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The domestic dimension of cross-border governance: Networks and coordination patterns

Summary of an exploratory study on behalf of the
German Federal Ministry of the Interior

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Working Paper No. 2: Tobias Chilla, Franziska Sielker, Frank Othengrafen (2017): Governance diffusion in Europe – the EGTC tool and its spatial implementation patterns. Online: <https://blogs.fau.de/regionalentwicklung/wp2-governance-diffusion/>

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The domestic dimension of cross-border governance: Networks and coordination patterns.

1. Background

Border studies have intensively analysed the dynamics of multi-level governance. Manifold facets of cross-border cooperation have been addressed in the vertical and the horizontal dimension. However, the *domestic* part of the setting has hardly been addressed so far (fig. 1).

We have now concluded a study on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, exploring the situation in a series in European countries. The report of this study is published in German language¹, and an in-depth reflection in English language is under preparation. However, in order to make some key results accessible for the English audience, this paper briefly summarises the key results in the format of this working paper.

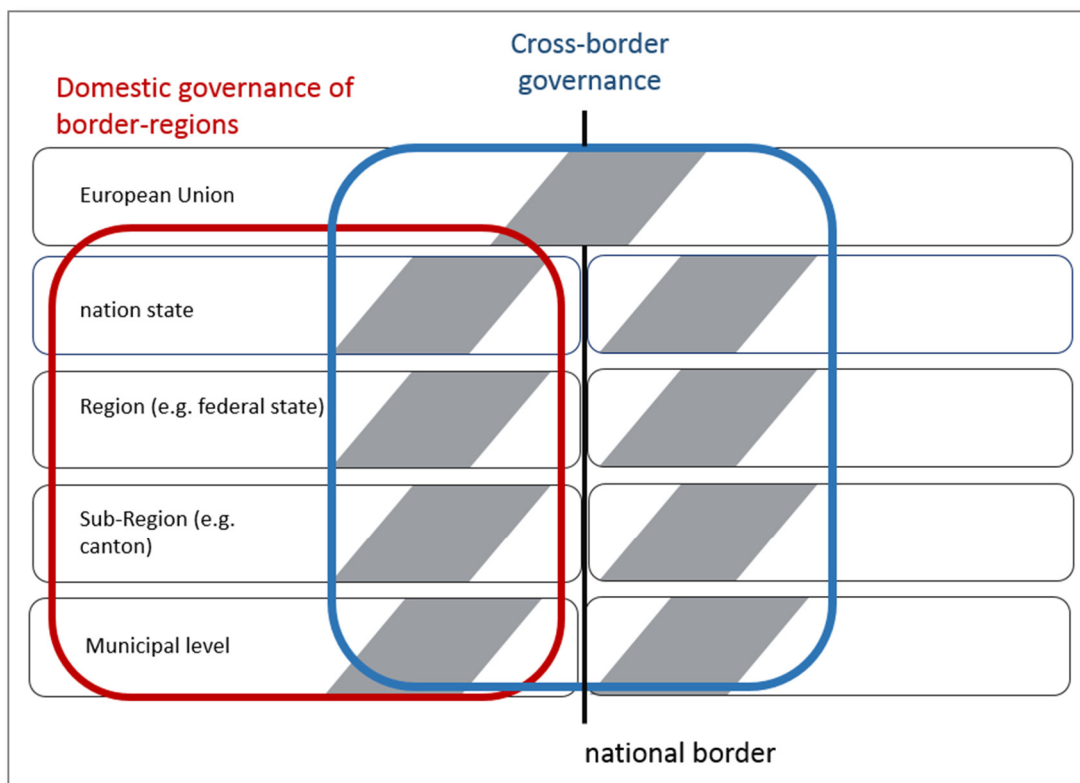


Fig. 1 Analytical focus: intra-national governance of border issues

The study is based on desktop research and expert interviewing. The desktop research explored the relevant information in scientific and grey literature (e.g. Wassenberg et al. 2015, MOT n.d.). The

¹ Chilla 2020, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/themen/heimat-integration/innerstaatliche-vernetzung-grenzregionen.html>

empirical core of the study consists of qualitative interviews: For each country, at least two experts were interviewed, and a total of 40 expert interviews were conducted in autumn 2020, covering 13 countries, complemented by the European perspective. The countries comprise Germany and all its neighbour countries, complemented by Sweden, Hungary, and Italy.

2. Key results

2.1. Positioning the domestic patterns

Fig. 2 visualises the positioning of the analysed countries in a condensed way. The visualisation comprises three kinds of information:

- The x-axis shows the intensity of intra-state networking and coordination. This is based on information on the frequency of communications and meetings, the political broadness of the addressed topics, the strategic orientation and similar arguments.
- The y-axis illustrates the level at which networking is primarily anchored and distinguishes between more centralised and more decentralised anchoring. This reflects the relationship between the rather nationally coordinated networks and the regional, bottom-up networks.
- The size of the squares indicates the number of inhabitants for each country, which is grouped into three size classes. The idea behind this indicator is that increasing country size comes along with a higher spatial distance of border actors within a country and a higher number of territorial authorities and actors.

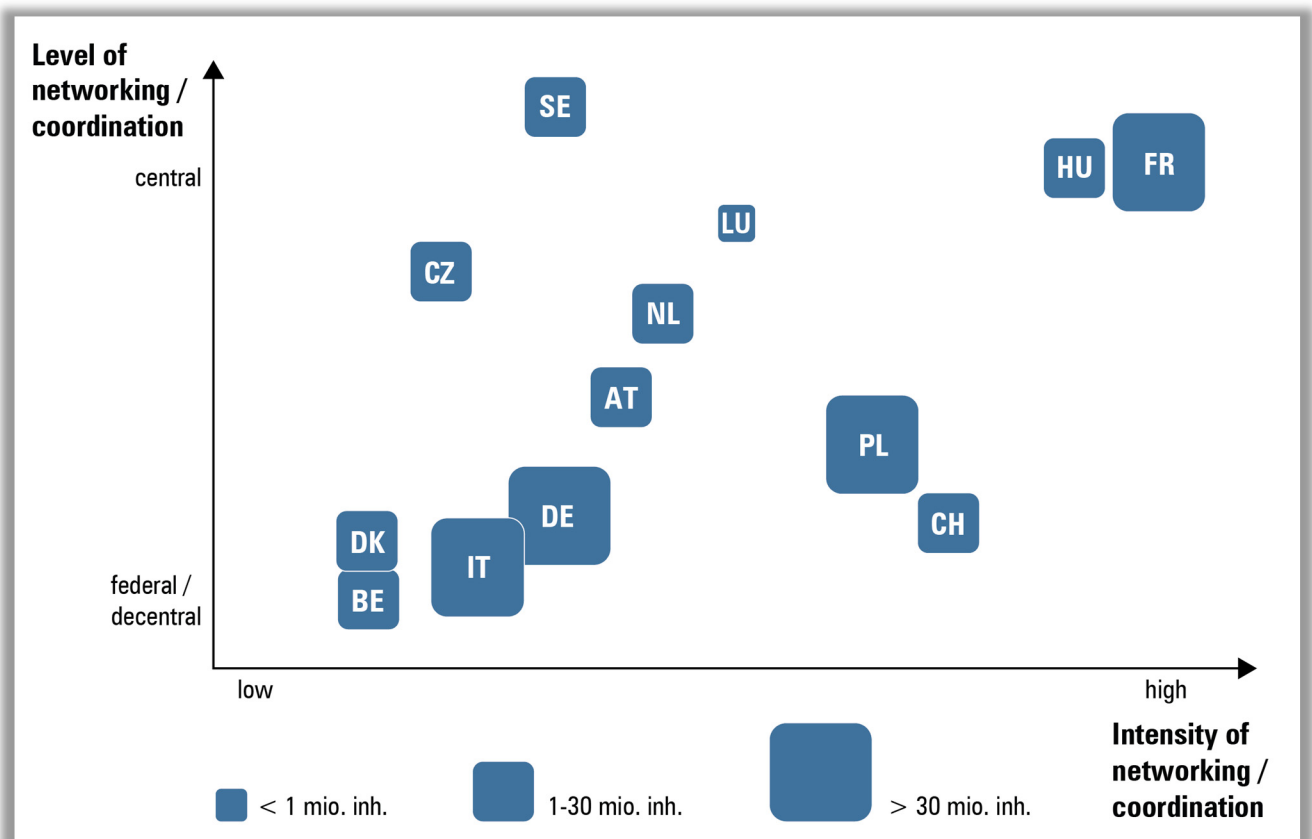


Fig. 2 Intra-national networking and coordination of border regions: level and intensity in a schematic overview

The overall pattern indicates the following aspects:

- There is a certain link between the intensity of networking and the anchoring at a central level: The stronger the national role, the higher the intensity of networking seems to be, even if there are a series of exceptions.
- A correlation between the size of the country and the intensity of networking is not given. Even if it seems generally plausible that greater spatial distances between the participants and their overall greater number might lead to specific forms of networking, this is not apparent according to this presentation: Other explanatory factors apparently play a stronger role.
- East-West differences are hardly discernible. Even if central forms of organisation can be found in the three Eastern European states under consideration, the differences are so strong that a categorisation according to East and West is not appropriate.

Obviously, *structural elements* are not dominant. Neither the geographical location nor the size of the country determines the policy options. The more detailed analysis shows that there is a great variety of intra-national networking formats and that there are no 'standard patterns' and no simple explanations. Border regions are not a simple category of territories but they consist of very different and complex settings.

However, the state structure plays an important role. Given the general structures of the French and Hungarian state, the relevance of a central institution is not surprising. Countries with a federal structure perform different from the central states. Administrative and political culture makes a difference as well: The strength of the Swiss cantons and the limited coordination focus of the Belgium national authorities are examples for this. These developments come along with a certain path dependency. The Polish example is interesting in this regard, as a rather strong bottom-up institutionalisation was decided after a long period of rather informal networking activities (for details see the country profiles in Chilla 2020).

This leads to the argument, that the patterns are characterised by *contingency*. Each border region has to develop its best fitting approach, combining the most adequate tools and options. It obviously depends to a large extent on the individual arrangements of each country, which must be seen as an expression of the European diversity, calling per se for place based arrangements. The following section illustrates the main elements of networking and coordination that can be combined in this context.

2.2. Elements of coordination and networking

Networking and coordination of border regions are based on very different activities and tools. Fig. 3 summarises this in a compact way. The table categorises the relevant networking formats and instruments, with one or more examples in the second column. The rows highlighted in light blue are arranged from top to bottom indicating the increasing degree of formalisation. This logic does not apply for the lower rows.


| Format | | Examples |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
|  Degree of formalisation | Informal networks | AEBR German regions (DE) |
| | Exchange formats (regular events) | Meeting of majors (NL), EGTC forum (HU), ÖROK cross-border working group (AT) |
| | Institutionalised network | Federation of Euroregions in Poland (PL) |
| | Federal concertation | CH, ÖROK (AT), BE |
| | Cross-border coordination point | CBM (Proposal DG Regio) |
| | Physical meeting point | House of the Greater Region (LU); regional level: Villa Rehfuß (FR-DE) |
| | Institution in a comprehensive sense | MOT (FR), CESC (HU) |
| Project format | | div. |
| Funding programming procedures | | div. |
| Transnational concertation | | Nordic council (SE) |

Fig. 3 Overview of the elements of coordination and networking

3. Conclusion

The results of this study reveal a new facet of border studies. The domestic governance dimension is positioned between the rather classical inner-state hierarchies and the soft cooperation tools of cross-border governance. This sheds light on the challenges for border regions: They do not only have to manage the mismatches of administrative and political levels between two sides of the border. They also have to bridge the frictions between clear domestic hierarchies and rather complex cross-border governance settings.

It is obvious that such an exploratory study leaves scope for validation and detailing of the findings. This is true, for example, for the more thorough inclusion of the coordination of sectoral networks. The study at hand focusses on general cooperation patterns and on some aspects of regional development and planning. It is obvious that these activities are complemented by a series of sectoral approaches: The EURES network addressing labour market issues for commuters is one of the more institutionalised examples; one might also mention networks for concrete transport policy objectives or for cross-border services of general interest (medical care, schools etc.). These aspects have to left for further research.

The study has no normative intention; in other words: the question is open which approaches are more or less effective, and also the question what kind of potentials are to be used: Cross-border governance often stresses the necessity of learning processes across the border. It seems plausible

that learning between border regions of the same national affiliation also bears still unused potential. If we understand border regions as a key nucleus of European integration, this potential should be considered in a systematic way.

4. Sources

The complete study in German language:

On the Homepage of the Federal Ministry of the Interior:

<https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/themen/heimat-integration/innerstaatliche-vernetzung-grenzregionen.html>

On ResearchGate:

<https://www.researchgate.net/project/The-domestic-dimension-of-cross-border-governance-Networks-and-coordination-patterns-Innerstaatliche-Vernetzung-von-Grenzregionen>

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