ONLY FOOD FOR THOUGHT?

An Analysis of Governance Frameworks for (Policy) Learning, -Transfer and Innovation in INTERREG Projects

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"For the things we have to learn before we can do them,
we learn by doing them."
Hanna Arendt

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List of Abbreviations

EU	European Union
CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
CBG	Cross-Border Governance
CBR	Cross-Border Region
ERFD	European Regional and Development Fund
ESDP	European Spatial Development Perspective
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
LRA	Local and Regional Authority
MLG	Multilevel Governance
MS	Member States
SGI	Services of General Interest
TC	Transnational Cooperation

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Abstract

Demographic change is a highly relevant topic in today's political arenas because issues within this context spread across all spheres of life, various policy fields and national borders. One important question is how the challenges of demographic change can be addressed in the multi-level context of today's European Union. As there are no blue-print solutions, ideally, actors from different levels of governance and countries share their experiences and best-practices and work together on responsive demographic policies. Within this context, it is crucial to look at the bigger picture and discuss several issues: Why do actors from different nation states work together? What is their rationale for cooperation? How can knowledge exchange and transfer of policies be embedded in the context of these forms of cooperation? A discussion of these topics builds the backbone of this Master thesis. The main research question investigates which patterns of local and/or regional governance enable policy learning, -transfer and innovation in the context of INTERREG projects. Data from interviews with projects partners of an INTERREG project dealing with demographic challenges in the Bodensee area and content analyses of project reports and policy papers reveal that INTERREG projects provide actors with opportunity structures for exchange. However, the patterns of governance which enable this do not only depend on the governance structures and the actors' predetermined beliefs and ideologies, but also on the dynamic of the group as well as the partners' willingness and capabilities for exchange and learning.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Demographic change is a highly salient issue which affects all spheres of life, and therefore also all spheres of politics. The long-term consequences of the 2007-2011 financial and economic crisis, as well as the 2015 migration crisis have resurfaced challenges of demographic change and have put current welfare states to a "stress-test" (Hemerijk, 2013: 1). As interdependence is a defining feature of politics (Gilardi, 2010: 650), policy makers are forced to react diligently to changing demographic structures because these have direct effects on the way how policies are designed and formulated. The stability of welfare states and therefore the security of retiring people and future generations to have supporting schemes within the welfare state are examples why there is a need for responsive demographic strategies. If the growing part of aging populations is to be balanced, it is vital that public policies, which encourage the building of a family, are further developed in order to secure the solidarity between generations (European Commission, 2005: 2). In sum, the current demographic challenges stem from three basic trends: increasing life expectancy, increasing work population over 60, and continuing low birth rates (ibid.: 3). Although the European Parliament has since 2005 made it a priority to take demographic changes into account in all relevant policies, most of these issues lie within the exclusive competences of Member States. Therefore, the multifaceted approach of policies must not only happen on the supranational level, but more importantly on the lower levels of governance. This thesis main focus of investigation are local and regional actors.

As challenges of demographic change also go beyond national borders (Kanton Schaffhausen, 2017: 2), it is vital that they are tackled jointly by actors along borders. In this regard, it is fundamental to look at the rationale behind entering cooperation with authorities of other nation states, at the actors involved in the cooperation as well as the rules of the institutional set up that might support (or undermine) such cooperation. Cooperation between various actors (e.g. transnational, cross-border, interregional) is also supported by various programmes by the European Union. As demographic strategies are highly salient topic for many politicians, it might be a pivotal factor that projects one these issues are 'backed' by European Union funding. This 'backing' can to a certain extend reduce the gravity and political salience of the policy issue in discussion.

Past research has shown that policies diffuse within and across countries (Gilardi, 2010: 65). Therefore, it is not only necessary to consider in which governance structures actors of multinational cooperation are embedded, but also what policy issues are at stake.

This will not only determine whether cooperation will take place, but also whether policy learning is a possible outcome of it. Often, the starting point for cooperation are similar challenges or similar problems that all involved actors are facing (Böhme et al., 2003: 7). This can also be argued for demographic challenges. A key element for policy makers who are dealing with regional and economic development is the learning aspect of policies which enables the transfer of knowledge from one actor to another actor and consequently, difficulties that other actors have experienced can be avoided. This is strongly entangled with best-practice approaches and their transfer (ibid.: 31). Through learning, a system can either be able to react to changes that are occurring in the surrounding environment or be seen as having a corrective function (Böhme et al., 2003: 32). This translates into the motivation for learning as something that can be seen in the efficiency differences between learning possibilities and experienced policy set-backs (Radaelli, 2008: 243). Within learning concepts, it is crucial to differentiate whether the motivation behind it stems from the motivation for policy improvement or from political purposes (Gilardi, 2010: 650). Therefore, this research will provide an analysis of the cooperation rationale for project partners in the INTERREG context.

It is vital for the context of this Master thesis that although demographic development is an ongoing trend which can be observed all over Europe, it is not possible to show a "unified demographic picture of the European macro-regions" (Szaló et al., 2011: 71). Rather, patch-work-like trends are visible. Faludi (2008a: 1470) has called the European Union a "learning machine" and has characterized it as a dynamic construct where learning is the engine (ibid.: 1472). The phenomenon of knowledge and experience exchange as well as learning as a potential source of innovation are at the focus of investigation of this Master thesis. Hachmann (2016) has argued that learning has been increasingly be acknowledged when researching connections between people, organisation, regions, borders, and nation states.

This thesis will carry out a case study and investigate the patterns of local and/or regional governance which might enable or impede exchange, learning and the potential for innovation in that context. The project partners in the INTERREG project are all facing similar challenges. Their cooperation can be seen as a valuable source of knowledge and experience exchange. Cooperation across borders or between European regions is stimulated by various European funding programmes. INTERREG is an especially interesting example because it involves at least partners from two Member States or one Member State and one third country. This opens up the possibility of horizontal and vertical learning and possible

cross-loading of experiences and policies. However, past research has argued that projects might not use their full potential (Hachmann, 2016). Therefore, this research will carry out an analysis of the framework conditions of the INTERREG project and investigate in which governance structures the project partners are embedded in. Further, the awareness of potential learning in INTERREG projects will be increased. It is expected to find out a number of challenges of cooperation projects which have not been the focus of investigation yet.

1.1. Readers Guide

Chapter one gives a clear introductory overview of the context and relevance of this research. Chapter two will review the most important literature which is relevant in the context of INTERREG cooperation forms and policy learning and policy transfer. First, a short introduction into the policy sectors and instruments is given before section 2.2. reviews what is already known about this topic from previous research. Further, the scope and relevance of the studied literature is underlined. By providing a critical independent discussion of already existing academic research, it is possible to highlight aspects which have not been addressed in the literature and the relevance of this research not only for society, but also for academia is emphasized.

Chapter three describes what kind of theoretical perspective has been adapted for this research. Building on the overview of relevant literature addressing cooperation, policy learning and -transfer, key concepts are introduced and put into the context of challenges of demographic change. This section will justify why this kind of framework is applied. Chapter four outlines the research design and clarifies the case and data selection. This entails a detailed discussion of how the data was collected, how it was analysed and also what difficulties this methodology and data set brings for the research. After that, chapter five presents the main findings of the research before the final chapter provides a comprehensive summary and gives some concluding remarks.

1.2. Context: Demographic Change

In the Europe 2020 strategy, demographic change has been identified among the key challenges that Europe is and will be facing (European Commission, 2010: 12). It has even been argued that

> "beside globalisation, climate change and a secure, sustainable and competitive energy supply, the demographic trends and dynamics will be one of the main challenges for Europe and will be of particular relevance for European cities and regions" and "[…]

the impact of demographic change will transform the age and employment structure of our societies, raising important issues of both economic efficiency and intergenerational equity" (Hahn, quoted in Szaló et al., 2011: 5).

Europe combines two extremes of demographic development: on the one hand, many of the Member States have the lowest fertility in the world, while on the other hand, most countries in the EU have the highest life expectancy world-wide (Muenz, 2007: 2). These multifaceted challenges have to be addressed by responsive policies in various fields of politics. The interdependence in politics and policies in general (Gilardi, 2010: 650) is in this regard also highly relevant for tackling challenges of demographic change. The following paragraphs will outline some of the most important and pressing demographic challenges and explain why cooperation within INTERREG projects should be considered in this context.

As already mentioned, the long-term trends not only in Europe, but in the majority of countries in the world, point to an ageing population structure (Muenz, 2007: 1). These changes have impacts on many fields of nation states: first and foremost, an increasing number of people is carried by a decreasing number of the working population. According to Eurostat projections, the ratio of the working age population to the old dependent population will go from 4 to 1, to 2 to 1 by 2050 (Eurostat, 2018). In addition, the decreasing number of the working population is carrying people that are either too young to work, unable to work, or unemployed. The decreasing share of the working-age population, the so-called demographic burden, is declining in all Member States of the EU and will eventually lead to less economic growth (Van der Gaag & De Beer, 2015: 94). What is more, birth deficits, increasing life expectancy, more migration within and outside the European Union, as well as changing family formats are shaping today's society structure (Hemerijk, 2013: 4). Accordingly, strong fiscal imbalances can create problems for the welfare state systems (Szaló et al., 2011: 12).

Some challenges which have been described in the previous paragraphs do not stop at national borders, therefore, it can be argued that cooperation of neighbouring authorities and the 'learning from each other' can add value to the formulation of policies. For instance, close interaction between demographic development and the economy is crucial to consider. An economic active population is able to cover their own needs and probably also able to compensate for unfavourable age dependency ratios (CoR, 2016: 5-6). At the centre of debate often stand pay-as-you-go systems based on public pension regimes and private pension systems (Muenz, 2007: 1). Ideally, changes in these systems will have to be accompanied by matching developments in other policy fields. If retirement ages are increased, labour market flexibility needs to be increased as well in order to support the older population to engage in

life-long learning and remain part of an active working population (Schwarz et al., 2014). Further, perceived levels of economic uncertainty can influence the decision where people want to settle and thus affect the composition of the welfare state of a country (CoR, 2016: 32). In order to cope with the demographic aging of the work force, various strategies, such as the introduction of a higher retirement age or a pro-active economic migration policy can be pursued (Muenz, 2007: 8).

Several push- and pull factors influence different age groups and their decisions where to settle. As a result, responsive and flexible designed policies are crucial because the differences in local, regional and national potentials of human capital will have serious consequences on the socio-economic development of various areas in Europe. In fact, demographic change could reinforce disparities which already exist within regions and cities of Europe (Szaló et al., 2011: 5). In many areas, it is already possible to observe a certain mismatch of the labour market and potentials of those areas. In order to reduce this mismatch, this should be an important component of responsive demographic policies which need to promote labour migration. These movements should not only be looked at on a European or national scale, but it is vital to also think about local migration, as for example the movement from a town to its neighbouring rural areas (CoR, 2016: 34).). It is vital to point out that demographic change is inevitable. Therefore, (a mix of) various policy options needs to be taken into account when formulating policies which correlate with the challenges discussed above.

In this context, it is important to mention another issue which is directly connected to demographic change: difficulties of public authorities of providing access to basic services of general interest (SGI). The importance of an accurate provision of SGIs is even outlined in the TFEU (Art. 14) and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The latter defines access to SGIs as a driver of social and territorial cohesion (Art. 36). SGIs include for example health care, long-term care, housing, transport, education or infrastructure (Gloersen et al., 2016: 15; Szaló et al., 2011: 5). The sustainability of public infrastructure can be affected by population shrinkage, or people migrating to other areas and is therefore vital for local and regional authorities (LRAs) which might be confronted with high maintenance costs and decreasing public revenue by changing demographic trends (CoR, 2016: 61). Territories with geographic specificities in particular are sometimes sparsely populated and have to deal with these challenges more than metropolitan or urban areas. Although sometimes shrinking cities and depopulating areas are often associated with economic decline (Müller, 2003: 30), it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that for example mountain regions or coastal zones

also offer opportunities (e.g. attractive living environments, access to nature and specific natural resources). Also, not all areas are undergoing the same trends: The Balkans/Southeast Europe experience continuous population decrease while the Alps have a steady growing population (CoR, 2016: 24, 55).

It becomes apparent that the challenges of demographic change are multifaceted and not all areas in Europe area affected homogeneously. The next sub-chapter elaborates on the complexity of the challenges policy-makers are facing and discusses various levels of governance which need to be considered. In the course of the chapter, it will become apparent why cooperation in the context of INTERREG programmes is such an essential factor in this context.

1.3. The Need for a Multifaceted Approach

The above mentioned arguments have all underlined the relevance of this topic. When it comes to issues of demographic change and actors who have to deal with these, there is a need to "open up the debate" (CoR, 2016: 6) and authorities on various levels of governance have to acknowledge the importance of this structural trend. What is vital to mention in this regard is the fact that the "real challenges for the future are the economic and social causes and consequences of demographic change, not demographic change itself" (Szaló et al., 2011: 13). Around this topic and its projections, the ongoing policy discussions are intense and debates are multifaceted because the policy field is linked to issues

> "as diverse as pension systems, labour markets, cultural identity and cohesion, gender balance in social and economic contexts, services of general interest, quality of life, public expenditure levels, territorial cohesion and balanced regional development" (CoR, 2016: 9).

As already explained, the reasons for this multifaceted linkage of policy issues are the result of a close interconnection of major demographic processes and challenges. (CoR, 2016: 9-10). In 2005, the European Commission published a Green Paper which also points to the fact that many policy issues are entangled with demographic change. However, the exclusive competences for many policy fields which are connected to this topic lie with the Member States of the EU (European Commission, 2005: 4). This thesis will look at the ability to meet these challenges mostly on regional and local levels of governance. Whether individual levels can change the trends to their 'advantage' depends for example on their ability to attract the working-age population and their ability to provide SGIs, such as public infrastructure or long-term care. The impact of demographic change in general on individual regions in Europe is complex and difficult to estimate (CoR, 2016: 1, 39). As mentioned above, the ability to be

'backed' by European funding can be an important factor that influences the development of demographic strategy formulation. Furthermore, even though the exclusive competences lie with the Member States, it does not mean that the EU has not brought forward important policies that affected demographic trends in Europe. The following paragraph gives an account of past strategies connected to demographic change.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, European spatial planning systems have been established (Müller, 2003: 31). These policies were formulated when Europe was experiencing strong population and economic growth. However, these trends have changed since then and therefore, policies need to be adjusted to current challenges affecting various levels of governance throughout Europe. The strong local dimension of demographic change calls for integrated and multi-level policy solutions. As the differences in challenges and adequate responses are mostly best understood at the level of governance which is closest to the citizens, local and regional authorities are pivotal actors when it comes to the formulation and implementation of policy changes (Szaló et al., 2011: 5). In contrast to policies which have been formulated as a response to growing population and economic growth, the process to steer the shrinkage and ageing of population is much more difficult. The reason for this is the increased potential to worsen or cause new negative externalities by inappropriate actions (Müller, 2003: 36).

The last paragraphs have shown that demographic change is a cross-cutting and highly complex issue. Not only various policies are in a strong interplay with each other, but it is vital that the 'appropriate' level of governance addresses the challenges. An example of cooperative structures which can make policies more sustainable are cross-border sharing of services which enable the exploitation of cross-border complementarities (Knippschild & Vock, 2017: 1738). However, many topics are unpopular for politicians to address (for example pension cuts or increase in retirement age because the processes of change are rather gradual and not all citizens are directly affected by them. Still, a successful demographic policy can serve as a steering instrument for dealing with challenges arising from demographic change (PA, 2015: 2). It is vital to anticipate demographic development and incorporate these changes in the formulation of future policies. The last paragraphs have described the reasons for making LRAs the central subjects of this research.

Challenges of demographic change should not be looked at in isolation of one national state. Especially authorities that are located close to borders might find it crucial to exchange knowledge or work together with actors from other countries in order to achieve more effective policy outcomes. This does not only concern those who are directly involved in the

policy-making process, but also actors on various levels of civil society which consequently requires an 'opening up of the debate'. A decisive component of future demographic strategies is the accumulation of knowledge, expertise and experience of different actors by bringing them together through various means of exchange and governance modes (PA, 2015: 2). The rationale behind such cooperation is also influenced by supranational policies by the European Union: the INTERREG V[1] programme for the period 2014-2020 (European Commission, 2018) promotes the linkage of local and regional actors. Project partners that join INTERREG initiatives do not only receive funding, but also support in research. As demographic change could reinforce the disparities which already exist between and within European regions and cities (Szaló et al., 2011: 5), it is imperative to promote the linkage of sub-national actors.

In order to understand what the framework structure of the project partners of the case study is, the next section gives an overview of INTERREG.

1.4.   INTERREG – A Framework for Cooperation

INTERREG is a form of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC). It is crucial to give a short overview of its development in the EU in order to set cooperation structures which are a central focus of this thesis in a broader governance context. The main focus of this thesis are cooperation forms which are part of INTERREG.

1.4.1. Development of INTERREG

In the 1990s, INTERREG was developed as a Community initiative for cross-border cooperation. The first programming period, INTERREG I (1990-1993) led to the enhancement of multi-level governance in Europe because "the funding did not have to be awarded to individual national-states but could be allocated directly to specific cross-border regions" (INTERACT, 2015: 2). In 2000, the programme was reorganized as a 'formal' objective of EU Cohesion Policy. Although cooperation between actors of various states and regions already existed before INTERREG, the forms of cooperation have undergone a boom since then (Medve-Bálint & Svensson, 2015: 238). It is fundamental to point out that these forms of cooperation are no long-term networks, but include time-limited projects with specific objectives (Hachmann, 2016). Starting from the funding period in 2007-2013,

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[1] INTERREG is a form of European Territorial Cooperation. Funding has increased from the first Interreg period from €1.1 billion to currently €10.1 billion. INTERREG V is the official name of the current programming period (European Commission, 2018).

INTERREG was made a separate structural fund objective – European Territorial Cooperation (ETC)[2] – alongside convergence and competitiveness (INTERACT, 2015: 5). Nowadays, the funding programme is built on three strands whose main distinction is the geographic scale of cooperation: cross-border (INTERREG A), transnational (INTERREG B) and interregional (INTERREG C). From its start and first funding period from 1990-1993 with a budget of €1.1 billion, four programming periods have succeeded each other, making the current one INTERREG V (2014-2020)[3], funded with € 10.1 billion (European Commission, 2018).

Each funding period has increased requirements for projects. This has been done on the basis of reviewing past project periods. Furthermore, it has been argued that there was an evolution from budgetary to regulatory programmes because the increased budgets also request increased requirements. This led to an alignment with the EU policy framework (Hachmann, 2016). Since the fourth programming period (2007-2013), INTERREG is on an equal basis with national and regional development programmes. This brought some advantages as cooperation within the programme has become more visible, and the legal basis for cooperation has been improved (INTERACT, 2015: 5). Still, it is vital to have a better understanding of how these projects work and what challenges they are facing in order to increase the effectiveness of their framework structure (Hachmann, 2016). This is inter alia one reason why this study investigates the potential for learning and policy transfer within these structures. By doing this, a contribution to this understanding and existing research will be made.

When looking at the three strands of cooperation, the initial strand of the initiative, (cross-border), still includes the most cooperation programmes today and is allocated also the largest amount of funding (€ 6.6 billion, about 74 %). The smallest amount of money goes to INTERREG C programmes (European Commission, 2018; Regulation (EU) 1299/2013). Although the three strands of the funding programme include different kinds of actors, they all involve cooperation and learning objectives, just as other forms of application within the European Social and Development Programme (ESDP) (Faludi, 2008b: 7). Within the INTERREG programme, territorial cohesion and cooperation forms are seen as important instruments to bring forward the EU's overall objectives and especially stimulate economic relationships over the borders in the case of INTERREG A (Perkmann, 1999: 664). Within that context, it has been a big priority for the EU to foster the exchange of best-practice on a

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[2] ETC and INTERREG can be used as synonyms.
[3] INTERREG V is used as the official term for the fifth funding period.

transnational, cross-border and interregional scale (Knippschild & Vock, 2017: 1736-37). The primary idea is to share and develop knowledge which can be used by other partners and is also transferrable. When compared to other EU funding programmes, INTERREG projects are the most dedicated ones to cooperation (Hachmann, 2016).

Further, although the EU has been investing in INTERREG projects for the last 25 years, there still remain certain difficulties in many areas, including access to healthcare, pension rights, cultural and language differences or the access to public facilities. Although the "spirit for cooperation" (European Commission, 2018) has been pushed forward, legal and administrative barriers are still an obstacle to certain cooperation forms. The conformance of projects is not always ideal and it seems necessary to take into account a more detailed consideration of the composition of project partners (Knippschild & Vock, 2017: 1743). The greater the homogeneity of the partners, the higher also the transferral rate and therefore, learning effects and territorial cohesion (ibid.). In 2003, INTERACT, a technical assistance programme to INTERREG, was created in order to support the programmes to facilitate networking links and transfer experience and good practices (INTERACT, 2015: 4).

As already mentioned, the central logic of INTERREG is to enhance the creation of new communities and networks and break down the "territorial and administrative constrains to the exchange of ideas" because the EU has "envisaged a project of European construction through the transcendence of local particularisms and boundaries" (Scott, 2015: 28). The next section gives an overview of the framework of INTERREG.

1.4.2. Framework of INTERREG

As has been discussed in the previous section, INTERREG underwent some changes since its launch in the 1990s. However, the projects in the programme function following a bottom-up approach because they are developed by the applicants and then approved and funded by programming bodies across the EU. Contrary to that, other programmes follow a top-down approach, which implies that funds are given out to certain projects only (e.g. European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON)) (Hachmann, 2016). As already mentioned, since the INTERREG IV period, the programme has become a mainstream objective of the Structural Funds as the ETC objective. Moreover, for the 2014-2020 funding period, ETC programmes are based on their own regulation (Regulation (EU) 1299/2013). As a result, the programme has been more formalized because general regulations "are not fully adapted to the specific needs of the European Territorial Cooperation goal, where at least two Member States or one Member State and a third country cooperate" (Regulation (EU) 1299/2013, Paragraph (2)).

Joint programming, the partnership principle, a bottom-up approach, as well as complementarity have been underlined as key principles of INTERREG (CEC, 2004, Art. 4). The general objective of INTERREG is to provide a framework for joint action and focus on common challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, the transfer of existing and emerging concepts is supported (Hachmann, 2016). Local and regional actors are involved and try to bring the EU closer to its citizen. The framework of INTERREG foresees the involvement of public and non-state actors from economic and civil society and different institutional frameworks in national states make the cooperation projects on the programme and project level a complex steering and coordination task. Therefore, it is vital that the above mentioned principles are followed (Zäch & Pütz, 2014: 30). The ETC is the EU's primary instrument to support CBC. In many other cohesion policy programmes, only authorities from one Member State are involved in the cooperation (INTERACT, 2015: 6-7). Subsidiarity and partnership is mirrored in the strong bottom-up aspects of funding. The "unique model of multi-level governance involves local and regional actors in the policy design and delivery, bringing in more efficiency and local knowledge" and "makes people work together through numerous cross-border and transnational programmes and networks" (CEC, 2008: 4 cf. Hachmann, 2016).

The previous paragraphs have given a short overview of the development and framework of the INTERREG initiative. This funding programme involves a special form of cooperation between authorities from different nation states and can involve actors from different levels of governance. When looking at the case study, it will become apparent that INTERREG can influence the governance regime of the respective area. It is further argued that the INTERREG framework can have an influence on the learning capacities and transfer possibilities among project partners. The next section gives an overview of the main research question and sub-questions.

1.5.   Main Research Question and Sub-Questions in a Nutshell

As challenges of demographic change also go beyond national borders, it is vital that they are tackled jointly by actors along borders. It is fundamental to look at various issues that go beyond the context of challenges of demographic change (Kanton Schaffhausen, 2017: 2; PA, 2015: 15). Within that context, cooperation in INTERREG projects is one of the main foci of this thesis. Therefore, the following questions are crucial to consider to be able to provide a comprehensive picture of the framework of this study: What is the rationale behind entering INTERREG projects? Who are the actors involved in cooperation and what are their reasons and motivations for joining the project? What role does the project structure play? Although

these questions do not constitute the main research questions of this Master thesis, it is indispensable that they are examined beforehand in order to embed this research into a broader context of already existing literature and academic research. This so-called 'ground work' for the thesis will lead to a more detailed discussion of the research question and sub-questions.

In the context of Interreg partnerships, cooperation does not follow a set institutional framework, but can rather be seen as an ad-hoc cooperation of various local and regional actors that join projects in order work together on certain issues. This research is going to investigate whether the structures of INTERREG projects are able to provide actors with policy transfer and policy learning possibilities. The main research question of this thesis asks 'Which patterns of local and/or regional governance enable (policy) learning, -transfer and innovation in the context of INTERREG projects?'. Further, a number of sub-questions are considered: How does the learning process within project partnerships look like? What effects (if any) of policy learning or policy transfer can we see in partner organizations (is there for example a change in working routines)? What are the limits of exchange? Lastly, as many projects are realized within the context of INTERREG programmes it is also vital to consider whether there is a potential for innovation (and thus learning) through INTERREG projects for project partners.

While looking at a rather short-term cooperation project because of its limited funding period within the official INTERREG framework, this research points to valuable lessons for the involved project partners and provides a framework for analysis for future projects. The thesis does not only trace the influence of INTERREG on multinational cooperation but will give an analysis of how knowledge is used or implemented (this is only possible with the precondition of some sort of transfer or learning). In addition, the relationship between the reasons for multinational cooperation and funding opportunities by the EU, as well as the learning possibilities within INTERREG projects will be tested. The societal relevance of this research is given because demographic change is an ongoing 'hot topic' throughout the European Union. Therefore, it is imperative to see how local and regional actors can through INTERREG cooperation projects exchange ideas and thus meet these challenges.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter gives an overview of the already existing literature on CBC, TC and policy learning and -transfer. First, the policy instruments and mechanisms will be elaborated on. Second, this is followed by a review of relevant literature. Third, the chapter concludes by pointing to important aspects which have not yet been the focus of investigation in academic research. Although learning aspects have been a focus in European funding initiatives, there is only limited understanding how knowledge can be exchanged within INTERREG projects. Above that, although sub-national authorities constitute a backbone of cooperation, only a few studies look at the governance structures of these actors within INTERREG projects. This thesis will deal with these aspects in chapter four and five and bring together lessons from the current study and other research about cross-border and transnational learning.

2.1. Policy Mechanisms and Instruments

The previous chapter has discussed a number of reasons why it is relevant to study policy formulation and policy learning within the context of INTERREG cooperation forms. Demographic change as the policy sector provides a broad range of aspects that need to be considered. The big challenge is to address the interplay of various policy areas and the ability to take decisions at the appropriate level of governance which will affect the way how policies are formulated and implemented (Szaló et al., 2011: 9). As pointed out, it is impossible to avoid the long-term structural development of societies in Europe (Eurostat, 2018). After the 2015 migration crisis, several European Countries had to experience "how short-term demographic development may generate significant challenges for national, regional and local authorities" (CoR, 2016: 5).

Policy instruments and mechanisms which are relevant for issues of demographic change can be steered at various levels of governance. This research focuses on local and regional authorities which are part of the INTERREG project[4]. LRAs are mostly confronted by a combination of challenges. There are a number of ways by which they are able to influence demographic developments in their area and it is crucial to consider modes of governance which are available to them. An important step in determining relevant factors for the mode of governance is the investigation of needs of the population. Consequently, these

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[4] The INTERREG Project ‚*Demografie-Netzwerk'* is funded under the current INTERREG V period (2014-2020). It includes partners from various governance levels from Germany and Switzerland. They are working on projects dealing with demographic challenges respective to their geographic area and society structure. The project started in 2015 and ends in 2018.

can be addressed by accurate solutions through various governance arrangements and incentive-setting (CoR, 2016: 79). In the design of responsive policies, actors have to take into account their strengths and weaknesses (e.g. in regards to territorial, economic, and population structure as well as opportunities to attract businesses and services) (ibid.: 92). In order to provide a clear and concise picture of the policy mechanisms and instruments available to these actors within the framework of INTERREG projects, the following sub-chapters present an overview of academic research that lies within the scope of this thesis.

2.2.   Literature Review

The following section will review the most important academic literature dealing with cross-border and transnational cooperation, policy learning and policy transfer. This section does not review general literature on demographic change because the latter is out of the scope of this thesis. The main focus is on examining the most important aspects of learning in the context of INTERREG cooperation. The relevant literature can be divided into three main parts. First, we have research on cooperation in general without specifically looking at aspects of policy learning and -transfer (Dühr & Nadin, 2007; Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011; Svensson, 2015; Sohn, 2017). Second, a wide range of articles (Bandelow, 2011; Bennett & Howlett, 1994; Gilardi, 2010; Hall, 1993; Heclo, 1974; Rose, 1991) is concerned with policy learning and investigates the definition and also framework conditions in which learning can take place. Third, some research (Benz & Fürst, 2002; Böhme et al., 2003: Hachmann, 2008, 2016) pays attention to the combination of cooperation and policy learning. While this part of the literature is most relevant to this thesis, section one and two are fundamental to consider in order to understand and explain the broader academic context this thesis aims to contribute to.

2.2.1. Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation

Academic research of INTERREG cooperation forms has been characterised by a growing interest in the increasingly integrated EU and the various periods of upsurge of cross-border cooperation (Sohn, 2017: 415). The literature can be grouped in several sections. While some authors (Böhme et al., 2003; Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011) discuss the definition of cooperation, there is also a strong focus on determinants of CBC (Boldrin & Canova, 2001; Colomb, 2007; Dühr & Nadin, 2007).

One aspect that stands out is the unclear use of terminology in the literature. This might be determined by the different forms of cooperation projects can take. It is very complex to get a good overview of how various terms, as for example transnational

cooperation, cross-border cooperation (CBC), cross-border governance (CBG), cross-border regions (CBR) are used in the different contexts (Böhme et al., 2003; Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011; Sohn, 2017; Svensson, 2015). Therefore, it is important to look at the definitions authors use in the context of cooperation across borders and between nation states and consider the scale of cooperation which is described.

Many forms of cooperation entail (at least) the involvement of actors from at least two different nation states. The cooperation can only focus on separate issues or involve a variety of sub-projects. Some authors put the cooperation in the context of transnational cooperation projects and argue that these can "contribute to […] new ways of thinking, conceptualising problems and identifying solutions" (Böhme et al., 2003: 34). They also argue that 'differently minded' actors are involved (ibid.), which is also pointed out by Scherer and Zumbusch who see cross-border regions as "multi-actor and multi-level spaces" (2011: 101) who are characterized by a higher degree of different actors than institutionalized regions (ibid.: 105). Although the terminology and degree of cooperation varies, they summarize that projects across borders want to "implement the 'idea of Europe' at the regional level" (ibid.: 104).

Next to the diverse terminology used, many scholars acknowledge the relevance of sub-national units for successful policy implementation and investigate the determinants of various forms of cooperation (Beugelsdijk & Eijffinger, 2005; Boldrin & Canova, 2001; Böhme et al., 2003; Colomb, 2007; Dühr & Nadin, 2007; Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011). The determinants for cooperation reach from legal and administrative, to financial, economic, cultural, linguistic and personal reasons. While Scherer talks about a variety of determinants (importance of accessibility to sufficient resources, personal relations between actors, or shared values and knowledge) (2006: 247), Böhme et al. research the nature of the knowledge and experience of project partners in transnational cooperation projects and try to find out how these can be made suitable for future effective cooperation and policy making (2003: 7). They focus on the investigation of different 'understandings of the world' and shed light on the homo – and heterogeneity of project teams. The authors summarize that the basic strength of each project team is a high level of expertise (ibid.: 34; 67-69).

Another focus of the literature lies in the financial determinants for cooperation. Often, CBC is inspired by the funding opportunities by the EU. These can set incentives for local and/or regional actors to address challenges. These similarities of the covered areas are mostly not addressed by joint solutions, but the focus of cooperation is about the sharing of experiences on common issues (Böhme et al., 2003: 7; 59; 63). There has also been influence

of supranational actors such as the European Commission because its focus on territorial cooperation on regional agendas has influenced the thematic agendas of cooperation projects (Ward & Wolleb, 2010: 77). Thus, while the financial aspects can be seen as an important driver for cooperation, European funding programmes have also influenced cooperation projects and brought new issues on the agendas which were not considered before (ibid.).

Studies do not only look at specific cases of cooperation and carry out comparative assessments of successful CBC (De Sousa, 2012; Perkmann, 2007), but also shed light on the 'added value' of addressing common issues (Colomb, 2007). Furthermore, another important factor – the legal framework of cooperation – plays a role. Many cooperation projects are not formal and institutionalized and have a high degree of informality. Cooperation therefore depends on successful governance processes. In this context, the INTERREG programme is often mentioned by several authors because it provides a framework for coordination and can act as a "political opportunity structure" (Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011: 111). Different formal competencies and responsibilities can be seen as restrictive determinants of cooperation because they can be incompatible for decision-making and increase the complexity of the cooperative arrangement. Furthermore, missing leadership and capacities for conflict-solving can also limit the success of cooperation and be seen as governance dilemmas. Although European integration is an important driver of CBC, there are still many barriers that need to be acknowledged (Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011: 101-106).

Next to the determinants of cooperation, the concept of Europeanization also plays a role in this field of research. Various scholars investigate territorial cooperation in the light of Europeanization (Dühr et al., 2007; Dühr & Nadin, 2007; Marshall, 2005). It is argued that transnational cooperation can be seen as an interactive process of Europeanization. However, the "effects [are] complex and often not directly attributable to a certain initiative" (Dühr et al., 2007: 300). Marshall has researched whether Europeanization models can be used to analyse multiple territorial levels and see whether there is a domestic institutional change. When lower-tier levels of governance participate in EU programming initiatives or partnerships, they are exposed to various procedures which might induce a change. However, he concludes by saying that it is difficult to define local-level Europeanization (Marshall, 2005: 669).

In sum, while it is vital to look at the nature of CBC and connected issues of democratic legitimacy (Gualini, 2003), most authors agree that commonalities, such as of geographic or spatial nature are important for projects across borders because they often force neighbouring authorities to engage in joint projects (De Sousa, 2012: 12-16). It is vital to

acknowledge that there is no single explanation for CBC and that such cooperation entails 'hard work' (Scherer & Zumbusch, 2005: 103). In fact, it is an interplay of various factors that are connected with each other which need to be taken into consideration when studying INTERREG projects. Knippschild & Vock underline the thought of an increased promotion of CBC in order to bring forward an exchange of ideas and experiences across borders (2017: 1744).

2.2.2. Learning

The second strand of research, which is relevant for this thesis is learning. Its relevance is apparent because it has become a key aspect of regional and economic development policies of the European Union. The importance, but also the complexity of the concept is underlined by several authors (Böhme et al., 2003: 31; Peck & Theodore, 2001: 449). Similarly to the literature on cross-border and transnational cooperation, this research can be grouped in three main strands: differences in terminology (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Hall, 1993; Heclo, 1974; Rose, 1991), types, forms and outcomes of learning (Bandelow, 2003; Böhme et al., 2003; Evans, 2009; Gilardi, 2010) and difficulties of tracing learning and policy transfer (Bennet & Howlett, 1992; Biegelbauer, 2007; Bogner & Menz, 2005).

Since the 1980s, and especially in the late 1990s to mid-2000s, research on learning has experienced a growth in interest and has been addressed in various disciplines (Bensons & Jordan, 2011: 366). Although the various categories have been grouped and categorized (see Bandelow, 2011), there is no common approach in the literature (Bensons & Jordan, 2011; Biegelbauer, 2007; Gilardi, 2010). One article points out that the concept has been "overtheorized and underapplied" (Bennett & Howlett, 1992: 289) and Gilardi argues that learning processes are more complex than assumed by previous research (2010: 661). Therefore, as with cooperation forms, various terms are present in the debate. Lesson-drawing (Rose, 1991), social learning (Hall, 1993) political learning (Heclo, 1974), policy learning (Biegelbauer, 2007), policy transfer (Bensons & Jordan, 2011) or learning as a mechanism of diffusion (Gilardi, 2010: 651) are used to describe this phenomenon of knowledge/experience exchange. One author summarizes all these examples under the umbrella term policy transfer, in which "knowledge about institutions, policies, or delivery systems at one sector or level of governance is used in the development of institutions, policies or delivery systems at another sector or level of governance" (Evans, 2009: 244). Although the concept of policy transfer attracts growing attention in political science, its application in the EU remains underdeveloped (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004: 103).

The second strand of articles focuses on different aspects of learning. Authors discuss various characteristics of the above mentioned definition or how the process of learning can be pictured. For example, lesson-drawing puts an emphasis on a voluntary act of transfer by rational actors and refers to the possibility of learning from both negative and positive experiences from politicians, the design of better policies (Rose, 1991: 3; 7) and the concrete situation when the outcomes of learning are a change of policies (Bennet & Howlett, 1992). Rose (1991) has been criticized for his "implicit assumptions" about the voluntary and rational aspect of learning (Bulmer et al., 2007: 13). However, also Evans underlines that lesson-drawing stems from a rational, action-oriented approach (2009: 245).

In contrast to that, social learning is about the understanding why certain initiatives fail and others succeed. In other words, they learn the social process behind certain actions. This type concerns the exchange of policy ideas, changes in policy and the strategic objectives of political actors (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Hall, 1993). This point of view on social learning is opposed by May (1992) who does not consider it to be about changes in policy, instruments, or goals. Other foci of investigation are political learning (Heclo, 1974: 306), governmental learning (Etheredge, 1981: 77-78), or policy learning, which is about the content of political programmes (Biegelbauer, 2007: 238).

Moreover, several terms have been developed to describe how the process of learning occurs (Agyris & Schön, 1996). In general, this involves the detection and correction of errors, the ability to invent new policies which are adjusted to the learning process, the incorporation of new items of information (Jachtenfuchs, 1996: 34) or the influence of prior decisions on policy choices by one actor in country A on another actor in country B (Gilardi, 2010: 651). While it is vital to acknowledge that learning is seen as a dynamic concept and dynamic process (Böhme et al., 2003: 32; Hachmann, 2008: 16) and that it can happen both in vertical and horizontal levels (Bulmer et al., 2007), Gilardi points out that not all actors are able to learn the same way because they are strongly determined by their ideology and prior beliefs (2010: 651).

Academic research also addresses the aspects of learning itself. This entails the content, the setting, the changes, the results, the types, and the subject or object of learning (Bandelow, 2003; Biegelbauer, 2007; Böhme et al., 2003; Hall, 1993; Rose, 1991). The subject of learning has received growing attention (De Jong & Edelenbos, 2007: 688). The literature differentiates between individual and organizational (or collective) learning. Although the authors do not all use the same terminology, it is apparent that individual learning mostly concerns single politicians, civil servants or so-called 'transfer agents' which

come from different levels (EU, national, programme level), while collective learning concerns the whole organization, NGOs, mass media, or civil society as a whole and is more difficult to achieve and investigate (Biegelbauer, 2007: 235; Böhme et al., 2003: 34; De Jong & Edelenbos, 2007: 687; Rose, 1991). Some authors say that it is extremely important to look at the subjects in their institutional context (Hall, 1993; Rose, 1991). Also, the types of learning (simple or complex) are investigated (Biegelbauer, 2007; Böhme et al., 2003). In sum, the crucial link between the various kinds of learning is the individual learning. In addition, the evaluation of learning (either ex ante, during, or ex post) is pivotal (Böhme et al., 2003: 8-11).

Next to the aspects of learning, research sheds light on forms and outcomes of learning. This entails whether learning is possible by "learning by doing" (Böhme et al., 2003: 66), or if it can also happen when a program is simply copied, used as a model but tailored, synthesized, or only taken as inspiration for one's own policy (Rose, 1991: 22; Rose, 2005: 81). Dolowitz and Marsh also address non-transfer or failed transfer (2000: 9). Rose (1991) investigates the possibility of more effective goal achievement through learning. Contrary to that, Hall does not consider the success-factor as a precondition for learning, but focuses on the actors' changing attitudes, belief systems and following behaviour (1993: 293). The opposing views of Rose and Hall, and thus the learning from either only positive or positive and negative experience is further investigated by other authors which analyse whether learning automatically leads to the solving of problems and consequently has positive outcomes (Nullmeier, 2003). Although the research on the forms and outcome of learning is extensive, there is no consensus in the literature why actors learn. Political pressure, re-election pressure, dynamic of the existing coalition or political or economic crises are examples which are mentioned by scholars (Bandelow, 2003: 311).

Finally, third big strand of literature discusses difficulties of tracing learning. Although various kinds of learning take place, it is hard to trace individual learning into organisational learning. The problem for researchers is the direct observation of political actors when they learn. Mostly, academic research in this field is based on expert interviews which implies only an indirect tracing of learning dynamics (Bogner & Menz, 2005). Biegelbauer (2007) has underlined that the biggest question for scholars is not how the knowledge was brought to the individual, but what has been learned. Whether learning has an effect on the formulation of policies is interesting to investigate and it would be vital to understand what an actor knew at point 0 and at point 1 and trace whether learning had an effect on policy formulation (ibid.: 242-243). However, Furthermore, existing theories vary

greatly not only in their terminology, but also on what the subjects and objects of learning are, what the effects of the phenomenon are and what impact it has. Bennett & Howlett already in the early 1990s called for an all-encompassing concept about organizational learning, learning in projects, policy-learning and the focus of learning as a source of policy change (1992: 276; 289). As the setting of the research can be multifaceted, and it is important to have a good overview of the existing theories (Biegelbauer, 2007: 232).

2.2.3. Learning in INTERREG Cooperation Projects

INTERREG cooperation forms and learning have been, in general, a widely researched topic. Several articles investigate various aspects of learning in these forms of cooperation (Benz & Fürst, 2002; Böhme et al., 2003; Böhme, 2005; Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois, 2006; Hachmann, 2008). In the last couple of years, transnational learning has become a buzzword in European policy-making. This can be ascribed to the increasing opportunities provided by EU funding programmes, but also to the increasing acknowledgment of the diversity of European regions and their exchange as an added value which can generate innovation and opportunities for success (Hachmann, 2016). The literature can be divided into three strands: definitions, research approach and differences in learning modes.

First, one article points out that it is vital to adopt a definition of learning which reflects "the learning character and at the same time also determinants for transnational cooperation" (Böhme et al., 2003: 32). Hachmann approaches this differently and underlines the fact that learning is a "key technique in transnational cooperation" and can be seen as a "method for transnational networking" (2008: 11). She argues that learning in transnational cooperation cannot fit certain categories, but that it is crucial to look at various viewpoints of learning theory (ibid.). While Böhme et al. (2003) argue that an accurate definition of learning in transnational cooperation needs to be adopted in order to carry out research in this field, Hachmann (2008) discusses different forms of learning and explains when and why they are vital to consider The author particularly points to adaptive and generative learning within the INTERREG projects. While the further implies the exchange of information, best-practice or experience about ideas, activities or strategies, the latter is about innovative approaches to experience exchange by jointly inventing new products, services and systems (Hachmann, 2008: 12). Hachmann indicates that transnational cooperation should be about generative learning implying a more complex conception of actions (2008: 12). Benz and Fürst see policy learning on the sub-national level as a precondition of development on that governance level (2002: 21). In contrast to that, Lähteenmäki-Smith and Dubois try to shed light on the

actual content of learning, rather than on the forms and processes of the phenomenon (2006: 10).

Second, the literature points to the importance of a joint approach to projects when transnational learning might be transposed (Böhme et al., 2003: 58) and investigates the learning possibilities in INTERREG projects and the beneficial or impeding conditions for a transfer (Hachmann, 2008: 11). It has been argued that one joint 'umbrella' project as well as the involvement of diverse actors can be advantageous to the project partners' ability to exchange experience (Böhme et al., 2003: 58, Hachmann, 2008: 11). Although the increased complexity can be seen as an impeding factor, Hachmann points out that the different professional, institutional and cultural backgrounds of project partners in European cooperation programs and initiatives are regarded as a resource of added value (2008: 11). However, the difficulty of finding similar interests and solutions can also impede the learning capacity (Adrian, 2003: 41).

Third and last, in INTERREG cooperation projects, it is also vital to make a distinction between individual and organisational learning. The literature lists three key moments of learning: first, when the actors learn about the cooperation and the content in the project group, second, when the individual participant learns something new in the various sub-projects and third, when individual learning becomes organisational learning (Böhme et al., 2003: 60). As described in the general articles on learning, the possibility of the outcomes of transferring knowledge can be manifold, however, it is nearly impossible to create transnational knowledge and it is argued that individual learning, which can occur during discussions, presentations or field visits to other projects, is much easier than organisational one (ibid.: 62). Although Hachmann also discusses individual and organizational learning, she focuses more on how the individual learning process should look like in order to adopt adequate communication and learning skills. Next to expertise, mutual trust, and the willingness to share resources and knowledge, these skills constitute a precondition of possible organizational learning (Hachmann, 2007 cf. Hachmann, 2008: 13). A big influence on the learning ability has also the focus of the project, the geography of cooperation and the composition of the project team (Böhme, 2005: 694-695). Learning can also happen mostly from best-practice examples (Ahlke et al., 2007: 25).

When looking at the literature on this subject, it becomes apparent that there are many similarities with the articles on INTERREG cooperation. In fact, many determinants which are vital to consider in the success of cooperation across borders, also have an influence on the learning possibilities across borders. The difficulty of learning in these projects ties in

with the arguments listed above which can impede cooperation. In fact, learning becomes extremely difficult when the actors are embedded in different administrative and legal systems (Böhme et al., 2003: 7), although this can also bring added value (Hachmann, 2008: 11). It remains a difficult task to research this topic because of the limited comparability of various INTERREG projects. However, Böhme et al. underline that they see effective cooperation as an integral part of the process of learning (2003: 7). Hachmann points out that the generalization of case study knowledge can support mutual learning and bring forward the research in this field. Nevertheless, bringing together lessons from INTERREG cooperation projects is extremely complex and needs the formulation of conceptual categories that go beyond case studies (Hachmann, 2008: 11; 15).

2.3.   The Contribution of this Study to Existing Research

The previous sub-sections have shown that the literature on CBC and TC and learning is extensive. Therefore, it is vital to be very precise when looking at case studies or comparative work in order to draw conclusions on learning aspects or determinant effects of INTERREG cooperation forms.

Although the learning aspect is a great focus of various European funding initiatives (for example INTERREG), there is only limited understanding on how (if at all) knowledge is exchanged across borders or nation states and whether the same or different aspects of learning are important to consider. It has been argued that local and regional authorities constitute the backbone of various INTERREG cooperation forms. However, only a limited amount of studies looked at lower tier actors (for example level of cities see De Jong & Edelenbos, 2007). Many articles focus on key stakeholders and neglect the importance and central role of lower governance levels (Svensson, 2015: 279). A better insight into the workings of such cooperation of the sub-national levels could lead to a better understanding and probably more effective and successful cooperation (ibid.).

It is complex to bring together lessons from INTERREG projects. The increasing interest in this research field has yet not provided a clear understanding of the inner functioning of cooperation projects (Hachmann, 2016). However, the lessons learned at programme and projects level have the potential to bring forward future research. This thesis contributes to the existing studies of cases on INTERREG projects and adds understanding to how the framework of those contribute to the learning abilities of project partners. Although the case study findings cannot be transposed to other geographic fields, it will be shown that there are similar thematic threads with other studies (Hachmann, 2008: 16). By doing this, a first step in overcoming the limitation of case-based experienced findings is made and a

framework of thematic categories of previous studies and the current study can be built. Furthermore, the policy field within this thesis can be situated – demographic change – is a pressing issue which needs more responsive policies on various levels of governance.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Chapter three lays the ground work for establishing a conceptual link between theory and practice. This theoretical framework is built on various strands of research. As a general introduction of the rationale of INTERREG cooperation and the importance of sub-national actors in this process, the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) by Hooghe and Marks (2003) will provide a guidance for the institutional framework in which actors of INTERREG projects can be located. For the more detailed operationalization of the research, concepts of CBC, TC and learning are taken into account. These sub-chapters aim at giving an insight into the working of particular mechanisms and give an appropriate justification of the framework which fits the research approach and research question. This chapter introduces not only relevant concepts, but also outlines how those will be used for the empirical investigation.

This chapter is structured in the following: first, the discussion of multi-level governance provides the necessary context and theoretical underpinnings for the chosen subject. Light is shed on the reasons of cooperation across borders or transnationally by looking through the lens of this first analytical model. Second, two crucial concepts, cooperation within INTERREG structures and learning, are presented. The most vital characteristics of both concepts will support the correlative nature of cooperation and various forms of learning. As the main research question of this thesis asks 'Which patterns of local and/or regional governance enable (policy) learning, -transfer and innovation in the context of INTERREG projects?', it is vital to build a framework which addresses both levels of governance and the learning and innovative possibilities of these actors. It is expected that the multi-level governance structure of INTERREG projects provides local and regional authorities with opportunity structures to exchange knowledge and experience and learn from each other. However, it must be acknowledged that the variables which determine the motivation for entering the cooperation play a vital role in the actors' willingness for exchange. Above that, although flexible patterns of governance increase the potential for learning and innovative policy transfer, there is no guarantee that knowledge and experience can be exchanged, even if the programme and project structure are advantageous for such a process.

3.1. Multi-level Governance

The introduction to demographic change has discussed why the look at various levels of governance is vital when it comes to responsive policy formulation. Various authors have researched diverse governance structures. Terms, such as the "relativization of scales"

(Brenner, 1998: 33), "multi-level governance" (Marks et al., 1996: 342) or "multi-tiered system of governance" (Leibfried & Pierson, 1995) have been introduced. Cooperation in INTERREG project contexts involves a series of actors who come from different nation states and levels of governance. In order to better understand this dynamic and be able to provide an answer to the main research question, the concept of MLG builds the theoretical backbone of this research. Its literature is mainly concerned with the involvement of sub-national authorities in the decision-making process in the policy process.

Hooghe and Marks (2003) discuss in their MLG concept that it is vital to look at the starting point of actors' capacities for action. When challenges want to be answered with the support of other actors, sub-national authorities in the decision-making process for policy strategies can be regarded as central 'players of the game'. In the case of demographic change, it is crucial to acknowledge that the challenges are an overarching theme across many policy areas, and thus, actors from various levels and policy areas can be involved in the successful formulation of future demographic policies. MLG assumes that actors are embedded in a system of governance where authority is dispersed, and thus regional and local governments are also responsible for policies at lower territorial tiers (Hooghe & Marks, 2003: 233). In contrast, authority might also be centralized and make governance limited to fixed barriers. However, the efficiency of nested government has been challenged by several authors (Casella & Weingast, 1995: 15). In fact, a dispersion of governance allows for more flexibility for action across multiple jurisdictions and also better tailored responses to citizens' preferences. Furthermore, the dispersion of governance allows for more flexibility across multiple jurisdictions (Hooghe & Marks, 2003: 235).

Hooghe and Marks describe two types of MLG. Whereas Type I is a typical federation (national states like Germany), type II has been made in order to show how the EU functions. Table one comparatively illustrates the two types:

MLG Type I	MLG Type II
General-purpose jurisdictions	Task-specific jurisdictions
Nonintersecting memberships	Intersecting memberships
Jurisdiction at a limited number of levels	No limit of the number of jurisdictional levels
System-wide architecture	Flexible design

Table 1: Types of MLG (Hooghe & Marks, 2003)

The discussion of the two MLG types is vital for the context of this research. Although actors who are involved in INTERREG projects mostly come from different administrative and legal

systems, the opportunity of this cooperation opens up possibilities which are often reserved for central state actors (Perkmann, 1999: 658). When looking at the characteristics of MLG type II, it can be assumed that cooperation within INTERREG projects fit this type. They focus on specific tasks, typically have intersecting memberships which means that they can be part of more than one project. Above that, actors from municipalities, cities, or regional entities can be involved. The fourth characteristic, flexible design, is also given both at programme and project level. This stems from the fact that projects within INTERREG are mostly designed bottom-up. Yet, it should be underlined that within the policy field of demographic challenges, the flexibility and responsiveness has a high priority when formulating policies. The assumptions about the application of MLG type II are built on a study on Euroregions (see Perkmann, 2007) and will be tested for the case study in chapter five.

The context of this research evolves around current demographic challenges actors in Europe are facing today. As this is a very case-specific topic, it is vital that authorities can react to challenges heterogeneously. Decentralized levels of governance are better able to accommodate differences. As Hooghe and Marks argue, actors at lower tiers of government are able to see preferences and re-design their policies more openly. A setting of MLG "allows decision makers to adjust the scale of governance to reflect heterogeneity" (2003: 236). The multi-level character of the European Union is vital to consider because the transfer-potential of actors is connected to that framework. Policy can be moved up, down or between the supranational, national and sub-national levels of governance (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004: 103, Bulmer et al., 2007). Not only vertical channels, but also horizontal channels can be used for a transfer of knowledge and ideas. This means that learning can manifest itself also between levels of different political systems. It is important to acknowledge that policy transfer is characterized by a shift from the government-centric level to actors on multiple levels and positions (Bensons & Jordan, 2011: 372). Furthermore, MLG structures provide local actors with the ability to use loosening jurisdictional boundaries between various tiers of governance. When local and regional actors are able to embed their initiatives into broader multilevel patterns, it is possible that higher input-oriented legitimisation is achieved. (Gualini, 2003: 46; 49).

The potential of these transfer opportunities has been described and analysed by several authors. While Radaelli called the EU a "massive transfer platform" (2000: 26), other scholars refer to it as a "supranational idea hopper" (Bomberg & Peterson, 2000: 12) where policy between Member States can be exchanged. Increased European integration and

harmonization have influenced the intensity of cross-border cooperation, a comparison and exchange with neighbouring authorities and sub-national levels of governance. Yet, this does not automatically imply a growth in policy convergence among the involved systems (De Jong & Edelenbos, 2007: 688). One hypothesis can be drawn from the theoretical underpinnings described above:

> *H1: The structure of INTERREG will have an influence on how the project partners connect, how they are able to work together and ultimately also whether they can learn something from each other.*

The determinants of cooperation are expected to depend heavily on the probability of being able to meet challenges of demographic change collectively. INTERREG cooperation projects can provide local tier actors with the ability to incorporate their policy initiatives in the broader multilevel context. The flexibility and preference adaption on lower tiers of governance must be taken into consideration when formulating policies for demographic change. As many actors (also with spatial proximity) are dealing with similar demographic challenges, INTERREG projects can provide a multi-level framework for exchange and learning. Still, direct transfer or cross-loading has to be seen in a critical light and be applied with caution although the potential of multi-level governance structures are great. As the INTERREG V programme aims at promoting a linkage between regional and local actors which should ultimately result in learning possibilities, policy transfer and a successful formulation of policies (Managing Authority ABH, 2014), it is vital to research these framework conditions and analyse whether the theoretical underpinnings which have been outlined above are relevant and play a distinctive role in successful cooperation and formulation of policies.

3.2. The Logic of Cooperation

As pointed out in the first chapter and the literature review, INTERREG cooperation forms can take many names and be characterized by many factors. The context of this research draws upon the assumption that actors from at least two different nation states work together. This usually covers sub-national entities on the regional and local level (Studzieniecki, 2016: 239). When researching cooperation of actors of different nation states, it is crucial to clearly indicate what sort of cooperation is investigated and how the terminology is used. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is pointed out that this thesis studies cooperation structures within INTERREG.

This section will provide the theoretical underpinnings for answering the following questions: What is the rationale behind entering INTERREG projects? Who are the actors involved in cooperation? What role does the project structure play? What kind of networks (if any) can be established? The importance of this research is underlined by the fact that cross-border cooperation can undermine the "exclusive gate-keeper role which national executive held during most of the 20th century" (Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011: 102). This position is not only challenged by public actors, but by a cooperative style of interaction and actors from public, private, and non-profit sectors who work together in new forms of governance. Blatter (2003: 513) has argued that cross-border institutions only complement national ones, but do not replace them. Every form of cooperation should find its own cooperative structure and way of governance in order to have successful cooperation outcomes. As argued above, the heterogeneity of a multi-tier governance structure is better able to react and incorporate citizens' preferences. Therefore, one universally valid model of governance structure does not exist for cooperation of actors of different national states (Scherer, 2006).

In the following, determinants for cooperation across borders and between nation states are outlined. There are a number of important factors that influence cooperation projects. Next to sufficient resources and capacities, personal relationships between the project partners, shared values, knowledge, expertise, and also existing political opportunity structures are vital for the existence or building of cross-border cooperation (Scherer, 2006: 247). Contrary to that, there are also factors which might impede successful cross-border governance. Examples for this are missing leadership, missing capacitates or missing cooperation on the local level. Colomb (2007: 355) argued that the topic of the policy issue at stake and the geographic nature of it are crucial determinants for cooperation across borders. In fact, the geographic nature will be a determinant of whether project partnerships receive INTERREG funding by the EU or not. Above that, research points to the fact that the main limit of cooperation is the restricted capacity for conflict-solving which is explained by the lack of democratic legitimization and the voluntary cooperative character (Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011: 106). In fact, the 'democratic deficit' in CBC does not resolve because the cooperation across borders might be seen as an inherent act of democracy, but questions of autonomy, accountability, effectiveness and legitimacy face "dual contradiction" (ibid.: 105).

Next to these determining factors, it is crucial to look at existing policy networks that are involved in cooperation (Benz & Fürst, 2002: 24). Stone has identified transnational networks as "important vehicles for the spread of policy and practice not only cross-nationally but in emergent venues of global governance" (2004: 545). Three variables are important to investigate in the context of networks: first, the mode of cooperation, second, the composition of project partners, and third, the individual characteristics of partners. The first variable, the mode of cooperation is pivotal. An analysis of the case study project group will be based on the characteristics which have been described by Böhme et al. (2003). The authors see cooperation on an axis between close and lose cooperation. One might assume that a high degree of participation also entails good-quality partnerships. However, it has been discussed that this cannot be seen as a pre-given characteristic, although a high degree of participation indicates a potential will for exchange. The literature on networks is very rich, therefore, this thesis will also pay attention to the potential of flexible ad-hoc networks to facilitate learning and policy transfer which are relevant in the context of INTERREG programmes and best-practice exchange. Figure one presents five modes of cooperation.
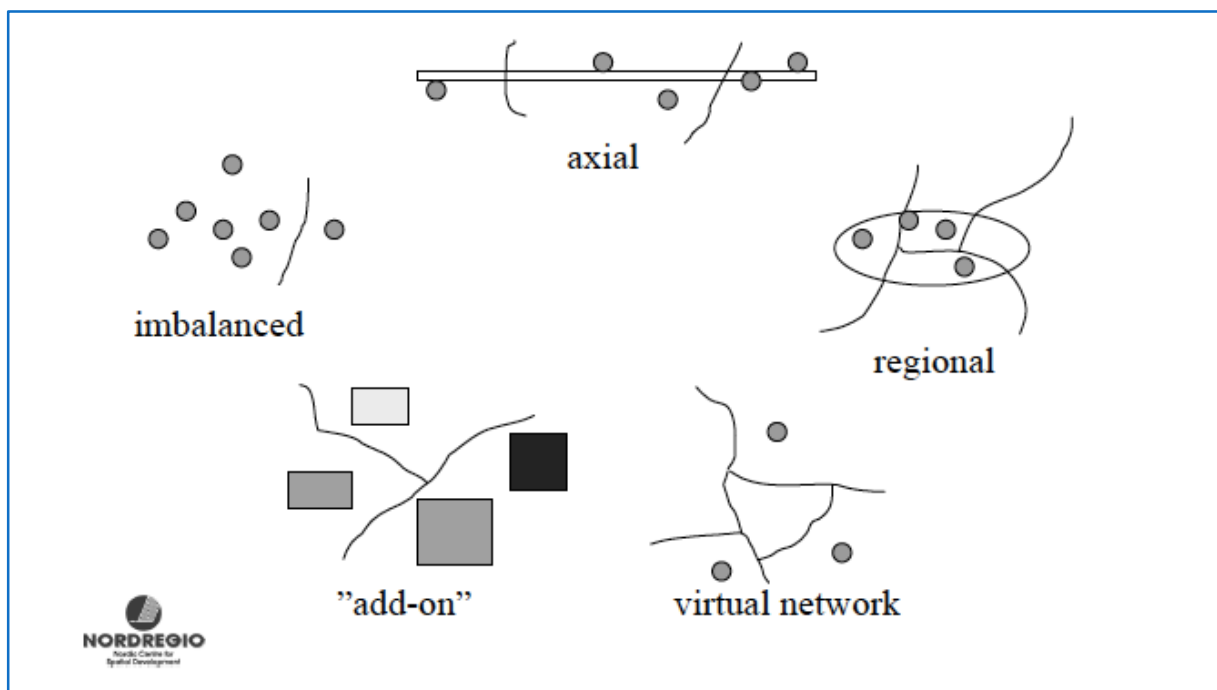

Figure 1: Modes of Cooperation (Böhme et al., 2003: 56)

Böhme et al. (2003) have discussed these modes in their study on Nordic-Scottish cooperation. In the following, in order to give a full picture of cooperation modes, each category is shortly discussed. The types of cooperation differ according to the shape and nature of the network. When most partners come from the same country, it is possible to speak about imbalanced cooperation. Imbalanced implies the partners do not come from the same administrative level of governance, for example some cooperation partners are regional

authorities, and one from the central government. Next, Böhme et al. describe axial and regional cooperation. While the axial type is often connected to 'real world' geographic specificities (transport axis or waterway), the regional cooperation is usually of spatial proximity and includes project partners from an emerging functional region. The last two modes of cooperation, virtual networks and add-on projects are on two different ends of a scale. Virtual networks are built in order to share experience, thus the idea of cross-border or transnational cooperation and learning is very present. In opposition to this, the authors describe add-on models where the exchange is kept to a minimum and where the cooperation project only forms a loose umbrella for a serious of sub-projects. In this case, the partners only join the cooperation to implement local sub-projects, but not as in the virtual network, with the primary idea to exchange ideas and share experiences (Böhme et al., 2003: 56-58). In chapter five, the mode of cooperation for the case study project group will be analysed and assumptions about the determinants and effectiveness of the project on demographic challenges are made.

Another important step when researching INTERREG cooperation forms is not only the mode of cooperation itself, but also the composition of the project team. The success of a project can be determined by factors such as language and cultural diversity. These characteristics influence the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity of the project team. Böhme et al. have pointed out that it is also relevant to look at whether partners of the project group had already pre-existing (personal) relationships which can influence trust – and confidence-building. If groups have a high degree of homogeneity regarding their language, culture and professional background, it can be easier to work together (Böhme et al., 2003: 67). Further, the transferral rate between the project partners can be higher (Knippschild & Vock, 2017: 1743). At the same time, these criteria can also impede the innovative character of the team. However, challenging discussions and ideas might evolve more prominently in heterogeneous groups, which are then nevertheless limited by the actors different starting points of expertise and lack of common understanding for certain topics. Next to these variables of cooperation which can be seen as overarching characteristics for the whole project group, the individual group members can have personal contacts to each other and establish a more sensitive relation by participating in a project with partners coming from different legal and administrative backgrounds (Böhme et al., 2003: 67-69; 72).

3.3.   Learning

This sub-chapter provides an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of *learning* in order to be able to connect theory and practice. Building on the knowledge elaborated on in this part

of the thesis, it is expected to provide answers to the following questions: How does the learning process within project partnerships look like? What forms of learning can be observed? Who are the subjects of learning? What effects (if any) of policy learning or policy transfer can we see in partner organizations (is there for example a change in working routines)? What are limits of exchange? Lastly, as many projects are realized within the context of INTERREG programmes, it is also vital to consider whether there is a potential for innovation (and thus learning) through INTERREG projects for project partners.

Before proceeding with the elaboration on this concept, it is necessary to set a definition of learning that will be applied for this research. In the context of projects of the INTERREG initiative, learning is seen as a dynamic process, where actors from various levels of governance interact and exchange knowledge or experience which can be applied elsewhere (Hassink & Lagendijk, 2001: 66-67). Learning is seen as "an interactive process of individually and collectively making sense of knowledge transfer by means of adapting routines, rules and practices, with each actor acting from a different socio-cultural, professional, institutional and organizational background (Healey, 1997 cf. Hachmann, 2008: 12). It is vital to point out that learning is not only connected to the implementation or formulation of policy, but also to the social aspects of that process (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Hall, 1993). Hachmann (2016) argued that it is crucial to include various viewpoints of learning theory, therefore, these will be the most important considerations for the concept.

The following paragraphs will discuss several characteristics of learning. First, the implication of various forms of learning is discussed. Then, the actors and types of learning, the motivations for learning and some challenges of learning are addressed. At the end of the chapter, table two gives an overview of the characteristics.

3.3.1. Characteristics of Learning

According to network theory, learning is about the combination of old and new knowledge and also implies the application of this knowledge in order to cope with emerging challenges (Lawson & Lorenz, 1999: 307). Successful learning takes place "if dominant actors have adjusted their potentials to changed conditions and are better positioned to cope with them" (Benz & Fürst, 2002: 22). Learning can be seen as a process and not all actors have to change or adapt at the same time to be able to trace learning capacities (ibid.). In accordance, it is vital to acknowledge that the experience or knowledge which is exchanged by actors will likely have different effects because of a predetermination of ideology and prior belief systems (Gilardi, 2010: 651). This closely ties in with the Bayesian approach where learning is connected to actors' beliefs. Learning manifests itself either through experimentation or by

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observance (ibid.). Moreover, it is also about the adjustment of goals and techniques for policy. Involved actors want to understand why certain policies fail and others succeed. Accordingly, a change in response, which has been driven by a certain stimulus can be observed (Hall, 1993; Heclo, 1974: 306). These characteristic all have in common that they are perceived as being part of a process (Böhme et al., 2003: 32). In sum, the dynamic of learning is a pivotal factor which makes it also important in cooperation projects where actors need to be flexible and react diligently to changing framework conditions. Building on this framework, it is argued that this dynamism will be a favourable condition for the formulation of responsive policies which contribute to answering demographic challenges.

It is crucial to acknowledge that policy makers have prior beliefs about the policy they are designing and implementing, therefore, the effects of learning will be different on various actors (Gilardi, 2010: 651). Gilardi describes this as "posterior beliefs which determine the choices of policy makers" (2010: 651). Following this conceptualization, a second hypothesis can be developed regarding learning and the actors of the INTERREG project under investigation:

> H2: The actors, coming from different levels of governance, have predetermined beliefs and ideologies and will therefore not be able to learn the same from the experiences of others.

However, although policy makers have prior beliefs, they are likely to enter the cooperation project in order to learn from the experiences of other actors. Another important factor of analysis is therefore the identification of actors who want to learn. Learning enables coordination whilst not giving away regulatory power, therefore, mostly politicians and civil servants want to learn from each other (Radaelli, 2008: 242-243). Policy performance on highly salient issues often determines the re-election of people in public office, therefore, the incentive to learn might be strong (Lewis-Beck & Paldman, 2000: 119). May (1992) has argued that when there is a certain pressure for adaptation, political learning can take place. The main aim of this is to learn about strategies of other actors. This form of learning materializes itself mostly when new arguments and political strategies are used (Nilsson, 2005: 2011). Civil servants want to learn in order to survive and adapt in constant changing policy contexts (Knill & Lenschow, 2005: 590).

In order to be able to provide a comprehensive analysis of the case study, it is necessary to give further insights in the types, stages, outcomes, effects and objects of learning. This elaboration is imperative in order to place this study in the overall picture of the existing research. The first category deals with the differentiation between individual and

organizational (or collective) learning on the one hand, and simple and complex learning, on the other hand. Also, simple learning is more on the surface of actors experiences and exchange, while complex learning refers to a more in-depth change of the way of thinking about problem-solving and action (Böhme et al., 2003: 33). These classifications are used by many authors that investigate the capacities of learning. Especially the division of individual and organizational learning is essential. The further can manifest itself in various forms (either social, political, etc.) and is also easier to trace for the researcher. However, the latter form of learning, organizational one, refers to how the experience and knowledge which was collected at the transnational, cross-border and national/regional level is translated to the persons' organizational base. In other words, this entails the transfer of individual learning to organizational one but does not mean that the two encompass the same content (ibid.: 33-65). Not everything learned for the individual can be transferred to people working at the home organization. A third hypothesis can be derived from these theoretical underpinnings.

> H3: Successful policy transfer between the project partners will one the one hand depend on the ability of individuals to 'transfer' the knowledge and on the other hand also on the content of the project.

This expected relationship is tested in chapter five. The next section discusses the motivation for learning before all characteristics are summarized in table two.

3.3.2. Motivation for Learning

There are various assumptions why actors would be motivated to learn from others when they engage in cooperation projects. First and foremost, efficiency differences between learning and experienced policy set-backs are a vital variable that is taken under consideration. When actors learn from others, they might be able to avoid making mistakes and thus work more efficiently (Radaelli, 2008: 243). Therefore, within learning concepts, it is crucial to differentiate whether the motivation behind learning stems from the motivation for policy improvement or from political purposes (Gilardi, 2010: 650). In this context, the cooperation rationale for project partners in INTERREG cooperation which has been outlined above is crucial to investigate also in the light of motivations. However, although the motivation for learning might be given, Borrás and Jacobsson have argued that the potential of learning is determined by the

> "systematic diffusion of knowledge and experiences; persuasion supported by practices of peer review and dialogue; knowledge work including the development of a common policy discourse; comparable statistics, and common indicators, repetition, and strategic use of policy linkages" (2004: 195).

Learning processes do not necessarily need to take place in the context of INTERREG cooperation, but can also only be activated within the internal organizational set-up of actors (Scott & Trubek, 2002). Thus, learning within the organizational network is a vital aspect that will be taken under consideration in this research to provide a complete picture. One important argument which connects the concept of learning with the multi-level governance character of the European Union is that learning helps to "accumulate one of the resources needed in governance: the capability for jointly identifying and solving problems" (Faludi, 2008b: 3). Learning has a great potential for change and is relevant not only for INTERREG projects but for European integration in general (ibid.: 4). Building on the theoretical underpinnings, in is expected that CBC which is driven by finding joint challenges on demographic trends, the motivation to efficiently work together, learn from each other and exchange experiences will be considerably high. The cooperation and funding by the EU might also reduce the political sensibility of the topic.

Table two provides an overview of categories which are considered during this research. This account gives a broad overview of how many characteristics and categories need to be considered when researching learning.

Category	Possible type
Level of learning	Individual vs. organizational
	Simple vs. complex
Subjects of learning	Politicians
	Civil servants
	Transfer agents
	NGOs
	Civil society
Motivation for learning	Re-election pressure
	Pressure for adaptation
	Political pressure (e.g. from coalition)
	Crisis
	Policy improvement
	Solving challenges
Stages of learning	Project design
	Appraisal
	Delivery
	Monitoring
	Evaluation

Outcomes of learning	Publications
	Seminars
	Conferences
	Strategy papers
	Non-material: new ideas and opportunities
Objects of learning	Political intervention
	Belief systems
	Development of innovative programmes
	Goals of policies
Effects of learning	Copy
	Emulation
	Hybridization
	Synthesis
	Inspiration
	Failed transfer
	Non-transfer
Framework of governance	Lower-tier level (local, regional)
	National
	European

Table 2: Overview of learning categories (Böhme et al., 2003, Evans, 2009; Hall, 1993; Rose, 1991)

As becomes apparent from the table, learning is not simply about a transfer of policies or ideas from one actor to another, but entails a multi-faceted process. These theoretical underpinnings form an important block for the empirical investigation of the case study. The above listed categories have all been drawn from relevant research in the field of learning and cooperation projects. It can be expected that not all categories will be found in the case study, but that at least part of them can be located in the investigation. It is vital to connect this research to the current state of the debate and build on already operationalized categories in order to add new knowledge to the already existing research on learning in INTERREG cooperation forms. As this thesis main question concerns the patterns of governance in INTERREG projects and learning, therefore, the level of governance is a category which has been added by the author when looking at learning mechanisms.

3.3.3. Policy Learning and -Transfer in a Critical Perspective

It has become clear that learning is a complex topic which has been intensively discussed and researched. This sub-chapters' aim is to provide an overview of criticism which has been expressed by various scholars. The criticism can be divided into two over-arching themes, one relating to criticism on methodological issues, the other addressing issues on the content of the research.

There is a lot of discussion within the literature on policy transfer concerning the application of a definition of transfer. Although a generally accepted definition by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 5) describing policy transfer as "the process by which knowledge about politics, administrative arrangement, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system", some authors argue that it is rather broad and therefore difficult to disentangle from other concepts (James & Lodge, 2003: 181). As discussed earlier, many different terms are used in this research field. Although the authors do not all describe exactly the same phenomena, it is vital to clearly define the implications of the concept being used. Page and Mark-Lawson argue that the referral to policy transfer has sometimes become misleading because it encompasses a process where a certain set of policies moves from one place to another (2010: 49). However, it can be argued that criticism against any definition can be raised. Therefore, it is indispensable to start one's research with a clear definition and logical and comprehensive reasoning on why certain terms and characteristics for the concept have been adopted.

Above criticism on the terms and definitions, Benson and Jordan have pointed out that the risk of policy transfer literature is that at one point it will reveal "less and less about more and more" (2011: 375). This criticism is shared by other scholars and it has been suggested that this research field also needs to be cautious about being able to 'draw lessons' from other scholars outside the familiar framework (Dussauge-Laguna, 2012: 321). Furthermore, there have also been critical voices when it comes to the transfer or exchange of best-practices itself. This critique stems from the fact that best-practices are often not decontextualized from cultural or administrative conditions. As a consequence, the approach can lose in value and fail because interdependencies of the 'transferring' actor are ignored. Thus, the intended benefits cannot be achieved which have been observed elsewhere (Knippschild & Vock, 2017: 1737). Moreover, it is often difficult to trace the causal links between learning and policy change. It is problematic "to observe the learning activity in isolation from the change requiring explanation" (Benett & Howlett, 1992: 290). Therefore, it is fundamental to acknowledge that learning is not a sufficient condition for policy change (Hall, 1993: 293) and that there are also limitations of learning potentials.

Last, when evaluating and researching INTERREG cooperation projects, it is vital to not only look at linear cause-effect relationships as the impact or structures of governance. However, a pivotal factor is the consideration of relations of specific contexts. It has been

argued that primarily 'what was done' and 'what was learnt' are aspects which have gained importance in the evaluation of projects (Knippschild & Vock, 2017: 1738)

The second theme of criticism mostly concerns the content of research. Some authors have argued that mainly individual learning occurs. It is not only hard to trace organizational learning, but cooperation projects are also often seen as an 'additional task' for project partners. Therefore, there is not enough engagement and sufficient integration of what has been learned. Further, some aspects are difficult to transfer when people who did not participate in the project want to apply knowledge by their colleagues (Böhme et al., 2003: 65).

Above that, the learning approach is often examined in contrast to power-based and interest-based approaches. This has received criticism in academic research because it does not feature the full picture of determinants which might affect learning abilities (Zito, 2000 cf. Nilsson, 2005: 210). Also, it is vital to acknowledge constraints to transfer possibilities as policy learning and -transfer as a mechanism itself has to deal with certain constraints. Evans (2009) has identified three broad sets of variables which have to be acknowledged when studying these mechanisms. He discusses cognitive obstacles in the pre-decision phase, environmental obstacles in the implementation phase and the influence of domestic public opinion (Evans, 2009: 246). Table three provides an overview of these obstacles:

Public Opinion	Environmental obstacles	Cognitive obstacles
• Elite opinion: political, bureaucratic, economic • Media opinion • Attitudes and resources of constituency groups	• Ineffective cognitive and elite mobilization strategies • The absence of a cohesive policy transfer network • Structural constraints • Normal technical implementation constraints (limited policy design, resources and technical support)	• Limited search activity • Cultural assimilation through commensurable problem recognition and definition • The degree of complexity involved in the process of transfer

Table 3: Processes of transfer (Evans, 2009: 247)

The obstacles listed in the three categories will be further investigated in the case study in chapter five. Other determining factors that might impede learning are also situated in specific programme characteristics. Above that, scholars have argued that the inherent "uniqueness"

of policies (Rose, 1993: 118) can impede the possibility of transfer of knowledge or experience.

3.4. Research Question and Sub-Questions – A Summary

The aim of chapter three was to lay down the theoretical framework for this research and draw a connection between theory and practice. Before the research design is introduced in chapter four, the following part will repeat the main research question and sub-questions to provide a summarized overview. As already argued in the introduction, several 'ground-work' questions are crucial in order to understand the context of the structural and academic context. This thesis addresses the relevance of cooperation of actors from different nation states within the context of demographic change, it is going to test the rationale behind entering such cooperation, assessing the reasons and motivation of the actors as well as the role of the group dynamic. These questions provide the reader with the framework of the topic and put the thesis in a broader academic context. By answering these questions, a more detailed discussion of the present case study is possible.

Above that, a second big focus of the thesis is the framework of governance in which actors are able to learn. The main research question of this thesis asks 'Which patterns of local and/or regional governance enable (policy) learning, -transfer and innovation in the context of INTERREG projects?'. In regard to the learning process, a number of sub-questions are considered: How does the learning process within project partnerships look like? What is the policy issue at stake? What effects (if any) of policy learning or policy transfer can we see in partner organizations (is there for example a change in working routines)? What are the limits of exchange? Lastly, as most projects are realized within the context of INTERREG programmes it is also necessary to consider whether there is a potential for innovation (and thus learning) through INTERREG projects for project partners.

Chapter 4: Research Methods

This chapter presents the research methods of the thesis and explains the main research objectives. First, the case selection is discussed. This is followed by a detailed account of the data selection and analytical methods. After that, chapter five presents the findings.

4.1. Case Selection

Demographic trends pose some of the most important strategic challenges to politics. The rather negative connotation to these policies does not make it simple for politics to approach challenges of demographic change and consequently be able to establish solidarity across generations and geographical territories (Szaló et al., 2011: 7). As described in chapter 1.4., the INTERREG A strand aims to tackle challenges which are identified by bordering regions and enhances a cooperation process between these actors (European Commission, 2018). This is important because in Europe, 37,5 % of the population lives in areas which touch the border of another state. Following the principle of spatial solidarity, the continuous reduction of regional disparities is seen as an important task (Szaló et al., 2011: 71) and can also be supported by INTERREG projects. As countries do not have blue-print solutions for demographic challenges, it is valuable to support and initiate the exchange on innovative policies (PA, 2015: 17).

This case study looks at the INTERREG project *demography-network*[5] which has been funded by INTERREG VA[6] in the region Alpenrhein/Bodensee/Hochrhein (ABH). CBC in this area has intensified since INTERREG, and projects have extended to various policy fields. Although certain types of cooperation already existed before, they primarily focused on issues such as fishery and tourism (Zäch & Pütz, 2014: 34-39). The projects' overarching objective within the programme framework lies on the intensification of administrative cooperation and civil society engagement. About 20 percent of EU funding goes to these objectives within INTERREG (Manging Authority ABH, 2014: 42). In order to respond to challenges and use INTERREG as an opportunity structure, effective and efficient coordination between administrations of the project partners is vital to lay the ground work for learning capacities and transfer.

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[5] The official name of the project is *Demografie-Netzwerk*, for the purpose of this thesis, it has been translated to demography-network.
[6] INTERREG VA means that the project is funded in the fifth programming period (2014-2020) and belongs to cooperation strand A (cross-border cooperation).

The project partners from Germany and Switzerland entered the cooperation in order to act against pressing demographic challenges, exchange experience and learn from each other (PA, 2015: 2). Since INTERREG was launched, Switzerland has participated in several programmes (Zumbusch et al., 2013: 3). As Switzerland is not a member of the European Union, INTERREG programmes with Swiss cooperation constitute a special case (Zäch & Pütz, 2014: 31). The project partners from various regional authorities (municipalities, cities, administrative districts, cantons) face similar challenges, which are especially pressing in the corresponding rural areas because of changing demographic structures. Furthermore, the partners in the project come from bordering regions which all have German as their native language. This linguistic-cultural proximity provides a better ground and more 'tools' for local and/or regional actors to work together. However, it cannot be seen as sufficient conditions for cooperation (Boman & Berg, 2007: 212).

Complex topics, which cannot be solved by looking at one policy sector only, are central in the INTERREG framework. The project partners of the demography-network aimed to work on various topics of demographic change relevant to each partner's corresponding geographical area and society structure. Each partner worked on a different topic in order to build up expertise which can then be exchanged with others (PA, 2015: 18). The case spanned over the period of three years (2015-2018) and leaves therefore enough room for partners to engage in projects and be able to exchange experiences. When looking at learning mechanisms and transfer possibilities, a sufficient time-span is crucial.

Furthermore, as outlined in the introduction, demographic challenges need a multi-faceted approach and have to be answered by responsive policies. In 16 individual sub-projects (so-called *Reallabore*), the partners aimed to strategically formulate new policies by also involving various actors from different levels in this process. These aims correspond to the general objectives of the INTERREG objective for this strand (Managing Authority ABH, 2014). Furthermore, the results of these sub-projects should constitute examples for others to follow and provide the partners with instruments which could also be transferred. Ideally, at the end of the project, a catalogue of innovative policy and processes, as well as exemplary implementation of sub-projects is available. The newly generated knowledge and experience concerning demographic change can be transferred to other project areas and also find implementation elsewhere. Moreover, the cooperation builds a network of experts, which can cooperate and support each other. The exchange includes expert- and methodological knowledge not only on the political, but also on the technical level (PA, 2015: 2; 17).

These described objectives and goals were formulated by the project partners of the demography-network when entering the cooperation. The objectives are in accordance with the INTERREG A programme's role to build cross-border policy networks and reduce the effect of barriers along the border (Sohn, 2017: 416). Nevertheless, the complexity of the framework, as well as the diversity of project partners involved can challenge the learning and transfer abilities within INTERREG (Hachmann, 2016). Yet, the case study is of value because before this funding period, there was an indication to the insufficient incorporation of municipalities (in small regions) in CBC. This should be solved by measures of deepened administrative cooperation and civil society engagement in funding period V (Managing Authority, 2014: 21; 42). This case study investigates the structure of local and regional governance within INTERREG advantageous or impeding for successful transfer and exchange. Perkmann has argued that in INTERREG-programme regions (in this case ABH), horizontal and vertical cooperation is important (1999: 661). The programme can constitute a "political opportunity structure" (Zäch & Pütz, 2014: 33) and add value to the actors' policy formulation and implementation (INTERACT, 2015: 7).

Although physical borders in the EU have been removed, there are still challenges border regions are facing. In order to provide a structured approach to these, CBC within INTERREG is a useful framework for cooperation (INTERACT, 2015: 1). Although the different contexts of INTERREG projects in general influence their character and objectives, Hachmann (2016) has argued that "expected benefits and related challenges are highly comparable". The following sections gives an account of how data was selected.

4.2. Data Selection

For this thesis, a prominent form of research – interviews – is used. The sensitive nature of the subject makes the choice of the qualitative methodology justified (Boeije, 2012: 34). Interviews will give a more detailed insight into the learning possibilities within this INTERREG project. However, only using interview data is also not sufficient (Beyers et al., 2014). A variety of data can help to overcome the bias that might emerge from only conducting qualitative research through interviews and only having a limited amount of people available for interviews. There are several forms of interviews available to researches (see Figure two). In general, the qualitative interview can be seen as

> "a form of conversation in which one person – the interviewer – restricts oneself to posing questions concerning behaviours, ideas, attitudes, and experiences with regard to social phenomena, to one or more others – the participants or interviewees – who

mainly limit themselves to providing answers to these questions" (Maso, 1987 cf. Boeije, 2012: 61).

The most common forms range on a continuum of structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews.
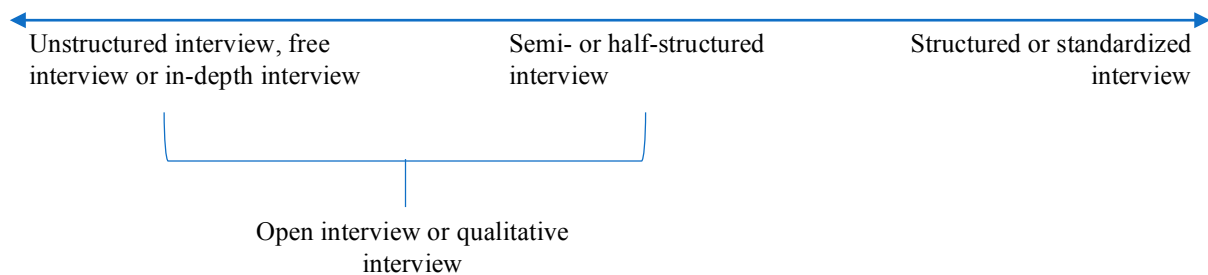

Figure 2: Forms of interviews (Weiss, 1994 cf. Boeije, 2012: 62)

While the latter two are more flexible, structured interviews are best suitable when a large number of people is interviewed and highly comparable information wants to be obtained (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 2-3). For the framework of this thesis, semi-structured interviews are used. A list of questions has been formulated by the researcher on a series of topics which are connected to the research- and sub-questions. This so-called interview guide is the same for each interview, but the flexibility in how and when questions are posed can be changed accordingly (ibid.: 29). Although the comparative character of structured interviews is greater, semi-structured interviews are suitable in this case because the number of interviewees is limited. When posing 'follow-up' questions, similar wordings and a focus on the same themes is kept in order to ensure comparability (Bryman, 2012).

The interviews for this research can be regarded as expert interviews because the people of interest are part of the research due to their capacities as experts for a certain field (Meuser & Nagel, 2002: 469). An initial list of experts was created in cooperation with the CEO of an external consultancy agency who was supporting the projects partners during this INTERREG project. 17 people were contacted for interviews, however, the response rate was below 50 percent and interviews with eight experts and politicians from each project partner and from the regional INTERREG secretariat were conducted. The interviews were carried out face-to-face and thus make it possible to extract richer data because respondents might feel more comfortable when being asked about specifics of the research of interest. Interviews lasted from 35 to 60 minutes and were conducted in German. Audio-records were kept for each conversation. Therefore, confidentiality and anonymity also played an important part of this research and anonymization of records, notes, recording of interviews, transcripts and similar documents was agreed on. It was clarified beforehand with the interview partners that

the interview would be recorded and transcribed afterwards, but that the data would be processed anonymously. This implies that names and other words which might identify the person (organization, profession) are not attached to this research (Sieber, 2008). While five interviews were conducted face-to-face (two in a pair, the others with single individuals), due to limited time, one interview was carried out as an attached Email interview. By definition, this implies a "survey in which respondents are sent a questionnaire, which is received as an attachment by email" (Bryman, 2012: 709). Mostly as a Microsoft Word document, the interview includes the same questions as the face-to-face interview guide. The respondent can type his or her answers in the attached file. This type of written form is easy to complete and also easy to send back to the researcher.

It has to be acknowledged that the preliminary structure of the interview, including how and in which sequence questions are posed and formulated will determine the answers of interviewees to some extent. The semi-structured interview is not entirely structured and provides for some room to ask additional questions or choose a different sequence (Boeije, 2012: 62). However, the interviewees knew what they will talk about in advance in order to be able to give the required scope of information. Furthermore, it is vital to keep in mind what issues want to be analysed when choosing interview partners (Beyers et al., 2014). As the investigation of this thesis concentrated around one specific issue, different stakeholders were valuable for data analysis. Therefore, not only project partners were interviewed, but also stakeholders from the regional INTERREG office. This can provide various viewpoints and help "explaining how specific group strategies affect the unfolding of concrete policymaking processes" (Beyers et al., 2014: 181).

In terms of location, interviews should be where "the topic of study manifests itself most strongly" (Boeje, 2012: 34). Therefore, the interviews, which took place during the months March and April 2018, were conducted in the respective places of work. This increased the possibility of creating mutual trust and encouragement to speak freely and engage in questions of the researcher.

Various set-backs from conducting interviews were considered. The first one refers to the limited number of people available for interviews. This was due to tight time schedules of people participating in the project. In the end, it was possible to have one interview partner from each participating project authority. Further, it was also possible to have people from different occupations (e.g. not only politicians, but also civil servants from different departments) and therefore provide a broader view on the study. Yet, research which only relies on conducting qualitative research through interviews is sometimes criticized for

distorting reality (Beyers et al., 2014). Therefore, to further inform this primary data, the findings from the interviews were compared with project reports and official documents from the project partners. Further, the knowledge obtained from previous studies through a detailed review of academic literature builds the ground work for the findings and serves also as a comparative structure for results.

4.3. Data Analysis

The theoretical concepts which build the theoretical framework of this thesis do not serve as a causal model, but provide useful categories and a heuristic to understand connections between actors and institutional settings, between policies and external factors, as well as the changing environment of policies (Zäch & Pütz, 2014: 33) This sub-chapter discusses how the data was analysed and help to understand how theory and practice were connected.

Although qualitative research is attractive because of its richness, it can also be difficult to find a path through the data sets (Miles, 1979: 590). There are several ways in which qualitative data can be analysed. It is a challenge to find the right approach which enables the researcher to extract the most important and relevant information in a coherent and comprehensive manner. The most prominent framework to approach this is grounded theory (see Glaser & Strauss, 2006). When interviews are conducted and transcribed, it is not possible to use the 'raw data' for the research. Consequently, the interviews have to be coded and interpreted (Boeije, 2012: 14). This is a key process in grounded theory and implies that data is broken down into component parts which are then given names (Bryman, 2012: 568). This process is also relevant for this research. Charmaz has argued that "the researcher's interpretations of data shape his or her emergent codes in grounded theory" (2000: 515).

In contrast to coding in quantitative research, the coding of qualitative data is a "constant state of potential revision and fluidity" (Bryman, 2012: 568). The researcher reviews the data set several times and looks for potential indicators of concepts. It is indispensable to constantly compare these indicators in order to see what concept will fit best for the coded data (ibid.). Before coding the interviews, as a 'measuring' instrument, a topic list was developed which was linked to the research questions. The coding process can take several stages but generally concerns the segmenting and reassembling of data (Boeije, 2012: 67; 89). Strauss and Corbin (1990) distinguish three types of coding practice: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. At the initial stage, data is broken down, compared, and grouped into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 61). At this stage it is vital to be open-minded and possibly code per line (Charmaz, 2006: 57). This was also done for this research. During this first step, a total of approximately 300 codes were generated. In a second step,

during axial coding, the data is reassembled and connections between the categories of step one are made (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 96). Finally, core categories of codes are selected and the most common and relevant codes are emphasized. This also entails that codes of the first phase can be dropped (ibid.: 116). Still, new codes can still be formulated and the data re-explored (Charmaz, 2006: 57-58). During these two steps, categories along the lines of the theoretical framework were formulated.

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations to coding. First, the coding 'modes' of grounded theory are sometimes criticized for not staying attentive enough to existing conceptualizations. It is vital as a researcher to build on other people's work and carry out a focused investigation (Bryman, 2012: 547). Therefore, the categories were compared with the main points of the theoretical framework and the content of project reports. Yet, when coding and categorizing, it can happen that relevant context of data is lost (e.g. social setting) which can lead to unclear results and the fragmentation of data. Every mode of analysis must stand in relation to the data which entails the theorization in relation to the data is central because the findings only become significant and relevant when they are reflected on, interpreted and put in relation to theory (ibid.: 578). Another set-back of this research can be found in inter-coder reliability. As the study was carried out by a lone researcher, and thus the interviews were only coded by one person, it is vital that the researcher codes consistently over time and also puts a considerable amount of time in coding, developing categories and making sure that there are no overlaps within those (Bryman, 2012: 299; 304). In order to check this, a toll code matrix was created with the coding programme MAXQDA in order to visualize the saturation of codes. By doing this, it was ensured that codes which were not used often were checked again in the context of the interview and then re-coded or deleted.

Next to the analysis of semi-structured interviews, content analyses of two reports per partner (for the first and second reporting period, as well as one cross-partner project report) was carried out. When carrying out content analyses, it is vital to have authentic documents which are representative and credible (Scott, 1990 cf. Bryman, 2012: 306). In the next section, the theoretical model is applied to practical cooperation of INTERREG projects in the case study. The project is 'deconstructed' (meaning looking into structures and processes, actors etc.), and the 'black box' of the project in order to understand inner mechanisms is investigated (Hachmann, 2016).

Chapter 5: Findings

Chapter four of this thesis elaborated on the methodological procedure followed during this research. The purpose of this final section is the discussion of the findings conducted during the interviews, as well as merging them with the analysis from both previous studied literature and the reports of the INTERREG project. After a short summary of the findings (see also table four), they are discussed in detail in the light of the research question and hypotheses. After that, the research's contribution to the theoretical realm as well as its practical meaning is elaborated on before looking at the limitations of this work.

5.1. Summary

Previous research has argued that INTERREG programmes provide a framework for coordination and can act as a "political opportunity structure" (Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011: 111). The political opportunity in this project was seen in the network character and policy transfer possibilities through exchange with other project partners. This was not only stated in the project application and reports, but also partly by interview participants. Although the partners were part of an ad-hoc network, they were able use the possibility to see how others work on the same issues in a certain policy area. While the financial stimulus was the elementary stimulus to join the cooperation project, the programme structure which includes a lot of rules can impede motivation for the project, because not only financial, but also human resources must be available to be part of such an INTERREG process.

In connection to cooperation and learning, it can be said that the bigger picture which arises from the interviews is mostly in line with the reviewed literature and shows some clear trends. While the rationale for cooperation follows the general trends of previous research, there is a divided picture when looking at whether learning and policy transfer within the INTERREG project was possible. In general, most partners were satisfied with the outcomes of the project. Some interviewees discussed a problem of exchange which arose because of the absence of a meta-topic. Others, however, saw the heterogeneity of the project group as beneficial. The project report argues that a knowledge-sharing platform has been created through the project. This entails bilateral visits to partners, exchange and input on best practise. Further, the content of the project report reveals that a network has been developed. This made it possible to connect one project partner with a best-practice example (although outside of the network) known by another project partner. In other words, it can be argued that these project partners were able to make use of the partner's personal network outside of the INTERREG framework.

The patterns of governance present in this project are characterised by a variety of administrative authorities which are embedded in different legal, administrative and cultural systems. However, as the project structure is given stimulus by the partners themselves, many of them argued that the INTERREG framework can certainly provide favourable governance structures for exchange and policy learning. However, interview participants have also underlined the limits of heterogeneity and differences in local sub-projects, as well as limited time resources of partners during the INTERREG process. In fact, the project structure and the partners' dynamic, as well as their personal and cultural exchange are partly stimulated by the governance structure they are in. Yet, the individual characteristics of involved actors and their willingness to learn can have a strong influence on the possibility to learn and cooperate for the whole group.

Concluding, this research was able to show how important the programme- and project structure of INTERREG projects is for the possibility of learning and transfer. Yet, it has become clear that many variables have to be taken into account when researching this topic. Most importantly, not only the individual actor's willingness for exchange plays an important role for learning, but also their ability to use the opportunity structure given by the INTERREG framework cannot be underestimated. The practical meaning of these findings imply that it remains difficult to compare INTERREG projects with each other. This is also led back to the differences in programmes throughout the EU, the thematic foci, as well as the bottom-up approach in project formulation. This study has provided a comprehensive overview of two important concepts and has practically embedded them in the MLG structure of the EU. Furthermore, the case study under investigation did mostly confirm previous research, but was at the same time able to shed light on the governance patterns favourable or impeding for learning and transfer to the INTERREG project demography-network. Valuable lessons can be taken out of these findings not only for the project partners themselves, but also for the actors of the programme area which are evaluating projects and formulating programme tenders.

Hypothesis	Sub-Questions	Findings
H1: As the level of governance and the framework conditions for CBC and TC play a central role for successful cooperation, the programme structure of INTERREG will have an influence on why, how the project partners connect, how they are able to work together and ultimately also whether they can learn something from each other.	What is the rationale for cooperation?	• Funding • Policy issue at stake • Motivation for exchange (local sub-projects)
	What role does the project structure play?	• Heterogeneity of partners and topics • Culture for exchange • Programme tender • Bottom-up approach
	What kind of network was established?	• Virtual network vs. add-on model (Böhme et al., 2003) • Ad-hoc network (Perkmann, 1999)
H2: The actors, coming from different levels of governance, have predetermined beliefs and ideologies and will therefore not be able to learn the same from the experiences of others.	What factors of the project structure impede or enable learning?	• Common language • Different administrative frameworks • Culture (social learning) • Group dynamic
	What are the limits of exchange?	• Deterring effect of INTERREG (bureaucracy, administration) • Structural and environmental constrains (Evans, 2009) • Umbrella vs. sub-projects (Böhme et al., 2003; Hachmann, 2008) • Thematic focus of projects • Failed or non-transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2009)
H3: Successful policy transfer between the project partners will one the one hand depend on the ability of individuals to 'transfer' the knowledge and on the other hand also on the content of the project.	What role does the policy issue at stake play?	• Pressing challenges – high saliency • Sensitisation • No blue-print solutions
	Who are the subjects? Is individual or organization learning possible?	• Politicians and civil servants • Individual and internal learning • Policy transfer: tailoring or inspiration (Rose, 1991) • Expert views – heterogeneity as added value
	What effects (if any) does learning have?	• Stimulus for policy innovation • Best-practice exchange • Knowledge enrichment • Changed understandings (social learning)

Table 4: Summary of findings

5.2. Testing the Research Question and Hypotheses

This chapter gives a detailed overview of the findings. First, answers to the 'backbone' questions of this research are provided. This entails the rationale for cooperation in the INTERREG project, the identification of the dynamics of the project group and the rules of the institutional set-up which might support or undermine the cooperation. Following, light is shed on the possibilities of learning and policy transfer. In a third step, the main research question is answered and the patterns of governance which enable or impede learning and policy transfer within INTERREG projects are described.

5.2.1. Cooperation in INTERREG Projects

This thesis specifically looks at local and regional actors in INTERREG projects. As argued before, they are considered crucial actors in this MLG setting and therefore, it is important to identify the actors of the project, the dynamic of the project group and possible undermining or supporting features for cooperation and consequent learning- and policy transfer. This section discusses implications for hypothesis one.

First, the motivation and determinants for cooperation are important variables which play a role in this research context and will explain the rationale for cooperation. The overall goal as part of the formal INTERREG framework was strengthened institutional cooperation between project partners (PA, 2015: 1). The most prominent motivation for cooperation was the financial contribution by the EU. Interviewees indicated that the financial support through the demography-network for local sub-projects was very important because the administrative burden for European funding programmes has a high deterring effect, especially for very small administrations (e.g. municipalities). Furthermore, this support also made it possible to access additional human resources which in this case was an external firm. It was responsible for the administrative and bureaucratic modules and the correct application and implementation of the INTERREG provisions during the whole project period. However, this finding cannot be generalized to other INTERREG projects because support of external firms is not usually part of INTERREG projects, but it can also be the case that the additional administrative work is taken over by a person working at the partner organizations.

The interviewees agreed that without this support throughout the process, they would not have entered the cooperation because the additional work from the project for the administration next to their 'daily work' would have been too high. Furthermore, the outsourcing of the administrative components enabled the partners to focus on the content of their projects. The dilemma which has been addressed by one interview participant was that

without the cooperation, the challenges could not be addressed because of lacking financial and human resources. These findings validate previous research which underlines the importance of funding aspects of INTERREG projects (Böhme et al., 2003; Scherer, 2006; Ward & Wolleb, 2010).

Another motivation was the expectation to meet challenges of demographic change easier within the cooperation project. In fact, authorities of bordering areas are sometimes reliant on the finding of solutions for regional problems in cooperation with authorities across the border. This is inter alia a result of high labour mobility (PA, 2015: 7). As demographic challenge is regarded as a rather unpopular topic, the framework of this cooperation project might have compensated this because it was partly funded by the European Union. However, this was not confirmed by the project partners. Nevertheless, it was indicated that INTERREG can provide an impulse for projects and topics which would not be addressed otherwise, but also keep strategies which have already been formulated in this policy area alive. In other words, already existing policies were strengthened. In sum, it can be said that funding, the policy issue at stake and the expectation to meet challenges are factors which were most prominent for the motivation of cooperation.

The project group and the dynamic within it is another crucial variable for cooperation. INTERREG projects which are part of strand A or strand B usually have to include at least project partners from two Member States or one Member State and one third country. In this case study, five projects partners from different local and regional authorities from Germany and Switzerland were part of the demography-network. It has been argued in the theory section that the heterogeneity or homogeneity of project teams has various (dis)advantages. The basic strength of project groups is considered to be a high level of expertise. Factors such as language and culture influence the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity (Böhme et al., 2003: 34; 67-69). While no interviewee addressed characteristics of common language as an asset, some pointed to the differences in culture which can influence the dynamic of the project group. In fact, the majority talked about the heterogeneity of the partners, which they saw in the differing administrative, cultural and social structures in the respective administrative areas. In terms of the expertise of the group, not all partners agreed that this heterogeneity can add value to the project as a whole because the differences in professional background and societal structure of the areas impede possible transfer.

As already mentioned, the programme- and project structure are key determinants when it comes to how project partners are able to connect, work together and learn from each

other. The programme tender was formulated in a way that the project had to be a cross-border cooperation form (INTERREG strand A). One interview partner discussed this and argued that it is often difficult to find partners (especially from Switzerland) because the requirements of application, formulation and implementation of INTERREG projects can be very demanding. In fact, the administrative provisions necessary during the project process were described by all project partners as having a deterring effect. In fact, for smaller local and regional authorities, for example municipalities, the administration would not have the human resources to keep up with the required reporting and billing conditions of the INTERREG project. Above that, the project set-up also influences the partners' ability to cooperate, facilitate exchange and learn from each other. The demography network includes a total of 16 sub-projects. These projects have been formulated by the partners according to their respective geographic area, demographic challenges and society structure.

The bottom-up approach of INTERREG which has been discussed in section 1.4., is crucial in regard to the project structure. The projects are developed by the applicants and then approved and funded by the programming bodies. Different institutional frameworks in national states make the projects a complex steering and coordination task (Zäch & Pütz, 2014: 30). One focal point is whether the programme and project structure can provide actors with policy transfer and policy learning possibilities. A trend which became apparent from the interviews was that the project structure did not provide a favourable framework for exchange. The reasons for this were seen in the differences of topics in the sub-projects and a consequent limited comparability. One interviewee mentioned that the exchange in such a structure can be more useful for politicians which benefit from the networking character of the cooperation. Another interview participant underlines that the heterogeneity in partners and projects was a vital aspect to learn about a broad variety of viewpoints on different topics.

Another clear trend in regard to project partners is the need for the project group to establish a certain dynamic for cooperation to be able to exchange ideas and experiences. Only some project partners had already pre-existing relationships, therefore, it has been underlined that the building of a common understanding and a certain group 'culture' as well as trust and mutual interest for projects is an important asset for successful cooperation. One interviewee indicated that at the beginning of the project, relationship building and building of trust is important for a good group dynamic. When looking at the mode of cooperation (see section 3.2.1., Böhme et al., 2003), it became apparent that this INTERREG project cannot be put in one set category according to its shape and nature. It can be said that the project group is located between the two categories virtual network and add-on model. While according to

theory, the further is built in order to share experience, the latter keeps exchange to a minimum and only forms a loose umbrella for a serious of sub-project. Although the partners in the demography-network joined the project to share experience and ideas and be able to transfer knowledge, it became also clear that they joined the cooperation in order to implement local sub-projects. Many interviewees mentioned that without the financial contribution of INTERREG, in-depth work on these policy areas of demographic change would not have been possible. One interview partner even underlined that the network character was not present because everyone was working on their own sub-projects. This would confirm the add-on model of Böhme et al. (2003). Only a few meetings which focused on the presentation of their sub-projects took place. Yet, when analysing the project reports, a primary focus is put on the sharing of experience through the single sub-projects. It is vital to keep in mind that these forms of cooperation are built on a voluntary basis. The ad-hoc character of the network allows for much flexibility and can open up possibilities which are often reserved for central state actors (Perkmann, 1999: 658). The focus on a specific task, the formulation of strategic policies regarding demographic challenges, as well as the inclusion of various levels of governance can be seen as indicators for MLG type II. Hence, it is validated that the project structure of the project influences how the project partners connect and how they are able to work with each other. The flexibility and the multi-level character of the established network underline these findings. Table five gives an overview of the findings to hypothesis one and is divided by categories which were generated during the data analysis.

H1: The structure of INTERREG will have an influence on why and how the project partners connect, how they are able to work together and ultimately also whether they can learn something from each other.		
Rationale for cooperation	Project structure	Network
• Funding • Policy content • Implementation of local sub-projects • Expectation to meet challenges	• Heterogeneity of partners • Dynamic of group • Programme tender • Bottom-up approach	• Virtual network vs. add-on model (Böhme et al., 2003) • Ad-hoc network (Perkmann, 1999) • MLG type II (Hooghe & Marks, 2003)

Table 5: Findings to H1

In sum, it can be said that the cooperation in the INTERREG project provided the partners with useful insight to how similar problems are addressed by actors of different institutional set-ups, population structure and cultural background. It is valuable to see different solutions in order to formulate innovative policies. However, this is only possible if a certain degree of

mutual interest and dynamic structure between the partners exists. The biggest motivation to enter the cooperation was the financial contribution by the EU although the partners also expected to learn from each other. It was surprising that interview participants put a focus on the structure of the project group regarding professional backgrounds. Most indicated that the interdisciplinary viewpoint on various policies was valuable. Participants prescribed an added value to the fact they could see how administrations in other cities/municipalities/countries deal with challenges of demographic change. Cooperation provided the partners with the opportunity to see a broad variety of policies and benefit from the exchange with other partners. More details on learning opportunities are discussed in the next section.

5.2.2. A Learning Machine?[7]

This section brings together theoretical assumptions about learning and policy transfer with the interview findings and analysis of project reports. First, the subject and moments of learning are analysed. After, the forms and motivations for learning, the evaluation of transfer as well as the possibility of transfer of innovative policies are presented and discussed.

According to network theory, learning is about the combination of old and new knowledge and the application of this knowledge in order to cope with challenges (Lawon & Lorenz, 1999: 307). In order to analyse this process, it is decisive to research who is the subject of this process, and thus who is able to combine old and new knowledge and the possibility to transfer and use it. It has been argued that mostly politicians and civil servants want to learn from each other because learning enables coordination whilst not giving away regulatory power (Radaelli, 2008: 242-243). Furthermore, policy performance on highly salient issues often determines the re-election of people in public office, therefore, the incentive to learn might be strong (Lewis-Beck & Paldman, 2000: 119). As already mentioned, the main actors of the demography-network were politicians and civil servants. These actors are also the main subjects of learning in the INTERREG project. From the data, it was not able to validate that the motivation for learning and cooperation was (in the case of politicians) determined by re-election issues. Other actors as for example participating citizens or NGO members in workshops or presentations on the sub-projects could also be subjects of the researched process. However, an analysis of these actors is without the scope of this study.

One joint 'umbrella' project as well as the involvement of diverse actors can be advantageous for the project partners' ability to exchange experience (Böhme et al., 2003: 58,

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[7] Faludi (2008a) mentioned this term in connection to the European Union.

Hachmann, 2008: 11). The first characteristic, one umbrella project, was not present in the demography-network. Still, there were various moments of exchange were the partners had the possibility to learn from each other. Joint meetings with presentations of all sub-projects as well as excursions and inputs about best-practice examples were mentioned by interviewees as moments were exchange could take place. Böhme et al. (2003) have described three moments of learning in INTERREG projects. These were partly confirmed by the interviewees. While actors were able to learn about the other partners and the content of the projects during the formulation and application process, individual participants were also able to learn something through the exchange on various sub-projects. However, there are no indications that individual learning became organisational (or collective) learning. This third moment of learning can neither be confirmed by the interview findings nor by the analysis of the project reports. Participants only mentioned internal knowledge transfer and individual learning. The difficulty of tracing individual to organization learning is in line with previous studies which have shown that individual learning during discussions, presentations, or field visits is much easier than organisational one (Bogner & Menz, 2005; Böhme et al., 2003). Yet, one interviewee indicated that the final project report has a lot of potential to stimulate learning also in the home organizations of partners.

In terms of the content of learning, the interview partners had diverse experiences. Some of them said that they could not learn anything, others argued that the project was very informative and provided them with new knowledge and ideas on how to approach certain policies differently. While no interview partner indicated the copying of a policy, one partner used the policy of another partner as a model and tailored it to the respective area[8]. What was interesting was the fact that interviewees did not regard the heterogeneity as an impeding factor for exchange on the interpersonal and professional level, but most of them assigned that characteristic a positive feature because it opened up the possibility to see how challenges are addressed in different organizational structures. This is confirmed in the project application. The differences in administration and institutional structure as well as understanding of democracy gives room for a multitude of perspectives. As a result, exchange, discussion and innovative ideas can be generated (PA, 2015: 17). When partners of different administrative

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[8] A demographic strategy paper including various measures on how to deal with challenges of demographic change in a number of policy fields was taken as best-practice example by another partner of the demography-project and tailored to the respective needs of their population structure and local demographic challenges. They addressed inter alia the need to make the municipality attractive for young people, which includes the attractiveness of their labour market as well as suitable housing for families. This policy paper serves them as a strategy for the next 10-15 years.

size work together, innovative best-practice examples can be experienced because small municipalities have sometimes more flexibility and freedom in their policy formulation. Above that, the project provided stimulus for topics which might not have been considered by all project participants. One interview partner described it as "you can learn how the other partner ticks and see other viewpoints on problems" (own translation) and added that this is very useful for future cooperation even if no (or only limited) transfer took place. Policies of others were taken as inspiration for one's own policy. This was inter alia possible because the other experts of the group provided new viewpoints on challenges (also because they were from different departments). This is also confirmed in the project application, which outlined that the thematic plurality should enable a high gain in expert knowledge (PA, 2015: 16).

It can be argued that these experiences by the interview participants match the theoretical assumptions on social learning which sees the actors' understanding of other decision-makers as a central point of the learning process. A few interviewees also addressed policy learning when they talked about the content of political programmes (Biegelbauer, 2007: 238) and their possibility of building on policies of other project partners. Both these types go hand in hand with the lesson-drawing concept, which argues that learning is possible from both negative and positive experiences (Rose, 1991: 3). Hall (1993) did not consider the success-factor as a precondition for learning. In fact, during the interviews it became apparent that not all participants had positive experiences during the project, but were still able to learn something even if their project goals could not be achieved. This is also visible in the project reports where partners had to give account of the progression of their sub-projects to the managing authority.

As already pointed out, the project participants entered the INTERREG cooperation with the willingness for exchange and to learn from each other. However, as also discussed by previous research, actors coming from various levels of governance and having predetermined beliefs and ideologies, are not able to learn the same. This underlines hypothesis two. In fact, the experience or knowledge which is exchanged has different effects on the partners (Gilardi, 2010: 651). The expectations of learning as laid out in the project application differ from what has been said by interview participants (PA, 2015: 9). Thus, it must be pointed out that the individual moments and contents of learning which have been determined through the interviews, do not apply for all project partners. What was shared by all interviewees was the fact that best-practice exchange can be very useful and that the willingness for exchange was present in the project group although it did not materialize fully. The willingness and expectations of exchange are also present in the project application (PA, 2015: 12). However,

while one interview participant only regarded exchange and policy learning as an "additional positive effect of the project" (own translation), others stated that their motivation to enter the cooperation was the possibility for exchange. An interesting finding was that one participant argued that there was great knowledge enrichment also on his or her own organization (for example how various departments approach certain policy challenges). The interviewee talked about a strengthened cooperation with departments within his or her own organization as an effect of the INTERREG project. Furthermore, it also became clear that the project showed the knowledge level of various people in departments on demographic change and thus also sensitised the different understandings and strategies to approach these challenges.

A surprising topic which stood out in the interviews were the limits of exchange. Interview partners agreed that being 'backed' by European funding is favourable when approaching highly salient topics which are connected to demographic change. However, next to the already mentioned project structure and heterogeneity, participants argued that exchange "can only happen in meetings, not in the 'doing'" (own translation) which was regarded a major set-back of the cooperation. Participants acknowledged that the limited time of project partners next to their daily administrative work made it considerably difficult to engage in-depth in such a project. One project partner even pointed out that his "administration would stand still if all people involved in the sub-projects would participate in exchange meetings" (own translation). These findings partly overlap with the obstacles described by Evans (2009) who categorized structural constrains or the absence of a cohesive policy transfer network as environmental obstacles to policy transfer. Above that, he also underlined the degree of complexity and cultural assimilation which play a vital role in regards to cognitive obstacles.

In sum, this set of experts gives credence to the argument that mostly individual learning on how the policy of the project, on how to work together with other partners and how this exchange could be useful for future policy formulation and implementation, can be traced in the interviews. As the group was rather heterogeneous in terms of profession, thematic focus and societal structure of their respective area, interviewees indicated that the transferral rate between the project partners was not very high although some of them saw the heterogeneity as 'added value'. This is in line with previous research which showed that policy transfer can be higher between homogeneous project partners (Knippschild & Vock, 2017: 1743). Moreover, also failed or non-transfer has to be taken into account within the limits of exchange. The hypothesis that not all actors can learn the same was validated and was led back to the fact that participants come from different administrative structures and

cultural backgrounds and have prior beliefs and ideologies. It has also become clear that positive and negative experiences can both generate learning mechanisms. Thus, success of INTERREG projects is not a pre-condition of learning (Hall, 1993). Although mutual trust and shared values build a good basis for exchange and policy learning, the group's heterogeneity was seen as beneficial by most participants, while the project structure and dynamic and the division into many sub-projects was seen an impeding factor for transfer by some participants. Table six summarizes the findings from this section related to hypothesis two and three.

H2: The actors, coming from different levels of governance, have predetermined beliefs and ideologies and will therefore not be able to learn the same from the experiences of others.	
Project group	Limits of exchange
• Common language • Different levels of governance (administrative frameworks) • Heterogeneity of local sub-projects and partners • Interdisciplinarity • Additional work vs. added value • Lesson drawing: from both negative and positive experiences (Hall, 1993)	• Deterring effect of INTERREG programmes • Limited time – complex steering and coordination task • Structural and environmental constrains (Evans, 2009) • Umbrella vs. sub-projects (Hachmann, 2008; Böhme et al., 2003) • Failed or non-transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2009)

H3: Successful policy learning or -transfer between the project partners will on the one hand depend on the ability of individuals to 'transfer' the knowledge and on the other hand also on the content of the project.		
Policy Issue	Individuals capacities	Effects
• High saliency • Pressing issue • No blue-print solutions • Heterogeneity of challenges are underlined	• Individual learning • Social learning (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Hall, 1993) • Internal learning (Scott & Trubek, 2002) • Lesson drawing: from both negative and positive experiences (Rose, 1991) • Dynamic and willingness for exchange	• Sensitisation of actors • Limited direct transfer, but tailored transfer • Inspiration and stimulus for own policies • Established network • Knowledge enrichment • Changed understandings of topic and involved actors

Table 6: Findings to H2 and H3

5.2.3. How Do Governance Frameworks Matter?

The previous two sections have elaborated on cooperation and learning mechanisms within the INTERREG project. Demographic change is a cross-cutting issue, therefore it should be addressed by the 'appropriate' level of governance. The theoretical assumptions behind this argument are grounded in the concept of MLG. Actor's successful strategies for demographic challenges can be used as a steering instrument (PA, 2015: 2). Although the challenges follow similar trends throughout Europe, they can materialize very heterogeneously on local-tier levels. The interview participants argued that although they were aware of this heterogeneity, the added value of exchange with other authorities which face similar challenges can be useful. Their aim was to "act collectively" (ibid.).

The research question of this thesis asked about the patterns of governance for local and/or regional actors which might (undermine or) enable learning and policy transfer. One vital variable for this is the framework of cooperation and exchange. When the interview partners were asked about the project structures role for the process of exchange, policy learning and -transfer, no clear trend is visible. Although part of the interviewees argued that the structure impeded transfer possibilities because of too heterogeneous local sub-projects, other participants claimed that learning possibilities can be enhanced because of the broad mix of project partners and multi-disciplinary view on challenges of demographic change. These statements show a clear division in terms of what the process of learning entailed: on the one hand, participants discussed the dynamics the project group and learning on a meta-level about institutional and administrative structures, and on the other hand, learning about the content and strategic formulation of policies was mentioned.

MLG involves local and regional actors in policy design and delivery. These projects provided the actors with a platform to bring in their local knowledge and exchange their experiences with other partners on the lower-tier levels. It can be argued that this exchange can also happen without the framework of INTERREG. However, interview participants claimed that cooperation in such a complex topic would probably not take place outside of this framework. Structures of multi-level governance can be seen as a guidance for the institutional framework in which actors of CBC and TC can be located. These structures bring together partners from INTERREG programmes.

It has become clear that the framework of governance matters in order to exchange ideas and learn from each other in INTERREG projects. Local and regional actors in this case study were engaged in projects which addressed the main challenges of demographic change. Services of general interest, migration, the activation of old people, attractiveness of

municipalities for young people were among the topics of sub-projects. The two overarching themes of citizen participation and strategic formulation of policies stand in relation to local-level actors advanced abilities to answer heterogeneous preferences of citizens. A decisive component of the projects was the accumulation of knowledge, expertise and governance modes. This was promoted by linking LRAs. In order to formulate responsive policies which can be efficient and successful, it is important to have a better understanding of how INTERREG projects work and what challenges they are facing to increase their effectiveness. Although the conformance of project partners was not ideal in this project, the primary idea of INTERREG is to share and develop knowledge which can be transferred.

In sum, it can be said that the multi-level character of INTERREG projects is important because the transfer-potential is partly connected to that. It has been argued that transfer involves a shift from government-centric level to actors on multiple levels and positions (Bensons & Jordan, 2011: 372). Through the framework of INTERREG projects, the participating authorities had the possibility to incorporate their policy initiatives into a multi-level context and share them with authorities on a horizontal and vertical level. Although the overall transfer-rate remains limited, some interview partners have underlined the learning potential and added value of cooperation through the programme. Short links between partners were regarded as especially important for transfer (PA, 2015: 17). While the institutional framework of the cooperating authorities is also addressed by the interviewees, no partner considered it to be an undermining factor of learning and exchange in the project. In fact, one interviewee argued that it is even interesting to see different institutional structures and administrative set-ups and how these administrations deal with challenges in their respective area. This cannot only stimulate different working methods, but also provide input for fields of policies which have not been the focus of analysis in another partner's organization. The interviewee acknowledged that policies can only be transferred to a limited extend because of the different framework conditions and population structure. This is in line with one of the main critiques of the policy transfer literature which is critical about the transfer or exchange of best-practices without decontextualizing them from cultural or administrative conditions (Knippschild & Vock, 2017: 1737).

This research has shown that it remains a difficult task to research this topic because of the limited comparability of INTERREG projects. However, Böhme et al. underline that they see effective cooperation as an integral part of the process of learning (2003: 7). Hachmann points out that the generalization of case study knowledge can support mutual learning and bring forward the research in this field. Nevertheless, bringing together lessons

from INTERREG cooperation projects is extremely complex and needs the formulation of conceptual categories that go beyond case studies (Hachmann, 2008: 11; 15). It is difficult to overcome the limitation of case-based experienced findings. The next section addresses the main limitations of this research.

5.3. Limitations of this Research

The outlined findings were reached by a combination of qualitative data analysis and study of projects reports and secondary literature. The following two sections will briefly address distinct limitations of this research, but also point to future strategies which have the potential to overcome these obstacles.

5.3.1. Limitations of Study Methods

In order to collect data for the current case study, expert interviews have been carried out. In addition, to further inform the findings from the interviews, project reports and secondary literature has been analysed and reviewed. Main limitations of these study methods are discussed in the following.

First, critique on semi-structured interviews limits this research. Although in comparison to structured interviews, semi-structured ones are more flexible and allow for follow-up questions, the comparability of data with those from structured interviews is lower (Bryman, 2012). When suitable, compensation to this limitation has been given by trying to pose the same follow-up questions with the similar wording and focus. Above the limited comparability, interviews are sometimes criticized for being biased (Beyers et al., 2014). Above that, researchers can encounter difficulties in gaining access to knowledgeable and cooperative interviewees. These difficulties did not pose a problem for this case study, although the response rate of approached participants was rather low (8 out of 17, below 50 percent). Although there were no language or cultural barriers, limitation in time and capacity did also not allow for follow-up interviews.

Second, when doing research in this study field, it has been argued that it is difficult to directly observe when actors learn or exchange knowledge. Therefore, researchers must rely on expert opinions although this only implies an indirect tracing of learning dynamics (Bogner & Menz, 2005). In order to counteract this second limitation, this studies' main aim was not to trace learning specifically, but analyse which modes or patterns of governance can enable or impede policy learning and policy transfer.

Third, it is vital to acknowledge limitations of reliability. This implies that with the same steps and research methods, another researcher would come to the same conclusions and

results as this study. In order to balance difficulties of reliability, the research method and steps have been discussed in great detail. Yet, there are limitations to this because of the semi-structured form of interviewing, even though the researcher has paid attention to a careful description of all steps. An important characteristic of this is also the "internal consistency and stability over time" of the framework (Boeije, 2012: 169; 174). In order to ensure compensate limitations of reliability, the interviews were carried out with a pre-formulated interview-guide. In addition, in order to minimize difficulties of inter-coder reliability, as the interviews were coded by a lone researcher, the process of coding was carried out in multiple steps (revising and re-categorizing) and thus, considerable amount of time was put into this process. By doing this, it was possible to generate some central categories along the lines of the theoretical framework.

Fourth, limitations of methods can also be found in the content analysis of project reports. This does not necessarily involve the analysis itself, but rather the availability of final reports of the project, which were not accessible at the time of the research. However, although the reports are not complete because the third reporting period has not started yet, the documents are authentic, and therefore representative and credible. These characteristics have been underlined by previous research (Scott, 1990 cf. Bryman, 2012: 306).

Finally, although this research relies on an analysis of project reports, secondary literature, and interviews, the generalizability of the case study is partly limited. Great attention has been paid to internal validity which implies the "causal relationship between variable in the actual units, spatial and temporal setting, and specific treatments that are examined" (Munck & Verkuilen, 2005: 385). This generalization of findings could be balanced out by comparing cases. Boeije (2012: 180) has argued that when research is "not externally valid, the findings only apply to the cases examined". Therefore, future research should carry out multiple case studies in this field and compare them on various meta-levels. Still, it can be argued that other INTERREG projects with a similar project structure (many sub-projects) can face the same difficulties as the project partners in this context. The absence of a meta-level when working on single sub-projects is probably a common problem of these kind of structures. However, further research on this needs to be carried out. By comparing the findings with previous research, the case study was embedded in the scholarly discussion and can further inform previous knowledge on governance modes and learning possibilities in INTERREG projects. By using various concepts in the theoretical framework, the limitation of interviews as the main source of data was partly overcome (Boejie, 2012: 176). The next part will address the limitations of the dataset.

5.3.2. Limitations of Data

Next to limitations of the study methods, the gathered data set is also characterised by certain flaws. As already mentioned, the low-response rate has to be accounted for (8 out of 17, roughly over 50 percent). A higher number of interview participants would extend the validity of this research and provide a broader set of explanatory variables for the hypotheses. As a result, this set of expert interviews cannot be seen as representative for the investigated field. Furthermore, as one interviewee was not available for a face-to-face interview, it was not possible to pose follow-up questions. As a result, the interview offered less insight into the working of the INTERREG project when compared to face-to-face interviews. It would be desirable for future research to increase the number of interview partners. Although interview partners from each project partner were part of the research, it would have been possible to have various participants from one project partner in order to extend the explanatory validity of the answers.

In addition, limitations of content analysis play also a central role for the data-set. Official project reports of each partner were analysed. This included a total of two reports per partner (for the first and second reporting period) and one cross-partner project report. However, as the reporting to the INTERREG managing authority takes place mostly ex-post, not all reports were yet available. The final reports will only be submitted after the end of the project in 2018. However, it can be said that the reports which have been available provided important insights in single sub-projects and general aims of exchange and learning. The limits of the data also stem from the time limit of this research. It would be desirable for future research to make an ex-post evaluation of the project and compare it to current findings.

In sum, it must be pointed out that the findings mostly relied on the insights of interview participants. Although this information was backed up by project reports and secondary literature, the findings can only partly be generalized and point to valuable lessons for the project partners of the INTERREG project.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Outlook – Only Food for Thought?

The context of this Master thesis looked at demographic challenges which have put current welfare states to a "stress test" (Hemerijk, 2013: 1). In fact, there is a list of factors which will influence where people want to live and settle, as well as how welfare states will develop in the future. However, the big challenges are not the trends themselves, but how nation states will deal with them. It is possible to describe basic trends, however, the challenges can vary between and within countries, between cities and the periphery and even between neighbouring municipalities. As a consequence, this thesis has argued that there is a need for a multifaceted approach on the policy and governance level.

A defining feature of the challenges and related policies is their interdependence. Changing demographic structures will have direct effects on the way how policies are formulated and designed. Above that, past research has shown that policies diffuse within and across countries (Gilardi, 2010: 650). Yet, when looking at demographic challenges, there are no blue-print solutions available for policy-makers. Therefore, the diversity of European regions and their differing approaches to similar challenges can be seen as a valuable source of knowledge exchange (Hachmann, 2016). As countries are very heterogeneous, following the concept of MLG (Hooghe & Marks, 2003), this thesis has argued that it is crucial to acknowledge that adequate responses are best understood at the level of governance which is closest to the citizens.

Actors of various levels of governance work together also in supranational programmes by the European Union. This thesis investigated INTERREG projects which promote the linkage of local and regional authorities. Consequently, this research drew upon the assumption that actors from at least two different nation states work together. As this usually covers sub-national entities on the regional and local level (Studzieniecki, 2016: 239), they have been the main focus of investigation. In the EU context, the possibility for learning and exchange is stimulated by a "myriad of cooperation projects funded in thematic programmes" (Hachmann, 2016.). The second main focus of investigation were therefore learning possibilities of actors of local and regional levels in INTERREG frameworks.

INTERREG projects were started already in the 1990s and have enhanced the multi-level character of the EU because the funding goes directly to LRAs and not to national states (INTERACT, 2015: 2). Cooperation in this framework is voluntary, can be used as a "political opportunity structure" (Scherer & Zumbusch, 2011: 111) and horizontal and vertical cooperation between actors can contribute to "new ways of thinking, conceptualising

problems and identifying solutions" (Böhme et al., 2003: 34). Therefore, the framework of INTERREG projects is regarded as a good opportunity to foster exchange and learning.

This thesis has underlined that actors depend on successful governance processes and framework conditions for cooperation. There has been much research on cooperation structures and learning as well as transfer abilities of actors, this thesis main research question has been the investigation of patterns of local and regional governance which might impede or enable learning, policy transfer and innovation in INTERREG projects. In order to give a full account of the framework conditions of the INTERREG project under investigation, various sub-questions have been formulated. The questions have addressed the rationale of cooperation within INTERREG, the analysis of the actors, the role of the project group, the established network as well as the motivation for joining the project. The findings have shown that mostly, the funding opportunities by the EU were the primary motivation for project partners to join the INTERREG project. Above that, the policy issue at stake as well as the expectation to exchange experiences were also among the motivations. The project group consisted of actors which are all part of different local or regional authorities (in this case from Germany and Switzerland). Consequently, the multi-level character of governance was given.

It has been argued by previous research that heterogeneous groups might impede transfer within projects (Böhme et al., 2003: 67). In this case study, the mix of experts in the project group was seen as advantageous for the possibility of receiving a multi-disciplinary view on challenges of demographic trends. However, it has been confirmed that transfer on the project level was limited. This can on the one hand be led back to the dynamic of the group, but also to the project structure (16 single sub-projects). In addition, when looking at the network character of the project group, it must be pointed out that this INTERREG project does not fit the modes of cooperation as described by Böhme et al. (2003). Rather, it can be seen as an ad-hoc cooperation which was started in order to jointly approach challenges of demographic change. The partners neither only cooperated in order to implement their local sub-project (would be the add-on model), nor only joined the project to exchange knowledge and experience (virtual network).

After setting the project group in an institutional context, this research has answered sub-questions which considered the potential of learning and innovation in the context of INTERREG projects. Although direct transfer in the project remains limited, the findings have revealed that the project participants were able to learn from each other and exchange innovative best-practice examples. Although no organizational learning could be traced,

individual learning was possible. Although one policy was transferred by tailoring it, no direct transfer was possible. This was due to the heterogeneity in sub-projects and the absence of a meta-level of topics. What is more, one interviewee pointed to the missing "dynamic for exchange" (own translation) in the project group. This influenced the learning possibilities and was also entangled with the fact that both politicians and civil servants were part of the project. As argued by hypothesis two, not all actors are able to learn the same from each other. In fact, Gilardi (2010: 651) argued that pre-existing ideologies and beliefs will determine what and whether actors are able to learn and transfer knowledge or policies. This has been validated because in fact, the heterogeneity of project partners and sub-projects was a main variable which influenced learning and policy transfer. Even when partners were not able to achieve the objectives of their project, it is possible to summarize that partners learned from both positive and negative experiences. Therefore, it has been confirmed that success is no predetermining factor for exchange (Hall, 1993).

Summing up, this research was able to point to valuable lessons for the project partners and provides a framework for analysis for future projects. The thesis has drawn up a comprehensive overview of categories which are important to consider when investigating both cooperation within INTERREG frameworks and learning possibilities. The societal relevance of this research was shown through the current importance of challenges of demographic change. These do not only concern one country or policy field, but are a cross-cutting issue throughout Europe and various governance levels. The absence of blue-print solutions of actors makes it valuable to learn from experiences of others. However, it must be underlined that although the concept of learning is sometimes being captured by "simplicity and availability" (Hachmann, 2016), it requires an in-depth analysis of a list of characteristics and variables which feature connections between actors from civil society, organisations, regions and nation states. Learning and transfer have been increasingly the focus of scientific research and policy discussions.

INTERREG provides local and regional actors with important opportunity structures for action. By entering projects, actors do not only have the opportunity to receive EU funding, but can furthermore address problems in cooperation with others. This implies that experience can be shared, common strategies formulated and ideally, joint solutions put forward. As European Territorial Cohesion was made one of the EU's main objectives, the importance of effective cooperation in INTERREG projects is underlined. The increased support is not only visible by increasing funding for INTERREG projects, but also by continuous adaptations in the legal framework. Nevertheless, this research has underlined

Hachmann's (2016) argument that the full potential of these projects might not be fully used. The project partners mentioned various limitations of INTERREG projects. These do not only concern the limited transfer possibilities, but also the deterring effect of EU funding programmes in general. However, they also provide local and regional actors with the possibility to address problems which would not be discussed to this extend otherwise. Although funding is the biggest motivation for entering projects, the governance structure of mixed levels of administrations which brings together experts from different cultural, professional and administrative levels, carries a high potential for transfer and the stimulation of innovative policies.

The findings of the research can be partly generalized to other INTERREG projects and this study was able to embed the results in already existing research. Furthermore, three strands of literature were brought together which made it possible to analyse the case study from a multi-level perspective. Further research, which should analyse a larger number of INTERREG projects should be carried out. A good starting point could be a comparative study of various projects within one programme area. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how learning possibilities are different in various cooperation strands in INTERREG (e.g. cross-border vs. transnational project structures) and investigate what role leadership plays in efficient knowledge exchange and learning. Although one interview participant argued that these projects are "nice to have" (own translation), but that the additional work stemming from them is overwhelming (especially for smaller administrations), there is huge potential behind these multi-level cooperations. Whether the projects only give some 'food for thought' or really present the actors with opportunity structures for policy transfer and exchange highly depends on the actors' willingness to work together as well as the group dynamic. In the case of CBC, it has been argued that it

> "is becoming an art that combines a steep learning curve to 'get on' with the Other […], a tight-rope walk through the legal rules in place and different border cultures on both sides of the border, but also a need for inventiveness and responsiveness to circumvent the emerging difficulties. Cross-border cooperation is therefore not a linear process, but rather a repetitive one in which the actors must proceed in an iterative manner over the long run" (Durand, 2014: 130).

In sum, INTERREG projects carry a great potential for actors. Learning within these structures is seen as a dynamic process and it is vital that the awareness of the potential of learning in INTERREG projects is increased. This research has shown that the conformance of projects is not always ideal. Therefore, in line with previous research, it is necessary to take into account a more detailed account of the composition of project partners (Knippschild &

Vock, 2017: 1743), but furthermore also investigate which patterns of governance they are embedded in and what influence these have on various constellations in the projects and the underlying opportunity structures. INTERREG should enable the creation of new communities and networks and provide actors with a platform to exchange ideas and experiences and not be primarily seen as an opportunity of funding. This difference in framing is yet to be achieved and should be addressed by programming authorities by stressing the multi-level character of the European Union and the transfer-potential of actors which is connected to this underlying framework. After all, learning is not simply about a transfer of policies or ideas from one actor to another, and from one level to another, but is a dynamic process which enables its actors to generate or exchange mutual understandings beyond the policy content. This brings increased understandings on a meta-level and will generate greater efficiency of INTERREG projects.

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