Governance diffusion in Europe – the EGTC tool and its spatial implementation patterns

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1. Introduction

European Integration has led to the development of a vast variety of European territorial cooperation (ETC) tools. Most of the tools – like funding instruments or the cross-border cooperation form of Euregios – have spread over large parts of Europe. In this paper we are concerned with the question how ETC governance diffuses over Europe and how we can explain the diffusion patterns.

The latest examples of ETC forms are macro-regional strategies and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The former one is an informal and strategic framework for cooperation in large-scale areas. The latter one offers a legal framework for cooperation on the regional cross-border level. This governance tool is currently being implemented in throughout Europe, and we engage with this tool in order to better understand diffusion processes.

European regions have now gathered some considerable experience with the 'European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation' (EGTC) which is based on the EU regulation from 2006 and its 2013 reform. This new tool has seen a remarkable development: Originally foreseen to facilitate the structural funds administration it has been applied to multiple contexts. 57 EGTCs are currently in the implementation process, and only very few of them are actually focussed on structural funds administration: The EGTC tool has developed more as a tool for tailor-made implementation for multiple purposes, including networking facilitation to the implementation of transport corridors.

Conceptually, we combine strands of the debate from political sciences and from spatial disciplines. With regard to the policy diffusion literature, the underlying hypothesis is that tools in support of territorial governance diffuse in similar ways policies diffuse. With regard to the spatial perspective, we synthesise discussions on the role of proximity, types of countries and others. We combine political and spatial arguments in form of a heuristic and apply this in our empirical argumentation.

Our empirical argumentation is based on an institutional mapping. This multi-temporal mapping shows spatial diffusion patterns Europe wide and the dynamic over time.

Empirically, we will first map the dynamics of the EGTC tool and its geographical spreading over Europe.

2.   Conceptual Framework: Towards Governance diffusion?

2.1.   The Policy diffusion debate

The question how and why policies, ideas, norms and practices spread or percolate from individual or collective actors and decision-makers to others, and how they move across different levels and spatial configuration has been subject to investigation in various social sciences debates. Here, we are concerned with the literature on policy diffusion, in which scholars are concerned with "the mechanisms that lurk behind the spread of policies across governments" (Shipan & Volan 2005: X). Literature has found vast proliferation over the last decades in various context, with sizeable studies analysing diffusion processes in the European policy studies.

Rogers (2003: 5) defines diffusion as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system". As regards to policy diffusion Simmons and Elkins (2004: 171) as well as Marsh and Sharman (2009: 270) amongst others apply a simple definition of policy diffusion as a "process through which policy choices in one country affect those made in a second country". Dependency is an important point of departure for diffusion processes. Diffusion studies do not take account of processes where two actors independent from each other arrive at the same point.

Studies on processes of diffusion explore the paths innovations spread, and try to explain the degree and speed of expansion (Lütz 2007). Early research on diffusion can be traced back to American political studies investigating the diffusion of policy innovations between American states, namely by Walker (1969) and Gray (1973). The research interest laid in identifying and describing patterns of diffusion of policy innovations. Explanatory forces came e.g. from the idea of pioneer-laggard existence or (source and adopter; Gray 1973), the geographical proximity (Walker, 1969), or the embeddedness in network structures with important communication channels. Generally, the spatial, socio-economic and structural reasons for the adoption of policy innovations were considered, in contrast to the reflection of individual stakeholders motivations (Lütz 2007). More recently, studies investigate the spatial and temporal cluster development between nation states (Simmons & Elkins 2004).

One consideration within diffusion studies is the assumption that the starting period with pioneers adopting the innovation, is followed by a phase of increasing application till a certain absorption rate is achieved. Marsh and Sharman summarize that "some authors speak of a 'tipping point' or 'threshold' (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998, Holzinger & Knill 2005, Braun & Gilardi, 2006) when the decision of one ore a few countries to join a group of policy pioneers precipitates a generalized rush to emulate" (2009, 273). Kristine Kern (2000) shows for the case of diffusion of environmental policies in US states that the critical mass can be achieved earlier when e.g. economically stronger and more densely populated states are among the early adopters or innovators. Unconnected networks however may have an obstructivist effect, or retard the diffusion of policies. According to Kern (2000) diffusion processes can occur horizontally or vertically. She demonstrates that horizontal diffusion processes are often induced by regulative competition, institutionalized bargaining processes or the involvement in communication networks. Vertical diffusion processes are accordingly linked to (national) institutions as nexuses.

Policy diffusion and policy transfer – overlapping strands of research

Processes described under the theoretical gateways of policy diffusion may well have been discussed or labelled as processes of "policy transfer, […] policy convergence, institutional isomorphism […] and other cognate terms" (Marsh & Sharman 2009: 269). Several scholars have explored the differences and similarities, most commonly between policy transfer and diffusion (cf. e.g. Lütz 2007). Marsh and Sharman (2009) attribute this to a lack of uniformity. Acknowledging the various calls for standardization of processes (e.g. Holzinger & Knill, 2005), Marsh and Sharman seek for potential cross-fertilization between this discussions. Research on policy transfer is rooted in British writings.

One of the most applied definitions describes policy transfer as "a process, in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place" (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 344), or in another political setting (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000, 5).

Several phrases are used in this context and refer to similar of policy learning (Börzel 1998), e.g. 'policy borrowing (Cox, 1999) or 'policy shopping' (Freemann 1999; for further elaboration see Stone 2001). One of the most popular concepts Rose's 'lesson-drawing (1991,1993). Dolowitz & Marsh draw much on the work of the letter and Bennet (1992) in the development of their framework to analyse policy transfer (2000, 9). Key topics of these discussions are agency and intentionality (Rose, 1991). Berry and Baybeck (2005, 505) note that decisions-makers, when confronted with a problem "simplify the task of finding a solution by choosing an alternative that has proven successful elsewhere". Transfer literature also questions the convergence of policies, which is not as important in diffusion literature.

In the context of European research for example Bulmer and Padgett (2004) or Radaelli (2000) respectively question the institutional steering capacities. A famous example is the "Open Method of Coordination". Literature on policy diffusion questions more the structural reasons behind and does not focus on the role of individuals. Apart from the slight difference in both these literature strands, there is a considerable conceptual overlap most notably in relation to the empirical phenomena. "[D]espite their different methodological approaches, generally four mechanisms, learning, competition, coercion and mimicry" (Marsh & Sharman 2009: 271) are identified in both strands. These four mechanisms are frequently referred to (Simmons et al., 2006; Dobbin et al. 2007, Balsiger & Nahrath 2015, Lütz 2007, Berry & Berry 1999, Marsh & Sharmann 2009).

Mechanisms of policy diffusion

Learning:
This first mechanism for diffusion processes highlights the role of agents, which might e.g. occur in epistemic communities or international organisations. The role of 'rational' decision making by e.g. governments or individual stakeholders to emulate other practices in order to achieve more) effective policy outcomes are highlighted in this strand (Rose, 1991). Weyland (2005) however contested these arguments and emphasized the role of bounded rationality.

Competition:
This second mechanism sees the impetus for policy diffusion processes in economic competition towards mobile production factors, such as different tax systems, investments etc. Arguments drawing

on competition are particularly relevant to processes to explain processes of governance diffusion between states in the context of globalization as well as European integration.

Mimicry/ Imitation:
Processes of policy diffusion can be explain by the copying of foreign policies, models, ideas, or innovations. This mechanism explains processes of policy innovations that are adopted in other regions or contexts in similar ways.

Coercion:
Finally, the coercion concept considers hierarchical elements within policy making, particularly in multi-level governance systems. This mechanism can be drawn back to the relative structural power one actor. In the European context supranational elements e.g. through requirements of the Single Market policy (Scharpf 2002) can be considered as coercive forms of policy diffusion. In this context the role of bargaining as the process in which common rules and norms are decided upon by state or regional authorities can be considered an own mechanism (Lütz 2007). As this however leads to indirect coercive forms of policy diffusion, we consider these elements under this mechanism.

Shipan & Volden (2008) test the interdependencies of these four mechanism for policy diffusion in cities. Balsiger and Nahrath (2015), in drawing on Busch et al. (2005) summarize "[W]hile international promotion facilitates diffusion its extent and speed is determined by the characteristics of what is diffused. Moreover, concerns of legitimacy and pressure to conform with international norms are often as much of a motivating force as the presumed rational drive of policy makers to improve effectiveness".

2.2. The spatial dimension

The literature on policy diffusion is rich with regard to institutional arguments but tends to be rather unspecific with regard to the spatial dimension. At the same time, it is obvious that the spatial dimension has a potential role in diffusion processes. We can summarize the geographical debates in three strands:

Proximity effect

The traditional geographical debate on diffusion of ideas focusses on the *proximity* effect as the dominant driving force. This debate is focussed largely on technical, entrepreneurial innovations in economic contexts. This perspective postulates that the closer one actor is to the place of the innovation, the earlier he is supposed to adopt or further develop this idea (Cliff et al. 1981). In some cases, diffusion agencies modify this pattern (Brown 1981).

In opposite to this proximity argument, *hierarchical* diffusion does not show clear geographical patterns as hierarchy can overlay spatial patterns. For example, transnational companies are likely to implement innovations in all their offices and locations (Pred 1975, Cliff et al. ibid.).

This argument mirrors to a certain extent the above-mentioned policy diffusion debate where proximity and hierarchy plays a role, too.

Types of spaces

A range of studies proposes categories of spaces that comprise more or less homogenous innovation areas. The classical approach refers to the Kondratieff's long waves that assigns countries and regions to macro-economic cycles due to basic innovations. Countries of old industrial innovations can be differentiated from countries that profit from booms of the automotive, chemical or IT sector. Some spaces are obviously more likely to make innovations successful than others. Until today, the comparative perspective of localised innovation processes represents a large part of the debate (cp. ESPON KIT 2013).

Relational approaches

Particularly from the perspective of political geography, the above-mentioned approaches have been criticized as being too descriptive and too much focussed on the rational choice perspective and quantitative arguments (Peck 2011). Indeed, postulating an automatism linked to spatial proximity would mean to fall into a territorial 'trap' (Agnew 1994). Indeed, the adaptation of political tools is a political process that does not rely on automatisms but on a complex variety of reasons.

More recently, the geographical diffusion debate has focussed more on critical and relational arguments. In particular, the assemblage perspective "is characterized by a concern for the actors, practices, and representations that affect the (re)production, adoption and travel of policies, and the best practice models across space and time" (Temenos & McCann 2013: 345, cp. McCann &Ward 2011). The respective research agenda demands deep empirical fieldwork and a number of case studies (Peck 2011).

2.3.   Confronting the political and the spatial typology

Both strands of diffusion debates have different roots and are hardly interlinked, but they have some overlaps (see fig. 1). This is in particular true for the hierarchical approach and the coercion argument, which essentially mean the same process.

The mechanisms of learning, imitation and competition can be characterised as 'horizontal', and implicitly there is some common ground. Many studies postulate that the smaller the spatial distance, the larger the probability of diffusion processes. The horizontal diffusion processes of the political debate overlap with the proximity argument without being identical.

With regard to types of spaces in the spatial debate, the discussion of policy diffusion does not have explicit parallels. Implicitly, however, there are important gateways: For example, Esping-Andersen (1990) has developed his well-known typology of welfare states that combines historical, cultural etc. arguments in order to explain similarities of political systems. This typology shows that within some

spaces it is more likely to develop or adopt certain social policy innovations. The debate on types of planning cultures and families goes a step further and shows that not only welfare states and social policies but also spatial policies are linked to societal frameworks and contexts (Othengrafen div). So again, we see an overlap between the horizontal diffusion mechanism and the spatial debate.

The relational debate has a very broad impetus and, thus, encompasses all potential form of diffusion without considering any of these 'mechanisms' to be an explanatory factor. So here, we can only state weak links.

| | | Political focus | |
		learning/ imitation / comptetition	coercion
Spatial focus	hierarchy		X
	proximity	X	
	types of spaces	X	
	relational approaches	(X)	(X)

Fig 1: positioning political and spatial typologies of diffusion modes (own draft)

Starting from this conceptual framework, we scrutinise the diffusion of an exemplary political innovation, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). We aim to explore, to what extent political and spatial arguments can explain the patterns of diffusion.

We start with positioning the tool in the European regional policy development before we present empirical arguments.

3. *The example of the EGTC tool*

Historical sketch

Traditionally, the borders between states have been perceived as an obstacle for the achievement of social and economic cohesion in border regions. Against this background, 'spatial development across national borders is one of the central aims of European political integration' (Fricke 2015: 849) and has been promoted by the 'institutionalisation' of cross-border regions such as Euroregions. The first official Euroregion, the Euregio, has been established in 1958 on the Dutch-German border. A Euroregion is a cross-border territorial entity that brings together partners from two or more cross-border regions in different European countries

– to overcome the obstacles hindering territorial cooperation and to contribute to the political and territorial integration of Europe;

– to strengthen the economic development of border territories; and

– to enhance social relationships among inhabitants living in the border region and to establish a common border-region identity (Haselsberger & Benneworth 2010; Oliveira 2015; Perkmann 2003)

Since then, Euroregions – and later also Eurodistricts – have developed throughout Europe, especially on the subnational level. This refers not only to the increasing number of cross-border regions (AEBR 2013) but also to qualitative changes in organizational forms (Fricke 2015). However, even if these European cross-border regions have been successful as 'micro-laboratories for European integration' (Van der Velde & Van Houtum, 2003, Garcia-Alvarez & Trillo-Santamaría 2011) they have in common that they are compounded by institutionally weak organisations and fragmented government structures. According to Evrard (2016: 1), cross-border cooperation does 'not appear particularly successful in constituting new, transnational scales of governance'. Following her argumentation there are two main reasons responsible for this. First, the organization of cross-border institutions as policy networks does not support the establishment of a common capacity, meaning that the involved actors focus on their own region without developing cross-border development strategies. Second and subsequently, cross-border regions have difficulties in effectively reaching 'the minds and hearts of "ordinary people"' (Evrard 2016: 2).

The EGTC tool

In order to overcome the obstacles hindering territorial cooperation, the EU introduced a legal tool to foster cross-border cooperation – the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The official objective of EGTCs as legal entities is to facilitate cross-border, transnational and/or interregional cooperation in order to strengthen economic and social cohesion. The EGTC allows 'the institutionalisation of a cross-border common institution that is legally recognised by the EU and member states' laws and on the other hand confers implementing powers on such an entity' (Evrard 2016: 3; see also Jaschwitz 2013:16). EGTCs are thus supposed to promote territorial approaches in EU politics and to contribute to the aim of territorial cohesion (CEC 2012).

An important characteristic is that this framework provides legal personality to the EGTC according to the national law of the Member Seat hosting the EGTC seat (CEC 2006, Art. 1, No. 3, 4). EGTCs address member states, regional authorities, local authorities and bodies governed by public law (e.g. universities). An EGTC is enabled to make legally binding decisions on behalf of its members in particular with regard to the implementation of territorial cooperation in the cohesion field (CEC 2006, Art. 7 No. 3). Moreover, the assembly, the decisive organ in an EGTC, establishes an annual budget and can recruit its own staff (CEC 2006, Art. 1 No. 4, Art. 11). The EGTS can thus implement projects on behalf of its members without direct influence of national or supra-national authorities (Evrard 2016: 2)

Before the EGTC tool was officially adapted in 2006, cross-border and transnational cooperation was based on multilateral treaties according to international law, leading to highly complex decision-making processes. For example, when a Euroregion or Eurodistrict has been 'institutionalised with legal capacity (usually through an association), this legal status remains regulated under national law, thus hindering its cross-border action' (Evrard 2016: 2). Against this background the introduction of

EGTCs can be considered as the first legal governance tool on European level (Spinaci & Gracia 2009, Zapletal 2010), allowing to experiment with the 'institutional architecture' of cross-border development (Klotz & Trettel 2016: 12-13). In this context, EGTCs present a new multi-level governance approach, here understood as multiple 'institutionalised modes of social coordination to produce and implement collectively binding rules, or provide collective goods' (Risse 2012: 7), as various public actors on different levels (local or regional authorities, bodies governed by public law etc.) can become a member of an EGTC in order to strengthen economic and social cohesion (CEC 2006, Article 3).

Against this background, recent research seems increasingly to focus on the questions how 'this new room for manoeuvre is interpreted and used by actors in their cross-border strategies ' (Evrard 2016: 2-3). With regard to the institutionalisation process of the EGTC INTERREG Programme Grande Région, it can be summarized that the supraregional potential of this tool is difficult to mobilise (Evrard 2016: 17-18). However, other studies emphasise the potential synergies between EGTCs and other multi-level governance approaches such as macro-regional strategies (Klotz & Trettel 2016). Macro-regions present an integrated approach to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area such as the Baltic Sea region or the Alpine Region in which the related member states or regions benefit from intensified cooperation contributing to achieve economic, social and territorial cohesion without the need to create new large-scale institutions (European Parliament 2015). In this supraregional multi-level governance context, macro-regions can provide the strategic frame or perspective for a region in which EGTCs can act as independent public institutions (Klotz & Trettel 2016). The advantage for macro-regions can be found in the effective implementation of its objectives by EGTCs which, by their origin, pursue territorial cooperation as main goal and can contribute to the implementation of strategies in a region. On the other side, EGTCs benefit as their activities are embedded in a broader context, meaning that they can pursue its goals in a broader context and that they can strengthen its visibility on the regional, euro-regional or European level (Klotz & Trettel 2016).

However, in practice it has to be recognized that the large majority of existing EGTCs do not provide 'innovative' solutions with regard to the provision of public services; they seem to focus on cross-border regional development, spatial planning and management issues and seem to be mainly based on small-scale partnerships on the local or regional level (CoR 2015: 7; Jaansoo & Groenendijk 2014; Zillmer & Toptsidou 2014: 4). Only few of these cross-border EGTCs cover larger territories or include actors from the national level on either side of the border. One example is the Central European Transport Corridor EGTC running from the Baltic to the Adriatic Seas and possibly along the potential branch of the corridor towards the Black Sea, where a larger number of partners and associated partners is included and where new contexts (e.g. TEN policy) are addressed (CoR 2015: 27-29) By June 2016, 57 EGTCs were established in total; including far more than 800 national, local and regional authorities from 20 different Member States (CoR 2015 and 2016). While one further EGTC is awaiting its approval, eight groupings are under preparation and three more are planned (CoR 2016). Since the adoption of the EC regulation in the EU member states the number of EGTCs being established is constantly increasing (CoR 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016). Interestingly, EGTCs are not implemented evenly across Europe, but there are patterns of concentrations around particular countries such as France or Hungary.

Despite the fact that the EGTC regulation was mainly supposed to facilitate the administration of EU programmes or to carry out projects under the structural funds (CEC 2006, Art. 1, 11), the first years have shown that EGTCs are being applied in multiple contexts but only partly for structural funds.

However, EGTCs have been given a more prominent role in the institutional set-up of EU Cohesion Policy more recently (Jaansoo & Groenendijk 2014) as the institutionalization of the EGTC INTERREG Programme Grande Région and the ESPON European Node for Territorial Evidence as managing authorities of EU programmes indicate (CoR 2016). Many EGTCs aim at building a general institutional framework for cross-border cooperation. Prominent examples are Hungarian EGTCs like the Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC or the Cerdanya Cross-Border Hospital EGTC in the Pyrenées-Mediteranée cross-border region between France and Spain. Furthermore, several Euregios or Eurodistricts relaunched their general institutional framework and became EGTCs as for example the Euregio Tirolo-Alto Adige-Trentino or the Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau (CoR 2015 and 2016).

4.   Institutional mapping of EGTC – methodology

Our aim is to understand the diffusion patterns of the EGTC tool by combining institutional and spatial arguments from the diffusion debate. The key element of our empirical argumentation is an institutional mapping: Institutional mappings aim at categorising and visualising the actors, perimeters and contents of institutional instruments and processes. Moreover, they address less visible components of territorial cooperation as actor relations, power bargaining etc. (cp. Chilla et al. 2012). In our case, we apply an institutional mapping approach that consists of the following criteria and is based on a variety of sources (Committee of the Regions website and the Monitoring Reports, academic literature, personal information from a series of expert interviews). The institutional mapping is based on three dimensions – historicity, institutional thickness, and the spatial dimension.

Historicity

The historicity dimension is considered by means of a three step chronological mapping. We have chosen the three steps 2010, 2013, and 2015 as this embraces the whole implementation phase in a demonstrative way. We restrict this to the establishment of concrete EGTCs but we exclude the earlier adoption of the EU directive into national law for two reasons: Firstly, the implementation on the national level was within a short period of time around 2009 (see Cesci n.y.). Secondly, the national rule adaptation does not say much about the political processes of diffusion. We have informal information that even in countries that have swiftly adopted the directive, the national authorities have hindered the later establishment of concrete EGTCs by informal means.

Institutional thickness

With institutional thickness we capture the intensity of the ECTC involvement in the respective countries. Here, we include a) the number of EGTCs as the obviously most important indicator and b) the number of EGTC seats. This second indicator informative with regard to the political priorities. Hosting an EGTC comes along with a pretty high bureaucratic effort and involvement from the national and the regional level. However, we apply a double weighting for the number of simple involvements in order not to hide the regional activity.

From a cartographic point of view, this indicator might be seen critical as it represents absolute numbers on areas of different size. Normally, one would put the values into relation to the numbers of inhabitants, surface, border length etc. In our case skip this step as it any potential quotient would bring new challenges (what about the length of the water borders of Italy or UK etc.) – for the later interpretation we have to keep in mind this point.

Spatial dimension

The mapping argues on the national level. The national scale is the appropriate level, as the establishment of EGTCs requires national consent and the administrative routines and regulations play a certain role. This is not do negate the role of regional players, but for European diffusion processes, the larger pictures becomes relevant. The maps reveal concentrations, adjacencies, and shifts.

*5.   Diffusion of EGTC over Europe – empirical arguments*

Description
The map shows the EGTC diffusion pattern of the recent years. The obvious patterns can be described as follows: First and foremost, the diffusion pattern of the EGTC tool is spatially not even, and this spatially uneven pattern is quite stable over time.
The first countries making use of the EGTC tool were mainly southwestern countries, in particular France (map A). In the first years, France is the most active country in exploring the potentials of EGTCs and in involving other countries at its borders (e.g. Germany and French speaking Belgium). In south eastern Europe, Hungary is using the EGTC tool most frequently. There is an activity increase from north to south.

In the years 2010-2013 (map B), the popularity of EGTCs in Europe grows not only in absolute terms but also in geographical terms as more countries become active. From 2010 onwards a certain 'shift' from western to eastern countries can be observed. In particular, the southeastern countries are increasing their EGTC involvement (e.g. Romania, Bulgaria); Hungary remains to be a very active country, hosting numerous EGTCs. At the same time, a certain stability of the geographical pattern can be observed with the Mediterranean countries at the forefront of the activities. It becomes also obvious that the countries which are already involved in various EGTCs are constantly projecting new EGTCs. Nowadays (map C), Hungary and France still show the highest EGTC activity values.

With regard to the overall geographical pattern, two main spatial trends can be summarized. Firstly, we see a quite stable gradient between Southern Europe and Northern Europe. The EGTC activity is higher in Southern Europe and even growing over time; Northern Europe remains reluctant. Secondly, we see a clear shift of the activities towards Eastern European member states. Hungary is particularly active, and in its neighbouring countries, we see growing interest.
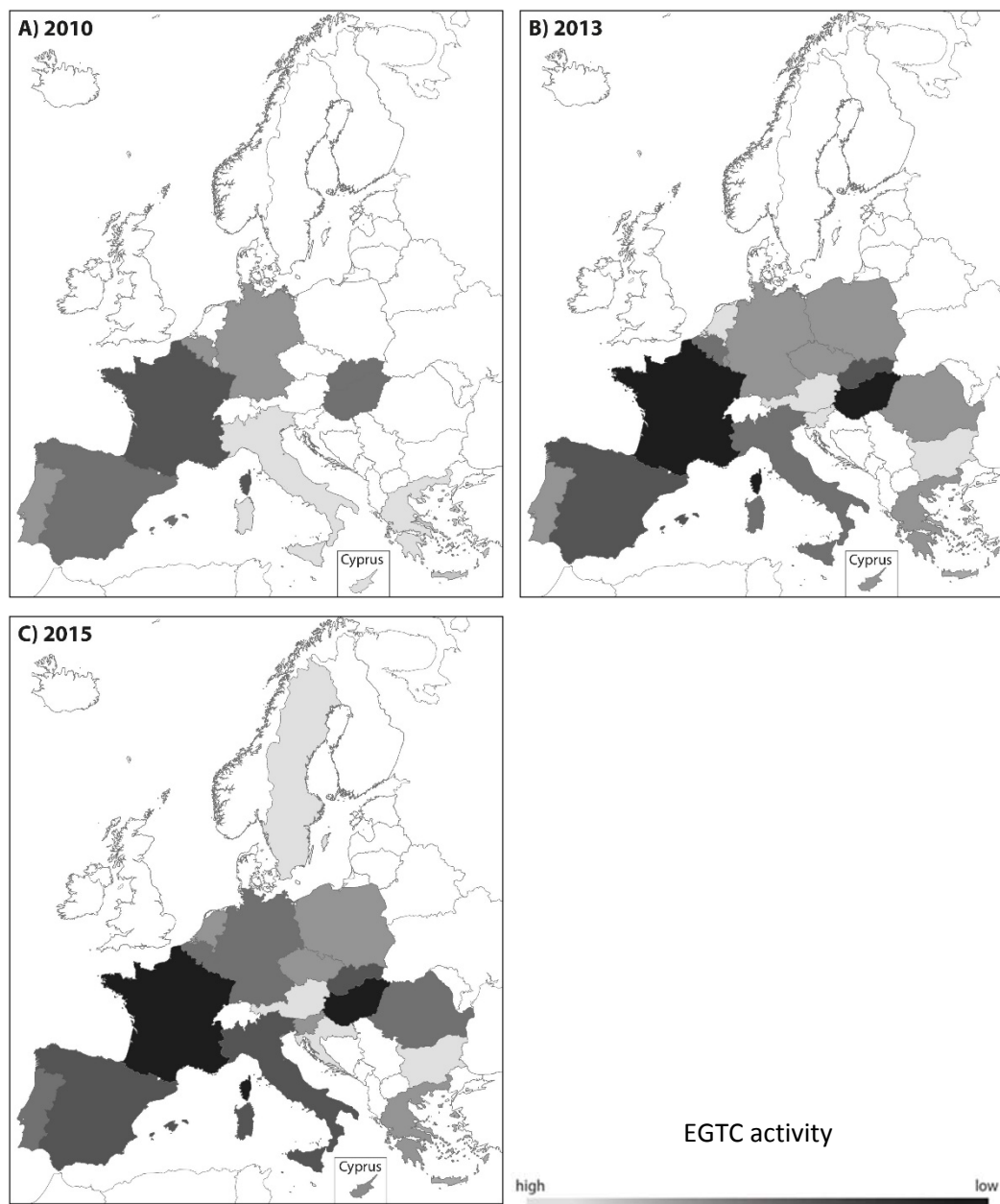
Map: Institutional mapping of existing EGTCs. EGTC Activity in Europe since the implementation of the EGTC-regulation (cartography: Franziska Sielker, Stephan Adler)

Interpretation

Coercive elements / hierarchy – the role of the EU

There is little reason to explain the EGTC diffusion geography with elements of hierarchy, in particular because the EU framework does not foresee any coercive elements in favour of EGTC development. The only coercive element of the EGTC directive is that all EU member states have to offer their regions the opportunity to develop EGTCs. But as mentioned above, this anchorage in national law has been completed quite swiftly and simultaneously (Cesci n.y.). The differences in the framework implementation do not explain the later development process of EGTCs – for example,

the later ECTC sceptical UK has included the EGTC already in 2007, and the later very active France did so only in 2008.

Moreover, there is little reason to believe in more subtle elements of political 'nudging' – the European Commission certainly feels positive about the unexpected EGTC activity. There are no extra funds or privileges for those regions or countries being more active than others, even if the report of the European Parliaments (EP 2015) mentions examples of higher rates of co-funding for EGTCs.

However, the EU' stabilising role in new member states can be seen as an important facet of Europeanisation: 'The very norms, values and acquis that define EU-Europe (for example the virtues of cooperation, democratic ownership, social capital and general values such as sustainability, solidarity and cohesion)' (Scott 2011, 136) are projected on (or approved by accession states and their border regions) guiding the actions of these states and regions. In that sense, European identity is a project of cooperation and the creation of democratic border regimes (O'Dowd 2002); and EGTCs are an opportunity for local stakeholders to implement democratic regimes, to foster their own developments and to contribute to European integration.

Horizontal transfer and proximity

The geographical pattern indicates that spatial proximity and adjacency has a role to play: The probability to establish a new EGTC seems to be higher if a neighbouring country already has experience with it. This makes sense as horizontal processes of learning and imitation are much supported as the EGTCs are *cross-border* instruments. Germany is a good example to illustrate this: For several years, Germany and many of its federal states were sceptical about EGTCs so they did not support the development of EGTCs having a head office within Germany. At same time, they agreed to participate into EGTCs, which were initiated and hosted in neighbouring countries (Luxembourg, France, Poland). In 2015, Germany finally agreed to host the first EGTC headquarter, the so called CODE 24 EGTC that aims to improve multimodal transport infrastructure between the North Sea and the Adriatic Sea. This change of attitude can be traced back – amongst others – to the experience that EGTCs have proven to be helpful in practice, and that domestic authority is not put into question. The neighbouring states of France and Hungary are further good examples for this diffusion patterns.

Solutions (of societal problems) through reflective learning processes (O'Dowd 2002)
hier evtl. auch noch einmal die Frage / den Aspekt der democratic border regimes (institutional thickness) aufnehmen? -> Lernen und Übernahme nur dort, wo es bislang keinen Austausch / keine Institutionen gibt, wo lokale demokratische Regimes weitgehend fehlen?

Hier vielleicht auch noch einmal stärker die Situation in den neuen EU-Mitgliedsstaaten erklären?

Types of spaces and horizontal transfer

The patterns of the EGTC implementation remind of country typologies in the above-mentioned debates on welfare states and planning cultures. Arguments of state organisation, administrative culture and tradition can play a role also with regard to EGTC implementation, complemented by

experiences in cross-border cooperation and European regional policy in general. The following postulates explore the potential of this argument:

- The Scandinavian countries are very hesitant about the use of EGTCs. One might have expected a much more active position as Scandinavian countries tend to believe in the potential of planning instruments and those of regional development. Surprisingly, it is exactly this point that serves an explanatory argument: Cross-border spatial development has been explored and debated intensively in Scandinavian countries. It is not by chance, that the first European macro-region developed around the Baltic Sea, and that the most prominent case of cross-border infrastructure – the Oresund Bridge – links two Scandinavian countries. The region is characterised by a variety of local, democratic (cross-border) arrangements. Also on the intergovernmental level, a constructive political cooperation culture is present.
  Against this background, EGTCs promise little added value. The cooperation focus of recent years was more on the macro-regional scale. Last but not least, one has to mention that Norway as non-EU-country has access to the EGTC only since the 2013 reform, and that Russia is not a very realistic addressee of ECTCs due to geopolitical reasons.
- Vice versa, the strong activities of the southwestern countries can be traced back to a traditionally distanced attitude towards instruments of regional planning and development. France is a particular case in this respect. Already in the 1990s, cross-border questions were high on the political agenda as France saw outgoing cross-border commuting in most of its border areas, and until today France is particularly active in this field. Simplifying to a certain extent, this country group follows the path of catching-up cross-border integration in particular against the background of relatively weak tradition of regional planning, and against the background of ongoing reforms in planning systems and the role of regions.
- The British Isles are often considered as being liberal in terms of planning culture. Strategic spatial planning does traditionally not play a prominent role here, and political elements of the European Union are often not very popular. This explains the EGTC absenteeism at least partly. In addition, one has to mention the geographical form of the islands that makes cross-border cooperation different to what continental Europe with its multiple 'green borders'.
- In the Eastern countries, instruments of European (regional) policy play an important role in general. This is due to the fact that a) European support programmes have a significant share in the countries' budgets and b) that the institutional thickness in border regions is still quite low due to the transformation process.

Simplifying even more, one can say, that little experience and a low institutional thickness in cross-border cooperation increases the probability of EGTC activities. This is why Mediterranean and Eastern European countries are more active than others are.

The implementation of EGTCs obviously is highly dependent on state traditions and the distinction of federal and unitary states (e.g. Loughlin 2001). In centralised unitary states the sub-national government only exists at the local level. The central government defines the aims and scope of policies, services etc., and local authorities are delivering the services. Decentralised unitary states regional structures have been introduced which are strictly to subordinate to central government. In Federal states, the power and the co-existence of sovereignties are shared between the upper and lower tier of government.

Relational arguments

The more structural patterns discussed so far are far from being complete, and they cannot explain the specific details. Every national as well as regional context and every EGTC development has its own path and motivations. In most cases, a very small number of politico-administrative leaders push the EGTC development forward, often against resistance from different levels. Here it depends on processes and dynamics on the micro-level, including the capacity to link into discursive paradigms and to perform successfully in institutional complex environments.

This happens against the background of historically embedded cross-border relations. For example, the border arrangements between Hungary and Yugoslavia in 1926 with regard to reciprocal traffic between the frontier zones the facilities required might be seen as an important background for today's EGTC in this region (Hendrikson 2011, 91). Separating borders can be seen as a starting point and resource for strengthening cooperation (Scott 2011, 132)

6.   Conclusion – elements of governance diffusion

Our empirical heuristic has led to the following insights with regard to the EGTC diffusion: Spatial proximity matters as it promotes and facilitates learning and institutional adaptions; political organisation matters as the degree of centrality and the culture of spatial development policies differs largely; and existing cross-border institutions matter as they can cause path dependencies.

On the conceptual level, one can state that the notions of governance diffusion and policy diffusion are very close and in parts redundant. The discussion on diffusion processes from political and spatial perspectives are partly overlapping and have clear interfaces. This can be seen as potential for interdisciplinary discussion.

The presented reflection offers a heuristic and inductive approach in the early phase of a new policy instrument and, thus, leaves important questions open: Obviously, more empirical studies are necessary, and linking link relational arguments and structural arguments is a major objective for future reflections in this respect.

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