expert interviews. It will be structured along the three dimensions (administrative, social and value) that were elaborated within the scope of the theoretical framework (chapter 3).

At first, by examining the network constellations of transnational cooperation within the concluded Interreg IV period (2007-2013) and the first call of the recently started Interreg V period (2014-2020) on a NUTS 0 level²², the network analysis mainly aims at contributing to

²¹ Main research question: What determines the partnership of European transnational cooperation projects within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region?

²² According to NUTS classification by Destatis/Eurostat (Destatis 2016) (Retrieved from https://www.destatis.de/Europa/EN/Methods/Classifications/OverviewClassification_NUTS.html, last access: 05 July 2016).

the answer of the first sub-question²³. Regarding the findings, I argue that the network analysis provides an useful overview to describe the connections between the countries on an aggregated level, based on transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme in the first instance (cf. Scott, 2012). The outputs of the network analysis will be used as a point of departure for the qualitative analysis. Generally speaking, the qualitative part aims at “associating the findings from the quantitative network analysis” on the centrality of countries and the connections among each other with the outputs from the expert interviews (Hollstein, 2010, p. 464). By interviewing experts, I mainly pursued the goal to identify further determinants that were not immediately clear from the data provided by the Joint Secretariats and the resulting network constellations. Thus, the qualitative analysis aims at answering to the first and especially second ancillary question on the one hand²⁴ and testing the hypotheses on the other hand. Simultaneously, based on the before mentioned hypotheses, the interviews enabled “to gather much deeper set of responses” (Mosley, 2013, p. 6) to examine the determinants of transnational cooperation.

The following chapter is structured along three parts. First, it briefly outlines the case selection of this study. Subchapters 4.2 and 4.3 describe the two methodological approaches – network analysis and in-depth interviews. Apart from outlining the data collection and justifying the reasons for having chosen a mixed methods approach, the following parts also reflect on the validity and reliability of the research design in a critical manner.

4.1 Case selection

Taking the total number of transnational cooperation programmes within the Interreg B programme 2014-2020 into consideration, the universe of possible cases that could have been examined accounts for 15 (cf. chapter 2.2; Commission, 2015c). The selection of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region as cases of analysis followed practical as well as scientific considerations. First, actors from Hamburg are entitled to take part as project partners in these two cooperation programmes (2014TC16M5TN001, 2014; 2014TC16RFTN005, 2014). Thus, the Senate Chancellery has a predominant interest in these areas (Hamburg, 2016). This enabled direct and indirect access to relevant actors and data, as I will further point out in chapter 4.2 and 4.3.

²³ First ancillary question: How are the countries connected to each other within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and which actors make most use of it?

²⁴ Second ancillary question: What explains transnational cooperation of governmental and non-governmental actors within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region?

Second, apart from these practical considerations for the non-random selection of the two programme areas, I argue that the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region meet – with some restrictions – the requirements of typical cases (Gerring, 2006). Broadly speaking, one can subdivide the 15 cooperation programmes into two categories. On the one hand, there are cooperation programmes that solely cover ‘old’ EU member states²⁵ from ‘Western Europe’ (including non-EU member states such as Norway, Iceland or Switzerland); examples are “Interreg North West Europe”, “Interreg South West Europe” and “Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic” (Commission, 2015c). On the other hand there are cooperation programmes that either only cover ‘new’ EU member states from ‘Central and Eastern Europe’ or in combination with ‘old’ EU member states (ibid, 2015c; cf. chapter 3.3.1).

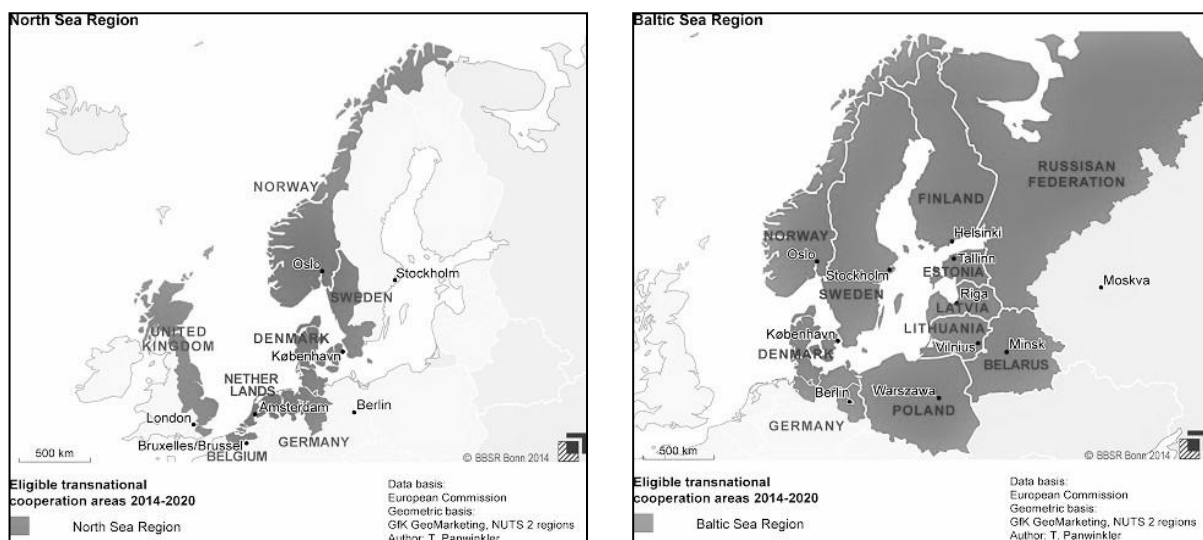


Figure 3. Maps of “eligible transnational cooperation areas (2014-2020)” covered by the Interreg North Sea Region (left)²⁶ and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region (right)²⁷.

Source: BBSR 2016, cf. footnotes (illustration by T. Panwinkler).

With respect to this subdivision, I argue that the Interreg North Sea Region meets requirements of a typical case within the first group of cooperation programmes outlined above, whereas the Interreg Baltic Sea Region can be assigned to the second group. Despite those differences, a number of parallels concerning the administrative processes enable empirical comparisons between the two cooperation programmes. In consideration of the scientific purposes of this master thesis, two features are of special relevance with respect to the underlying

²⁵ Including the United Kingdom.

²⁶ BBSR (2016b). Figure ‘Interreg North Sea Region’ retrieved from: http://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/EN/INTERREG/SixProgrammeAreas/NorthSeaRegion/northsearegion_node.html (last access: 28 June 2016).

²⁷ BBSR (2016c). Figure ‘Interreg Baltic Sea Region’ retrieved from: http://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/EN/INTERREG/SixProgrammeAreas/BalticSeaRegion/balticsearegion_node.html (last access: 28 June 2016).

methodological approaches (cf. chapter 4.2 and 4.3). On the one hand, the chronological sequence of application respectively implementation processes are similar in both cooperation programmes. Besides, in both cooperation programmes the funding period Interreg IV concluded in 2013 and the successor funding Interreg V phase started in 2014. Regarding the latter one, in both cooperation programmes the first call concluded with the approval of a number of projects in winter 2015²⁸²⁹ (Commission 2015c; Interreg NSR; Interreg BSR). On the other hand, the roles of eligible actors are defined in a similar way (cf. chapter 2.2) which is of relevance with respect to the sample of interviewed experts.

4.2 Network Analysis

By conducting a network analysis, I especially aim at contributing to the answer of the first sub-question. In addition, the findings intend to serve as a foundation for the qualitative analysis respectively the empirical investigations concerning the second ancillary question and the hypotheses testing. In the following, I will briefly outline the data collection, describe methodology as well as the used software programmes for the network analysis and will critically reflect obstacles, reliability and validity in the end.

4.2.1 Data collection

To begin with, the data on which the network analysis bases, entails information on all actors (i.e. project acronym, partner number, legal status NUTS 0, NUTS 1, NUTS 2, NUTS 3) that participate in projects that were approved within the Interreg IV period (2007-2013) or the first call of the Interreg V period (2014-2020) in the two cooperation programmes of interest (cf. bibliography). With respect to the data collection it turned out that, the period of time when the internship took place, was well suited³⁰. Because the deadlines for the second call for expressions of interest in the Interreg North Sea Region respectively for concept notes in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region fell into this period, it was possible to gain direct practical insights into the coordination and application procedures within the Interreg framework. In addition, little time before the beginning of the research internship, the Joint Secretariats of the two cooperation programmes of interest published the decisions about the projects that were approved within the scope of the first call of the Interreg V period (cf. chapter 4.1). Regarding

²⁸(Sørensen, 2015) – Interreg NSR: approval of project applications within first call Interreg V in November 2015; Retrieved from: <http://www.northsearegion.eu/about-the-programme/programme-news/steering-committee-1-approves-first-projects/> (last access: 28 June 2016).

²⁹ Interreg BSR (2015a): approval of project applications within first call Interreg V in November 2015; Retrieved from <https://www.interreg-baltic.eu/news-detail/news/35-projects-approved-in-first-call.html> (last access: 28 June 2016).

³⁰ Period of the internship: 15 February 2016 - 15 June 2016.

the data collection for the present master thesis, this period of time is of relevance as it enabled to analyse ‘brand-new’ data of the recently started Interreg V period and to draw first comparisons to the concluded Interreg IV period.

Regarding the data collection, there were several legal obstacles. Aiming at avoiding the risk of non-disclosure agreements, I therefore attached great importance to contact the Joint Secretariats of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, which is situated in Rostock (Germany) and the Interreg North Sea Region, located in Viborg (Denmark), directly, in order to ask them to provide for data for this master thesis on the past and on the recently started funding periods.

4.2.2 Methodology

Core of the quantitative part is a network analysis. At first, it aims at shedding light on the general role of the participating states within the framework of transnational cooperation in the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Against the backdrop of the multi-level governance approach as a theoretical basis, this analytical method allows for an examination of the relative centrality of the countries that are covered by the cooperation programmes. Their centrality results from the composition of project partnerships and the connectivity of all participating organizations (cf. Scott, 2012).

With respect to the focus of this thesis, the network analysis enables a general comparison of the connections between countries (NUTS 0 level). Regarding their ‘position’ within the network of transnational cooperation, the analysis focuses on ‘degree centrality’. This method enables a determination of the share of direct connections between the countries within the overall network, following from the total number of connections between all project partners in the Interreg B programme (Witting, 2013, p. 59). Thus, the share of the degree centrality of a country within the network, reflects the overall number of direct transnational connections of project partners from this country to project partners from other countries (Ohm, 2009, p. 292). The outputs from the network analysis symbolize how well-connected the countries are within the framework of the Interreg B programme (Scott, 2012, p. 82). These results were analysed by additionally taking the share of lead partners from the participating countries into consideration.

5.2.3 Network Software

In order to create, analyse and visualize the networks, I used two software programmes³¹. The analytical process was carried out in three steps. At first, I identified the transnational connections resulting from 215 project partnerships within the two periods of analysis and presented the connections in Excel matrices (cf. Schneider, 2014, p. 275; cf. appendix II). As a second step, the data retrieved from the matrices was processed by using the social network analysis programme ‘UCINET 6’. This software package provides several tools such as for the calculation of degree centralities (Borgatti et al. 2002). By using ‘UCINET’ I transformed the data into the data format ‘Matrix’ and exported it as a ‘dl file’. Third, by using the software ‘Visone 2.16’ (“Visual social networks”)³², I analysed the centrality of the various countries resulting from the number of project partners and their connections to project partners from other countries. Based on this, I visualized the resulting networks.

Cooperation programme	Period	Number of projects	Number of partners
Interreg North Sea Region	2007-2013	78	1054
Interreg North Sea Region	2007-2013	12	161
Interreg Baltic Sea Region	2014-2020 (first call)	90	1387
Interreg Baltic Sea Region	2014-2020 (first call)	35	506
Total		215	3108³³

Table 1. Overview – Number of projects and project partners per funding period and cooperation programme.

The data on the approved projects was provided by the Joint Secretariat Interreg North Sea and the Joint Secretariat Interreg Baltic Sea.

5.2.4 Obstacles and critical reflection

The Joint Secretariats of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the North Sea Region were highly cooperative with respect to the provision of the data required for the network analysis. Due to several obligations of confidentiality, however, it was only possible to use data on approved projects for this master thesis. Legal restriction mainly affected application forms, assessment sheets and the data on rejected projects. Thus it has to be mentioned, that the created network outputs ‘only’ illustrate connections resulting from successful project applications respectively implementations. In addition, especially with respect to the data on the projects that were approved in the course of the first call of the Interreg V period, minor changes with respect to

³¹ And Microsoft Excel.

³² The software package ‘Visone’ was developed at the University of Konstanz and the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in 2001. Until today it is continuously renewed and therefore provides valuable tools for the analysis and visualization of social networks (Visone 2016).

³³ Some project partners took part in several Interreg projects.

the partnerships cannot be excluded (cf. Interreg BSR 2015c)³⁴. Regarding the added value of this method, however, it has to be critically stated, that the analysis of such networks is often seen as a “complementary element” to other approaches within the social sciences and not as a ‘full’ method in itself (Schneider, 2014, p. 282).

4.3 Qualitative analysis

This is why, based on the findings from the network analysis, a central objective in interviewing experts³⁵ that are involved in the Interreg programme was, to “gather a much deeper set of responses” in order to answer the second sub-question and the main research question in the end (Mosley, 2013, p. 6). The interviews were conducted in May and June 2016. In order to benefit from in-depth information, the central aim was to meet all interviewees in- person. One practical reason was, that some respondents were not allowed to use virtual video chat services such as ‘Skype’ due to the data protection policies of their institutions. The main reason however was, that virtual interviews – in contrast to face-to-face meetings – “lack much of the contextual information that can be important to interpreting interview data” (Mosley, 2013, p. 7). Apart from one exception, it was possible to meet all experts in-person. The interviews took place in four different cities in Northern Germany. They had an average duration of about 50 minutes³⁶. The respondents had the possibility to either answer in English or German language. Since most conversations were entirely in German, I translated all direct quotes I referred to in chapter 5 and chapter 6 into English. In order to address overall concerns with respect to reliability and validity, all respondents were asked for permission for audio recording. In addition, also for analytical purposes, I transcribed every interview.

4.3.1 Data collection

In order to minimize a non-respond bias, I addressed most experts in person on the occasion of project partner meetings, conferences or networking events that took place between February and May 2016. In the following, I again contacted them via email. I assume that this approach is one of the main reasons, why the response rate to the emails in which I proposed dates for possible interview meetings was surprisingly high.

³⁴ For further information see: https://www.interreg-baltic.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/News/2015_all_news/201511_November/2015.11.20_35_projects_approved_table.pdf (last access: 28 June 2016).

³⁵ In total, I conducted eleven conversations with experts. However, in one case an audio recording was not allowed. Therefore the responses from this interview only serve as ‘background information’ and will not be used directly.

³⁶ The shortest interview had a duration of about 33 minutes; the longest took about 76 minutes.

Group	No.	Code assigned to expert	Type of partner ³⁷	Main role within Interreg V	Main cooperation programme
A (Project partners and lead partners)	1	A-SA	Sectoral agency	Lead partner	BSR
	2	A-HE-1	Higher education Institution	Project partner	BSR
	3	A-RI	Research institution	Project partner	BSR
	4	A-RPA	Regional public authority	Project partner	BSR (NSR)
	5	A-HE-2	Higher education Institution	Lead partner	BSR
B (Advisors and representatives of federal states, i.a. responsible for Interreg B)	6	B-BSR-1 ³⁸	Regional public authority	Consultation and coordination	BSR (NSR)
	7	B-BSR-2	Regional public authority	Consultation and coordination	BSR (NSR)
	8	B-BSR-3	Regional public authority	Consultation and coordination	BSR (NSR)
	9	B-NSR-1	Regional public authority	Consultation and coordination	NSR (BSR)
	10	B-NSR-2	Regional public authority	Consultation and coordination	NSR (BSR)
	11	B-NSR-3	Regional public authority	Consultation and coordination	NSR (BSR)

Table 2. Overview: Interviewed experts

Regarding the data collection, I intentionally pursued a purposive sampling. That means, that I selected “elements of a population according to specific characteristics deemed relevant for the analysis” (Lynch, 2013, p. 41). Following Lynch’s description of sample strategies, I argue that the selected experts are – to a limited extent – representative to a large part of actors that are involved in transnational cooperation within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the Interreg North Sea Region.

First, in order to answer the main research question in an appropriate way and to contribute to a greater comparability of the two programming areas, I purposefully interviewed numerous individuals who are representing organizations that have experience in both cooperation programmes. Second, I deliberately interviewed experts representing organizations with various legal statuses. The respondents can be – broadly speaking – classified into two groups. This distinction will be of relevance with respect to the interpretation of the findings, especially in chapter 5.3. On the one hand, I interviewed actors, who were involved in a project, that was

³⁷ Based on classification by the Joint Secretariat Interreg Baltic Sea Region.

³⁸ Experts B-BSR-1 and B-BSR-2 were interviewed together.

approved during the first call of the Interreg V period or shortly before submitting an application as a project or lead partner within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region or the Interreg North Sea Region at time when the interview was conducted (group A)³⁹. Among those actors, some had long-term experience regarding the Interreg programme while others took part for the first time. On the other hand, it was possible to conduct interviews with members of the national committee as well as with members of the international monitoring committee from both cooperation programmes (group B). The latter board decides *inter alia* about the approval or rejection of project applications (JS BSR, 2015, p. 7). Due to their advisory function as coordinators and consultants for other actors, those stakeholders were able to give general insights and to provide background information. Against the backdrop of the theoretical framework, it therefore was possible to address actors from various levels of governance. In order to ensure the anonymization of the personal data, each interviewee was assigned to a ‘code’.⁴⁰

4.3.2 Methodology

The addressed experts were subjects to similar interview protocols. In order to increase the comparability of the given answers, a semi-structured interview was developed (Mayer, 2012, p. 37). Regarding the structure, content and question order I partly drew on formulations and experience by other scholars as source of inspiration (cf. Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Leech, & Kimball, 2009; Groebner 2015; Minniberger, 2015; Mosley, 2013).

The semi-structured interviews were composed of three parts. In light of the operationalization outlined in the theoretical chapter, the questions were structured along the following three main sections:

- (1) Incentives/Reasons for transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme
- (2) Characteristics of transnational cooperation/project partnership:
- (3) Future development of transnational cooperation/recommendations for Interreg B

Depending on the position of the actors and their role with respect to the Interreg programme or their specific answers, the structure of the interview was sometimes modified. For instance I

³⁹ The deadline for the submission of the concept note application within the Second call of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region was on 01 June 2016; Interreg BSR (2016b). Retrieved from <https://www.interreg-baltic.eu/applying-for-funds/secondcallforapplications/2nd-call-step-1.html> (last access: 28 June 2016)

⁴⁰ The codes consist of the following information. (1) First capital letter: group A or group B; (2) letter sequence: abbreviation of type of partner (group A) or cooperation programme the expert mainly deals with (group B); (3) digit: number of interviewed expert that belongs to this specific category.

transposed or added questions. Regarding this, I considered Baumgartner's and colleagues' method by occasionally asking questions in an "intentionally conversational" manner in order to get further information while upholding a professional interview atmosphere (Baumgartner et al., 2009, p. 273). With respect to the operationalization of the second sub-question and the 'value dimension' in specific (cf. chapters 3.3 and 5.3), one element requires further clarification. The interviewed project partners and lead partners (group A) were asked to describe their organization's reasons for transnational cooperation. Simultaneously actors representing group B were asked to describe the motives of the organizations they coordinate respectively consult. In this context, I invited them to spontaneously classify these motives on a schematic diagram I created based on the Dühr's and Nadin's distinction between 'soft values' and 'hard values' (cf. chapter 3.3; Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375). Using this classification as a 'stimulus', I aimed at gaining deeper information on the 'true' reasons for transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme.

Where on this figure would you classify the main motives of your organization/institution for transnational cooperation within the INTERREG B programme?

Interview code:

With respect to the 'values' of transnational cooperation, two social scholars, Stefanie Dühr and Vincent Nadin (2007), distinguish between soft and hard values (*show figure and hand a pen*). Please mark on this scheme where you would classify the main motives of your organization/institution for transnational cooperation within the INTERREG B programme?

<p>'Soft values' (informal networks, learning outcomes)</p>		<p>'Hard values' (infrastructure investments, ERDF co-financing)</p>
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Figure 4. Schematic diagram for expert interview.

(Own illustration; Based on Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375).

4.3.3 Obstacles and critical reflection

These approaches require a critical reflection of the validity and reliability of the interview data as there are a number of limitations: first, it has to be taken into consideration, that the actors were only interviewed at one point in time. Second, the sample only entails German actors as it was aimed, to meet the interviewees in-person. Third, the semi-structured order of questions and the non-random sampling may limit the generalizability of the interview data and of the results (Mosley, 2013, p. 19). Considering these limitations, for instance with respect to the analysis or interpretation of the answers, I however argue that the semi-structured interview techniques as well as the non-random sampling are of benefit. In order to understand the data on the project networks and relevant actors in a comprehensible manner, the experts' experience, motives and perceived challenges provided deep insights into the determinants of

transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme. Furthermore, the validity of the above mentioned schematic diagram might be questioned in terms of generalization. Nevertheless, it allowed for a suitable overview of the interviewed experts' positions and turned out to serve as a useful point of departure for further in-depth evaluations on the reasons for transnational cooperation. Due to the partially open-ended questions, a difficulty was to avoid answers that were too excessive or did not address the initial questions. In addition, there was a risk that the interviewees understood the questions in another way than intended. In the end, however, I agree with Aberbach's and Rockman's line of argumentation according to which "the advantages of conversational flow and depth of response outweigh the disadvantages of inconsistent ordering" (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002, p. 674).

5. Empirical investigation

The empirical investigation is structured along the three dimensions that were highlighted in chapter 4 and is based on the results from the network analysis and the semi-structured expert interviews. In order to evaluate the determinants of the project partnership within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, to answer to the two ancillary questions and to test the hypotheses, the empirical investigation will be complemented by a critical discussion (chapter 6).

5.1 Administrative dimension (Network analysis and expert interviews)

With respect to the administrative dimension, I a mixed method approach was used. The network analysis aims at contributing to the answer to the first ancillary question. Simultaneously, it serves as a foundation to test the hypotheses by enabling comparisons between the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Since the determinants for varying degree centralities were not immediately clear from the provided data and the network analysis, experts were asked to shed light on the underlying administrative dimension. In sum, the findings from the expert interviews complement the results from the network analysis by focusing on three aspects that were highlighted by the respondents: the newly introduced two-step application procedure, the involvement of external management

consultancies and alternative funding instruments. In combination with the following discussion (chapter 6.1.1), this subchapter aims at testing hypothesis 1⁴¹.

5.1.1 Network analysis: 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 (first call)

In the following part, I identify four networks in total. On the one hand, I distinguish between the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. On the other hand, I compare the cooperation programmes themselves by analysing the data of the concluded funding period Interreg IV (2007-2013) and the first prevalent data on approved projects within the current funding period Interreg V (2014-2020). Apart from shedding light on the degree centralities of the countries, I focus on the distribution of lead partners (cf. chapter 2.2) in order to evaluate which actors make most use of the Interreg programme.

- **Interreg North Sea Region (2007-2013)**

Among the 78 projects that were approved as being eligible for co-financing within the framework of the North Sea Region programme, there were project partners from eight different countries. Even though the cooperation programme only covers seven countries, the involvement of partners from outside the programme area is allowed in exceptional cases (2014TC16RFTN005, 2014, p. 47). This explains, why the figure below also involves a node that symbolizes France – which has, however, a quite decentral position within the whole network structure in comparison to the other countries since it does officially not belong to the seven nations that are covered by the programme area. According to the data provided by the Joint Secretariat, 1054 organizations in total cooperated transnationally within the recently concluded programme period 2007-2013. Regarding this quantity, it has to be mentioned that numerous organizations took part in several projects. Taking the organizations' places of origins into consideration, the resulting network structure, however, illustrates differences with respect to the transnational connectivity of the participating countries.

⁴¹ *H1: Actors from states that became an EU member in 2004 or later are expected to face more administrative difficulties and are therefore transnationally less connected within the overall networks of the Interreg B programme compared to states that joined the EU earlier (cf. chapter 3.3.1).*

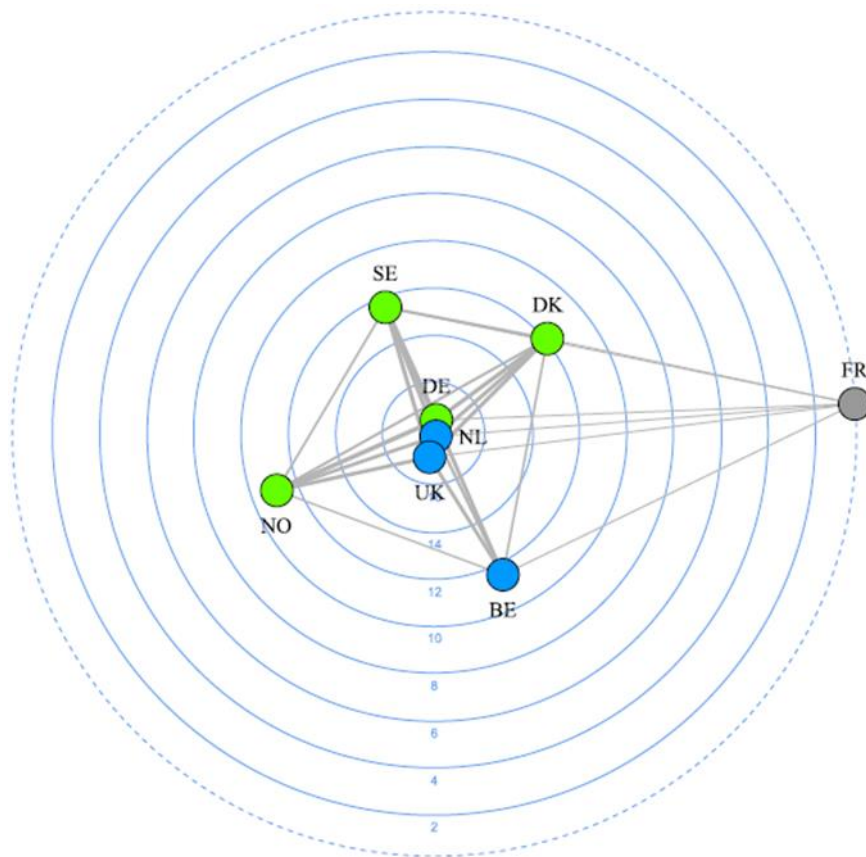


Figure 5. Degree centrality Interreg North Sea Region (2007-2013).

Own calculation and visualization.

For this network analysis, I considered all approved projects during the funding phase of the Interreg North Sea Region and their specific project partners. The participating organizations were classified based on their country of origin (cf. chapter 4.2). Green nodes represent countries from ‘Western Europe’ that are also covered by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, blue nodes symbolize countries from ‘Western Europe’ that are not covered by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and grey nodes are the aggregation of actors from countries that are officially not covered by the Interreg North Sea Region but took part in exceptional cases.

By taking all participating institutions per country for the degree-based measure into consideration, it is striking that one can roughly differ between two clusters that show a similar centrality degree. Transferring the composition of the underlying project partnerships on a NUTS 0 level, the network visualization detects that actors from especially three countries ‘dominated’ transnational cooperation within the Interreg IV period, at least according to their degree centrality: the Netherlands (18.03 %), Germany (17.59 %) and the United Kingdom (17.15%). Besides, it is striking that 56 out of these 78 projects (71.79 %) are led by organizations from these three countries. According to the centrality degree, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Belgium are comparatively on the periphery of the network structure.

- **Interreg North Sea Region** (2014-2020; results from the first call)

The following figure provides a first overview of the preliminary network structure and transnational cooperation within the recently started funding period. It is based on data concerning twelve project applications which were approved by the steering committee of the Interreg North Sea Region⁴² in November 2015 (Sørensen, 2015). At this point in time, the number of all beneficiary organizations accounted for 161. In contrast to the network structure analysed before (Interreg IV 2007-2013), this network is therefore only composed of the organizations involved in projects that were approved in the course of the first call for applications in Interreg V (cf. chapter 4.1). Nevertheless, I argue that it already provides a first impression of the current developments with respect to transnational cooperation. Despite the fact that a comparison between the whole Interreg IV period and the results of the first call of the fifth period can be subject to criticism, it allows for a temporary analysis and interpretation of the composition of partnerships and therefore serves as suitable basis for the interviews, analysed in chapter 5.1.2.

In comparison, the prevalent network structure shows several differences to the network of the previous funding period, for instance regarding the degree centrality. First, it is striking that, as a result of the composition of the project partnerships and connectivity of the participating organizations, Denmark has clearly moved towards the centre of the network from a NUTS 0 perspective. Following the partnership composition of the projects that were approved in the course of the first call of the Interreg V period, it increased its connectivity by about 4.85 percentage points in comparison to 2007-2013. While the node that refers to the Netherlands again identifies the country as the most central one within the network (18.69 %), this time Denmark has the second highest degree centrality (16.75 %).

⁴² As outlined in chapter 2.2: while the decision-taking body in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region is called “monitoring committee”, its counterpart in the Interreg North Sea Region is called “steering committee” (2014TC16M5TN001, 2014; 2014TC16RFTN005, 2014).

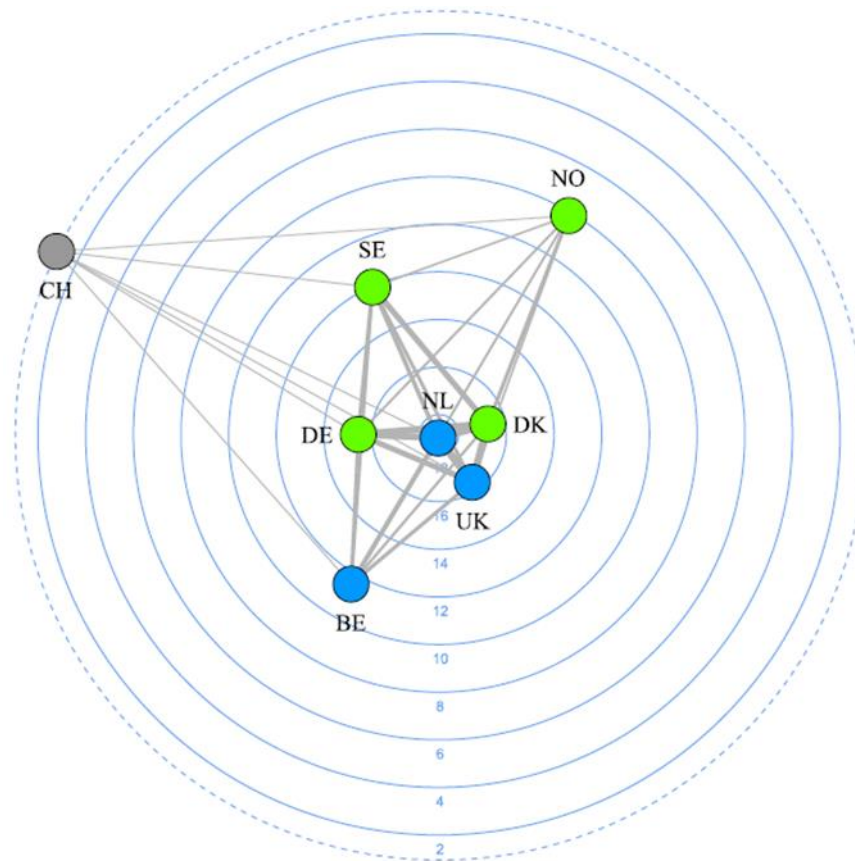


Figure 6. Degree centrality Interreg North Sea Region (2014-2020; results from the first call).
Own calculation and visualization (cf. comments figure 5).

At the same time, a clear subdivision of the countries into two clusters according to their centrality degrees, as seen in the previously analysed network, is not found here. Although the degree centrality of Sweden and Belgium – on an aggregated level – is relatively equal, Germany, the United Kingdom and Norway slightly moved towards the periphery of the network compared to the previous funding period. With respect to the number of lead partners, however, a premature conclusion would – due to the low quantity of projects in total – be too early. However, considering this weakness, it has to be mentioned that 4 out of 12 project leaders whose projects were approved for co-financing are organizations from the Netherlands.

- **Interreg Baltic Sea Region (2007-2013)**

In contrast to the Interreg North Sea Region, that only covers ‘old’ EU member states and Norway, the Interreg Baltic Sea Region differs, as outlined in Chapter 4, in many respects. Regarding the network structure, two differences are of major importance for the analysis of the partnerships: first, the programme area consists of more countries than the North Sea Region, namely eleven. Second, it comprises apart from ‘old’ EU member states, also countries

that accessed the EU as ‘new’ member states within the enlargement round in 2004 as well as non-EU member states (cf. chapter 4.1). In total, 90 projects were considered eligible for co-financing within the framework of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region between 2007 and 2013. According to the data provided by its Joint Secretariat in Rostock, the number of participating organizations amounted for 1387. Among them were also project partners from Belgium and the United Kingdom, countries that are officially not covered by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. With respect to its impact on transnational cooperation the following network structure, however, implies an imbalance with respect to the centrality of the represented countries from a NUTS 0-perspective.

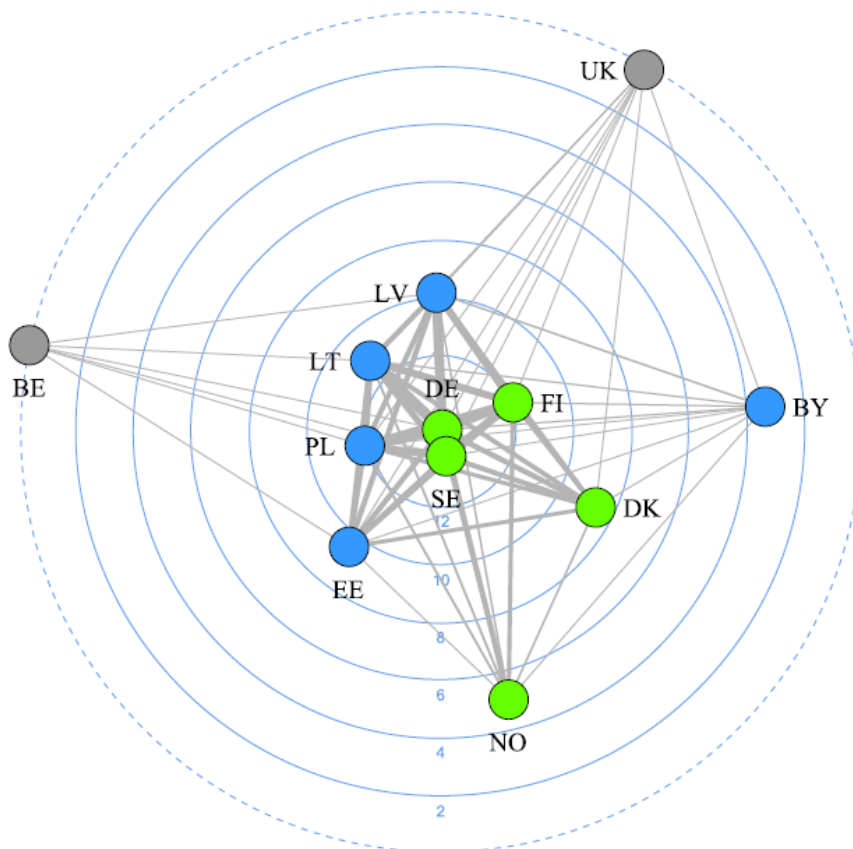


Figure 7. Degree centrality Interreg Baltic Sea Region (2007-2013).

Own calculation and visualization.

For this network analysis, I considered all approved projects during the funding phase of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and their specific project partners. The participating organizations were classified based on their country of origin (cf. chapter 4.2). Green nodes represent countries from ‘Western Europe’ that are also covered by the Interreg North Sea Region (apart from Finland), blue nodes symbolize countries from ‘Eastern and Central Europe’ and grey nodes are the aggregation of actors from countries that are not officially covered by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region but took part in exceptional cases.

Taking the degree centralities within the network structure into consideration, it is striking that the two nodes with the highest centrality represent countries from 'Western Europe', namely Germany (14.52%) and Sweden (13.72%). The central position of Sweden is especially remarkable, as it has a rather peripheral position within the previously analysed network structures of the Interreg North Sea Region. Even though the 'new' EU member states Poland (11.96%), Lithuania (11.18%), Latvia (9.82%) and Estonia (9.52%) are not as central as Germany and Sweden, the network structure suggests that these countries are better transnationally connected than Denmark (8.63%) and Norway (5.04%) for instance.

However, an examination of the network in more detail, implies that this setting is not reflected in terms of the distribution of lead partners. While about 38.57 percent of the total number of participating organizations during the Interreg IV Baltic Sea Region period (1387) stemmed from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, only eight out of 90 project leaders (8.89%) came from these countries. The remaining projects (91.11 %) were under the leadership of organizations from Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden.

- **Interreg Baltic Sea Region** (2014-2020; results from the first call)

Despite the fact that the following network structure only comprises the first 35 projects that were approved in the first call of the recently started Interreg Baltic Sea Region period, it implies a similar pattern with respect to the centrality of the represented countries within the area of transnational cooperation. Among them Sweden (14.55%), Germany (14.24%), Poland (13.06%), Finland (12.86%) and Lithuania (11.58%) rank among the countries with the highest centrality values. In comparison to the previous funding period, the share of participating organizations stemming from Eastern EU member states even increased. Out of the 506 project partners 208 (41.11%) are from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

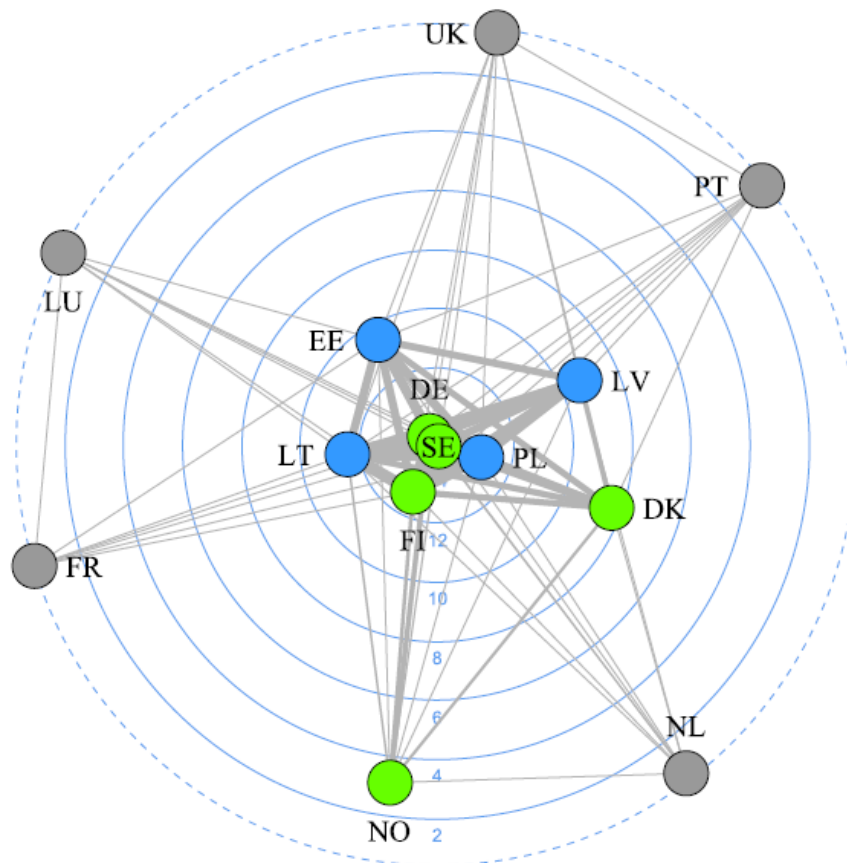


Figure 8. Degree centrality Interreg Baltic Sea Region (2014-2020; results from the first call).
Own calculation and visualization (cf. comments figure 7).

Regarding the distribution of leadership however, a similar pattern as in the prior funding period emerges: about 85.71% of all projects are led by organizations from either Germany, Denmark, Finland, Germany or Sweden. Only a minority, five projects, have a lead partner from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania or Poland. In addition, it is striking Norway has moved towards the periphery of the network structure. Its centrality decreased by about 1.94 % percentage points. Project partners from Belarus, are at least in the first round of approved projects, not part of the transnational cooperation network.

In sum, according to hypothesis 1, actors from ‘new’ member states, are less well transnational connected within the network of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. In turn, that would mean, that ‘old’ member states in general have a more central position. At first sight, taking the outputs from the network analysis together, the most central nodes within the transgovernmental networks are indeed Sweden and Germany, while nodes that represent ‘Eastern or Central Europe’ have a more peripheral position within the network. The outputs, however, also

indicate on an aggregated level, that actors from these countries are better connected than, for instance, actors from Denmark or Norway. Simultaneously, it is striking that the networks, which are illustrating the transnational connections within the North Sea Region, show a similar pattern: despite the fact that this cooperation programme solely covers countries from ‘Western Europe’, it is necessary to mention that varying degree centralities are observable here as well.

As I will discuss in chapter 6.1.1 in more detail, this allows for the conclusion that neither the geographical position nor the duration of the EU membership are sufficient conditions themselves to explain the position of a country within the overall network of transnational cooperation. In light of this, another factor is all the more striking: the low share of project lead partners coming from Eastern Europe. As outlined in chapter 4, the expert interviews mainly aimed at investigating the underlying determinants for the network constellations on the one hand and the varying shares of lead partners on the other hand that were not immediately clear from the provided data and the network analysis.

5.1.2 Expert interviews

Regarding this, numerous respondents mentioned the decisive role of lead partners (cf. chapter 2.2) and the actor’s administrative capacities for instance with respect to financial and human resources. First of all, the previous descriptive analysis, according to which few lead partners in the Baltic Sea Region stem from Eastern countries, was confirmed by various experts (i.a. A-SA; B-BSR-1). On an aggregated level, the positions of the countries within the networks seem to relate at least in parts to the number of lead partners originating from this country. According to one respondent’s experience, there is an association between the lead partner’s origin and the tendency to gather project partners from the same region because of “political reasons” (B-BSR-2, 7). In terms of their budget and role within the project, however, the respondent emphasized that these actors might also be relatively insignificant. The interviewee interpreted this as a central factor that might explain the higher degree centrality of states that provide many lead partners within the network (ibid, 7)⁴³.

In line with the network analysis and the descriptive statistics on the lead partners, this interpretation holds for both cooperation programmes: for the Interreg North Sea Region as well as for the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. In this context, it is striking that the programme

⁴³ In order to ensure an anonymization of the personal data, each expert, which I interviewed for this master thesis, was assigned to a code (cf. chapter 5.2.3). The digit following the first comma (i.e. B-BSR_2, “7”) represents the question on the specific interview transcripts to which the expert answered.

manuals point out the special status of lead partners. Designated as a so-called “lead partner principle” it is highlighted that these actors are “responsible for submitting the project application to the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat” (JS BSR, 2015, p. 8). Thus, in light of the significant roles that is attached to project leaders, the expert interviews especially offered the chance to scrutinize the before analysed network constellations and the strikingly high amount of lead partners stemming from countries from ‘old’ EU member states in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region.

As pointed out in the theoretical framework, Dąbrowski and colleagues highlight the dependence of the success of cohesion policy on an effective multi-level governance framework. With respect to project partnerships they emphasize that actors from Central and Eastern Europe are confronted with “many barriers” (Dąbrowski et al., 2014, pp. 360-361). Regarding this and in consideration of the strikingly low share of lead partners from Eastern Europe in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, the interviewees especially stressed the following three aspects: the newly introduced two-step application procedure (1), the involvement of external management consultancies (2) and alternative funding instruments (3).

- **Two-step application procedure (1/3):**

The varying administrative capacities appear to play a decisive role especially within the selection processes. In comparison to the previous funding periods, the 2014-2020 phase is characterised by a renewed application process. For the first time, a two-step-application procedure was introduced in the Interreg North Sea Region as well as in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. According to the cooperation programmes, this is an attempt to “simplify the application process and to reduce the work put into unsuccessful ideas and provide more uniform funding for detailed application development” (2014TC16RFTN005, 2014, p. 8; cf. chapter 2.2). With special regard to the administrative capacities of lead partners, however, the findings from the interviews pointed out, that this two-step application procedure entails contradictory consequences.

Initially its introduction was supposed to lower the “inhibition level” especially with respect to inexperienced project or lead partners (B-NSR-1, 1c). However, several respondents questioned the implementation. One interviewee had the impression that there are varying expectations and demands towards the content and the quality of the various application documents (ibid, 1c). Similarly, two respondents argued the concept note is very time-consuming and therefore not

perceived as a low barrier of entry (A-HE-2, 11; B-NSR-2, 4). In this context, it is remarkable that two interviewees underlined that experience in applying for funding is of decisive importance. According to them, partners from ‘old’ member states might have an “experience-based advantage” with respect to the formulation of applications and the requirements they should meet (B-BSR-2, 4; B-BSR-1, 4).

▪ **Involvement of external management consultancies (2/3):**

Regarding the application procedure, most experts observed an increasing involvement of management consultancies. Interestingly, this is not necessarily reflected by the data that was provided by the Joint Secretariats for the network analysis. This is all the more remarkable, since external management consultancies are often not listed as project partners in official statistics such as those used for the network analysis. Three respondents highlighted the fact that the presentation of the project idea within the given application forms and especially the use of specific key words are of utmost importance for a successful submission (A-RPA, 7; A-HE-1, 7; B-BSR-1, 7). Due to their wide-ranging expertise with respect to Interreg, one respondent assumed that project applications that were supported by such consultancies have comparatively higher chances for approval (B-BSR-1, 7). The involvement of external consultancies is perceived as a “dilemma” (A-RPA; 7)

In consideration of the highly competitive application procedure,⁴⁴ one interviewee pointed out that proposals have to be of high-level professionalism in order to be successful. Therefore, most project applicants that represent public authorities were not able to meet the requirements due to limited administrative capacities especially in the public sector (B-BSR-3, 16). However, it is argued that the involvement of external consultancies is for logical reasons. Due to their expert knowledge, regarding aspects such as the structure of the applications, the exact wording or the presentation of a project idea their collaboration is of benefit (A-RPA; 7; B-BSR-3, 16). However, the involvement of external consultancies during the application phase often results in high fees (A-HE-1, 7).

In this respect, the project leaders are confronted with unfavourable conditions – especially since the application requires human and financial investments during a phase, where the

⁴⁴ As an example serves the decision by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Monitoring Committee in November 2015 which approved 35 project applications as a second step of the first call of the Interreg V period. Thus, in the end, 12.4 percent of in total 282 concept notes that were initially submitted as a first step in February 2015 (Interreg BSR 2015d, e). Retrieved from <https://www.interreg-baltic.eu/news-detail/news/statistics-first-call-for-applications.html> (last access: 28 June 2016) and <https://www.interreg-baltic.eu/news-detail/news/81-project-concepts-are-invited-to-develop-project-proposals.html> (last access: 28 June 2016).

approval of the project and therefore the reimbursement through the ERDF co-financing is still unclear. Therefore, one might assume that this “dilemma” impedes the chance for lead partners that are financially weak. However, this would mean that Piattoni’s assumption with respect to the linkage of cohesion policy to the multi-level governance, according to which “regions should mobilize at the EU level (outward movements on the X1X2 plane)”, can only be confirmed in parts (Piattoni, 2010, p. 102). The findings imply that a mobilization at the EU level via the policy instrument Interreg appears to be more likely for lead partners which are able to involve external management consultancies.

▪ **Alternative funding instruments (3/3):**

In this context, one respondent drew attention to alternative funding instruments. From the interviewee’s experience project partners from ‘new’ EU member states mostly ask for the “investment components” of the Interreg instruments (B-BSR-3, 3). As one decisive factor which might explain the comparatively peripheral position from these actors within the Interreg network, the respondent pointed out that they might be eligible to a relatively higher amount of alternative funding subsidies that have higher co-financing rates than Interreg or even cover all arising expenses. The respondent described Interreg as a policy instrument with comparatively few financial aid (B-BSR-3, 17). Furthermore, the respondent emphasized that partners are only entitled to a limited amount of ERDF co-financing. This is for instance the case in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region where a co-financing share of 75 percent applies for partners from Germany, while partners from Poland or the Balkans receive a reimbursement of 85 percent (JS BSR, 2015, p. 6).

In addition, the so-called reimbursement principle is perceived as a barrier for actors to take part in Interreg projects (B-BSR-1, 4). According to that principle, “each project partner needs to pre-finance its activities” (JS BSR, 2015, p. 8). Two interviewees that are in charge of the coordination of project partners pointed out that stakeholders from Eastern countries face more difficulties as they might have a higher scarcity of financial resources and are therefore less able to raise capital for the co-payments and the pre-financing (B-BSR-1; 4; B-BSR-3, 9). A general difficulty with respect to the ability to compete with alternative ERDF funding instruments is a weakness in terms of public relations. Thus, from one interviewee’s experience, “a politician favours to present a two million euros grant instead of 100.000 euros”. In addition “it is difficult to explain to the public what we are doing”, especially with respect to the exchange of ideas among project partners (B-NSR-2, 14

5.2 Social dimension (Expert interviews)

The following sub-chapter aims at shedding light on the underlying social determinants for transnational cooperation and at testing hypothesis 2⁴⁵. In this regard, it especially considers connections, actors have even before the implementation of projects within the Interreg B programme on a personal or on a topical level. The fact that the interviewed experts represent a certain variance with respect to their roles within the Interreg programme (cf. chapter 4.3) provided the opportunity to consider the social dimension from varying levels of governance. Based on the statements by the interviewed experts, three aspects could be elaborated in the context of the social dimension: pre-existing connections (1), type of issue (2) and individual competences (3).

- **Pre-existing connections (1/3):**

According to the European Commission the Interreg programme “helped reduce the distances between territorial stakeholders located in different foreign countries” (Wassenberg et al., 2015, p. 38). On the one hand, the findings from the interviews partly confirm this claim – especially with respect to projects that build upon collaborations within the framework of previous Interreg funding periods. On the other hand, it is argued that this process is quite time-consuming. In one case, an interviewed expert represented an organization that was partner in a project that was approved within the first call of the 2014-2020 funding period and based on a project that was implemented in the prior Interreg IV funding period. Despite the fact that the project team even involved “new” partners, the expert highlighted that it was “extremely important that the same people sit round the table” (A-RI, 1b, 6). According to the respondent, this enabled to “keep the network alive” (ibid, 1b, 6). Against the backdrop that project partners have to provide their own contribution in order to be entitled for co-financing (JS BSR, 2015, p. 6), several experts highlighted the importance of mutual trust. One actor, whose organization already took part in several Interreg projects but applied for the first time within the 2014-2020 funding period when the interview was conducted, argued, that knowing the project partners or the lead partner “plays an important role” with respect to the organization’s decision to participate in the current funding period 2014-2020: “the higher the budget, the greater the trust has to be” (A-HE-1, 8).

⁴⁵ H2: *The better actors are connected to other potential partners even before the project implementation, the higher are the chances for transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme* (cf. chapter 3.3.2).

From a rather general perspective – according to one actor who is in charge of coordination and consultation – direct acquaintance of the individuals that are representing the partner organization is not a necessary condition to take part in a project. The respondent however described it as a “suitable” factor since it simplifies the development of an Interreg project and the distribution of the work packages. From the expert’s experience, such a communication platform enables a much more “intensive and efficient” process of development (B-NSR-2, 14). At least from the perspective of the experts that were interviewed for the thesis, the relationship between the project partners is in parts already decisive even before the project implementation and during the application phase. Another expert emphasized that face-to-face meetings are a basic requirement during the initial phase of a project, especially with respect to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. Against the backdrop that project partners from varying geographical origins cooperate transnational on distance, it is important “to meet on an equal footing” (A-RPA, 4). In sum, project partners that are comparatively experienced with respect to the Interreg programme appear to profit from existing social connections during the application as well the implementation phase. In this regard, factors such as mutual trust, joint project experience and a vital communication platform are of special relevance (B-NSR-2; A-RPA; A-RI).

Vice versa, this raises the question how partners, which have less established connections to other actors or even no experience at all with respect to the Interreg programmes, get access to this so-called ‘family’⁴⁶ (BBSR, 2015). From a rather general perspective, it is striking that all interviewed experts from regional public authorities who are in charge of the project partner coordination and consultation agree in principle that the entry barriers are quite low from a social perspective (B-NSR-2, 4; B-BSR-3, 13). Regarding this, they pointed out opportunities to join partner meetings on a regional, national or international level as well as online exchange platforms. According to these experts, such meetings enable the chance to “get relatively fast into contact” with other potential project partners even before the project application (B-NSR-2, 4).

In order to scrutinize this statement, the perspective of comparatively unexperienced project actors was of special relevance. Among the interviewed experts, one respondent initiated an Interreg project as a lead partner for the first time, without any personal experience regarding the Interreg programme (A-HE-2, 1a). Shortly after the interview was conducted, the represented organization submitted a concept note within the second call of the Interreg Baltic

⁴⁶ Interreg networking events are often called “family reunions”.

Sea Region funding period 2014-2020 (cf. chapter 4.3.1). Due to few pre-existing connections, the respondent compared the search for project partners to a “snowball sampling” (A-HE-2, 1c). The expert considered two factors as crucial for the composition of the project team: first, professional expertise with respect to the topic; second, representatives from all countries that are covered by the cooperation programmes, in order to increase “the chances of the project” for approval (ibid, 1c). Despite support from a management consultancy, the preparation phase of more than a year for the concept note can also be traced back to the time-consuming partner search. Regarding that, the respondent stated: “perhaps it would have been easier if we had many established connection” (ibid, 1c, 11). This endurance with respect to the partner networking was strongly determined by the support of the represented organization according to the respondent. Due to the extensive use of resources that are not fully reimbursed, the respondent assessed this as a bureaucratic obstacle especially for potential private partners (A-HE-2, 11).

- **Type of issue (2/3):**

In order to further evaluate the connections between the project partners, the interviewed experts were asked for the “type of issue” their projects are dealing with. Regarding the distinction between common issues and transnational issues, as outlined chapter 3.3.2, most respondents reacted in a hesitating manner (A-HE-1, 2; A-HE-2, 2, A-RPA; 2). One actor criticized the distinction as an “artificial classification which has nothing to do with the primary idea of Interreg” (A-RPA, 2). Other actors classified their project spontaneously as a common issue by arguing that it could also have been a “pure German project” (A-RI, 2; A-SA, 2). Simultaneously they highlighted that transnational cooperation stimulated the projects outputs in a positive manner (ibid, 2; ibid, 2). In sum, the respondents’ reactions confirmed Colomb’s line of argumentation according to which “the boundary between ‘common’ and ‘transnational’ issues is, in practice, not clear cut (Colomb, 2007, p. 357).

Thus, while the type of issue and its underlying distinction into ‘common’ and ‘transnational’ appears to be of minor importance, the interviews revealed that the thematic focus itself plays an important role for the actor’s decision to refuse a project request. Several experts, who I assigned to group A, highlighted the fact that they would only cooperate across borders and participate within the framework of the Interreg programmes if a project would be of use in terms of content for the organization (A-HE-1, 8; A-HE-2, 2; A-RPA, 8; A-SA, 8). This is in line with the line of argumentation of most interviewed experts regarding the chronological

order of the project development. Questioned on whether there was first the ‘problem’ in form of the project issue or the ‘solution’ in form of the Interreg programmes, every interviewed expert (group A) argued, that there was a problem in the first instance for which they were looking for possible solutions. Even though these project partners acknowledge that there has to be a temporal link to an Interreg call for project applications, they stressed that the funding itself was of secondary importance. Regarding the above mentioned project that succeeded a prior collaboration, one interviewed expert argued that most project partners agreed in the necessity to “continue the activities” (A-RI, 1b). With respect to projects that did not base on prior collaborations within the framework of the Interreg programme, one expert argued with respect to the chronological order, that the responsible actors were wondering, “which partners do we have that are active in this field and which strategic themes do we want to push anyway” (A-SA, 1, 8). According to this actor, one should not take part in a project, if that was not envisaged anyway, regardless of the Interreg programme (ibid, 8).

In contrast to that, it is striking that the answers from the respondents who are in charge of coordination and consultation of project partners (group B) reveal a rather mixed picture. They observe quite “different approaches” regarding the actors they give advice. From the experience of one of these actors, applications that solely modify a local idea in order to receive funding within the Interreg framework, often will not work out (B-BSR-1). Being in accordance with this claim, its counterpart from another region argued that if there was not a comprehensible problem, “a project will not be good”. From the respondent’s point of view, it would be too costly to apply with a project idea “just because of the money” (B-NSR-1, 1a, cf. chapter 5.3). Thus, at least with respect to the personal opinions from these respondents, one can conclude that the chances of a successful project application increase in case that the actors are indeed connected via a problem that meets the requirements for transnational cooperation.

- **Individual competences (3/3):**

Individual competences rank among the determinants that I did not consider being decisive to such an extent from the outset of the interviews. However, it was striking, that the interviewed experts explicitly highlighted the impact of individual characteristics on the partnership within the framework of transnational cooperation. Regarding the individual composition of the project teams, all interviewed experts emphasized the relevance of personal connections and competences that determine the success of projects. In case that individuals who are forced by their organization’s top level to implement a project due to political or administrative reasons

do not have the resources or willingness, “the project performance will turn out to be bad” (B-BSR-3, 12; cf. A-HE-2, 6). With respect to the individual skills, the respondents put special emphasis on the following individual skills: English language proficiency, openness towards other cultures and enthusiasm for transnational cooperation within the framework of Interreg.

At the outset of project developments, linguistic barriers apparently often cause a problem. According to the interviewees, this is especially the case for local authorities who are considering an application (B-NSR-3, 12). It is highlighted that the overall ability of project actors in the Interreg North Sea Region to communicate in English is higher compared to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region (A-SA, 4). Whether this is an absolute advantage, however, remains unclear. Given that the Interreg North Sea region covers the United Kingdom and therefore project partners that are native speakers, could even result in a situation, where project partners who are not fluent in English lack the courage to communicate (B-NSR-1, 4). This paradox becomes visible with respect to the Baltic Sea Region that does not cover any country where English is used as a first official language: “I think that the fear of speaking or writing English is lower” (ibid, 4). According to these statements, those ‘shared’ difficulties with respect to English language proficiency even appear to be a connecting element among the project partners in the Baltic Sea Region. Another respondent confirms this assumption by arguing that everyone shows understanding for each other due to own difficulties to express oneself in English (A-HE-2, 4). Besides, it was argued that language skills do “not play any role” as long as the partners are motivated (A-HE-1, 5).

Due to the complex application and implementation procedure that has to be managed in a transnational manner by project partners with varying cultural backgrounds, the openness of individuals is described as a key determinant for a successful project. Regarding the partnership of the project in which respondent A-SA participates “every project partner has at least one person that is open, transparent and without reservation” (A-SA, 6). From another actor’s perspective, who argued that a central element of Interreg is the exchange of knowledge, one should have “a great interest in dealing with other cultures” (B-NSR-2, 4). According to the respondent’s experience, the willingness of actors to share their knowledge therefore is a necessary condition for the achievement of the underlying objectives of the Interreg programmes. Regarding that, the respondent argued that universities have an advantage in this context, due to their international orientation: “they already have networks” (B-NSR-2, 4). While one expert argued that it is not possible to analyse individuals and organizations as

separated entities (A-RPA, 6), another described individuals as the driving force within the Interreg projects: “you need people who are passionate about it, who are able to share their own enthusiasm and can separate international from regional needs” (B-BSR-3, 12).

5.3 Value dimension (Expert interviews)

While the previous chapters focused on the administrative and social conditions that determine the project partnerships within the framework of the Interreg B programme, the following analysis sheds light on the actor’s incentives and on hypothesis 3⁴⁷. In light of the “often cited added value of transnational cooperation” (Minniberger, 2016, p. 239), it aims at scrutinizing the reasons for actors to take part in such projects, based on the previously elaborated findings on the pre-existing networks, types of issue and individual competences. Whereas the perspectives on the barriers and eligible costs of transnational cooperation regarding the reimbursement principle, the co-financing and search for suitable project partners were examined before, the following analysis mainly focuses on the actual motives to cooperate transnationally.

The underlying basis of this analysis is Dühr’s and Nadin’s distinction between ‘soft’ and ‘hard values’. As pointed out in the theoretical chapter, the authors argue that the main value of transnational cooperation lies in “more qualitative learning outcomes”. In contrast to that, “hard infrastructure investments” are classified as secondary objectives (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375). Derived from this line of argumentation, the hypothesis expects that ‘soft values’ outweigh ‘hard values’ as the actors’ main motives to take part in projects within the framework of the Interreg B programme. In order to enable an in-depth examination, the interviewed experts were therefore asked to describe their organization’s (group A) respectively other organizations’ (group B) main reasons for transnational cooperation. In this context, they were invited to spontaneously classify these motives on a schematic diagram based on the Dühr’s and Nadin’s distinction between ‘soft values’ and ‘hard values’ (cf. chapter 3.3.3). As outlined in chapter 4.3, the validity of this schematic diagram might be questioned in terms of generalization. Nevertheless, it served as a suitable overview of the experts’ positions and as a useful point of departure for the further identification of reasons for transnational cooperation.

⁴⁷ H3: *‘Soft’ values outweigh ‘hard values’ as the actors’ main motives for participating in the Interreg programme* (cf. chapter 3.3.3).

While the administrative and social determinants in the previous chapters were analysed by taking the findings from the expert interviews all together into consideration, this analytical part distinguishes between the two groups of respondents: project and lead partners (group A) and actors who mainly have coordinative and consultative functions (group B). In sum, the findings show a mixed picture. With respect to the project and lead partners, there are remarkable differences regarding their position within the schematic diagram. While representatives from higher education institutions had the tendency to classify the main motives of their organization for transnational cooperation within the Interreg programme on the right hand side of the schematic diagram ('hard values'), the experts from the higher research institution, the regional public authority and the sectoral agency spontaneously classified their position on the left hand side ('soft values') in the course of the interviews. In comparison to that, the experts that are mainly in charge of consultation and coordination of project partners, were asked for their impression of the main motives of the organizations they advise. While only one expert had the tendency to classify the main motives towards 'soft values', most experts either argued that the reasons are "in-between" or rather towards the 'hard values'.

- **Group A: motives for transnational cooperation**

As one expert critically pointed out, the results from these spontaneous classifications of the main motives for transnational cooperation should not be interpreted in a "black-and-white" mind-set (A-RPA, 3). Indeed, most actors were quite hesitant in the first instance, to spontaneously mark their opinion on the schematic diagram. Nevertheless, in the end, they all agreed on weighing the main values from the perspective of their organization with respect to Interreg. Concerning the 'hard values', it is striking that the actor's perception of the co-financing is ambiguous. On the one hand, according to one respondent whose organization is a higher education institution, third-party-funding ranks among the most important reasons for the participation within the Interreg B programme: "I think that applies to any university, since we rely on external funds in order to finance staff" (A-HE-1, 3). The importance of external funds such as Interreg for universities is highlighted by another respondent in a similar manner. Thanks to the ERDF co-financing in the event that the project application will be approved within the framework of the Interreg programme, it would be possible to recruit new staff (A-HE-2, 3). On the other hand, however, the share of the co-financing respectively the amount of the own-contribution could even be an exclusion criterion for actors to take part in a specific project partnership. Regarding the fact that the funding rate in the Interreg North Sea Region programme is 50 percent, one respondent argued: "We would like to take part, but our hands

are tied” (A-HE-1, 8). According to this actor, it has already been difficult to realize the project application within the framework of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, even though the share of the own-contribution is comparatively lower in this cooperation programme (cf. chapter 4.1).

In light of this, the findings therefore also show that the so-called ‘hard values’ are not the sole purpose for transnational cooperation. Despite the own contribution, project partners and project leaders have to finance within the framework of Interreg, the policy instrument appears to stick out compared to alternative, national funding instruments: “In comparison, EU projects are more exciting due to the network philosophy” (A-HE-1, 10). In addition, the respondent pointed out personal learning experience with respect to intercultural skills and language skills. (A-HE-1, 10). Regarding the fact that these two respondents also highlighted individual progresses, such as the opportunity to get to know a variety of experts from neighbouring countries or alternative working methods, indicates that the own financial contributions are envisaged for justified reasons. On the one hand, by means of Interreg projects, the absorption of funds could be increased (A-HE-2, 10). On the other hand, ‘soft values’ appear to be of relevance especially with respect to the personal experience the individual representatives of the varying institutions gain and the possible increase of the universities’ visibility on an international level (A-HE-1, 10; A-HE-2, 10). With respect to the sustainability of these connections, however, the two experts represent organizations with varying points of departure. As previously mentioned, A-HE-2 is in charge of a project whose partnership was generated without any pre-existing networks. In contrast to that, expert A-HE-1 could profit from a long-standing joint working experience from which new contacts can be generated (A-HE-1, 10).

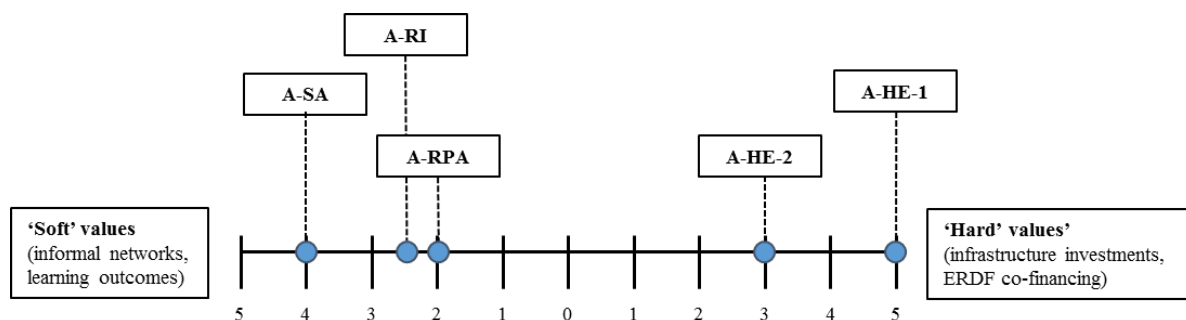


Figure 9. Group A - Project partners and lead partners: Spontaneous classification by the respondents interviewed for this master thesis of the main motives of their organization for transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme. Own illustration (based on Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375).

When comparing the statements of the interviewed experts that are representing the universities to the statements of experts that are representing other institutions, slight differences with respect to the emphasis of ‘soft values’ are observable. For actor A-RI “learning outcomes have definitely been the main focus” as a motive for repeatedly taking part in a project within the 2014-2020 programming phase (A-RI, 3). Given that the project bases on a pre-existing network, the decision for transnational cooperation was determined by a “political decision” (A-RI, 3). First of all it has been conditioned by the fact that all partners were situated in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. This is why the North Sea Region has not been a real alternative for a project application at the point in time when the interview was conducted. In addition the expert claimed that the share of own contribution has been of minor importance, since the organization attaches great importance to the project itself (A-RI, 3). As a consequence, the expert argued that the added value of transnational cooperation from the personal perspective goes hand in hand with the added value from the organizational perspective: the expansion of an informal network across borders even beyond the duration of an Interreg project. This is why the respondents highlighted advantages such as “to know whom to call, if you are considering to attend an event” (A-RI, 10). In addition the respondent cooperates with actors in successor projects, “I would never have met without Interreg” (A-RI, 10). In line with this approach and by referring to the learning outcomes, expert A-RPA emphasized that the main reasons for transnational cooperation lied in the opportunity of mutual learning: “diversity leads to innovation” (A-RPA, 3, 10). According to the interviewee’s experience, young people often attach importance to the cross-linking degree of their future employers. In this context the interviewee emphasized the organization’s ambition to offer interesting working places to its employees. However, according to the respondent’s own assessment, the regional public authority is relatively unknown. Since it mainly “recruits at the university”, the respondent aims at increasing the organization’s visibility to qualified staff by engaging in Interreg projects (A-RPA, 1a, 3).

Among the interviewed experts only one respondent (A-SA) clearly emphasized that the ‘soft values’ outweigh the ERDF funding. By arguing that financing needs of the organization the respondent was representing were ensured regardless of its participation in the Interreg programme, the main interest lies in establishing an international network not only on a “human level” but also on a “technical level” (A-SA, 3). With respect to the so-called “added value of transnational cooperation” (Minniberger, 2016, p. 239) the respondent compared the programme to a “community”. The interviewee emphasized that transnational cooperation

enabled the formation of “really strong relationships on which you can build any kind of projects” (A-SA, 10).

In sum, the answers by the interviewed respondents (group A) show a mixed picture of the main reasons of project partners and lead partners for transnational cooperation. Based on the in-depth insights gained by means of the semi-structured questionnaires it is not possible to confirm hypothesis 3 according to which ‘soft values’ outweigh ‘hard values’ as the actor’s main motives to take part in the Interreg B programme. Nevertheless, it is possible to outline an answer to the second ancillary question from the perspective of the project partners: while the ERDF funding is classified as being of primary interest for universities to take part in Interreg project, non-educative actors highlight the role of ‘soft values’, by claiming that the co-financing is of minor interest. In general, it is striking that most experts emphasized the benefit of profiting from the connections gained within Interreg projects even beyond the framework of the policy instrument. Given that the amount of funding is relatively small on the one hand and that the application procedure is comparatively complex on the other hand, the Interreg programme appears to encourage Europeanization through informal networks. As it will be discussed in chapter 6, the findings however show that these informal networks are not necessarily the primary reasons for transnational cooperation themselves.

- **Group B: general impression of the organization’s main motives for transnational cooperation**

In comparison to the project and lead partners, the representatives of the regional authorities who mainly have coordinative and consultative functions, rarely act as project partners themselves. In the course of their advisory service, they are mainly in charge of supporting actors from their regions who are interested in transnational cooperation in order to ensure that as much as actors as possible from varying levels of governance are represented in project partnerships (cf. B-NSR-3, 1). This is why it was argued, that a specific classification from the perspective of *their* organization was not possible, since the regional public authorities are barely members of such project partnerships (B-NSR-3, 7).

By comparing the results of this sample to the previously elaborated findings, there are two striking features: In contrast to the classification of the project and lead partners, a slight trend towards ‘hard values’ is observable. In addition, the assessment especially with respect to the

‘soft’ values slightly differs from one another depending on the cooperation programme. In the course of the interviews, advisors that mainly deal with project partners that take part in the Interreg North Sea Region classified their general impression of the organization’s main motives on the schematic diagram either in the centre or towards ‘soft’ values (B-NSR-3, B-NSR-1). In contrast to that, the interviewed experts who mainly deal with the Interreg Baltic Sea Region had the tendency to classify their general impression from the organization’s overall motives for transnational cooperation within the framework of the policy instrument towards ‘hard values’ (B-BSR-1, B-BSR-2, B-BSR-3).

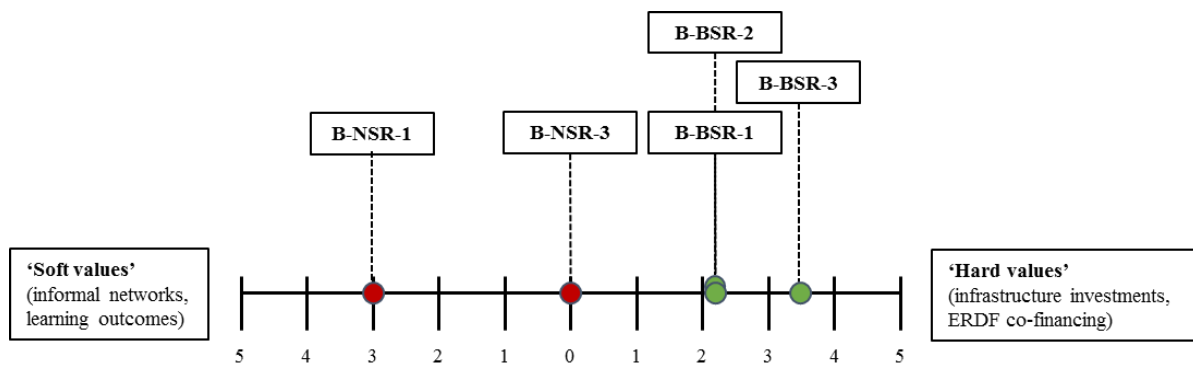


Figure 10. Group B – Advisors from regional public authorities (with coordinative and consultative functions): Spontaneous classification by the respondents of their impression of the main motives of the organizations they advise for transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme. Own illustration (based on Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375).

The interviewed experts (group B) pointed out that there is a mutual influence of these two categories (B-BSR-1, B-BSR-2, B-BSR-3). This is in accordance with the previously cited expert A-RPA (group A), who criticized that the comparison between ‘soft values’ and ‘hard values’ is not “black-and-white” (A-RPA, 3). One expert emphasized that learning outcomes and the chance to exchange with partners from foreign countries were an “unquestionable” benefit (B-BSR-2, 3). Nevertheless, these features together were not sufficient conditions for transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme: “That alone would not be enough to convince the hierarchy to take part in such projects (ibid, 3). Another respondent, who justified financial motives for taking part in Interreg projects as “legitimate” reasons, confirmed this line of argumentation (B-BSR-3, 4). Thanks to the ERDF co-financing those organization could implement projects that were impossible with own financial resources alone (ibid, 4).

On the one hand, respondent B-NSR-1 acknowledged the participation in Interreg projects for “pragmatic reasons” especially with respect to municipalities. According to the interviewee, it was not necessarily required to hire new staff within the framework of Interreg “in contrast to

other funding programmes” (B-NSR-1, 3). On the other hand, with respect to the relevance of “hard values”, respondent B-NSR-1 was comparatively sceptical. Regarding the reimbursement principle, the expert argued that “the actors have to be clearly aware that they have to pre-invest”. According to the actors’ experience, this is a major reason why the “transnational added value of networking and transferring knowledge” was a key determinant (B-NSR-1, 2).

In light of this, the respondent identified the share of the ERDF co-financing as being of minor relevance. According to the expert the lower share of the own contribution might increase the actor’s motivation to “have a look into the Baltic Sea programme” (B-NSR-1, 3). With respect to the networks however, the respondent pointed out the differences regarding the partnership structures between the two cooperation programmes. By comparing the countries that are covered by the Interreg North Sea Region with the countries that are covered by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region the question arises, “whether the economic relations [...] are really given?” (ibid, 3). This view is confirmed by the other experts as well. Even though expert B-BSR-2 described the comparatively higher number of applications within the Baltic Sea Region as an indicator that the varying funding rates determine the actor’s motivation to apply for an Interreg project, the differences with respect to the networks was underlined as well. Due to the fact that the North Sea Region is more homogenous, it is argued that the various actors from multiple governance levels have a comparable high quality level. As a consequence, the chance for implementing a project “on equal terms is higher in the North Sea Region” (B-BSR-2, 3). By sharing this line of argumentation, expert B-BSR-3 likewise emphasized the varying stages of development with respect to the countries covered by the North Sea Region and the Baltic Sea Region (B-BSR-3). To sum up, these determinants might, according to respondent B-BSR-2, explain why numerous affluent project partners are willing to cooperate transitionally within the North Sea Region even despite the comparatively lower funding rates. (B-BSR-2, 3).

In sum, the findings from this analysis confirm the previously outlined mixed picture with respect to the main reasons organizations have, to participate in Interreg projects. In general, it is visible that most experts whose answers were analysed in this subchapter had the tendency to classify the main reasons for transnational cooperation in the centre respectively on the right hand side of the schematic diagram. Due to their advisory role, however, it can be assumed that this only reflects a general impression and would differ if they were supposed to classify an individual organization in light of the multi-level governance approach. Nevertheless, at least

with respect to the present sample of experts, the findings from the interviews imply that neither the co-financing rate nor the informal networks themselves are insufficient determinants for taking part as project partners within the framework of Interreg B. Regarding the informal networks, it was argued that, due to the re-imbursement principle on the one hand and the composition of the project partnerships depending on the cooperation programme on the other hand, ‘hard values’ were not perceived as sufficient determinants for transnational cooperation. Simultaneously, however, it became clear that the ‘soft values’ themselves do not outweigh ‘hard values’. According to the experience of the experts, informal networks and learning outcomes are not sufficient determinants to justify the required efforts for project partners to participate within the Interreg B programme.

6. Discussion

In light of the theoretical framework and the empirical investigation, this chapter aims at answering the main research question that introduced this master thesis: *What determines the partnership of European transnational cooperation projects within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region?* Core of this chapter is the discussion of the results by especially focusing on its theoretical implications – with respect to the multi-level governance and Europeanization approaches – as well as on the practical implications concerning the Interreg programme itself. Second, I will consider shortcomings of this thesis by especially referring to limitations with respect to the association between the theoretical framework and the empirical investigation as well as to the methodology. Finally, this chapter intends to shed light on the future development of the Interreg programme. Apart from pointing out recommendations for improvement of the transnational cooperation within the framework of Interreg B in general, I will reflect on the future performance of the Interreg North Sea Region in light of the ‘Brexit’ as well as on possible scientific ideas for further research.

6.1 Theoretical and empirical implications

The main research question will be answered along the three explanatory dimensions and hypotheses that were outlined in the theoretical part and analysed in the prior chapter. This subchapter concludes with a brief summary of the main findings on the determinants for transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme.

6.1.1 Administrative dimension

In order to answer the main research question in a comprehensible manner, I suggested focusing on the overall composition of the project partnerships within the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. In light of the multi-level governance approach, the analysis was based on transgovernmental networks in the first instance. These networks resulted from the project partnerships of governmental and non-governmental actors within the whole 2007-2013 funding period and the first call of the 2014-2020 funding period. By arguing that nation-states illustrate the aggregation of connections that result from the overall transnational cooperation, I assumed that the composition of the transgovernmental networks reflected the overall administrative capacities to participate in the Interreg programme. In view of debates on “barriers to such cooperation” actors from Central and Eastern EU member states are confronted with (Dąbrowski et al., 2014, pp. 360–361) and an alleged failed breach of the “east-west divide” (Epstein & Jacoby, 2014, p. 12; Langbein, 2014) I hypothesized:

H1: Actors from states that became an EU member in 2004 or later are expected to face more administrative difficulties and are therefore transnationally less connected within the overall networks of the Interreg B programme compared to states that joined the EU earlier.

Based on the outputs from the network analysis and the findings retrieved from the sample of interviewed experts, I argue that this hypothesis can be carefully accepted. However, as I will outline in the following, this verification requires a critical discussion especially with respect to the theoretical and practical implications. In general, the findings show that the connectivity of the countries within the framework of the two cooperation programmes of analysis partly differ. With respect to the analysed funding periods of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, the results indicate that Sweden and Germany are the most central countries within the networks. In comparison to that, countries that joined the EU as member states in 2004 (cf. chapter 2.2) have a more peripheral position. Thus, at first sight, this might confirm at least parts of hypothesis 1, according to which actors from these states were transnationally less connected within the framework of the Interreg B programme. Nevertheless, I argue that a closer examination of these results is highly required in order to allow for a comprehensible assessment.

First, this line of argumentation stems from the fact that the network analysis of the 2007-2013 and the 2014-2020 funding periods of the Interreg North Sea Region likewise indicated varying

degree centralities. Thus, just because the cooperation programme only covers countries from ‘old’ EU member states plus Norway⁴⁸ does not necessarily imply that all countries are equally connected to each other on an aggregated level. The network analysis of the Interreg North Sea Region depicts that the Netherlands, followed by Germany and the United Kingdom, had the most central positions resulting from the project partners transnational connections during the Interreg IV period. This basically means that project partners from these countries have the highest number of direct transnational connections to project partners from other countries (cf. Ohm, 2009, p. 292). Regarding the first call of the newly started Interreg V period, this is the case for the Netherlands, Denmark and the United Kingdom. Conversely, countries such as Belgium, Sweden and Norway are less central. The network analysis of the Baltic Sea Region illustrates that, in comparison to Germany and Sweden, Poland and the Baltic states have lower degree centralities. Consequently, the countries positions are more peripheral within the networks. Compared to Denmark and Finland however, their positions are mostly equal or partly even more central. Therefore, by considering these results, I contend that a conclusion, according to which there is an “east-west divide” within the framework of the Interreg programme, would not be suitable if it was exclusively based on the network analysis itself. However, in light of the first ancillary question, I argue that the observed tendency according to which states from ‘Eastern or Central Europe’ are less connected within the network of the Baltic Sea Region, requires a closer look on the composition of the project partnerships.

Regarding this, the findings from the semi-structured interviews imply that there is a mutual impact between the position of the country within the network and the amount of lead partners coming from there. In consideration of the competitive selection procedure, the interviewed experts therefore ascribed great relevance to the project and lead partners’ varying administrative and financial capacities. In this context, however, the composition of the partnerships within the framework of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region is even more striking: among the whole number of projects, actors from Poland, Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania only lead a minority of projects. As elaborated in chapter 5.1 only about 8.9 percent of all projects had a lead partner from these countries during the Interreg IV period. With respect to the approved projects of the first call of the Interreg V period, this was the case for about 14.3 percent of all projects.

⁴⁸ See chapter 2.2.

Third, with respect to the administrative dimension, the qualitative findings suggest that the capability of affording the involvement of management consultancies during the application phase as well as the co-payments in general determine the participation of actors within the framework of the Interreg B programme. In this context, the results imply that project partners respectively lead partners from so-called ‘old’ EU member states tend to have competitive advantages. In consideration of the newly introduced, time-consuming two-step application phase, the qualitative results have shown that actors from these countries have the tendency to be more capable of getting along with the reimbursement principle. Simultaneously, the qualitative findings put forward a further crucial factor for transnational cooperation that is not directly visible from data examined for the network analysis. Against the backdrop of the fact that project partners are only entitled to receive a limited amount of the ERDF co-financing, the results from the expert interviews imply that actors from Eastern European states simply put more effort in alternative funding programmes with comparably more financial support.

As outlined in the theoretical chapter, Dąbrowski and colleagues argue that an “effective multi-level governance and mechanisms for ensuring genuine participation of the local stakeholders are considered as crucial for the success of the recently reformed cohesion policy” (Dąbrowski et al., 2014, p. 361). The outputs from the network analysis in combination with the statistics on the share of lead partners unveil that this ‘genuine participation’ is not given within the framework of the Interreg programme. On the one hand, I argue that a conclusion that was solely based on the connections between the countries on an aggregated level would not be sufficient regarding this way of argumentation. On the other hand, the significant differences with respect to the share of lead partners and the statements by the interviewed experts indicate, that local stakeholders from ‘new’ member states apparently face more difficulties within this multi-level governance structure. Thus, by referring to Piattoni (cf. chapter 3.1), the geographical origin of the partners seem to matter within the framework of the Interreg B programme (Piattoni, 2009, p. 173). However, due to the fact, that the specific legal status of the various actors is not considered in the previous network analysis, the explanatory power of the multi-level governance concept is indeed limited (cf. chapter 3.1). Simultaneously, the findings from the expert interviews such as on the involvement of external management consultancies, indicate, that a rough distinction between the various levels would miss several points that are of crucial importance for instance with respect to the actor’s individual competitive advantages during the application procedure within the framework of the Interreg programme.

6.1.2 Social dimension

While hypothesis 1 focused on the existing connections among project partners, it was argued that the composition of the network structures and the underlying administrative and financial capacities themselves, were not sufficient to elaborate the determinants of the partnership of European transnational cooperation project within the framework of the Interreg B programme. The theoretical expansion of the multi-level governance approach by means of the concept of Europeanization aimed at investigating the social dimension of day-to-day operations with respect to transnational cooperation. Considering the characteristic features of the Interreg programme, I classified the policy instrument as an example, how EU policies influence the behaviour and process of actors on a national, regional or local level (cf. Dąbrowski, 2014; Radaelli, 2003). Against the backdrop that actors from varying countries are required to collaborate, I assumed that social connections among the actors already before the application phase had an impact on the team formation. Consequently, I hypothesized:

H2: The better actors are connected to other potential partners even before the project implementation, the higher are the chances for transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme.

The expert interviews allowed to investigate the results from the network analysis in a greater detail. As I will discuss in the following, I argue that hypothesis 2 can be carefully accepted. First, the research findings suggest that there is an advantage for project partners that can base their project partnerships on pre-existing connections. In this context, it is striking that mutual trust was identified as a decisive determinant for project partners to engage within the framework of the Interreg programme. The results point out that this mainly stems from the fact that the individual project budget is only partly covered by the ERDF co-financing. Because of the time-consuming application procedure, pre-existing connections facilitate the formation of project partnerships as the tasks and the specific roles are already clearer from the beginning. In addition, the implementation of transnational projects serves as a way to extend existing networks. In turn, it can be concluded that comparatively unexperienced actors are confronted with barriers. Even though the interviewed expert who initiated a project for the first time without any experience successfully submitted the concept note⁴⁹ - is unlikely that all project partners are backed up to a similar extent in order to completely construct project partnerships and transgovernmental networks at the outset, even before a project is approved for funding.

⁴⁹ A-HE-2.

Second, even though the findings imply that the connectivity among project partners is characterized by pre-existing networks that might result in mutual trust, they reveal that these are not the only determinants with respect to the social dimension. The empirical investigation uncovers that actors have to see a real need for a transnational project. More specifically, this means that organizations would not take part in Interreg projects just to cooperate transnationally according to the findings of the present thesis. However, With respect to day-to-day operations, it is of minor relevance whether the Interreg projects themselves show characteristic features of a ‘transnational’ or ‘common’ issue as defined by Colomb (Colomb, 2007).

Third, the findings reveal that individual competences are of utmost importance with respect to transnational cooperation. The theoretical foundations already suggested that individual actors representing the participating organizations have an essential role with respect to territorial cooperation (Colomb, 2007; Sousa, 2012). Regarding this, the findings from the expert interviews stress two aspects: first, English language proficiency (cf. chapter 5.2), second, a certain enthusiasm and openness towards foreign project partners. At first sight, both aspects might be postmarked as being of minor relevance. However, against the backdrop of the fact that the interviewed experts consistently highlighted these two determinants, I argue that these findings are highly significant for practical implications. Thus, future trainings and conferences organized by the Joint Secretariats for instance, should not lose sight of these aspects.

In sum, with respect to the theoretical implications regarding the social dimension, the findings thus suggest to have a closer look at the distinct points of departure the multiple actors have in order to “upload” their ideas bottom-up. Especially with respect to organizational learning, the results indicate that individual competences such as language skills or openness towards foreign partners should not be underestimated in the course of transnational cooperation within the Interreg programme. Vice versa, from a top-down perspective, it contributes to an understanding how the “ways of doing things” (Radaelli, 2003) might differ depending on pre-existing transnational connections even before the submission of a project application.

6.1.3 Value dimension

With respect to the “often cited added value of transnational cooperation” (Minniberger, 2016, p. 239), the second ancillary question additionally contributed to the answer to the main research question by focusing on the underlying reasons of project partners to take part in the

Interreg B programme. Referring to the theoretical framework, the policy instrument was described as a “stimulus for Europeanization” (Stead, 2014, p. 23). In consideration of that, I hypothesized:

H3: *‘Soft’ values outweigh ‘hard values’ as the actors’ main motives for participating in the Interreg programme.*

Based on the empirical investigations within the framework of this master thesis, I argue that this hypothesis has to be rejected. The findings from the expert interviews imply a quite mixed picture regarding the reasons of actors to cooperate across borders within the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region.

On the one hand, one can observe a consistency of the actors’ opinion with respect to the importance of informal networks and learning outcomes that result from Interreg projects. The results show, that actors are able to profit from transnational connections that were built in the course of Interreg projects even beyond the framework of the policy instrument. Such relationships are all the more remarkable as they suggest with respect to practical implications that the connections as well as the previously analysed relationships and the degree centralities illustrated by the transgovernmental networks, might even be underrated. Taking the findings together, such connections that “survive” the limited duration of Interreg projects (cf. chapter 2.2) can be classified as a major determinant for the decision of project partners to cooperate transnational within the framework of this policy instrument. Additionally it can be assumed that these connections in turn reinforce the relevance of pre-existing networks for the formation of project partnerships and explain the actors’ willingness to engage themselves in Interreg projects, despite the re-imbusement principles respectively requirements such as concerning the own-contributions.

On the other hand, however, the findings imply that the assumption, according to which ‘soft’ values outweigh ‘hard’ values as the main motives to take part in Interreg projects specifically, is not valid for every project partner. In contrast to the previously discussed findings according to which actors decide to cooperate transnationally within the framework of the Interreg programme *despite* the co-financing regulation, other organizations primarily participate *because* of it. While higher research institutions chiefly take part in Interreg projects in order to ensure the generation of jobs respectively the implementation of research activities, other actors

rather indicate ‘soft values’ as the primary reasons for transnational cooperation. The overall impression of experts that are in charge of coordination and consultation of project partner indicates, however, that this slightly depends on the cooperation programme itself. It is striking that experts who mainly deal within the comparatively homogenous Interreg North Sea Region, where project partners are entitled to a co-financing rate of about 50 percent (2014TC16RFTN005, 2014), classified the main motives either “in-between” or towards ‘soft values’. In contrast to that, their counterparts who are dealing within the rather heterogeneous Baltic Sea Region had the tendency to classify their general impression on the actor’s motivations to take part within the Interreg programme towards ‘hard’ values.

In sum, with respect to the value dimension, the findings suggest that the project partnerships are especially based on two determinants: first, on the homogeneity of the various countries that are covered by cooperation programmes and second, on the role of the various actors within the multi-level governance framework. In view of the concept of Europeanization, the mixed picture with respect to the value dimension unveils a confrontation between the theoretical and empirical implications. The results indicate that “thinking European” (cf. Dühr et al., 2010, p. 362) by taking part within the framework of the Interreg programme does not necessarily solely derive from the motivation of actors to establish informal networks – but also to acquire funds.

6.1.4 The determinants of transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme

This subchapter intends to discuss the most central points that characterize transnational cooperation within the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region in light of the main research question. In a nutshell, the most specific feature is, that actors from varying levels of governance from different countries are required to successfully pass a complex (two-step) application procedure⁵⁰ in order to receive ERDF co-financing for jointly implementing temporary projects. Against this backdrop, the main research question aimed at scrutinizing the determinants for project partnerships within the policy instrument. Based on the findings from the network analysis and the expert interviews, the present master thesis unveils that transnational cooperation within the Interreg B programme is especially shaped by the following three determinants.

⁵⁰ Cf. chapter 2.2.

First, regarding the administrative dimension, the findings show that the project partnerships in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region reflect an “east-west divide”⁵¹ with respect to the distribution of lead partners. In comparison, the amount of lead partners of approved projects that are coming from ‘new’ EU member states is significantly low. Taking the results from the network analysis and the expert interviews into consideration, I argue that the constellation of the project partnerships is strongly determined by the administrative and financial capacities the responsible lead partners have even before the submission of a project application. In consideration of the complex application procedure, the findings reveal that the involvement of external management consultancies is perceived as an opportunity to increase the chances of a project application for approval. The relevance of this specific feature was not expected from the outset. Referring to the answers from the interviewed experts, one can conclude that actors and especially potential project leaders from member states that joined the EU in 2004 or later face more difficulties regarding that compared to actors from ‘old’ member states. Therefore, based on the outputs showing the transgovernmental network constellations and the interviews, I argue that the current effects of the lead partner principle (cf. chapter 2.2) symbolize a risk, that actors that are comparatively “dynamic” (Margaras, 2016, p. 2) with respect to their administrative capacities for instance, tend to have competitive advantages within the framework of the Interreg programme.

Second, with respect to the social dimension, the findings show that mutual trust and experience in working together across borders strongly determine the willingness of actors to engage themselves in Interreg projects. Not expected from the outset was the utmost important role of individual competences such as English language proficiency or openness towards project partners from other countries in this context. In consideration of the concept of multi-level governance as well as the “ways of doing things” (Radaelli, 2003) the findings show, that project partnership are strikingly determined by pre-existing transnational connections even before the submission of a project application. In contrast to that the findings suggest that it is of minor importance, whether the project fulfils the determinants of a ‘transnational’ or ‘common’ issue.

Third, concerning the value dimension, the findings imply that neither ‘soft’ values in terms of informal networks nor ‘hard’ values in terms of the funding are sufficient factors themselves to take part in transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme.

⁵¹ Using the terminology by Epstein & Jacoby, 2014, p. 12.

However, based on the expert interviews, I argue that it depends on the actor's constellation within the cooperation programme as well as on the eligible co-financing rate, which values predominate. In the comparatively heterogeneous Interreg Baltic Sea Region, where the co-financing rate lies at 75 and at 85 percent, the participation in projects appears to be more determined by 'hard' values than 'soft values' compared to the rather homogenous Interreg North Sea Region, where the co-financing rate is 50 percent regardless of the origin and position of the participating actors.

6.2 Limitations and critical reflection

Whereas the reliability and validity of the methodology was discussed in chapter 4, this subchapter mainly aims at critically reflecting on the main limitations of this master thesis. It especially sheds light on the interface between the theoretical and the empirical part and the shortcomings with respect to the multi-level governance approach as a theoretical basis. Furthermore, it points out limitations of the data that was used as a basis for the network analysis as well as the sample of interviewed experts.

Considering the relation between the theoretical foundations and the empirical investigations, the difficulties with respect to the concept of multi-level governance as indicated in chapter 3 could be ironed out only to a limited extent. A major criticism has been the concept's weakness in explaining the "dynamics of European integration" (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 99). Regarding the central focus of this master thesis, this weakness was reflected by a certain difficulty with respect to the formulation of hypotheses in light of this theoretical concept. Being aware of this critique, I however argued that it would not be suitable to ignore the multi-level governance concept with respect to the research question. In his article on the examination of the EU structural fund system and democracy paradoxes, Olsson argues that "using the concept of multi-level governance may help us to understand the operation of different types of mechanism within this area" (Olsson, 2003, p. 285). This line of argumentation could be partially confirmed, as the multi-level governance approach served as a suitable tool to describe the differences of the lead partners regarding their administrative capacities. With respect to the outputs from the network analysis however, it turned out that the descriptive power of the multi-level governance approach could only be used to a limited extent within the empirical investigation. While it illustrated the position of nation-states within the transgovernmental networks on an aggregated level, the network analysis did not take the various types of actors in specific into consideration. Simultaneously, however, the in-depth information gained by

means of the expert interviews unveiled that the individual situation of the project partners was of utmost importance. Following this, I therefore argue that, at least with respect to the Interreg programme, a general conclusion on the performance of the actors would be limited, if it was solely based on the multi-level governance concept. However, with respect to the transgovernmental networks analysed in this master thesis, I state that the multi-level governance approach – despite its theoretical weaknesses – is a valuable starting point to understand the involvement of varying actors stemming from distinct levels of governance.

As outlined in chapter 4 the data provided by the Joint Secretariats of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the Interreg North Sea Region only includes information on approved projects. This is why the network analysis was restricted to approved projects. It would be of great interest, to take data on project partnerships into consideration that were rejected in the end. Especially with respect to the specific role of lead partners, such data would empower a re-examination of the interviewed experts' estimations concerning the administrative capacities of possible lead partners from countries that joined the EU as member states in 2004. Apart from that, the results of the transgovernmental networks regarding the Interreg IV period and the newly started Interreg V period, should be interpreted with caution. While the data on the 2007-2013 funding phase includes information on the whole number of projects, the provided data sheets concerning the 2014-2020 funding period solely include information on projects that were proved within the scope of the first call. Besides, in the latter case minor changes with respect to the project partnerships might be possible according to the Joint Secretariats as not all projects were signed at the point in time when the research was conducted (cf. Interreg BSR 2015d⁵²). By assuming, that all projects that were entitled to ERDF funding will be implemented, I however would not expect great differences with respect to the composition of the networks. Even though the attempt was to interview a broad range of experts who represent organizations that are project partners, lead partners or advisors, the sample obviously does not picture the whole population of organizations. In addition, I did not interview experts whose organizations were not entitled to receive funding, withdrew an application or made bad experience with the policy instrument. In addition, inferential biases might result from the fact that solely actors from Germany were interviewed. Thus, although the semi-structured interviews enabled a better understanding of the outputs from the network analysis, reliable generalizations are limited (Lynch, 2013, p. 41).

⁵² Further information: <https://www.interreg-baltic.eu/news-detail/news/statistics-first-call-for-applications.html> (last access: 28 June 2016).

6.3 Outlook

In the following, I explicitly point out selected recommendations for the improvement of the Interreg programme that were not or only to a limited extent highlighted in the prior discussion. Furthermore, I briefly reflect on possible future developments that are resulting from the ‘Brexit’ referendum in the UK in June 2016 before suggesting ideas for further research.

6.3.1 Policy recommendations

Against the backdrop of the fact that this master thesis was written during the first half of the 2014-2020 funding period, a special aim was, to provide suggestions for improvement with respect to short-term as well as to long-term developments. This is why the experts were asked for their opinion on how transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme might be improved. A striking feature of the interviews was, that all respondents appeared to be quite open-minded with respect to their opinion on the programme. In order to ensure a practical relevance of the policy recommendations this subchapter is structured along three selected comments by the interviewed respondents. Based on the theoretical framework and the empirical findings, I will further elaborate these suggestions.

- Administrative dimension: differences between the two cooperation programmes

“This is a major hurdle (...) It would be of great help if they were more or less similar” (A-HE-1, 11).

Although the cooperation programmes are partly consistent with respect to the covered countries – both include (parts of) Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Norway – they differ in many respects in terms of the programme design for instance. Regarding this, I especially question the exact terminology with respect to the application procedure (cf. chapter 2.2). On the one hand, several advisory experts highlighted the individual character of each programme area that resulted from their heterogeneity respectively homogeneity. On the other hand, they acknowledged that this might be confusing for actors that are interested in both programme areas (B-BSR-1, 11; B-NSR-2, 9; B-BSR-3; 22). In consideration of the above-mentioned statement, I plead for a harmonization of the terminology. This applies for instance for the first part of the two-step application procedure. By simply adjusting terms such as “expression of interest” (Interreg North Sea Region) and “concept note” (Interreg Baltic Sea Region) for instance, it would be possible to avoid confusion among applicants that are interested in both cooperation programmes. I argue that minor changes like these would facilitate the starting

position of possible – especially unexperienced – applicants, without changing the fundamental character of the cooperation programmes themselves.

- Social dimension: public relations

“Its practical implication is difficult” (B-BSR-3, 13).

According to the above-cited expert, the Interreg programme faces difficulties with respect to public relations as the result of Interreg B projects are often not “tangible”. This was especially illustrated by the fact that pictures often show meetings of people who are sitting together (B-BSR-3; 13; 17). Especially against the backdrop of the fact that various interviewed experts attached great importance to pre-existing connections and individual competences, I conclude from the interviews that there is room for improvement with respect to the public perception of the programme. In this context, it is striking that two experts, A-HE-2 and A-RPA, highlighted similarities between the Interreg programme and the student exchange programme ‘Erasmus’ (A-HE-2; A-RPA, 11). From my point of view, this comparison might serve as a valuable point of departure for enhancing the value for engaging in Interreg projects despite the allegedly complex application procedure. In view of the findings resulting from the empirical investigations, I therefore argue that project partners should not be afraid of constantly emphasizing the relevance of such informal networks, towards supervisors and politicians. The outputs from the network analysis visually underline these interconnections.

- Value dimension: co-financing rate

“If we want to have a broader partnership structure, we actually need to go towards 100 percent funding” (A-RPA, 11).

Even though the findings show evidence that the co-financing is a primary determinant for certain actors to take part in Interreg projects, I argue that a full funding, that is absolutely cost-covering, would weaken the relevance of ‘soft values’ such as informal networks as reasons to cooperate across borders (Dühr & Nadin, 2007, p. 375). It might even bear the risk that project actors take part in Interreg projects just because of the funding itself. As a consequence, it would be questionable whether the Interreg B programme would (still) be a “stimulus of Europeanization” to a similar extent as it is depicted in chapter 5.3 (Stead, 2014, p. 23). With respect to the multi-level governance structure of the programme, however, I argue, that one should consider that project partners derive from different starting points with respect to their

available financial resources. The classifications on the schematic diagrams and further findings from the expert interviews illustrate these varieties (cf. chapter 5.3). Due to the composition of the small-N sample of interviewed project partners and the fact that they all represent organizations from Germany, these findings might be biased. Nevertheless, I recommend considering the adjustment of the co-financing rate to the individual financial situation of the project actors, regardless of their country of origin. This especially counts for the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, where the co-financing rate differs between the countries. I argue that this rate should depend on the legal statuses of the participating organizations instead of its country of origin. While universities for instance could be entitled to larger co-financing rates, it might stay equal for other project partners such as sectoral agencies.

In sum, I argue, that these recommendations for improvement could serve as starting points for further discussions, for instance at project partner meetings organized by the Joint Secretariats or the advisory actors from public authorities, respectively at monitoring committee meetings.

6.3.2 The future of the Interreg B programme (after the “Brexit”)

Despite several areas of disagreement and their various positions as project partners, project leaders or advisors, it was striking that all interviewed experts⁵³ agreed on one aspect. Regarding the question of whether they expected an Interreg VI programme following the 2014-2020 funding period, they consistently answered in the affirmative. However, the expert’s line of reasoning that justified this persuasion, however, was thoroughly wide-ranging. Some actors argued that no other EU funding programme could adequately replace the Interreg programme (A-SA, 12; A-RPA, 12). Others emphasized the ongoing need for transnational cooperation (A-RI, 12; B-BSR-3, 23). Moreover, other actors highlighted the fact that the funding costs were only a small part of the whole ERDF (B-BSR-1, 12; cf. chapter 1 & 2).

While the critique and recommendations for improvement were discussed in the previous subchapter, recent political developments within the EU pose new challenges to the Interreg programmes. In a first statement on the result of the UK’s referendum on 23 June 2016 to leave the EU as a member state, the Secretariat of the Interreg Europe programme (Interreg C) highlighted that there was a lack of clarity regarding the further strategy: “the next steps are uncertain until the UK and the EU have negotiated a position which will then be discussed

⁵³ The expert interviews took place in May and beginning of June 2016.

within the Interreg Europe monitoring committee”⁵⁴ (Interreg Europe, 2016; Wheeler & Hunt, 2016). The same appears to apply to the Interreg North Sea Region cooperation programme, which covers the English and Scottish east coast as eligible areas (chapter 2.2). With respect to the result of the UK referendum, the Joint Secretariat described the situation in a first statement as “times of uncertainty” (Interreg NSR 2016e)⁵⁵. It is stated that “the UK referendum will obviously eventually have an impact on our programme, but at this stage it is impossible to say precisely what the impact will be” (JS BSR 2016). In this context, I argue that it would be of great interest to examine this “impact” on the projects that are approved for funding resulting from the first call as well as the impact on future project applications.

6.3.3 Further research

While the transgovernmental networks enabled a general overview on the various positions of the countries within the two cooperation programmes on an aggregated level, the provided data offers potential for further comprehensive investigations. Network analyses that would take the NUTS 1, NUTS 2 or even NUTS 3 level into consideration, could for instance unveil in even more detail, how specific regions or cities are connected to each other within the framework of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region and the Interreg North Sea Region. This would be of great interest for regional public authorities such as the Senate Chancellery or comparable institutions in other countries as they could invest in certain ‘connections’ with even more determination. Besides, in light of the multi-level governance concept, it might for instance be of interest to consider the specific legal statuses of the various actors within the framework of such network analyses. By shedding light on the varying reasons for transnational cooperation, the qualitative analysis suggested that universities tend to participate due to the co-financing, while others indicated informal networks as primary reasons to cooperate within the framework of the Interreg programme. By considering individual project partnerships, it might be of interest whether actors with varying preferences tend to cooperate in project teams or not.

Apart from that, I encourage to scrutinize the degree centralities of the various countries as depicted by the network analysis. On an aggregated level, the outputs suggest for instance with respect to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region, that ‘new’ member states have, in contrast to Sweden and Germany for instance, a comparatively peripheral position within the transgovernmental

⁵⁴ This statement by the Joint Secretariat of Interreg Europe was published on 24 June 2016: <http://www.interregeurope.eu/news-and-events/news/57/statement-on-the-uk-referendum/> (last access: 28 June 2016).

⁵⁵ This statement by the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region was published on 27 June 2016: <http://www.northsearegion.eu/about-the-programme/programme-news/what-will-happen-to-my-project-after-brexite/> (last access: 28 June 2016).

networks. However, the data on the project leaders as well as the information gained by means of the expert interviews depicted that it is worth to question these connections. While it would go beyond the scope of this master thesis, I argue that future research should consider how these degree centralities on an aggregated level come about. In consideration of the multi-level governance concept, it would be interesting to see whether specific regions or cities dominate these networks. In this respect, it could make sense to relate the degree centralities to the number of inhabitants of the regions respectively countries that are entitled to take part in order to ensure a better comparability. Simultaneously, it would be of interest to relate the degree centralities to the specific co-financing budget per project partner, respectively the thematic focus of the collaborations. In this context, an interesting research subject would be, to scrutinize the central position of Germany and the Netherlands within the transgovernmental network of the Interreg North Sea Region. Based on the qualitative findings from the expert interviews one could assume that for instance long-term pre-existing connections among actors from these two countries had a positive impact on the overall degree centralities within the transgovernmental networks. However, it would be of interest to question, what kind of project partners were involved; for instance whether these are in particular stakeholders that are situated close to the border – and would cooperate anyway.

Furthermore, the network analysis of this master thesis might serve as a suitable basis to examine the future developments with respect to the connections among the project partners in the context of the United Kingdom's vote to leave the EU in June 2016. In light of the uncertainties with respect to the determinants of the project partnerships (cf. chapter 6.3.2), it would be of great interest to investigate whether the degree centrality of the United Kingdom within the Interreg North Sea Region in comparison to other countries will change in the future – and if yes, for what reasons.

Finally, in light of the lacking generalizability resulting from the small sample of interviewed experts, I argue that there is a necessity to access project partners from other eligible Interreg B regions than Germany in order to review and to control the line of argumentation made in this master thesis. This especially concerns findings such as on the “dilemma” regarding the involvement of external management consultancies in the application phase (administrative dimension), the relevance of individual competences (social dimension) or the correlation between ‘soft’ and ‘hard values’ as main reasons for transnational cooperation (value dimension). Taking the decisive role of each individual project partner within the framework

of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region in to account, I argue that more qualitative research is required in order to complement the findings of these master thesis on the overall determinants for the partnership of European transnational cooperation projects.

7. Conclusion

Since the main findings as well as their theoretical and empirical implications and, in the end, the answer(s) to the main research question were discussed in the previous part (especially chapter 6.1); this last chapter mainly aims at providing some concluding remarks. This master thesis explicitly focused on two areas of transnational cooperation within the Interreg programme by posing the following main research question: *What determines the partnership of European transnational cooperation projects within the framework of the Interreg B programmes North Sea Region and Baltic Sea Region?*

In order to answer to the main research question in a comprehensible manner, I conducted a network analysis of the overall constellations of the project partnerships. The Joint Secretariats published the decisions on the project applications that were submitted within the first call of the newly started 2014-2020 funding period shortly before the start of the research process for this study. Thanks to this, it was possible to compare ‘brand new’ data from the Interreg V period with data from the concluded 2007-2013 funding phase. The outputs enabled to evaluate, which countries were the most central players within the various Interreg programmes and funding periods resulting from the overall number of project actors coming from there. On the one hand, the results from the network analysis revealed that countries are interconnected to varying degrees in both cooperation programmes. On the other hand, it was shown that the share of lead partners coming from ‘new’ EU member states is considerably lower than the share of lead partners stemming from ‘old’ EU member states.

Drawing comprehensive conclusions on the determinants of transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region exclusively from the provided data on approved respectively implemented Interreg projects, was however limited. In order to scrutinize the network constellations, to test the hypotheses and explore further determinants for the partnership of European transnational cooperation projects, I argued that qualitative research was required. This is why I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with eleven experts in total.

With respect to the administrative dimension, the findings suggest that the involvement of external management consultancies within the application procedure gains more and more in importance. However, in order to further secure heterogeneity of projects teams with actors coming from various levels of governance and countries, I argue that one must not underestimate such developments. Regarding the social dimension, the findings unveil that the project partnership within the framework of the Interreg programme is strongly determined by the actors' pre-existing connections and administrative capacities. Furthermore, the findings underline the utmost importance of individuals that are representing the participating organizations with respect to the success of project applications as well as project implementations. These aspects are especially of relevance with respect to the lead partners that guide the project partnerships. Besides, the results from the expert interviews unveil a mixed picture with respect to the 'value dimension' and the underlying motives of actors to take part in Interreg projects – despite the comparatively complex application process. In light of the Europeanization concept, it is striking that 'soft values' such as informal networks are not necessarily the primary reasons for project partners to take part in Interreg projects and to 'upload' local or regional ideas and working styles on a transnational level. Especially the findings on motives of actors from the Baltic Sea Region, where the co-financing rates are higher compared to the North Sea Region as well as on actors who are representing higher education institutions, suggest that 'hard values' in terms of financial support outweigh 'soft values'. In sum, the results from this study suggest that there are various differences between actors from 'Western Europe' and 'Central and Eastern Europe' with respect to the application for and implementation of European transnational cooperation projects. Therefore, additional qualitative case studies and interviews with actors coming from other countries than Germany might not only help to further categorize the findings provided by this master thesis, but could also complement the overall picture on the determinants of transnational cooperation within the framework of the Interreg programme.

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- Important note:* The data sheets that were provided by the Joint Secretariat Interreg North Sea Region and the Joint Secretariat Interreg Baltic Sea Region (cf. chapter 1 and chapter 4.2) for the scientific purposes of this master thesis are – for confidentially reasons – not enclosed with this digital version. However, the information contained in the data sheets is similar to – respectively the same as – the information that is publicly available via the following online project databases:
- (1) Interreg Baltic Sea Region (2007-2013). Funded projects. Retrieved from: http://eu.baltic.net/Project_Database.5308.html (last access: 05 July 2016).
 - (2) Interreg North Sea Region (2007-2013). Projects. Retrieved from: <http://archive.northsearegion.eu/ivb/projects/> (last access: 05 July 2016).

Appendix I – Questionnaire semi-structured interview

Protocol/Questionnaire: semi-structured interview for Master thesis⁵⁶

Christoph Petry, Utrecht University and University of Konstanz

Interview code

Information on interview	
Date	
Interviewer	
Location	
Duration	
Language	
Audio recording	

Information on interviewee	
Name	
Organization	
Position	

Specific role within INTERREG programme	
Type of partner (Definition according to JS BSR)	<input type="checkbox"/> Business support organisation <input type="checkbox"/> Education/training centre and school <input type="checkbox"/> Higher education and research institution <input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure and public service provider <input type="checkbox"/> Interest groups including NGOs <input type="checkbox"/> International organisation, EEIG <input type="checkbox"/> Large enterprise <input type="checkbox"/> Local public authority <input type="checkbox"/> National public authority <input type="checkbox"/> Regional public authority <input type="checkbox"/> Sectoral agency <input type="checkbox"/> Small and medium enterprise
INTERREG IV (Projects/Role)	
INTERREG V (Projects/Role – lead partner, project partner, associated partner, consultation)	1 st call 2 nd call (Deadline for submission of concept note: 01.06.2015 – Interreg BSR)

⁵⁶ Important note: for all semi-structured interviews, I used this questionnaire as a basis. However, as outlined in chapter 4.2., the structure as well as the exact terminology of questions was sometimes modified, depending on the role of the expert or the specific interview situation. Occasionally I asked additional questions.

(1) Incentives/Reasons for transnational cooperation within the INTERREG B programme

<p>From your experience, what characterizes the development of INTERREG B projects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If necessary:</i> With respect to the chronology order of the project in which you are currently involved – was there first the ‘the problem’ (project issue) or the solution (INTERREG B)? 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you find out about the INTERREG project, in which you are currently involved? 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you assess the fact, that there is a two-step application procedure in the BSR programme (first the concept note then a fully-fledged project application) with respect to the participation of project partners? 	

<p>Question 2: Regarding the thematic focus of the project in which you are currently involved: Is it a <i>transnational issue</i> (“which cannot be tackled adequately at the local, regional or national level”) or a <i>common issue</i> (“which could be or has been tackled at the local, regional or national level, but for which transnational cooperation brings more innovative and efficient solutions” (cf. Colomb 2007: 357).</p>	

<p>Question 3: What are, from your organization’s perspective, the main reasons for transnational cooperation within the INTERREG B programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With respect to the ‘values’ of transnational cooperation, two social scholars, Stefanie Dühr and Vincent Nadin (2007), distinguish between soft and hard values (<i>show figure and hand a pen</i>): Please mark on this scheme where you would classify the main motives of organizations/institutions in general to participate in INTERREG B projects and explain this assessment? 	

(2) Characteristics of transnational cooperation/project partnership:

A special characteristic of the Interreg BSR programme area is, that I officially covers 11 countries – ‘old’ EU member states, ‘new’ EU member states and non-EU member states.

Question 4: What determines “good” transnational cooperation between project partners from different government levels and countries?	

Question 5: What are the main problems or challenges?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizational structures ○ Resources ○ Competences (e.g. language skills) ○ Culture (communication) 	

Question 6: How would you assess the role of individuals working for the participating organizations/institutions with respect to transnational cooperation?	

Question 7: What is your opinion on the involvement of external consultants within the concept note phase, application phase and implementation phase?	

Question 8: Have you ever refused an invitation to become project partner in an INTERREG B project?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, why? • If not, what were possible reasons to do so? 	

Question 9: What is your opinion about the fact that the majority of project partners are public actors (compared to the share of private actors)?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the reasons for this? • How could the share of private actors be increased? 	

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(3) Future development/recommendations

Question 10:

Please describe in only one sentence: What is the ‘added value of transnational cooperation’ with respect to the INTERREG B Baltic Sea Region from

- Your personal perspective
- Your organization’s perspective

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Question 11:

What are your recommendations for improvement of the INTERREG B programme?

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Question 12:

Do you expect that there will be an INTERREG VI period?

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Appendix II – Overview data

Matrices for network analysis, degree centralities and share of project partners and lead partners (per cooperation programme and funding period)

Interreg North Sea Region (2007-2013)

	BE	DK	FR	DE	NO	SE	NL	UK
BE	0	64	1	94	59	67	89	96
DK	82	0	2	110	77	90	104	104
FR	2	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
DE	144	123	2	0	122	146	183	184
NO	61	74	0	96	0	67	94	103
SE	73	63	1	113	73	0	104	108
NL	148	146	8	207	134	156	0	208
UK	137	114	1	181	116	144	167	0

Matrix (partner constellation for network analysis); based on data provided by JS Interreg NSR; own calculations.

Interreg NSR 2007-2013	
Country ID	Node centrality (degree in %)
NL	18,03%
DE	17,59%
UK	17,16%
SE	12,44%
DK	11,90%
BE	11,51%
NO	11,09%
FR	0,28%

Total	100,00%
Arith. mean	12,50%
Median	12,17%

Degree centralities (according to 'Visone').
Based on data provided by JS Interreg NSR.

ID	Number of PP ⁵⁷	in %
NL	220	20,87%
DE	202	19,17%
UK	187	17,74%
DK	121	11,48%
SE	115	10,91%
NO	107	10,15%
BE	100	9,49%
F	2	0,19%
Total	1054	100,00%

ID	Number of LP	in %
NL	22	28,21%
DE	17	21,79%
UK	17	21,79%
DK	6	7,69%
NO	6	7,69%
SE	6	7,69%
BE	4	5,13%
FR	0	0,00%
Total	78	100,00%

Based on data provided by JS Interreg NSR; own calculations.

⁵⁷ Number of project partners in total, including lead partners.

Interreg North Sea Region (2014-2020, results from first call)

	BE	DK	DE	NO	SE	CH	NL	UK
BE	0	11	13	7	12	3	18	14
DK	15	0	28	14	22	0	31	29
DE	22	24	0	10	15	1	25	21
NO	6	8	9	0	9	1	9	9
SE	9	15	14	9	0	1	16	13
CH	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
NL	23	28	26	18	25	1	0	30
UK	19	26	22	12	19	2	29	0

Matrix (partner constellation for network analysis); based on data provided by JS Interreg NSR; own calculations.

Interreg NSR 2014-2020 (first call)	
Country ID	Node centrality (degree in %)
NL	18,69%
DK	16,76%
UK	16,42%
DE	15,42%
SE	12,02%
BE	11,55%
NO	8,14%
CH	1,00%

Total	100,00%
Arith. mean	12,50%
Median	13,72%

Degree centralities (according to 'Visone').
Based on data provided by JS Interreg NSR.

ID	Number of PP⁵⁸	in %
NL	32	19,88%
DK	31	19,25%
UK	29	18,01%
DE	25	15,53%
BE	18	11,18%
SE	16	9,94%
NO	9	5,59%
CH	1	0,62%
Total	161	100,00%

ID	Number of LP	in %
BE	2	16,67%
DK	2	16,67%
DK	2	16,67%
NL	4	33,33%
UK	2	16,67%
SE	0	0,00%
NO	0	0,00%
CH	0	0,00%
Total	12	100,00%

Based on data provided by JS Interreg NSR; own calculations.

⁵⁸ Number of project partners in total, including lead partners.

Interreg Baltic Sea Region (2007-2013) – [1/2]

J	BY	BE	DK	EE	FI	DE	LV	LT	NO	PL	SE	UK
BY	0	0	18	27	34	34	40	33	13	28	28	2
BE	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
DK	21	0	0	74	80	99	79	86	41	76	93	2
EE	33	2	64	0	85	99	98	96	27	94	93	2
FI	41	0	119	137	0	167	140	136	79	149	160	1
DE	56	3	164	172	169	0	187	205	100	196	188	9
LV	35	2	72	89	82	103	0	97	38	94	92	3
LT	31	2	100	115	109	144	126	0	47	126	124	4
NO	9	0	32	34	43	50	40	35	0	46	54	0
PL	49	1	108	135	129	154	132	138	77	0	141	4
SE	45	1	162	167	197	208	145	175	106	187	0	4
UK	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	2	0	2	2	0

Matrix (partner constellation for network analysis); based on data provided by JS Interreg BSR; own calculations.

Interreg BSR 2007-2020	
Country ID	Node centrality (degree in %)
DE	14,52%
SE	13,73%
PL	11,96%
FI	11,91%
LT	11,18%
LV	9,82%
EE	9,52%
DK	8,63%
NO	5,04%
BY	3,34%
UK	0,27%
BE	0,10%

Total	100,00%
Arith. mean	8,33%
Median	9,67%

Degree centralities (according to 'Visone').
Based on data provided by JS Interreg BSR.

Interreg Baltic Sea Region (2007-2013) – [2/2]

ID	Number of PP⁵⁹	in %
SE	233	16,80%
DE	232	16,73%
FI	184	13,27%
PL	166	11,97%
LT	150	10,81%
LV	111	8,00%
EE	108	7,79%
DK	103	7,43%
NO	57	4,11%
BY	40	2,88%
UK	2	0,14%
BE	1	0,07%
Total	1387	100,00%

Based on data provided by JS Interreg BSR; own calculations.

ID	Number of LP	in %
DE	36	40,00%
SE	22	24,44%
FI	17	18,89%
DK	6	6,67%
PL	4	4,44%
LV	2	2,22%
LT	2	2,22%
NO	1	1,11%
BY	0	0,00%
BE	0	0,00%
EE	0	0,00%
UK	0	0,00%
Total	90	100,00%

Based on data provided by JS Interreg BSR; own calculations.

⁵⁹ Number of project partners in total, including lead partners.

Interreg Baltic Sea Region (2014-2020; results from first call) – [1/2]

	DK	EE	FI	FR	DE	LV	LT	LU	NL	NO	PL	PT	SE	UK
DK	0	30	30	0	33	23	30	0	1	15	30	2	35	2
EE	23	0	39	2	38	34	39	2	1	7	43	1	40	1
FI	34	55	0	5	56	42	58	5	5	17	60	1	61	1
FR	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
DE	56	68	73	3	0	50	69	3	5	24	74	5	76	5
LV	25	38	37	0	33	0	39	0	2	4	43	3	38	3
LT	29	44	47	3	44	37	0	3	2	12	51	3	50	3
LU	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
NL	1	1	2	0	2	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	2	0
NO	10	7	10	0	10	5	8	0	1	0	8	0	10	0
PL	34	54	56	1	58	46	57	1	7	13	0	4	60	4
PT	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
SE	57	65	78	1	70	56	65	1	2	25	78	2	0	2
UK	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0

Matrix (partner constellation for network analysis); based on data provided by JS Interreg BSR; own calculations.

Interreg BSR 2014-2020 (first call)	
Country ID	Node centrality (degree in %)
SE	14,55%
DE	14,24%
PL	13,06%
FI	12,86%
LT	11,58%
EE	10,54%
LV	9,30%
DK	8,32%
NO	3,10%
NL	0,66%
PT	0,51%
UK	0,51%
FR	0,38%
LU	0,38%

Total	100,00%
Arith. mean	7,14%
Median	8,81%

Degree centralities (according to 'Visone').
Based on data provided by JS Interreg BSR.

Interreg Baltic Sea Region (2014-2020; results from first call) – [2/2]

ID	Number of PP⁶⁰	in %
SE	87	17,19%
DE	82	16,21%
FI	69	13,64%
PL	66	13,04%
LT	55	10,87%
EE	44	8,70%
LV	43	8,50%
DK	36	7,11%
NO	11	2,17%
(No info)	7	1,38%
NL	2	0,40%
FR	1	0,20%
LU	1	0,20%
PT	1	0,20%
UK	1	0,20%
Total	506	100,00%

Based on data provided by JS Interreg BSR; own calculations.

ID	Number of LP	in %
DE	14	40,00%
FI	8	22,86%
SE	7	20,00%
PL	2	5,71%
DK	1	2,86%
EE	1	2,86%
LT	1	2,86%
LV	1	2,86%
(No info)	0	0,00%
FR	0	0,00%
LU	0	0,00%
NL	0	0,00%
NO	0	0,00%
PT	0	0,00%
UK	0	0,00%
Total	35	100,00%

Based on data provided by JS Interreg BSR; own calculations.

⁶⁰ Number of project partners in total, including lead partners.

DECLARATION:

I hereby affirm that I have independently written the attached Master's thesis on the topic:

and have not used any other aids or sources other than those I have indicated.

For parts that use the wording or meaning coming from other works (including the Internet and other electronic text and data collections), I have identified them in each case by reference to source or the secondary literature.

Furthermore, I hereby affirm that the above mentioned work has not been otherwise submitted as a thesis for a Master's examination. I further understand the pending completion of the review process I must keep the materials available that can prove this work was written independently.

A current confirmation of my enrolment is attached.

(Signature)

(Place, date)