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# Towards a new generation in European cross-border cooperation

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**An in-depth case study on the European Grouping  
~~of Territorial Cooperation legal entity by looking at~~  
cooperation processes within ESPON EGTC**

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**How has the EGTC structure contributed to overcoming challenges  
and issues in the cooperation between different levels of actors by  
looking at the ESPON case?**

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## **I. Preface**

Before you lies the bachelor thesis 'Towards a new generation in European cross-border cooperation', part of the bachelor programme Geography, Planning and Environment (GPE) at the Radboud University Nijmegen. I was engaged in writing this thesis from February to August 2018.

Today's Europe is becoming ever more unified through increasing cross-border cooperation which in my opinion is a fascinating development and influences our everyday lives. Better understanding cooperation processes within the European Union is key to improving social, economic and territorial cohesion. This research delves deeper into a niche of the European Union that is aimed at improving cross-border cooperation.

This research has forced me to broaden my perspective, explore new theories and develop a better understanding of the European Union. All from a social geographers point of view. This has not been easy, especially because this is the first research I have conducted all by myself. Fortunately my supervisor Theodoros Soukos has been of great help in reaching the final product.

Therefore I would like to thank Theodoros Soukos, who has always been available, supportive in answering my questions and pointing me in the right direction. I would also like to thank all of the respondents who have been very cooperative and willing to help, without whose cooperation I could not have concluded this research. To my fellow students at the Radboud University; I would like to thank you for your support and great discussions that helped me achieve the best research possible.

A special expression of gratitude goes to my parents who have always supported me and kept me motivated, without them this research would not have been possible.

Nijmegen, August 16<sup>th</sup> 2018

Marnix Mohrmann

## II. Abstract

One of the focal points of the European Union is territorial cohesion. A multiplicity of programmes has been launched to achieve the goals of social, economical and territorial cohesion. Examples of such European programmes are INTERREG, ENI, INTERACT and ENPI, but apart from these efforts the EU continues to innovate and launch new programmes. Such a new programme is the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Where the aforementioned programmes target large scale supranational cooperation, EGTC targets sub-national cross-border cooperation. EGTC has been launched in 2006 and differs substantially from earlier programmes. It enables sub-central governments and actors to cooperate across borders without the need for a national government.

Annually an appointed rapporteur establishes a report on the EGTC. By gathering data from all active and soon to be launched EGTCs the report gives a descriptive analysis on the functioning. A typology is being made to classify EGTCs and identifying common problems, which have to be solved. A lacking aspect of the report is the explanation for the identified problems, as it does not go beyond stating reported challenges and issues. The typology is made up of a factsheet, containing information about the involved countries, the goals, tasks, challenges and issues. The factsheet serves as the basis for this research.

The approach of this research is a single case study through in-depth interviews. As they build a complete and thorough understanding of reality. The case selection involved criteria such as accessibility, main language and date of establishment to ensure a well-rounded case. As a result ESPON, European Node for Territorial Evidence has been chosen.

The aim of this research is to delve deeper into the arguably new *generation* of cross-border cooperation, through EGTC, and to determine whether or not EGTC has contributed to the European goals of improving territorial cohesion through cooperation. In order to achieve this aim, the following main research question is formulated: 'How has the EGTC structure contributed to overcoming challenges and issues in the cooperation between different levels of actors by looking at the ESPON case'. The main question is supported by three sub-questions; 'What challenges and issues ESPON EGTC faces can be identified?', 'What causes for the challenges and issues can be identified?' and 'What measures is ESPON EGTC taking to overcome these challenges and issues?'.

Building on the readily available knowledge on cross-border cooperation, Perkmann serves as the basis for the theory. His writings on European cross-border cooperation helped identify the way ESPON EGTC cooperates within the European Union. In describing supranational cooperation processes with contemporary theory, multilevel governance (MLG) cannot be ignored. MLG helps to further identify and classify how ESPON EGTC cooperates. By combining Perkmann and multilevel governance they serve as the basis for the data analysis.

The data gathering has been done in the form of in-depth interviews, out of which two main challenges and issues emerged; outreach towards the smallest regions of the EU and reduced European cohesion through reduced supranational cooperation. Lacking outreach has already been identified by ESPON EGTC internally and have acted upon it, reduced European cohesion emerged as a new problem which cannot be found in literature yet.

The cause of lacking outreach lays in the structure of ESPON EGTC, specifically the way they provide their service. In order for a region to gain support from ESPON EGTC they have to apply a request for territorial evidence support, meaning that ESPON EGTC is a bottom-up approach. It is possible that actors and regions are ill-equipped and not able to formulate such a request for territorial evidence support, therefore never gaining support from ESPON EGTC

Reduced cohesion due to reduced international cooperation is a new challenge for ESPON EGTC. The cause for reduced European cohesion is straightforward and has a single cause; changed contract types. Due to a different form of contract there is less international cooperation between research institutes in regard to territorial evidence delivered by ESPON EGTC.

To tackle the challenges of outreach, ESPON EGTC deploys several approaches; organizing workshops and annual seminars, attending external events and maintaining good contacts with other European organizations. ESPON EGTC uses scientific research in their services which is suitable for educating actors through these approaches. Respondents have mentioned that these approaches ensured good contacts between ESPON EGTC and actors and offered a way to support regions without contracts. Whether or not these approaches achieve the goal is to be seen when the deadline is reached in 2020 and a new programming period starts.

Reduced cohesion due to reduced international cooperation is not yet a recognized challenge by ESPON EGTC, therefore there are no direct measures taken. Despite this fact ESPON EGTC improves international cohesion by bringing together actors and regions that experience the same problems. The effect of this has to be further researched.

Answering the main question, the EGTC structure has contributed to reducing administrative burdens for researchers of ESPON through making ESPON EGTC the managing authority and single beneficiary. The EGTC structure has allowed for more personnel, thus increasing the ability to cope with the challenges of outreach. The downside of the EGTC structure is the introduction of a new contract type, reducing international cooperation. Though, at the same time, ESPON EGTC provides a platform through which European cooperation and cohesion can be improved.

### III. List of abbreviations

CESCI	Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives
CoR	Committee of the Regions
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EC	European Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
MLG	Multilevel Governance
MS	Member State
TA	Targeted Analysis

## Table of Contents

I.	Preface .....	I
II.	Abstract.....	II
III.	List of abbreviations .....	IV
1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	Background .....	1
1.2	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation .....	3
1.3	Research relevance.....	4
1.4	Research objective .....	5
1.5	Research framework .....	6
1.6	Research questions.....	7
2	Theoretical framework .....	8
2.1	Cross-border regions, a unique fingerprint .....	8
2.2	Cross-border cooperation.....	8
2.3	Multilevel governance .....	9
2.4	INTERREG in detail.....	11
2.5	EGTC in detail .....	14
3	Methodology .....	16
3.1	Data collection .....	16
3.2	Case selection .....	17
3.3	Analysis methodology.....	20
4	Analysis .....	21
4.1	Committee of the Regions report.....	21
4.2	Interviews .....	24
5	Conclusions and reflection.....	29
5.1	Conclusions .....	29
5.2	Reflection.....	35
6	Bibliography .....	36
7	Appendices .....	39
7.1	Appendix A: The treaty of Nice.....	39
7.2	Appendix B: Interview guide A.....	40
7.3	Appendix C: Interview guide B .....	41
7.4	Appendix D: Codebook.....	42
7.5	Appendix E: Factsheet ESPON EGTC .....	44

# 1 Introduction

On the European continent several countries are working together in the European Union (EU). This Union evolved over the years into its current state, effecting many national laws and policies. One of the core goals of the EU is to enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion between member states (MS) (European Union, n.d.). Because the institutional differences between member states have proven to be a challenge for the individual countries, a supranational organization like the EU plays a role in overcoming these differences (European Commission, n.d.). In order to overcome national and regional differences the EU has developed several approaches, informed by border studies; INTERREG, ENI, ENPI and INTERACT. Over the years these approaches have gained attention in the academic world and have gradually become the subject of study, increasing border-region knowledge. As a result of both the EU approaches and border studies, European programmes have been developed. An example of such European programme is the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The aim of this research is to delve deeper into the new *generation* of cross-border cooperation, through EGTC, and to determine whether or not EGTC has contributed to the European goals of improving territorial cohesion through cooperation. This chapter contains an introduction to the research topic and builds towards the main research question through the research objective and framework.

## 1.1 Background

### *The European Union*

After the Second World War, countries on the European continent wanted to make sure there would be a lasting peace and cooperation (European Union, n.d.). The first step towards this goal was the signing of the Paris treaty in 1951, which formally established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The first members were Belgium, France, West-Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (CVCE, 2016. p.2). The second milestone was achieved in 1957, with the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC). The EEC extended the cooperation between the countries beyond the trade of only coal and steel. Together with the Euratom community, a cooperation on atomic research, these three were combined into the European Community (EC) in 1965 (CVCE, 2016. p.2). Continuing until 1992 several countries were added to the EC, like Denmark, Ireland, the UK, Greece, Portugal and Spain. With the signing of the Maastricht treaty in 1992, the European Community got its current name; the European Union (EU). Currently the European Union is an economic and political alliance between 28 European countries. They strive, among others, to unify legislation and trade within their borders to achieve free movement of goods and people (European Commission, n.d.). As the unification grew with the introduction of the Euro, it opened more possibilities for the future (Knill and Lehmkuhl, 2002). On paper this looks like the perfect transnational cooperation and to a certain degree it is (Europa Nu, n.d.), however reality is more complex. Every member state still has a great amount of sovereignty and thus the ability to prevent transnational, European, legislation which is not in their best interest. Countries must cooperate within the European Union to achieve the beforehand set out European goals.

### *European approaches*

These goals, in regard to this research, are to enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion among the member states (European Union, n.d.), prompting some challenges. The first, and foremost, challenge is the institutional difference between the countries. When setting up cooperations between two (or more) countries, there are two (or more) applicable sets of national law. Because of the large amount of sovereignty every member state holds, these laws can differ quite a bit. The second challenge comes from the, possible, cultural differences. How does one view the problem? How does one value the problem? How does one approach the problem? The answers can differ per member state and thus differ in their approach. It then is up to the participating member states to overcome these differences to achieve a joint project or goal. These challenges occur on all three scales of transboundary cooperation; interregional, transnational and cross-border. Therefore, the European Union has developed different programmes for each scale.

There are multiple views on and approaches to the three scales of cross-border cooperation within Europe, for example *INTERREG*, *INTERACT*, *ENPI*, *ENI* and *EGTC* (European Commission, n.d.). Every aforementioned approach has its own applicability and area of expertise, the European Union continues to develop new programmes to keep improving social, economic and territorial cohesion. This research will touch upon the *INTERREG* programme and focus on the *EGTC*. *INTERREG* is important in understanding where the *EGTC* comes from and how it fits in the European legislative context. Because the main focus of this research is on the *EGTC*, the cross-border scale is applicable (see chapter 2.5 for a detailed explanation). All these projects are in place to support countries, regions and stakeholders in cross-border cooperation. Official reports and statements from the European Union make clear that the goals of cohesion have not yet been reached (Committee of the Regions, 2007; European Union, 2017). Despite the goal not being fully reached yet, the programmes did make an impact on cross-border cooperation (CBC). Border regions have noticed the European legislation taking effect, for example they could cooperate more easily beyond the national borders with the financial support of EU funds (Colomb, 2017, p.5).

Cross-border cooperation is a broad term. Perkmann (2003) defines CBC as the cooperation between different levels of governmental actors and non-governmental actors on either side of the border. CBC within Europe takes shape through the mentioned European approaches with the goal to increase European cohesion. This research zooms in on *EGTC* as part of European cross-border cooperation. To understand where the need for the *EGTC* legislation comes from, it is important to look at the *INTERREG* programme. From this starting point the *EGTC* is explained and the goal of this research is formulated.

### *The INTERREG programme*

The *INTERREG* programme is necessary to understand where the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation comes from. As aforementioned the European Union gained power through treaties, enabling it to set up cooperation programmes like *INTERREG I* during the Nineties. *INTERREG* has been founded with the idea of supporting cross-border cooperation. "It is a part of the European cohesion policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States" (European Commission, n.d.). Comprehensive cooperations like *INTERREG IV A 2 Seas*, *INTERREG Baltic Sea Region* and the plethora of projects under the *INTERREG IVC* strand are all made possible by the *INTERREG* programme. Affecting most member states ever since.

INTERREG has been divided into three main scales (*strands*) of cooperation; A, B and C (Figure 1.1). Chapter 2.3 contains an elaboration on the different scales. In this research INTERREG strand A has the main focus. Strand A is the smallest scale and entails two regions neighbouring each other. In the legislation of the EGTC it is stated that a requirement is that the engaging regions have to be physically bordering each other on each side of a national border (Official Journal of the European Union, 2006).



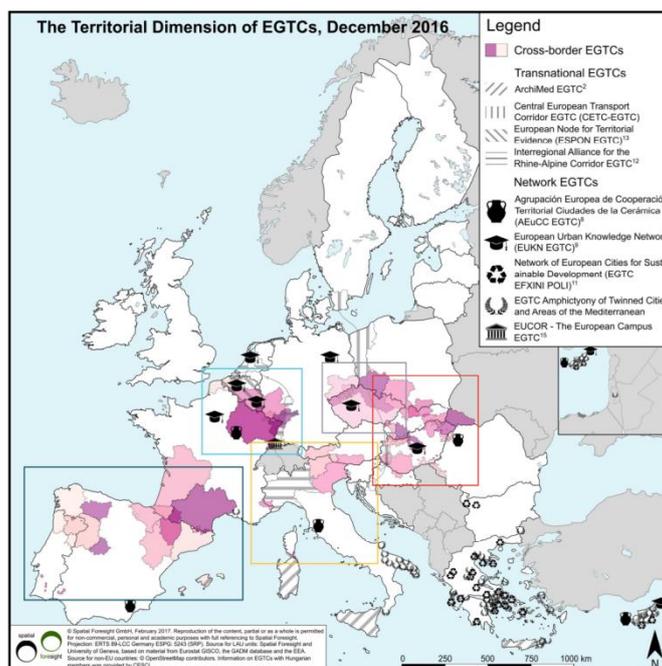
Figure 1.1 Different scales for the INTERREG programme (own figure)

## 1.2 European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation

Despite the large number of projects supported by the INTERREG programme, there are still shortcomings. These shortcomings mainly occur due to legal differences between countries. The legal obstacles between member states within the European borders still prove to be significant (Committee of the Regions, 2007. p.5). Based on this argument, the European Union set out to develop a new programme to overcome this obstacle, maintaining the *strand* division of the INTERREG programme (Committee of the Regions, 2007. p.6.). The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation is a different approach to cross-border cooperation. This approach sets itself apart from INTERREG and other CBC programmes because it enables public authorities of various member states to team up and deliver joint services, without requiring a prior international agreement to be signed and ratified by national parliaments (European Commission, n.d.). It diversifies the support the European Union offers in overcoming national borders. The EGTC offers a radical different European approach to cross-border cooperation.

This makes EGTC an interesting European legislative tool because it offers the possibility for local actors to set and achieve mutual goals, have access to multiple European funding sources and act as a guide to cooperation. Figure 1.2 contains information on the spatial location of every active EGTC in 2016. But, based on the CoR monitoring report 2018 (CoR, 2018) there is still room for improvement. From the report it becomes apparent that just like the INTERREG programme, the EGTC faces policy barriers. These policy barriers occur in the form of lengthy constitutions and national differences in adopting EGTC legislation (CoR,

2018). The Monitoring report states these problems, but does not provide advice in how to solve them. There seems to be room for improvement in the cooperation of EGTCs, especially what actors can do to overcome or maybe even prevent policy barriers.



**Figure 1.2** The territorial dimension of EGTCs, December 2016 (Spatial Foresight, 2016)

Since the last evaluation in 2011 and a brief overview after the latest amendments in 2013, no in-depth research has been conducted into the workings of the EGTC (EstIf 2, 2014; European Union, 2017, p.11). Both reports are missing the explanation for the experienced difficulties, in particular the 2018 report. This report summarizes the difficulties and issues EGTCs face, based on information given by the partaking EGTCs, but then does not give an explanation. Reported challenges and issues relevant to this research are, for example, lengthy constitutions due to implementing difficulties and national differences in adopting the EGTC structure. The full overview of the report can be found in chapter 4.1, Committee of the Regions Report.

### 1.3 Research relevance

#### *Scientific relevance*

Upon searching the term 'transboundary cooperation', a broad array of (ground bound) environment related articles come up. These vary from the use of aquifers by different countries to agreements on climate change adaptation (Keessen Et. Al. 2016; Huitema, Meijerink, 2017; Eerd Et. Al. 2017). Only a small selection of articles is about (physical) cross-border projects like a hospital (Colomb, 2014), that utilized the EGTC legislative tool. The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation is fairly new and only explicitly mentioned in a handful of articles (Toca & Popovici, 2010; Colomb, 2017).

In a study from 2007, externally conducted on request of the Committee of the Regions, a recommendation for an *action plan* was made to improve the implementation of EGTCs (CoR, 2007). The second bullet point of this action plan states that there should be an '*appointment of a rapporteur each year*' who assembles an annual report (CoR, 2007, p9).

The latest report is from 2018, looking back on 2017 (European Union, 2018). The report contains a descriptive analysis of every registered EGTC and contains the latest data where possible. The downside of the report is that it does not go beyond stating the varying types of problems EGTCs encounter in their *'everyday life'*. The typology is adequate to give an overview of the problems, which can be used to make general conclusions about the EGTC. However, to gain more insight a more elaborate research on cooperation processes within EGTC is required. This research aims to contribute to the field of cross-border cooperation in regard to European legislation, through EGTC. By building upon the work of Perkmann in combination with multilevel governance theory (chapter 3), light is shed on the place of EGTC in European cross-border cooperation. Arguably exploring a new generation of cross-border cooperation within Europe.

Because of the lack of an in-depth analysis of the problems stated in the monitoring report this research attempts to continue where the report stops and build upon it by delving into one carefully chosen case (see chapter 3.1), to attempt to assess what the problems exactly are. The report is not solely used to determine the problems and issues, the respondents will also be asked what they see as problems and issues, building a broader understanding. The main research goal therefore is to map the problems and issues facing the EGTC and to understand how this influences the cooperation within the EGTC. If this is successful this approach could be translated to other EGTCs in an attempt to improve the overall effectiveness of the EGTC policy tool.

#### *Societal relevance*

Governments, policy makers and private actors who want to commence cross-border cooperation are supported through multi-leveled legislation, i.e. local up to European legislation. The more understanding there is on the driving forces, processes and the practical knowhow, the more likely they are to succeed. This research aims to help build this deeper understanding by building upon the readily available knowledge from border scholars. Multiple levels of government and private entrepreneurs are among the actors that benefit from improved European social, economical and territorial cohesion.

Besides the mentioned actors the current EGTCs could also benefit from this research. By knowing the challenges and issues their colleagues face and how they approach these, they can learn and improve their own EGTC. This also contributes to the goals of the European Union in regard to ETC.

### **1.4 Research objective**

The European Union has set out to enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion among member states. An important aspect to this goal is the cross-border nature. Accompanying this cross-border nature are cross-border regions and cross-border cooperation. As mentioned in chapter 1, there are multiple European approaches to these matters. The scale of CBC is too large to study in its entirety. Based on personal interests and recent forms of CBC (for example INTERREG), EGTC has been chosen as subject of study in this research. Studying CBC through the EGTC is still too big of a challenge; therefore this research zooms in on one EGTC case. This zooming in is based on and will build on the CoR monitoring report 2018. The report contains a good typology of the problems and issues facing every EGTC, but the explanation for those problems and issues is not present. It becomes clear

that there is no deeper knowledge on the problems and issues EGTCs face, making it an interesting starting point for this research.

Therefore this research starts with identifying challenges and issues in regard to the selected case, based on the report and on interviews. This is where the report stops and this research continues. The objective is to shed light on the actions of and processes within ESPON EGTC, aimed at overcoming challenges and issues. To understand the taken measures, or to take new measures, the causes of the problems have to be identified.

This research has four aims: Firstly, using the CoR EGTC monitoring report 2018 the problems and issues are identified, but also building on the same report the respondents will be asked what they identify as problems and issues. Secondly, the causes for the challenges and issues are identified and argued. Thirdly, the taken measures by ESPON EGTC are identified. Lastly, the added value of the EGTC structure of ESPON in regard to overcoming these challenges and issues is argued.

## 1.5 Research framework

Before commencing the data gathering, it is important to know what information one is looking for. This prevents wasting resources, i.e. time and money, of the respondent and the researcher. A thought through research leads to better results (*Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2007*). This research consists of four steps; critical literature review, interviews, analysis and conclusions.

The critical literature review is the first step. Rarely policies are carried out exactly as they were written without any problems. Therefore, how an EGTC translates into practice is of importance in finding out if the set out goals are reached and to find out the contribution of the EGTC structure towards these goals. In case of the EGTC policy, this *translation into practice* is about the cooperation between actors. Cooperation in a cross-border context has been studied by Perkmann for years and is used in this research to help build a scientific base for cooperation within EGTCs. The actors within EGTCs define the goals and aspirations of the cooperation. *Actors*, in this regard, can constitute of a broad array of persons, institutions, initiatives, politicians, businesses, governments, etcetera (*Official Journal of the European Union, 2006*).

The data gathering, step two, will be done through interviews at one selected case; ESPON EGTC. In chapter 3, methodology, is explained why this case is chosen. The data gathering is done through in-depth interviews with respondents working at ESPON EGTC. The interviews will explore possible and identified challenges and issues and to shed light on the cooperation processes of ESPON EGTC.

Perkmann combined with multilevel governance serves as the theoretical framework for analyzing the data, which is step three. The analysis will be done using ATLAS.ti, this programme has proven useful for qualitative data analysis in the past and has enabled the researcher to keep a systematic approach. This systematic approach is recommended by Verschuren and Doorewaard (2007). The analysis aims to gather information which helps answer the main research question and to uncover new information in regard to the research topic.

Finally, a conclusion is made and the main research question is answered based on the gathered data. By using multilevel governance and Perkmann the data is interpreted and an extrapolation can possibly be made to gain insights in the cooperation processes of ESPON EGTC to see whether or not the EGTC structure has contributed to the goals of ETC.

## **1.6 Research questions**

To ensure a structured approach for the data gathering, analysis and conclusion, main and sub-questions are formulated. The main question of this research is:

*'How has the EGTC structure contributed to overcoming challenges and issues in the cooperation between different levels of actors by looking at the ESPON EGTC case?'*

Related sub-question further helps the structure of the research. The sub-questions of this research are as follows:

1. What challenges and issues ESPON EGTC faces can be identified?
2. What causes for the challenges and issues can be identified?
3. What measures is ESPON EGTC taking to overcome these challenges and issues?

The first sub-question is answered through literature research and interviews and lays the groundwork for the other questions. The second and third sub-questions are answered through gathered data from interviews. These questions go beyond the knowledge available from the literature. The sub-questions deliver the required information to answer the main question in a structured manner.

## 2 Theoretical framework

European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation is a legal entity intended on enhancing the cross-border cooperation between, at least, two member states. The theoretical framework zooms in on the aspects related to cross-border cooperation, the writings of Perkmann and colleagues, multilevel governance, the INTERREG programme and lastly the EGTC framework.

### 2.1 Cross-border regions, a unique fingerprint

Every border region has a different character, culture, and institutional regulations. These can be seen as the fingerprint of a region. Following this reasoning, a *one size fits all* solution does not exist.

*‘Places have specific geographic, historic, environmental and economic circumstances that help to determine the prospects for growth and the most suitable approach to support the private sector and residents’ opportunities.’* (HM Government, 2010)

To define a CBR, a clarification of the term *region* is in order. There are multiple ways of defining a *region*; a political region, a cultural region, an economic region, a geographical region (Perkmann and Sum, 2002a; Sum 2002; Anderson, O’Dowd and Wilson 2003; Sparke 2004). Also the size of a CBR matters, Perkmann (2003) talks for example about a micro-CBR, which is the same as the INTERREG strand A scale. Next to strand A are strand B and C (INTERREG Europe, n.d.). These different scales have different approaches and different actors, making them as unique as regions. To make the matter even more complex, these definitions of a region can exist alongside each other and on multiple scales. Take for example Basque Autonomous Community, a self-proclaimed region within Spain. It is a cultural region, wishes to be an independent country (implying an institutional region), but is still a region in Spain. The Basque Autonomous Community is part of Basque Country, referring to the larger cultural region. This example is to show how the different ways a region can be defined contribute to a complex accumulation of a region (Perkmann and Sum, 2002a). This leads to the following operational definition of a cross-border region: *A cross-border region is the geographical adjacency of two institutional regions across a national border* (Perkmann, 2003).

### 2.2 Cross-border cooperation

“Today there are virtually no local or regional authorities in border areas that are not somehow involved in cross-border co-operation (CBC) initiatives.” (Perkmann, 2003). The importance of these regions has only grown since Perkmann’s research of 2003. The growing importance is due to increasing focus on European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), among which CBC belongs. Cross-border cooperation has become a focal point for achieving social, economical and territorial cohesion in Europe (Brunet-Jailly, 2012). Perkmann (2003) defines European CBC as the cooperation between different levels of governmental actors and non-governmental actors on either side of the border (Perkmann, 2003). The way CBC takes shape is dependent on the institutional factors limiting or enabling cooperation. These institutional factors occur on multiple scales of government, from local to

supranational. An example of an enabling factor for a local government is the degree of communication between governmental levels. The better the relation with higher governmental levels the more likely cooperation, among which CBC, is to succeed (Perkmann, 2003).

On the other end of the scale, the supranational level, is the growing European integration which provides a series of opportunity structures for sub-national authorities to participate in international activities (Perkmann & Sum, 2002a). This is achieved through three processes; (1) sub-national authorities are being used as implementers of supranational policy, (2) sub-national authorities are being involved in the formulation and implementation of national foreign policy and (3) increased international communication and interaction between local regions, therefore bypassing national governments (Perkmann & Sum, 2002a). For this research the interplay between sub-central governments and supranational institutions is relevant. Mainly focusing on the first point of Perkmann and Sum (2002a), how sub-national authorities are being used as implementers of supranational policies. Put differently, how bottom-up initiatives from sub-central authorities contribute to European ETC goals of social, economic and territorial cohesion.

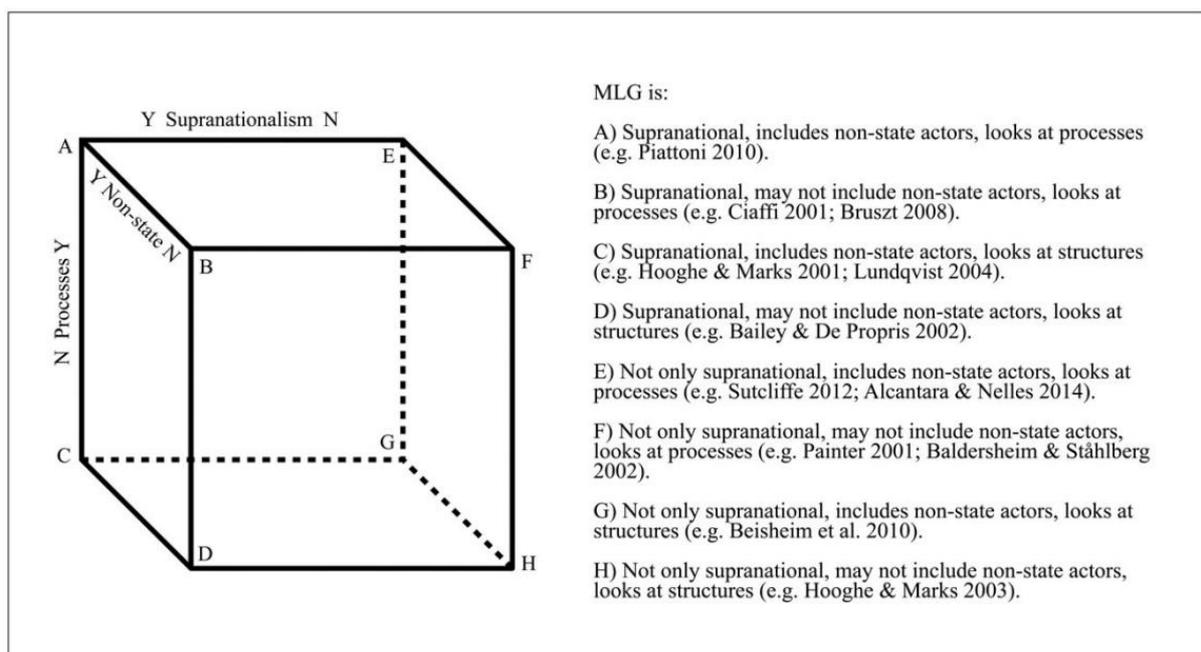
### **2.3 Multilevel governance**

In describing supranational cooperation processes with contemporary theory, *multilevel governance* (MLG) cannot be ignored. MLG has proven to be of significant value in understanding and explaining the current workings of the European Union (Marks et al., 1996; Saito-Jensen, 2015; Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2006 [in Tortola, 2017]) and also in grasping the complexity of supranational cooperation with the upwards and downwards diffusion of political authority (Tortola, 2017). MLG is a way of analyzing the changing role of different governmental levels in achieving the European territorial cohesion goals. From the Maastricht treaty and onwards the European Union has gathered more power, this paired with Perkmann's notions of increased participation of sub-national governments in supranational activities has caused new power relations. These entail that sub-national governments can bypass national authorities in cooperating across national borders. Perkmann adds to this that EU policy increases incentive for CBC and helps loose and poorly equipped regions to form a more institutionalized cooperation (Perkmann & Sum, 2002a).

The exact use of MLG in analyzing these processes is heavily debated. Tortola (2017) has attempted to structure the MLG debate with a classification of three axes; supranationalism, non-state and processes. All axes are divided on a 'yes' and 'no' scale for simplicity (see figure 2.1). On the right hand side of figure 2.1 is a textual description of every 'corner' of MLG with a statement from each respective author. Tortola continues to argue that the cube can be interpreted in two ways (Adcock, 2005 [in Tortola, 2017]); semantic and conceptual. For this research this approach will be disregarded because (1) the concept of MLG is fairly new thus the intersubjective solidity of the variants is questionable and (2) it is of no added value to rank each corner in order of significance for this research (Tortola, 2017). What is of importance to this research is the corner which this research belongs in, i.e. what aspects of the axes this research follows as 'yes' or 'no'. It is helpful to identify the axes to keep a clear picture as to what definition and approach this research uses of MLG.

For this research MLG is supranational, includes non-state actors and is seen as a process, thus placing it in corner A. As mentioned in chapter 2.2 this research focuses on sub-national governments and their involvement in supranational policies. It can be argued that the sub-national authorities are thus placed in the supranational policy arena. As for the non-state actors, EGTC includes these in the policy from the start, at least as participatory actors together with governments. This research is focused on cooperation processes of EGTC and in specific ESPON EGTC, hence there is a focus on processes and not on a static structure.

This identification and classification of multilevel governance helps structure the direction of this research in regard to the interviews and the data analysis. The chosen MLG form can be used as a guideline in analyzing the data in regard to the identification of supranational cooperation, the involved actors and how the cooperation processes changed over time within ESPON EGTC.



**Figure 2.1** The semantic space of multilevel governance (Tortola, 2017)

The original multilevel governance theory from Marks (1993, 1996) seeks to explain the functioning of and cooperation within the European Union. At the time this form of supranational cooperation was new and shook up the way central, and in due time sub-central, governments cooperated. MLG looks at different levels of government and how they cooperate and communicate. These different *levels of government* can be understood primarily as territorial levels, such as local, national and supranational (Piattoni, 2009).

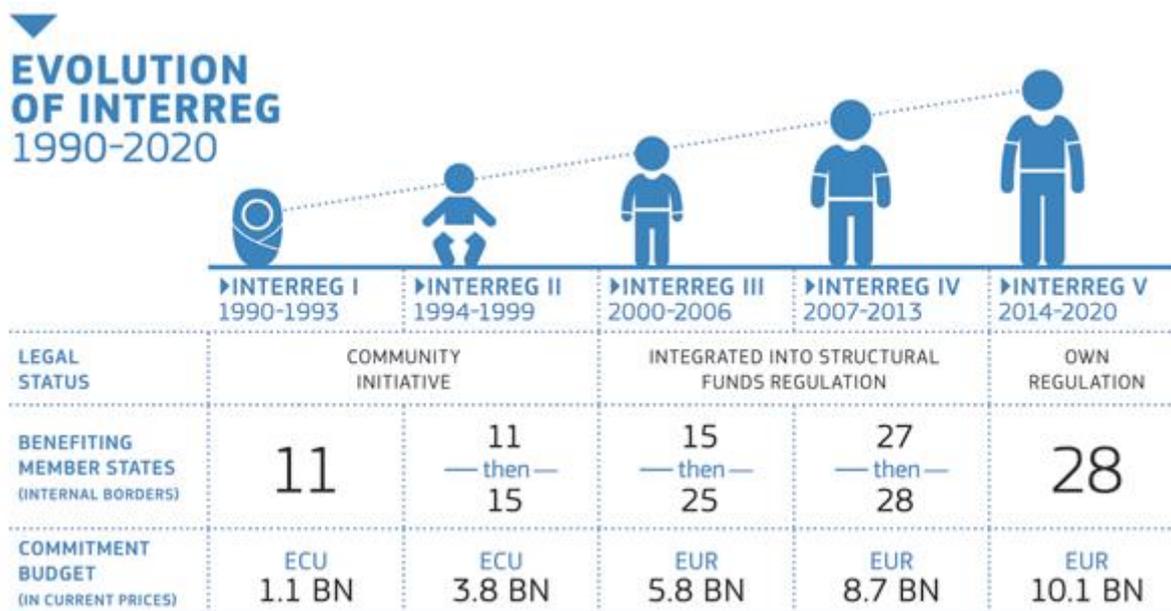
EGTC continues to change the way central and sub-central governments cooperate and communicate, in this sense it fits in the tradition of supranational cooperation since the Nineties. As argued, EGTC provides an unprecedented way for sub-central authorities to cooperate across borders on the supranational scale in Europe. Arguably innovating cross-border cooperation and bypassing problems other European programmes encounter. Even though EGTC changes the interaction between governmental levels, it remains constructed by those same governmental levels. This indicates that the EGTC policy has been build upon the same existing network of actors as INTERREG and is not entirely innovative. It is

thus possible that EGTC programmes run into the same limitations as its predecessors. MLG can help in analyzing the way current EGTCs cooperate within the legal framework of EGTC to assess if this is the case, or if there is room for improvement for the EGTC legislation to overcome the problems experienced by other European programmes.

## **2.4 INTERREG in detail**

INTERREG is one of the major European CBC programmes. Since INTERREG V every member state is involved. INTERREG aims to support cross-border cooperation through project funding (INTERREG.eu, n.d.). The supported projects range from health to sustainable energy. This section gives an overview of the history of INTERREG, the project life cycle and concludes with its shortcomings and limitations.

This programme has evolved over the years, fitting to the CBC goals of the EU. During the Nineties INTERREG started as a relatively small programme, which proved to be successful. After the first period, the INTERREG programme expanded its aim to support not only cross-border cooperation, but also transnational and interregional cooperation between the member states (European Commission, n.d.). This is in line with the main goal of the EU to diminish the influence of internal national borders as much as possible and create a homogenous distribution of economic, social and political development (European Commission, n.d.). The INTERREG programme has been in development since 1990 and has been evolving ever since. At this point in time it has seen four completed stages and is currently in its fifth stage (figure 2.2). The first INTERREG ran from 1990 to 1993, the second from 1994 to 1999, the third from 2000 to 2006 and the fourth from 2007 to 2013. With each stage more member states joined the programme and with it the budget rose. Currently in the fifth stage there are 28 European participants and several non-EU participants (European Commission, 2014). The budget comes from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the member states, which accounts for 2.8% of the EU budget (figure 2.2), and direct investments for non-EU participants.



**Figure 2.2** Evolution of INTERREG (European Commission, n.d.)

INTERREG consists of three scales, also called strands; strand A, B and C:

- INTERREG A is cooperation on a cross-border scale. This is cooperation between adjacent regions, for example the region of Cerdanya in Spain and the region of Capcir in France. Local governments and actors are involved with these projects
- INTERREG B is cooperation on a transnational scale. The aim of this scale is to improve the integration of the particular region within the European Union. Local governments, regional governments and the national government are involved on this scale. An example is the Benelux area in which the Dutch, Belgium and Luxembourg governments are working together. Though the countries do not have to be adjacent to each other.
- INTERREG C is cooperation on an interregional scale. Being the largest scale the INTERREG programme offers, it is essentially the scale of the entire European Union. All member states work together on this scale.

For a project to be supported by INTERREG and receive funds they have to go through a five step cycle, called the project life cycle (European Union, n.d.). The five steps are; project idea generation, project development, getting started, project implementation and project closure. This cycle only applies to projects while they are part of the INTERREG programme. The results of the project outlive the project cycle; the knowledge, products or expertise will be used in other projects (figure 2.3). Projects can also continue independently and self-sustainable after INTERREG support.

The first step, project idea generation, entails coming up with an idea to pitch with potential partners to see whether or not there is a need to execute the idea. This step establishes both the need and a baseline for a project, i.e. what has been done already. A search for project partners starts here, in order to shape and formulate the scope and content of the project. Possible pilot activities are deployed or preliminary academic research is performed.

As well as getting in contact with the relevant coordinators of the micro- and macro regional strategies.

Step two, project development, brings the idea and developed baseline a step further. The potential partners consolidate the idea and partnership by developing the idea into a concrete project proposal. This is done through organizing responsibilities, goals, processes and accountability and agreeing upon the lead partner. From an economical standpoint a budget is made. INTERREG provides support where requested in formulating these matters into a final submission form.

At this moment an application for support has been submitted to INTERREG and the solidification of funds is required. This step is called, getting started. A direction of the project and its funding has been established. This is where the authorities come in with subsidy contracts, which has to be signed by all involved actors. Also a project coordination and decision-making structure is established and milestones are set.

After the approval of funds and the agreeing upon the tasks and responsibilities of each actor, the project can be implemented. The planned activities for each of the actors are executed in order to achieve the objectives. Regular monitoring, managing and reporting are in place to oversee and guide the project process towards reaching the objectives. If in practice the agreement turns out to be ineffective, too time consuming or limiting changes can be made. But only if all involved actors agree. During the implementation process knowledge and expertise is gained, through experience or through communication with parties from the built up network. The network serves another purpose besides knowledge sharing, it also serves as a way to connect with actors to uptake the use of the projects knowledge and outputs after the project has ended.

When the project goals have been achieved, the last step, project closure, begins. Every actor has to deliver and finish their agreed upon tasks before the last deadline and the project is administratively ended. The involved actors establish a final report to send to INTERREG. Optionally actors develop a follow-up plan for activities based on the project.

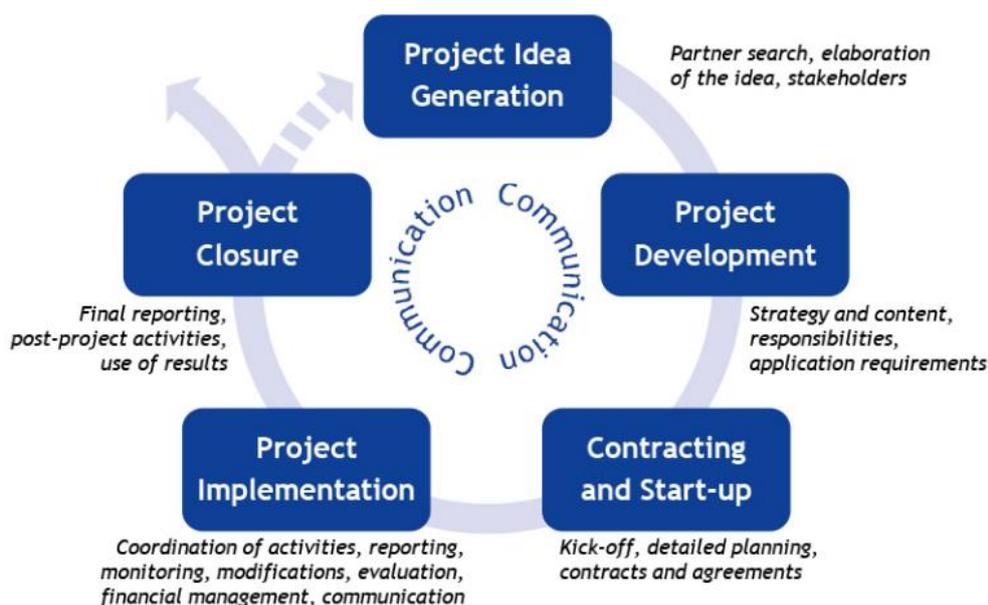


Figure 2.3 Project life cycle (European Union, n.d.)

This is a structured approach to European CBC, but has limitations. There are actors that wish to get involved with INTERREG and the funding, but are not able to formulate an application. This can be due to a lack of expertise or resources. Another limitation could be the amount of actors involved in setting up a project with INTERREG support. Too many actors, mean a lot of opinions and interested parties, making cooperation too complicated. This could be why INTERREG has not completely reached all its goals. EGTC approaches CBC differently from INTERREG to overcome these possible problems. It is a new attempt in reaching the goals of the European Union.

## 2.5 EGTC in detail

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation is a new European approach towards improving cross-border cooperation within the European borders. It originates from legislation passed in 2006, based on article 158 and 159 of the treaty of Nice (2006). It attempts to overcome national differences more easily through bypassing national governments to a certain degree. This section elaborates on the legal framework of EGTC, how it fits in ETC and why it differs from other European approaches. Based on this, the added value of EGTC to ETC is argued.

The EGTC is formed by regulation (EC) No. 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2006 (Journal of the European Union, 2006), which in turn finds its roots in article 158 and 159 of the treaty of Nice (appendix A) (European Community, 2001, p. 104-105). Article 158 states that member states need to work together in order to promote the overall harmonious development of the European Union, by developing and pursuing actions contributing to economic, social and territorial cohesion. The article continues to define this by stating that member states need to reduce these disparities between the levels of development between various European regions, even of the least favoured regions. Article 159 exists of three paragraphs, in which the first paragraph expands on article 158 by providing a guideline along which member states can comply with article 158. These guidelines being that the member states need to use their national economic policies to attain the objectives of article 158. The second paragraph contains the statement that every three years a progress report is to be made, this is not too relevant for this research. The third paragraph contains the leeway on which the EGTC has been based; 'if specific actions prove necessary outside the Funds and without prejudice to the measures decided upon within the framework of the other Community policies, such actions may be adopted by the Council' (European Community, 2001, p. 105). The EGTC is such 'action outside the framework of the Community policies'.

For an EGTC to come into existence it must contain every collaborating member (actor) of the cooperation and a '*leader*'. *Actor*, in this case, has a broad definition. It can range between one single person to an entire company. The *leader* is an appointed person and is essentially the embodiment of the EGTC. This person is the representative of the EGTC and signs the contracts. As a possible extension, the regulation also allows for sub-organs of an EGTC (paragraph 14). Furthermore, the tasks and competencies of an EGTC need to be set in a convention and in statutes (European Union, 2006. article 8; article 9).

The regulation (EC) No. 1082/2006 entails that it is now possible for actors to form a legal entity, which in turn is capable of entering contracts (article 1, clause 3). This removes the

need for national governments to take part in cross-border cooperation, because sub-central governments can now make legally binding contracts. Removing the need for ratification of local cooperations on a national level already eliminates a lot of red tape, which is one of the barriers INTERREG faces. Besides this is the aspect of forming a legal entity, which simplifies administration, cooperation and financial control of cross-border cooperation (Tóth, 2009). This is contrary to INTERREG, where lack of coordination and complexity of project structures caused delays and negative impacts.

Summarized; contrary to INTERREG there is no *hard cut* in eligible projects through the process of 'calls for projects' in EGTCs (INTERREG Europe, n.d.). For a sub-central government to commence cross-border cooperation through the EGTC, the national government has to acknowledge the specific cooperation area and put it through to the European Union (Regulation 1082/2006, article 3, paragraph 3). In general, INTERREG has done its job in supporting CBC's, though it is not the right legislative tool for every cross-border area. The EGTC can therefore be seen as an addition to the European Union 'toolbox' of CBC legislation rather than a substitute for the INTERREG programme. This information is summarized in table 2.1.

	<b>INTERREG</b>	<b>EGTC</b>
<b>Goals</b>	Enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion between member states	Enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion between member states
<b>Formation</b>	Call for projects, e.g. a <i>hard cut</i>	Registration by the Committee of the Regions
<b>Execution</b>	Partnerships Economic incentive	Legal identity Bound by its convention
<b>Application</b>	Large scale, interregional projects	Small scale, regional cross-border projects

**Table 2.1** Differences between INTERREG and EGTC (own table).

### **3 Methodology**

The methodology chapter contains an elaboration on the chosen qualitative methods for this research and a comparison to other possible methods. The chapter starts with arguing the chosen method for data collection and why this method is more suited than others. Second, the case selection is explained. Third, the chosen method for analyzing the data is argued in comparison to other methods. Lastly, fourth, continues to elaborate on the data analysis and how it will be conducted.

#### **3.1 Data collection**

There are multiple ways of gathering qualitative data, depending on the main research question a specific approach is chosen. Verschuren & Doorewaard (2007) classify five types of research strategies; survey, experiment, case study, grounded theory approach and desk research. A survey research gathers data about a topic through a large amount of research units and creates a broad understanding of the topic. In order to answer the main research question for this research, a deep understanding contrary to a broad understanding of the topic is required. Therefore a survey research approach is not suitable. An experiment measures the impact of a change compared to no change, this does not contribute towards answering the main research question of this research. The grounded theory approach seeks to make links between empirical data and theories. This approach is not suited for gathering data because it utilizes readily available knowledge, whilst this research sets out to gather new data. A desk research gathers all the data from literature, without adding empirical data. In order to answer the main research question of this research additional empirical data is required, making a desk research also an unsuitable approach.

A case study is the fifth method mentioned by Verschuren & Doorewaard (2007). There are two types of case study, a single case study and a comparative case study. Single case studies are suited for mapping a problem or phenomena in great detail, but are of limited use to accurately tell something about the population (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2007). A comparative case study has less depth than a single case study, but compares characteristics of the selected cases to extrapolate common conclusions. A comparative case study can be used to accurately tell something about the population. In order to answer the main research question of this research in-depth empirical data is required. A single case study is the approach that has the most added value towards the main research question, hence it has been selected for this research.

##### *Interviews*

At the case, the data is gathered during in-depth interviews with respondents. A face-to-face interview is characteristic for a case study because it delivers a deeper understanding of the case (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2007). Contrary to a survey research, a case study with in-depth interviews delivers qualitative data which is specific to the chosen case. A case study is made up of a small amount of research units, in this research being respondents (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2007). Therefore the respondent selection is not at random but specifically selected. The base criterion is that the respondent is involved in the object of study in this research, the EGTC. The respondent must have knowledge on the topic which cannot be found in literature, this way the respondent can contribute to this research. Creswell (2013, p.155) argues that this is a good approach to purposeful sampling.

According to Creswell (2013) the ideal amount of interviews is between 2 and 5. Fewer interviews may cause a wrong depiction of reality, more do not contribute to a better understanding of the problem.

Based on this four respondents have been selected based on their added value for this research. The first respondent is the director of the ESPON EGTC, she oversees all aspects of the EGTC and is aware of all processes within the EGTC. She contributes to the understanding of what ESPON EGTC is about and how cooperation processes within ESPON EGTC are arranged. The second respondent is a senior project expert on the area of European outreach. With over ten years of working experience at ESPON EGTC she contributes to the understanding of outreach and how ESPON EGTC goes about managing this aspect. The third respondent is a senior project expert in the area of analysis. With almost fifteen years of working experience at ESPON EGTC she contributes to the understanding how ESPON EGTC analyzes spatial data and uses it to provide their territorial evidence support. The fourth and last respondent is a senior project expert on the area of statistics, data and maps. With over ten years of working experience at ESPON EGTC she contributes to the understanding how ESPON EGTC uses data in maps and visual representations to provide their territorial evidence support. All three senior project experts are involved in the day-to-day operations and are communicating with the supported projects, actors and regions. By combining their knowledge they contribute to understanding the cooperation processes within ESPON EGTC as well as being able to pinpoint challenges and issues they face on a daily basis. Besides mentioning encountered challenges and issues they could also speculate about how these problems came into existence and what can be done to overcome them.

For the interviews two interview guides have been developed. The first interview guide (appendix B) serves to gain insights in what the ESPON EGTC exactly is and what experienced challenges and issues are, together with how ESPON EGTC tackles these challenges and issues. The first respondent, the director, has been interviewed with the help of this guide. The second interview guide (appendix C) has been used to interview the remaining three respondents. This served to build upon the knowledge gained from the director and focused on the day-to-day cooperation processes within ESPON EGTC. As well as identifying challenges and issues they experienced in implementing ESPON EGTC and what ESPON EGTC does to overcome the challenges and issues. Both interview guides follow the structure of introduction, cooperation and problems to systematically acquire information about the respective topics.

### **3.2 Case selection**

Selecting a case that is representative and suited for answering the main research question is a challenge. A multiplicity of factors needs to be present or absent in order for a case to be suited. The case needs to be accessible for the researcher, a common language is required, and be representative for the population. These base criteria limit the adequate sample size. This affects the outcome of this research and could well not be representative and used beyond the purpose of this research (Seawright, 2008). This section argues the choice for a case and its added value toward the main research question.

### *EGTC classification*

In total there are 72 registered EGTCs, established between 2006 and 2018. Every EGTC has its own goal and structure. An overarching classification has been made to classify different types of EGTCs, this is done by the Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (CESCI). CESCI has been called into existence by the European Union to support permanent cross-border cooperation using European CBC projects like INTERREG, EGTC and ENI (CESCI, n.d.). By providing the classification EGTCs can be classified more easily and it becomes apparent what the EGTC is most used for.

The classification consists of four types; (1) EGTC-managing authority, the goal is to implement a specific programme (e.g. La Grande Région, ESPON). (2) EGTC-governance, providing a cross-border platform to which actors can apply projects aiming to develop a joint CBR (e.g. Eurometropolis Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai). (3) EGTC-network, the grouping of actors to promote and defend their common interests (e.g. EUCOR). (4) EGTC-project, combining actors to realize projects of infrastructure, public service or public interest (e.g. Hospital de Cerdanya).

### *Criteria*

The aforementioned classification is a starting point for selecting a case. To better select a case from these categories, additional criteria need to be looked at. For a case to be suited and relevant to the main research question four criteria are in place; registration date, spoken language, size and accessibility.

The first criterion in selecting a case from the list is the registration date. To keep this research relevant an EGTC from at least after the amendments of 2014 is required. All EGTCs must adapt to the amendments, but it can take years for all EGTCs to acknowledge the amended legislation. EGTCs established after 2014 are subject to the adjusted regulation.

The second criterion is the spoken language. Eastern Europe established in comparison to the West, relatively many EGTCs. Especially Hungary is active in utilizing the EGTC. This is due to the large amount of attention and adoption of EGTC in national regional policy by the Hungarian government (Svensson, 2016, p. 32). The Hungarian EGTCs, which constitute of a large amount of all EGTCs, do not have English as the main language. Therefore these EGTCs are not suited for this research.

The third criterion is the size of the EGTC. EGTCs are designed to be small in size to be able to work efficient and effective, this limits the amount of potential respondents. For example the Mura Region EGTC, this consists of less than 10 employees. This reduces the validity of the research.

The fourth criterion is the accessibility of the EGTC. The employees of an EGTC have to be willing to cooperate and participate in interviews. This criterion is a basic requirement for a researcher, but only when contacting EGTCs which are suited based on other criteria the willingness to cooperate can be encountered. This research encountered such a limit with the EUCOR EGTC case. Communication between the researcher and the EUCOR EGTC proved difficult and resulted in the denial from the EUCOR EGTC to participate in this research.

Of the four types of EGTC, the EGTC-network type and the EGTC-project type are the largest. These contain, mostly, smaller EGTCs with the aim of realizing practical cross-border projects. These small EGTCs do not employ enough personnel to be of added value and validity to this research. A project from these categories that is suited is EUCOR. But as mentioned at criterion point four, they were not willing to participate. The other two types, EGTC-managing authority and the EGTC governance type, contain just a few projects. The Eurometropolis, Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai EGTC has been established before the amendments, thus being unsuited. A case that suits all the criteria and is accessible is ESPON, the European Node for Territorial Evidence.

### *ESPON*

ESPON is the European Node for Territorial Evidence. ESPON EGTC has been established to reduce the administrative burden for the research department of ESPON. The assembly consists of the national government of Luxembourg and three Belgium regions (figure 3.1). The EGTC structure has been introduced in 2014, with the start of the new European programming period 2014 – 2020. In establishing the EGTC structure ESPON EGTC became the single beneficiary and managing authority to deliver the content envisaged by the ESPON 2020 cooperation programme (ESPON, 2014).

The ESPON 2020 Programme aims at promoting and fostering a European territorial dimension in development and cooperation by providing evidence, knowledge transfer and policy learning to public authorities and other policy actors at all levels (ESPON, 2015). The aim of ESPON is to support European regions in reinforcing their implementation of European cohesion policies. ESPON EGTC functions as an administrative and supporting department of ESPON. This is in contrast to other EGTCs that realize their own projects and have control over the cooperation with the partner countries. This makes ESPON EGTC unique in the EGTC legal framework.

Another unique aspect of ESPON EGTC is that it covers the whole European with its supporting activities. This, as well, is contrary to other EGTCs and at first glance, the EGTC regulation 1082/2006. The regulation states that the EGTC is targeted at two regions physically bordering each other along national borders. Upon close reading the amended EGTC policy, the leeway for this *new wave* of EGTC policy application can be found. In the remarks of the amendments it is stated that 'EGTC's are also being used for cooperation in the context of Union policies ... including by implementing programmes ... with Union financial support other than that under Cohesion Policy' (Official Journal of the European Union, 2013). In terms of this quote, ESPON EGTC holds relevance towards European cohesion policy, but utilizes the legislative tool in a way which was not envisioned in 2006. Further down in the same paragraph of the amendment it is stated that the EGTC can be used to 'provide for more efficient operation of macro-regional strategies'. This is exactly what ESPON does. It can be argued that the European wide coverage of ESPON EGTC is a new form, or wave, of application of the EGTC policy. In moving towards a new generation of European cross-border cooperation this development is interesting, making the ESPON EGTC case relevant and representative for this research.



Figure 3.1 Location of the ESPON EGTC (CoR, 2017)

### 3.3 Analysis methodology

After gathering the data at the cases through in depth interviews, the data has to be analyzed. The analysis in this research is based on theory elaborated upon in chapter 2. The theory provides direction, structure and scientific embedding for the analysis. The writings of Perkmann serve as a guiding reference to observed cross-border cooperation processes. With the help of Perkmann's writings contemporary cross-border cooperation processes are exposed and existing processes are identified. Multilevel governance is used as a guideline for analyzing supranational cooperation processes and how these changed with the introduction of ESPON EGTC.

For reference the data recordings of the interview have been transcribed serving as a reference for other scholars and as a way to more easily analyze the data. To aid in a structured analysis of the data, the software ATLAS.ti is used. Within the software open codes have been developed to classify various quotes from the interviews. Using ATLAS.ti these codes have been provided with an overarching code, called a family code. A total of 46 open codes are used, grouped under thirteen family codes (appendix D). Both type of codes helped structure the large amount of raw data. Together with using theory to identify certain processes within the raw data a complete picture is made. This approach has similarities with grounded theory, especially in using codes to analyze raw interview data. So-called hermeneutic units have been established to build an understanding of the bigger picture. In developing codes and analyzing the data references are made to the theory and the theoretical concept of the semantic space of MLG. This method contributes to a scientific approach of qualitative data analysis and increases the validity of this research. The analysis of the data is further structured in providing links between the open codes and the family codes, providing a visual representation of arguments made by respondents in the interviews, showing any contradicting or supporting arguments.

## 4 Analysis

The data analysis explores the gathered data in a descriptive manner to get a full overview of the data. The conclusions, interpretation of and reflection on the data can be found in chapter 5. Over two sessions, a focus group and a one-on-one interview, a total of four people have been interviewed. This provided information which could not have been obtained otherwise. This chapter is made up of three parts; firstly an analysis of the CoR Monitoring Report 2018, which serves as the basis for the critical literature review and the interviews. From this report known challenges and issues regarding ESPON EGTC and EGTC in general are identified. Secondly is an analysis of the interviews, identifying the exact challenges and issues for ESPON EGTC. In the analysis of the interviews links will be made with the CoR Monitoring Report to either confirm or contradict statements made by the respondents. Throughout both sections links are made to the theory, as elaborated in chapter 3. Lastly is the goal attainment, to analyze if the EGTC structure contributed to the goal of reducing the administrative burden for ESPON.

### 4.1 Committee of the Regions report

The Committee of the Regions EGTC Monitoring Report 2018 is the latest annual report on the EGTC. With 200 pages it is an elaborate report that highlights a multiplicity of EGTC related aspects, ranging from the spatial division of EGTCs to a comparative analysis of national provisions. In context of this research and analysis, two aspects are relevant; challenges and issues and the factsheets. The analysis of the report starts with the challenges and issues section and continues with an analysis of the factsheet of ESPON EGTC.

Rarely policies are carried out as written on paper. This is also true for the EGTC. In setting up and executing an EGTC, challenges are encountered. The CoR Monitoring report summarized all reported and identified Challenges and issues (see table 4.1). The main issue is the insecurity of the financial aspect for an EGTC (CoR, 2018, p.122). The amount of EGTCs reporting financial issues has grown since the previous report, which can be explained due to the establishment of multiple EGTCs since then. Despite the extensive typology, ESPON EGTC does not encounter any of the listed challenges and issues. Chapter 4.2 elaborates on the challenges and issues identified by respondents. This does imply that the CoR report is irrelevant in regard to ESPON EGTC, but merely illustrates the limits of the report.

Challenges and issues	Obstacle	EGTCs reporting obstacles
Finances	Lack of stable financial framework for operational stability/pre-financing of projects	6
Staff/Expenses	Lack of transnational statute recognition for personnel	1
	Varying wage/tax levels, national differences in labour law (timing and criteria), etc.	3
Legal	Lengthy constitution because of difficulties in implementing EGTC law in national law (including recognition of	1

	documents)	
	EGTCs having to apply the legal framework of the country of the seat/EGTCs having to apply the legal framework of multiple countries (impact on staff, controls, procurement, etc.)	2
	National differences in adoption of EGTC regulation	2
	Different laws to be applied in the working fields of the EGTCs (not EGTC regulation related)	1
	Cooperation with national bodies on respective national regulation difficult	1
Recognition and challenges	Recognition of EGTCs as cross-border/transnational-partners (ETC) or by MA (to make funding easier)	7
EGTCs in/and ETC	Interreg projects less focused on the needs of some types of EGTCs/territories of EGTCs (i.e. cross-border, more people-to-people projects, etc.)	2
	Furthering the involvement of EGTCs in ETC	1
	Eligibility of EGTC or members outside the programming area (location of headquarters vs. location of members)	1
Other	Emergence of nationalist influences	1

**Table 4.1** summarized problems and difficulties (adapted from: *Spatial Foresight*, 2017, p.122 - 123)

The report further mentions ESPON EGTC in regard to EGTCs being used as implementers of ETC. The implementation of ETC by EGTCs is not common, because most EGTCs pursue their own goals, for example in realizing cross-border infrastructure. ESPON EGTC and EGTC INTERREG Grande Region are the only two programmes responsible for implementing ETC through EGTC. This is why ESPON EGTC is unique and differs from other EGTCs. This information illustrates the reason for ESPON EGTC but does not explain anything about the cooperation processes within ESPON EGTC. The only information on ESPON EGTC which is relevant to this research is the factsheet, containing a descriptive analysis of every registered EGTC with the same format for every EGTC and a more elaborate analysis for newer EGTCs.

The factsheet is based on information provided by the EGTCs. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, this gives a good typology and overview of the multiplicity of EGTCs. The format for the analysis is divided over several sections; name, countries involved, (changes in convention/statute), tasks, challenges or issues, budget, EU co-funding, EU-funded projects and programmes being implemented in 2017 and staff (in FTE). The information provided by the EGTCs to fill in these sections has been reviewed for consistency and edited to improve the quality of the factsheets by the Committee of the Regions (CoR, 2018). This research mainly focuses on the factsheet as a basis for the analysis.

The factsheet for the ESPON EGTC gives a good overview of its vision, goals and tasks (the full factsheet can be found in appendix E). The tasks section contains information on the goals and developments. For example it is stated that "ESPON EGTC launched research

activities covering a wide range of topics" and that ESPON EGTC will work together with multiple actors and initiatives to keep improving ETC (CoR, 2018). Already from this the multi-actor and multi-level nature of ESPON EGTC and its supported programmes becomes apparent, indicating possible bottlenecks in cooperation processes. As Brunet-Jailly (2012) argues, cross-border cooperation, like ESPON EGTC, has become crucial in achieving social, economical and territorial cohesion, being the goal of the ESPON EGTC.

The theory chapter discusses three ways European cohesion can be achieved as argued by Perkmann and Sum (2002a); (1) sub-national authorities are being used as implementers of supranational policy, (2) sub-national authorities are being involved in the formulation and implementation of national foreign policy and (3) increased international communication and interaction between local regions, therefore bypassing national governments. ESPON EGTC implements programmes which are part of ETC, pointing to the first point of Perkmann and Sum (2002a). The ESPON EGTC assembly is used as implementer for programmes within ETC. The interviews focus on communication and cooperation of ESPON EGTC to identify challenges and issues which do not become apparent from the report in regard to the implementation of ETC programmes.

As mentioned, older EGTCs do not contain a 'problems and issues' section in the factsheet of the report. This does not imply that there are no problems regarding the implementation of the ESPON EGTC, it means that the report does not update the information regarding this section. The annual report from the year ESPON EGTC was established does contain such a section, but this information has become outdated. This is due to new initiatives being set up after the original annual report. Because there is no *problems and issues* section, there is little information on the challenges of the internal and external cooperation processes. At the same time, compared to the CoR monitoring report 2017, cooperation between ESPON EGTC and other initiatives have intensified. An example of a program which intensifies cooperation is the '*Territorial Evidence Support for ETC programmes*'. According to the report this programme will launch in 2018 and supports 12 ETC programmes which have been selected based on a screening from 2016 (CoR, 2018). Together with Interact, ESPON EGTC will implement this project. It is apparent that cooperation, internal as well as external, plays a big role in succeeding in these goals. Put differently, internal and external cooperation play a big role in achieving successful cross-border cooperation and thus in achieving the goals of the European Union, ESPON and ESPON EGTC. The interviews zoom in on how ESPON EGTC organizes internal and external cooperation, to go beyond the report and gain insight in the workings of the EGTC.

The Monitoring report gives an overview of reported and identified challenges and issues, serving as a basis for the interview guide and the interviews. In this regard the report has added value in serving as a starting point for this research, but has no added value towards the question how the EGTC structure is used to overcome challenges and issues. However the report does provide information about ESPON EGTC and the unique place it holds within EGTC in implementing programmes for ETC. This serves as a background in understanding the goal of ESPON EGTC, but again does not inform about the cooperation of the ESPON EGTC. Lastly the report mentions a new initiative launched by ESPON EGTC in regard to providing specific territorial evidence in the form of Territorial Evidence Support for ETC programmes. This indicates growing cooperation within ETC and the role ESPON EGTC plays. The report helps to identify possible challenges and issues and serves as a basis for

the interviews, but holds no real value in understanding cooperation processes of ESPON EGTC.

## 4.2 Interviews

The conducted interviews have been structured in a manner to uncover possible challenges and issues which do not become apparent at first sight. For example, during exploratory personal communication, prior to the actual interview, one of the respondents concluded that there were no challenges or issues in regard to ESPON EGTC (Raugze, personal communication, 2018), however during the first interview already a challenge for ESPON EGTC emerged. The second interview zoomed in on this challenge and attempted to identify other ones. Both interviews had the structure of introduction, cooperation and problems, as explained in chapter 3.

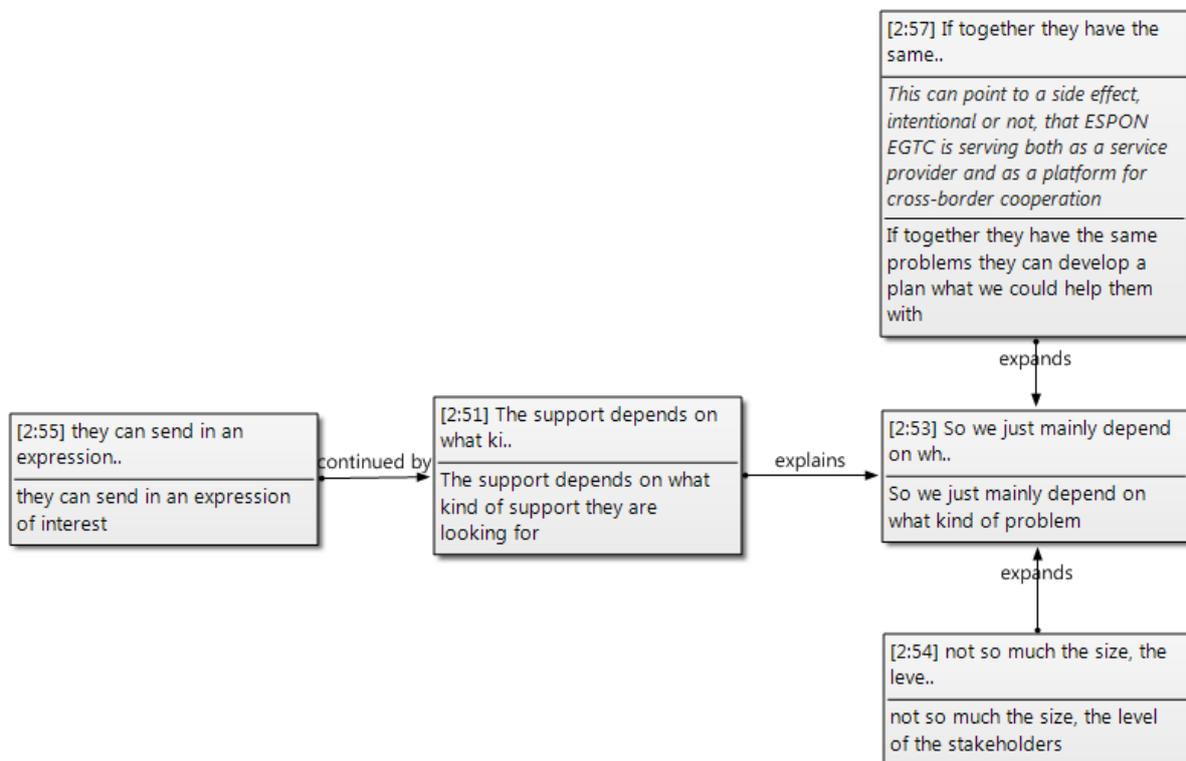
The information extracted from the CoR Monitoring Report has served as the basis and starting point for the conducted interviews. In the interviews the first topic of discussion, the introduction, is the establishment of the EGTC, what it means and how it works. They state, along with the Monitoring Report, that ESPON EGTC is the single beneficiary of ESPON and responsible for implementing the single operation within the current programming period (Cor, 2018; Raugze, personal communication, 2018).

The second topic of discussion is cooperation; who is involved? Why are they involved? What is their role? The answers to these questions varied a lot because ESPON EGTC deploys a wide range of programmes and supports a large array of projects. For that reason the focus was directed to one specific project conducted by ESPON EGTC, the Territorial Evidence Support for ETC programmes (TES). This programme has launched this year and contains every aspect of what ESPON EGTC does and how it cooperates to achieve its goals. Based on TES a full picture of ESPON EGTC has been made and how the respondents experienced cooperation with the introduction of the EGTC as opposed to the previous structure of ESPON.

Based on the previous programming period, INTERREG IV 2007 - 2013, external stakeholders made clear that there was a need to somehow update the information on territorial evidence (Petruzzi, personal communication, 2018). Following this demand, ESPON EGTC made a screening to see where, if and how to serve the needs of the stakeholders more precise, being the starting point for the TES programme. The actors that were interested were taken on board as part of the steering committee. This committee is involved with the implementation of the project from start till end. This is not only the approach and structure for TES, but also for macro-regions (Petruzzi, personal communication, 2018). "This project ... is a bottom-up project that starts by the expression of interest by stakeholders" (Di Biaggio, personal communication, 2018). ESPON EGTC provides a service, but actors/stakeholders/regions themselves must act upon it. In achieving the goals of the European Union these sub-national authorities and non-governmental actors are being used as implementers of supranational policy. Besides this process, as argued by Perkmann and Sum (2002a), is also the process of increased international communication and interaction between local regions. The bottom-up approach partly disregards and bypasses the national governments, unless the request for territorial

evidence has been made by a national government, or national governments as part of a macro-region (strand B scale).

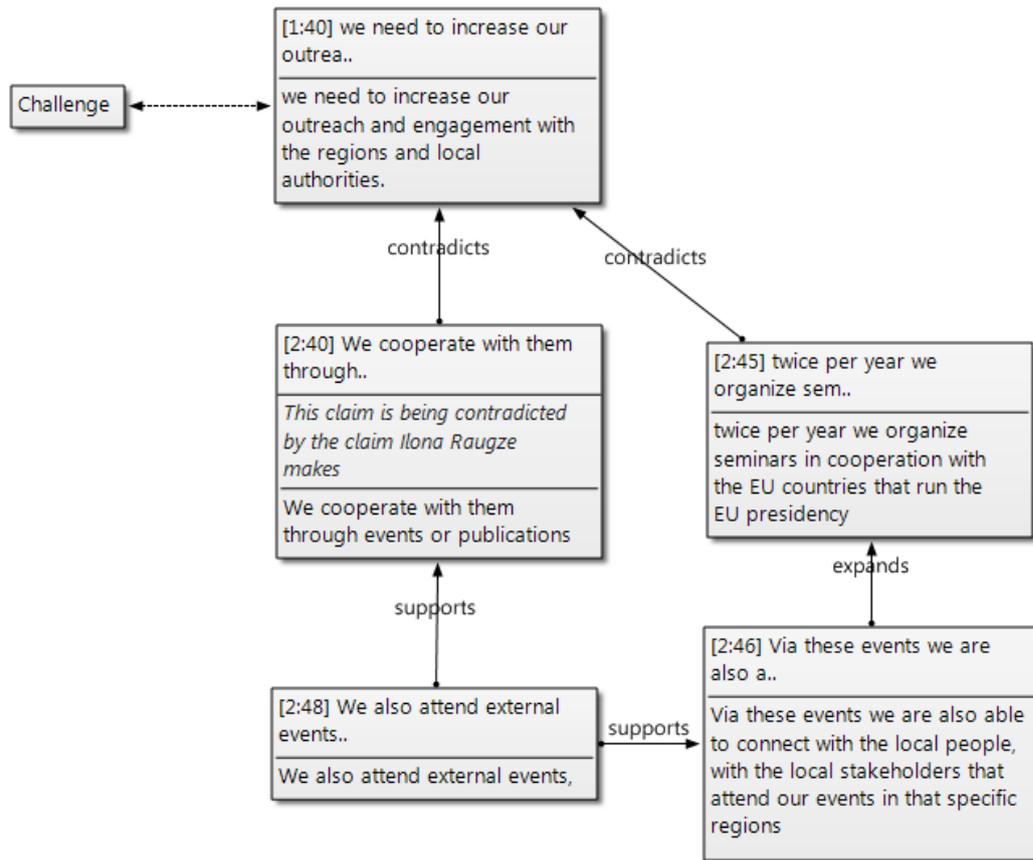
Upon receiving a request for territorial evidence, ESPON EGTC has multiple tools for assessing the request. In the interviews one tool has been specifically discussed, the targeted analysis (TA). The TA aims to find out who are the regional and local stakeholders (Di Biaggio, personal communication, 2018). The support ESPON EGTC offers is based on the TA, so there is no standard template for the service they deliver. “The support depends on what kind of support they are looking for” (Van Herwijnen, personal communication, 2018). Van Herwijnen continues to explain that regions that come to ESPON EGTC for their service also come into contact with other regions that experience the same problems or have experienced the same problems (Figure 4.1). “If together they have the same problems, they can develop a plan what we could help them with” (Van Herwijnen, personal communication, 2018). In successfully providing territorial evidence, based on this quote, it could be argued that ESPON EGTC is a platform for inter-actor cooperation in CBC. Whether or not this is intentional requires additional research. The implication of such a platform would be that through supranational legislation the national governments are bypassed even further.



**Figure 4.1** Relational overview of provided support by ESPON EGTC

The third topic of discussion is the problems. The CoR Monitoring Report 2018 gives an overview of problems indicated by EGTCs (see chapter 1, figure 1.3). Upon directly asking about problems, no problems were identified. Upon asking about issues as described in the report, financial and legal, no problems were identified (Raugze, personal communication, 2018). Raugze continues to explain that the absence of problems, challenges and issues is due to the structure of the EGTC; “Financially we are sufficiently covered by ... the national budget of Luxembourg” and “If there is new legislation ... then we simply abide” (Raugze, personal communication, 2018). Although these remarks are contradictory to the CoR Monitoring report, Raugze briefly mentions that the ESPON EGTC is providing sufficient support but that they need to increase their outreach. The outreach by ESPON EGTC is a matter of communication, communication with the smallest and remote regions of the European Union. “At the local level there are probably 150.000 municipalities and we are not able to help them all” (Van Herwijnen, personal communication 2018), illustrating the challenge for ESPON EGTC. Communication with stakeholders, actors and potential actors is being maintained and improved through various ways; workshops, annual seminars, targeted analysis, attending external events and close relationships with several European institutions like the Committee of the Regions.

From the interviews it becomes apparent that despite these efforts the outreach is still lacking, “The ESPON 2020 cooperation programme clearly defined the need to improve the outreach” (Petruzzi, personal communication, 2018). Possible causes could be that actors are not aware of ESPON EGTC or that there is a lack of knowledge and expertise to formulate a request. The first possible cause can be related to Perkmann and the awareness of regions about the European Union and the services it offers. By improving European cohesion, ill-equipped regions are better integrated in the EU. As a result these regions are made aware of the support the EU offers. The second possible cause can be related to multilevel governance. The regions that lack knowledge and expertise to formulate a request are not capable of communicating and cooperating with other regions and institutions. To tackle the first possible cause, ESPON EGTC could intensify their outreach towards and in the furthest regions. This is currently being done indirectly through service requests of larger regions which the small regions are part of (Van Herwijnen, personal communication, 2018). The second possible cause is being tackled by a different European programme, ETC. If an actor or region is unable to formulate a request for ESPON EGTC, they are directed towards the national contact points for ETC. Aside from that, ESPON EGTC is working on developing a new policy brief to show these regions how to strengthen themselves and be able to compete and cooperate with other regions (Van Herwijnen, personal communication, 2018). The contradictory nature of several statements made by respondents has been schematically summarized in figure 4.2. What these contradictions mean for this research is how ESPON EGTC deals with lacking outreach. How respondents state to overcome the identified problems, through the EGTC structure.



**Figure 4.2** Relational overview of contradictions

From the interviews another possible problem emerges, the transnational character of the research department. This problem has emerged with the establishment of the ESPON EGTC and the switch from subsidy contracts to service contracts. In the case of subsidy contracts it is a prerequisite to have at least three nationalities in the research team, even if one nationality plays a minor role in the research. This ensured communication and cooperation between several countries in order to be approved. Improving the cooperation between countries is one of the goals of ESPON and the EU, subsidy contracts contributed to this. The downside of subsidy contracts is that the payments are done based on worked hours and entails that it is not possible to make profit from certain tasks. As a result only public institutions like universities applied (Petruzzi, personal communication, 2018). This limits the effectiveness of the ESPON EGTC. With service contracts there is no prerequisite of multiple nationalities in the research team, simplifying the teams but lowering the international cooperation and cohesion. The service contracts do enable private organizations to apply, which improves the effectiveness of the ESPON EGTC. For the exact impact of this change more research is required.

The last part of the analysis is about the goal attainment of the EGTC structure for ESPON. The EGTC structure has been proposed by the European Commission and implemented to reduce the administrative burden of partners, research institutions and stakeholders (Di Biagio; Raugze, personal communication, 2018). In terms of goal attainment this was successful because the administrative burden is not their back anymore, especially for the researchers. This is illustrated by the fact that the timing has greatly improved; before the EGTC producing a TA could take up to a year, with the EGTC structure a TA can be

produced in a year. This is a substantial improvement and benefitting the goal attainment of the ESPON EGTC. But, a respondent discerns that the chosen EGTC structure might not be the cause. “If you ask me ... If this is due to the EGTC or something else, I would not be able to respond and discuss” (Petruzzi, personal communication, 2018). In turn, the EGTC structure has provided the administrative section of ESPON with more personnel, thus being more equipped to execute the requested tasks (Petruzzi, personal communication, 2018). This raises an interesting debate about how cross-border cooperation in Europe could be shaped, this requires more research. A relational overview of the statements made by respondents has been given in figure 4.3.

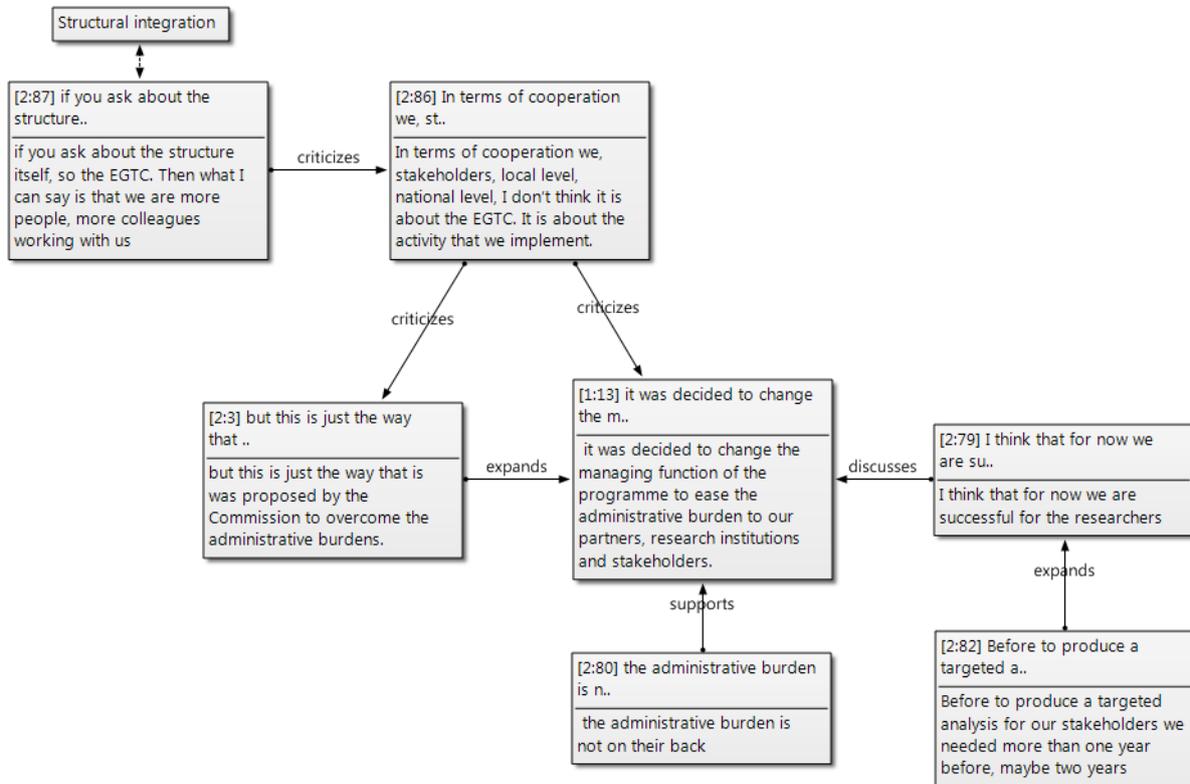


Figure 4.3 Relational overview of ESPON EGTC goal attainment

## 5 Conclusions and reflection

In this research the cooperation processes within the ESPON EGTC are examined and how well the EGTC structure is performing in achieving the goals of the European Union. The main question is answered by three sub-questions. The data for the questions is gathered through two interviews, a focus group and a one-on-one interview, which totals to four respondents. Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the gathered data from the interviews. This chapter is, in contrast to chapter 4, interpretive and explanatory. This chapter contains, first, the conclusion and interpretation of the gathered data based on the theory and second, a critical reflection on the research.

### 5.1 Conclusions

The conclusions section of this research contains a critical interpretation of the gathered data. The section is structured according to the main research question and the supporting sub-questions. Every sub-question is answered through combining the analyzed data with the theory from chapter 2. By combining the answers to all the sub-questions, the main research question is answered.

*What challenges and issues that ESPON EGTC faces can be identified?*

The first sub-question is, “what challenges and issues that ESPON EGTC faces can be identified?”. This question can be answered by combining data gathered from the monitoring report and the interviewed respondents. The monitoring report states a multiplicity of challenges and issues that EGTCs face, but as became apparent from the interviews, none of those were faced. The report identifies issues such as financial shortcomings, legal issues in implementing an EGTC and a lack of national recognition of the EGTC. No respondents reported that these issues were present. In this sense, the monitoring report has no added value in regard to the ESPON EGTC.

The monitoring report does contain a good guideline to explain why ESPON EGTC does not face these challenges. In chapter 1.2 it is noted from the Monitoring report that there seems to be room for improvement in cooperation within EGTCs. Especially in overcoming and preventing policy barriers. ESPON EGTC is special case because it is a service provider in which the EGTC structure merely acts as a way to reduce administrative burdens. From the report and the interviews it becomes apparent that ESPON EGTC does not encounter any form of policy barriers. The lack of policy barriers is partly due to the reason why ESPON EGTC has been established. The ESPON programme has existed for a long period of time in which it maintained good contacts with most regions in Europe, but there was a great administrative burden which could be improved. For that reason the EGTC structure has been established by Luxembourg and Belgium. Luxembourg chairs the assembly. It can be argued that the already existing good connection and communication between the two countries made it easier to set up and acknowledge the ESPON EGTC. The lack of policy barriers is explained by respondents due to the clear regulations by the Luxembourg government. By giving full authority to one of the two countries after establishing the EGTC it prevents policy barriers to come up during the implementation phase. Good communication in cooperation is crucial in achieving this.

Contrary to the report, the analysis chapter identified two challenges and issues from the interview transcripts. The respondents pointed out two ESPON EGTC specific challenges and issues. The first issue is a lack of outreach, the second issue is reduced European territorial cohesion due to reduced international cooperation.

The challenge of lacking outreach entails that there is insufficient communication and cooperation with actors and regions within the European Union. Regions that are ill-equipped to apply for support from ESPON do not benefit from the territorial evidence ESPON EGTC provides. The implication for ESPON EGTC is that it does not completely fulfill the European goal of territorial cohesion.

The second issue of reduced European territorial cohesion due to reduced international cooperation has been noted by a senior project expert. It was a result of asking about personal experiences with the EGTC structure of ESPON. Chapter 4.2 elaborates on the changed contract structure, the shift from subsidy contracts to service contracts. As a result the target audience of ESPON has broadened, due to the fact that non-governmental actors can benefit from ESPON support at a lower cost. Including private actors in European ETC could allow for more dynamics in European cross-border cooperation, as there is a larger amount of cooperating and communicating actors. The multilevel governance as presented by Piattoni (2009) includes private actors in supranational cooperation. Using Piattoni (2009) the way private actors and governmental actors can be analyzed and understood. But to definitively state that this is an issue, more research is required. Only then can multilevel governance and European cohesion through international cooperation be combined to solve the issue.

Challenges and issues	Description	Identified by
Lacking outreach	Insufficient communication and cooperation with actors and regions	The respondents
Cooperation through research	Reduced European territorial cohesion due to reduced international cooperation.	The respondents

**Table 5.1** Challenges and issues (own table)

*What causes for the challenges and issues can be identified?*

‘What causes for the challenges and issues can be identified?’, Is the second sub-question. This question is answered using only data provided by respondents, because the monitoring report does not mention anything about this topic. Table 5.1 states the identified challenges and issues. This section zooms in on the causes for these challenges and issues

The challenge of lacking outreach had been identified by respondents, meaning there is insufficient communication and cooperation between ESPON EGTC and actors and regions within the European Union. To improve the communication and cooperation ESPON EGTC deploys several tactics and approaches. But to understand why the outreach is lacking and the current approaches have not been sufficient, an understanding of ESPON EGTC is needed and how they deliver their service. In order for a region to gain support from ESPON EGTC they have to apply a request for territorial evidence support, meaning that ESPON EGTC is a bottom-up approach. It is possible that actors and regions are ill-equipped and not able to formulate such a request for territorial evidence support, therefore never gaining

support from ESPON EGTC. Lacking outreach in this regard can be seen as an external challenge instead of an issue caused by ESPON EGTC itself.

Another possible cause can be that regions are not aware that ESPON EGTC and their territorial evidence support exist. Despite all the efforts of the European Union and ESPON EGTC to make regions aware of its existence, there are still regions which are not aware. The next section elaborates on the taken measures to maintain and improve the outreach of ESPON EGTC.

Both causes are not specifically due to ESPON EGTC, they are external factors limiting the outreach. Due to the bottom-up nature and the way ESPON EGTC works with service requests the outreach has been limited. The outreach could be improved by improving the contact between ESPON EGTC and national governments and regions. How to improve in this aspect requires more research.

Reduced European cohesion due to reduced international cooperation is a new challenge for ESPON EGTC. The cause for reduced European cohesion is straightforward and has a single cause; the changed contract types. Chapter 4.2 and the previous section of this chapter have explained what exactly the difference between subsidy contracts and service contracts are. To exactly state what the impact of the changed contract type is, more research is required.

Challenges and issues	Description	Identified by	Causes
Lacking outreach	Insufficient communication and cooperation with actors and regions	The respondents	Inability of regions to request territorial evidence support  Regions are unaware of the existence of ESPON EGTC
Cooperation through research	Reduced European territorial cohesion due to reduced international cooperation.	The respondents	Changed contract type

**Table 5.2** Causes for challenges and issues (own table)

*What measures is ESPON EGTC taking to overcome these challenges and issues?*

'What measures is ESPON EGTC taking to overcome these challenges and issues?', is the third sub-question. This question is answered through data gathered from respondents, because the monitoring report mentions nothing on this topic. The challenges and issues have been identified and the causes have been argued. The causes have been summarized in table 5.2. This section contains information on what measures ESPON EGTC takes to overcome these challenges and issues.

Maintaining good outreach is a challenge on its own, one of the respondents is a senior project expert on outreach. This shows that ESPON EGTC has taken up the challenge of maintaining and improving their outreach. ESPON EGTC deploys a multitude of tactics and approaches to improve their outreach. Table 5.3 summarized all measures being taken to improve outreach, as reported by respondents.

Measures	Description
Workshops	Educational workshops given by members of the ESPON EGTC to stakeholders
Seminars	ESPON EGTC annually organizes two seminars, which stakeholders and interested actors can attend
External events	The presence of ESPON EGTC at external events to further extend the outreach
Territorial impact assessment (TIA)	Indirectly improving the outreach through providing territorial evidence tools to external organisation like the Committee of the Regions
National ESPON contact points	Not directly an activity deployed by ESPON EGTC, but serves as a local contact point for stakeholders and actors
Joint publications	By working together with research institutes they improve communication and relationships
High degree of contact with other European organisations	By being aware of what their colleagues in the European Union do, ESPON EGTC builds upon their knowledge

**Table 5.3** Measures (own table)

From table 5.3 it becomes apparent that ESPON EGTC approaches outreach in a variety of ways. Through direct and indirect influences, they increase their outreach. A form of indirect influence is the territorial impact assessment. ESPON EGTC developed this tool and the Committee of the Regions, for example, uses it in their communication and cooperation with European regions. These approaches have been deployed for a long time, also before the implementation of the EGTC structure. In this way there was no apparent difference in outreach in the pre- and post EGTC structure. Though, the respondents still stated that there is a need to improve the outreach. More research is required to determine the current state of the outreach and what the best way is to improve the outreach. This research will probably come with the new programming period in 2020, where the new EGTC structure is evaluated for its performance in the 2014 – 2020 programming period.

Reduced European cohesion due to reduced international cooperation is not yet a recognized challenge by ESPON EGTC, for that reason there are no direct actions being taken to overcome this challenge. But, as stated in chapter 4.2, regions applying for territorial evidence support are brought together by ESPON EGTC. This indirectly improves European cohesion, not through research cooperation but by bringing regions together that apply for territorial evidence support. In the following paragraph an observation is argued, which does not contribute to solving the challenge of reduced European cohesion due to reduced international cooperation, but could be used to strengthen European cohesion through a different aspect of ESPON EGTC.

Chapter 4.2 identified an indirect form of support ESPON EGTC delivers to improve the goals of the European Union; social, territorial and economical cohesion. This indirect form of support is through bringing actors and regions together who want to apply for territorial evidence support. The reason ESPON EGTC brings these parties together is to be efficient in delivering their service. If they can help multiple regions at once with the same problem, it is more effective than helping each region independently and giving them the same evidence. By bringing together actors at the stage of applying for support, a unique

European scale of cooperation is developed. A European scale where municipalities, private actors and institutes cooperate to achieve a joint goal; gaining ESPON EGTC support. Instead of calling it a complete new scale of cooperation, based around ESPON EGTC support, calling it a platform is more adequate. Regions, for example a municipality, might well not be aware of the challenges their colleagues encounter. They are not aware they are encountering the same problems as their colleagues, hence they apply for ESPON EGTC support separately. What ESPON EGTC does is bring them together so they can discuss their problems. Arguably two things can occur at this point; (1) the regions solve their problem together, (2) the regions jointly apply for territorial evidence support. In both cases there is a positive impact. Option one improves European social cohesion through international cooperation, option two brings about a greater efficiency for ESPON EGTC. Therefore it can be argued that ESPON EGTC provides a platform for inter-actor cooperation in cross-border cooperation. A negative impact of this platform could be that it invades in the goals of other European programmes, or to be developed programmes. The real impact and implications of developing such a platform further requires more research, possibly through a pilot project.

Challenges and issues	Description	Identified by	Causes	Measures
Lacking outreach	Insufficient communication and cooperation with actors and regions	The respondents	Inability of regions to request territorial evidence support  Regions are unaware of the existence of ESPON EGTC	A multiplicity of communication and cooperation enhancing approaches
Cooperation through research	Reduced European territorial cohesion due to reduced international cooperation.	The respondents	Changed contract type	No direct measures

**Table 5.4** Measures for the challenges and issues (own table)

### *The main research question*

The previous sub-questions build an understanding for answering the main question; ‘How has the EGTC structure contributed to overcoming challenges and issues in the cooperation between different levels of actors by looking at the ESPON case?’. The challenges and issues are known, the causes are known and the measures ESPON EGTC takes to overcome the challenges and issues are also known. Table 5.4 contains a summary of all the sub-questions. The last step is to see how the EGTC structure contributed in overcoming the challenges and issues. An important part of the EGTC structure is how different levels of actors cooperate, the unique aspect that sets EGTC apart from other European programmes.

The EGTC structure of ESPON has contributed towards reducing the administrative workload on the research departments, as was the intention of the European Commission. In that sense the EGTC has been successful in achieving its goals. But the EGTC envisioned by the European Union is about more than reducing administrative burdens, it is to enhance social, economical and territorial cohesion within Europe. The EGTC structure for ESPON

has centralized communication and cooperation, all these activities are placed together. In regard to the challenge of outreach, ESPON EGTC can dedicate more resources towards maintaining and improving it now that it is the managing authority. Through larger teams and more colleagues provided by the EGTC structure ESPON can improve their outreach more easily. In regard to reduced European cohesion due to reduced international cooperation, the EGTC structure has been a negative impact. With the introduction of the EGTC structure for ESPON the type of contract changed from a subsidy contract to a service contract, reducing the amount of research institutes that are involved. The EGTC structure has been the cause of this, but the EGTC structure also provides a new way to overcome this challenge. As argued in the previous section, ESPON EGTC can provide a platform through which European cooperation and cohesion can be improved.

By looking at the theory in regard to the main research question, the cooperation between different levels of actors can be analyzed. Throughout the research ‘regions’ and ‘actors’ are mentioned who apply for territorial evidence support by ESPON EGTC. The mentioned regions can range between municipalities to provinces, indicating multiple levels of government. The mentioned actors can be divided into two categories, public and private, e.g.. a university and an entrepreneur. The argued observation of a platform, supported by ESPON EGTC, brings these actors together. The interaction between these regions and actors together with ESPON EGTC contain all characteristics of multilevel governance as argued by Piattoni (2009). By bringing together all these actors without contracts or agreements, based on data from the respondents, the social and territorial cohesion within the European Union is strengthened.

The small nature of EGTC and its bottom-up approach are completely different from the ETC programmes in use at this moment. The initiative lies with the regions of the European Union, supported by the transnational government. No more comprehensive managing structures to achieve large scale infrastructure projects or prestigious international projects. EGTC brings back cooperation to its core, to the core of the European Union. Ordinary people trying to achieve a goal in their own backyard, with the support of the European Union. Is EGTC a step forward in ETC or a step in a different direction? Until bottom-up approaches in cross-border cooperation become widespread in ETC, it would seem a step in a different direction. Nonetheless, instead of a new iteration, EGTC can be argued as the start of a new generation in ETC, building upon the knowledge of its predecessors like INTERREG.

ETC	
Generation I	INTERREG      ENI      ENPI      INTERACT
<b>Iterations during generation I</b> <b>(European programming periods)</b>	I (1990 - 1993)
	II (1994 - 1999)
	III (2000 - 2006)
	IV (2007 - 2013)
	V (2014 - 2020)
<b>Generation II</b>	EGTC

**Table 5.5** Generations of ETC approaches (own table)

## **5.2 Reflection**

Starting from an interest in European cross-border cooperation to an analysis of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, this research attempts to add new knowledge to this specific form of European CBC. But this research has its limitations.

The first and foremost limitation is time. This bachelor's thesis is written from February to August 2018, limiting the amount of time that could be spent on gathering data. It took more time and effort to explore possible cases and arrange interviews than anticipated, resulting in less interviews and respondents than required for a solid research. An implication of this is lower external validity of this research. Every statement made in this research requires more data to be definitively supported. In this regard this research can be seen as an exploratory research into the EGTC legislation, through ESPON EGTC. Though, this research gains insight into challenges, issues and possibilities for ESPON EGTC which are not yet known based on existing literature.

The second limitation is the chosen research method; a single case study. Linking back to the limitation of time, only one case has been researched due to time restrictions. The implication is that only statements about ESPON EGTC can be made, not about the EGTC legislation in a more general sense. Nonetheless, in the next section is a discussion on the EGTC structure based on observations within ESPON EGTC. Thus the scope of this research is quite small. The strong aspect of a single case study is that the chosen case is being researched thoroughly. As mentioned in chapter 3.1, a single case study builds a better and deeper understanding of a case than a comparative case study.

Despite the small scope and low validity, this research encountered an interesting discussion during the interviews. The discussion of what the best way is to realize the goals of the European Union in regard to cross-border cooperation. Is the EGTC legislation really causing improved CBC? Is the EGTC legislation the way forward? Or can the improvements be caused by other developments or processes? Achieving the goals of the European Union is an iterative process in which EGTC is one of the latest iterations. In this research the contribution of ESPON EGTC in European cross-border cooperation, i.e. ETC, is analyzed. It laid bare challenges and issues, explored the causes and measures to counter them and it argued the added value of the EGTC legislation in cooperation processes between different levels of actors to achieve the European goals. To further help improve reaching the European goals of social, territorial and economical cohesion through EGTC, more EGTCs have to be researched and analyzed. Perhaps it is the best way to achieve the goals, but researching them will at least help build an understanding of the latest iteration and of its challenges and issues. Thus continuously shaping cross-border cooperation and evolving it towards a new generation of cross-border cooperation within Europe.

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## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix A: The treaty of Nice

“Chapter 17, article 158

In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Community shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic and social cohesion.

In particular, the Community shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions or islands, including rural areas.

Chapter 17, article 159

Member States shall conduct their economic policies and shall coordinate them in such a way as, in addition, to attain the objectives set out in Article 158. The formulation and implementation of the Community's policies and actions and the implementation of the internal market shall take into account the objectives set out in Article 158 and shall contribute to their achievement. The Community shall also support the achievement of these objectives by the action it takes through the Structural Funds (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, Guidance Section; European Social Fund; European Regional Development Fund), the European Investment Bank and the other existing Financial Instruments.

The Commission shall submit a report to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions every three years on the progress made towards achieving economic and social cohesion and on the manner in which the various means provided for in this Article have contributed to it. This report shall, if necessary, be accompanied by appropriate proposals.

If specific actions prove necessary outside the Funds and without prejudice to the measures decided upon within the framework of the other Community policies, such actions may be adopted by the Council acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251 and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.” (European Community, 2001. p.104-105)

## 7.2 Appendix B: Interview guide A

- **The respondent:**
  - Who are you?
  - What is your position in ESPON EGTC?
  - What do you do in ESPON EGTC?
- **ESPON EGTC establishment:**
  - What is the difference between ESPON and ESPON EGTC?
  - Why has the ESPON EGTC been established?
  - What are the ESPON EGTC goals?
  - What is the EGTC focus?
- **Cooperation:**
  - Who is involved with the ESPON EGTC?
  - Why are these actors involved?
  - What is their role?
  - How do they interact?
  - What is their interaction level?
  - Are they equal?
  - How did these interactions change from ESPON to ESPON EGTC?
  - What do they see as problems?
- **The problems:**
  - How did these problems emerge?
  - How do you deal with these problems?
  - What did the EGTC do to help solve these problems?

### 7.3 Appendix C: Interview guide B

- **The respondent:**
  - Who are you?
  - What is your position in ESPON EGTC?
  - What do you do in ESPON EGTC?
- **Cooperation:**
  - Who is involved with the ESPON EGTC?
  - How do you reach out to poorly equipped regions?
  - Why are these actors involved?
  - What is their role?
  - How do they interact?
  - What is their interaction level?
  - Are they equal?
  - How did these interactions change from ESPON to ESPON EGTC?
  - What do they see as problems?
- **The problems:**
  - How did these problems emerge?
  - How do you deal with these problems?
  - What did the EGTC do to help solve these problems?

## 7.4 Appendix D: Codebook

Family code	Open code
<b>Challenges and issues</b>	
	Challenge
	Issues
<b>ESPON EGTC - Cooperation</b>	
	Intergovernmental cooperation
	Inter-actor cooperation
	Actor
	Projects
	Education
<b>ESPON EGTC - Structure</b>	
	Offered support
	Goal (ESPON EGTC)
	Establishment (ESPON EGTC)
	Structure (ESPON EGTC)
	Offered support (indirect)
<b>ESPON EGTC – Support</b>	
	Objective
	Expression of interest
	Requested support
	Base
	Side target
<b>ESPON EGTC - Mindset</b>	
	Insight
	Experience
<b>ESPON EGTC – Strong aspect</b>	
	Legal
	Financial (strong)
	Structural integration
	Communication (strong)
<b>ESPON EGTC – Weak Aspect</b>	
	Outreach
	Communication (weak)
	Transnational character
	Financial (weak)
<b>ESPON - Structure</b>	
	Current period
	Previous period
	Goal (ESPON)

<b>ESPON - Research</b>	
	Current period (research)
	Previous period (research)
<b>TES</b>	
	Establishment (TES)
	Cooperation (TES)
	Structure (TES)
	Needs
	Goal (TES)
<b>EGTC</b>	
	Structure (EGTC)
	Goal (EGTC)
<b>Theory</b>	
	Internal Stakeholder
	External Stakeholder
	State actor
	Non-state actor
<b>Committee of the Regions</b>	
	Structure
<b>Opinion</b>	
	Attainment
	Improvement
	Criticism

Table 7.1 Codebook

**7.5 Appendix E:  
Factsheet ESPON EGTC**

 <p>European Committee of the Regions</p>	
<b>Name (Acronym)</b>	ESPON EGTC – European Node for Territorial Evidence (ESPON EGTC)
<b>Countries involved</b>	Belgium and Luxembourg
<b>Tasks</b>	<p>The purpose of the ESPON EGTC is to act as single beneficiary to implement and deliver content envisaged by the ESPON 2020 cooperation programme. This programme is designed to reinforce the effectiveness of Cohesion Policy and other sectorial policies and programmes under ESI funds as well as national and regional territorial development policies, through the production, dissemination and promotion of territorial evidence. ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary for implementing the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme in the framework of Cohesion Policy and is one of the interregional territorial cooperation programmes. It covers all 28 EU Members States, as well as the 4 Partner States of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The purpose is to contribute to a Cohesion Policy that has the maximum effect in supporting Europe 2020. This includes strengthening the capacity of the EU economy to grow, innovate and generate employment, and deliver positive and lasting impact in promoting territorial cohesion and harmonious development across EU regions and MS. Support for national and regional authorities in contributing to Europe 2020 and to territorial cohesion is an inherent part of the Programme.</p> <p>During 2017 ESPON EGTC launched research activities covering a wide range of topics such as financial instruments, green infrastructure, circular economy, youth unemployment, geographical specificities and territorial reference framework.</p> <p>There were also targeted analyses in response to stakeholder demands including regional strategy, territorial cooperation areas, metropolitan areas, protected areas, migration flows, macro-regional spatial planning, cross-border public services, digital health, cultural heritage, territorial impact assessment for cross-border cooperation, maritime spatial planning and land-sea interactions, big data for integrated territorial policy development, as well as urban-rural connectivity in non-metropolitan regions.</p> <p>In addition, activities initiated in 2016 delivered data, territorial evidence, analyses and trends that have been used at all levels to improve policy making in Europe.</p> <p>In 2018 ESPON EGTC will launch a project entitled ‘Territorial Evidence Support for ETC programmes’. The project will be implemented by a transnational service provider selected following competitive tendering in the last quarter of 2017. Following detailed discussions with Interact, this project will focus on 12 ETC programmes that responded to the 2016 survey to determine the demand for customised territorial evidence support from</p>

<b>ESPON EGTC</b>	<p>ESPON. ETC programmes provide a framework for implementing joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different member and partner states, and their regions, and are therefore a very important stakeholder target group for ESPON territorial evidence. The primary objective of this project is to make the ESPON territorial evidence knowledge base accessible and useful for programme managers, joint technical secretariats and policymakers involved in the implementation of ETC programmes. In pursuit of this objective, the project shall aim at developing an improved set of territorial indicators for ETC programmes to support, inter alia, investment priority setting, strategic programming, monitoring and evaluation. This shall be supported by extensive ETC stakeholder consultation and enhancing the usability, functionality and relevance of ESPON evidence by integrating territorial indicators into the Interact KEEP database (<a href="http://www.keep.eu">www.keep.eu</a>), which provides a centralised source of aggregated data for all ETC programmes. ESPON EGTC will work with Interact to implement this project. The EGTC has received much interest from ETC programmes for this project as they move towards mid-term evaluations. Accordingly, success could lead to rolling out the project beyond the initial 12 programmes.</p> <p>The EGTC is developing a project "European and Macro-regional Territorial Monitoring Tool" aimed at providing support to EU macro-regions and VASAB. It should develop one module covering the entire EU plus Switzerland, Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway for monitoring, interpreting and communicating territorial development trends and forecasts for policy objectives like Cohesion Policy or the Territorial Agenda. In addition, and more specifically for EU macro-regions, it will also develop four modules covering implementing macro-regional strategies (EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSAIR and EUSALP) as well as the VASAB Long-Term Perspective. The main outcome will be a web tool, which provides territorial evidence to stakeholders and policymakers in Europe as well as the Baltic Sea, Danube, Alpine and Adriatic-Ionian macro-regions on key development trends and the progress and implementation of policy objectives as defined in the macro-regional strategies.</p> <p>ESPON EGTC is also implementing a targeted analysis to develop common spatial perspectives for the Alpine area (Alps2050). The main outcome will be a territorial vision and common spatial perspectives for the Alpine area, to indicate how developments in selected thematic fields can influence sustainable territorial development and enhance territorial resilience, including ecosystem functioning and biological diversity until 2050. It will also identify broader impacts of developments in thematic fields for different types of territories in the Alpine area (e.g. rural areas, urban areas).</p>
<b>Budget</b>	€ 10,961,350.98 for 2017
<b>EU co-funded</b>	€ 39,276,145 for the entire financial period
<b>EU-funded projects and programmes being implemented in 2017</b>	In the framework of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme, the ESPON EGTC in the period 2015-2022 implements the ESPON Single Operation. <b>ESPON Single Operation</b> , total budget: € 48,032,234 for the entire financial programming period, total budget implemented since the start of the Single Operation and until June 2017: € 4,041,023.36.
<b>Staff (in FTE)</b>	20 FTE in 2017, all hired directly.

Figure 7.1 ESPON EGTC – European node for territorial service (CoR, 2018)