Source: A Green Rhine Corridor report
https://www.stroming.nl/sites/default/files/2017-02/rapport_rijncorridor21juni.pdf

AN INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON 'SOFT' SPACES OF COOPERATION

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BLEKINGE TEKNISKA HÖGSKOLA · BTH ·

AN INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON 'SOFT' SPACES OF COOPERATION

Findings from a transboundary Dutch-German cooperation network

MASTER THESIS
June 2018

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s4828569 / Siha17

PLANET EUROPE MASTER'S PROGRAM
European Spatial Planning and Regional Development

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(Word count: 25010, excluding tables, references, acknowledgments, abstract and annexes)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'll always appreciate and cherish the past two years spent at two prominent universities, Radboud University and Blekinge Institute of Technology. Planet Europe Master's Program has been very critical and nourishing to my development not only as a young professional but also as a person. I couldn't have finished my studies and thesis without the help of countless important people in my life.

I would first of all like to thank all of my professors for their time, encouragement and professional guidance to me during my studies. Special thanks go to my supervisors, Duncan Liefferink and Jan-Evert Nilsson, who guided and mentored me in a critical yet diplomatic manner through the process of preparing my thesis. They have given an immeasurable amount of clarity and direction to my thesis. An additional valuable experience for me during this time was my internship at Spatial Foresight. This internship provided me professional and real-world experiences that I will be able to apply to my future as a planner.

The professionals and researchers of the Green Blue Rhine Alliance gave me heaps of insight and knowledge shaping my empirical research. I greatly appreciate the time that they dedicated to me to glean and compile critical information.

I would like to give a truly heartfelt thanks to my friends and family. Friends that I made during my time in Sweden and the Netherlands are the ones who helped me get through the difficult times while giving me memories that I'll cherish forever. Last but definitely not least, my family. Without their love, support and all that they do for me, I wouldn't be the person that I am today.

Sindi Haxhija,
June 10, 2018

ABREVIATIONS

BASF	Baden Aniline and Soda Factory
ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observatory Network
EU	European Union
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
FD	Floods Directive
GBRA	Green Blue Rhine Alliance
ICPR	International Commision for the Protection of Rhine
LANUV	Das Landesamt für Natur, Umwelt und Verbraucherschutz (The State Office for Nature, Environment and Consumer Protection)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRW	North Rhine Westphalia
NUTS	The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PBWC	The Permanent Border Waters Commission
SAP	Systems, Applications and Products
UK	United Kingdom
VNR	Vereniging Nederlands Riviergemeenten (Union of Dutch River Municipalities)
WFD	Water Framework Directive

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ABSTRACT

Following the necessity for spatial planning to focus on ‘what works’ in terms of implementation and policy delivery, during the last decade, the notion ‘soft’ spaces of cooperation have been in the spotlight of many academics working on territorial cooperation units. ‘Soft’ spaces of cooperation have been introduced mainly to explain what was happening for real through the continuous attempts to promote new policy scales, initially through the device of fuzzy boundaries. However, despite the necessity to address interests beyond existing rigid administrative boundaries, still issues related to financial power, infrastructure coordination and investment, ecological and environmental concerns, etc., all are situated within hierarchical structures of government and governance. Challenges arise and affect the interaction of actors in these areas, given the different institutional and cultural settings. This research investigates ways in which governmental institutions influence the coordination between non-governmental actors, points of interests that can foster the cooperation between governmental institutions and, more specifically the main challenges that non-governmental actors face while trying to cooperate due to cultural differences and institutional set-up in a ‘soft’ territorial cooperation. The research has been carried out in the Dutch-German border area, focusing on a common natural linkage and asset such as the Rhine river. While coordination between different sectoral policies exists in both sides of the border, different social context, planning mode and different legal and political conditions make the implementation of common projects a challenge.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and rationale for the study

Living in a Europe, which continuously tries to be more open, fosters mobility within its citizens and puts territorial cohesion as its number one priority within the political agenda, has demanded the formation of new territorial units and constellations. With the emergence of new territorial co-operations (macro-regions; cross-border areas), national/local governments need to shift their power, or at least accept to be more flexible and open while working with other national/local governments toward a common issue. Our societies have become fluid and no longer constrain themselves within rigid geographical borders, while territories have become fragmented as a result of overlapping and conflicting processes which take place at different geographical scales. Even though, hierarchical structures of politics and power are also influenced by relational networks which try to overpass the rigid national borders, still issues related to financial power, infrastructure coordination and investment, ecological and environmental concerns, etc., all are situated within hierarchical structures of government and governance (Allmendinger, Chilla and Sielker, 2013).

It is true that these fixed spaces, provide actors with legal security and make sure to be democratically legitimate. But for how long will they be able to retain their democratic legitimacy? Always if we assume that they ever completely had it, since concerns about national borders have existed from the very first moment of their establishment. Following this line of though, Faludi (2016), considers the territorial-administrative complex as a container, which is filled by citizens, to whom the ascribed unique identities shaped by the territorial roots might not necessarily be true. Where these unique identities did not exist, but were mainly shaped by the territorial boundaries to which a community belonged to, democratic governments have constructed and continue to construct territories and populations. All in all, what Faludi suggests with his critiques toward territoriality, is that policies need to be tailor-made to suit local conditions, and here with local, he is not referring to the overlapping with the territory of local authorities.

As a reaction on and reflection of this complex and changing context, the abstract concept of 'soft' space planning related to fuzzy boundaries, has emerged. New governance arrangements are flourishing all over Europe and at all geographical scales, by trying to complement but not coming in place of formal governmental institutions and statutory planning. Therefore, these two spaces of government, namely 'soft' and 'hard' spaces, are '… intended to work alongside, augment and – where more expeditious – challenge existing institutional frameworks.' (Heley, 2013, p.1329). These spaces, put together new networked forms of governance which work outside the rigidity and statutory planning processes (Olesen, 2012). The European Union has indirectly influenced 'soft' space approaches, since it has always been an advocate to a more comprehensive spatial planning, while encouraging: bigger cooperation of planning systems between member states; coherence across social, economic and environmental policy goals, and; cohesion through formal ('hard space') grounds and informal ('soft space') networks (Walsh et al., 2012). Working in this context, is possible to exploit further the implications of relational and non-state-centric geographies for planning and governance, creating in this way, hybrids of territorial and relational spaces.

These new hybrid spaces, can be regarded soft in two aspects: institutionally and geographically. They are soft when it comes to the definition of their boundaries, since they are mainly addressed as 'fluid areas' with 'fuzzy boundaries'. Using fuzzy boundaries makes it possible for actors to get rid of existing patterns, it offers flexibility for actors to join certain activities and in the same time, allows soft

spaces to distance themselves from traditional administrative units, making space for de-politicized decision-making (Olesen, 2014) and avoid potential political conflicts. Not being part of traditional administrative units, highlights further in these areas, mismatches between administrative and functional areas. Nevertheless, it is impossible for them to exist and be taken into account without cooperating with real institutional organizations and considering regulations and laws coming from all sides of the border. Their 'get things done' and problem-solving attitude can help them reach a certain level of legitimation. Being 'tailor-made' spaces, they bring in new actors and interests from beyond existing territorial concerns, operating at variable scales, to which certain functions (e.g. regeneration projects, transport, infrastructure, education, etc.) can be attributed. In this way, 'soft' spaces reflect the desire to create forms of networked governance to reflect the complexity of societal issues and institutions (Allmendinger et al., 2013).

To foster development in a specific area, research suggests that networks and connections that have similar interests are more important than physical proximity. These informal networks that notice the need to jump across national borders in order to address common spatial issues and problems and to seek out a way how to maximize their benefits, are addressed as 'communities of intent' in a recent ESPON project[1] and will be used in this thesis while identifying the main informal networks from both sides of the border and their interest for joining up forces for a common issue. However, in most cases, it is difficult for potential networks in border areas to come together, as a result of different policy, regulatory and service provision systems in border countries. Despite their continuous interest and desire to cooperate for common issues, cross-border networks face challenges related to project coordination and implementation not only due to different policy alignments but administrative territorial differences and cultural differences also. While, soft territorial cooperation may result in communication between actors across sector boundaries, it is a challenge for them when it comes to deliver practical outcomes.

The research seeks to look into the coordination and cooperation gap in the project implementation phase, between relational networks in soft territorial cooperation. While non-formal networks help with the identification of the main challenges and come up with real place-based solutions helping the governance to develop further their strategies, it all fades away when it comes to the implementation phase where power and resources pass down from newly created territorial forms to local/national government and old forms of institutions and decision-making. Despite the fact that governmental actors may also be part of such networks, for them, national policy frameworks and priorities set on higher level agendas are more important to follow-up with than priorities or objectives designed by the relational network. At the same time, while exploring the literature related to 'soft' spaces of cooperation, the main difficulties arisen, when it comes to the well-functioning of informal networks, are related to different institutional frameworks and settings. However, little is talked about the challenges and different ways how these networks operate while being shaped by the different cultural and social context they work in. The author of the thesis, considers important to investigate further the interplay and interactions within a 'soft' territorial cooperation network. The research will investigate ways in which governmental institutions influence the coordination between non-governmental actors, points of interests that can foster the cooperation between governmental institutions and, more specifically the main challenges that governmental and non-governmental actors face while trying to cooperate together due to cultural differences and institutional set-up.

As region with a long history of cooperation across the border, shaped by common problems, similar cultural roots, a common historical background and joint supranational European legal and

[1] Thinking and Planning in Areas of Territorial Cooperation, also referred to as ESPON ACTAREA.

institutional framework (Renner & Meijerink, 2015), the Dutch-German border area will be the focus of the empirical research. The research will focus on a common natural linkage and asset such as the Rhine river. While coordination between different sectoral policies exists in both sides of the border, different social context, planning mode and different legal and political conditions makes the implementation of common projects a challenge. The need for the project partners to work together is strongly present. However, is not only the institutional context that challenges the deliverance of good results. Another issue is the cultural differences between informal networks from both sides and their interplay with their respective government institutions. The framework provided by these institutions to support cross-border initiatives is different also.

The 'Green Blue Rhine Alliance' [2] is the case study chosen for the empirical research. Before benefiting from INTERREG Program, organizations in both sides of the border have been working in developing further ecological connection zones in rivers, waterways, natural areas, etc. Two of the main issues that informal networks from both sides have been working on are related to: integral flood defense development and solving barriers that exist for the transnational otter population in the border area. Furthermore, sustainable development of the otter population is limited by the large number of infrastructural bottlenecks in both the Netherlands and Germany. Therefore, the necessity to cooperate together on solving these bottlenecks was the first step toward putting actors together. On both sides of the border, parties operate in a different social context, planning mode and under different legal and political conditions. Despite the necessity and willingness to work together toward common issues, the project is currently facing problems on its implementation phases, where, as mentioned above, different cultural context and institutional set-up is posing a challenge to the cooperation

1.2 Research problem, research questions and objectives

The reasons stated above are considered as main drivers for researching 'soft' territorial cooperation and the social and institutional interactions that shape their relational networks. The 'soft' territorial cooperation initiative that will be analyzed, draws upon difficulties of aligning statutory administrative boundaries with those of ecological systems. In the Dutch-German border, the necessity to cooperate for common water systems has brought up different actors, formal and informal, to facilitate the water management process for issues affecting both countries at the same level. Given the differences in territorial administration and institutional organization, national and regional traditions of water management (e.g. how is 'risk' interpreted) differ and cause mismatches within the two sides of the border.

Therefore, the main question of this thesis – which also forms the main objective behind it – is to understand: *how different institutional and cultural settings influence the cooperation of relational networks working together in 'soft' spaces of territorial cooperation.* This broad research question will be broken-down into several sub-questions which when being analyzed step-by-step will form a better understanding for the main research question. Central for this study will be the following sub-questions:

- How is the alignment of interests perceived between informal networks from both sides of the border?
- What are the 'rules-of-the-game' upon which the relational network cooperates?

[2] See: https://www.gbra.eu/nl

- To what extend do different organizational arrangements in both countries influence the interplay within the network?
- How does the distribution of resources affect the interplay within the network?

1.3 Societal and scientific relevance of the study

As mentioned above, societies are becoming more fluid. They are no longer restrained within fixed administrative boundaries. People, goods and services move everyday across the border, therefore, the necessity for cross-border regions to cooperate and to coordinate their actions and strategies is present more than ever. However, the cooperation is marked by different institutional and cultural settings, posing in this way a challenge to actors who want to come together and work towards a common issue which overpasses territorial boundaries. The study itself is focused on a very specific project which is still undergoing. Institutional and cultural barriers are creating difficulties for actors to cooperate together across the border. First of all, this thesis aims at contributing directly with its findings, to the Green Blue Rhine Alliance cooperation network. It aims at enhancing the cooperation initiative of local partnerships working with various stakeholders, which are joined together to operate a 'soft' space contexts in order to achieve a common goal.

At the same time, the establishment of cross-border cooperation projects on ecological issues, does not affect only the actors involved in the project but it certainly constitutes an issue and affects the interests of a wider range of citizens within the region that is being studied. The GBRA project particularly has a great societal relevance, especially because it aims at aligning approached in both sides of the border, to work together on floodplain development. High water issues, are of particular importance for the citizens in the area. Consequently, the research itself aims at understanding the organizational structures and the policy frameworks that can be used to facilitate the cooperation process on high water issues, among cross-border partners.

From the scientific point of view, 'soft' territorial cooperation itself is a recently developed notion, therefore, the necessity to work further for the development of the concept is present. As stated in the background and rationale for the study section, the different institutional perspectives have been identified as main problems which hinder the cooperation process among relational actors. However, little is talked about the cultural overlaps within such spaces and to what extend to they exist. If they do not exist, to what extend are they posing a challenge to the cooperation process. At the same time, ecological issues – upon which this thesis is based – cannot be dealt only within fixed and rigid administrative boundaries. The need to solve ecological problems overpass administrative boundaries and rigid institutions.

Furthermore, the research aims to add more findings to cross-border cooperation issues happening in countries shaped by downstream-upstream relations on water management issues.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Excluding introduction, this dissertation comes in four parts. The following section will introduce the concept of 'soft' space and place it in a broader societal context. First the theoretical foundation for the thesis is laid out, providing a conceptual understanding of the emergence of soft spaces. In the same chapter an analytical framework has been set out for the purpose of this research in order to understand better institutional and cultural barriers influencing the cooperation network. A set of elements which have been used in previous studies to explain cross-border cooperation initiatives will be used in this study to position the empirical research.

On the third chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology used to develop this study and provide a brief overview on the chosen case-study. This section of the dissertation aims also at justifying the use of the methods and why they are better suited for such a research.

On the fourth chapter, findings from the empirical research will be laid out. This section discusses in more details the Dutch-German cross-border project, namely, Green Blue Rhine Alliance, as an example of a 'soft' territorial cooperation where different institutional and cultural setting influence the relational network. The empirical research findings will be presented in accordance to the analytical structure which have been developed on the analytical framework section.

The last chapter provides the conclusions and recommendations for this study. In the conclusion I synthesize the results and identify enabling and disabling factors that influence the cooperation process among actors in 'soft' spaces, as a result of different institutional arrangements and cultural settings. Furthermore, a critical overview of the notion 'soft' territorial cooperation in accordance to findings from the empirical research, will be included.

2. THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Theoretical framework: 'Soft' spaces of cooperation

The theoretical framework of this thesis will be developed within three main sections. The concept of 'soft' spaces of cooperation will be introduced, touching upon the main subjects which will help the purpose of this thesis. Within the first sub-chapter the notion 'community of intent' will be explained in order to understand the reasons behind the cooperation of relational networks. in the same time, the main subject that this thesis will treat in terms of 'soft' spaces of cooperation will be different cooperation initiatives. As understood, the first sub-chapter will mainly treat 'soft' spaces of cooperation from a bottom-up perspective. The second sub-chapter aims to reflect upon a more top-down approach, where the influence of European policies in territorial development is explained as a driver of these new spaces. Also, it sheds light into the fact, that despite the necessity to work with these new forms of 'soft' territorial arrangements and even though the EU has been one its main advocates, they still are seen mainly as experimental areas, lacking the required legitimacy and decision-making tools. Following this line of thought, in the third sub-chapter the functional interlinkages between 'soft' and 'hard' spaces of cooperation has been described and later on schematized, in order to show that neither of them can function properly without taking into consideration the presence of the other.

2.1.1 Subjects and objects of 'soft' spaces

The emergence of 'soft' spaces is closely linked to the New Labour's rational view on spatial planning in the UK, focusing in neoliberal political agendas where spatial planning is mainly concerned with devolution, policy integration, effectiveness and policy delivery (Davoudi and Strange, 2009). Following the necessity of spatial planning to focus on 'what works' in terms of implementation and policy delivery, Allmendinger and Haughton (2009), introduced 'soft' spaces not as a concept, but mainly to explain what was happening for real through the continuous attempts to promote new policy scales, initially through the device of fuzzy boundaries. They reflect the necessity to switch to new and innovative ways of thinking, especially in areas which are not open to cross-sectoral and multi-actor governance approaches.

> So, whilst planning still needs its clear legal 'fix' around set boundaries for formal plans, if it is to reflect the more complex relational world of associational relationships which stretch across a range of geographies, planning also needs to operate through other spaces, and it is these we think of as 'soft spaces' (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009, p.619).

From what mentioned above, they appeared as the right mechanism to give the opportunity for functional planning to address interests from beyond existing territorial concerns by bringing in new actors who reflect the desire to create new forms of networks to challenge the complexity of social issues and institutions. For the purpose of this thesis, this section will explain 'soft' spaces through two main components - objects and subjects - which will also be addressed throughout the whole thesis whenever it's necessary. Related also to the main research question, the main objects will be actors/stakeholders/communities forming these soft spaces, and they will be explained as 'communities of intent'[3]. The subjects that will act upon these objects are referred in this thesis as 'cooperation initiatives' and will be described through three different processes of cooperation: strategic cooperation, implementation cooperation and instrumental cooperation.

Objects. To foster development in a specific area, research suggests that networks and connections that have similar interests are more important than physical proximity. However, in most cases these potential networks in border areas do not come together, as a result of different policy, regulatory and service provision systems in border countries. Literature suggests also, that when the so-called networks come together (e.g. city-regions) they have several benefits in terms of economic competitiveness, economies of scale and become more efficient in service provision (Walsh, Driscoll and Creamer, 2016). These informal networks that notice the need to jump across national borders in order to address common spatial issues and problems and to seek out a way how to maximize their benefits, are addressed as 'communities of intent' in a recent ESPON project[4].

> **Community of intent** stands for a voluntary collaboration open to public and private actors who decide to jointly address territory-specific opportunities and challenges. They cooperate across institutional levels and administrative boundaries on strategic development options based on needs and strategic ambitions linked to their shared territorial embeddedness ('intent'). The 'community' is a networked set of actors that seek to enhance their influence within certain fields without applying a rigid concept of membership (Chilla et al., 2017, p.3)

Consequently, as it has also been implied by AIlmendinger and Hauhgton (2009) while explaining soft spaces, these networks are no longer constrained within traditional government systems but aim to develop new forms of cooperation by including both, private and public stakeholders. These networks can be also as a result of private stakeholders coming together to foster regional development. An interesting example is the co-operation in Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region, where twenty large companies – John Deere, BASF, Mercedes Benz, SAP and so on – came together to form a Stakeholder Association which later on included public partners also. They produced a regional strategy in order to jointly direct the region's future development (Waterhout, 2010). It can be understood that the actors who manage to identify and later to establish such 'communities', are required to combine their proficiency in subject areas such as process design and workshop facilitation with place-based local/regional knowledge. These actors are embedded to a cooperation area; therefore, they try to tackle specific territorial challenges while identifying common perceptions,

[3] As introduced in the ESPON ACTAREA project - https://www.espon.eu/actarea

[4] Thinking and Planning in Areas of Territorial Cooperation, also referred to as ESPON ACTAREA.

interests and objectives which can later help to create strategic viewpoints and alternatives for the development of the area.

Functionality linkages that attract territories to work together and form what has been defined as ‘community of intent’, are not always present. However, these territories might get together in order to be more resilient to external pressures or to common ambitions such as: positioning the cooperation within a wider geographic context, manage metropolitan pressures, stand up to global competition, achieve stronger regional integration, respond to a common set of opportunities and challenges more effectively, etc. (Chilla et al., 2017).

The notion ‘community of intent’ on itself advocates mainly bottom-up driven initiatives, yet a first top-down stimulation is required in many cases. This will be explained in section 2.1.2, where the emergence of ‘soft’ territorial cooperation will be further explored as a result of territorial policies. Following this line of thought, what needs to be emphasized in this part is that to be coherent with the latest territorial developments – which also have an impact on achieving political legitimacy – the political action, can no longer depend only on formalized procedures which apply to fixed territorial boundaries. In this new context of territorial convergence, practical and dynamic aspects must be considered.

Subjects. The main subjects upon which these networks come together are related to cooperation initiatives. Cooperation initiatives and the organization of these informal networks go hand in hand and complement each other. Therefore, it can be understood that an initial networking between different groups of interest triggers a first set of strategic goals. To achieve the implementation of these goals, adjustments in formal or informal organizational networks are needed which can in another phase generate further ambitions for cooperative action. In soft spaces, three types of territorial cooperation can be distinguished, namely, implementation cooperation, strategic cooperation and instrumental cooperation.

Strategic cooperation has an all-purpose character and is flexible to changes and agenda-setting over time. Sectoral policies are not defined in advance as a result of top-down policies. On the contrary, they are developed in different stages of cooperation process. Their ‘tailor-made’ character is shaped by actors and interests coming from beyond existing territorial concerns, operating at variable scales, to which certain functions (e.g. regeneration projects, transport, infrastructure, education, etc.) can be attributed. Interested actors come together to form a strategic cooperation, by referring to the soft territorial cooperation space as a unified object to be shaped and constructed (Perkmann, 2007). Construction of these spaces, has become a clear objective of interested organizational networks, within and beyond border regions. Spaces created as a result of a strategic cooperation, can be an object for politico-territorial intervention, which possibly reflects the intended outcomes to be achieved by the actor-networks who were able to shape this kind of cooperation.

Implementation cooperation is understood mainly as a mechanism to facilitate the implementation of spatial planning objectives. Its main aim is to help on the in-ground concretization of development agendas. A typical example of this kind of cooperation is the ‘Thames Gateway Development Corporation’ which helped the Dockland development and local brownfield conversion. In the case of soft spaces, these type of cooperation is not only organized within traditional, domestic administrative institutions (Chilla et al., 2017). Due to the participatory and cooperative nature of governance in areas of soft territorial cooperation, actors are pushed forward to take charge of their own development. This

injects a sense of ownership within interested actors and is prone to increase their commitment to implementing planning outcomes.

While the first two types of cooperation have a broader scope, when it comes to *instrumental cooperation*, the scope gets more narrowed down as they focus mainly on achieving concrete sectoral and territorial objectives (Chilla et al., 2017). Policy frameworks form are an important tool upon which these types of cooperation are developed. However, it can be said that they have a shorter time extend and a limited visibility. An example of this kind of cooperation is the project MOBI2GRI whose main objective is to increase electro-mobility in the Euroregion Galicia-Norte-de-Portugal

Findings from ESPON Actarea project (2017), where 24 examples of different soft territorial cooperation areas have been analyzed, show that most of cooperation instances have a cross-border dimension. However, instrumental initiatives are more often of cross-border character than the implementation and strategy ones.

2.1.2 The controversial approach of the EU toward 'soft' territorial cooperation

Worldwide processes of globalization, have had an impact on the EU territory by encouraging the emergence of new forms of cooperation. As a result, the necessity for EU countries/cities to be stronger and more competitive as global players, has given rise to concepts of regionalization, where they position themselves in a regional context while: (1) striving to become more present transnationally, (2) ambitiously proclaiming themselves internationally by trying to have a bigger population base (e.g. Greater Copenhagen), and (3) to become larger players in the EU policy decision-making. Following the necessity to trigger and be able to manage new dynamics in territorial cooperation, the EU regional policy has been introduced, where funding opportunities initiate or support cross-border and interregional cooperation networks. Notions of territorial cohesion and territorial cooperation within EU Regional Policy, will serve as a framework to show how the very abstract and informal concept of 'soft' spaces, has been originated by inevitable territorial developments of the latest decades. In the same time, the very controversial approach of EU toward 'soft' spaces will be explained further.

EU Regional Policy also referred as Cohesion Policy aims to improve the economic well-being of regions in the EU and avoid disparities, through a 'harmonious development of all of Europe's diverse places'. Developments in the implementation of this principle have been limited and criticisms have arisen for several reasons, one of which is the difficulty to define a way that can be used as a benchmark to distinguish between desirable and undesirable patterns and trends of development. Consequently, 'territorial cohesion' tends to be approached in terms of 'efficiency' and 'equity', where territorial organization should aim to be well-suited to promote economic growth and innovation, or to maintain at a considerable level social disparities or environmental impacts of human activities (Chilla et al., 2017). In the same time, multi-level governance forms an essential element of Cohesion Policy framework, since the interplay between different decision makers at various territorial levels and among a wide range of stakeholders is important for the effectiveness of policy implementation. Through analyzing different policy reports/statements, Stead (2013) identifies five ways of conceptualizing territorial multi-level governance:

1. The vertical or horizontal coordination of policies and/or actors;
2. Participation and consensus-building among public and/or private actors;
3. The devolution of powers and/or resources to lower levels of decision-making;
4. The delivery of "territorial cohesion";
5. The assessment of territorial impacts and development of territorial visions.

Following this line of thought, it can be seen that ‘soft’ spaces of cooperation as conceptualized above – as communities of intent – can be linked to the five conceptualizations of territorial governance as introduced by Stead. Where the current institutional set-up, with its fixed administrative boundaries fails to explain cooperation going beyond administrative units and the complex relation between ‘communities of intent’ and territories, ‘soft’ forms of cooperation make sense to be used in order to come to help to these new forms of territorial governance.

Considering the way how soft spaces have been conceptualized, they can be understood as mainly bottom-up initiatives. Yet they require a first top-down stimulation (national or regional strategies, subsidy schemes, guidelines, conditional policy delivery) which can serve as a framework for them to push for further cooperation (Chilla et al., 2017). It is true that political action can no longer be restrained by fixed territorial boundaries but has to look forward to practical and dynamic aspects of relational spaces. But, at the same time, ‘soft’ spaces are considered by many as experimental areas of intervention, whose time extension cannot be predicted and their ability to become more formalized is not a sure result. A ’spatial fix’ is provided by these new spaces and as a result it appears the need to make available legally and democratically connected plans and strategies that will be able to express the complexity of networked spaces (Allmendinger et al., 2013). The main challenge, which also constitutes the controversial part of the concept, is that while these new spaces are not grounded in old and fixed territorial boundaries, the institutions and rules upon which they operate are.

The regional policy itself can also be addressed as controversial to ‘soft’ territorial cooperation. Although, it contributes to the creation of soft spaces by operating at the NUTS 2 level (Davoudi, 2007), which in most countries is not part of the statutory planning system, its political and institutional approach is not parallel to its soft territorial cooperative approach. By providing funds for local or regional actors who develop projects that meet the EU objectives, it does not take into consideration the bottom-up planning attitude as an integral and very decisive part of ‘soft’ territorial cooperation. As pointed out by Purkathofer (2016), another controversial point of discussion within the very formalized regional policy and the creation of ‘soft’ spaces is that government actors remain the main accountable body when it comes to the negotiation of agreements and programs which clearly indicate the use of funds.

An additional driver of new spaces within the EU is spatial planning across Europe. The EU has indirectly influenced ‘soft’ space approaches, since it has always been an advocate to a more comprehensive spatial planning, while encouraging: bigger cooperation of planning systems between member states; coherence across social, economic and environmental policy goals, and; cohesion through formal (‘hard space’) grounds and informal (‘soft space’) networks (Walsh et al., 2012). Therefore, spatial planning across the continent reflects by itself the strains among nation-state territoriality and objectives of EU territorial cohesion.

The variety of territorial strategies that have been developed, influence the behavior of territorial/spatial governance (Allmendinger et al., 2013). Recent spatial governance studies, by exploring the emergence of new spaces such as the Baltic Sea Region, have highlighted the conflicts and tensions which arise within state-bounded territorial and relational networked governance (Stead, 2011). There is a common agreement regarding a movement away from expert-driven planning to multi-stakeholder, multi-organization planning in Europe, where collaborative methods shed light into the importance of widening stakeholder involvement beyond traditional power elites and building new institutional capital by involving social networks. This can provide a rapid and legitimate implementation to new initiatives, by helping at the same time, the needs and interests of a wider

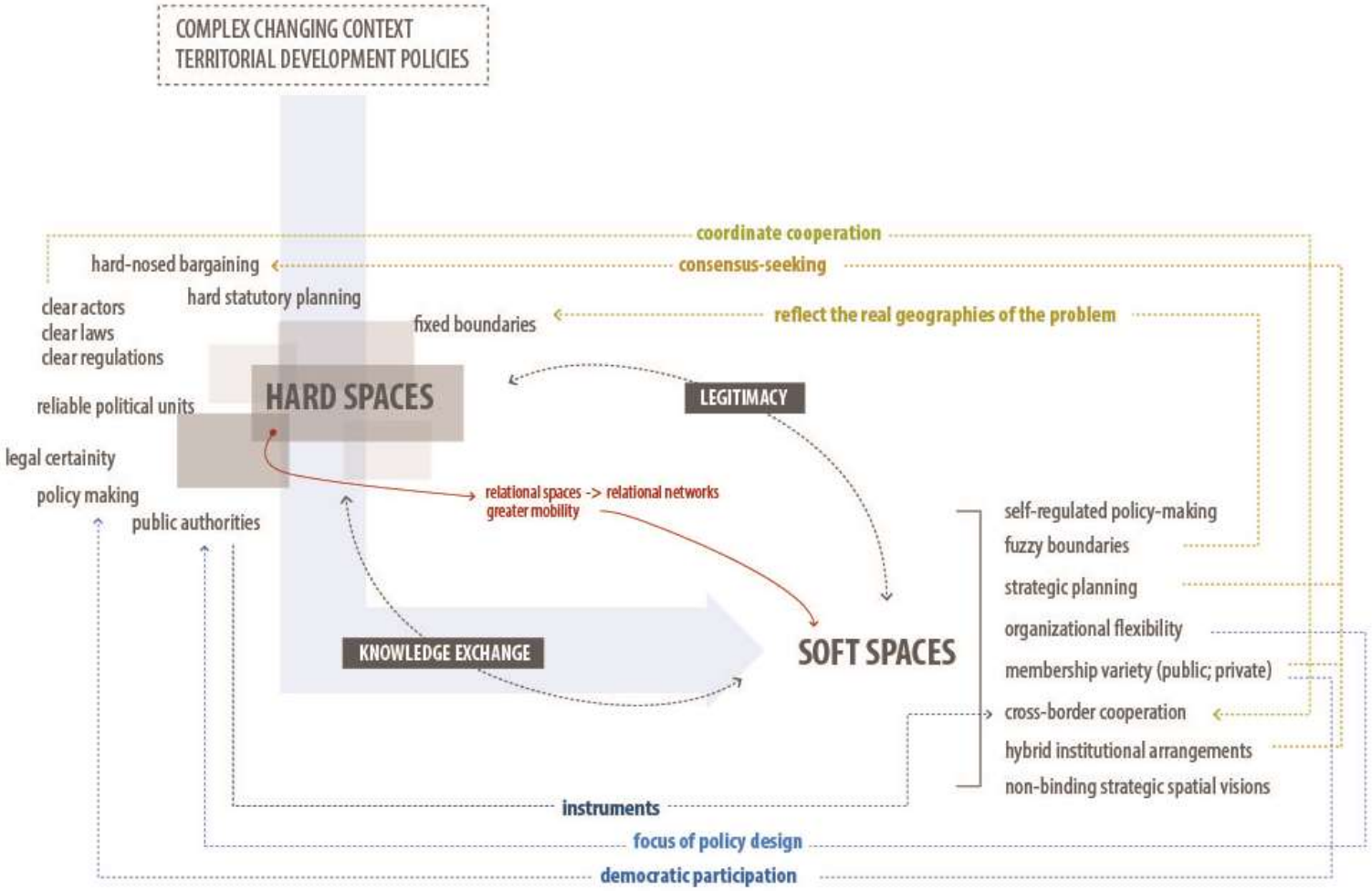
community of stakeholders to be better identified and served. As Faludi (2010) argues, the EUSBSR tries to build upon and promote ideas of territorial cohesion, coherence and cooperation. However, when it comes to providing new instrument, legislation or funding for these new networks of cooperation, it goes back to already-existing initiatives and instruments within the frames of the Baltic Sea Region. As a result, these spaces of interaction within the EUSBSR are usually not provided with decision-making capacity for the new actors and institutions which emerge as a result of cross-border cooperation. While the EU supports soft spaces, it is not as informal when it comes to imposing rules/regulations for planning at the domestic level, where the scales, actors and instruments that deal with EU inputs are set at the very beginning, and they are the ones who in most cases determine the influence of EU policies on spatial planning.

All in all, 'soft' territorial cooperation has emerged as a concept to explain different processes of territorial rescaling which have been mainly driven by EU regional policies. However, these soft and informal spatial approaches go hand in hand with hard and formal regulations which affect spatial development. This mainly, due to the fact that while this informal spatial approach seems to reflect better the real geographies of the problem and help policy-makers to better focus their policy-design, they do not have the necessary legal certainty and the right institutional framework.

2.1.3 'Soft' spaces as complementary to 'hard' spaces

It has been explained above how soft territorial cooperation have emerged as a tool to address the cooperation of relational networks whose interests in specific spatial issues can no longer be achieved while working in fixed boundaries. In the same time, it has been argued that as a reaction on and a reflection of this complex changing context, policies affecting territorial development have had a great impact on the emergence of the so-called soft spaces. Processes of reterritorialization address the general trend of the changing nation state and the weakening of government control. Globalization and the rise of network societies can no longer fit into a world shaped in boxes. Territorial and functional areas overlap, is clearly forming different shapes and sizes of criss-crossing jurisdictions (Faludi, 2016). It is important to emphasize that, these new spaces of cooperation are not alternatives, but complements to hard structures. Figure 1 is an attempt to illustrate in a diagrammatic way the vibrant relationship between these two spaces. All the linkages shown in the diagram are a collection and reflection on possible functionality interdependencies of the two spaces, while critically reviewing literature on 'soft' spaces. The division in two different parts is done in order to clearly identify the elements composing each of the spaces. Though, this does not mean that they can be seen as two different forms of space-making, or that one is more relevant than the other. While 'hard' spaces are the formal, visible arenas and processes, often statutory and open to democratic processes. Driven by a myriad of policy concerns – such as the hierarchy and co-ordination of national policy and development plans, their co-ordination with community strategies and the significance given to community involvement – they are characterised by complexity and delays. 'Soft spaces' are the fluid areas between such formal processes where implementation through bargaining, flexibility, discretion and interpretation dominate. Therefore, the main aim is to show the interdependencies that are created while working in both, informal and formal settings.

Figure 1. Functional relationship between 'hard' and 'soft' spaces (produced by the author)



'Hard' spaces of planning and governance have long since tried to shape societies and the rules and laws upon which they function. They exist at different scales, namely municipal scale, federal or unitary scale. Their boundaries are clear, as are the actors responsible for decision-making and policy frameworks they are based on. Despite the fact that these units have changed considerably due to greater mobility, they are still considered the most appropriate and reliable political units. On his discussions about territoriality and territorial-administrative complex, Faludi (2016), sheds light into the fact that these territorial-administrative complex, may it be national or local scale, 'sustains itself for those who occupy positions of power in it'. Following this line of thought, he considers the territorial-administrative complex as a container, which is filled by citizens, to whom the ascribed unique identities shaped by the territorial roots might not necessarily be true. Where these unique identities did not exist, but were mainly shaped by the territorial boundaries to which a community belonged to, democratic governments have constructed and continue to construct territories and populations.

Reflect geographies of the problem. Where governmental structures, shaped into clear and hard boundaries, fail to address functional linkages within their politico-administrative territories, thinking and planning in soft areas of cooperation may help to overcome these constraints. However, both of them, soft and hard spaces, have functional interlinkages between each other, which means that one

needs the existence of the other to operate. As Allmendinger and Haughton (2009, p.631) say, '…formal scales of planning and institutional set-up are not becoming irrelevant, but the formal scale only is not sufficient'. Therefore, more sophisticated frameworks, are needed in order to reflect how complex, relational networks work with and through the boundaries of institutional geographies.

Focus of policy design. When these relational networks – explained above as 'communities of intent' – come together, they help to tackle territorial issues by indicating for public authorities the right geographical scale of intervention and the focus of policy design. The increasing interconnected nature that is shaping nowadays social, economic and ecological environment of individuals and communities, sets a challenge for the sectoral and hierarchic forms of policy-making. The need to address these complexity is associated to soft spaces of cooperation. The costs and difficulties that traditional governmental spaces find on overcoming the complexity challenge, are related both to the unwillingness of sectoral authorities to transfer authority to coordinating bodies, and the difficulty on managing sectoral interdependencies (Chilla et al., 2017). Thus, cooperation through 'soft' forms helps to tackle the complex system of interdependencies, while the necessity for cooperation itself, helps to identify the most relevant issues, partners and methods.

Implementation of planning outcomes. The organizational networks working in soft territorial cooperation areas, are flexible and can reflect the interests of stakeholders from both sides of the border. Therefore, due to the participatory planning of the governance in this kind of spaces, the implementation of planning outcomes is more efficient since by giving actors the right tools to take charge of their own development, injects a greater sense of ownership (Chilla et al., 2017)

Coordination of cooperation initiatives. These soft spaces are continuously cooperating, therefore a cooperation framework to coordinate the cooperation initiatives is needed. This is where soft spaces and formal planning arenas clash. As illustrated in Figure 1, the actors/rules/laws of 'hard' spaces play the main role in shaping decision-making processes and planning practices (Olesen, 2012). Viewed mostly as bottom-up approaches, cooperation initiatives include a wide variety of members, ranging from private to public bodies. Involving different tiers of government, cooperation in these areas can strengthen multi-level governance and the exchange of knowledge among cross-border institutions.

Instruments. Even though, these cooperation initiatives should try to reach out to different financial resources to be able to sustain themselves, a basic essential funding coming from formal authorities or institutions, is a necessary stimulation to ensure continuity of the development. Regulatory framework, provided by authorities working within fixed institutional instances, is essential to make available instruments to cooperation processes. Seen mainly as bottom-up approaches, cooperation initiatives include a wide variety of members, ranging from private to public bodies. Involving different tiers of government, cooperation in these areas can strengthen multi-level governance and the exchange of knowledge among cross-border institutions.

Consensus-building. It has been argued till now that informal networks in soft spaces and institutionalized networks are mutually dependent on each other. However, when it comes to their operational autonomy, informal networks try to strictly retain it, in the sense that they are not commanded by superiors or by those who attain decision-making powers (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). The flexible and spontaneous way that these networks are built upon does not include norms, procedures or policy frameworks which can later determine where and how a legitimate decision should be taken. Due to their flexible and non-statutory nature, by negotiating together and at the same time with other governmental institutions, these networks, try to add to hard-nosed bargaining policies discussions aiming at consensus-seeking.

Legitimacy. Not only do hard spaces help soft spaces with coordinating different cooperation initiatives, but they also provide legitimacy to the territorial cooperation approach (Chilla et al., 2017). Even though, soft spaces seem to be the right form to deal with governance complexity, it is clearly understandable that the legitimacy issue is a problem since the actors acting as political decision-makers do not have the necessary democratic power. On the other side, the effectiveness and legitimacy of nation-state institutions is also doubted, since social processes can no longer be explained and restrained in geographical borders. The implementation of policy frameworks and plans seem more legitimate when it is supported by the target groups who is likely to be affective. The engagement of stakeholders from the beginning is more likely to enhance the acceptance and support of the plan. This is not relevant only to citizens, but also to non-governmental networks. By encouraging the formation of networks composed of public and private bodies, governmental authorities try to enhance democratic participation in public policy-making. Simultaneously, these governance rescaling processes can make public governance less transparent and accountable (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). To sidestep this issue, careful metagovernance by politicians, public managers and other relevant actors is needed for these 'hard' and 'soft' institutional arenas to contribute to an effective and democratic governing of society

However, we do not want to suggest a false dichotomy between 'hard' and 'soft' spaces – rather, the new spaces of planning may be providing a form of lubrication to the development process, acting outside some of the frictions of formalised processes, engrained expectations, and institutional and professional histories. While they may gain some benefits from this 'distance' from the formal spaces of planning, they also need to link strongly to them in order to deliver some of their objectives.

2.1.4 Summary

The available literature in regards to soft space planning is rather favorable to its benefits, yet acknowledges the risk that wider planning responsibilities will be neglected:

> 'Soft space approaches can be a useful part of the strategic planning repertoire in terms of facilitating development and creating competitive advantage, in part, through minimizing regulations or short-circuiting and partnering developments through formal processes. The danger though is that they might be used to sidestep wider responsibilities, not least those relating to the social justice and environmental aspects of sustainable development" (Haughton et al, 2010, page 241).

It has been argued above that European integration and EU regional policy started the debate on 'territorial governance' which consequently gave rise to discussions on 'soft' spaces, coming as a result of territorial development without necessarily being dependent on hard statutory planning instruments. However, from what mentioned above, the concept isn't clear yet and neither is the way how EU is supporting further such territorial developments.

What is clearly understood, is the fact that such spaces cannot work dependently without the support coming from 'hard' spaces in terms of regulatory frameworks and financial incentives. Processes of reterritorialization address the general trend of the changing nation state and the weakening of government control. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that, these new spaces of cooperation are not alternatives, but complements to hard structures. 'Hard' structures can also benefit from these interdependencies when it comes to making their political decisions more legitimate and make the implementation process more efficient.

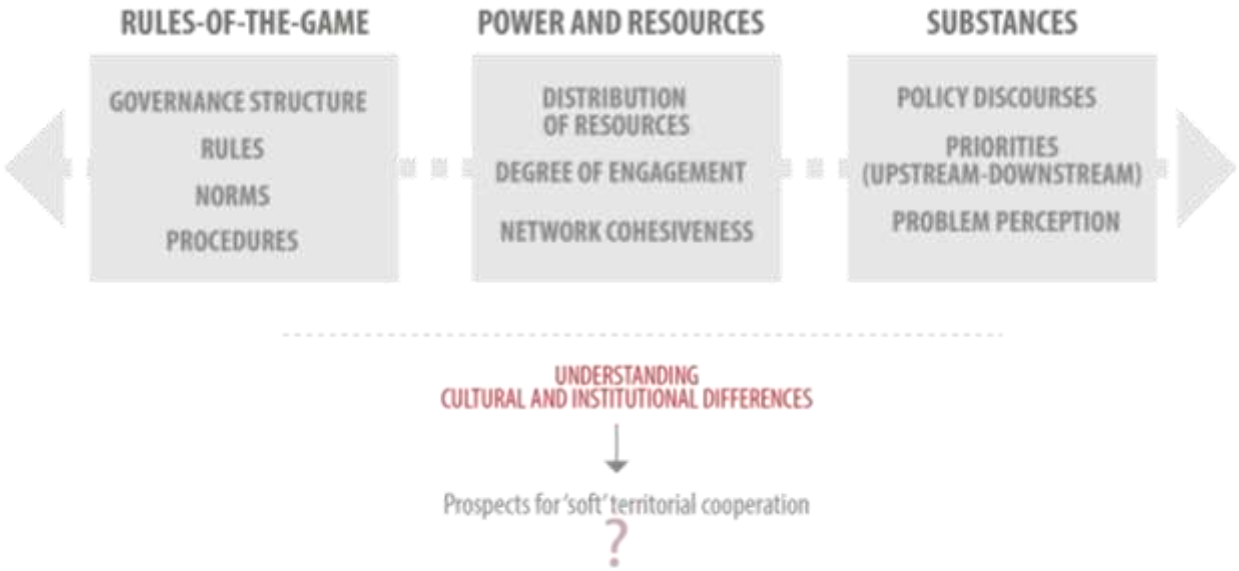
2.2 Analytical framework: Cross-border cooperation features

A cross-border relational network is shaped by complex ties, not only because its cross boundaries territorial governance, but also the very different relations that exist between governmental and non-governmental networks in both sides of the border. Even though, the cooperation initiative is formed by common interests from both sides of the border, differences on their mindset toward tackling a certain issue – which are also shaped by cultural differences – pose a challenge to the cooperation process. As mentioned above, 'soft' spaces of territorial cooperation are tailor-made' spaces which no longer can be functional within hard administrative boundaries. They bring in new actors and interests from beyond existing territorial concerns and linkages – water linkages, economical, ecological, educational, etc. The empirical research is based on water management in these 'soft' spaces of territorial cooperation. Water is a natural connection, therefore, abiding to human-made jurisdictions and administrative borders is not enough in such a context. In such networks, co-governance should receive the majority of the attention, resulting in horizontal structures dominating the network and joint decisions being made as a result of the bargaining process.

An analytical framework (Figure 2) has been developed for the purpose of this research in order to understand better institutional and cultural barriers influencing the cooperation network. A set of elements which have been used in previous studies to analyze cross-border cooperation initiatives (e.g. Policy Arrangement Approach) will be used in this study to position the empirical research. The analytical framework has been adapted to the purpose of this study, therefore, not all elements have been used, from previous analytical frameworks analyzing cross-border cooperation arrangements. In addition, where it seemed convenient and appropriate new elements have been added. The main elements that will be analyzed to understand the cooperation initiative and to underline the main institutional and cultural barriers are as follows: rules-of-the-game (analyze the cross-border cooperation in terms of common policies and organizational structures); power and resources (analyze the interplay within the network, power relations and the degree of engagement of stakeholders composing the network); policy substances (focus on priorities on each side of the border for setting the territorial agenda and policy discourses).

These three elements are in some ways overlapping with each other. For instance, policy frameworks and governance arrangements explained in the first pillar, namely rules-of-the-game, are related to both relational actors and the policy substances. Governmental arrangements within a certain country show the hierarchical structure that may or may not exist among different governmental levels. In a cross-border setting hierarchical structures and hierarchical working cultures influence the interplay among actors involved in the network. At the same time, it can be an indirect indicator to how the power is distributed within the network, especially among actors within the same country. On the other hand, taking a look at policy frameworks that influence cross-border cooperation initiatives, may they be international, national, regional or local, can help to understand the priorities and policy discourses in border regions. In this way, the focus shifts from the more organizational dimension of policy making to its content and the belief systems or problem definitions of actors. The first two pillars, rules and power and resources help to understand better the institutional differences. The third one, policy substances, focuses more on cognitive and discursive approaches (Van Eerd, Weiring and Dieperink, 2014). Therefore, it has a more social nature and it will be used to understand cultural differences, while analyzing the frames and concepts that actors use to give meaning to problems that they deal with in a cross-border context. However, as mentioned above the three elements are overlapping, therefore differences related to the institutional set-up and social and cultural contexts can be extracted from each of them.

Figure 2. Analytical framework: Cross-border cooperation features (produced by the author)



2.2.1 Power and resources

The second element used to identify institutional and cultural differences among partners within the network are power and resources. The distribution of resources among the partners can give a general overview on how the power is distributed within the network. Power refers to the ability of certain actors to mobilize, divide and deploy resources that will influence policy outcomes of the policy arrangement (Van Eerd, et al., 2014). They involve all kind of tools used to give power to the actors and enable them to implement certain policy arrangements. Duties among these actors are divided based on the resources that they possess. Resources may be of different nature – juridical mandates, financial resources and incentives, human resources and knowledge. However, the fact that not all actors possess an equal amount of resources (even if they would, not all resources are as useful as others), can lead to disparities in power relations. The actors owning the highest amount of resources are the ones who can implement specific policies and steer the process. Actors possessing the main resources, referred to as spokespersons in some literature should make sure to take into account the desires and cooperation interests of other actors as well, in order for the cooperation to be successful (Bodin and Crona, 2009).

Analyzing power relations within the network will help to understand the degree of network cohesiveness such as: to what extend the network 'hangs together', instead of being divided into separate subgroups? (Bodin and Crona, 2009). The cooperation among relational actors is shaped by the institutional and cultural setting they work in. In a transboundary context, relational actors have to cope with differences when it comes to institutional set-up and working cultures which most of the time is a barrier for the cooperation initiative. Such differences include (1) the interplay of informal networks with their corresponding government institutions, given that the framework provided by governments on each side in order to support cross-border initiatives varies; (2) different kinds of problems framing and differing approaches on how to work with them. Network cohesiveness, will be understood by the bonding ties that may or may not exist within the cooperation network (Newman and Dale, 2007). As defined by Ostrom (2000), within a relational network, bonding ties promote trust, reciprocity and thus cohesion within communities, which is beneficial for consensus building and solving conflicts.

2.2.2 Rules-of-the-game

Rules-of-the-game will include all possible principles, norms and procedures that directly or indirectly are used to guide and stimulate the interplay between actors, may they be governmental or non-governmental bodies (Wiering et al., 2010). Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis policy documents including norms, rules and procedures to facilitate cross-border cooperation initiatives, especially when it comes to water management, will be analyzed separately for each country. Understanding the organizational structure under which each country collaborate will enable to gain an overall knowledge of policy arrangements involved in the 'soft' territorial cooperation area, and potential common policy arrangements or areas where the cooperation is more prone to foster. To understand rules-of-the-game in cross-border networks, is important also to understand international arrangements available in the area such as cross-border institutions. Scholars argue that regional, national and international rules need to be in line with each other for cooperation on water management between different countries to be successful (Young, 1999; Marty, 2001; Skjaerseth, 2000). It is important to understand how policies on different levels, related to water management, are integrated on each country. Following this line of thought, in a cross-border context, is of vast importance to understand which level of governance – local, regional, national –deals with what and whether there's an alignment of competencies and duties between adjacent levels in cross-border countries.

Additionally, in a transboundary context, international arrangements can produce common norms and values by encouraging the integration of the interests of the involved countries (Wiering et al., 2010). International institutions, will be understood in the empirical research as additional venues to help foster cooperation initiatives or to help actors find each other in a cross-border context.

2.2.3 Policy substances

Conflicts on working through the implementation of common objectives are a challenge in a transboundary context, where priorities on problem-solving may differ and when the problem and/or its solution are not perceived in similar terms by all actors. In this section, the focus will shift from the more organizational dimension of the cross-border network to the its content, where the ideas, policy concepts, belief systems and problem definitions of actors will be analyzed (Wiering et al., 2010). Discourses will be analyzed, related both to political issues and upstream-downstream conditions that the cross-border cooperation area represents. A discourse is defined as a set of ideas, concepts and narratives that give meaning to certain phenomena in the real world (Wiering and Arts, 2006). Discourses should be seen in a larger context of the related case. Actors can have different perspectives when it comes to certain problems and to priorities that they set in their agendas. A sector-based policy discourse can identify priority sectors in respective countries.

In water management problems, asymmetries in territorial agenda in an interregional context become more obvious, when the countries involved show upstream–downstream conditions. In such arrangements downstream partners are the ones who show the biggest interest and willingness to foster the cooperation, therefore, there's a necessity to balance the distribution of water related interests. By understanding priorities on each side of the border, possible areas of interest can be identified easier to help partners on setting common objectives.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research strategy

Philosophical approach. Clarifying the research philosophy chosen by the author is important as it creates the foundation and guidance of the entire research process. Once the author has made it clear what he/she wants to explore further with the formulated research questions and sub-questions, an appropriate methodological framework can be designed. By trying to create the most suitable way how to discuss and answer the research questions, have decided upon choosing the direction of ontological and epistemological approach. It is important to mention that both, ontology and epistemology are inevitably connected to each other, where the former is concerned with the question: "is there a 'real' world 'out there' that is independent of our knowledge of it?" (Marsh and Furlong, 2010: p. 185). The epistemological assumption is mainly focused to explain how we know what we know, therefore it can be explained as a process which aim to gather the required knowledge (Marsh and Furlong, 2010).

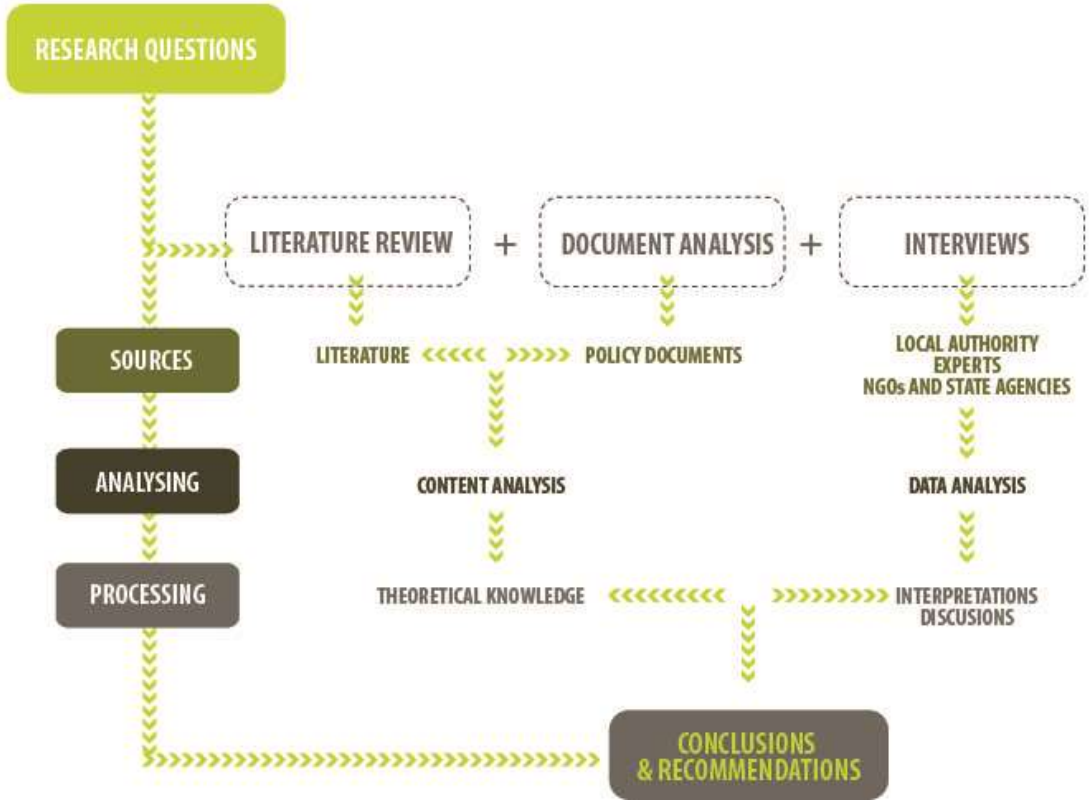
Epistemology approaches have two different positions: positivism and interpretivism. While epistemological positivism highlights the objectivity element, where things are perceived by individuals in identical manner, it can be understood that it's application is more related to fixed natural sciences (Olson, 2013). Interpretivism has emerged as an additional approach to positivism and argues that the nature of reality is multiple and relative (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998). Epistemologically the research is steered by the interpretivist positions since different ideas of various actors are collected and analyzed. As well as, given the context dependent nature of the study, a positivist approach has not been seen as being useful for the purpose of the research.

The epistemological position considered appropriate for this research, determines the ontological position and therefore, it chooses the constructionism direction. There are two ways how ontological studies can be approached: the objectivism and constructionism one. The thesis focus are relational networks in a certain territorial cooperation area and the way how they try to influence the territorial development through their continuous interactions. Constructionism explores different versions of the social world, instead of defining one reality and considering social phenomena as being external facts, as it would be the case of the objectivism approach (Becker, Bryman & Ferguson, 2012). Within the research, the interviewees are most probably expected to interpret situations and obstacles to the interaction with each other in different ways, influenced by the different cultural, institutional and territorial-administrative context they work upon.

Research design. After describing the philosophical approach that the author has chosen while developing this research, it is easier to understand the reasons behind the steps involved in the strategy design through which the research will be conducted. Also, the philosophical approach, underpins the methods that will be used to carry out the research. Given the fact that the study is based on constructivist-interpretivist considerations, a qualitative approach has been chosen, since the research itself, is focused more on understanding social and institutional relations between actors involved in the study area. Thus, as Bryman (2015) implies, in such studies the meaning of words is way more important than numbers in data collection and interpretation. Research questions can be answered mainly by analyzing and combining answers which come from social information gathered from both governmental and non-governmental institutions. The main research question itself implies this, when asking about possible ways on how to solve cultural and institutional problems coming from both sides of the border, to facilitate the alliance between cross-border informal networks while working on issues of common interest. The research methodology (Figure 3) that has been designed

for the purpose of this study, has resulted from the main research questions, the theoretical and analytical framework of the study and the necessity to deliver reliable data while presenting the findings and conclusions of the study. The current methodology has been driven by the research issues, which have later on defined the most appropriate conceptual framework and methods to be used. While selecting the methods several factors have been taken into consideration such as: previous methods that have been used by scholars while researching network arrangements in cross-border areas; methods which are in line with the research questions and fit the research frameworks; and, methods which can ensure the richness, robustness and comprehensiveness of the research, while being used together.

Figure 3. Research design (produced by the author)



To achieve the aim of this research project, a single case-study approach will be used, based on qualitative data and using the constructivist-interpretivist stance as explained above.

A case-study approach. The topic is very specific and it focuses mainly in soft cooperation areas from an actor network and institutional perspective. Soft cooperation areas on themselves, imply areas sharing a common border, may it be a local or national border, so the focus of the empirical research is already narrowed down. The choice on cooperation projects sharing a national border, has been mainly due to the challenges that these cooperation areas face when it comes to different institutional arrangements from both sides, which also constitutes the main foundation of the research. Furthermore, areas where borders are already soft due to the necessity of their citizens to commute daily and due to certain functional linkages and necessities to cooperate (ecological, transportation, economic, social issues), has been a strong reason behind the choice of the case-study. Therefore, it has been carried out in the Dutch-German soft border area, focusing on a common natural linkage and asset such as the Rhine river. While coordination between different sectoral policies exists in both

sides of the border, different social context, planning mode and different legal and political conditions makes the implementation of common projects a challenge. The need for the project partners to work together is strongly present.

This empirical research is based on a Dutch-German case study project in the delta of the Rhine catchment focusing on the network set-up of the project which involves different governmental and non-governmental bodies from both sides of the border and alternatives to foster their cooperation despite the different cultural, institutional and organizational arrangements. Among several project initiatives established in the area, the Green Blue Rhine Alliance project has been selected as it fulfills some of the pre-determined criteria related to informal networks in soft territorial cooperation areas. The pre-determined set of criteria involve:

- A medium to long term integrative perspective – the network is not limited to the implementation of a single project;
- Ambition to enhance capacities of involved players within the network and outside;
- Coming together to work toward a common interest and tackle a common problem;
- Determination to renew relations among institutional level, sectors of activity and types of actors.

Choosing a specific project will help to focus the empirical research. However, relationships between governmental and non-governmental institutions in the cross-border context and the problems that cooperation initiatives face will not be limited only to the specific project. Governmental and non-governmental bodies involved in the project area, will be asked to give their further insights related to their cooperation with the respective side of the border. In this way results related to barriers when it comes to transboundary cooperation can be possible to be generalized in a wider regional level.

3.2 Data collection

Reviewing prior, relevant literature is of essential importance for any academic research project (Webster and Watson, 2002). On the other hand, reviewing existing literature can foster the theory development and can help the study to uncover areas where research is needed. As Irwin (2013) suggests, a qualitative secondary analysis of data can help the researcher to address new questions on their own data and in the same time help to relate their own primary data to existing data sources. Speaking of this research, it has started with a desk study of secondary data, reviewing relevant literature related to issues on soft spaces of cooperation, with the aim to create a firm basis of knowledge. The concept has been chosen in order to address the informal and flexible way that informal networks cooperate together on common issues, despite their different institutional and cultural context that exists alongside the borders.

Secondary data, comes from existing sources of data collected by other academics within the field. Therefore, it is not always directly related to the aim of the research study. Webster and Watson (2002), explain that there are two types of existing literature reviews. The first case is that of a mature topic, where there is already a good amount of accumulated research and the researcher need to mainly analyses and synthesize it. A thorough literature review is done in this case, and the researcher can propose an analytical model of his own in order to synthesize and extend existing research. The second case of literature review presented by the two authors, is when the researcher manages to identify a recently emerging topic which can benefit from exposure further theoretical foundation. The researcher can give his contribution by developing further the theoretical foundation related to the topic at hand and propose possible analytical models to understand it better. The notion of soft spaces of

cooperation is quite wide and being a recently developed concept there are many different meanings associated to it. It needs to be emphasized that even though the concept has been recently developed there has been a big interest among researchers, to further develop the concept, so there exists a considerable amount of research related to the topic. From the thesis authors' perspective, the secondary data associated to this research, stand in the middle of a newly and mature concept. The main challenge while working with the literature review was to narrow down the topic and define the concept in order to serve the purpose of this thesis. At the same time an analytical model has been proposed to understand better the concept of soft spaces of cooperation in terms of social network analysis, which forms also the main foundation of this thesis.

The second method used in this research is a content analysis of primary data. It is used mainly in order to understand the policy and institutional frameworks which influence projects in cross-border areas. It has been mentioned in the literature review part that informal networks in soft spaces of cooperation benefit from the already existing policy frameworks which aim at coordinating cooperation within actors involved in cross-border projects. Therefore, policy documents have been analyzed in order to extract the necessary information which can be of significant importance to the empirical research. The content analysis of primary data has been done in two different stages of the research: in the beginning in order to have a general overview and after the empirical research has been conducted in order to compare results from the interviews by identifying common documents and laws used in both countries. On the other hand, the author has also taken advantage of different workshop reports that have been made available from the project coordinator of the case-study. The analyzed documents include:

- EU guidelines related to cross-border cooperation;
- Water management policy frameworks in the Rhine river;
- Domestic planning documents;
- Workshop reports; Kick-off meetings reports.

The third used method are interviews. Interviews are one of the most flexible and widely used methods for gaining qualitative information about people's experiences, views and feelings (Saunders et al., 2009). It has been chosen for this research especially because of the focus on actors relations and institutional perspective that the study has. Additionally, the lack of information through other sources, since the case-study project is at an early phase of development, is another reason that pushed the author to choose this method. Soft spaces of cooperation, are identified as spaces driven mainly by bottom-up initiatives, therefore interviews can provide relevant information from actors in both sides of the border, while collecting their experiences (challenges and interests) from cooperating with actors within and beyond the border. Prior to the interviews, it is important to structure the interview, by preparing a questionnaire in advance. The questionnaire itself aims at providing further answers gathered from qualitative data, to address the research questions. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, for the interviewee to feel freer to develop their ideas further and expand more on topics that are considered important for them. An interview guide (Annex II) has been developed, where questions have been structured according to the topics that the author wishes to cover. Three different samples of questionnaires have been introduced, such as:

- Expert interviews: provide context, background information and contacts;
- Interviews with government bodies: directly and indirectly involved in the GBRA project;
- Interviews with non-governmental bodies: directly involved in the GBRA project.

The three different types of interview samples are necessary due to the different background and different data that each group of interviewees will provide. Interviewees have been selected, according

to what Blackstone (2016), refers as nonprobability sampling which includes. Meaning that, interviewees are related to the field of study (purposive sampling); they come from different subgroups (quota sampling); new contacts have been identified by relying on referrals (snowball sampling).

Research sub-questions	*Literature review*	*Document analysis*	*Qualitative interviews*
1. *Tools/policy frameworks used to foster cross-border cooperation in both sides of the border*	√	√	√
2. *How is the alignment of interests perceived between relational actors in both sides of the border*			√
3. *To what extend do different organizational arrangements in both countries influence the interplay within the network?*	√	√	√
4. *How does the distribution of resources affect the interplay within the network?*		√	√

Table 1. Methods used to answer the research sub-question

3.3 Data analysis

When analyzing the gathered data for this research, the main structure follows the method of qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is used to describe the characteristics of the documents' content, while exploring large amounts of textual information and inconspicuously determining trends and patterns of words used, their relationships and discourses of communication (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). The collected data is analyzed in a structured way, answering the research question. On the other hand, thematic analysis of the qualitative data, will be used to analyze and report similar patterns within the data collected. The analytical framework has been used to guide the interview questions which were developed according to the information found in the theoretical framework and the related analytical framework. The interviews have been recorded, in order to make it possible for the author to use direct and indirect quotations.

The records of the interviews have been transcribed and main themes have been identified when searching for repetitive words or topics in the interviews, always related to the analytical framework. The main aim was to understand possible institutional and cultural differences that are hindering the cross-border cooperation process in the Dutch-German border. The analytical framework has been used to structure the analysis and therefore codes have been attributed to one of the three pillars of the analytical framework: rules-of-the-game, power and resources, policy substances. An 'intercode agreement' (Cresswell. 2012) method has been applied where the occurrence of the same codes in the conducted interviews, will give information about the three mentioned aspects of the analytical framework. The coding technique served as an instrument to label, examine, separate, mix and organize information. The author, when examining the interviews was be able to generate concepts that can later on play a significant theoretical role.

Triangulation have been used to interpret and compare different opinions and points of view from policy documents, literature and interviews. At the same time, different points of view have been gathered and compared from governmental and non-governmental actors within the cross-border

area, mainly to understand the networks' level of interaction. Most documents and interview transcripts are too large to be analyzed thoroughly, therefore, all the data will go through the process of judgmental sampling, where only certain paragraphs considered more relevant will be selected for the analysis.

3.4 Reliability, validity and limitations

Following the same line of thought that Bryman (2015) argues, the author of this research study agrees that the main drawback of the qualitative research method is that the study itself, is very much based on the authors' personal opinions and relies mainly on the authors' interpretation of the outside world. As mentioned above, the validation of this study has been made by using triangulation and comparing data generated from different methods. The interview method is limited to a small number of interviews, that's why it is complemented with a primary data analysis of policy documents and reports produced by the project partners and constantly reflecting on concepts and arguments collected in the conceptual framework. On the other hand, the selection of interviewees follows the same logic. Government representatives, NGO actors and experts in the field have been interviewed, to discuss different points of view. It's considered important for this study to conduct interviews with different levels of governance in both sides of the border, in order to understand the complex interactions between actors and their actions and regulations in their respective countries influencing cross-border water management issues.

Since the very beginning, the actors involved in the case-study project have shown a great interest on the findings and recommendations that could possibly come out of this research. Therefore, a constant communication mainly with the project coordinator has been possible where findings have been discussed with him.

Limitations regarding the proposed methodology come from the single case study approach which will serve to draw the findings upon. The research aim is to analyse possible cultural and institutional differences while working in a cross-boundary context, in order to foster the cooperation process between interested groups which come together to collaborate upon a common problem. Due to time constrain and the very complex nature that the chosen cooperation network represented since the beginning, the research has been based upon a very specific case study, aiming to provide possible recommendation to the ongoing project and contribute with its results. The limitations of using a single case study is that the research may not have adequate information. Focusing the analysis in a single unit, increases the risk of external validity. The results are very specific and cannot always be generalized for all cross-border cooperation initiatives. However, an attempt to generalize the data from the empirical research, is done by relating concepts from the theoretical and analytical background to the empirical research findings. In this way there are a few generalizations that can be done which will be explained in the last chapter of this thesis. Further research on the topic is recommended, in order to understand whether the institutional and cultural barriers that have been identified in this study, are valid for other research studies within the same topic.

Another limitation within this research has been to arrange meetings and interviews with governmental actors at different levels. Mainly the governmental institutions from both sides have been way too difficult to reach out. Due to time constrains and lack of availability, not all actors which were planned to be interviewed in the beginning, have been interviewed. It was important for this study to interview actors from organizations established to foster cross-border cooperation initiative, such as Euroregio Rhine Waal. Despite their initial insights, to help identify projects that would be interesting for the purpose of this research, when contacted later for the interview phase they were not able to be approached again. Another institution that was important to be interviewed was the state ministry of

North Rhine-Westphalia. Since the very beginning, it wasn't possible to establish a communication with them. Reflecting back on the empirical research, it can be stated that the time scheduled for the empirical research in the beginning was underestimated. Gathering data for the empirical research took longer than expected, slowing down in this way the research agenda.

Another constrain or limitation that the author is able to identify has to do with the level of expertise or the role in the project of the interviewed actors. Talking to all partner organizations involved in the project have been considered of immense importance in order to understand the cooperation context and to gain information from all involved parties. However, due to their lack of availability, it wasn't always possible to talk to actors involved directly in water management issues within the project, therefore, other actors performing other tasks within the project have been interviewed.

4. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: Findings from Green Blue Rhine Alliance

4.1 Setting the scene

The empirical research will be conducted on the Dutch German cross-border area, more specifically in the Rhine-Waal region. It encompasses the province of Gelderland from the Dutch side and the district of Düsseldorf in Nordrhein-Wetstfalen. Cross-border policy making in the Rhine basin takes place in an environment shaped by the two bordering countries, Germany and the Netherlands which do have similar cultural roots, a common historical background and joint supranational European legal and institutional framework. (Renner & Meijerink, 2015)

Figure 4. Case-study project area (produced by the author)

Despite the joint supranational European legal and institutional framework, cross-border studies have shown that the cross-border water policy in the area, faces noticeable differences in institutional and legal context, mainly because of different levels of ambition and different priorities in the territorial agenda setting with asymmetries due to the upstream-downstream relationship in the international

river basins. Cultural differences between the two border countries, play an important role also. Both Germany and the Netherlands have several nature reserves along one of the largest European rivers, the Rhine, which is known for its values towards nature, tourism and landscape. Its protection and improvement is a concern for the governments and NGOs, which work on both sides to keep the quality high. An example is the Water Framework Directive (WFD) for which the authorities have been working on. Nevertheless, currently this joint landscape is not functioning as united due to the need of connection by means of ecological networks. Cooperation across the border for this purpose remains a challenge due to diverse contexts in terms of planning mode, legal and political conditions. Even though coordination of several sectoral policies is present in both sides of the border, implementing common projects faces big challenges in terms of planning and dealing with different legislatures and political conditions. The improvement of the cross-border cooperation is crucial in order to have effective business and better results. However, as mentioned above, the cooperation difficulty results also from other issues such as the cultural differences. Such differences include the interplay of informal networks with their corresponding government institutions, given that the framework provided by governments on each side in order to support cross-border initiatives, varies as well.

4.1.1 Green Blue Rhine Alliance

The chosen case study-project is at an early phase of implementation and it is currently facing the above-mentioned problems. Therefore, the process is delayed due to different institutional and cultural settings that informal networks are working upon. While exploring the literature related to 'soft' spaces of cooperation, the main difficulties arisen when it comes to the well-functioning of informal networks are related to different institutional frameworks and settings. However, little is talked about the challenges and different ways how these networks operate while being shaped by the different cultural and social context they work in.

Green Blue Rhine Alliance project has been established to improve the Dutch-German cooperation in the installation of ecological connection zones such as: rivers, waterways, natural areas, etc. On both sides of the border, parties operate in a different social context, planning mode and under different legal and political conditions. That is why, partners involved in the project want to work with the project in an active way to improve cooperation between German and Dutch parties. For this it is necessary that the parties get to know each other better in terms of organization, working method, powers and objectives.

Improving cross-border cooperation is also very important for more effective policy planning and better results. The project therefore focuses on strategically improving the network, strengthening the knowledge base and working on concrete projects. For example, by solving 55 otter and fishing bottlenecks, small-scale restoration measures along the Oude IJssel or further development of the floodplain landscape. The project partners aim to build a sustainable network for the protection of the Rhine in 2020. Another typical border issue is the limited cooperation on planning and management of the areas. It would be optimal that the planning of river and the ecological connections as an integrated policy would be implemented to ensure that water safety, nature management, agriculture, recreation, etc. are coordinated. On both sides of the border, however, this happens in a different planning mode and with different legislatures and political circumstances. The need for the project partners to work together is strongly present.

Therefore, the cross-border network faces the task of creating better and innovative opportunities for people, water, nature and the environment. They opt for a joint approach to concrete measures, conducting structural cooperation and strengthening the ecological network

4.1.2 Driving forces to implement the project

As it has been emphasized through the literature review part, that soft territorial cooperation initiatives progress by identifying win-win situations (Chilla et al., 2017). In order to foster the cooperation, the focus need to be on issues where involved actors share a common interest because they are embedded in the same territory. An assessment table to explain the main driving forces toward the cooperation initiative has been developed. The driving forces listed on the table have been extracted from the three types of cooperation initiatives listed on the theoretical background: strategic cooperation, implementation cooperation and instrumental cooperation.

It does not relate directly to the case-study project, but through a deductive method, while conducting the interviews it aims at to direct the discussion and shed light into the reasons for the cooperation initiative.

Driving force	***Relevance for cross-border co-operation***
Economic	PRESENT
Political influence	PRESENT
Complementarities	NOT PRESENT
Branding	NOT PRESENT
Border issues	NOT PRESENT
Ecological connection	PRESENT

Table 2. Driving forces for the implementation of the project

The table have been used to identify the main driving forces for the implementation of the Green Blue Rhine Alliance project. Most of the interviewed actors have mentioned the necessity to develop further the ecological connection in the Rhine river as the main driving force.

'One was dealing with otter habitat improvement so that the migration routes could be improved in order to be safer for the otter. The other one was improving the river Rhine as a migration route for migrating fish.'

'…we are looking for otters and try to create a cross-border ecological corridor'

'We want to use the otter to create more nature-like streams and rivers and structures which can help the otter to migrate from one place to the other. In this way we want also to create ecological connections, which is also one of the main drivers why the cooperation exists.'

Several partners within the project have been working together on the same issue even before the project got financed. Developing fish migration routes and improving the otter habitat are perceived of great importance for governmental and non-governmental organizations working on both sides of the border. Other driving forces that have been reported continuously by most actors, are the economic and political influence issue. Floodplain development is considered important for both sides of the border, but does not have the same priority in Germany as much as in the Netherlands. There's a lack of coordination among water management institutions in both sides, therefore acknowledging the

differences that do exist and trying to align approaches when it comes to water planning and management in the cross-border area, among regional levels have a considerable importance within the project.

During the literature review section, border issues related to the flow of people, goods and services across the border have been identified as one of the main drivers toward the necessity to overpass working within strict administrative boundaries, since they no longer respond to the requirements of the community. However, within the specific project this issue has not served as a driver for the cooperation initiative to take place.

4.2 Power and resources

This section aims at understanding the interaction between actors involved in the cross-border project. Hence, it describes first of all the different types of organizations involved in the project and their field of interest. Later on, the main elements that will be used to understand the network interplay within this thesis are: the resources that each of the actors possess and which make the network stronger, the degree of engagement and the level of network cohesiveness.

4.2.1 Identifying the types of actors

The cross-border network is composed of both governmental and non-governmental actors, where all of them give the same contribution when it comes to the implementation of activities. 11 interviews have been conducted with partners involved in the project. It is important to mention, that for reasons stated in the limitations section of the methodology chapter, not all actors that were considered important for the cooperation initiative, have been interviewed. The interviewed actors work in government agencies, administrators, institutes and non-governmental organizations. Their main focus is nature conservation and water management.

DUTCH ORGANIZATIONS	GERMAN ORGANIZATIONS
ARKNATUUR ONTWIKKELING[5]	BIOLOGISCHEN STATION IM KREIS WESEL[6]
VERENIGING NEDERLANDS CULTUUR LANDSCHAP[7]	NABU – Naturschutzstation Niederrhein [8]
SPORTSVISSERIJ NEDERLAND[9]	NATURSCHUTZ-ZENTRUM IM KREIS KLEVE[10]
RIJKSWATERSTAAT OOST NEDERLAND [11]	BEZIERKSREGIERUNG DÜSSELDORF[12]

[5] ARKNATUUR Development - https://www.ark.eu/

[6] The Biological Station in Wesel - http://www.bskw.de/

[7] Cultural Landscape Organizations Netherlands - http://www.nederlandscultuurlandschap.nl/

[8] Nature Station Niederrhein - https://www.nabu-naturschutzstation.de/de/

[9] Sports Fishing Netherlands - https://www.sportvisserijnederland.nl/

[10] Nature Station in Kleve - https://www.nz-kleve.de/index.php?id=30

WATERSCHAP RIJN EN IJSSEL[13]	
PROVINCE GELDERLAND[14]	

Table 3. Interviewed project organizations

Roles among organizations are divided within two main subject areas: fish migration and otter habitat, and floodplain development. While working within these two different fields they will try to understand what the main barriers are when it comes to cooperating in a cross-border setting, related mainly to different organizational, institutional and cultural differences.

Governmental bodies have financial powers also, that's why their involvement within the project was of immense importance. Their role isn't limited only on providing financial resources. They also are responsible to help getting access to higher levels of government. In Germany, due to its hierarchical nature of governance, the involvement of Bezierksregierung (District Government) Düsseldorf is important to facilitate the connection between lower and higher governmental levels. Therefore, this actor constellation, composed of both governmental and non-governmental bodies, allows involved players to enhance their capacities.

4.2.2 Resources

Resources among the actors will be described in terms of juridical mandates, financial resources, human resources and knowledge. The distribution of resources among the partners can give a general overview on how the power is distributed within the network. Power refers to the ability of certain actors to mobilize, divide and deploy resources that will influence policy outcomes of the policy arrangement (Van Eerd, Weiring and Dieperink, 2014). On the other hand, having the right resources is necessary to improve the cross-border cooperation. In this case, actors, are dependent upon each other for resources. It has been pointed out in the theoretical background, that actors in 'soft' territorial cooperation work mainly with non-statutory instruments and external funding sources.

The main financial resources coming directly for this project are external funding sources, namely the INTERREG program. Governmental bodies within the project, which do have financial powers, stated that is not always easy to cooperate with the other side of the border and to decide to invest in a common problem with their own financial resources. It will be described on another section (4.5.3), that aligning priorities and deciding in which common problem to work first, is difficult in these two border countries, especially due to the different political competencies and tasks, that regional bodies have.

> *'If we decide to do more with the ecological connections then the Bezirksregierung has to decide and say that we'll spend money on it. The other organisations don't have any money to do it. It's only Bezirksregierungs that if they say that we're going to make more space for water in combination with nature, then it will happen. If they say that there are other priorities, then it's not going to happen.'*

[11] East Netherlands Rijkswaterstaat - https://www.rijkswaterstaat.nl/

[12] The District Government of Düsseldorf - http://www.brd.nrw.de/index.jsp

[13] Waterboard Rhine and Ijssel - https://www.wrij.nl/

[14] The Province of Gelderland - https://www.gelderland.nl/

The cooperation initiative includes public and private bodies with certain decision-making powers. On the Dutch side, water board Rijn en Ijssel described itself as a public corporation with a certain autonomy. Next to this, they do have financial powers as well, since they are financed by taxes paid by citizens in the catchment area. The involvement of Rijkswaterstaat Oost Nederland is also important to ensure the alignment of objectives in the cross-border agenda with higher political agendas.

When it comes to floodplain development reconstruction, Dutch organizations have an easier access to make resources available (e.g. available land).

'The advantage in the Netherlands is that a lot of land is owned by nature-based non-governmental organizations or like the above-mentioned States Forestry Organization. This is a development of the last 30 years, where more and more land is owned by organizations who are strongly contributing to floodplain development also. On the German side, everything is private owned. So, it makes it very difficult to build something.'

The District Government of Düsseldorf (Bezirksregierung), is the governmental body from the German side involved in the project which have financial and decision-making powers to foster the cooperation process and ensure a higher legitimacy of its decisions. As it has been stated by the Bezirksregierung itself, they are mainly responsible on setting the agenda from the German side. However, when it comes to human resources they are quite limited, especially the fish department which is directly involved in the project, therefore, they find the need to work more with lower levels, such as the bio-stations:

'The fish department has a small staff and way too much workload…The nature conservation constitutional side is quite nicely organized here, so we have the Bio-Statzion which works at a lower level and they have people working with fishery, which can help us (the Bezieksrigierung) since we don't have that much of working powers and expertise.'

On the Dutch side, human resources are available as well. The two regional bodies, Rijkswaterstaat Oost Nederland and Waterboard Rijn en Ijssel, have a great expertise in terms of water management which they are willing to make available for the project. They closely work with four different non-governmental organizations to reach their goals for the project.

The last type of resource which is of high importance to develop tacit knowledge of complex systems, such as ecosystems (Bodin and Crona, 2009), has to do with knowledge and information. Within the network, there's a lack of knowledge on what organizations at the other side of the border are dealing with. However, the actors understand the necessity to get to know the actors on the other side and are working together toward getting to know each other better:

'These projects are not far away, we have the same interests but we still did not know about anything happening on the other side of the border. Just because of the border, you don't know it, because you consider it another country.'

Another important resource in terms of knowledge and information, which influence the cooperation of cross-border actors is the language. In a cross-border network language can be a barrier to hinder the cooperation process. The two countries under study, speak different languages, therefore, a third common language, such as English, is necessary to facilitate the communication. It is not widely spoken among all the partners. It has been identified as a reason to slow down the communication process. However, the partners did not consider it a serious issue, for them not to be willing to cooperate with the other side. As identified by the partners themselves, Dutch partners have

a better knowledge of English and are more flexible on communicating on a third language while German partners are a bit more reserved.

'Germans are not fond of speaking English, they are a bit shy and less confident with speaking English than Dutch parties, so I think this makes the disbalance even bigger.'

All in all, within the network, partners have different resources. Governmental actors on both sides, seem to be the ones having the biggest amount of resources available, consequently powers within the network also. Where necessary non-governmental actors complement them with human resources and knowledge. Therefore, communication among governmental and non-governmental actors within the network is of immense importance since they are both dependent upon each other. For the cross-border cooperation to succeed it all depends on the actors' willingness to make resources available and to find ways of cooperating even after the financing period for the project comes to an end. At this stage of the project development, there seems to exist a willingness to work upon follow-up ideas for the project.

4.2.3 Degree of engagement

To evaluate the degree of engagement of actors within the project, two elements have been taken into consideration. The first one relates to the level of interest that the actors have to participate in the two working groups within the project, namely, the fish and otter migration group and the floodplain development. This first criteria seems to be fulfilled by all the actors, given the fact that they all came together in this cooperation in order to tackle these two common issues. All interviewed partners showed a great willingness to be in this cooperation initiative and to contribute with all their available resources. Some of their statements have been mentioned in section 4.1.

The second criteria relate to the possibility that partners have to be engaged into the project, which is directly related to different organizational structures that exist in both countries and financial resources among partner instiutions:

'Some partners have a smaller budget, since they are involved only in a few project implementation activities, so in this way we differ.'

When it comes to the organizational structure, all interviewees have stated that the Dutch side of the border is more flexible when it comes to the interplay between governmental and non-governmental bodies. The so-called Dutch 'polder model', where many consultation bodies are involved in the decision-making process, can be clearly seen on the very elaborated water network. As described by one of the interviewees, decision-making on water-related issues is a result of a co-creation process:

'In all river basins in The Netherlands there are regional meetings every few months with policy officials, but also with the main responsible actors of the water boards or the regional Rijkswaterstaat. But in these meetings, there are also nature organizations involved together with people from the agricultural sector, drinking water companies, etc. I think it's a co-creation of the Dutch water management so they can set something on the agenda and it'll directly go to the ministry.'

The cooperation between governmental and non-governmental bodies is seen on the decision-making process as well as implementation process, ensuring in this way a high degree of engagement among all Dutch partners.

'We very easily can make appointments with waterboards here and they are very helpful and willing to cooperate with us and give their support, so it's quite easy for us. We can just meet them and say 'Oh we want to implement otter holes' and they can help us with possible locations.'

In general, in North Rhine Westphalia the implementation process is also highly decentralized. However, in terms of content development and political discussions is centrally coordinated by the Ministry of Environment. This hierarchical organizational structure, is also seen within the German partners involved in the cooperation initiative from the German side. Even though, they are all considered as equal partners, the Bezieksregierung is mainly responsible in the end to set priorities in the cross-border agenda, from the German side. At the same time, despite the willingness to be engaged within the implementation process and to contribute to the development of the project, the German non-governmental bodies face several constraints which slow down their work.

'Sometimes you can notice that it's more difficult for them as an NGO to execute the project, because their cooperation with the government is not as easy as ours… They also started to contact their waterboards about implementing the otter holes, but it's going to be way more difficult for them, because they have to contact so many different small waterboards with so many different tasks.'

National rules also are very important to comply with for German governmental bodies, and as stated from partners in both sides of the border, they do not always foster cross-border cooperation initiatives since governmental bodies on the German side have to pass through several bureaucracies to ensure their engagement within the project.

From what mentioned above there can be drawn two main conclusions when it comes to the degree of engagement within the project. When it comes to the implementation process, there's a high degree of involvement from both sides, with a few challenges posed for the German side, which can slow down the process but not make it impossible. Furthermore, all partners are equally involved in the implementation process. Disbalances are identified when it comes to the decision-making process, where the Bezieksregierung is the main body with decision-making powers from the German side and the very formal and hierarchical way of working, may pose a challenge to the engagement of non-governmental organizations.

4.2.4 Level of network cohesion

The level of cohesion within a certain network is used to understand the interplay within the network. To what extend the network 'hangs together', instead of being divided into separate subgroups. In a cross-border context, the existence of subgroups may result in 'us-and-them' attitudes among partners, which may later on hinder the cooperation process aiming at managing a common natural resource (Bodin and Crona, 2009). It has been mentioned in the analytical framework that geographical boundaries, distinguish sets of actors from others. Despite the necessity to cooperate and to work together toward a common problem, the border is still a constrain and makes the cooperation a challenge, in the case of Green Blue Rhine Alliance project. The Dutch side, due to its flexible and less hierarchical nature is more open and faces less problems to cooperate in such a context. The border from the German perspective is more visible. As pointed out by the interviewees (3, 7 and 10), the border exists and is quite recognizable. Constrains to the cross-border cooperation, related to different administrative hard boundaries become clearer especially due to bureaucracies that German governmental levels, in this case the District Government of Düsseldorf must come across in order to be able to participate in meetings on the other side of the border. This also affects lower levels

of government or other German organizations involved in the project, by making the cooperation and decision-making process slower and less flexible:

'…but they frequently say they don't have time or that they can't. For example, the German governmental authorities aren't allowed to go abroad.'

'The border exists and is quite recognizable. When I'm going to a city on the Dutch side, I have to sign papers not only from my superior but from a higher level. Even when I travel to other federal states in Germany I have to do some paperwork in order to be able to travel, so when I go to the Netherlands, the paperwork becomes even more difficult. It takes time and slows down the process.'

The cooperation within the Dutch governmental and non-governmental organizations has been described as more flexible and less hierarchical. This makes cooperation and decision-making on the Dutch side faster. When it comes to the interacting with the other side of the border, the main constrains mentioned by Dutch partners have to do with differences on how things are organized and differences in tasks and duties with their counterparts on the German side. This makes the cooperation more difficult since they cannot find the right governmental level to talk to regarding a certain issue, especially the regional level.

'In reality there is a clear border because of the differences in organization.'

'In the Netherlands at the regional level, we as waterboards, manage the entire water course and the artificial works in this water course, but in Germany it's far more fragmented. It depends on the size of the water body and the particular location. Therefore, in general it's more difficult to find the appropriate partner to speak with about certain issues.'

'That's also a border region, but we don't work that much with the German governmental or non-governmental bodies, regarding ecological or environmental issues. There is some kind of collaboration but not what we do. The collaboration exists mainly on the national level between Netherlands and Germany, like the International Rhine Commission. That's more the whole river Rhine and because I'm mainly working on the regional part of the Rijkswaterstaat, we had the wish to search for collaboration at a more regional level.'

'…all nature conservation organizations have different tasks. Therefore, it's very difficult for us to find out who's responsible for what in Germany. And, if you want to cooperate with German partners you need to know exactly whom to address the question, because in Germany if that's not your task you're not supposed to say anything about it.'

Despite a few problems that are faced due to language barriers, the cooperation between non-governmental organizations doesn't pose any kind of challenge when it comes to the communication and recognizing the problems in the project area. The main problem identified, is when it comes to interventions in practice. They do not have common tools or integrated frameworks on how to solve certain issues. This is mainly seen as a problem within the project itself, lacking a common agenda.

'…solving the otter barriers went OK. Especially identifying the otter bottlenecks... But, for example, when it comes to placing the otter holes we're not doing it together, we're just exchanging a few of experiences. We don't have a common way on where and why to place the water holes that we're placing in both sides of the border. I think if we start discussing about this, you can really feel some tension going on.'

4.3 Rules-of-the-game

The Rhine river is a natural connection within the two countries, therefore, abiding to human-made jurisdictions and administrative borders is not enough in such a context. Given the fact that hierarchical governance isn't a feasible option in such networks, co-governance should receive the majority of the attention, resulting in horizontal structures dominating the network and joint decisions being made as a result of the bargaining process.

> Governance of ecosystems is inherently difficult since both the natural environment and human societies are characterized by uncertainties, complex dynamics, natural variations and scale dependencies (Bodin and Crona, 2009, p.336).

Being able to address contemporary natural resource problems, is important to better understand how collaborative barriers can be overcome. Different actors, may they be governmental or non-governmental ones, come together to effectively deal with natural resource problems and dilemmas. The empirical research is based on findings coming from different policy frameworks supporting the cross-border cooperation in the Rhine-Waal, governance arrangements in general and the project network arrangement in particular.

4.3.1 Policy instruments to foster the cooperation initiative

In this section policy instruments which foster the cooperation between cross-border networks, will be examined. When asked about their knowledge on possible tools or policy frameworks that they use to facilitate their cooperation, most of them mentioned international (EU) regulations or national involvement in transboundary initiatives (ICPR). There are alignments between the Netherlands and NRW, when it comes to shaping policies at a national level, mainly because both territories work with common policies related to water framework directive implementation.

EU legislations tend to stimulate transboundary governance, such as the EU Floods Directive, Water Framework Directive, Birds Directive and Habitats Directive. The directives stimulate cross-border cooperation initiatives at a regional level also, by formally institutionalizing cooperation and putting performance obligations.

> *'…So, we use the WFD in order to convince/stimulate other organizations to come to our workshops, work together. In that way, yes. We refer to it as a fact in order to explain to our partners why we're doing something or why their participation is beneficial.'*

> *'Sometimes, NATURA 2000 helps us with putting cooperation obligations between North Rhine-Westphalia and the Netherlands.'*

However, the EU directives impact is limited on having a positive affect to trigger cross-border cooperation. Regardless of, common European legislations and directives, both countries work with different rules and norms at a regional level.

> *'The concentrations we find acceptable are different in Germany, so it's fairly difficult to come to an agreement on where we want to reach for instance. I think the other problem is related to those certain topics within water management. There's no clear responsible organization in Germany, so that makes it very difficult for common planning.'*

> *'On the other side, we really try to work together, but when it comes to actually complying with common rules is not so easy. It's not very easy to agree among us and we don't have some clear rules imposed by someone else to comply with, so both German and Dutch people deal with the issue of placing the otter holes on their own ways.'*

Regional instruments to foster cross-border cooperation initiatives have not been identified to a considerable extend. On the contrary, the norms and rules they work with are completely different. They are mainly cooperating in an informal way or with common agreements, especially when it comes to delicate issues related to water management.

'... because we share a common dike for example, if the dike is going to break stream upwards in Germany, even then, half of our area can go underwater, so we are looking very carefully also with their Dike Verbände and maybe we are going to restore it together even in Germany because we have different norms with the dikes. For Germany that area is not an important agricultural area. They have more important places near big cities, but for us it's quite a thing.'

However, the lack of strict norms and rules have not been identified as a constrain. Relating back to the theoretical background, cooperation initiatives in 'soft' spaces can be orchestrated and managed without very strict directives and hard rules, but mainly through strategic programs and plans.

'The Dutch German working group on high water does have its own policy or strategies. It's not comparable with a directive on the EU level… That doesn't have to be a problem because cross-border cooperation sometimes goes quite well without very strict directive.'

4.3.2 Governance arrangements

The case of River Basin governance represents an interesting case, since hydrological boundaries prevail over political ones. A number of policy fields are included in the decision-making process, for both, water and land management, where a number of responsible authorities and other stakeholders are responsible for 'making things happen in real situations'. Regional and local authorities play a decisive role in establishing cross-border cooperation in smaller shared river systems, therefore the multi-level governmental arrangements will be analyzed at this level.

Multi-level governance arrangements on the Dutch side. Regarding the Green Blue Rhine Alliance project there are several governmental bodies included which have certain functions in water management. They vary from a more national level to a regional and provincial one. Rijkswaterstaat is responsible for the outer dike area, managing the main rivers like the Rhine and the Waal. It's the supreme state authority for water management and has political, executive, monitoring and coordinating powers. It is divided into 7 regional organizational units, where Rijkswaterstaat Oost Nederland is one of the partners within the project and its work mainly consists on the maintenance of the big rivers in the Eastern part of the Netherlands. At a regional level, responsibilities are shared with waterboards as well. Waterschap Rijn en Ijssel is a partner within the cooperation, dealing mainly with the inner dike area which is also the inhabited side of the dike area, therefore, they have to work toward flood prevention also. Their work mainly consists on managing small waterbodies; taking care of the water quality in order for the fish to move easier and multiply; working on the ecological restoration of many little rivers and streams. Waterbodies, work closely with the provinces by setting goals together (Interview 4[15]). Provinces act as supervising authorities over the water boards.

Non-governmental bodies working on nature conservation and water management are responsible to push forward the cooperation (since the project coordinator is a non-governmental body from the Dutch side) and intervene with their expertise in certain areas. As mentioned by the biggest part of the interviewees in both, the German and Dutch side, the cooperation within governmental and non-

[15] Waterschap Rijn en Ijssel

governmental bodies in the Netherlands is more horizontal and flexible, with less bureaucratic procedures.

Multi-level governance arrangements in North Rhine-Westphalia. On the German side the highest governmental level, which has been involved in the project mainly during the initial period, when funding for the project had to be allocated, is the 'Ministry for Climate protection, Agriculture, Nature protection and Consumer protection of the Land North Rhine-Westphalia', exerting legal and technical control powers. However, they are not a partner within the project. The main governmental body from the German side is the *Bezirksregierungen Düsseldorf* (District Government of Düsseldorf), where mainly the fishery department is included within the cooperation initiative. The fishery department of the District government of Düsseldorf is required to work closely with the respective experts at LANUV institute. Even though, the latter is not a partner within the network, due to institutional arrangements, the District Government of Düsseldorf have to consult their experts for certain issues and measures (Interview 7[16]). Responsibilities for the water management in the NRW, are way more fragmented than in the Netherlands. There are 53 subordinate water agencies which have different tasks and expertise within water management, making the coordination related to water management more complex. They have no political power but have the main responsibility in terms of dike maintenance, dike control and flood alleviation. The *Kreis* (county) level is an important an important governmental level also. Kreis Kleve and Wesel are involved in the project through their nature conservation organizations and bio-stations whose work is monitored by the District Government. The *Kommunen* (municipality) level, is the lowest level within the hierarchical water management umbrella of institutions in the German side. However, within the project this level of government is not involved in a direct way.

Transboundary governmental arrangements. Governmental arrangements for transboundary water issues, between a Federal state and a Unitary one is not an easy task. At a regional level, tasks for policy formulation and implementation in Germany are fragmented among 5 governmental levels (Bundesebene, Landesebene, Bezirksregierungen, Kreise and Kommunen). In the Netherlands also, as mentioned above, there are several institutional levels working on the water sector. Nevertheless, at a regional level, mainly the waterboards are accountable for regional water policy formulation and implementation. There's no counterpart of waterboards in Germany where the responsibilities on water policy formulation are on a higher level (district government and ministry) than in the Netherlands.

> *'From my experience the Dutch has a more concentrated approach with Rijkswaterstaat and waterboards. In the German side we are a bit more spread, including all levels from the communal one, the Bezieksregierung, the ministry level. So it's divided in different levels and some aspects are more concentrated in some levels and some in others. Even with the whole Bundesrepublic level, they have certain responsibilities with the Rhine. So that makes it probably more difficult to align all aspects on the German side and to get approval for certain implementations regarding the project.'*

> *'…apart from that there isn't an integrative Germany water authority or water management organization like there is in The Netherlands. Maybe the Netherlands are special in that because of our long fight against water. For us that's quite a handicap in general.'*

The waterboard, recognizes the District Government of Düsseldorf as an important, but not easily reachable level of government, for them to cooperate with. It has also been mentioned from governmental and non-governmental bodies that in German priority is given to national rules and

[16] Bezieksregierung Dusseldorf

policy frameworks. Therefore, if lower levels of government are not requested to cooperate by higher levels of government, they do not cooperate. In the Netherlands, national rules and laws have their priority also. However, as described, regional governmental bodies have a high level of autonomy. In addition, the necessity to cooperate and try to reach to certain compromises with other border regions is more obvious in the Netherlands, due to its downstream conditions.

These structural differences that can be found among the two different sides of the border, lead to communication obstacles. Interviewed actors had difficulties to appoint the right contact person across the border because of the different institutional systems.

4.3.3 Exploitation of international venues

The previous sections have been focused on analyzing the cross-border cooperation initiative in terms of policy frameworks and governmental arrangements. In particular, describing key actors involved in the project, their tasks and challenges that they face while trying to cooperate on a common issue, in a context shaped by differences in their institutional and legal frameworks. It is clear that the water sector is quite fragmented, shaped by different governmental hierarchies which vary in Germany and the Netherlands. In addition to this, regional governmental institutions in both countries have different roles, duties and mandates. Despite the differences, all interviewed actors stated that they are willing to be part of cross-border cooperation initiatives and try to understand working cultures and institutional arrangements on the respective side of the border. This section, will explore additional venues, characterized as governance or inter-organisational networks, which are trying to overpass cross-border challenges and link the different German and Dutch institutional structures (Renner and Meijierink, 2015).

At a regional level, *Euregio Rhine-Waal* is a long-standing cross-border institution, and the cooperation initiatives established in the area take advantage from this history of cross-border trust building and networks. The European funding sources – mainly the INTERREG programme – play an immense role in catalyzing the cross-border efforts. This program aims at reinforcing the economic, social and regional cooperation. Cooperation leads to new opportunities for border regions and coordination of policy and investments. All the interviewed partners have recognized the establishment of Euregio Rhine-Waal as an important element to foster cooperation initiatives. When asked about possible hard rules that they might have to comply with before and during the funding phase, the interviewees mainly appreciated and were grateful for the help that they did get from the institution. However, they identified that the rules dictated by them, did put several constrains on choosing the partners for the project:

> *'In the beginning while choosing the partners was done more in a pragmatic way, because of the money content everyone had to contribute. We could have had some other partners involved as well. For instance we have this water management verbände, they would be interested as well but was complicated to include them and there was a money problem. Universities as well were interested but again was impossible. I think it's not an optimal way of choosing partners for the project but mainly dictated from EU regulations related to funding this project.'*

Other transboundary cooperation structures, within the Netherlands and NRW will be listed above. Actors within the project, but not only, can use such additional venues to foster their cooperation, find their respective counterparts better and together try to align ideas and measures in joint meetings.

TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION STRUCTURES	NETHERLANDS	NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA
1. THE PERMANENT BORDER WATERS COMMISSION **(PBWC)**	Water boards Provinces Regional representatives of Rijkswaterstaat	Bezirksregierungen; Kreise Stadte Wasserverbanden Landesamt für Umwelt, Natur und Verbruachersschutz NRW
2. THE DUTCH-GERMAN WORKING GROUP ON HIGH WATER	Water board Rivierenland Water board Rijn en IJssel Rijkswaterstaat Union of Dutch River Municipalities (VNR)	District Government Düsseldorf State Institute of Environment North Rhine-Westphalia Municipality (Kreis) Cleve Association for flood protection and waters in North Rhine-Westphalia Flood Centre Köln
3. ICPR **INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF RHINE**	The Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment The Ministry of Foreign Affairs	The Ministry of environment, nature conservation and nuclear safety The Ministry of transport, building and housing The Ministry of foreign affairs German states in the Rhine basin

Table 4. Additional venues fostering cross-border cooperation[17]

4.4 Substances

Discourse shaping the cross-border cooperation in both sides will be discussed in this section, as the last component to identify differences between the two sides of the border. Setting a cross-border territorial agenda is important for a cooperation network. However, they do face several constrains to implement a common agenda, due to diverse institutional and organizational set-up and cultural differences. The main tools used to analyze discourses important for the cross. Border cooperation will be: policy discussions, priorities influenced by downstream-upstream conditions and the level of negotiation among interested partners and those who have resources and get to steer towards certain issues and goals.

4.5.1 Policy discourses

Findings from the empirical research show that water policy issues in the Dutch-German cross-border context, do not face differences only due to different institutional and organizational set-ups, but also, they face diverse ambition levels and discourses related to water management. Water

[17] See: HSGR 3.3 report transboundary aspects of high water in the Meuse and Rhine catchment, http://repository.ubn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/2066/131820/131820.pdf

management in the Netherlands is mostly concerned with high water and safety, while all other interests come second (Van Eerd, Weiring and Dieperink, 2014). When asked about main water management issues in the Dutch side, interviewees focused mostly on issues related to flood risks. As mentioned above, while identifying the resources that stakeholders within the area have, in the Netherlands public nature-based organizations own land, which is later on used for floodplain development. Creating more space for rivers in NRW, is mainly focused on river restoration and ecology. This clearly shows different levels of risk perception. Being more alerted on water issues and other related sectors, the Dutch has been identified as having a more proactive approach to certain problems. On the other side, having less experience with water management and sectoral integration on water-related issues, the German partners are described as having a more reactive approach.

> *'We don't see water in such an integrated way. We deal with for instance, how we can get better water supply, water conditions etc. Human have done much drainage systems within the region. It has affected the environment and we're aware of that but have not been able to prevent it. Now we want to find possible remedies and work toward nature conservation. We're in a phase of preparation and the Dutch side knows what they want to do in order to prevent future damages.' (D.C., NABU)*

The other policy discourse related to differences in water management in the two countries, is related to the fragmented (NRW) and comprehensive (the Netherlands) approach concerning the water sector. Water management in the Netherlands tends to be an inclusive sector, going hand and being taken into consideration in other sectors as well. In NRW institutions working on issues related to planning, environmental protection, water management, agriculture, are not used to cooperate more than defined planning procedures (Moss, 2004). The agricultural sector tends to have a big impact in the policy discourse in NRW:

> *'In Germany there's a very strong agricultural focus on policies, so the nature conservation there might be even more difficult than it actually is in the Netherlands.'*

4.5.2 Priorities influenced by upstream-downstream condition

Asymmetries due to upstream-downstream conditions, influence the relationship in the cross-border cooperation initiative while setting priorities and defining issues in both sides of the border. There is a clear distinction when it comes to aligning flood and water quality issues, leading to conflicting interests, goals, etc. Measures taken in NRW affect the Netherlands and the other way around, therefore there's a strong necessity for consensus-building among actors.

> *'We have a few cases where we tried to restore the streams in a more natural fashion which sometimes means that you put in more objects within the water course, it sometimes means that you also increase water levels at higher discharges, etc. What then happens immediately is that German farmers or the German authorities call us. But if you want to address the water quality issues for instance due to high levels of emission from Germany then it becomes far more complicated to find a solution.'*

Within the project itself issues related to floodplain development are important. However, due to their experiences, resources and different legal frameworks that actors in the adjacent regions have, the cooperation becomes difficult. It is clear that the Dutch people are more experienced and have more resources when it comes to floodplain development, as it's one of their number one priorities in the cross-border agenda.

'We do a lot of work and new projects on the Water Framework Directive, related to floodplain development. On the German side of the border, despite the territorial proximity, there isn't happening too much related to this issue.'

'The Dutch people are more aware of the risk of flood events, and that's why they do more on floodplain development. In Germany there's one big problem at least up to December, if you would take near the river, for example there's much gravel and gravel pit stuff…It always counts as mining, like coal or metal stuff and that's why it's difficult for any natural reserve organization to do anything near the floodplains.'

To be mentioned also, is the stage of development of the water management sector resulting from different priorities that the water sector has in national policies.

'We don't see water in such an integrated way. We deal with for instance, how we can get better water supply, water conditions, etc. Humans have done much drainage systems within the region. It has affected the environment and we're aware of that but have not been able to prevent it. Now we want to find possible remedies and work toward nature conservation. We're in a phase of preparation and the Dutch side knows what they want to do in order to prevent future damages.'

4.5.3 Negotiations

The upstream-downstream relationship presents an element of dependence for the downstream, regional Dutch water authorities, which has resulted in a more active role in cross-border cooperation on the Dutch side. While working toward common issues and setting priorities on the cross-border agenda, the Dutch side has been described by the German partners as easier to communicate with, more relaxed and more flexible on making compromises (Interview 3, 6 and 7). On the other hand, Dutch partners find difficulties to make joint arrangements with the German governmental bodies:

'The people immediately on the other side of the border are very keen on preventing increased flood risk coming from high groundwater levels due to the measures we take, but there seems to be far less evenness to improve the water quality because it flows down to The Netherlands anyway.'

This relates back, to what have been stated in the analytical framework, where downstream partners have been described as the ones showing the biggest interest and willingness to foster the cooperation. Therefore, they are the ones who are most of the time taking measures to balance the distributions of water-related interests by negotiating. Within the project network itself, negotiation among partners doesn't seem to be at a high level. However, most of the interviewees have considered the lack of a common agenda within the project as a main reason why they are not closely working together on achieving common objectives.

'There's a problem on finding a common objective. Even between partners from the same country, mainly due to a lack of general agenda within the particular project. We inserted in this working package the NABU and they have a particular research question which they inserted. We spent quite a lot of time discussing with each other what would be the general objective of our working package. So, we each have specific objectives but what is the general framework...'

Within the literature review, for a cross-border cooperation initiative to be sustainable in the long-term, linking the interventions proposed within their project agenda with a wider strategic agenda which align priorities from both countries, is necessary. This, requires the right levels of government to

cooperate together in both countries and identify objectives in higher level agendas. An important governance problem when it comes to the coordination and cooperation of Dutch and German counterparts is called the 'zipper problem' which deals with differences in responsible political levels. As it has mentioned in the previous sections, it is difficult for regional waterboards in the Netherlands to find their counterparts in Germany, especially due to the different political competencies and tasks. The same happens at higher levels of governance, where in the Netherlands the national government is primarily accountable for the water policy. This responsibility in Germany is shifted to the Länder. The inability to find the right negotiation partner to discuss the coordination, potential problems, future conflicts, etc., is a challenge to the cooperation process.

'I also have the impression that at the level of civil servants which we are, I think we have a bit more freedom to negotiate than the German counterparts have.'

'In Germany it's the top boss or top politician person who decides.'

4.6 Institutional and cultural differences

Differences in culture, language barriers, tools of communication with governmental actors, organizational structure, different tasks, responsibilities and mandates, etc., are reportedly a barrier for the cross-border project implementation. Despite, the proximity and openness of social networks in adjacent regions, mentality and working practices differ. The three main elements which has been used above to analyze the cross-border cooperation, will be used to derive from them institutional and cultural barriers influencing the network.

Institutional differences have to do with policy frameworks and the organizational structure within respective countries. It is primarily and extensively analyzed within the first pillar of the analytical framework, namely, rules-of-the-game. The second pillar has also been used to gain further understanding in terms of power and the level of engagement. The third pillar has been used in a more indirect way.

There is an imbalance in the policy competencies of the cross-border area's regions, making in this way the cross-border governance complex. It requires a number of agreements between many institutional actors, with different policy competences. When it comes to water management, in the Dutch side has a more concentrated approach with their waterboards which have a wide range of competencies, involving decision-making powers. It is not the same in the German side. This has been confirmed by both Dutch and German regional bodies.

'Within Germany we divide responsibilities and duties on fishery within different levels, on the communal level, on the Bezieksregierung level and on the ministerial level. I'm responsible on the regional level which is also the Bezieksregierung. However, we have to consult everything with the experts from the LANUV as well. I'm a fishery expert myself, but nevertheless, due to institutional arrangements I have to ask people from LANUV for certain aspects.' (N.S., Bezirksregierung Düsseldorf)

From what mentioned above it can also be concluded that a main institutional difference challenging the cooperation is that **there is no direct connection between governmental institutions from both sides.** Responsibilities in Germany are at a higher level than in the Netherlands, where waterboards work in an independent and autonomous way. Institutional discrepancies make puts a challenge to Dutch and German counterparts to find each other.

'Yes, I also have the impression that at the level of civil servants which we are, I think we have a bit more freedom to negotiate than the German counterparts have.'

Disparity in political commitment across different water governance levels in the cross-border area. In many respects, the Dutch side of the border seems to be willing to push more forward the cooperation process. This might be also, because the Dutch highest governmental level on water-related issues, Rijkswaterstaat, is also involved within the project. Furthermore, it has been mentioned that the upstream-downstream relationships introduce an element of asymmetry and dependence. The dependence lies mainly on the downstream partners, regional Dutch water authorities, resulting in a more active role in cross-border cooperation on the Dutch side. In Southeast Netherlands, regional water bodies and the regional Rijkswaterstaat are partners in the project and are fully committed on helping the cross-border cooperation. North Rhine-Westphalia indicated its political commitment on the project at the onset of collaboration but could be re-engaged. This causes problems, because when it comes to decision-making for bigger issues the District Government of Düsseldorf itself doesn't have full power.

'So the people we speak with are usually from the NABU which are very nice and smart people but they don't actually have authority. They're realistic and I understand that and I share their ideals but they are not a governmental organization.'

'I'm still looking for the responsible bodies in Germany, who's deciding upon the measures. Because there are some non-governmental organizations who are taking a few measures, but I guess the responsibility have to be on governmental organizations.'

Different organizational structure plays an important role on the actors' interplay within the network. As mentioned above the water system in the Netherlands is organized in a more concentrated way on the regional level, where competences are clearly divided among waterboards and the regional Rijkswaterstaat. In the federal state of North Rhine Westphalia, there are several small organizations with small tasks which share competences on water issues. However, they don't have decision making powers and due to the very hierarchical way of how things are organized in Germany they do not have a continuous interaction with higher governmental bodies.

'Each organization though has different small tasks. This is a little bit of a problem, because the most important organizations on the German side do not have integrated tasks, but only a few special tasks.'

'It's the size and tasks of certain organizations that make it difficult. For instance, waterboards in the Netherlands are much bigger than their counterpart in Germany and have much more tasks. So not having the same tasks and competencies makes the work more difficult and challenging. On paper they are the same, but in reality, it's not.'

Within the cooperation initiative itself, it has been stated that the departments from the District Government Düsseldorf should work more together across sectors. However, this is a finding associate only to this cooperation initiative and the coordination of several sectoral policies in NRW cannot be generalized.

'Even though, at the moment we're more focused on the fish department, we should include other departments as well such as the water management. That would be a big step from the German side, to integrate other sectors as well.'

Despite the fact that both countries are required to cooperate in water related issues they both operate with **different legal requirements.** It has been mentioned by interviewee 4, 8 and 10 that there are different norms and rules when it comes to water quality.

Tools to support cross-border cooperation. All the partners that have been interviewed came to a general conclusion that none of the organizational structures in either country, offer exact tools to support the cross-border cooperation initiatives. However, in some ways the Dutch institutional structure is at least not hindering the cooperation. It has been stated that the quick, flexible, heterarchical and informal nature that characterize governmental structures in the Netherlands is beneficial for cross-border cooperation. On the other hand, they are faced with slow, hierarchical and formal governmental structures on the German side. All German partners, involving the governmental bodies itself have identified the hierarchical structure in Germany as an element which is slowing down the cooperation process.

Different policy mindsets/discourses. In the Netherlands, there's a clear focus on safety and high-water issues, which is clearly reflected within the cross-border cooperation network. In the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the emergency to work on high water issues is also present, even though at a lower level. On the hand, in North Rhine-Westphalia there's a focus on a balancing of interests among stakeholders from different sectors. There's a strong political stance on agricultural issues and agricultural organizations have a say on water management issues.

Despite the identified differences among policy and governmental arrangements in both countries they are not necessarily harming and hampering the cooperation process. Sometimes they can stimulate it, especially when actors from both countries find interdependencies and complementarities among each other. Dutch partners have more experience on floods and water management, while the German partners are more focused on ecosystem management.

Cultural differences are shaped by the different social interactions that exist among the partners within the network, different ways how they perceive and define problems and different policy discourses. It has to be mentioned beforehand, that despite the differences shaped by different cultural contexts, the actors share a high level of tolerance and understanding while working with each other. this is mainly because their level of interest on understanding partners on the other side of the border is relatively high.

Differences in the way how they perceive different cross-border problems, mainly related to water management. When asked about priorities on the cross-border water management issues, partners seemed to define similar problems, mainly related to water quality, however the way how they dealt with them was different. The main difference which has been identified was during the floodplain development workshop, where Dutch partners clearly have more resources available to work on floodplain development, because they put a big importance on such issues.

'This is a development of the last 30 years, where more and more land is owned by organizations who are strongly contributing to floodplain development also. On the German side, everything is private owned. So, it makes it very difficult to build something.'

When asked about main water management issues in the Dutch side, interviewees focused mostly on issues related to flood risks. Creating more space for rivers in NRW, is mainly focused on river restoration and ecology. This clearly shows different levels of risk perception.

Different attitudes on approaching a problem, which clearly identify different cultural settings between both countries, have to do with the proactive and reactive nature among Dutch and German partners respectively.

'On the Dutch side they are more flexible and deal much more with the idea of nature development, where are the problems, what should we do to not let them happen. They are more

proactive. On the German side they are more reactive. They don't think much about the future and are a bit more passive than the Dutch side.'

Language barriers will always be an obstacle while working in cross-border areas, however, it cannot be considered as a factor which can stop the cooperation process. It is of course, more difficult to work on a certain issue without being able to speak your primarily language, but most of the interviewed actors agreed that this problem can be overpassed.

'Not everybody manages to understand perfectly what the others are talking about. English is often used as the main language to communicate among us during workshops. It's a challenge, but it can be overpassed.'

Different working cultures: German actors within the cooperation initiative are trying to work together and coordinate their actions, however, they seem to be a bit limited due to their strong structure of hierarchy, which also influences the communication within the network. This strong hierarchical working culture, seem to be slowing down the cooperation process, due to several obstacles that non-governmental bodies have to pass in order to reach governmental bodies on the German side. As discussed above, the Dutch system is more heterarchical, allowing an easier access and a more flexible cooperation with governmental bodies.

'A difference between Dutch and German organizations is the ability to get an easy access to policy makers. A challenge is getting access to policy makers on the German side. But the German culture is more hierarchical and formal. It's easier to contact Dutch governmental bodies. I can directly get in touch with the Province of Gelderland by calling them. In Germany, I have to make quite a long way to get through the governmental actor that I want to contact.'

Dutch partners work in a more pragmatic way than Germans. They can easily adopt if the reality differs from what have been stated in the plan. German partners are less flexible on changing their working methods. It doesn't mean that one working culture is better than the other, these differences on the way how they work can influence the results.

'Important is that we all want to learn from each other regarding water management. The problem is that some organizations (on the German side) are not very flexible on changing their main duties, targets and goals'

'…in the Netherlands, we have the habit of not entirely working up a project in detail before we start it. We see what challenges rise while working and that's when we decide what we're going to do. In Germany it's not like this, it's the other way around.'

Different tools of communication with governmental institutions. Communication with governmental actors seem to be more difficult in the German side. This due to bureaucracies that the hierarchical governmental structure represents. In the Netherlands, the communication with governmental actors have been stated to be more flexible and less time consuming.

'You can just call people from the Dutch governmental side and tell them what's going on and ask for them to attend. In Germany you have to send an official letter and address it to a specific person. If the person is not available to come, you can ask their colleague. But the former person cannot just forward the letter, so you have to write a new letter, address it to this new person and this just takes way too long.'

'On the German side is way more formal, even just contacting them and ensuring their participation in workshops. We're not only facing a different kind of organization and how things are organized there, but also different kind of attitudes.'

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions of the empirical research

The main question driving this study has been to explore different institutional and cultural barriers which are posing a challenge to cross-border cooperation networks. These two barriers has been analyzed by taking into account three important elements in cross-border networks: the rules that they are based upon, the power relations within the networks which are strongly influences by the availability of resources and the discourses among actors.

- **What are the 'rules-of-the-game' upon which the relational network cooperates?**

Starting with the rules which directly and indirectly shape the interplay within the network. Both systems, the Dutch and German, are to some extends influenced by European guidelines. However, from what has been obvious in this thesis findings, they are mainly committed to their national laws. It has been mentioned in the theoretical background, while describing the influence of the EU in 'soft' territorial cooperation areas, that it has an extensive influence on cross-border cooperation networks, especially on those sectors which are strongly influenced by international legislation in terms of laws and agreements. The empirical research focused on water related issues between cross-border partners in the GBRA project. Two important EU directives, such as WFD and FD, have a strong influence on national laws and are reflected there. However, when it comes to the more regional and local level, where cross-border cooperation is happening, the influence is quite small. It has been mentioned by the interviewees that they use these directives mainly to trigger cooperation and use them in to explain the reasons behind what they are doing. Regardless of, common European legislations and directives, both countries work with different rules and norms at a regional level.

Although, there are no binding laws to ensure the cooperation of actors across national border, several agreements have been made aiming to achieve cross-border cooperation on water management issues. Within the network itself, despite the challenge of working with different norms and rules, they all stated a willingness to work together on common issues and get to know each other better. Another challenge that has been stated is the difficulty of working with cross-border water management issues without having a common background. Countries have to concentrate on other national responsibilities which are required by law. Taking into consideration that within the network there are many governmental actors, their lack of availability to give their contribution in the project because of other national priorities, hinders the cooperation process.

- **To what extend do different organizational arrangements in both countries influence the interplay within the network?**

Within the network, both sides of the country are marked by different organizational structures, with different tasks, responsibilities and mandates. The first challenge, mentioned by almost all the interviewed partners have to do with the fact that it is difficult for them to find the right counterpart to talk to regarding water management issues. The Dutch waterboards, which are responsible for regional water policy formulation and implementation, do not have a counterpart in the German area of study (NRW). Responsibilities on water policy formulation are on a higher level IN Germany (district government and ministry) than in the Netherlands.

Another issue, related again to the organizational structures in both countries, identifies a fragmented water management system in Germany and a comprehensive water management system in the Netherlands. It has been argued that these two different kinds of water management systems slow down the cooperation process, especially during the implementation phase. While in the Netherlands, most water related regional issues can be solved by contacting the waterboards, in the state of NRW in Germany, the responsibilities on water management are divided among different small organizations with different tasks.

The third issue that has arisen while trying to understand the interplay within the network, due to different organizational structures, has to do with the hierarchical and formalized organizational system in Germany and the heterarchical and less formal system in the Netherlands. While being asked about the different tools that they use to communicate with governmental bodies in both countries, Dutch partners seemed to have a very informal way of communication. Non-governmental actors would use phone calls to communicate with governmental actors in order to ensure their participation in workshops. On the other side of the border hasn't been concluded the same. On the contrary, governmental bodies had to be reached through formal letters addressed to the specific person that they wanted to participate in their workshop. Non-governmental partners involved in the network stated that they had to make sure at least one month before to invite German governmental bodies in meetings. The same thing wasn't observed with Dutch governmental bodies.

- **How is the alignment of interests perceived between relational actors in both sides of the border?**

Different interests among both sides of the border have been extracted by analyzing policy discourses and the priorities on territorial agenda setting shaped by the upstream-downstream conditions. The upstream-downstream relationship influences the cross-border cooperation initiative on water management issues, since it presents an element of asymmetry and dependence for the downstream water authorities. The Dutch partners have clearly a more active role, when it comes to issues related to floodplain development or water quality. In the Netherlands, there's a clear focus on safety and high-water issues, which is clearly reflected within the cross-border cooperation network. In the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the emergency to work on high water issues is also present, even though at a lower level. On the hand, in North Rhine-Westphalia there's a focus on a balancing of interests among stakeholders from different sectors. There's a strong political stance on agricultural issues and agricultural organizations have a say on water management issues. These two different approaches on water issues, are considered to create a possible discrepancy which can affect negatively the cooperation process. However, as mentioned above the upstream-downstream relation does not cause only asymmetries but also dependencies among partners. Governmental and non-governmental bodies within the cooperation initiative are aware of the necessity to cooperate and get to know each other better, not only in terms of this project but also other future cooperation initiatives. If nothing at all, the interviewees, stated that recognizing each other concepts, policy discourses and working mindsets and find possible ways how they overlap can stimulate the cooperation.

- **How does the distribution of resources affect the interplay within the network?**

Some actors within the network arrangement are more active than others. According to the empirical research findings, this is directly related to resources that actors poses. Resources that have been identified by the analytical actors are: juridical mandates, financial resources, human resources and knowledge. Another resource that have been identified by actors is time. Time has been considered as an important factor that is putting restrictions to certain actors to fully engage within the

cooperation initiative. In terms of financial resources, the cooperation initiative is financed by the Interreg Program. Some organizations have more financial resources than some others. This is done in accordance to the what they are responsible on implementing in terms of the project. However, this is a strong indicator restricting the level of engagement of some organizations,

Juridical mandates are mainly distributed among governmental bodies within the project. To a certain extend this influence the interplay within the network and power positions. In Germany, the Bezirksregierung has decision-making powers which can be used to foster the cooperation process and ensure a higher legitimacy of its decisions. Due to the hierarchical structure of government in Germany, decision-making powers are concentrated on the higher levels of government. The Netherlands has a more governance-oriented public water sector involving all levels of government and other interested stakeholders on the decision-making process. Even though, not all Dutch partners possess juridical mandates, the interaction among governmental and non-governmental bodies is considered to be more vibrant.

Knowledge is another important resource within the network. In a cross-border network the availability of knowledge and information becomes even more important for the cooperation to foster. As stated by the interviewees, there's a lack of knowledge and information on knowing how the other side of the border works with similar issues. Language is also important in a cross-border context, among countries which do not speak the same language. The lack of not being able to speak a third common language such as English, has been considered as a constrain but not something that cannot be worked with. Dutch partners seem to be more flexible on communicating in English, while the German ones seem to be more laid-back and less willing to communicate in another language. This issue has been considered as a problem to participate in common meetings and workshops.

Based on this explanatory analysis I get back to the main research question where several institutional and cultural barriers challenging the cooperation process can be concluded. Institutional differences include:

- Imbalance in the policy competencies;
- There is no direct connection between governmental institutions from both sides;
- Legal requirements;
- Organizational structure, shaping the interplay among governmental and non-governmental bodies
- An imbalance in political commitment across the different water governance levels in the cross-border area;
- Tools to support cross-border cooperation;
- Different policy models involved in the decision-making process.

Cultural differences influencing the interplay within the network are stated above:

- Different views regarding problems and solutions related to water management issues;
- Language barriers;
- Working cultures – formal vs informal; hierarchical vs heterarchical;
- Different tools/cultures of communicating with governmental institutions
- Upstream vs downstream mindset on policy discourses and perceiving priorities

Because of these differences it can be hard to decide upon common approaches and joint solutions, influencing in this way compromises that can be made among actors coming from both sides of the border. Constant mutual understanding and communication can help cross-border cooperation to be more effective. However, joint policy making at the moment seems to be a difficult issue, unless EU influences on water management at a regional level increases, making the

countries operate within same legislative frameworks. Based on the findings, such hard measures are difficult to reach and in a 'soft' territorial cooperation context it can be dealt with common agreements and strategies, as long as there is a high degree of interests and involvement of actors, on working with common issues.

5.2 Recommendations

In this section the given recommendations will be drawn upon the empirical research findings related to improving cross-border cooperation networks and recommendations for further research.

Recommendations related to the empirical research. It is clear that the actual national organizational structure in both countries, isn't really cross-border cooperation friendly. There are still too many obstacles to pass. Therefore, relational networks in cross-border contexts should make use of additional venues (international cross-border institutions), in order to be able to find each other better and where possible align approaches in decision-making.

In addition to this, in a context where national rules and laws define the level of cooperation and the involvement of governmental actors, might be beneficial if governmental actors at higher levels which have real decision-making powers (ministers), would identify the importance of cross-border water management and push forward to exchange experiences, data, contacts, etc., across the border. At the present situation there are no clear laws which require such a level of interaction. This would be a first step in order to understand the institutional structure and consequently be able to communicate with each other better. One of the main findings from the empirical research was the fact that most actors were not aware of their counterpart on the other side of the border, creating in this way doubts and obstacles in terms of communication. Furthermore, the international and national law shouldn't only state that border countries need to cooperate on water-related issues, they also need to specify the way how this cooperation can be done.

Recommendations for further research. The thesis has been limited in time, therefore, a full approach to European and national legal backgrounds to understand profoundly with what kind of tools do they support cross-border networks, has not been reached. Documents that have been used for previous similar topics have been consulted and later on the interviewees have been asked about their relevance. However, a further study on European and national rules/laws would be beneficial regarding future cross-border water management issues.

Even though the empirical research is based on a considerable number of interviews, including most of the governmental and non-governmental bodies involved in the cooperation process, there are still a few more actors which are considered to be important for this research. Actors from cross-border institutions (e.g. Euregio Rhine Waal) have not been included in the empirical research. Their insights on cross-border cooperation would have been of immense importance to understand what kind of additional tools do they offer to these relational actors to foster their cooperation and overpass institutional and cultural barriers.

Last but not least, as mentioned on the limitations sector on the methodology chapter, focusing on one case study makes it difficult to make further generalizations, despite the fact that complementary methods have been used (e.g. results from interviews have been complemented with a thorough primary and secondary data analysis of documents). Findings from this case-study can be compared or transferred to other similar case-studies in border regions, dealing with transboundary water issues.

6 REFLECTIONS

6.1 Reflecting back on theories of 'soft' territorial cooperation

Theories used in this thesis refer to the recently developed notion of 'soft' territorial cooperation areas, which has been considered as a strategic component to address complex situation that the cooperation in such areas poses to governmental and non-governmental actors, operating in overlapping areas of interest which overpass national boundaries, but within the already existing institutional setting. Different institutional perspectives that challenge the cooperation in soft spaces, has been analysed previously. This thesis, apart from describing the institutional differences happening in the chosen cross-border area, tried to explain another softer component, but which strongly affects the cooperation in such spaces, namely, the cultural differences.

From an institutional point of view, indirectly related to the cultural one as well, hierarchical forms of policy-making have been considered to be less efficient when confronted to interconnected influences at different levels of governance, which shape the social, economic and ecological environment of relational communities. There are two main reasons, why hierarchical forms of governance have been opposed while analyzing 'soft' territorial cooperation areas. The first one has to do with the Hierarchical form of governance has mainly been opposed, while analyzing 'soft' territorial cooperation areas. The first one, has to do with a hesitant approach from sectoral authorities to transfer authority and power to coordinating bodies while operating in a transboundary context. Findings from the empirical research support this statement as well. The main challenge within the GBRA project network, that has been described in a repetitive way from most of the interviewees have to do with the hierarchical way on how the German institutions have to cooperate. Although, this doesn't necessarily stop the cooperation process, it does slow down the decision-making and implementation process. Secondly, and which is also supported by the findings in this research, is the difficulty of managing sectoral interdependencies while working with hierarchical structures of government.

Another issue that the author is able to reflect upon while comparing the research findings with the theories upon which the research was based, is the idea that 'soft' territorial cooperation allows actors to identify the most relevant issues and partners to work with (Chilla et al., 2017). It is true that actors deciding to cooperate in such areas, work upon common issues affecting their own interests. However, despite their willingness to cooperate, they find obstacles and constrains to include all actors while applying for funds. This because international institutions working with European regulations, such as the Euregio-s, pose some hard rules to cross-border network in order for their project to be financed. This reflects back on the controversial 'soft' and 'hard' nature that the EU has toward 'soft' territorial cooperation areas.

At the same time, it has been mentioned that there are three types of cooperation upon which 'soft' territorial cooperation is based. The instrumental cooperation, relates to the desire of transboundary networks to gain preferential access to EU funding. The GBRA network has been influenced by financing rules posed by INTERREG program and Euregio Rhine Waal. Therefore, the concept of relational networks and communities of intent might be questioned since the network wasn't genuinely set-up, but it was done in a more pragmatic way. This raises questions to the flexible and non-statutory nature of 'soft' territorial cooperation networks.

However, it is true that working in such less formal contexts, aims to add to hard-nosed bargaining policies, discussions aiming at consensus-seeking. From the GBRA project experience, working in such context had an immense importance for governmental bodies involved in the cooperation

initiative to get to know each other and their working cultures, so negotiations would be easier to make. The flexible and spontaneous way that these networks are built upon does not include norms, procedures or policy frameworks which can later determine where and how a legitimate decision should be taken. In practice, the lack of common norms to work upon and rules to facilitate the cooperation was a challenge to the flexibility of the cross-border network.

6.2 Reflecting on the research process

In dealing with 'soft' territorial cooperation areas, more specifically in a cross-border context, I set my aim at understanding the institutional and cultural challenges that they work with and might be hindering their cooperation. The chosen case-study did add a lot of value to the research process itself, but was limited. The amount of case studies should have been bigger. At least one more case study should have been added to the research, in the same cross-border area in order to compare the results and to validate them. The problems defined here in terms of institutional and cultural challenges, are supported by the theoretical background in order to be valid for further generalizations. On the other hand, choosing more case studies would have been a challenge due to time restrictions and each one would have been under-researched, having to divide my time for interviews amongst various case studies.

The analytical framework, was a challenge to this research. Many concepts have been derived from the Policy Arrangement Approach. However, it was mainly essential to explain the institutional perspective. In order to understand more the social connections within the cooperation initiative which is directly connected to cultural differences, elements from the Policy Arrangement Approach had to be linked to elements explaining relational patterns of social networks in nature resource governance.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX I – List of conducted interviews

INTERVIEW CODE	*CURRENT JOB / INSTITUTION*	*COUNTRY*
Interview 1[18]	Scholar – spatial planner - PhD	Germany
Interview 2[19]	Project Coordinator GBRA – ARKNATUUR Ontwikkeling	The Netherlands
Interview 3	Naturschutz-Zentrum im Kreis Kleve	Germany
Interview 4[20]	Waterschap Rijn en IJssel	The Netherlands
Interview 5	Sportsvisserij Nederland	The Netherlands
Interview 6	NABU[21] – Naturaschutzstation Niederhein	Germany
Interview 7	The District Government of Düsseldorf	Germany
Interview 8	Rijkswaterstaat	The Netherlands
Interview 9	Biologischen Station im Kreis Wesel	Germany
Interview 10	Vereniging Nederlands Cultuurlandschap	The Netherlands
Interview 11	Province Gelderland	The Netherlands
Interview 12	Oost Nederland Rijkswaterstaat	The Netherlands

[18] This interview has not been recorded

[19] Continuous communication via e-mail, phone or Skype calls

[20] Two experts were involved in the interview

[21] Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union

ANNEX II – Interview Guides

INTERVIEW GUIDE: Non-Governmental Actors	
1. Understanding the cooperation initiative	Questions related to: - The role of the organization in the cross-border cooperation project - The interest behind the cooperation initiative - The network set-up
2. Understanding the interplay within the network	- Cooperation process while working with partners in Germany and the Netherlands (challenges and opportunities) - Bonds within the network; - Hierarchical arrangement (core and peripheral partners) - Division of duties / responsibilities
3. Governance and policy framework	- Tools / policy frameworks that non-governmental actors find beneficial - Governmental – nongovernmental interplay - Tackling different policy mindsets - Exploring different venues to deal with different institutional and organizational framework in Germany and the Netherlands - Recommendations for the other side of the border in terms of governmental interplay
4. Barriers for the CBC	- Hard rules to comply with - Challenges / barriers when working with partners from the other side of the border - Differences in terms of institutional set-up that may hinder the cooperation initiative - Cultural differences that may

	hinder the cooperation initiative

INTERVIEW GUIDE: Governmental Actors	
1. Understanding the multi-level governance in the cross-border project area	Questions related to: - Role of the governmental body in the cross-border cooperation project - Level of government that they cooperate with, within and outside the border - Flexibility of the governance setting in the cross-border cooperation project - Alignments of governmental institutions - Supporting non-governmental bodies
2. Priorities in territorial agenda setting	- Who sets the territorial agenda (which actors have resources and get to steer toward certain issues and goals?) - Coping with differences and setting priorities while shaping the territorial agenda for a common cross-border issue in general and this project in particular - Shaping the focus of policy design on water management in a cross-border setting
3. Attempts / opportunities for integrated policy	- Policy instruments and documents to manage and foster cross-border initiatives - Intermediate bodies / venues to foster cooperation in cross-border projects

4. Barriers for the CBC	- Obstacles related to statutory planning, different legislations and political circumstances - Tackling different policy mindsets in a cross-border setting

INTERVIEW GUIDE: Experts

1. Soft spaces of territorial cooperation	Questions related to: - Understanding the origins of the concept - Functionality of territorial cooperation
2. Context and background information in water management cooperation projects in the Rhine-Waal Region	- Common cross-border issues with partners within a network - Governmental cooperation deficits - Issues related to territorial agenda setting - Different cultural context - Policy entrepreneurship - Exploitation of alternative venues who's aim is to foster the cooperation initiative
3. Documents and policy frameworks – CBC in the Rhine-Waal Region	- EU documents / reports; EU laws / directives / regulations - National policy framework - Regional and local policy framework