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Bridging borders through institution-building: the EGTC as a facilitator of institutional integration in cross-border regions

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ABSTRACT

This article examines cross-border integration at the sub-state level in the frame of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The EGTC is a supranational and directly applicable EU legal instrument that regulates the creation of cross-border 'associations' with legal personality between public authorities. Thus, it represents a policy tool that can have an effect on the institutional frame of cross-border cooperation and potentially enhance cross-border institutional integration at the sub-state level. The aim of this article is to examine the potential effect of this EU instrument on cross-border institutional integration by studying the institutional architecture of selected EGTCs. This is done on the basis of an analytical grid that defines elements of a possible integration process based on an institutional-oriented approach. This analytical grid is applied to four case studies: the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, the EGTC Ister-Granum, the Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion and the European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino. The empirical analysis shows that despite the considerable improvement of the legal basis for cooperation, the possible effect of the EGTC for further institutional cross-border integration is still rather limited due to a narrow design of institutions and a low level of actor involvement.

KEY WORDS European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation; cross-border cooperation; integration; institutions; actor involvement

1. Introduction

As part of the 2006 reform of the EU cohesion policy, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the Regulation on a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The EGTC instrument provides legal support for cross-border cooperation and complements the EU's financial support for cross-border cooperation provided by the European Regional Development Fund.¹

The possible long-term effects of the EGTC instrument are twofold. At the European level, legal questions regarding territorial cooperation have become

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part of the EU cohesion policy. Thus, in addition to the member states, the European institutions can also act as agenda setters when defining legal frames of this policy goal. At the sub-state level, the instrument has opened new possibilities for local and regional authorities to enhance territorial cooperation with entities from other states, especially in border regions where the existing legal framework did not provide an adequate basis for cooperation. This will be highlighted below. De Sousa (2013: 685) writes: "Cross-border co-operation arrangements have now been integrated into the EU legal framework. The proponents of this new bottom-up approach to territorial co-operation argue that cross-border co-operation will move from being marginal, specialized and (often) informal set of arrangements to become stronger, more legally certain and transparent organizational features of the EU institutional architecture. The new EGTCs are expected to play a greater role in setting the regional policy agenda."

The EGTC instrument, a cross-border cooperation tool with legal personality anchored in EU law, may substantially influence the institutional design of territorial cooperation. It provides the frame for an 'institutional experiment', by enabling local, regional and state actors from various states, which differ considerably in terms of legal status and level of government, to collectively create a new institution and act together as a distinct legal person. In other words, the EGTC is a new type of governance institution that "can positively link actors within a policy network" (Durand and Nelles, 2013: 588).

Compared to the cooperation that existed before the establishment of an EGTC, the creation of an EGTC likely encourages a further development of institutional cross-border cooperation. Yet, it is not sufficient to simply describe an EGTC's statutory institutional architecture. It is important to learn about the possible benefits of an EGTC and to evaluate the possible effects with regard to an increasing cross-border integration. This article does so by assessing the institutional architecture of four EGTCs, using an analytical grid that defines some elements of a further integrated institutional cooperation based on formal and procedural actor involvement. The article proposes a qualitative analysis that, on the one hand, compares the institutional frame of cooperation before and after the creation of an EGTC and, on the other hand, assesses the institutional cooperation within an EGTC using the analytical grid described below. The article analyses the potential for integration in cross-border regions through the prism of institutionalization of cross-border cooperation within an EGTC. The article delivers no direct data on actual interactions within an EGTC or on the impact an EGTC has on cross-border spaces; instead, it focuses on the institutional architecture of the EGTC as a proxy indicator for the possible effects of the instrument.

By focusing on the rarely studied EGTC as a cooperation tool and by considering both conceptual and empirical aspects, this article contributes to the existing scholarship on sub-state territorial cooperation and integration. Now

that the European Union has indisputably evolved into a space that facilitates sub-state networking across borders, scholars must study these networking processes in depth, and evaluate the possibilities and patterns of sub-state cross-border integration. The conceptual and empirical work of this article gives further input to such scholarship from an institutional-oriented perspective.

2. The EGTC and its premises for institutional cross-border integration

Since the 1950s, cooperation between sub-state authorities from different European states has become a widespread practice. Even more, such cooperation has come to foster local and regional development, particularly in border regions (Perkmann, 2003; Zeyrek, 2005; Ricq, 2006: 41–42). Commonly, cross-border cooperation can be defined as “a more or less institutionalized collaboration” between contiguous sub-state authorities across state borders (Perkmann, 2003: 153–171). Cross-border cooperation renders a border region into “a special area of fluxes and exchanges of a social, cultural, economic and political nature, a space where the development of multiple activities takes place and where the type and intensity of transactions have evolved in time” (De Sousa, 2013: 671). At the same time, cross-border cooperation is pursued outside of the conventional lines of public action (Perkmann, 1999) and cross-border institutions face certain limits to bringing actors and activities under their governance umbrella (Pikner, 2008). Nevertheless, several actions have been taken to overcome these limits.

To facilitate cross-border cooperation, both the Council of Europe and the European Union have developed specific instruments. The international conventions mediated within the Council of Europe aimed at establishing a regulatory framework for territorial cooperation. One example is the Madrid Outline Convention of 1981 and its three Protocols (1998, 2001, 2013), which were to be implemented by ratification and by bi- or multilateral state treaties. The legal impact of these conventions and treaties, and the resulting opportunities for local and regional authorities to cooperate formally across state borders, remained rather limited—mainly due to the hesitant ratification and implementation by many states (Engl, 2007, 2014).

Since the adoption of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 1975, the European Union has begun to launch policies and rules to incentivize cross-border cooperation. These policies have gradually evolved from merely taking into account the cross-border impacts of ERDF-investments (Art. 5(1)(D), EFRE-Regulation No. 724/75) to actively designing separate programmes that specifically allocate funding to cross-border activities and projects (Interreg since 1990). In fact, in 2006 the EU defined territorial

cooperation as one of the three principal goals of EU cohesion policy and adopted the EGTC as a specific legal instrument.²

The EGTC can contribute to a further institutional integration in border regions because the EGTC has a legal personality anchored in EU law and it can be applied in all EU member states. These characteristics distinguish the EGTC from other instruments such as the Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) or the Local Grouping of Cross-Border Cooperation (LGCC), both of which can be applied only to a limited number of actors. The ECG is an instrument adopted by the Council of Europe (CoE), which needs state ratification to enter into force. By the end of 2015, only 6 out of 47 CoE member states had ratified it. The LGCC is based on two interstate agreements, the 2002 Brussels Agreement between France and Belgium and the 1996 Karlsruhe Agreement between France, Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland. The LGCC thus applies only to the border areas of the contracting states. The EGTC can significantly change the legal basis for an institutionalized cross-border cooperation because it extends the possibility to create cooperation groupings with legal personality across the entire EU territory, as will be highlighted in the case studies below.

The EGTC also contributes to institutional integration in border regions through its possible multi-level membership structure, which includes local and regional authorities, other bodies governed by public law, as well as state authorities as legitimate members. Other cooperation instruments such as the LGCC exclude the state level. Moreover, the EGTC's predefined but at the same time flexible institutional structure with an assembly and a director as mandatory organs combined with the option to create any other organs considered necessary for cooperation may also support an institutional cross-border integration. Finally, the purpose of an EGTC is flexible. An EGTC can enhance territorial cooperation, in contrast to the rather economic purpose of the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), but it can also have more specific purposes regarding the management of EU-funded programmes or of public services.

In order to assess how the EGTC tool is used to frame cross-border cooperation institutionally, the present article focuses on four selected EGTCs that mainly or only consist of neighbouring local and/or regional authorities and that follow a general cooperation purpose. Controlling these aspects ensures that the analysis focuses on examples that correspond to the overall concept of cross-border cooperation, as defined above. Furthermore, in all four cases the EGTCs were preceded by other arrangements for cooperation, which allows to assess the institutional changes caused by the EGTC as well as to consider possible endogenous effects that the pre-existing arrangements may have had on the EGTC.

3. An institutional approach to EGTCs as possible frames for cross-border integration

Among the different ways to study integration in a cross-border area, it is possible to distinguish between a relational approach (e.g. Durand and Nelles, 2013; Decoville et al., 2013; Svensson, 2015; Svensson and Nordlund, 2015) and an institutional approach (e.g. Schmitt-Egner, 2005; Boman and Berg, 2007). This distinction is part of the broader discourse on the conceptualization of regions either as territories vs. networks (Harrison, 2013) or as “spaces of place” vs. “spaces of flows” (Blatter, 2004; Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Hansen and Serin, 2010). Relational approaches focus on relations and network analysis between actors; institutional approaches put more emphasis on the institutional frame of cooperation and see cross-border cooperation as a process of institution-building (Perkmann, 1999: 658). These two approaches focus on different dimensions of cross-border integration, which according to Durand divide into (1) a structural dimension, (2) a functional dimension, (3) an institutional dimension and (4) an ideational dimension (Durand, 2015: 11–12).

The present article adopts the institutional-oriented approach and uses the institutional architecture of a cross-border cooperation arrangement as the point of reference to assess the potential of EGTCs for cross-border integration. I define integration as an increasing connection between border territories by the creation of common cross-border institutions that include different public and private actors from the whole cross-border territory. To assess the potential of the EGTC instrument to trigger such an integration process, I develop an analytical grid, described further below, and apply it to four case studies.

Policies to foster cross-border cooperation have initiated a process of de-bordering and political rescaling that creates new institutional territories and political structures (Nelles and Durand, 2014). From a general perspective, institutions define the frame for political action and govern cooperation as well as the actors’ involvement in decision-making processes (Perkmann, 2002; Carter and Pasquier, 2010). As already mentioned, institutions are, together with structural, functional and ideational elements, the core dimensions that construct cross-border spaces (Durand, 2015: 11–12) and institutions are the frame of most of the communications that take place in a cross-border network (Svensson, 2015). Scholars argue that a high level of institutional organization, and the formal and substantial tasks of these cross-border institutions characterize an integrated cross-border region (Schmitt-Egner, 2005: 26–28). The key assumption of this approach is that certain institutional designs are likely to trigger a deeper integration.

It must be acknowledged that the construction of a cross-border space is a complex process, which includes numerous factors and specific factor-

combinations that influence cross-border integration (Durand, 2015). Because of the complexity of this process, no single institutional pattern or methodology to establish a cross-border arrangement exists (Nelles and Durand, 2014: 114). However, scholars have highlighted some factors that positively influence the construction of cross-border spaces and the performance of cross-border institutions. Two of these factors are actor involvement and linguistic-cultural proximity.

Several scholars have highlighted that a cross-border cooperation area develops successfully and effectively if it implements governance structures and processes that include a different range of relevant actors and government levels (Perkmann, 2002: 113; Boman and Berg, 2007: 196; Pikner, 2008). Similarly, a cross-border integration process implies that sectorial and territorial boundaries are blurred by “direct contacts between sub-state actors of various types as well as the inclusion of non-public sector organizations in cross-border institutions” (Blatter, 2004: 533). On the other hand, institutional cross-border arrangements are often limited to political elites and do not include other actors and networks and, therefore, neither promote a high level of institutional integration nor succeed in mobilizing broad attention and support among the population (Boman and Berg, 2007; De Sousa, 2013; García-Alvarez and Trillo-Santamaría, 2013; Traweger and Pallaver, 2014). Therefore, actor involvement facilitates and promotes cross-border cooperation and integration, also from an institutional perspective. Institutions are action contexts, whose effectiveness depends on the actors as their institutional supporters (Pikner, 2008: 213). Historical-cultural identity dimensions also favour cross-border cooperation and the creation of cross-border regional spaces (Boman and Berg, 2007; Malloy, 2010). Linguistic-cultural proximity in a cross-border area facilitates institutionalized cross-border cooperation, because the same or a similar language is spoken and a similar culture is shared (Svensson, 2015). This article controls for linguistic-cultural proximity and historical identity, as will be demonstrated in the description of the case selection, and focuses on the impact of actor involvement as the condition that shapes the development of cross-border institutions and facilitates institutional integration (Boman and Berg, 2007).

It would be too simplistic to say that the mere existence of an institutional frame of cooperation can lead towards further integration. First because a certain institutional asset is mandatory for the EGTC; and second because a mere description of an EGTC’s statutory provisions gives only limited hints of the possible effects on institutional integration. Therefore, it is necessary to detect patterns of institutional evolution more precisely. For this purpose, this article develops and applies an analytical grid that focuses on selected institutional elements and differentiates various possibilities of actor involvement. The aim is to explore and compare the institutional

development of the selected EGTCs, to learn from these experiences and to draw some conclusions on the broader implications of the EGTC instrument.

Actor involvement within an institutional frame of cross-border cooperation can relate to formal aspects, such as the type and composition of organs, or procedural aspects, such as the processes that elaborate common projects and administer cooperation.

With regard to the formal dimension, which relates to the type and composition of organs, the following patterns of actor involvement can be distinguished: (1), the involvement of different political institutions, either horizontal, if different political organs from the same governmental level are represented (i.e. regional governments and parliaments), or vertical, if cross-border institutions extend to political organs from different government levels (i.e. regions and municipalities); (2), the involvement of other public actors such as administrative bodies and civil servants; and (3), the involvement of non-governmental actors such as civil society organizations. This classification allows us to distinguish between the three main categories of actors that are relevant for cross-border cooperation: political representatives, administrative representatives and civil society representatives.

However, actor involvement is not limited to the formal dimension of institutions alone, but also touches upon procedural aspects. Procedures of cooperation can also help to ensure the regular involvement of different actors. Referring to political, administrative and civil society representatives as the three main categories of actors, the analytical grid includes the following three procedural elements to complement the analysis of the formal set-up of cross-border institutions: the nomination of representatives to the steering organs, the development of common projects and the administration of cooperation. These processes can either be shaped in a restricted manner—for example, through formally restricted procedures in appointing representatives and in project development—or by approaches that ensure an expanded participation of the three actor categories, such as consultative mechanisms to nominate political representatives or to plan common activities. Furthermore, the administration of cooperation can also be organized along different procedural patterns, with an ‘inter-regional’ administrative leadership on the one hand and a ‘supra-regional’ administrative leadership on the other hand as the two main options. As ‘inter-regional’ administrative leadership, I define an administrative set-up that is primarily organized along the constituent entities of a cooperation arrangement (i.e. the territorial authorities making up the EGTC) and not along the cooperation institution itself (i.e. the EGTC). A ‘supra-regional’ administrative leadership, on the contrary, is marked by direct links to the cooperation arrangement as constituent entity and thus, with regard to the present analysis, to the EGTC itself as legal person.

Table 1 summarizes the main elements of the analytical grid developed to assess the institutional architecture of cross-border arrangements based on actor involvement (Table 1).

Table 1. Analytical grid to assess the institutional architecture of cross-border arrangements based on actor involvement

Formal dimension	Procedural dimension
Involvement of different political institutions/ representatives	Procedures to nominate representatives in the organs
Involvement of administrative bodies and civil servants	Procedures to develop common projects
Involvement of non-governmental actors	Procedures to administer the cooperation

Source: own elaboration.

In the next section, this analytical grid is applied to four selected empirical cases in order to assess the EGTCs' potential for further institutional cross-border integration. The coding system applied to the cases is kept simple because the analysis offers a baseline study of the institutional composition of the selected EGTCs through a qualitative analysis of actor involvement. The article does not aim at analysing how these actors interact, nor does it rely on statistical data and respective scale values.

The presence of the involvement of a defined actor category on the formal side, irrespective of the number of actors involved or the way they interact, and the presence of open and supra-regional patterns on the procedural side are coded with a plus (+); the absence of such elements is marked with a minus (–). Each of the six categories is weighted equally. The more of these elements a cooperation arrangement scores with plus, the higher is the actor involvement within its institutional set-up, which indicates a higher potential for institutional integration. The resulting assessment of the case studies is rather simplified, but it reveals interesting patterns of how the EGTCs are institutionally structured and whether they have potential for a further institutional integration. This allows us to understand the dynamics at play and to debate the impact of the EGTC on cross-border institutional integration and the broader political implications of the EGTC instrument.

Keeping the analytical grid simple permits us to extend this analysis to other cases and thus to enlarge the comparative frame relatively easily. At the same time, the analytical grid has some limits, which have to be acknowledged. First, the grid covers formal and procedural patterns of actor involvement only; it does not assess the extent to which the actors actually influence cooperation or the actual performance of the cross-border institutions. But by detecting formal and procedural patterns of actor involvement, the analysis is able to differentiate cases in which formal requirements for a participation of

different actors are present from such cases in which formal involvement and thus institutional basis for guaranteeing actor involvement are lacking completely. Second, the analytical grid does not measure any other patterns of interaction within a cross-border area, such as social interaction or other networking activities. To counterbalance these limits, the analysis could be complemented by further research on actual actor involvement or on relational patterns in the respective cross-border areas.

4. Institutional cross-border integration in practice: established EGTCs in a comparative perspective

4.1. General remarks on the four cases

In the following sections, this article summarizes the results of a qualitative empirical study of selected EGTCs to explore patterns of and possibilities for further cross-border institutional integration within these cooperation arrangements. The empirical study considers the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, the EGTC Ister-Granum, the Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion and the European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino. To select telling cases (della Porta, 2008), the selection of the EGTCs was controlled for both relevant commonalities and contrasting elements.

The following commonalities guided the case selection. First, all four EGTCs considered in this article have been established by neighbouring local and regional authorities. Consequently, they are all focused on a specific, regionally framed territory. None of them aims towards inter-regional cooperation between non-adjacent bodies, nor involves other public entities. Second, in all four cases, the members of the EGTCs were already involved in cross-border networks before their respective EGTCs were established. This may prove an indicator for why the EGTC instrument was chosen, as well as for whether or how cooperation has changed through the establishment of the EGTC. Furthermore, it allows us to identify possible endogenous effects on the development of the EGTC. Third, all the border areas share a similar ethnic-cultural background and historical identity with a population on both sides of the border that speaks the same or a similar language and has a strong historical link to the cross-border territory (e.g. the German-speaking minority in Italy, the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, Catalan speakers in Spain and France and the French-speaking population in Belgium). Finally, all four EGTCs follow very general objectives and were created to promote cross-border cooperation in the respective border areas.

The contrasting elements are the number of members and the type of members. The participating entities derive from different state structures (federal, regional or decentralized, and unitary states) and range from administrative entities (France, Slovakia, Hungary) to entities with legislative powers

(Belgium, Italy, Austria, Spain). The number of EGTC members (3 vs. 82 as two contrasting examples) and the levels of government involved (partnership between authorities from just one level of administration vs. partnership between various levels of government) are also heterogeneous. These contrasting elements may influence institutionalization patterns within an EGTC, and may therefore have an effect on the institutional integration within a cross-border area.

Table 2 summarizes the main features of the four EGTCs and sets the ground for a more in-depth analysis of their institutional architecture based on the analytical grid outlined in section 3 (Table 2).

At first glance, the organizational set-up of the four EGTCs appears to be quite similar, especially when considering the number and type of organs. Table 2 shows that all the EGTCs have between four and six statutory organs. These include, in most cases, an assembly, a board and a president as steering organs, and a joint secretariat or a joint office as administrative organ. Two of the EGTCs also have a supervisory board or a council of auditors, another two EGTCs have permanent thematic working groups, and only one EGTC has created a so-called conference of mayors.

The following case-by-case analysis will provide further insights into the institutional set-up of each of the four EGTCs. It will also take into account the legal basis of cooperation and the respective cooperation arrangement that existed prior to the establishment of the EGTC. This allows us to detect whether and how the creation of the EGTC influenced the institutional cooperation and also to assess the potential endogenous effects that pre-existing agreements may have had on the development of an EGTC.

4.2. The EGTC Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai

The EGTC Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai (hereinafter Eurométropole L-K-T) is situated on the border of France and Belgium and involves municipalities around the cities of Lille (France), Kortrijk (Flanders, Belgium) and Tournai (Wallonia, Belgium). Municipal cooperation in this border region dates back to 1991, when the French and Belgian municipal associations located near the border founded a common permanent conference (Conférence Permanente Intercommunale Transfrontalière, COPIT) to intensify their cooperation. In 2001, this conference was transformed into an association under French law. As an association, the cooperation arrangement was equipped with some common organs, which included an assembly composed of political representatives of the participating municipalities, a board and a common administrative office (Engl, 2014: 278). In 2005, a bilateral treaty between France and Belgium (the so-called Brussels Agreement) came into force, permitting the participating municipalities to transform their association into an LGCC. However, this new legal framework did not

Table 2. The four EGTCs at a glance

EGTC	EGTC Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai	EGTC Ister-Granum	EGTC Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion	EGTC European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino
Members	14 members Fr: the French state, the Nord-Pas-de Calais Region, the Département du Nord, the municipal association Lille Métropole Communauté Urbaine (LMCU). B: the Federal State, the Region and Community of Flanders, the Province of Western Flanders, the Inter-Communal Authorities LEIEDAL and WVI, Wallonia, the French Community of Belgium, the Hainaut Province, the Inter-Communal Authorities IDETA and IEG.	82 members Sk: 40 municipalities. Hu: 42 municipalities.	4 members E: the Autonomous Communities Catalonia and Balearic Islands. Fr: the Regions Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées.	3 members A: the Land/state Tirol. I: the Autonomous Provinces Bozen/Bolzano and Trento.
Founding year	2008	2008	2009	2011
Registered office	France	Hungary	France	Italy
Statutory organs	1 Assembly (84 members) 2 Board (32 members) 3 President and 3 Vice-Presidents 4 Administrative Agency 5 Conference of Mayors 6 Thematic Working Groups	1 Assembly (82 members) 2 Senate (8 members) 3 Director 4 Supervisory Committee	1 Assembly (4 members) 2 President 3 Director 4 General Secretariat 5 Representative in Brussels 6 Thematic Working Groups	1 Assembly (12 members) 2 Board (3 members) 3 President 4 General Secretariat 5 Council of Auditors
Budget	2013: ca 1.906.601 €	2012: ca 74.000 €	2013: ca 1.820.970 €	2013: ca 567.783 €

Source: own elaboration

remedy one of the fundamental limits that this inter-municipal cooperation was facing both as an association under French law and as a possible LGCC, namely the limited competences of local authorities in implementing common projects and policies (see also Durand and Nelles, 2013; Nelles and Durand, 2014).

In view of this limitation, the adoption of the EGTC instrument in 2006 considerably changed the legal framework for cross-border cooperation. The EGTC expanded cooperation arrangements to other levels of government, including provincial, regional and state authorities, and thus counterbalanced the competence limits of a mere inter-municipal cooperation. As a result, the partners in Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai decided to use the EGTC instrument to further institutionalize their cooperation and adopted the respective convention and statute, both of which were officially approved by the respective state authorities in January 2008 (Engl, 2014).

As Table 2 shows, the Eurométropole L-K-T has six statutory organs: assembly, board, president and three vice-presidents, administrative agency, conference of mayors and thematic working groups. Thus, the institutional set-up of this EGTC is partly overlapping with the structure of the pre-existing association, which also had an assembly, a board and an administrative agency. Yet, the EGTC is also equipped with new common organs such as the conference of mayors. Moreover, since the multi-level partnership structure of the new EGTC has considerably changed the actor involvement in the common organs, the composition of the statutory organs is completely different in comparison to the prior cooperation arrangement. Overall, the institutional architecture of this EGTC ensures that all three kinds of actor categories are formally involved, as the following examples show.

The assembly and the board of the Eurométropole L-K-T both ensure the involvement of different political institutions and political representatives. The Eurométropole's assembly has 84 members and is composed of the representatives from all levels of government that participate in the EGTC as members. These include municipal associations, provinces, regions, as well as state authorities (for a list of the EGTC members see Table 2). The assembly gives more weight to local representatives by providing them with a higher number of seats. The municipal associations hold the majority of seats (64 seats), whereas other levels of government have fewer seats (6 representatives in total for the provinces, 12 representatives for the regions and 4 representatives for the states). There is a strict territorial parity both between France and Belgium as well as between Flanders and Wallonia in Belgium (42 representatives from France and 42 from Belgium, and among the latter there are 21 representatives from Flanders and 21 from Wallonia).

The Eurométropole's board has 32 members and is composed of assembly members who also act as board members. Again, all the levels of government are represented. The overall composition of the board is organized along the

territorial parity principle, and the municipal representatives hold the majority of seats.

Furthermore, the conference of mayors also ensures that different political representatives are involved in the cooperation arrangement. The conference of mayors, as a statutory body, was established in order to ensure that those mayors of municipalities who are not represented in the EGTC assembly could also be involved institutionally in the cooperation framework. This annually organized conference gathers the mayors of all the municipalities on the EGTC's territory in order to exchange information about ongoing activities and planned projects.

The participation of administrative representatives and civil servants—the second category of actors—is ensured through thematic working groups that have the mandate to coordinate activities and to plan projects. The EGTC has six such working groups, which focus on specific topics of cooperation, such as citizen services, tourism, culture, mobility, land use planning and economic development. The six thematic working groups have 32 members each. Each of the 14 EGTC members appoints two representatives to each thematic working group: a civil servant and a political representative who are not necessarily assembly members. These 28 politicians and civil servants are joined by 4 civil society representatives who are nominated by the civil society forum (to which we will return below). Consequently, the working groups do not only channel the participation of civil servants, but involve all three kinds of actors by including also political and civil society representatives.

The involvement of civil society representatives is based on the so-called civil society forum. This forum was created by civil society representatives in 2009 to create an institutional link between the civil society organizations on the EGTC's territory. The forum comprises 80 Belgian and French civil society representatives and is headed by a board and six thematic working groups, each composed of four appointed civil society representatives. Founded independently from the EGTC's institutional framework, the forum is not formally part of the EGTC's statutory organs. Nevertheless, it has been linked to the EGTC institutionally since representatives of the forum are automatically included in the six thematic working groups of the EGTC and the forum receives funding and administrative assistance from the EGTC secretariat.

Also on procedural aspects, the Eurométropole L-K-T follows a comparatively open and participatory approach. The steering organs are nominated through a relatively unrestricted procedure and the type of political representative who participates in the assembly and the board is not predefined. Each EGTC member, such as the council of a participating region, municipality or province, decides after internal discussions who to nominate as its representative to the various organs. This open nomination procedure is also applied

to the thematic working groups, which, as already mentioned above, have the mandate to design and plan common projects. Thus, the process for developing common activities also occurs within a stable and at the same time participatory structure because, as mentioned above, the working groups ensure the permanent and formal participation of political representatives, civil servants and civil society representatives.

Finally, the Eurométropole L-K-T has an administrative agency that serves as a common secretariat and manages the cooperation daily. The leadership and management of the administrative agency is assigned to a general secretary, who is appointed after a competition, employed directly by the EGTC as a legal person and sustained by other administrative staff who are also recruited and employed directly by the EGTC. The direct affiliation of this administrative office to the EGTC as a legal person surpasses existing affiliations limited to a certain state or regional territory, and creates a 'supra-regional' administrative organ of a kind.

4.3. The EGTC Ister-Granum

The cooperation within the EGTC Ister-Granum (hereinafter EGTC I-G) is focused on the cities of Esztergom (Hungary) and Stúrovo (Slovakia), which formally became twin towns in 1991. Subsequently, several municipalities around these cities signed a cooperation agreement in 2000 and created a cross-border municipal assembly that gathered political representatives from the involved local authorities. In 2003, the municipalities signed a declaration of intent to establish a Euroregion Ister-Granum, whose legal institutionalization encountered major obstacles arising from a lack of an adequate legal basis in both states. Although both states ratified the Madrid Outline Convention, they never adopted a bilateral treaty to draw a more specific legal framework for its implementation and for the creation of cross-border cooperation arrangements with legal personality (Engl, 2014: 303–305).

Thus, also in this border area the adoption of the EGTC-Regulation has considerably changed the legal basis for cross-border cooperation by providing the means for the legal institutionalization of inter-municipal cooperation. As a result, in the spring of 2008, the respective convention and statute were adopted. The Hungarian and Slovak state authorities gave their consent and the EGTC was officially founded in November 2008. The EGTC I-G consists of 82 municipalities (Engl, 2014).

From a formal institutional perspective, the EGTC I-G has four organs: assembly, senate, director and supervisory committee. Compared to the pre-existing cooperation arrangement, the assembly follows a similar institutional cooperation pattern to what existed prior to the creation of the EGTC, whereas the other organs have been newly established. However, as

the following assessment of the institutional architecture demonstrates, the formal and procedural actor involvement in the EGTC I-G is very limited.

The EGTC I-G assembly consists of 82 members who are the mayors of the participating municipalities. The mayors of Esztergom and Stúrovo act as permanent presidents of the assembly. The senate is the executive board of the EGTC and has eight members. The mayors of Esztergom and Stúrovo also have permanent seats in this organ, whereas the other six seats rotate between the mayors of the other participating municipalities. Both organs are thus limited to the municipal level and only include the highest political representatives. No other political representatives, either from other political institutions or from other levels of government, are included in the institutional cooperation framework. Furthermore, the institutional set-up of the EGTC I-G foresees neither a formalized and regular participation of administrative representatives and civil servants nor an involvement of civil society representatives.

A similar restrictive approach applies to the procedural aspects of cooperation. The nomination of the assembly and senate members occurs ex officio and is linked to their position as the mayor of a participating municipality. There is no political or public bargaining, nor any discussion about who can nominate representatives in the cooperation organs. Moreover, the development of common initiatives and projects is rather restricted, because this task is assigned to ad hoc committees that include only the mayors and, if necessary, their closest collaborators. Thus, the procedural frame to develop and implement concrete cooperation activities neither has permanent structures nor does it follow a formalized open approach that includes diverse actors and stakeholders. The EGTC I-G, however, has a permanent director assisted by two more collaborators, who are directly employed by the EGTC as a legal person. Thus, there are basic elements of an independent administrative structure to give the EGTC an organizational backing, but the comparatively small budgetary capacity of this EGTC limits the scope of action of this administrative organ compared to the other three case studies (see Table 2, which summarizes the main features of the four case study EGTCs).

4.4. The EGTC Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion

In 2009, the French regions Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées, together with the Spanish Autonomous Communities Catalonia and Balearic Islands, created the EGTC Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion (hereinafter Pymed Euroregion). In this border area, regional cooperation has also been ongoing for decades, especially after the founding of the Working Community of the Pyrenees (CTP) in 1983 as a major pillar of cooperation.

Closer cooperation among the partners of today's EGTC started only in 2004, when the representatives of Aragon, Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées adopted a declaration on the establishment of a common Euroregion. As common institutions, the involved authorities established regular meetings of the regional presidents, a coordinating committee consisting of political and administrative representatives of the involved authorities, and a general secretariat. However, the framework to legally institutionalize the Euroregion had significant limitations. Although France and Spain had implemented the Madrid Outline Convention by adopting the so-called 1995 Treaty of Bayonne, a bilateral treaty that regulates the creation of cross-border arrangements with legal personality, this legal framework could not be applied to institutionalize the Pymed Euroregion because the treaty provisions only apply to the regions located at the state border and not to the Balearic Islands, which are partners in this cross-border initiative (Engl, 2014: 326–327).

Therefore, the partners decided to make use of the EGTC instrument to legally institutionalize their cooperation. The preliminary work began in 2007 and resulted in the development of the respective convention and statute, which were signed by the partners at the end of 2008 and officially approved by the state authorities in spring 2009 (Engl, 2014).³

With the creation of the Pymed Euroregion, cross-border cooperation was vested with the following organs to form an institutional frame: assembly, president, director, general secretariat, representative in Brussels and thematic working groups. The assembly and partly also the general secretariat are structures that already existed under the previous cooperation arrangement, whereas the other organs were newly created with the foundation of the EGTC. Although the institutional composition at the steering level is rather restricted, the Pymed Euroregion has nevertheless developed some patterns of a diversified actor involvement, as the following examples show.

The assembly has four members and consists of the presidents of the four participating regional entities. It is the only decision-making organ established within this grouping and does not share its tasks with a second steering organ, such as a board, as is the case in the other three EGTCs considered in this article. The assembly of the Pymed Euroregion is comparatively small and restricted to the highest regional political representatives. Thus, from a formal institutional perspective, it does not involve representatives of different political institutions or administrative levels.

However, the working groups partly counterbalance the limited actor involvement at the steering level and provide for a formal inclusion of political and administrative representatives of the involved regional authorities. Within the Pymed Euroregion, four permanent working groups have been created; they focus thematically on sustainable development, culture, innovation and education, and have the mandate to coordinate activities and plan

projects. The size and composition of these working groups are not predefined, but vary depending on the topic. However, each group includes both political representatives and civil servants to ensure that the representatives of administrative departments are also involved in the formal frame of cooperation. Yet, in contrast to the working groups of the Eurométropole L-K-T, those of the Pymed Euroregion do not include civil society representatives and non-governmental actors. The participation of non-governmental actors is not formalized by any kind of institutional frame and only occurs selectively in individual projects.

The cooperation procedures within this EGTC are, in some aspects, restricted and, in others, more open and participatory. On the one hand, the procedures to appoint the representatives to the organs, particularly to the steering organ, are restricted because they do not follow a political bargaining process. In this regard, the Pymed Euroregion is similar to the EGTC I-G. The composition of the assembly is already predefined because membership is automatically assigned to the regional presidents; no other political representatives are included. On the other hand, the Pymed Euroregion has established a rather open mechanism to develop common projects – mainly due to the working groups which include political representatives and civil servants – and has a strong administrative backing. The task of giving administrative support to the EGTC is divided between two organs, namely the general secretariat and the administrative director. The leadership and management of these administrative units is assigned to both the director and the general secretary, who are appointed after a competition, employed directly by the EGTC and are sustained by further administrative staff, who are also recruited and employed by the EGTC. Thus, the Pymed Euroregion uses the opportunity to employ its own staff as a legal person and to develop its own administrative structure.

4.5. The EGTC European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino

The EGTC European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino (hereinafter European Region T-ST-TN) is situated at the border between Austria and Italy and is composed of the Austrian state Tyrol and the Italian Autonomous Provinces Bozen/Bolzano and Trento. In this case, the partners of the grouping have also been collaborating for decades prior to the establishment of the EGTC. Examples of cooperation are the Working Community Arge Alp, which was established in 1972, and regular meetings of the regional parliaments of the three entities, which have been held every two years since 1991. The regions also attempted to further intensify cross-border cooperation by creating a Euroregion with a legal status based on public law. This, however, failed due to legal and political constraints. Both Italy and Austria have ratified the Madrid Outline Convention and adopted a bilateral treaty in 1993 to

implement the convention, but this treaty does not regulate the establishment of cross-border institutions with legal personality, as for example the treaty between France and Belgium and the respective provisions on the LGCC mentioned above do.

Therefore, the involved regional and provincial authorities continued to cooperate on an informal basis with regular meetings of the regional parliaments and the regional governments as the main institutional platforms of cooperation until the adoption of the EGTC-Regulation opened a new window of opportunity to formalize the cooperation. In 2009, the regional parliaments of the three involved entities decided to establish an EGTC. The respective convention and statute were signed in 2011 and in the same year the EGTC was officially founded, after the respective state authorities gave their official consent (Engl, 2014).

Overall, the European Region T-ST-TN has five statutory organs: assembly, board, president, general secretariat and council of auditors. All these organs were newly created with the EGTC and do not strictly follow the pre-existing institutional patterns of cooperation. However, the newly established institutional framework only partly ensures a diversified actor involvement.

A remarkable feature of this EGTC is the involvement of both executive and legislative representatives at the steering level. The assembly of the European Region T-ST-TN has 12 members and prescribes an equal institutional representation of the regional governments and parliaments. According to the convention and the statute, each EGTC member is represented by two members of the respective regional government and two members of the respective regional parliament. Thus, the composition of the assembly ensures a diverse participation of political representatives on a horizontal level by including not only representatives from executive organs, as in the other three cases, but by expanding the formal participation to the regional legislative organs. However, the board, as the second steering organ, is not characterized by the same institutional boundary-crossing and only includes the three regional presidents as predefined members.

At the same time, however, this EGTC does not have any institutions or organs that formally involve administrative representatives and non-governmental actors. The participation of these two actor categories occurs only selectively, either in ad hoc working groups or in individual projects, and not through permanent and institutionalized channels.

Regarding the procedural aspects, the European Region T-ST-TN follows a rather restricted approach. The procedures to nominate the representatives in the steering organs do not leave much room for political bargaining because all seats on the board and half of the seats in the assembly are automatically assigned to people with a specific political function. The board is automatically composed of the presidents of the three regional entities. In the twelve-member assembly, three seats are given again to the regional

presidents and three to the heads of the regional parliaments. These six pre-defined assembly members subsequently appoint the other six assembly members according to procedures internally decided in the sending authority. The development of common projects also occurs within rather restricted procedures. The main instrument with which to conceptualize and implement joint projects is the so-called annual work programme, which is prepared by the president and approved by the board. On the one hand, this ensures that the activities are planned according to a concretely defined frame, but on the other hand, this process only involves a limited circle of actors and does not follow an open approach, which formally includes diverse actors and stakeholders.

Finally, the procedures to administer the cooperation within the European Region T-ST-TN differ from the other three presented cases, because this EGTC is the only grouping that has not developed an independent administrative structure in the form of a permanent administrative head, such as a general secretary or director, who is assisted by a staff directly employed by the EGTC. Instead, the administrative unit of the European Region T-ST-TN reflects 'inter-regional' principles, because the joint secretariat of this EGTC is composed mainly of officials, who are delegated to the joint secretariat by the EGTC's members and who are still in an employment relationship with the respective delegating authorities and not with the EGTC itself. The position of the general secretary rotates every two years among these delegated officials, who primarily represent the single EGTC member to which they are affiliated. The European Region T-ST-TN, therefore, lacks a permanent administrative head.

4.6. Summary

This empirical analysis has sought to assess whether the EGTC as a legal instrument has the potential to trigger an institutional cross-border integration process between local and regional authorities. The institutional architecture of the EGTC and a closer analysis of the institutional actor involvement have been used as a proxy indicator to assess the effect of the instrument.

In all four cases considered here, a strong incentive to use the EGTC as a legal framework for cooperation existed because the partners had encountered legal obstacles to the formal institutionalization of their cooperation. In two cases, the legal framework that existed prior to the adoption of the EGTC-Regulation would have allowed, in principle, the creation of cross-border institutions with legal personality. However, in both cases this legal basis did not meet the specific needs of cooperation because of the limits it set on the partnership structure (Eurométropole L-K-T) or on the geographical application of the legal provisions (Pymed Euroregion). In the other two cases, the legal framework for cross-border cooperation that preceded the EGTC did

not regulate the creation of cross-border institutions with legal personality. Thus, the EGTC instrument opened the possibility to legally institutionalize cooperation, to modify and expand it in terms of participating partners and organizational set-up, and, thus, to potentially further institutionally integrate the cooperation structure.

In none of the four cases did cross-border cooperation start with the foundation of the EGTC. Rather the EGTCs were preceded by other cross-border partnerships, such as town-twinning, working communities, cross-border municipal associations or informal Euroregions. However, the endogenous effect of these prior arrangements of cooperation on the institutional development of the EGTCs does not appear to be significant. Moreover, there is no clear evidence for a link between such endogenous effects and an EGTC's potential for further institutional integration. In fact, the EGTC with the least institutional similarity compared to its earlier cooperation arrangement, namely the European Region T-ST-TN, does not show a higher probability of further institutional integration.

A simple glance at the EGTCs' statutory organs would lead to the conclusion that the establishment of an EGTC expanded the institutional cooperation in all cases because in all four EGTCs considered here new common institutions were created. Furthermore, the EGTC-partners not only established the institutions prescribed by the EGTC-Regulation, which are an assembly and a director, but also created additional organs with clearly defined powers. However, a closer institutional analysis based on the analytical grid reveals significant differences with regard to the potential for further institutional integration. Most of the investigated EGTCs have not yet triggered a significant institutional integration process. Table 3 summarizes the results of applying the analytical grid to the four cases (the presence of actor involvement on the formal side and the presence of open and supra-regional patterns on the procedural side are coded with a plus, whereas the absence of such elements is marked with a minus) (Table 3).

The highest potential for further institutional integration based on these formal and procedural elements is achieved in the Eurométropole L-K-T. Among the studied cases, this is the only EGTC with an institutional set-up that reflects all the six elements defined as proxy for a further institutional integration. Both from a formal and a procedural perspective, the institutional set-up of this EGTC ensures a formalized participation of different actors from politics, administration and the non-governmental sector, as well as open and participatory cooperation methods with a strong administrative support (see also Durand and Nelles, 2013).

The institutional set-up of the Pymed Euroregion complies with half of the defined elements and exhibits a stronger integration potential on the procedural side. The formal institutions of this EGTC have a rather restricted composition, primarily because the steering organs do not

Table 3. Summary of the EGTCs' institutional set-up and actor involvement

EGTC	Formal dimension			Procedural dimension		
	Involvement of different political institutions/ representatives	Involvement of administrative bodies and civil servants	Involvement of non-governmental actors	Procedures to nominate representatives in the organs	Procedures to develop common projects	Procedures to administer the cooperation
Eurométropole L-K-T	+	+	+	+	+	+
EGTC I-G	-	-	-	-	-	+
Pymed Euroregion	-	+	-	-	+	+
European Region T-ST-TN	+	-	-	+	-	-

Source: own elaboration.

provide for formalized contacts among different political institutions and representatives. This is, however, partly counterbalanced by the thematic working groups, which ensure the involvement of various political and administrative actors. These working groups are also the linchpin of an open and participatory process to plan common projects. Furthermore, the Pymed Euroregion is administratively backed by its own director and general secretary, both of whom are affiliated directly to the EGTC and have their own EGTC staff.

The European Region T-ST-TN, unlike any of the other three EGTCs considered here, ensures the formal participation of both legislative and executive representatives in the EGTC assembly and thus allows for horizontal political-institutional boundary-crossing. However, apart from the involvement of selected representatives of the regional parliaments, the organizational set-up of the European Region T-ST-TN does not guarantee the institutional involvement of administrative and non-governmental actors either in terms of organs or in terms of formalized procedures. Moreover, the administrative support to this EGTC still follows a rather regionally divided approach and has, in contrast to the other three cases, not yet developed into a distinct structure that is primarily subordinated to the EGTC as a legal person. Overall, the institutional set-up of this EGTC complies with less than half of the defined elements and thus has a lower potential for further institutional integration.

The lowest score is achieved by the EGTC I-G. The cooperation within this EGTC appears to be rather loose and restricted to the highest political authorities at the municipal level both in formal and in procedural aspects. Although the EGTC has a director with their own administrative staff, its limited personnel and financial resources limit the scope of action of this administrative organ.

Overall, out of the four cases, only one EGTC shows significant potential for triggering further institutional cross-border integration. The Eurométropole L-K-T case is marked by a multi-level approach and an institutional set-up that transcends different scales of government and actor categories, whereas the other three cases still root in a 'traditional' territorial mind-set (Hansen and Serin, 2010: 203) with traditional governments dominating the scene and other actors playing only a marginal role.

Furthermore, these findings support Boman and Berg's conclusion that the level of actor involvement and the identity created by existing cross-border institutions are more important for successful cross-border cooperation than historical-cultural identity (Boman and Berg, 2007). The Euroregion T-ST-TN in particular supports this finding. As several studies show, it is a cross-border territory with a strong ethnic-cultural proximity and historical identity (Steininger, 2003; Palermo and Woelk, 2005), but despite these

factors it scores low on the potential for further institutional cross-border integration.

5. Conclusions

This article started with the assumption that the EGTC instrument, due to its strong legal anchoring and its flexibility with regard to membership and organizational set-up, can influence the design of cross-border cooperation and trigger an institutional integration process.

The empirical analysis of selected EGTCs reveals, however, that the possible effect of the instrument is limited. Although the four case studies demonstrate that the EGTC as a cooperation instrument significantly changed the legal framework of cooperation, most of the institutional set-ups that have been created display a rather limited potential for a further institutional cross-border integration, as defined by the analytical grid applied in this article. In most of the analysed cases, the EGTCs' institutional frame of cooperation is narrowly designed with a low variety of actor involvement, both from a formal and a procedural perspective.

Furthermore, the opportunity offered by the instrument to formally involve various levels of government has seldom been used in practice. A significant extension of partnership took place only in the Eurométropole L-K-T, since the cooperation was extended to other levels of government to include also the provincial, regional and state authorities in addition to the municipal associations. In the other cases considered here, the membership structures remain rather simple and one-dimensional as they comprise only one level of government. This trend can also be observed in most other EGTCs (METIS, 2008; METIS, 2012). The division of competences between levels of government, such as municipality, region and state, seems to have had little impact, since this one-dimensional membership structure appears regardless of whether the authorities involved belonged to federal, decentralized or centralized states, and regardless of the powers with which they were consequently equipped (with the exception of the Eurométropole L-K-T). Moreover, the constitutional status of the EGTC members seems to directly influence neither the institutional set-up of an EGTC nor the potential for institutional integration in a cross-border area. The EGTC with the most federalized entities on both sides of the border, namely the European Region T-ST-TN, is among those that according to the analytical grid have developed less potential for institutional integration. In contrast, the Pymed Euroregion, whose membership structure is similar to that of the European Region T-ST-TN and which involves French regional entities that have less power than federal units, has developed a higher potential for further integration from an institutional perspective.

Overall, despite the fact that the EGTC is a directly applicable supranational legal instrument for the further development of cross-border cooperation and institutional integration, its potential has not yet been fully realized.⁴ Although the legal and linguistic-cultural conditions for cross-border cooperation are favourable in all four examined cases, political action in most of these cross-border spaces continues to be dominated by traditional governments reinforcing traditional intergovernmental relationships (Durand and Nelles, 2013). The findings of this article provide empirical evidence that most of the studied EGTCs do not witness the empowerment of new political actors and institutions and that the impact of the EGTC on cross-border institutional integration is rather limited. This supports similar findings, which reveal that cross-border arrangements do not yet “signify the consolidation of political rescaling” (Nelles and Durand, 2014: 119), and complements the findings that question the effectiveness of similar European instruments, such as Interreg, to foster meaningful and sustainable partnerships (Harguindéguy, 2007; Nelles and Durand, 2014). Nonetheless, the analytical grid applied to the cases reveals that the four EGTCs are different in their institution-building and actor involvement, despite the similarity of their statutory organs. This allows us to differentiate EGTCs with a higher potential for further institutional integration from those with less potential, and gives a more detailed insight into patterns of actor involvement and empowerment. In sum, it must be concluded that the EGTC instrument is not yet exploited as an ‘institutional experiment’ to enhance cross-border institutional integration.

Looking at the bigger picture, the impact of EGTCs in terms of creating support for further European integration can also be questioned. Scholars have noticed a tension between citizens and regional bureaucratic elites of border regions when it comes to preferences for supranational EU integration. At the individual level, transnational interaction of citizens living in a border area increases their support for the integration project (Kuhn, 2011). At the elite level, the involvement in transnational projects does not significantly influence their attitudes towards the European project (Tatham and Bauer, 2014). Tatham and Bauer consider as transactionalism the participation in transnational projects and representational offices in Brussels and not the involvement in regional institutional cross-border arrangements (such as Euroregions or EGTCs). Nevertheless, it can be argued that narrowly designed EGTC institutions that exclude sub-state administrative elites will fail to overcome this tension.

The adoption of the EGTC-Regulation clearly marked a major shift in the regulatory framework for territorial cooperation. The dominant position of the states that prevailed until 2006 was replaced by shared responsibility between the European institutions and the states. The regulation of territorial cooperation has become a common objective of European policy, which is not only designed by the states but also by supranational institutions. To further

exploit the potential of the instrument, political action is necessary both at the European and at the regional and local level. At the European level, the European institutions could exploit their mandate to further encourage the effective implementation of the EGTC as tool to enhance cross-border cooperation and integration. At the regional and local level, creativity, vision and a will to share power are needed, especially among political representatives, to effectively foster institutional integration in cross-border policy spaces. Institutionally integrated cross-border policy spaces can form one facet of a strategy to enhance territorial cohesion within the EU, but only if effectively implemented.

Notes

1. In this article, the terms 'cross-border cooperation' and 'territorial cooperation' refer to the cooperation between regional and local authorities from different states.
2. By the end of 2015, more than 50 EGTCs have been created. They are spread all over the EU territory, except for the Nordic countries where cross-border cooperation is already intensively promoted by the Nordic Council.
3. The Autonomous Community Aragon formally withdrew from the collaboration in the course of this process (García-Álvarez and Trillo-Santamaría 2013: 110).
4. A shortcoming of the institutional-oriented approach to studying cross-border integration process is that it neglects networks and contacts that are established outside the formal institutional framework. Thus, the findings of the present study could be complemented by a network-oriented study or by surveys among the population in order to compare the findings based on institutional factors with findings deriving from a network analysis or surveys (see, for example, Svensson, 2015).

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