

The European Global Gateway, Belt and Road Initiative and interorganisational diffusion; The EU mimicking a rival?

By: Sander Hoefsloot, s1044300

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Political Science (MSc). Specialisation: European Union Politics and Governance.

Supervised by: prof. dr. J.M. van der Vleuten

Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

Submission: 20th of July, 2024

Word count: 20.984

Abstract

The field on institutionalisation of regional organisations has been growing and deepening. Interorganisational diffusion can occur when these organisations influence each other's institutionalisation. However, the EU, a strongly institutionalised RO, is often seen as a pioneer or shining image for other ROs but is often assumed to be uninfluenced itself. The example of the new EU initiative, the Global Gateway (EUGG), which attempts to bring all the EU's developmental policy under one roof, is theorized by commentators as being a direct response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a similar developmental catch-all project. The EU seems to be influenced. This thesis attempts to show to what extent the Chinese initiative has driven EU policy makers to consider the EUGG and looks for a possible 'China-factor' in the creation of this project, both in the EUGG's institutional structure, but also in its implementation. It does so by using process tracing and interviews to create a clear image of the motivations and developments in the creation of the EUGG. In line with current literature on interorganisational diffusion, I have found indirect "recipient driven" influence and mechanisms to be strongest, with the competition mechanism dominating governance institutionalization, lesson drawing being at work in the implementation aspects of the initiative and finally normative emulation explaining the 'branding' and narrative of the initiative. Therefore, EUGG decisionmakers are influenced by the so-called 'China factor'.

Contents

Abstract.....	1
Contents.....	2
List of abbreviations and acronyms.....	4
List of figures and tables.....	6
1. Introduction.....	7
1.1 The Projects.....	7
1.1.1 The New Silk Road.....	7
1.1.2 The Global Gateway.....	8
1.2 The Link.....	8
1.3 Method.....	9
1.4 Societal and scientific relevance.....	9
1.5 What's next?.....	10
2. Theory.....	11
2.1 Regional Organisations.....	11
2.2 Characteristics.....	13
2.3 Institutionalization explained: Interorganisational diffusion.....	15
2.4 Hypotheses.....	18
3. Method.....	20
3.1 Research design.....	20
3.2 Conceptualization & operationalization.....	21
3.2.1 Measuring influence.....	21
3.2.2 Measuring institutionalization.....	21
3.2.3 Measuring diffusion mechanisms.....	22
3.3 Case justification.....	24
4. The Global Gateway's Development.....	25
4.1 2013-2017: The Infrastructure gap & China.....	25
4.2 2018-2021: The need for an alternative.....	27
4.3 2021: European lawmaking at a dazzling pace.....	28
4.4 2022-2023: External shocks and further institutionalization.....	31
4.5 2023-...: A declining BRI?.....	34
5. Analysis.....	36
5.1 Influence & Diffusion.....	36
5.2 Institutionalisation.....	36
5.2.1 Governance.....	37
5.2.2 Implementation.....	37

5.2.3 The Brand.....	38
5.3 Diffusion mechanisms.....	38
5.3.1 Governance & Institutional design	38
5.3.2 Implementation	39
5.3.3 The Brand.....	39
6. Conclusion.....	40
6.1 Limitations	40
6.2 Future avenues	41
Bibliography	42
Appendices	47
Appendix A: Interview guide.....	47

List of abbreviations and acronyms

ACP – African, Caribbean and Pacific States

AIIB – Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

AU – African Union

B3W – Build Back Better World Initiative

BAG – Global Gateway Business Advisory Group

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative

CSO/LA - Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Dialogue Platform

DG INTPA – Directorate General for International Partnerships

DG NEAR – Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

EEAS – European External Action Service

EEC – European Economic Community

EIB – European Investment Bank

EP – European Parliament

EU – European Union

EUGG – European Global Gateway

HR/VP - High Representative of Foreign Affairs, Vice President of the Commission

IGO – Intergovernmental Organisation

IIGO – Informal Intergovernmental Organisation

MFF- Multi-annual Financial Framework

MoU – Memorandum of Understanding

NDRC – National Development and Reform Commission

ODA – Official Development Assistance

PAP – Pan-African Parliament

PFD – Policy Forum for Development

PGII – Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment

PRC / China - People's Republic of China

RI- Regional Institution

RO – Regional Organisation

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SMEs – Small and Medium Enterprises

UN – United Nations

UNCTAD - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

WHO – World Health Organisation

WTO – World Trade Organisation

List of figures and tables

<i>Figure 1.1: General timeline of BRI & GG projects.</i>	<i>Page 8</i>
<i>Figure 2.1: The BRI and China's International Trade (The Belt and Road Research Platform, 2021).</i>	<i>Page 13</i>
<i>Figure 2.2: Conceptual model of interorganisational diffusion.</i>	<i>Page 18</i>
<i>Table 3.1: Function and reference code of the 5 interviewees.</i>	<i>Page 21</i>
<i>Figure 3.1. The informal-formal spectrum of intergovernmental arrangements (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013).</i>	<i>Page 22</i>
<i>Table 3.2: Showing different strategies of diffusion.</i>	<i>Page 22</i>
<i>Figure 4.1: Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – by December 2023, 145 to 149 countries had signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with China to cooperate under the BRI framework (Nedopil, 2023).</i>	<i>Page 26</i>
<i>Figure 4.2: The full process of the EUGG draft passing down the political hierarchy in the period June-December 2021.</i>	<i>Page 30</i>
<i>Figure 4.3: China's Overseas Development Finance by Year, 2008-2021 (Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2023).</i>	<i>Page 34</i>

1. Introduction

The European Commission, in 2021, proposed the European Global Gateway, a catch-all name for development aid and investments in countries around the globe, to “tackle global challenges” (Commission & DG INTPA, 2021). However, when researching this project and its surrounding publicity, one word is difficult to ignore: China. Outlets like Politico and the Financial Times were quick to label this project as an attempt to counter China's own infrastructure and development strategy: the Belt and Road Initiative (Fleming, 2021; Lau, 2021). The EU and its representatives, however, are hesitant to name this potential rival, instead presenting the project as a new EU global investment strategy. They do make hidden references and jabs at its perceived Chinese counterpart (Fleming, 2021; European Commission, 2021). The EU also has a long history of setting the example for others in global politics, inspiring the rise of regional organisations around the globe (Lenz, 2021), yet here it seems to be learning from someone else. To understand if the EU is indeed influenced, comparing the European and Chinese initiatives provides an interesting case.

1.1 The Projects

First I will shortly dive into a comprehensive history of the development of the two projects in our case, where I first introduce China's Belt and Road Initiative and then the European Global Gateway. I also shortly go into both its positive and perceived negative impacts, which will strengthen the relevance for this research later on.

1.1.1 The New Silk Road

The Belt and Road initiative (BRI hereafter) was first introduced by Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party in 2013 as an infrastructure development plan aiming to fund over 150 countries globally (Xinhua, n.d.). It has since then grown into ambitions of creating a new trade corridor between the People's Republic of China and other parts of the world, by land and by water, thus the name of the initiative hinting at historic Chinese trade routes. It currently has 151 states as members, through a signed memorandum of understanding. So far, there have only been two withdrawals: Argentina and Italy (Xinhua, n.d.). This initiative has become a central part of Chinese foreign policy, even being enshrined in the Communist Party Constitution at a recent party congress (Communist Party of China, 2022).

Since the proposal in 2013, the initiative has taken on different forms through its projects. Its main component is Chinese investment into infrastructure in the partner companies, but it also invests into energy grids, digital technologies and energy plants (Xinhua, n.d.). The BRI also regularly holds forums, where leaders of member countries come together to negotiate on and launch new projects. The latest edition in 2023 hosted 22 heads of state. Of these, the only member state of the EU to attend was Hungary represented by Viktor Orbán (Mistreanu, 2023). The published goals: “The Initiative will enable China to further expand and deepen its opening-up, and to strengthen its mutually beneficial cooperation with countries in Asia, Europe and Africa and the rest of the world. China is committed to shouldering more responsibilities and obligations within its capabilities, and making greater contributions to the peace and development of mankind.” (Ministry of foreign affairs of the PRC, 2015).

The World Bank, researching the effects of the initiative, reports several economic benefits. Firstly, the initiative could significantly reduce travel times for citizens and goods across the trade route by about 12%. Secondly, trade will increase between 2.7% and 9.7% for the member states in the network. Finally, an estimated 9.7 million people can be lifted from extreme poverty (World Bank, 2018). However, there also concerns about human rights, climate policy and especially unfair economic practices by China in the BRI. These concerns came to a head when Italy left the project in

the end of 2023, because its trade deficit with China had only disproportionately grown since joining the project (Mazzoco, 2023).

1.1.2 The Global Gateway

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, as part of her State of the Union address, announced a new European global investment initiative would be launched on the 1st of December 2021 as part of the larger EU MFF for 2021-2027 (von der Leyen, 2021). This initiative, consisting of up to 300 billion euros, provided by Team Europe (the EU, the Member States, European Investment Bank or EIB; and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development or EBRD), wants to “tackle the most pressing global challenges, from fighting climate change, to improving health systems, and boosting competitiveness and security of global supply chains.” (Commission & DG INTPA, 2021).

The main tool this project will use for development of non-EU partner countries is infrastructure projects, health improvements, climate and energy funds and investments in education and research (Commission, n.d.). Its beneficiaries range from European candidate states in the Neighbourhood like Serbia and Montenegro, to African and Asian partners like Madagascar and Mongolia. The project also hosted its first forum in 2023, hosting high-ranking government officials and industry representatives from across the globe (Commission, 2023). However, the contents of its projects are not new. Instead, it builds upon previously existing initiatives like EU-Asia Connectivity cooperation, Erasmus+ and the BELLA programme, increasing their funding or ambitions (Commission & DG INTPA, 2021). Yet, this bundling of international development strategies signals an increased Commission awareness of the need of a centralized strategy.

However, the status of the projects is still unclear. Many projects that are running, were already in the Brussels pipeline and have not received any additional funding from the Global Gateway project. Meanwhile, other projects that have been noted as ambitions by the Commission, have yet to materialize. Some critics go as far as to say: “The EU’s much-hyped Global Gateway is just old wine in new bottles” (Barbero, 2023).

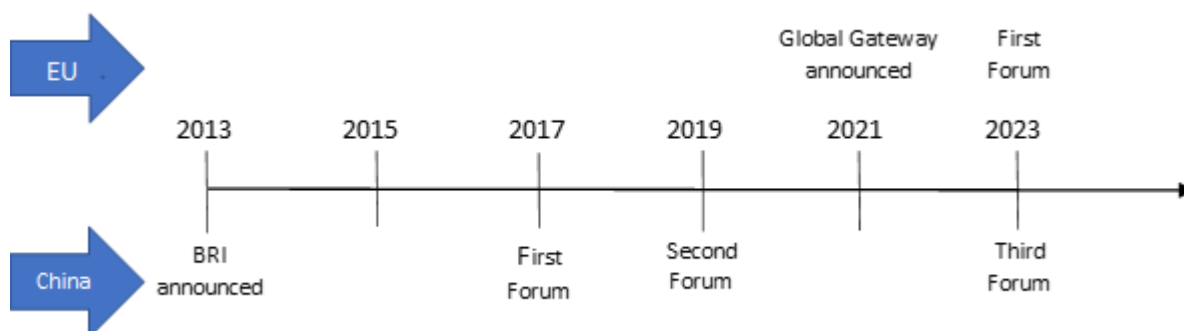


Figure 1.1: General timeline of BRI & GG projects

1.2 The Link

These projects, at first glance, seem similar. They seem to employ similar tools, mostly in the form of infrastructure projects. They seem to have similar goals, creating a more open trade network and ‘fighting global challenges’. They seem to have a similar structure, with states receiving aid and providing input in fora. Yet, the BRI has been around since 2013 and has a solid project line-up, while the Global Gateway was only launched relatively recently, with many commentators immediately linking the launch of the latter to the existence of the former (Lau, 2021). However, the EU is normally not the one learning, but the one teaching, which makes the seeming similarity between the projects puzzling. Why would the EU opt for this design? Is it influenced by China and the BRI, learning or even copying its strategy from its rival? In other words: is there a ‘China-factor’ in the EUGGs development?

This thesis dives into why the EU & the Commission decided to launch the Global Gateway as a 'BRI-style' package of development projects and how those two initiatives might be similar or different, comparing the governance, implementation and branding. Eventually arriving to the core of the puzzle: are the two interdependent? If the BRI and Global Gateway are conceptualized as regional organisations with China and the EU as driving actors, Lenz' theory of institutional diffusion (2021) may provide interesting insights regarding mutual influence. Leading us to the question:

To what extent can interorganisational diffusion, and its underlying mechanisms, from the Belt and Road Initiative explain the institutionalization of the European Global Gateway?

1.3 Method

The main tool this research utilizes to find an answer to my question is process tracing. This method aims to reconstruct the development of the EUGG chronologically to then be able to find possible diffusion and its mechanisms in this case. Semi-structured interviews with experts and associated staff within out outside the EU; and an extensive document and literature review; will construct the timeline and process.

1.4 Societal and scientific relevance

The BRI and the EUGG, together representing over 1.3 trillion euros in development aid and partnerships, play an important role in supporting partner countries in their domestic challenges, closing the infrastructure gap, making a green transition and developing quality of life in those countries. Knowing how the initiatives influence each other and how they might develop in the future can be of importance not only for policy makers trying to create a functional initiative, but also for recipients of funds who can be reliant on these initiatives to create opportunities to develop. It also informs us how EU decision-makers are reacting to China's influence in this sector and to its larger geopolitical implications. The EUGG is being framed as crucial in the EU's strategic decoupling and derisking from Russia and China and therefore having insight on how it is developed can be understanding the EU's bid for strategic autonomy in the future.

Scientifically, as Acharya (2016) and Risse (2016) mention, research on interorganisational diffusion is often Euro- or Western-centric, with little research looking into other actors to be able to influence each other or the West. Institutionalisation as product of diffusion effects can be explained and has been shown for other RO's (Lenz), but not yet for the EU. Normally, we expect no EU reaction or an opposing one to external influences from other ROs, but the EU copying the Chinese institutional design (as the media seems to think it does) is unexpected as the EU is often the institutional innovator or frontrunner. It will be very interesting to see if the EU is a recipient and a learner in this case instead, opening up research avenues into other cases where the EU might be learning from others instead of teaching. Existing theories on regional integration and institutionalization also tend to focus on institutionalization as a product of their constituent actors' preferences, environment and power, while none account for the role other ROs can play in influencing each other. The theories therefore do not provide an answer to why ROs would opt for copying others, like seems to be the case with the EUGG and BRI. This answer can be found when including the interorganisational diffusion theory. Therefore, finding and testing hypotheses that do take these influences into account will be an important step in researching institutionalization of IOs.

1.5 What's next?

This thesis is divided into several chapters. In the next chapter the current literature on state strategic behaviour and institutional diffusion will be discussed. In chapter 3, the chosen method will be highlighted and justified. Afterwards, the results of the case studies will be presented in chapter 4, closely followed by a conclusion and discussion in chapter 5 and 6.

2. Theory

In this section we will introduce a concept of regional organisations relate the EUGG and BRI to this definition by conceptualizing the EUGG and BRI as ROs. When analysing the institutionalisation strategies of these ROs, we need to understand the underlying dynamics within the initiatives. So, we will explain the internal power dynamics and the importance of the EU and China in both initiatives. Then we will define institutionalisation and its drivers within ROs, with interorganisational diffusion as a possible explanation for the case. The diffusion mechanisms will also be elaborated on. The end of the chapter presents the hypotheses.

2.1 Regional Organisations

An institution is a set of norms, rules and procedures shared among actors. An informal institution manifests itself through shared beliefs and common knowledge, in turn shaping behaviour. Formal institutions usually have some degree of actorhood themselves, usually beginning with an independent secretariat or “street address” (Börzel & Risse, 2016). The latter can also be called an *organisation*. Then, regional organisations (or ROs) are such organisations comprised of states, often representing a certain region.

When relating these concepts to our case, it will be useful to categorize both the BRI and EUGG as forms of ROs. Firstly, they have ventured from collections of bilateral development agreements into more formal agreements, paving the way for institutionalization. Vabulas and Snidal in their 2013 categorisation of intergovernmental organisations, along a scale from informal to formal, list three important qualities: organising principle, membership and organization structure. They theorize that an informal intergovernmental organisation has the following association with these qualities respectively: *explicitly shared expectation of purpose, explicit association of members and regular meetings but no independent secretariat*. The BRI, with its aim of regional economic integration can be seen as ‘quasi-institutionalised’, especially through setting up interaction mechanisms through its regular summits, institutionalised associations, and coordination network (Vangeli, 2020). It has a large host of official members, being states that have signed a memorandum of understanding with China. Even though this agreement is reached bilaterally, the states then become part of the larger initiative framework and need to adhere to the BRI rules laid down in the MoU. Yet, the BRI does not sport an official headquarters or independent staff, its administration is fully run by the Chinese government's National Development and Reform Commission, located in Beijing. Neither does it have a formal decision-making body, these powers are also situated in Beijing. The same rough model is applicable to the European Global Gateway. Even though it does not speak of members, it has ‘partner countries’ with which the EU cooperates on projects, and organises summits and diplomatic visits (European Commission, n.d.). This connectivity initiative is seen as an expression of the EU's interregional strategy (Karjalainen, 2023). Yet, its institutionalisation seems, once again, limited. It is headed by the Global Gateway Board, which consists of members of the European Commission and the ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU member states but has no independent staff or representative delegations from partner countries. The EUGG's administration is fully run out of Brussels, more specifically by the Directorate General of International Partnerships (INTPA) and the Directorate General of Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR). Both the BRI and EUGG can then be labelled as Informal Intergovernmental Organisations, or IIGOs (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013). IIGOs being IGOs with explicitly shared expectations and explicitly defined members through the reached agreements or signed MoUs; regular meetings through the organised summits and diplomatic visits; yet no independent secretariat in the organizational structure. Thus, they both neatly fit in Vabulas and Snidal's conceptualization of IIGOs.

Secondly, both initiatives seem to represent a sort of region. The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism defines regions as “social constructions that make references to territorial location and to geographical or normative contiguity” (Risse & Börzel, 2016). Both projects can be seen as regionalist in their framing and execution. For the BRI, this is most obvious. The initiative is constantly linked to China's ancient *Silk Road*, which used to be Han-China's main trade route with Western partners, even reaching as far as the Roman Empire, starting in the 2nd century BC. Its name derives from the Chinese export of silk among others, of which it had a near production monopoly for centuries, which brought unprecedented economic and cultural riches to the Han and other connected empires (National Geographic Society, 2024). Now, the BRI, fully known as ‘The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road’, wants to “instill vigor and vitality into the ancient Silk Road, connect Asian, European and African countries more closely” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2015). Yet, the geographical scope of the new Silk Road does not end at its ancient overland connections and partners, it also (as the full title suggests) is comprised of a maritime route, connecting South-East Asia, Africa, Oceania and even South America to the enterprise as visible in figure 2.1 (The Belt and Road Research Platform, 2021). Yet, inherent in the connectivity strategy is also creating connectivity between countries in one region, like Central Asia or South-East Asia. So, although the BRI includes a large number of countries across the globe, its ancient foundations in the old Silk Road route are still visible, forming one of many subregions, which now constitute the basis of the BRI ‘mega-region’. However, this region is increasingly defined by connectivity, infrastructure and industrialisation, challenging the old cultural or geographical notions of regions (Vangeli, 2020).

The EUGG region is similarly defined, comprised of a list of countries like that of the BRI. These countries are not members, but are ‘partners’ in previous development programmes, now all housed under the EUGG flag. Historically, the EU (then the EEC) signed a development and trade agreement with former colonies of the European Member States, mostly former French, British and Dutch colonies in the Yaoundé Convention (Bindi, 2022, pg 15). This cooperation has since seen more agreements (the Lomé agreement in 1975 and the Cotonou Agreement in 2000) and a large membership basis with 78 ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific states) and all European Member States. The cooperation governed by the Cotonou Agreement is mostly concerned with trade, market access and political conditionality (DG International Partnerships, 2021). The new EUGG lays its focus on the areas generally underdeveloped with regards to physical infrastructure, largely focussing on the European Neighbourhood, Africa and Latin America (European Commission, 2021a). It is framed as the EU's strategy to support and invest in global partners in achieving their shared goals, mainly sustainable development, a green transition and the strengthening of strategic autonomy (European Commission, 2023). So, the region the EUGG represents is also more accurately represented by historical ties (often colonial relations), economic partnerships, connectivity and infrastructure within subregions. It is also more accurately described as a modern ‘mega-region’, contrasting with the established notions of regions (Vangeli, 2020).

So, because of their limited formal structure and their representation of a (loosely defined) region, it will be useful to refer to both the BRI and EUGG as regional institutions (RIs), being regional IIGOs who show potential to develop and integrate into more fully fledged formal ROs.

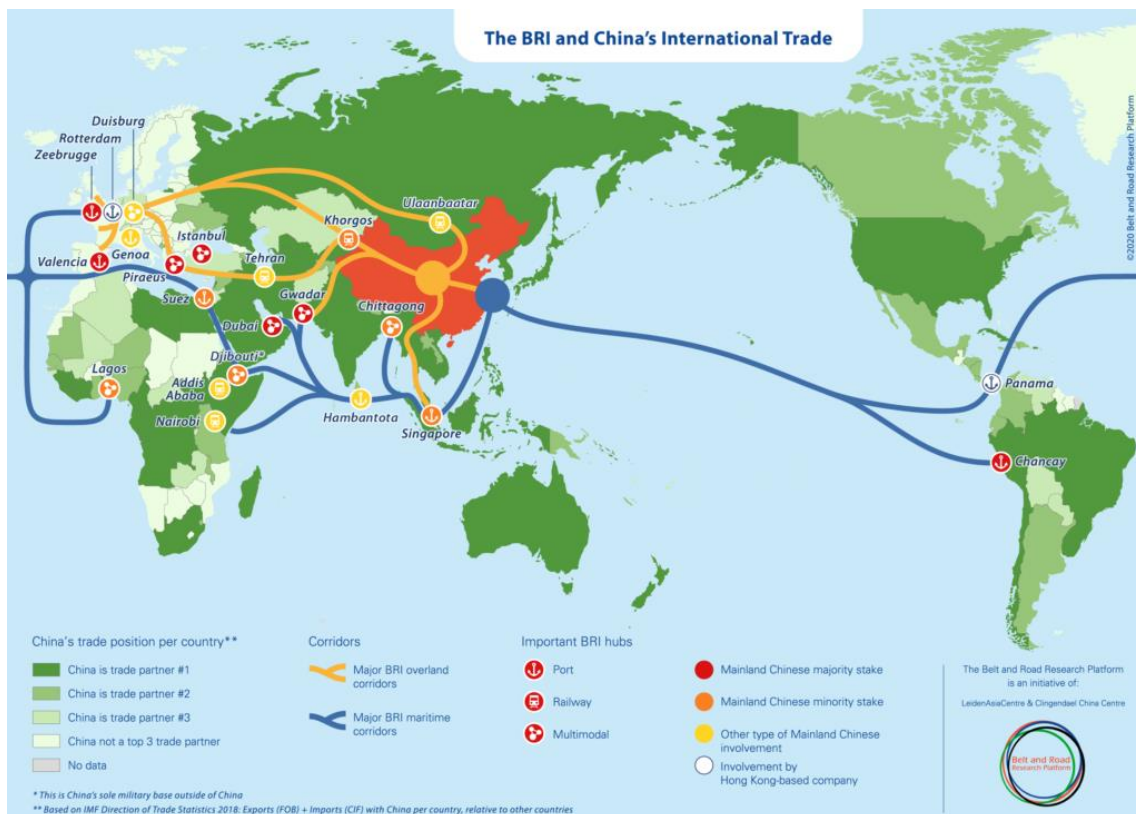


Figure 2.1: The BRI and China's International Trade (The Belt and Road Research Platform, 2021).

2.2 Characteristics

Now we have categorized the BRI and EUGG into a typology of intergovernmental organisations and recognized their regional character, we will now analyse unique characteristics that might set them apart from regular ROs.

ROs can take several forms, usually a product of their goal or intention. Types range from ROs concerned with maintaining power of a hegemon and ones intended to suppress nationalism and war (the EU) to organisations intended as platforms for advancing decolonization (Acharya, 2016). Both the BRI and EUGG seem to take two types, *developmental* and *hegemonic regionalism*, and blend them together to form a new one. The first important type is *developmental regionalism* or “efforts to promote economic development and political stability” (Acharya, 2016). This is done through tools such as “investment, research and development, as well as policies aimed at accelerating regional industrial development and regional infrastructure provision, such as the building of better networks of roads and railways.” (UNCTAD, 2013). The lead members of the RIs, the EU and China, frame their initiatives as being of a developmental nature, increasing partner country autonomy and their ability to combat individual and collective problems like poverty and climate change (Ministry of foreign affairs of the PRC, 2015; European Commission & DG INTPA, 2021). Critics judge both projects more harshly, instead opting for the *hegemonic regionalism* type, stating these RIs are manifestations of great power spheres of influence (Acharya, 2016; Andornino, 2017). The influential article by Brahma Chellaney keys the term ‘debt-trap diplomacy’, describing the BRI as a project intentionally driving partner countries into debt to increase leverage (Chellaney, 2017). The EUGG, similarly, has been called a ‘norms trap’, essentially forcing norms upon partner countries which have almost no say in the process (Karjalainen, 2023).

Geopolitics shifting to a more geo-economic paradigm (Vangeli, 2020) and the identities of these two RIs lead us to a new type of RI, forming a combination of the two types previously discussed: patronage regionalism. Patronage can be understood as a system where one (usually more powerful) actor, the patron, bestows resources or favours, patronage, on (usually weaker, lower standing) recipients in exchange for loyalty or services. This characterisation of these initiatives is important because it shows us how BRI and EUGG behaviour is formed strategically, and who forms it. Instead of being an amalgamation of member state consensus and institutional choices being a product of bargaining like most ROs (Lenz, 2021), the patrons almost exclusively decide the course. Patron ROs still have developmental ideals and are structured narratively and substantively as developmental schemes. However, they will have a special institutional and substantial role for a single member state or group of states: the Patron. This actor will fund the development of the others, the recipients, partly to achieve developmental goals like fighting collective challenges, combatting climate change, eradicating poverty etc. It will also have further gain through increased soft power and value-driven influence over the region, (most probably in economic and trade means and by externalizing values such as democracy or women's rights), because the patron themselves does not directly benefit from the developmental policy. The patronage regionalist model has several important characteristics: the patron is the central coordinator of the RO; the patron is often the sole institutional decision-maker and agenda setter in the RO; the policy scope of the organisation is flexible; and there is often a significant resource flow from the patron towards the recipients (a form of patronage).

This patronage regionalist model solves some fundamental flaws in ROs which strive for increasing economic welfare: low implementation rates, informal institutions and ineffective or absent enforcement mechanisms (Lenz & Marks, 2016). These problems arise usually because politically stabilizing regimes (one of the tenets of developmental regionalism) “tend to be less oriented towards implementation” (the other tenet of developmental regionalism). This occurs likely because they prefer to spend the funds elsewhere (Lenz & Marks, 2016), creating an internal contradiction. By introducing hegemonic leadership through a patron, developing countries will be less likely to renege on their promises. Not only because of the bilateral agreements and broader initiative framework creating rules and procedures, but also because of the dependency on the inflow of funding. What often sets non-EU regional organisations apart from the EU is that they are not focused on integration and authority transfer, as the EU is, but are instead built around strengthening the autonomy and sovereignty of member states (Acharya, 2016). While these norms normally might counteract the effective functioning of a formal RO (Lenz & Marks, 2016), they can remain intact under the leadership of a patron, making it an even more effective model for non-Western ROs. This fact makes it even more surprising that the EUGG seems to have developed into this model.

Relating this new concept to our cases, firstly, the BRI shows interesting signs towards this model. As Vangeli & Andornino point out, China occupies a special role within the BRI institutional framework. It is not only the main benefactor, almost solely providing the funds for the several projects through its own funds and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), it is also the sole agenda setter for the organisation as a whole and the forums specifically. It holds this position because of the unique membership system, where all members sign a MoU with the Chinese government directly and bilaterally to join the BRI. A subcommittee of the Chinese NDRC, called the “Belt and Road Construction Leadership Group” is also solely responsible for the institutional decision making and the administration of the initiative. Therefore, there is no independent secretariat. Lastly, the policy scope of the project seems pragmatic and flexible (Vangeli, 2020). Initially proposed as an infrastructure development scheme, it has since invested into healthcare, data & technology science innovation and energy solutions.

The EUGG can also be seen as an application of this model. Through the Team Europe approach, the EUGG generates funds within the EU, its financial institutions, Member States and the domestic private sector. These funds are then invested into projects in partner countries, who in turn adhere to values stipulated in the agreement (conditionality). This is a way for the EU to externalize its standards, and thus create a soft, value-driven influence over the partner. These deals are made on a bilateral basis, as normal diplomatic relations are structured, but the EUGG itself is governed solely by EU institutional actors, primarily officials from the Commission, the EEAS and its DGs. They are responsible for organising events, setting the agenda, running the secretariat, determining the strategy and administering the initiative.

There can be several explanations of *why* decision makers would change strategies while trying to achieve their main policy objectives. These include decreased effectiveness of the existing scheme, a shift in the balance of power between the EU and other actors or influence by other actors in the decision-making process. Interorganisational diffusion provides us with an explanation of *how* decision-makers were influenced and can provide us with possible explanations for their motivations in changing behaviour. It can also point us towards expected outcomes of the influence, in the form of a magnitude or direction of institutionalization. So, the theories also provide answers to different types of research questions.

2.3 Institutionalization explained: Interorganisational diffusion

ROs have varying levels of institutionalisation, ranging from practically informal institutions to fully fledged organisations with supranational bodies, judicial systems, broad mandates and transferred sovereignty, a prominent example of the latter being the European Union (Vabulas, 2013).

Three dimensions are usually important when assessing the institutionalisation of an RO: pooling, delegation and policy scope (Vabulas, 2013; Lenz & Marks, 2016; Lenz, 2021). However, due to the unusual roles of the patron and the associated partner countries and the intergovernmental character, these dimensions are not the most useful for this research. Let's turn instead to the measures used by Vabulas and Snidal (2013): organisational principle, membership and organisational structure. Organisational principle denotes the nature of the expectations of members of the organisation, ranging from 'self-help', meaning no expectations to 'institutionalized rules and centralized enforcement', where expectations are codified in several treaties and institutions (like in the EU). Membership is concerned with the association of possible 'members', with the lowest institutionalised being 'all actors' globally and the highest institutionalisation 'recognized members'. Finally, organizational structure is concerned with the institutional design of the organisation. The lowest institutionalized version of this variable is 'spontaneous interactions' and the highest institutionalization is found with 'regular legislative meetings & independent secretariat'. When any of these three dimensions are further integrated or increase along the spectrum introduced by Vabulas and Snidal (2013, table 2), we can speak of institutionalisation or institution building.

What can explain institutionalisation in ROs? As explained by Lenz and Marks in their chapter 'Regional Institutional Design' in the Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism (2016), there are several possible explanations, of which the most prominent are realism, constructivism, institutionalism and diffusion. The first, realism, assumes that "the design of international institutions reflects the underlying distribution of power among member states". The establishment or the absence of ROs is the product of efforts to influence the balance of power through strategies like bandwagoning, balancing or hedging. The second is institutionalism, which explains ROs as either functional solutions to collective problems or unavoidable products of historical developments. This strand of literature names interdependence, economic or otherwise, as the main driver behind further integration and

institutionalisation. Actors respond to constraints created by exogenous effects and by their own interdependencies and opt for further integration to solve problems created by those constraints. The third strand is constructivism, which emphasizes the roles of underlying beliefs and norms within actors, helping them to determine their role and act in their environment (Lenz & Marks, 2016).

Yet, all these theories claim ROs are a product of their constituent actors' preferences, environment and power, while none account for the role other ROs can play in influencing each other. The theories do not provide a satisfactory answer to why ROs would opt for copying others, like seems to be the case with the EUGG and BRI. The EUGG being framed as a copy of the BRI pushes us to research what influence the BRI has on the EUGG and using the previously described theories negate that influence as a meaningful factor. Acknowledging influence and its possibly remarkable effect on decisionmakers in the structure of ROs is an important step forward in regional integration research. To explain this trend and the mechanisms of possible inter-RO influence we turn to interorganisational diffusion for this thesis.

The core claim of interorganisational diffusion approaches is that ROs are interdependent. ROs do not exist in a vacuum but are always situated as relative to each other and can compete against, learn from or cooperate with other ROs. When analysing the EU, Lenz phrases influence like this: "the existence of the EU makes an identifiable and substantive difference to the institutionalization of ROs in other parts of the world" (Lenz, 2021. Pg 9). The assumption is then, that decision-making within ROs is interdependent and that the preferences of actors making institutional choices are partly based on influence by other ROs (Lenz, 2021). An important distinction to make that will set apart these two RIs from regular ROs, as already explained in the patronage regionalist model but important to this assumption, is that the forming actors in the RIs are the EU and China almost exclusively. Therefore, the strategic behaviour of both actors is impacted by the diffusion mechanism and their decision-making should be interdependent and influenced by the other, as there is close to no institutional decision-making on RI level. We have seen that there is an 'EU factor' in the institutional design of ROs like African Union (Lenz, 2021. Pg 21). There is little evidence in the largely EU centrist literature of influence of other ROs on the EU (Acharya, 2016), but an EU-run RI and the EU as actor within it might be influenced after all. Is there a similar 'China-factor' in the establishment of the EUGG?

The influence of ROs on each other can take two different forms, active/direct or "sender-driven" influence and passive/indirect or "recipient-driven" influence (Risse, 2016; Lenz, 2021). The first form is direct influence, which is understood as an RO having direct involvement in the institution building of another RO, for example through knowledge sharing, funding or other support avenues. A good example of direct influence in practice is the regular interparliamentary meeting between the European Parliament (EP) and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) of the African Union. In these meetings, EP members and experts advise and support members of the PAP on how to effectively use their parliamentary powers in African governance but also on how to expand the role of the PAP in the AU institutional framework (European Parliament, 2022). Thereby, the EU plays an active and direct role in influencing the institutional design of the AU. This influence results in the mechanisms: incentives & sanctions, coercion or persuasion & norm socialization.

- Coercion: physical or legal imposition of diffusion. Here the dominant logic is the logic of consequences. In this logic, actions are motivated by expectations of consequences and actors "choose among alternatives by evaluating their likely consequences for personal or collective objectives, conscious that other actors are doing likewise." (March & Olsen, 1998). Coercion, through imposition and the use of force creates involuntary diffusion, forcibly pushed on the receiver by the sender. Although this mechanism is rarely seen through military means, it can

also occur through the imposition and enforcement of legal standards in international cooperation (Risse, 2016)

- Positive Incentives and Negative Sanctions: offering incentives and threatening sanctions if receiving actors do or do not adopt certain institutionalisation. This mechanism also has the logic of consequences at its core. However, a key aspect of this mechanism is that the receiver is voluntarily receiving diffusion, for example by being rewarded or punished for making certain institutional choices. Thus, the sender is “manipulating utility calculations by providing negative and/or positive incentives”. This can come in the form of rewards for adoption or support for internally reforming domestic actors.
- Norms Socialization and Persuasion: actors try to persuade each other of the benefits of adoption of norms, institutional models and increased cooperation through discussion and arguing. This mechanism has another logic, the logic of appropriateness. This logic places the identities, personal beliefs and values at the core of the actors’ behaviour. “Human actors are imagined to follow rules that associate particular identities to particular situations.” (March & Olsen, 1998). Through arguing between the sender and the receiver, the sender tries to convince the sender of the benefit of certain institutionalizing choices.

In indirect influence, RO's, instead of being directly involved, form an image or example from afar. The influence manifests itself within the recipient and is generated by their perception of this ‘exemplary’ RO. This perception, either negative or positive, can create inspiration, aversion or other emotions with decisionmakers that can affect the way they develop their own institutions. Usually, institutional choices within ROs are made through a process of bargaining between decisionmakers, who will be impacted by their perceptions of the 'sender', which allows the influence of other ROs to gain a voice within the institutional decision-making process (Lenz, 2021). An example of this influence might be the institutional design of Eurasian ROs, which have had little to no institutional contact with the EU and even explicitly oppose it, but seem to mimic European institutional structures (Hancock, 2016). Here the EU fulfils the role of indirect influencer, while the Eurasian ROs engage in recipient-driven institutionalisation. The four mechanisms following from this kind of influence are competition, lesson drawing, normative emulation and mimicry (Risse, 2016).

- Competition: institutional choices are made to better be able to compete with a rival and increase performance. This mechanism is based on the logic of consequences and is mostly concerned with outperforming and improving the position of the recipient relatively to the sender. The recipient can combine their own practices with best practices from the sender to improve performance.
- Lesson Drawing: actors within ROs look to other ROs to learn how to or how not to solve an internal problem. This mechanism also finds its roots in the logic of consequence and is similar to competition in the fact that recipient is looking at the sender to find solutions to their problems. However, in lesson drawing, the sender's behaviour, institutional structure and policies can inform the recipient of ways to solve domestic problems, without being explicitly aimed at the sender or other actors as a way to compete with them.
- Normative Emulation: actors look to other ROs for normative reasons, like increasing reputation or legitimacy and emulate their institutional norms. The logic of appropriateness gives base to this mechanism, where actors look at others for normative reasons like increasing legitimacy or externalizing values. "Actors and organizations behave in isomorphic ways in order to maintain their status and secure legitimacy within the normative social structure in which they are situated" (Polillo & Guillén, 2005).

- Mimicry: actors almost wholly ‘download’ the institutional setup or policy ideas of another RO to further their own goals. This is also based on the logic of appropriateness, pulled into the extreme. Here ROs can imitate others because the appropriateness of the action is taken for granted, creating a passive downloading of policy, institutional design and strategic choices (Risse, 2016). This can have several other reasons, as ROs “imitate each other when uncertainty makes the assessment of cause-effect relationships problematic, or when their bounded rationality renders it impractical to assess each and every available alternative course of action.” (Polillo & Guillén, 2005)

Identifying the type of influence China and the BRI might have on the institutionalisation of the EUGG and what kind of mechanisms are at work in the EUGG institutional decision-making can be instrumental in determining the presence of a possible ‘China-factor’. Especially with a large initiative like this, several parts might see different mechanisms being active, dependent on what logic, perception and institutional decision making is present for that section. For example, governance structure might change through indirect influence and the normative emulation mechanic, while implementation of projects on the ground might be directly influenced by working together with partners from other ROs and norms socialization is most important.

2.4 Hypotheses

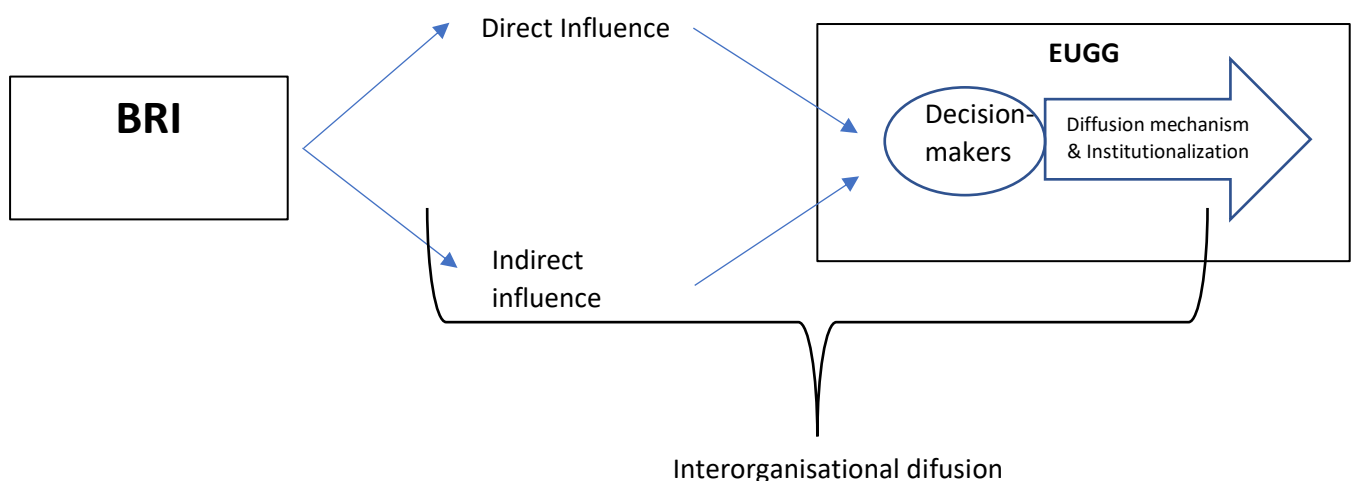


Figure 2.2: Conceptual model of interorganisational diffusion

To find the presence of interorganisational diffusion and identify possible diffusion mechanisms at play in this case we need to discover proof for its two parts, the influence by the other organisation and the actual effects in the decision-making of the leaders of the EUGG. We expect to find traces of this diffusion effect in this case, therefore the first hypothesis is:

H: *Interorganisational diffusion plays a significant role in explaining the institutionalisation of the European Global Gateway.*

As already discussed, this interorganisational diffusion has two distinct parts: influence and impact. The hypothesis can then be split into two parts.

H1: *Institutionalisation is promoted by EUGG decisionmakers that are influenced in their decisionmaking by the BRI and its constituent actors.*

This can be further specified when looking at the type of influence that diffuses between the two RIs

H1a: *EUGG decisionmakers are influenced through indirect, “recipient-driven” influence when making institutionalizing decisions.*

H1b: *EUGG decisionmakers are influenced through direct, “sender-driven” influence when making institutionalizing decisions.*

The second part of interorganisational diffusion is the actual effect on institutional decisionmaking within the EUGG.

H2: *The EUGG institutional decisionmakers’ strategies of institutionalisation are formed through a diffusion mechanism*

This hypothesis will be interesting to research because even though commentators ascribe the EUGGs establishment to being a reaction to the BRI (and therefore diffusion), literature seems to assume the EU is a difficult actor to influence. Proving this hypothesis will open new avenues for future research, as it shows that the EU can be influenced through diffusion, therefore creating that option as explanation in other cases. The corresponding null-hypothesis is:

H0: *Interorganisational diffusion does not explain the institutionalisation of the EUGG*

If this hypothesis is confirmed, I should look to other theories such as realism, institutionalism or constructivism to explain the EUGGs institutionalisation in the future.

Now, I will dive in the method used to collect data to test our hypotheses and will explain how these hypotheses are made testable.

3. Method

In this chapter, I will first give a general overview of the method used. In the first section I elucidate on the research design and explain how I executed my process tracing through interviews and document review. Then I lay out the operationalization of my important variables and how they are measured from the data in the process tracing. Finally, I will shortly explain why the case of these two initiatives provides such a striking testing ground for the theory of diffusion and my hypotheses.

A qualitative case study is at the heart of this research. Because the case study specifically looks at the EUGG as a single initiative and compares it to the BRI, and the data structure, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, qualitative research methods are the best fit in this thesis. It will take the shape of 'theory-testing', specifically testing if interorganisational diffusion is present in this specific case. Then process tracing will be used, through document analysis and semi-structured interviews, to construct a full picture of the development of the EUGG. Process tracing is a research method that attempts to find the causal connection between variables X and Y by reconstructing the process between them. As part of this analysis, an extensive timeline of the causal process is created by combining document analysis and semi-structured interviews, to create a full picture of the developments of X and Y. Firstly, documents can shed a light on when certain decisions were made and who the key involved actors were. Semi structured interviews can then more deeply showcase what goes on in the heads of those involved actors and can fill any gaps left by missing documents or can shed more light on the policymaking that happens behind closed doors. There are different types of process tracing, including theory centric methods and case centric methods. Because this publication posits interorganisational diffusion between the BRI and EUGG as the cause for the EUGGs institutionalisation this is theory-proving process tracing (Beach, 2013. Pg. 18).

3.1 Research design

Document analysis will form the main part of the process tracing and reconstruction in this thesis. The timeline can be reconstructed by consulting various sources reporting on the EUGG and the EU's development regime, for example through Council conclusions and Commission documents and communications where the EUGG was discussed. These documents tell us what decisions were made and often shed a light on the underlying motivations. This analysis is expanded by including expert reports and papers on the EUGG and its development and by reading press statements, both from official EU sources and from other media like Politico and newspapers where national policy officers of EU officials might comment on the EUGG. However, documents only present the official narrative, but can often omit the experience of decision-makers in the process, which is why interviews are important.

One aim of data gathering through interviews was confirming, strengthening or correcting the process that was constructed during document analysis and fill holes in the data where necessary. Yet, the most important aim of the interviews was gaining an insight into the internal processes within the institutional decision-making, including the strategic choices made, the motivations behind it and the perceptions of the decisionmakers. This means that the most important sources of data during these interviews are most ideally decisionmakers or policymakers present during the decision-making, because they can give the most insight into the process and its underlying motivations, strategies and perceptions. Yet, because these people are few and difficult to reach, interviews are used to strengthen the process tracing, but document analysis remains the main research method. The interviews are recorded and transcribed. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A and the list of functions and reference codes can be found in table 3.1. In the end, five interviewees were found from across the political hierarchy within the EU, from one in the DG INTPA concerned with the

technical implementation to one in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one in the Commission responsible for the political aspects and strategies. An external expert was also interviewed, who gave unique perspectives as an EU outsider, compared to the rest of the interviewees.

Table 3.1: Function and reference code of the five interviewees.

Function	Code	Date of interview
Policy officer at the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs.	NL-MFA	May 29 th 2024
Policy officer at the Directorate General for International Partnerships.	EU-DG	June 5 th 2024
Policy officer at the European External Action Service.	EU-EEAS	June 12 th 2024
Staff of Commissioner Urpilainen's Cabinet.	EU-COM	May 29 th 2024
Global Gateway Researcher and Expert.	EX-EXP	June 13 th 2024

These two data gathering strategies then combine to create a timeline which can illustrate what choices were made when, what the motivations behind those choices were, how those motivations change over time and how the BRI as sender behaves during the development of the EUGG.

3.2 Conceptualization & operationalization

The causal relationship we are looking for is that between cause X, the existence of the BRI and Y the institutionalisation of the EUGG.

3.2.1 Measuring influence

Firstly, the X variable: 'presence' of the BRI is worded ambiguously because of the different natures of influence. When measuring direct influence, the BRI and its members need to play an active role in the institutionalisation of the EUGG, for instance through regular meetings, provided funds or knowledge sharing between the two initiatives. When interested in 'recipient-driven', indirect influence, the BRI needs to play no active role and only needs to exist for the EUGG as recipient to be influenced by it. However, this existence needs to be perceived by and have influence on EUGG decisionmakers. This existence can then be measured by researching to what extent the EUGG decisionmakers are aware of the BRI, its internal workings and its external effects. If EUGG decisionmakers have never heard of the BRI or know next to nothing about it, it is difficult to imagine they are influenced by its presence directly or indirectly. Therefore I assess the nature and number of references made to the BRI in EU & EUGG policy documents; and the level of knowledge of decision makers ranging from no or basic knowledge to in-depth knowledge of for example institutional, political and practical implications of the BRI; as a proxy for our independent variable 'existence'. Usually, EU policy documents also elaborate on the background leading up to a certain event or policy decision. If the BRI plays a role in these policy documents, I know the decision makers are aware and there is at least some level of influence present. In interviews, it is possible to assess the individual level of awareness of the existence and monitoring of the BRI to eventually test if the BRI actually played a role in the process.

3.2.2 Measuring institutionalization

Secondly, the Y variable is institutionalization. Institutionalization is generally understood as the process of something becoming part of a large system or organization. It can be more specifically

defined as growing or changing competences in agenda setting, decisionmaking and dispute settlement of an institution (Lenz, 2021, pg. 4). Vabulas and Snidal's (2013) typology relies on three variables: organizing principle, membership and organizational structure, which have clearly measurable characteristics. See figure 3.1. This typology provides a clear way to classify the stages of institutionalization of an RO and are therefore used as measurements in chapter 4 & 5.

	INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT	ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE	MEMBERS	ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE	EXAMPLE (s)
More informal	NO ORGANIZATION	Self-help (anarchy)	All	Spontaneous interactions	Hobbesian world
	DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION	Tacitly shared expectations	Loosely associated members	Spontaneous order	Customary International law
	EXPLICIT AGREEMENT CONSULTATIONS	Oral Agreement Communiqué Non-ratified treaty Dialogue	Parties to the conference	Limited Meetings No independent secretariat	Plaza Communiqué Soft Law START negotiations
	INFORMAL IGOs (IIGO)	Explicitly shared expectations	Explicitly associated members	Regular meetings No independent secretariat	G8 G20 Concert of Europe
	IIGOs WITHIN FIGOs ^a	Shared focus on a specialized issue area (non-codified rules)	Subgroups of FIGO members	Ad hoc meetings No independent secretariat, might report to formal Secretariat	NATO Quint group UNSC Core group WHO Groups
	FORMAL IGOs (FIGO)	Formalized expectations (International Treaty)	Formal members	Regular meetings Independent secretariat	WTO Arab League NATO
More formal	SUPRANATIONAL ORGANIZATION	Institutionalized rules and centralized enforcement	Recognized members	Regular legislative meetings Independent secretariat	European Union

Figure 3.1. The informal-formal spectrum of intergovernmental arrangements (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013).

3.2.3 Measuring diffusion mechanisms

Now I will introduce the mechanics that drive interorganisational diffusion between two organisations.

Table 3.2: Showing different strategies of diffusion (Risse, 2016; Börzel & Risse, 2009)

	Influence	Logic	Role of sender	Role of recipient
Coercion	Direct	Consequences	Coercive authority	Obedience, submission
Incentives & Sanctions	Direct	Consequences	Providing incentives	Rewards, punishments

Norms socialization & persuasion	Direct	Appropriateness	Promote ideas through normative pressure or reason giving	Internalization of ideas; reasoned consensus; identity change
Competition	Indirect	Consequences	-	Strategic adoption, Opposition-based
Lesson Drawing	Indirect	Consequences	-	Strategic adoption, Performance-based
Normative Emulation	Indirect	Appropriateness	-	Emulation, Active search for solutions
Mimicry	Indirect	Appropriateness	-	Imitation, Passive downloading

These strategies are measured by identifying the type of influence present (direct or indirect) and identifying the dominating logic in institutional decision-making (appropriateness or consequences). Then, weighing the roles of the sender and recipient and comparing it to the description of each mechanism singles out a mechanism that is most likely at work. The expected characteristics of each mechanism are shown in table 3.2. That mechanism are then confirmed by comparing the degree of institutionalisation with the expected institutionalisation theorized by the mechanism.

The logics driving decisionmakers in their institutionalizing choices can best be measured through the motivations they give for their decisions. When motivated by consequentialism, I would expect the decisionmakers to be more pragmatic and strategic in their behaviour, weighing positives and negatives to eventually inform the final decision. They will most likely be motivated by economic, geopolitical or strategic considerations when designing the EUGG. Conversely, if the logic of appropriateness is dominant, I expect a more normative, value driven narrative. Then, decisionmakers will most likely mention moral convictions; legitimacy and social standards; and values such as human rights, democracy or equality; as the primary motivator for institutionalization. More often than not, motivations form a combination of both these logics. Then it is important to identify which was dominant in decision-making and possibly the narrative presented to the outside world.

Then, I measure the position of the sender and recipient and fit it into the typology presented by Börzel and Risse (2009), visible in table 3.2. The role of the sender in diffusion values towards the recipient is most important in the case of direct influence, because the sender itself does not play an active role in the case of indirect influence.

From preliminary research for the earlier sections of this thesis and from reading the general consensus in the media, I expect a significant level of influence from the BRI in the EUGGs institutional decision-making. This manifests as decision-makers increasingly using the BRI and China as motivation and driver for the creation of the EUGG in discourse and seeing it as a challenger or example, increasing the need to institutionalize the EUGG. This then leads the EUGG to opt for institutionalization strategy which points me towards which mechanism is at play. This is underpinned by the EUGG decision-maker perceptions of the BRI. It is hard to determine whether the institutionalization of the EUGG would have happened differently if there was no BRI, but as explained

in the introduction and as will be explained in the case justification, there is reason to believe that the development of the EUGG was significantly impacted by the BRI.

3.3 Case justification

The case that is being researched, the BRI and the EUGG, present strong evidence for finding the diffusion mechanism in action. Firstly, both X and Y, the independent and dependent variable, the BRI's existence and institutionalisation of the EUGG respectively, seem to be present in this case. Also, most media and commentators are proposing that the causal mechanism is present, however do not present striking proof. Because the EU as actor being influenced through diffusion mechanisms is generally understudied (Risse, 2016, pg 93), this case would seem a 'least-likely' case. However, because these two RIs are exemplary for the diffusion mechanism to be present, this case seems to be closer to a 'most-likely' case. The dichotomy of the case seeming 'most-likely' to the outside world and to interorganisational diffusion literature but 'least-likely' to scientific studies, which usually assume the EU is the sender and not the recipient, make this case so valuable and puzzling.

The case can also provide us with insights into the generalizability of the findings. If diffusion can be shown to play a part in the development of the EUGG and EU decisionmakers were influenced by the BRI and China, it opens up further avenues to research other fields where the EU might have been influenced by other actors. This 'most-likely' case is characterized by the position of the EU compared to its counterpart, China, within the policy area. It seems to be nearly equal, with China taking the initiative and filling the legislative hole left by the global infrastructure gap. This means the EU has to compete for space in the policy area with another influential actor, while the EU is normally a frontrunner and sometimes lone star in legislation on the global level, for example with its regulatory lawmaking capabilities. So, if the EU is influenced here, we would expect an influence of others in other policy areas where the EU finds itself in a competitive space, in a balance of power or in a legislative vacuum where interaction with others can help further its own goals.

4. The Global Gateway's Development

This section provides the results from the document analysis, including press releases, conclusions, communications, reports and meeting notes; and interviews with 5 interviewees, of which 4 were situated among various levels within the EU political hierarchy responsible for the creation of the EUGG.

4.1 2013-2017: The Infrastructure gap & China

In 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping visited Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University, named after the former Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbayev. His speech, laced with historical allusions to Kazakhstan and China's shared Silk Road history and culture through anecdotes about his own life and those of historical Kazakh and Chinese figures, however has serious economic and political purposes. During his speech, he announced the need for countries in Central Asia to step up cooperation in the form of an “economic belt along the Silk Road” (Xi, 2013). Substantially, the main priority of this cooperation is stepping up infrastructure investments along the historical ‘Silk Road’ route, including most Central Asian countries ranging from China towards Europe.

This announcement seemed to follow a number of developments prompting China to take its infrastructure development global. Firstly, as a study for the European Parliament on the EUGG states, the global infrastructure gap created a “hybrid space, where geopolitical and technical considerations, political mandates, financial instruments, diplomatic tradition, development efforts, and public and private interests converge” (Buhigas Schubert & Costa, 2023). The infrastructure gap is the difference between global infrastructure spending, and infrastructure needs, theorized to be around 15 trillion dollars by 2040 (George, 2019; Global Infrastructure Outlook, 2024). The need for infrastructure investments in Africa, Central Asia and other parts of the world opens up opportunities for a number of actors, including the EU, the US and China to strike development cooperation deals. Another reason China saw this form of cooperation as a valuable opportunity is due to its burgeoning domestic construction sector. Investments in the sector during the financial crisis led to an unprecedented growth of construction, both of infrastructure and housing, which, after leading to overcapacity in mainland China, needed a release valve in the international market. A policy officer in the EEAS specifically mentions China's “surplus of concrete and steel” as a manifestation of this overcapacity leading to China's new strategy focussing on the international markets.

In 2015, China's NDRC published ‘*Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*’, the first official document in which the goals or motivations of the initiative are presented. By now, the commonly used names for the initiative include ‘One Belt, One Road’, and most famously: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The initiative focusses on so called ‘hard-infrastructure’, meaning tangible roads, railways and maritime trade routes, but however also holds a role for ‘soft infrastructure’ in the form of cultural, educational, medical and technological exchange.

China's offer was based on a few fundamental worldviews, contrasting with traditional Western international development policy. The most important is the principle of ‘non-intervention’ and state sovereignty, both values held high by Xi Jinping personally and the Chinese state more broadly (Xi, 2013). This means that the Chinese state will not pass judgement or intervene in other states’ internal affairs, as they expect others to treat the Chinese state the same way. This contrasts with conditionality and normative approaches, where the EU or other Western actors expect certain standards to be held by their partners, including human-rights, democracy or free press as a way of externalizing its own standards (Damro, 2015). This ‘low conditionality’ has made China a valuable and important development partner of countries in the BRI community.

So, the first contender entered the geopolitical space created by the global infrastructure gap with an attractive offer.

Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative

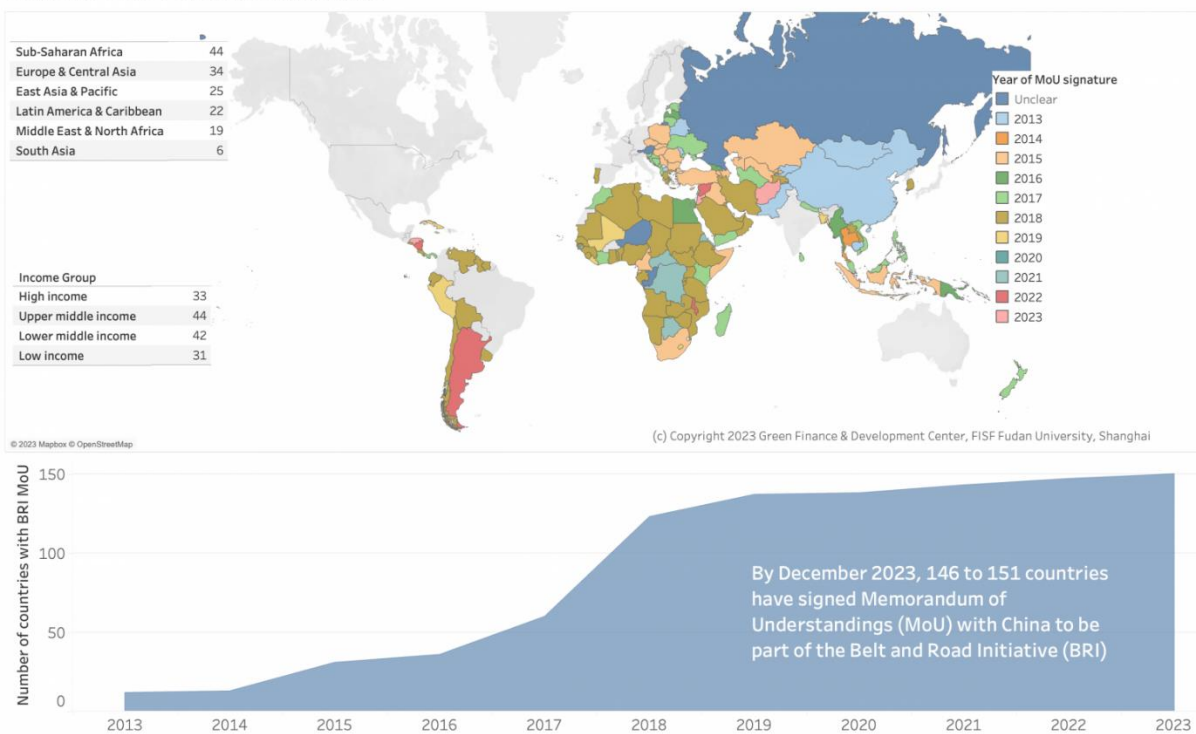


Figure 4.1: Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – by December 2023, 145 to 149 countries had signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with China to cooperate under the BRI framework (Nedopil, 2023).

As the BRI grew and Chinese investments increased, more countries joined the initiative by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with China, see figure 4.1. Most were already partnered with China in different regional organisations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, an organisation for mostly Central Asian states and the 17+1 forum, an organisation for Eastern European states. Especially this last batch of members, a number of them being EU member states, started to worry European strategic lawmakers about China's growing influence in those countries and their domestic infrastructure sectors (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). An important moment in the BRI's membership base was the ascension of Italy in March of 2019, the first G7 member and 'developed economy' to become a member, quickly following Austria, Portugal and Luxembourg.

During these years, China contacted its partners through conventional bilateral diplomatic relations, but also through the 'BRI Forum', a large event taking place in a different partner country ever edition, welcoming representatives from all countries associated with the BRI. These fora are scheduled to take place every two years, with the first being held on the 14th of May 2017. Of most prominent partner countries, the forum hosts the head of state or government, making it an important political event in the diplomatic relations of these countries.

However, soon, criticisms of the initiative started to appear, mostly linked to the lending aspects of China with its partners. China is accused of lending sums of money for infrastructure projects that won't generate profit or of lending money that cannot reasonably be paid back by the lender. Then, if the loan isn't paid back, China will ask for alternative payment in return, famously being leased a (through BRI funds constructed) Sri Lankan port for 99 years (Brakman, 2019). Another example:

“Montenegro nearly bankrupting itself building a highway it didn't need” (interview, EU-EEAS, June 12th 2024). This strategy of making geopolitical moves through unfair lending practices is coined as ‘debt-trap diplomacy’ in 2017 by researcher Brahma Chellaney, which is now regularly used by critics of the BRI, including the US government. Even though the existence of this overarching lending strategy and China's role in creating debt has since been pulled into question (Debt Justice, 2022; Singh, 2022), policy officers from across EU institutions emphasize that the BRI is responsible for “unfair lending practices” and “increasing the debt burden of partner countries instead of lowering it” (interview, EU-EEAS, June 12th 2024) signalling a very negative image of the initiative. Other perceived issues include “opaque contract[s], where the clauses are not known [leading] to unsustainable debt levels in other countries” and “[the BRI is] only there to extract or to come in with their own workforce” (interview, EU-COM, May 29th 2024).

So, in Brussels and in Member State capitals, the growing infrastructure gap and increased influence of China through the BRI, growing involvement of major economies, diplomatic significance of the fora and worries on the quality of the Chinese offer all created the sense that an alternative is needed.

4.2 2018-2021: The need for an alternative

Previously to 2018, the Council working-group on Asia relations had been watching the increasing infrastructure gap and the BRI's growth, prompting a response. Firstly, as mentioned by staff of Commissioner cabinets, the growing infrastructure gap increased EU belief that previous development aid was “not enough” (interview, EU-COM, May 29th 2024). Global infrastructure investment need increases and the EU needs to step up its investment to keep up with this global need and close the gap. Another factor contributing to this new strategy was perspectives on the BRI, partly impressed by its effectiveness in rolling out projects, partly worried about its growing geopolitical influence as previously described. This culminated in Europe's first tangible response in September of 2018, the publishing of the Europe-Asia Connectivity Strategy (European Council, 2018; European Commission, 2018a). This new strategy highlights the Commission's choice to increase the budget for external action in the new Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 to €123 billion and motivates strategies and focusses on the infrastructure sector and Central Asia. As mentioned in a memo by the Commission: “The impact of climate change and the need to speed up a global transition to low-carbon economies, the pitfalls of unsustainable borrowing and the dangers of unfair trade and investment practices make a sustainable, comprehensive and rules-based approach to connectivity not only desirable but necessary. Others are also setting out their own strategies at this time.” (European Commission, 2018b). This, in line with interviews with several policymakers at different EU institutions confirms the main motivations for this strategy in 2018: strengthening development cooperation & countering negatively perceived Chinese influence.

In the years following the adoption of the EU-Asia connectivity strategy, the West was once again confronted with a number of issues, both with the strategy and in the wider world. Firstly, according to staff of Member States ministries, the EU realized in the period from 2018 it “cannot always count on its partners and friends. The fact that the influence of the West on our security was waning, including economic security, which came under increasing pressure, that trade flows and free movement of goods around the world came under further pressure due to various developments, forced the EU to a somewhat broader intervention” (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). This signifies a call for greater strategic outlook when moving forward with the connectivity strategy. Secondly, the infrastructure gap is prevalent in other parts of the world, with Asia needing relatively less investment compared to Africa and Latin America. The EU-Asia cooperation suffered from “being too focused on a certain part of the world” (interview, EU-EEAS, June 12th 2024) thus the geographical scope of the strategy needed to be broadened. Thirdly, the BRI seemed to be effective in generating a “shocking

amount of money” (interview, EX-EXP, June 13th 2024) and finding willing recipients. Thus, a more global strategy was in the works.

Then, the event which many named as a key reason for the current shape of the EUGG, the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in mainland Europe during the first months of 2020. A number of effects become clear: “Firstly, the importance of the EU and Member States working much more closely together. Secondly, the importance of supply chains. And the vulnerabilities of supply chains, not just for the European Union but for all of our partners around the world. [Thirdly], we’ve been learning the lessons from the continuing overhang of the financial crisis and the debt burden that imposed on a number of our partners and the fact that other actors such as China, were not decreasing but rather increasing the debt burden of some of these partners and placing unsustainable burdens on them” (interview, EU-EEAS, June 12th 2024). The pandemic made one thing absolutely clear: global supply chains are crucial for the EU, its Member States and its partners, especially during the pandemic when vaccines, facemasks and other medical items were in short supply but sorely needed. Not only were the resources to adequately fight the pandemic hard to come by, they were also often provided by actors such as China, being able to exact more influence through the distribution of its supply. Creating a better integrated, holistic, global initiative could serve to strengthen global supply chains and decrease dependence of the EU and its partners on predatory actors.

“China has this BRI and we think there is a much more equitable way to provide for the needs of countries around the world. It’s a values driven, high standard, transparent finance mechanism we’re gonna provide,” says Joe Biden after the G7 summit wrapped up on the 13th of June, 2021 in Cornwall, UK. This statement comes after a weekend long meeting between leaders of some major democratic economies, including Japan, the UK, the US and South Africa. Ursula von der Leyen, Charles Michel, Mario Draghi, Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel are present to represent European Member States and EU voices in the summit. The leaders, aimed to address the BRI’s growing influence, announced the Build Back Better World initiative, wherein the members of the G7 would generate funds for global infrastructure development and pandemic recovery (G7, 2021). This initiative would later be renamed the Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (or PGII) to avoid confusion with Biden’s domestic Build Back Better Plan. However, just like the EU-Asia connectivity strategy, this plan did not go further than stated ambitions and strategies and did not include actual mechanisms to further the plan’s goals. Yet, all G7 actors have now been prompted to start designing their own strategies to contribute to the PGII, so the EU goes back to the drawing board.

4.3 2021: European lawmaking at a dazzling pace

These latest developments: the interruption of the global supply chain, the G7’s PGII initiative and its concerns over the BRI’s influence and finally the need for a less geographically constrained development strategy led the European Council to meet and design a new strategy in July of 2021. Just a month after the G7 adopted its conclusions on the PGII, the Council meets to mandate the Commission to work on the European contribution to the initiative. This can be seen as a next step in the development of a more holistic strategy, as the Council mentions in the document: “the EU applies the basic principles set out in the 2018 Joint Communication ‘Connecting Europe and Asia –building blocks for an EU Strategy’ at a global level” (European Council, 2018). Member States seem to have been unanimous in their perception of the need of a global strategy, only diverging in opinions about the scale of private investor involvement, where large Member States want to opt for more ambitious, transformative projects, but smaller Member States fear “missing the boat” (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024) because they might not have the capacity to fully contribute to or benefit of the new initiative. Member States did however agree that the new strategy should have a ‘brand’ and improve visibility and transparency of European development aid. “We see that in many places in the world

the EU is the largest trading partner or the largest investor or the largest donor in terms of development aid. But as an EU we often receive very little political recognition [...] in return” (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). This explicitly means “a recognisable brand name and logo developed together with the Member States [...] supported by a campaign for greater public visibility” (European Council, 2021). So, the Commission is tasked by the Council to create a new global, more holistic development cooperation strategy and to give it a recognizable brand name to increase the visibility of European development aid.

The Commission and its associated Commissioners, Jutta Urpilainen for International Partnerships, Olivér Várhelyi for Neighbourhood and Josep Borrell HR/VP, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the associated DGs (INTPA and NEAR) start drafting the new strategy in the spring and summer of 2021. In this set-up, the Commissioners and their cabinets are giving political steer, while the EEAS and the two DGs are responsible for the technical aspects of implementation. This seemingly broad team was set up because the new strategy concerns foreign relations, making the EEAS crucial, yet also a clearly developmental regional and partner country focus, therefore DG NEAR (for European neighbourhood countries) and DG INTPA (for countries that are not in the neighbourhood) are also present, as they are generally responsible for development policy and relations with those partners. At these lower levels of EU decisionmaking, a diversity of perspectives, motivations and strategies persist. Firstly, at the political level (the Commission), the EUGG is seen as a positive offer in itself, not created to be an alternative to what China offers through the BRI. They might even go hand in hand: “I would not exclude that it is possible also to work together with China in order to see how standards in infrastructure investments can be raised overall and whether they are interested in cooperating on this to have more considerations for being, you know, social labor standard” (interview, EU-COM, May 29th 2024). However, as is also evident here, the execution of BRI projects is still viewed to hold negative effects. Yet, the priority seems to be shifting from explicitly countering China to creating a European offer that can raise standards in the partner countries and create local added value, with positive effects on the BRI deals as a welcome extra effect.

This becomes extra obvious when moving a step down the political hierarchical level, to the DG & executive level. Firstly, the EEAS, concerned with the strategic aspects of the strategy, emphasizes that the strategy provides an offer that can first and foremost strengthen the EU through its partnerships, supply chains and the fight against global challenges like climate change, just as China tries to do with the BRI. The EUGG is “an attempt to identify a much more competitive offer in this in this marketplace” (interview, EU-EEAS, June 12th 2024). It can however become more competitive due to learning of the faults of the BRI and showing how European standards differ and lead to more local added value. The DGs take a more grounded approach, mentioning they are: “always bear[ing] in mind when we start working on a project is the partner country’s priorities, is the strategy for development and the interests of partner countries. [...] The people, the Kenyan people would love to see as project coming from the European Union and its Member States, so it’s not the question of, you know, tracking what the others are doing” (interview, EU-DG, June 5th 2024). So, especially on the executive level, there is not much information gained from the BRI for EU development projects. According to an interviewee in DG INTPA this can be attributed to low transparency of local BRI projects, making it difficult to learn from their execution. So, as we move down the political ladder towards the executive and implementation branches of the EU development structure and strategy, political and geopolitical interests seem to become less prevalent.

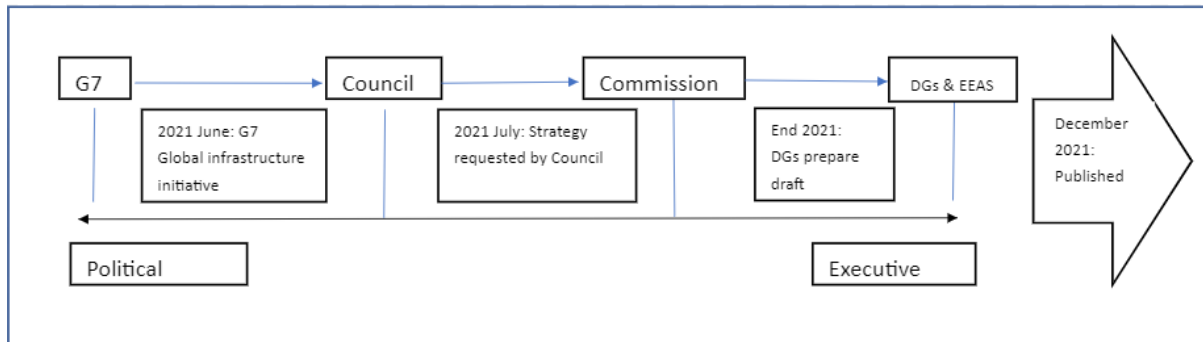


Figure 4.2: The full process of the EUGG draft passing down the political hierarchy in the period June-December 2021.

Even though the announcement was scheduled for spring 2022 (European Council, 2021), the Global Gateway was officially announced on the 1st of December 2021, a short 5 months after the mandate was passed to the Commission by the Council and 6 months after the G7 opted for a global strategy.

What was new about this initiative compared to the previous development regime? Firstly, it clearly delivers on the ‘branding’ aspect of the plan. A new logo and name (first mentioned by Von der Leyen in her State of the Union speech in September (von der Leyen, 2022)) are created and from now on explicitly used when creating and administering so-called ‘flagship projects’, meaning projects that receive funding or were created under the Global Gateway brand. Secondly, this new initiative creates more place for private investment as part of the new ‘Team Europe’ approach, which means funds are generated by a combined effort of EU institutions, Member State agencies and private actors. Thirdly, this initiative created a governance structure for a more centrally and strategically steered development regime. It introduced the Global Gateway Board, a board consisting of the Commission President, relevant Commissioners, the HR/VP, foreign affairs ministers from the Member States and representatives from the European Parliament. This body is created “to provide strategic guidance to this initiative.” (European Commission, 2021a). Furthermore, two consultation groups were conceptualized, the ‘Business Advisory Group’ and a civil society advisory group, to involve relevant private actors in the process. However, the actual implementation and institutionalisation of these groups will take years, first meeting in 2023, almost two full years after their announcement. Finally, the communication announces a ‘Global Gateway Forum’, a multi-day event where representatives from the EU, partner countries and private actors can gather to discuss the EUGG and its progress.

Thus, with the creation of this new governance system, European development cooperation seems to be strongly institutionalizing. However, this institutionalization was not instant, as the Board took one year to gather and meet for the first time, both Advisory groups and the Forum all took at least 20 months to organise and set up. This announcement did signal the next step in the evolution. The fact this initiative and strategy was announced a mere 6 months after the request by the Council in June is surprising as EU legislation generally takes longer to pass through the legislative machine. The upped pace can be explained by a number of reasons. Firstly, it was a joint communication by the Commission and HR/VP and was drafted internally, meaning it did not pass through the Ordinary Legislative Procedure. This means it needs no official readings by the Council of Ministers and European Parliament. However, due to the number of actors involved in its drafting, as explained in the previous section, this might not be a satisfactory explanation. A second explanation is that this initiative was a high priority policy item of the Commission, and therefore received special treatment. This is most likely due to the challenges described in this chapter becoming more urgent (the global infrastructure gap, China's influence and supply chains) and pressure from higher political layers like the G7 and European Council creating urgency regarding this agenda item. Commenting on the speed: “This is

crazy. And it explains many of the problems that we have nowadays with no thinking properly about everything you have to think about for such a huge initiative as the Global gateway, because the fact is that even today there are so many things that do not fit together. [...] It was this geopolitical push that with time became more and more technical, [...]" (interview, EX-EXP, June 13th 2024). The third reason, as presented by one interviewee, is that this announcement in the trend of previous announcements by the G7 and the EU, simply does not have much established content yet. The governance structure, basically planned out needs to be expanded and fleshed out in the months following the announcement, is "still very much under construction" (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). This can be a strategy, as the initiative "can also evolve in the light of the geopolitical environment," and be "adaptable" (interview, EU-COM, May 29th 2024).

So, after a fast process of drafting, the Global Gateway Initiative was finally announced as a next step in the institutionalisation of European development cooperation, but it still has many steps to take to become a fully-fledged governance system as envisaged in the announcement in 2021.

4.4 2022-2023: External shocks and further institutionalization

On the 24th of February, just two months after the announcement of the Global Gateway initiative, Russia invaded Ukraine in an unprecedented attack in the conflict between the two countries. This conflict revealed two key dependencies of the EU and its partners: food supply from Ukraine, mostly through its exported grain and energy supply from Russia, through its exported fossil fuels. The need to diversify both supply chains spurred EU lawmakers to look for solutions, including a bigger role for the EUGG. "And in this light also the focus of the strategy has changed a bit. So now we were also looking much more into renewable energy and critical raw materials supply chains" (interview, EU-COM, May 29th 2024). Much like the COVID pandemic before, this conflict created new priorities for EU decisionmakers when governing and developing the EUGG. "Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine emphasized the importance of flexible supply chains, emphasized the ability of malign actors such as Russia to disrupt supply chains for food, for energy" (interview, EU-EEAS, June 12th 2024). In a report titled the '2022 Strategic Foresight Report', the Commission writes about the importance of the 'twin transitions', meaning green and digital, in the 'new geopolitical context', where China and Russia hold enormous sway in the world of critical raw materials and digital infrastructure & presence (European Commission, 2022a). These transitions are not only crucial for EU Member States, but also for partners, and the EUGG can play a role in supporting those countries make this transition. The Global Gateway can play a crucial role in facilitating these transitions and decoupling and derisking from Russia and China respectively. The G7 also meets around this time, in July, with a core message that the EUGG and the PGII (the larger G7 initiative of which the EUGG is a part, see section 4.2) can support partners and show that "democracy delivers" (Von der Leyen, 2022) as opposed to autocratic forces like China and Russia gaining influence. So, once again, the urgency for a strong, expanded and visible initiative becomes more apparent in European and Western circles, but also around the world, as partners feel the effects of the food and energy crises.

The next step in the EUGGs institutionalization is set on the 11th of December 2022, when the Global Gateway Board first meets. As mentioned before, this body is comprised of the Commission president, HR/VP and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of EU Member States and is tasked with the strategic and political steering of the EUGG. It is also responsible for reviewing implementation of the previous years. Von der Leyen also takes the chance to reaffirm the EUGGs main goals: "Global Gateway is above all a geopolitical project, which seeks to position Europe in a competitive international marketplace. It is a critical tool because infrastructure investments are at the heart of today's geopolitics." (European Commission, 2022b). This composition of actors signifies that the initiative is centrally controlled from Brussels with limited say for the EP (which is an observer) or partner

countries in the strategic and political priorities of the initiative as a whole. The motivation for this governance structure reminds some of the BRI. “I think that the Chinese are simply better able to centrally manage and deploy their business and investments in a very strategic manner. That the EU finds this very difficult” (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). However, this governance has its own issues. This is the first and only time this Board has met, with no concrete moment set for a next meeting. “But it hasn't all come together very often, and they are still very much looking for their role. The Council finds it difficult to provide political guidance” (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). This is related to the number of actors involved in this Board and within a Team Europe approach. “So it requires a lot of effort to bring everyone around the table. It's also equally difficult for us to coordinate with all 27 Member States. So it takes each requires time to put in place this type of mechanism to keep the momentum and to keep it going. There are many priorities on the agenda, on 27 Member States agendas, on the President of the Commission agenda” (interview, EU-DG, June 5th 2024). Commissioner Urpilainen also comments on the EUGG's current governance in an article from May 2024, saying “complex bureaucracy and environmental and social conditions attached to EU financing made it hard for the bloc's international investment strategy to counterbalance China's Belt and Road Initiative.” (Bounds, 2024). While this Board is a step in the direction of more centralized agenda setting and control over the EU's development regime, it leaves much to be desired in efficiency and effectiveness.

10 months later, in October of 2023, the first annual Global Gateway Forum is held in Brussels. It hosted an impressive number of heads of state, ministers, EU officials, development organisations and international organisations like the UN, WHO and WTO. It did however only host 9 European Member State officials, of which some countries sent ministers, such as France. Large financiers of the EUGG and the EU's ODA like the Netherlands and Germany have not sent a delegation. The Forum is open to any participant country, there is no membership requirement. The main goals of this forum are providing a platform for exchange with partners, unveiling new projects and signing important documents such as cooperation agreements. As with the Board meetings, these Fora have proven difficult to organize, due to scheduling issues, the logistics of bringing representatives from all over the world to Brussels and the political cost of organizing an event like this (interview, EU-DG, June 5th 2024). It certainly wasn't as effective as the BRI's first Forum, which hosted 29 heads of state and representatives from 130 countries and 70 international organisations (Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, 2017). These fora have no institutional importance, there is no voting, membership or a more official role for attendant countries. This will most likely not change: “I don't think it will be changed in the sense of mandate of the forum and I don't think it will be institutionalized in the sense that it will be a more like a group,” says one of the organisers of the event (interview, EU-DG, June 5th 2024). It requires political stability within the EU, willingness of Member States and partners to attend and a bit of political leverage, he explains. The European and national elections of 2023 will most likely prevent the organisation of a Forum in 2024. HR/VP Borrell, in one of his blogposts, reflected: “We have not been as fast as others have, in this global “battle of offers”. However, it is not about a competition [...]. We want to extend and deepen [The Team Europe] approach with the Global Gateway. At the same time, we must recognise that Team Europe is still in its infancy. The EU and its member states are by far the biggest provider of development aid to the “Global South”, but we still lack an effective enough coordination on this matter. We must do more together to have the impact that our citizens and our partners expect. This first Global Gateway Forum has shown to our partners that Europeans are aware of what is at stake and that the EU, its member states, and financial institutions have begun to deliver together. I am sure the second Forum will prove how we have been able to pick up the pace in the coming months” (Borrell, 2023). So, he clearly reflects that the Board and governance structure needs more work, but the Forum has been a success.

The next steps in institutionalization of the EUGG are taken in September and October of 2023, during the Forum, with the establishment of the business and civil society advisory groups respectively. These groups, officially called the 'Global Gateway Business Advisory Group' (BAG) and 'Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Dialogue Platform' (CSO/LA), aim to include stakeholders of the projects, from partner countries and within the EU, in the decision-making of the EUGG strategy and implementation. These groups had been in formation since at least the beginning of the year, with multiple rounds of applications, eventually settling on around 60 members for both groups. The CSO/LA platform includes members from across the globe, including the Red Cross, Africa-Europe Foundation, Arab NGO Network for Development and several associations of local authorities (European Commission, 2024a). BAG represents European businesses and the EU industrial sectors, with companies like DHL, Phillips, Volvo and the port of Antwerp (European Commission, 2024b). Both these groups meet twice a year (in plenary) and have subdivisions concerned with specific sectors or policy areas, they also sit into the wider EU initiative Policy Forum for Development (or PFD) which has facilitated dialogues aimed at development in the past. Yet, these two new governance bodies also need to take further steps to properly function and both seem to "not have found their role" (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). The Business Advisory Group, although it has an important role in the implementation of the EUGGs projects, cannot properly function without adequate inclusion of SMEs (Small & Medium sized Enterprises), it proposed during its second plenary meeting on the 24th of April 2024 (Chourreau, 2024). The CSO/LA dialogue platform seems to be plagued by other problems, researcher Amandine Sabourin of think-tank ECDPM argues: "Their capacity to influence is not a given: unlike the Business Advisory Group, civil society organisations and local authorities will be informed about the projects only after they have been designed and approved. This questions the willingness of the EU to engage with the CSOs and local authorities to co-create the EU's agenda" (Sabourin, 2023). So, while these groups have now been set up and have started meeting and contributing to the EUGG governance, their own institutional structure may need to develop further to fully utilize their potential as decision-makers within the EUGG.

So, it is evident that since the announcement, the EUGG and its governance has started taking shape more and more. The projects and the implementation that were already established before the announcement continue. "So actually we can say that it was 2022 that was the year that allowed us to start working on rolling the Global Gateway strategy out, starting to implement it. So I guess that has also impacted the whole process and the organization of the global gateway board, however, just to say that the Global Gateway implementation continues. I mean at technical level; we are we are moving full speed ahead" (interview, EU-DG, June 5th 2024). But, while the EUGG is developing and taking shape, the BRI is also in flux.

4.5 2023-....: A declining BRI?



Figure 4.3: China's Overseas Development Finance by Year, 2008-2021 (Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2023).

In the last few years, China's development regime and BRI strategies seem to be changing. As is visible in figure 4.3, China's overall generated funds and number of projects is falling drastically, from a high of nearly 100 billion USD to below 10 billion USD in 2021. Whereas the amount of money and low conditionality might have made the Chinese offer attractive before, an expert on development policy bluntly comments: "What I've seen in my life is that it's just, [Partners] go for the most efficient. That's it. Value for money. You have no other options in many countries. And it's not that the Chinese go around killing everyone or anything like that. It's just that they have no standards, all that is clear, but that might be improving as well, because they know very well that the value is important" (interview, EX-EXP, June 13th 2024). The Chinese seem to be upping their standards in the offers they make and going for a "small is beautiful" approach, "which prioritizes smaller and more targeted projects" (Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2023). The Chinese were "often unable to actually get a return on those investments", something the EU looks at "much more strictly" (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). Combine this with China's slowing down domestic economy, rising number of defaults on BRI projects and the EU's stronger focus on feasibility, human development, conditionality and avoiding "cutting corners", it becomes clearer that the EU, though it does not invest as much as the Chinese, seems to invest much more securely (interview, NL-MFA, May 29th 2024). The EU, always aware of quality, is now investing in a quantity approach, while the BRI, with its foundations in a more quantitative approach are now opting for more quality.

Although the EU is now more strategic about "where to put its focus" and which projects to engage with, the values at the core of previous development initiatives like the SDGs, the Climate transition, human rights and democracy still play a key role in designing Global Gateway projects (interview, EU-COM, May 29th 2024). In July of 2023, the EU delivered a 300-page voluntary report on its delivery with regards to the SDGs (European Commission, 2023b). In this document, the Global Gateway is mentioned 144 times and comes back as a core strategy in all 17 SDGs (European Commission, 2023b, pg 19). The interviewees also confirm the foremost goals of the Global Gateway remain addressing the infrastructure gap, promoting the twin transitions and promoting European values in the partner countries.

Another landmark event in EU & BRI relations is on the 6th of December 2023, where Italian PM Giorgia Meloni, after a long campaign trail and several months in office, announces Italy will not renew its BRI membership (Mazzoco, 2023). This comes after Meloni called Italy's joining of the initiative a “big mistake” during her campaign for the country's leadership (ANSA, 2022) and several Italian officials, including the minister of foreign affairs Tajani have admitted the initiative has not yielded the expected economic benefits in the 3 years Italy was a member (Mazzoco, 2023). Italy, as a country that has a relatively developed ‘hard infrastructure’ sector compared to other BRI members, relied on other policies of the BRI to receive benefits, like trade and business agreements and therefore missed the boat on the brunt of Chinese investments, which did not significantly increase during the Italian membership. Even though many European economies are still members of the BRI, Italy, as the only G7 member, leaving the initiative relieves the worry EU and Western leaders started to have about China's influence expanding when Italy joined. It also shows that a combination of public opinion and seemingly absent economic gains can push more developed economies out of the BRI and that the initiative stays one that is mostly attractive to countries that can depend on the funds.

So, in the future of the EUGG's development, China's role may seem diminished, but its influence and other challenges persist, including problems with the initiative itself, calling for further reform or institutionalisation. Commissioner Urpilainen in her 2024 interview with Financial Times stresses the EUGG's current ineffectiveness at countering China, both due to its complex bureaucracy and its stringent internal regulations of imports (Bounds, 2024). In a briefing for the coming Commission, leaked by Politico, DG INTPA also introduces a plethora of possible future avenues for the EUGG, ensuring that the strategy is not done developing (Politico, 2024).

5. Analysis

To determine whether interorganisational diffusion was present in this case, I now determine the presence of direct or indirect influence of the BRI and China on European decisionmakers. Then, assessing the level and direction of institutionalisation will help me in determining which diffusion mechanisms were present in the establishment of the EUGG.

5.1 Influence & Diffusion

To test if the BRI had influence on the EUGG, I need to find evidence that its existence has made ‘identifiable and substantive’ difference to the institutionalization of the EUGG. Firstly, identifying which actors are the decisionmakers within the EUGG is important, to determine if they have been influenced. The decisionmakers for the EUGG are a combination of EU actors, including; the Member States through the Council; the Commission and its Commissioners; and administrative subdivisions like the EEAS and the DGs. The type and direction of institutionalization is then a combination of their positions through a process of bargaining, as theorized in section 2.3. The full political hierarchy that forms the decision-making machine in the institutionalization of the EUGG can be found in figure 4.2.

When analysing the process for influence on and interdependence between European and Chinese institutional decision-making I separate the two types of influence, direct and indirect. Starting with direct influence or “sender-driven” influence, I look at direct Chinese involvement in the development of the EUGG. Throughout our timeline and in the interviews, it becomes apparent that there has been no exchange between BRI and EUGG officials. China is not a partner in the EUGGs structure and governance and might play a role in implementation cooperation, but not on an institutional level. Therefore, there is no direct influence and hypothesis H1b is not confirmed. Other development initiatives do play a direct role in influencing the EUGG, like the PGII and other G7 initiatives, including through knowledge transfer and institutional support and coordination, just as the EUGG influences them. They are however not the focus of this thesis. Then I dive into indirect or “recipient-driven” influence, which manifests itself through the perception of the BRI in the eyes of the EU decisionmakers. The EU seems to have many perspectives on the BRI, its governance and its implementation with some distinct patterns. Firstly, the BRI's centralized governance was viewed positively, because it's seen as a reason it is able to more effectively generate funds and roll out projects, compared to the European bureaucracy. However, the implementation of the BRI projects is viewed overwhelmingly negative, as interviewees continuously lay the focus on unfair lending practices, opaque contracts, low standards and unsustainable debt. These reasons have pushed the involved actors to develop the EU development aid towards the EUGG and its current structure, yet also further. The BRI and its negative effects were continuously brought up as one of the factors driving the need for a global strategy, combined with others like problems with supply chains, the infrastructure gap, and combatting climate change. So, I can conclude that the existence of the BRI, its governance and its implementation have had indirect influence on the decisionmakers in the EU when creating and developing the EUGG, confirming hypothesis H1a and H1. This is not a surprise, after the initiative has continually been framed as “[evolving] in the light of the geopolitical context” (interview, EU-COM, May 29th 2024). This prompts me to believe there is some kind of interorganisational diffusion, but to understand the effects and strength we first dive into institutionalisation.

5.2 Institutionalisation

Now I know the BRI was an important factor influencing EU decisionmakers when institutionalizing the EUGG, I need to assess the institutionalization of the initiative. This will be done by splitting the initiative into three parts: its governance structure, the implementation and the ‘brand’. The

governance forms the body of this thesis, but because of the different perspectives on governance, implementation and the brand, positive and negative respectively, explained in section 5.1, they are separately analysed.

5.2.1 Governance

The institutionalization of the EUGG was an incremental process, spurred on by global events like the COVID pandemic and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. The announcement itself, with its new introductions like the logo and name in 2021, was a precursor of the later steps in institutionalization, like the meetings of the Board and both Advisory groups and the later organisation of the first Forum. I will assess the institutional arrangement using the three variables provided by Vabulas & Snidal (2013): organizing principle, members and organization structure.

- **Organisational principle.** There have been no explicit combined statements, like the MoU and Fora communiqués in the BRI or the Samoa Agreement between the ACP and the EU. There is also no treaty, with signatories. However, the countries that participate in the EUGGs project and in the Fora do subscribe to the values stipulated by the deals. Therefore, this arrangement has developed from tacitly shared expectations towards oral agreement, making the EU fall in the 'explicit agreement consultations' row.
- **Membership.** Before the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy, partner countries were associated with the EU on an ad-hoc, bilateral basis. There was no real all-encompassing initiative partners could become associated with or members of. Now, the EUGG represents a larger, unified narrative with a central message, mission and goals. Partners in this collaboration are also invited to the forum and can participate through negotiations and through the CSO/LA platform. They can thus be identified as 'parties to the conference', placing the EUGG in the 'explicit agreement consultations' category, where previously there was no organisation.
- **Organisational structure.** The EUGG developed the EUs development cooperation from spontaneous order to limited meetings and no independent secretariat. The fora, which represent the meetings with partners (that aren't bilateral) are supposed to become regular (annual), but the planning of these meetings is currently still dependent on the political situation in Europe, e.g. because of the European elections and a changing Commission. The secretariat is currently run internally, within the Commission. There is no independent secretariat in which partners or other actors are involved. However, due to the plan of making the Fora regular, the organisational structure is situated between 'explicit agreement consultation' and to that of an informal IGO.

So, the EUs developmental policy has evolved from very informal, ad-hoc based relations towards a more formalized institutional arrangement of 'explicit agreement consultations', but shows some characteristics of an informal IGO (IIGO). This means its governance has institutionalized and become more formal according to the typology provided by Vabulas and Snidal (2013), and has developed to become more similar to the BRI, which is an IIGO through its MoUs, explicitly associated members, Chinese-run secretariat and its once-in-two-years regular Fora.

5.2.2 Implementation

While the execution of projects may not be measured by the same standards as the institutional structure and governance of the EUGG, it tells us something about the product of the new governance of the initiative, most interestingly through the motivations and values striven for when creating flagship projects. This new mindset can inform us about how the new governance structure was influenced by the BRI in making strategic choices with regards to the cooperation with partners. First and foremost, geopolitics and strategy have come to the foreground as is evident multiple times

throughout the timeline. The BRI's growing influence and its perceived bad practices, the vulnerability of supply chains and the growing infrastructure gap have made development cooperation more of a strategic interest for the EU. Even though it has become more strategic, it has not let go of the values that were and still are so important to the EU. Instead, they were expanded, from a handful in previous connectivity, to a full 6 in the EUGG, including climate, democracy and transparency.

5.2.3 The Brand

Another, and probably the most substantial path of institutionalization, has been the 'branding' of the EUGG, notably its logo, name and promotional material. Whereas before EU development aid was decentralized and divided across countries, regions or sectors, the EUGG has created a single brand under which all projects can be housed. This has been an effort to make EU development aid more visible and transparent and aims at the EU receiving more recognition and influence than previously. The Fora also play a large role in promoting this brand, not only being platforms for discussion and knowledge sharing but also providing showcasing of new projects and prior successful agreements. This is comparable to the BRI, which has always had a strong branding and promotional aspect, mostly through its historical and cultural narrative of creating a 'new silk road' to reconnect the peoples among the historical routes. So, the EUGG's identity has formalized in the form of branding, becoming closer to its Chinese counterpart.

5.3 Diffusion mechanisms

What strategies/mechanisms have leadership used to institutionalise? Because I have found no sign of direct influence of the BRI on the EUGG, those diffusion mechanisms will be counted out. There are no dialogues, partnerships or knowledge exchanges between EUGG officials and BRI or Chinese officials, so the BRI is only a passive sender. Keeping in mind the indirect influence in this case, the next steps are deciding which logic drove and drives the institutional decisionmakers and finally which diffusion mechanism is at play for different parts of the initiative.

5.3.1 Governance & Institutional design

The logic of appropriateness does not play a significant role in the considerations for this new institutional design, as the European values and identity have not necessarily changed in the years following the original development policy structure. There has not been a shift in the European identity, norms & values and approach when it comes to how to govern initiatives and cooperation with partner countries. The predominant shift was one in the perspective on efficiency. The logic of consequences can give us more answers, as the process also reveals geopolitical and strategic reasons were often at the core of the motivations for further institutionalization. The BRI was more centrally controlled which makes it more effective at mobilizing the private sector but also more adaptable to the global political environment, as confirmed by Commissioner Urpilainen in early 2024 (Bounds, 2024). The EU needs to become more competitive on a competitive market, the DG and Borrell comment, for instance by the creation of the Global Gateway Board and by a more strategic geographic allocation of funds and number of projects. Adding these reasons to the geopolitical concerns strongly connected to strategic derisking of the EU from Russia and China and the creation of flexible supply chains, all signal the primary way of thinking was of consequentialist nature when institutionalizing the EUGG. This points us towards two remaining mechanisms, competition and lesson drawing. In both mechanisms, the EU strategically adopts best practices from the BRI in its design of the EUGG, which it is currently doing in centralizing its governance and trying to make it more effective. However, the purpose of the EUGG is not only to improve the EU's development aid, it is also design explicitly to counter the BRI's influence, as is evident from the statements of EU political leaders at the G7 and in the Financial Times. This tells us the *competition* diffusion mechanism is most likely at play here.

5.3.2 Implementation

A negative image of the BRI and its unfair debt burdens, exploitation, low value to the partner countries, and other issues persist within the perception of the EU decisionmaker. This, regardless of the dominant logic would disincentivize them to develop EUGG implementation to become more similar to the BRI. Instead, we see that the conditionality and values-based approach stand strong in negotiations with partner countries. The only value that has diffused from the BRI towards the EUGG is the need for a more strategic selection of projects, this does however not deter the values-based approach the EU had before. Therefore, the logic of appropriateness would convince us that if the EU's identity as an actor that strives for high value, normative partnerships, it prevents decisionmakers from developing the implementation of the projects to become more similar to the BRI and has instead motivated them to best develop in the opposite direction and emphasize its value-based approach, which is what we see happening in the EUGG. This part of the initiative then has developed according to the *lesson-drawing* mechanism, but instead of taking over a negatively perceived BRI design, decisionmakers have instead emphasized strengthening its own, unique design.

5.3.3 The Brand

The main goals of creating the brand were twofold: getting the EU the recognition and legitimacy it deserves following its continuously large role in global development aid; and creating a visible, transparent and especially trustworthy brand for partners who want to set up an economic and socially value-driven partnership. There is no obviously material gain to be found in these motivations and in the effects of the creation of the brand, so the logic of consequences is not convincing. The logic of appropriateness triumphs here, because the brand is a strategy of reputation and identity building for the EU and for its partners. As explained in the goals, the brand really mostly concerns the image the EU and its developmental policy have and is a strategy to strengthen that image. To distinguish between the final two possible mechanisms, normative emulation and mimicry, we finally look at the role of the recipient, the EU and the EUGG in this case, and whether it was actively looking for strategies to take over or whether it was passively downloading the BRI's strategy. Because the Global Gateway presents a differently based narrative, not based in historical and cultural analogies like the BRI and the EU is actively rolling out websites, social media campaigns and other innovative ways of promoting the brand, it seems to me that *normative emulation* is the mechanism at work in the case of the brand. The EU recognized from the BRI that a central narrative and brand can be effective and actively designed its own, instead of copying or mimicking the Chinese form.

6. Conclusion

Since its initial announcement in 2021, the EUGG has been constantly compared to the Chinese BRI infrastructure initiative. It is claimed to be inspired by it, be a reaction to it and some even say a copy of it. This thesis uses the interorganisational diffusion theory as a way to connect both initiatives and find a possible link between the BRI and the EUGGs development. I went searching for a possible China-factor in the EUGGs development. If such a factor is found and the claims of the ones comparing are confirmed, this confirms the surprising and under-researched fact that the EU is not only being an example and image for others, it is also actively learning itself.

The research question reads: *To what extent can interorganisational diffusion, and its underlying mechanisms, from the Belt and Road Initiative explain the institutionalization of the European Global Gateway?*

In this thesis I have found evidence pointing to the presence of interorganisational diffusion from the BRI as sender, to the EUGG as recipient. The BRI indirectly influences EU decisionmakers in their institutionalization of EU development aid and this results in different diffusion mechanisms across the different parts of the EUGG, confirming H1a, H1. However, there was no proof of direct influence through direct cooperation between the EUGG and BRI present, so H1b is refuted. Only either direct or indirect influence need to be present for diffusion to be present, so the support for H1a also support H1. I have also found several diffusion mechanisms at play, which confirms H2. Firstly, the centralized governance of the EUGG has been developed according to the competition mechanism, with increased performance to be able to rival the BRI at the core of the motivations. Secondly, the implementation of the projects on the ground has developed according to the lesson-drawing mechanism, where problems with the BRI have learned the EU decisionmakers in which way to develop their projects, namely away from the BRI, to become more attractive and successful. Finally, the branding of the EUGG, including its logo, title and narrative have developed as predicted by the normative emulation mechanism, where the BRI branding has seemed effective and the EU decisionmakers have created their own distinct version of it. Influence being present in the form of recipient driven influence and diffusion mechanisms being active for different parts of the initiative thus confirm my main hypothesis: *interorganisational diffusion plays a significant role in explaining the institutionalisation of the European Global Gateway.*

So, the presence of this China-factor and its mechanisms, which have been very influential, within the institutionalization of the EUGG in its different parts explain the puzzling speed and direction of the institutionalization process. But, while the branding and governance have become more similar to the BRI and they are both initiatives with infrastructure at their heart, the implementation seems to be moving the opposite way. As one interviewee put it: “I wear a shirt. You wear a shirt. We are not twins” (interview, EU-DG, June 5th 2024).

6.1 Limitations

The most pressing issue haunting any research into both the BRI and the EUGG is low transparency, concerning the fact it is difficult to find information on the initiatives, their responsible teams/persons and their internal processes. While this is to be expected of the Chinese initiative, which keeps the contents of negotiations secret between China and the partner country, it is more surprising from the EUGG. Some researchers even posit this to be one of its main ‘weaknesses’ (Buhigas Schubert & Costa, 2023). Increased transparency cannot only improve the internal process, it can also improve the delivery of information to the public, which will strengthen its branding aspect and its popularity, they posit in a recommendation to the European Parliament.

This low transparency and the fractured nature of the governance and administration of the EUGG made it difficult to find the source of the political decision-making and the involved people for interviews. Once a few sources were found, it is hard to encounter one person with an overview of the entire initiative or knowledge on most political aspects of its development, as such a person probably doesn't exist, due to the division of responsibilities among the Board, Member States, DGs and Commission. As some have pointed out, the constant comparison of the BRI and EUGG is frustrating the EUGG's tangible efforts to increase and streamline its development aid. The harsh accusation of the EUGG as a copy or mimicry of the BRI is seldom true at the executive level, making it harder to engage with this claim on a theoretical level in conversation with experts. The true motivations and strategies of the EU decisionmakers, which tiptoe around using China and the BRI in their discourse, thus had to be found by reading between the lines and by asking proxy questions, see appendix A. So, it cost more effort to find the underlying perceptions regarding China and the BRI, however, the impact of this limitation on the results is limited as defensiveness with regards to the mimicry claim also informs me about the underlying perceptions.

6.2 Future avenues

Especially because of the changing nature of the BRI as explained in section 4.5, it will be very interesting to see how both the EUGG and the BRI develop and institutionalize in the future. As explained in section 5.2.1, the EUGG seems to be on its way to becoming an IIGO, once the Fora become regular and partner countries can become associated members with shared expectations. How the BRI further develops from a quantity to quality-based approach, possibly even influenced by the EUGG as sender, can provide further avenues to apply interorganisational diffusion theory to this case. This will prove a more difficult path, as Chinese decisionmakers are often hard to reach and the Chinese decision-making process is often very obscure.

When moving away from this case and looking at similar cases, described in section 3.3, like cases with a legislative vacuum or a highly competitive space, we have now opened up a way in which to look at the EU as recipient of diffused values. Finding evidence for diffusion in other cases can further strengthen the theory and its application to the EU as recipient.

As mentioned in section 2.3, other theories try to explain institutionalization which don't account for the influence of other actors on the decision-makers: realism, constructivism and institutionalism. These possibly also play a role in the institutionalization of the EUGG internally, combined with diffusion from external sources. Diving into these theories can then give us a fuller picture of which factors influenced the development of the EUGG and the relative strengths of each factor, although, due to the weight given to the Chinese influence during this process tracing and the dazzlingly fast development of the EUGG compared to other initiatives, I expect the China-factor to be the strongest.

A final avenue which was brought up to me by an expert I consulted on the EUGG was: what makes the BRI so attractive to partners? The development of the EUGG and this research is almost solely based on the perceptions and motivations of EU decision-makers. Setting up a dialogue with decision-makers in partner countries and identifying the realities of EUGG and BRI presence, attractiveness, influence and effectiveness in those countries could inform the EUGG in a different way. This new avenue of research could also provide a learning opportunity for those developing the EUGG.

Bibliography

- Acharya, A (2016). *Oxford handbook of comparative regionalism, Chapter 6: Regionalism beyond EU-Centrism*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199682300.001.0001>
- Andornino, G.B. (2017). *The Belt and Road Initiative in China's Emerging Grand Strategy of Connective Leadership*. *China & World Economy*, 25: 4-22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cwe.12211>
- ANSA (2022). *Meloni: "Non rinnoverei l'adesione alla via della seta cinese"*. 23rd September. https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2022/09/23/meloni-non-rinnoverei-ladesione-alla-via-della-seta-cinese_c6c5a8b3-a9a7-4d82-91cc-41d669584cd5.html
- Barbero, M (2023, January 10). *Europe Is Trying (and Failing) to Beat China at the Development Game*. *Foreign Policy*. URL: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/10/europe-china-eu-global-gateway-bri-economic-development/>
- Beach, D; Pedersen, R.B (2013). *Process-Tracing Methods : Foundations and Guidelines*. University of Michigan Press. 12th February.
- Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (2017). *Joint Communiqué of the Leaders Roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation*. 16th May. URL: <http://2017.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2017/0516/c22-423.html>
- Bindi, Federiga and Angelescu, Irina (2022). *The Foreign Policy of the European Union: assessing Europe's role in the world, 2nd ed.*. Brookings University Press.
- Borrell, J (2023). *Global Gateway, EU's proposal in the global "battle of offers"*. European External Action Service. 27th October. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-gateway-eus-proposal-global-battle-offers_en
- Börzel, T. A.; Risse, T (2009). *The Transformative Power of Europe: The European Union and the Diffusion of Ideas*. Freie Universität Berlin. May. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/115939/2009-Transformative-Power-of-Europe.pdf>
- Boston University Global Development Policy Center (2023). *"Small is Beautiful": A New Era in China's Overseas Development Finance?* 19th January. URL: <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2023/01/19/small-is-beautiful-a-new-era-in-chinas-overseas-development-finance/>
- Bounds, A; Mosolova, D (2024). *EU fighting to counter China's influence in Global South, says EU top official*. *Financial Times*. 12th May. <https://www.ft.com/content/690e65c5-ee93-4a21-b4c7-12110ae48984>
- Brakman, S., Frankopan, P., Garretsen, H., & van Marrewijk, C. (2019). *The New Silk Roads: an introduction to China's Belt and Road Initiative*. *Cambridge journal of regions economy and society*, 12(1), 3-16. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsy037>
- Buhigas Schubert, C; Costa, O (2023). *Global Gateway: Strategic governance & implementation*. European Parliament. 28th March. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/702585/EXPO_STU\(2023\)702585_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/702585/EXPO_STU(2023)702585_EN.pdf)
- Chellaney, B (2017). *China's debt-trap diplomacy*. Australian Strategic Policy Institute. 24th January. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy/>

Chourreau, A (2024). *Global Gateway: SMEs voice their requests to the Commission*. European Digital SME Alliance. 3rd May. URL: <https://www.digitalsme.eu/global-gateway-smes-voice-their-requests-to-the-commission/>

Communist Party of China (2022, October 22). *CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA*. http://www.chinatoday.com/org/cpc/Constitution-of-Communist-Party-of-China_202210.pdf

Damro, C. (2015). *Market Power Europe and new EU trade policies*. in Jan Wouters et al (eds.) *Global Governance through Trade* (pp. 19-42)

Debt Justice (2022). *African governments owe three times more debt to private lenders than China*. 11th July. <https://debtjustice.org.uk/press-release/african-governments-owe-three-times-more-debt-to-private-lenders-than-china>

DG International Partnerships (2021). *ACP-EU partnership*. URL: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/european-development-policy/acp-eu-partnership_en

Dunford, M; Liu, W (2019). *Chinese perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative*. *Cambridge journal of Regions, Economy and Society*. 12(01): 145. doi: 10.1093/cjres/rsy032

European Commission (2018a). *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy*. Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of Regions and the European Investment Bank. 19th September. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_communication_-_connecting_europe_and_asia_-_building_blocks_for_an_eu_strategy_2018-09-19.pdf

European Commission (2018b). *Memo: explaining the European Union's approach to connecting Europe and Asia*. 19th September. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_18_5804

European Commission (2021a, December 1st). *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank: The Global Gateway*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021JC0030>

European Commission (2021b, December 1st). *Question and Answers on Global Gateway*. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_6434

European Commission (2022a). *COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: 2022 Strategic Foresight Report*. Eur-Lex. 29th June. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022DC0289>

European Commission (2022b) *First meeting of the Global Gateway Board*. December 11th . URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7656

European Commission (2023a). *Global Gateway Forum 2023*. https://global-gateway-forum.ec.europa.eu/index_en

European Commission (2023b). *EU voluntary review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. European Union. 4th July. <https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/SDG-Report-WEB.pdf>

European Commission (2024a). *Global Gateway Business Advisory Group*. International Partnerships. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/governance/global-gateway-business-advisory-group_en

European Commission (2024b). *Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform*. International Partnerships. 16th April. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/governance/global-gateway-civil-society-and-local-authorities-advisory-platform_en

European Commission (n.d.) *Global Gateway*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en

European Council (2018). *Connecting Europe and Asia: Council adopts conclusions*. Press release. 15th October. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/10/15/connecting-europe-and-asia-council-adopts-conclusions/>

European Council (2021). *A globally connected Europe – Council conclusions 12th July 2021*. General Secretariat of the Council. 12th July. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10629-2021-INIT/nl/pdf>

European Parliament (2022, December 8th). *European Parliament-Pan-African Parliament inter-parliamentary meeting (EP-PAP IPM)* (https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/africa-eu-partnership_en#institutional-partnership)

Fleming, S; Khan, M (2021). *EU proposes new infrastructure programme to rival China*. Financial Times. 15 September. URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/7feb34b3-6ce3-4883-b18b-1e2b4401678e>

G7 (2021). *Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communique – Our Shared Agenda for Global Action to Build Back Better*. European Council. 13th June. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/50361/carbis-bay-g7-summit-communique.pdf>

George, A; Kaldany, R; Losavia, J (2019). *The world is facing a \$15 trillion infrastructure gap by 2040. Here's how to bridge it*. World Economic Forum. 19th April. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/infrastructure-gap-heres-how-to-solve-it/>

Global Infrastructure Outlook (2024). *Forecasting infrastructure investment needs and gaps*. G20. <https://outlook.gihub.org/>

Hancock, K., Libman, A. (2016). *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism, Chapter 10: Eurasia*. Oxford University Press.

Karjalainen, T. (2023). *European Norms Trap? EU Connectivity Policies and the Case of the Global Gateway*. East Asia 40, 293–316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09403-x>

Lau, S; Cokelaere, H (2021, September 15). *EU launches 'Global Gateway' to counter China's Belt and Road*. Politico. URL: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-launches-global-gateway-to-counter-chinas-belt-and-road/>

Lenz, T; Marks, G (2016). *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism, Chapter 22: Regional Institutional Design*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199682300.013.23>

Lenz, T (2021). *Interorganisational diffusion in international relations*. Oxford University Press.

- March, J. G.; Olsen, J.P. (1998) *The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders*. International Organization 52(4): 943–69. doi: 10.1162/002081898550699.
- Mazzoco, I; Palazzi, A. L. (2023). *Italy Withdraws from China's Belt and Road Initiative*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. 14th December. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/italy-withdraws-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>
- Ministry of foreign affairs of the PRC (2015). *Vision And Actions On Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt And 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*. Published by Xinhua. 30th March. URL: <https://eng.vidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/1084.html>
- Mistreanu, S. (2023, October 17). *Here are the key leaders joining the Belt and Road forum and their wish lists to Beijing*. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/belt-road-forum-china-putin-xi-orban-beijing-b248ad6f710bfcf9aea62e916239a37d>
- Nair, A (2021). *Connectivity Initiatives by G20 Countries: Convergence or Divergence?* Research and Information System for Developing Countries. September. <https://ris.org.in/newsletter/RIS%20Latest%20Publications/2021/G20%20Digest/Sept%202021/pdf/G20%20Digest-Arun%20S.%20Nair.pdf>
- National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) (2015). *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*. People's Republic of China. 28th March.
- National Geographic Society (2024). *The Silk Road*. National Geographic. 9th February. URL: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/silk-road/>
- Nedopil, Christoph (2023). *Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative*. Green Finance & Development Center, FISF Fudan University. <https://greenfdc.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/>
- Politico (2024). *Briefing Book: International Partnerships*. April. <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/18/draft-IntPa-briefing-for-next-Com-April-2024-1-cleaned.pdf>
- Polillo, S; Guillén, M. F. (2005). *Globalization Pressures and the State: The Worldwide Spread of Central Bank Independence*. American Journal of Sociology 2005 110:6, 1764-1802.
- Risse, T. (2016). *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism, Chapter 5: The Diffusion of Regionalism*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199682300.001.0001>
- Sabourin, A (2023). *Copilots, not passengers: The story of the Policy Forum on Development*. ECDPM. 16th October. URL: <https://ecdpm.org/work/copilots-not-passengers-story-policy-forum-development>
- Singh, A. (2020). *The myth of 'debt-trap diplomacy' and realities of Chinese development finance*. Third World Quarterly, 42(2), 239–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1807318>
- Teevan, C; Bilal, S (2023). *Brief: The Global Gateway at two: Implementing EU strategic ambitions*. ECDPM. 27th November. <https://ecdpm.org/work/global-gateway-two-implementing-eu-strategic-ambitions>
- The Belt and Road Research Platform (2021). *The BRI and China's International Trade*. Figure published by the Leiden Asia Center. URL: <https://leidenasiacentre.nl/english-new-map-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative/>

Hoekstra, W. (2021). *Fiche: Mededeling De Global Gateway*. Tweede Kamer Der Staten Generaal.

United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2013). *Shift from traditional approach to integration to 'developmental regionalism', report urges*. Press release. URL:

<https://unctad.org/press-material/shift-traditional-approach-integration-developmental-regionalism-report-urges>

Vabulas, F., Snidal, D. (2013). *Organization without delegation: Informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs) and the spectrum of intergovernmental arrangements*. *Rev Int Organ* 8, 193–220. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-012-9161-x>

Vangeli, A. (2020). *Belt and Road and China's Attempt at Region Building in Central-East and Southeast Europe*. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 49(1), 14-32.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1868102620953439>

Von der Leyen, U (2021). *State of the Union 2021*. European Commission. 15th September. URL:

https://state-of-the-union.ec.europa.eu/state-union-2021_en

Von der Leyen, U (2022). *Press statements on the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment - President von der Leyen*. European Council Newsroom. 26th June. URL:

<https://newsroom.consilium.europa.eu/events/20220626-eu-g7-summit-2022/135937-3-press-statements-on-the-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment-president-von-der-leyen-20220626>

World Bank (2018, March 29). *Belt and Road Initiative*.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>

Xi, J (2013). *Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China At Nazarbayev University*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China. 8 September.

<https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/BR/20130907.O1E.html>

Xinhua (n.d.) *Official Chinese Website of the Belt and Road Initiative*. URL:

<https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/>

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

Questions

Personal profile

Who are you and what is your function (in relation to the Global Gateway)?

Since when have you been involved in the initiative? Were you involved before the Global Gateway was established?

What role does your DG play in the development and administration of the EUGG

Process tracing & Motives

The Global Gateway is often described as a bundling of existing European infrastructure and development initiatives under one roof. Would you agree with this and when did it become apparent that a new step was needed? (The establishment of the Global Gateway).

Which factors provided the driving force behind the establishment of the Global Gateway according to you? Why wasn't the previous development structure enough?

In the press release by the Commission in 2021 when the initiative was announced, 'physical infrastructure' was coined as a key focus. Why? And how is the Global Gateway different than previous development aid initiatives like the Cotonou Agreement?

When building the Global Gateway, were there different perspectives and opinions and disagreements among the involved institutions (Commission, Council, HR/VP)? If so, what were the most important ones according to you?

Were there other options on the table for the institutional framework of the Global Gateway? If so, why were they (not) chosen?

Institutional design

Find direct influence. Is there active information exchange between Global Gateway staff and staff of other development initiatives like the BRI, (comparable to the intra-parliamentary meetings with the African Union?)

Membership. In what way are partner countries involved in decision-making within the Global Gateway? Could they be considered 'members' of the organisation? Or is administration and decision-making fully reserved for EU actors? Can members be considered equal?

Influence of the BRI

Fora & Language. Media and researchers have framed the Global Gateway as either Europe's response to or copying of the Belt and Road initiative? What is your perspective on these labels and is either of them accurate?

Strategies. How would you say the construction of the Global Gateway was influenced by other development initiatives like the BRI? Was there a process of learning or were the made choices more strategic and competitive?

Alternatives? Future perspectives?

How is the Global Gateway still developing? Are there aspects in its governance that could improve?

Transparency: Which documents or resources do you suggest are most important to fully understand the process of the creation of the Global Gateway project.

Structure of the interviews

This interview will be semi-structured, meaning the researcher can ask follow up questions which have not been prepared beforehand. This will happen to clarify or to elaborate further on a selected topic, for instance if the interviewee is especially knowledgeable or authoritative.

Interview objectives

Process tracing: Fill in gaps in the process

Measuring institutionalization: Create a solid picture of the institutional design of the EUGG (management)

Measuring influence: Elaborating on motives and strategies