

REGIONE TOSCANA



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Premio tesi di Laurea

“David Sassoli”

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Presentazione

La decisione del Consiglio Regionale della Toscana di istituire un premio di laurea dedicato a **David Sassoli** è un gesto semplice ma carico di significato. È il nostro modo per tenere viva la memoria di ciò che David ha rappresentato, nella sua vita e nel suo impegno politico e civile.

Il **Premio Sassoli** non è soltanto un riconoscimento all'eccellenza accademica, ma è soprattutto un tributo al profondo impegno di un uomo che ha fatto dell'ideale europeo la sua missione. David è stato un politico appassionato, un leader leale e rigoroso, capace di mettere la propria cultura al servizio delle Istituzioni e dei cittadini. Un uomo del dialogo, fermo nella difesa dei valori della solidarietà, della democrazia e della libertà.

Sassoli ha saputo avvicinare l'Europa ai cittadini e alle cittadine, rendendola più comprensibile, più vicina, più umana. Questa è forse la sua eredità più preziosa. Oggi, anche grazie al suo contributo, l'Unione Europea è una dimensione essenziale e irrinunciabile per il futuro delle nostre democrazie. Senza le Istituzioni europee, i singoli Stati sarebbero fragili e impotenti di fronte alle grandi sfide globali del nostro tempo: i cambiamenti climatici, i fenomeni migratori, le crisi geopolitiche, le transizioni demografiche e i poteri economici e finanziari che superano ogni confine.

Certo, **la nostra Europa non è perfetta**. Ma resta la migliore garanzia di pace, di diritti e di opportunità per tutti i cittadini europei.

Con la pubblicazione delle tesi vincitrici del Premio Sassoli vogliamo fare due cose: **custodire il ricordo di David e dare spazio allo sguardo dei giovani**, alla loro capacità di leggere il presente e immaginare il futuro. Solo attraverso lo studio, la ricerca e la partecipazione possiamo continuare a costruire l'“Europa della speranza” che David amava evocare.

Ci auguriamo che questa collana possa ispirare nuove riflessioni, stimolare il pensiero critico e contribuire alla crescita di un'Europa **più inclusiva, più solidale, più democratica**.

Dobbiamo imparare a guardare all'Europa come a un luogo di possibilità, un orizzonte comune dove poter realizzare il proprio futuro, soprattutto per le nuove generazioni. L'**Europa unita** è l'eredità che Altiero Spinelli ci ha lasciato dal suo “Sogno Europeo” nato a Ventotene.

Un sogno che oggi più che mai abbiamo il dovere non solo di ricordare, ma di custodire e far vivere.

Antonio Mazzeo

Presidente del consiglio regionale della Toscana

Prefazione

È con crescente soddisfazione che presentiamo la pubblicazione di questa tesi, insignita di uno dei riconoscimenti nell'ambito del premio di laurea intitolato a David Sassoli.

Questa iniziativa, fortemente voluta dalla Commissione Politiche Europee e Relazioni Internazionali del Consiglio Regionale della Toscana, ha trovato pieno e fondamentale sostegno nell'Ufficio di Presidenza della nostra Assemblea, a partire dal Presidente Antonio Mazzeo. Ci è sembrato il modo più significativo ed emozionante per onorare la memoria di David Sassoli, valorizzando le idee e le proposte delle giovani generazioni.

Fondamentale in questo percorso, creato in questa legislatura regionale, è stato anche il supporto che abbiamo ricevuto dal mondo delle Università toscane. Ecco perché vogliamo ringraziare le docenti ed i docenti che hanno accettato di far parte della Commissione che ha scelto le tesi da premiare, perché, con la loro competenza e passione hanno dato un valore aggiunto a questa nostra iniziativa: una commissione presieduta dal prof. Edoardo Bressanelli della Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna di Pisa, il prof. Enrico Borghetto dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze, il prof. Vincenzo Bove della Scuola IMT Alti Studi di Lucca, il prof. Guglielmo Meardi della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, prof. Luca Verzichelli, dell'Università degli studi di Siena, il Prof. Luca Paladini, dell'Università per Stranieri di Siena, il prof. Saulle Panizza, in rappresentanza dell'Università di Pisa e la dott.ssa Sarah St. John, dell'Istituto Universitario Europeo.

Il volume che state per consultare rappresenta un ulteriore traguardo che abbiamo perseguito con determinazione e che condurrà alla creazione di una specifica collana all'interno delle pubblicazioni del Consiglio Regionale della Toscana. Queste tesi costituiranno quindi un segno tangibile di un impegno rivolto all'Europa di oggi e di domani. Un'iniziativa che, per volontà unanime, è stata inserita tra le attività istituzionali del Consiglio Regionale della Toscana, affidandola così anche alle colleghe e ai colleghi che verranno.

Tutto ciò non sarebbe stato possibile senza lo straordinario impegno e il lavoro dei componenti della "Commissione Europa" che ho avuto l'onore di guidare. Di questa Commissione, in questa XI Legislatura, hanno fatto parte Giovanni Galli (vicepresidente, Lega), Anna Paris (vicepresidente segretaria, PD), Fiammetta Capirossi (PD), Irene Galletti (M5S), Valentina Mercanti (PD), Fausto Merlotti (PD), Marco Stella (FI), Andrea Vannucci (PD) e Gabriele Veneri (Fdl), insieme all'indimenticabile Massimiliano Pescini (PD), al quale rivolgiamo sempre un fraterno e commosso pensiero.

A loro va interamente il merito dei risultati raggiunti, e questo grazie all'impegno di chi ha partecipato alla fase iniziale dei nostri lavori e di chi continua a far parte di questa Commissione con una passione e una competenza davvero uniche. A tutte e tutti loro va la mia più profonda riconoscenza, che estendo agli uffici ed al personale che ci hanno accompagnato in questo percorso.

Mi sia concesso di ringraziare il mio gruppo, il PD, per un sostegno totale e costante, e anche il gruppo di Italia Viva che, pur non essendo rappresentato in Commissione, non ha mai fatto mancare stimoli e supporto. Ma è a tutti i gruppi, di maggioranza e di opposizione, che va la mia più sentita gratitudine per un lavoro che, grazie alle commissarie e ai commissari, stiamo portando avanti insieme, costruendo una modalità di dialogo e di confronto che è motivo di vanto e orgoglio.

Il lavoro della Commissione proseguirà anche sui territori con iniziative e progetti legati alle Giornate dell'Europa, affiancati dalla volontà di approfondire diverse tematiche, potendo contare anche sulla disponibilità della Giunta guidata dal Presidente Eugenio Giani e delle assessori e degli assessori che ne fanno parte.

In conclusione, desidero inoltre rivolgere un affettuoso pensiero anche ai familiari di David Sassoli che hanno sempre dimostrato grandissima attenzione a questa nostra iniziativa. La presenza di Alessandra Vittorini alla cerimonia di premiazione è stato un momento particolarmente emozionante. A lei, ai loro figli ed a tutti i familiari di David va un abbraccio fortissimo, unito all'impegno, valido per l'oggi come per il domani, di mantenere sempre vivo il ricordo di un uomo che ci ha reso orgogliosi di essere toscani, italiani ed europei.

Francesco Gazzetti

*Presidente Commissione Politiche Europee e Relazioni Internazionali del
Consiglio Regionale della Toscana*



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DEGLI STUDI
FIRENZE

Scuola di
Scienze Politiche
"Cesare Alfieri"

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in

Relazioni Internazionali e Studi Europei

**MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND CROSS-BORDER
COOPERATION: THE CASE OF ITALY AND SLOVENIA**

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Abstract

This dissertation delves into the cross-border cooperation dynamics on the border between Italy and Slovenia, with a specific focus on the Interreg VA project during the period 2014-2020. Through a thematic and spatial analysis of the stakeholders involved in the Interreg VA program, this study provides insights into the emergence of cross-border cooperation in the area and the impact and relevance of institutional asymmetries arising from the different degrees of regionalization in the two countries.

The thesis is divided into three sections. First, it outlines the conceptual background of multilevel governance, emphasizing the role of subnational authorities as protagonists in the emerging governance patterns in the European Union. Next, it provides an overview of cross-border cooperation activities within the European Union and of the horizontal and vertical patterns that can be identified in the various cross-border cooperation setups, with a particular focus on Interreg and its specificities within the broader cross-border cooperation landscape. The third section provides an in-depth analysis of the two cases under consideration, namely Italy and Slovenia, which were selected because of the different degrees of centralization and regionalization of the territories involved. Building on relevant existing research, it explores how the administrative mismatch of the countries affects the emergence of multilevel governance patterns and cross-border cooperation in the context of the Interreg VA program between 2014 and 2020. The thematic and spatial analysis makes use of desk research and an original use of the KEEP database.

The findings highlighted that hierarchical asymmetries influence the establishment of cross-border cooperation structures differently based on top-down or bottom-up approaches. While they pose a challenge in establishing permanent cooperation structures such as the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, their role in bottom-up projects like Interreg is more nuanced. Hence, varying levels of centralization and regionalization do not necessarily result in unbalanced cooperation dynamics.

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore the theories of multilevel governance and cross-border cooperation within the European Union (EU), with a specific focus on the border between Italy and Slovenia. It is constructed within the theoretical framework of multilevel governance and cross-border cooperation.

Multilevel governance provides a lens through which to understand the dispersion of authority from the central state upwards, towards supranational institutions, and downwards, towards subnational authorities. Originating within the European Union, this framework has been applied to explain the apparent weakening of the central state in decision-making processes, in favour of both European Union supranational structures and the subnational authorities of the Member States.

Cross-border cooperation within the European Union enables subnational and local authorities to collaborate within more or less institutionalized structures, often funded with financial tools granted at the supranational level. These cross-border territories are often described as “laboratories” of European integration, where subnational authorities have opportunities to cooperate with each other, leveraging resources provided at the supranational level, and further emancipate from central state authorities.

However, when applied on the ground, one of the main obstacles to cross-border cooperation and the creation of multilevel governance structures is the presence of asymmetries, such as differing conditions on either side of a border. This research considers asymmetries, particularly administrative hierarchical ones, including the level of (de)centralization of the countries involved and varying stages of regionalization. Italy, for instance, exhibits a decentralized state structure where regions enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in administration and decision-making, while Slovenia operates within a centralized state framework without a regional level.

The objective, therefore, is to test these dynamics through desk research and analysis of one of such cross-border cooperation structure sponsored by the EU: Interreg VA, during the period 2014-2020. This research encompasses desk research and a thematic and spatial analysis conducted with data from the KEEP database, an online tool provided by the European Union that collects data on Interreg cooperation projects.

Chapter I delves into the theory of multilevel governance, discussing its emergence within the field of European integration theories. It includes a literature review and provides an in-depth overview of the two main factors leading to its emergence: the transformation of the nation-state and the dispersion of authority from the central to the supranational and subnational levels, as well as the introduction and evolution of Cohesion policy in the EU.

Chapter II addresses cross-border cooperation from a theoretical perspective, exploring concepts such as borders, territoriality, and the emergence of multilevel governance structures in cross-border areas. It also examines the evolution of cross-border cooperation structures in the EU, with a specific focus on Interreg.

Chapter III focuses on the Italy-Slovenia border area, encompassing a desk research examining the emergence of multilevel governance structures and an analysis of Interreg VA 2014-2020 to investigate cross-border cooperation patterns and dynamics, while considering the existence and role of hierarchical asymmetries.

CHAPTER I: MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

Chapter I lays the theoretical groundwork upon which the study is constructed, focusing on the conceptual framework of multilevel governance. Originating in Europe during the 1990s, the multilevel governance approach offers a systematic approach to comprehend and analyse the distribution of authority and decision-making processes across multiple levels of government, alongside the interactions among these levels. The tools and principles of multilevel governance are pivotal for understating the topics explored subsequently – cross-border cooperation and the chosen case study, which delves into the patterns and dynamics of cross-border collaboration between Italy and Slovenia, particularly during the implementation of the Interreg VA program.

Understanding multilevel governance is crucial due to its emergence from two significant phenomena in Europe: the shifting role of the nation-state, characterized by decentralization and regionalization trends altering state territoriality, and the evolution of Cohesion policy, which provided mechanisms and principles to fortify cross-border cooperation, notably through programs like Interreg. The multilevel governance theory serves as a lens to comprehend the trends of authority transfer from national to supra- and sub-national levels of government. These are the founding elements for the realization of cross-border cooperation in the European Union territory.

1.1 Multilevel governance: birth and evolution

The European Union was described and analysed in countless ways, from various points of view, by scholars of different disciplines. Its existence, construction, development and evolution sparked passionate debates and discussions on its nature, its status and its future. An international organization from its foundation, and considered so from a strictly legal

perspective, in the seven decades of its existence it grew from a simple yet ambitious agreement on coal and steel to a complex political entity.

It eventually came to occupy a *sui generis* position in the realm of international governance and, as such, new and unique theories and perspectives were developed to investigate and analyse its existence and mechanisms. To investigate a matter of studies, scholars usually approach the subject with a comparative perspective; when investigating the European Union, however, there is no perfect fit in any other existing political classification. Innovative approaches were introduced to describe this exceptional political phenomenon, such as multilevel governance.

Multilevel governance was introduced by Gary Marks (1992, 1993, 1996), who subsequently furthered the development of this theory in collaboration with Liesbeth Hooghe. Although since the first mention of multilevel governance as a new lens to investigate the European Union literature on the topic flourished, they are still considered the “mother and father” of this approach. The multilevel governance approach gained attention and importance and, together with other theories such as Europeanization, represents a move forward from the “classical” theories that were prevalent in European studies until the 1990s, such as intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism.

When analysing the European Union by comparing it with existing regimes, the comparison is usually based on entities that share commonalities with it: international regimes, like international organizations, or domestic regimes, like federal states. Although the European Union shares some traits with both phenomena, there is not an exact fit with any of them. Multilevel governance offers a distinct perspective on how European Union policies impact nation-states and their subnational components, diverging from state-centric theories of European integration. Hooghe and Marks adopted a different perspective, conceiving the European Union like a domestic regime, but focusing on state building in Western Europe and investigating the results of this comparison to give their point of view on European integration.

Multilevel governance captures the growing autonomous influence of supranational institutions and the activation and empowerment of subnational governments as components of a process where power is dispersed within the European Union. This process entails a relative transfer of regulatory authority to the supranational level and a shift in decision-making and operational capacity towards the subnational levels (Hooghe, 1996; Marks et al., 1996; Hooghe and Marks, 2001a).

Marks and Hooghe's theory comes from the observation of the transformation of the state and the subsequent dispersion of authority, which in the European Union was synthesized in the reform of structural funds and the EU regional policy in the late 1980s and in the diffusion of governance processes across multiple levels of authority, not only upwards (towards supranational institutions) but also downwards (towards subnational actors). As described by Marks, the concept of multilevel governance was the one able to capture "systems of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers" resulting from "a broad process of institutional creation and decisional reallocation that had pulled some previously centralized functions of the state", where "supranational, regional and local governments are enmeshed in territorially overarching policy networks" (Marks, 1993, pp. 392, 402 – 403).

1.1.1 Literature review

Since the introduction of the multilevel governance concept, many scholars understood the potential of this approach both in theoretical and practical studies, leading to a flourishing body of literature. Recognizing the extensive scope of the existing literature on multilevel governance, only some examples can be provided. The review will be based on the work of Stephenson (Stephenson, 2013), who provided a thorough and comprehensive review of this vast literature, categorizing the first 20 years of multilevel governance studies into various "generations": original uses, functional uses, combined uses, normative uses, and comparative uses.

Stephenson's overview also highlighted contributions from other scholars, who similarly collected existing literature and elaborated their own perspectives in recent contributions. Conzelmann and Smith (2008) delved into themes like environmental policy and structural funds, while Piattoni (2009, 2010) offered a conceptual and historical analysis, exploring the polity, policy, and politics aspects. Kohler-Koch and Larat (2009) gathered insights on research traditions and the application of multilevel governance in national contexts. Enderlein, Wälti, and Zürn (2010) provided a comparison between domestic and EU perspectives, and Bache and Andreou (2011) focused on multilevel governance patterns in Southern and Eastern Europe. Levi-Faur (2012), with contributions from Bache (2012), explored multilevel governance's role in the broader context of governance.

According to Stephenson's categorization, in the early stages, *original uses* of multilevel governance were aimed at exploring its potential in explaining the evolving governance patterns in Europe. This was particularly relevant due to changes introduced by the 1988 reform of

structural funds, the creation of the Single Market, and the Maastricht Treaty (1992), after which the European Union's governance configuration started taking an innovative path and resulted inadequate to fit into the rigid categories used up until that moment. Scholars such as Bache (1998), Bache and Flinders (2004), Jessop (2004), Kohler-Koch and Eising (1999) made significant contributions to the literature on European governance during this period. A partial overlap with the theory of Europeanization was noted; at this stage, the contribution of Bache (1998, 2008) was fundamental, with his influential studies exploring Cohesion policy in the United Kingdom and the European Union, which managed to reconcile the two theories.

The second generation of multilevel governance studies, from 1997 onward, which Stephenson labelled *functional uses*, was influenced by the potential of the application of this approach to the European Union's enlargement process and other areas. The focus shifted to the problem-solving aspect of multilevel governance in the broader context of policy-making, thanks to its flexibility: "Policy-making was considered a process involving self-organizing, multi-level actors – and one which signalled a move away from 'hierarchical steering' towards communication-based instruments" (Stephenson, 2013, p. 823).

Around 2001, a new trend emerged with *combined uses* of multilevel governance, incorporating rival theoretical frameworks such as new modes of governance after the introduction of the Open Method of Communication (Hodson and Maher, 2001; Kaiser and Prange, 2004), principal-agent theory (Blom-Hansen, 2005), and new institutionalism (Schmitter, 2004; Avesti, 2007). Theories then shifted to *normative uses* around 2003, when the theory started to be criticized for the consequences it entailed, especially a lack of legitimacy and democracy (Peters and Pierre, 2004; Papadopoulos, 2008) since it focused excessively on efficiency, thus creating shortcomings in the field of accountability.

From roughly 2007 onward, multilevel governance shifted to *comparative uses*, and started being applied both to theories of global governance and international institutions (WTO, UN) and theories of regionalism in other areas of the world (NAFTA, MERCOSUR, ASEAN). As Stephenson summarized, "Multilevel governance captured and simplified the spatial configurations of policy-making activity, implying the dispersal and redistribution of powers and competences to different levels of policy-making activity, and roles for both existing and newly-created institutions and bodies, i.e., of interconnected public and private actors" (Stephenson, 2013, p. 828). The roots and development of multilevel governance theory imply that "multilevel governance can and should be interpreted and discussed [...] as a theory of European integration and of the transformation of the nation-state" (Piattoni, 2010, p. 108).

1.2 The transformation of the state and the dispersion of authority

The birth of the modern state is the result of a long process of historical transformation of society and politics, emerging from the fragmented landscape that characterized Europe until the Middle Ages. The date of the emergence of the state form that would become prevalent in Europe is canonically set in 1648, after the signing of the Peace of Westphalia that put an end to the Thirty Years War. For the three following centuries, the concept of statehood that emerged from the negotiation of the treaty defined decision-making processes based on the idea of exclusive authority and responsibility of the state on a territorially bounded space and on the people that inhabited it.

Since then, states expanded their administrative capacities and their competencies domestically over various jurisdictions (Piattoni, 2010). They also had exclusive legitimate power not only in domestic politics but also in the international arena while acquiring growing power in the supervision and regulation of markets and economic flows. The concept of sovereignty suggested that states had legitimate power exerting control both on their territories and populations, but also on their position in the international arena and on trade within and across their national borders.

This unchallenged role of national governments as the sole depositors of power and control was put under increasing pressure since the 19th century, which intensified during the 20th century. Transformation in society, accompanied by the emergence of phenomena such as internationalization and globalization, led leaders and bureaucracies to be increasingly aware of the effect of external forces on national politics. Consequently, the international and internal political arenas came to be more connected, and the former had to be increasingly considered and taken into account while shaping policies for the latter (Putnam, 1988).

In Europe, the interconnectedness between domestic and foreign policy was heightened by the foundation of the Coal and Steel Community and the consequent developments that led to the creation and establishment of the European Union through a series of treaties. The European Union, an international organization founded and composed of sovereign states, is characterized by a division of competencies between the national and supranational levels, which led to a dispersion of authority through the pooling of sovereignty and the delegation, to various extents, of decision-making powers to the supranational level.

1.2.1 The transformation of the state in the European Union context

Jessop (Jessop, 2004) analysed this phenomenon of dispersion of authority and considered the European Union as an ‘emerging form of statehood’ by considering the emergence of a new state form, from a “Keynesian welfare national state” (KWNS) to a “Schumpeterian workforce post national regime” (SWPR). By identifying the first as an historical benchmark and the latter as the state form that we are evolving towards, he observed a reorganization of state power.

The KWNS, emerging in the Western World¹ between the 1950s and the 1970s, was characterized by a closed national economy, distinguished by its welfare-oriented social policies. This approach aimed to grant economic and social rights to all citizens, fostering prosperity and encouraging consumption as means to stimulate overall economic growth. Situated within historically and socially constructed national borders, the national state was holding dominance over its sub entities. State institutions assumed the pivotal role of guiding and regulating market forces, serving as the primary drivers of economic and social policies during this era.

A change occurred in the mid 1970s and throughout the 1980s, driving the whole system into crisis and change. After shifts in international economy, influenced by phenomena such as globalization and internationalization on the one hand, and a renewed importance associated to sub-national entities on the other, together with the emergence of multicultural and multi-ethnic societies within previously uniform national states, a new state form started to emerge, which Jessop indicated as SWPR (Jessop, 2002). This system is defined by open economies that prioritize growth through competitiveness.

In this framework, flexibility in the labour market and economic competition take precedence over social policies. The significance of the national territory diminishes as economic and social policy-making responsibilities are distributed across multiple levels of governance. There is a trend towards decentralization and the establishment of networks as a response to the state’s perceived inadequacy in previous decades.

In describing the shift from one conception of the state to the other, Jessop identifies six trends of state restructuring and reorganization:

¹ Jessop refers to North-Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

1. *De-nationalization of statehood*, which implies the redistribution of power and competencies, previously firmly held by the national state to a supra-level (international or supra-regional entities) or to a sub-level (regional or local entities) or spread through cross-national networks. Although these kinds of deterritorialization and reterritorialization have a weakening effect on centralized state power, they could also help to gain operational efficiency and diversified capacities.
2. *De- and re-statization* refers to the alteration of the division between the public and the private sphere, where competencies and functions previously performed exclusively by one are transferred to the other, and vice-versa.
3. *The retreat of the state* describes a situation where de-territorialized and self-organized forms of power manage to circumvent the power of the state. This situation describes the rise of forms of power that transcend territorial borders, like the influence of international regimes and of virtual networks.
4. *Re-articulating the economic and extra-economic* entails the involvement of a plethora of actors coming from a variety of institutions and civil society, which were previously excluded, in economic processes. These actors have a role in driving economic success and enhancing competitiveness, and thus, the state must take them into account when formulating economic practices.
5. *Re-ordering of political hierarchies* refers to the multiplication of levels and the connections between emerging economic and political actors at different scales, which result in interconnected hierarchies across extraterritorial and transnational levels. Evidence of this can be found at the local, regional, and supranational levels by the growing number of linkages across borders and levels of governance.
6. *Re-imagined political communities (or publics)*, which shape identities and political communities regardless of state boundaries, characterized by non-territorialized forms of power (Jessop, 2004).

Jessop remarks on the importance retained by state actors, albeit in this shifting scenario, redefining the shift from government to governance as a shift from governance to meta-governance.

Marks and Hooghe (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a) also analysed the dispersion of centralized authority, reconducting it to the shifts in authority through the empowerment of supranational institutions via European integration and the empowerment of local and subnational entities. Many discussions concerning multilevel governance policy networks have traditionally framed power as a zero-sum game, where the gains of one actor imply losses for another. Consequently,

in this context, there is a prevalent assumption that any increase in power held by subnational, supranational, and non-state actors as a result of European integration necessarily comes at the cost of power for nation-state actors (Bache, 2008).

The concept of power is, however, framed differently by multilevel governance scholars, avoiding the narrow notion of power as a zero-sum game and as a mean of control over population and resources. Rather, power is conceived as the capability to reach a certain result. Shifting the interpretation of power in this more comprehensive way allows us to understand the reasons why states may want to transfer power and competencies to other levels of governance (Bache, 2008), while avoiding the classical intergovernmentalist explanation that suggests that state's actions are always justified by an attempt to increase power (Moravcsik, 1994).

1.2.2 The dispersion of state authority from a multilevel governance perspective

Marks and Hooghe (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a) argue that governments leaders may be consciously willing to surrender authority to other entities. They connect it to the core mechanisms of liberal democracy, whose engine revolves around winning elections rather than the maintenance of centralized authority. Yielding power could potentially increase negotiation leverage in both domestic and international scenarios, or it could allow a current government to protect certain policies by shifting them away from its own power and thus safeguarding it from potential alteration by a future elected government. Furthermore, such actions can also relieve a government leader from the responsibility associated with the policy in question.

There are also, however, scenarios in which the shift of authority is made unwillingly. In these cases, multilevel governance is a result of compromises made by politicians that allow the shift of authority to achieve different goals. Therefore, multilevel governance arises from processes that aim to achieve completely different outcomes. Finally, multilevel governance could also result from a loss of control by national leaders, who find themselves incapable of managing the organizations that they have established at the supranational and subnational levels (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a).

This point of view, focused on the willing or unwilling shift of authority and decision-making power, is mainly challenged by the intergovernmentalist perspective, in particular liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1991, 1993, 1998). The argument proposed by this perspective suggests that “the unique institutional structure of the [EU] is acceptable to national

governments only insofar as it strengthens, rather than weakens, their control over domestic affairs” (Moravcsik 1991, p. 515).

According to the liberal intergovernmentalist perspective, nation states are rational actors who seek to pursue their interests; therefore, their participation and cooperation in the European Union is a way to serve their interests and needs. Power distribution is conceived in a purely hierarchical way; states are in control of their power and supranational and subnational levels act with very limited autonomy. The state fully exercises its gate-keeping role and has control over the centre-periphery gates, the state-society gates, and the domestic-foreign gates. Consequentially, they have full control over the sub-national entities and their representation, they can choose and prioritize societal demands to shape them into the national interest, and they retain the legitimacy of such national interest in the international arena (Nadalutti, 2015).

An intermediate view is adopted by scholars that acknowledge processes like globalization and European integration had an impact and changed the understanding of the governance concept and of the interaction between central governments and supra- and sub-national actors. Such processes shifted the spotlight from the state as the sole protagonist of decision-making processes and pressured it to consider other actors (Peters and Pierre, 2000). The role of these pressures is, however, lesser than what is claimed by multi-level governance proponents.

The multiplication of actors in the political arena does not correspond to an immediate transfer of power between governance levels; therefore, participation does not immediately translate into influence and governance (Bache, 2010). The role of subnational and supranational authorities in eroding the core of state power is therefore downsized to a symbolic, rather to an actual, role. The sheer increased number of actors allowed to access the European arena of decision-making does not mean that those actors have an increased influence in the results of governance processes (Wilson, 2003; Allen, 2005). This approach recognizes the presence of a network with horizontal linkages in addition to vertical ones and that states underwent a transformation, but it also still describes the state as the ultimate “gate-keeper” of power that utilized the network as a channel to assert its power (Peters and Pierre, 2000).

Marks and Hooghe addressed these criticisms by stating that although the state has lost some of its gatekeeping power, it did not lose a central role in decision-making but rather lost a monopoly over a number of competencies. Moreover, they underlined the difference between institutions and actors and how their preferences do not necessarily correspond; in marking this distinction, they place the focus on the interests of actors that compose and guide institutions

(Hooghe and Marks, 2001a). Additionally, the two-stage decision-making model pictured by Moravcsik failed to consider the policy-implementation stage, which is the stage at which decisions are translated into action and at which additional political activity takes place, thus adding nuances to the overall exercise of state power (Bache, 2008).

To clarify these conflicting views, an empirical approach is often adopted as a way to untangle the complexities of relations between the different levels of governance (Nadalutti, 2015; Hooghe and Marks, 2001a). Member States inside the European Union have different institutional setups, and within them, sub-national entities have different levels of autonomy and competencies; differences in domestic contexts create differentiated patterns of adjustment to the inputs described by the multilevel governance approach (Bache, 2008). This creates gaps in the understanding of the effects of a theoretical application of multilevel governance which is aggravated by a lack of research (Dąbrowski et al., 2014).

1.3 Cohesion policy and the role of subnational actors

The multilevel governance approach emerged as a result of studies and the observation of substantial transformations that unfolded within the domestic and supranational spheres of the European Union from the 1960s onward. These changes encompassed alterations introduced in the territorial organization of centralized nation-states (Piattoni, 2010), the introduction of Cohesion policy, and the subsequent series of reforms in structural funds at the supranational level. These profound shifts in the European context prompted a re-evaluation of traditional models of governance and necessitated a framework that could more effectively account for the new patterns of interplay of authority, decision-making, and policy implementation across various levels of government and governance structures.

The study of the European Union was initially approached through the lenses of traditional International Relations (IR) studies. Until the 1960s, the neo-functionalism theory introduced by Ernst B. Haas (Haas, 1958) was the most fitting theory to describe the organizational patterns emerging in the first period of existence and rapid evolution of the European Communities. Stemming from a pluralist perspective, it asserted that the integration process started by national authorities was resulting in a decline of their power and control in favour of the supranational level, which would satisfy the state's interests better than the traditional, state-centric way. Neofunctionalism highlighted the role of sub-state and non-state actors in the web of interdependence that characterized the European landscape.

Neofunctionalism was later rejected in the light of historical events such as the “empty chair” policy carried by Charles De Gaulle, that reasserted the centrality and the power of the state channelled through the veto power that they retained. Intergovernmentalism, the rival theory rooted in IR’s realist approach, developed by Stanley Hoffman in its “classical” configuration (Hoffmann, 1964, 1966) and later developed by Andrew Moravcsik in a “liberal” perspective, suggested that governments were still the gatekeepers of power and held firmly control over their competencies, authority and sovereignty vis-à-vis the subnational and supranational actors. The intergovernmentalist perspective gained momentum in the period between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. During those 20 years, European integration was not significantly deepened by treaty reforms or further developments (Bache, 2010).

1.3.1 Changes in the territorial structure

Despite the lack of significant developments at the supranational level, the period from the 1960s onwards was marked by a deepening of integration at the subnational level. In several European states, centralized states’ territorial structure was altered in favour of regional actors, resulting in the creation or empowerment of “meso-level” actors. These transformations were the response to the need for a more complex organization of political participation and service delivery, with inconsistent patterns across Europe. The trend of decentralization from the top was met with a trend of regionalization from the bottom (Piattoni, 2010). Since 1980, no Member State has experienced an increase in centralization, with approximately half of them opting to transfer authority to a regional level of government through decentralization measures (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a).

Form of territorially bounded minority nationalism started to emerge in Western Europe, driven by identity differentiation based on history, culture, language and religion, especially in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Italy, Scandinavia (Sweden, Finland and Norway) and the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal). These processes were enriched by historical events in Eastern Europe, namely the disaggregation of the Communist rule that resulted in the peaceful separation of Czechoslovakia and the tragic break-up of Yugoslavia. Wherever it was not possible to create precise boundaries for ethno-states, minorities grouped around identity-based nationalism (Piattoni, 2010).

The European Union did not have a proactive role in these developments, but nonetheless had a role to play, as it offered a safe context for the expression of regionalist movements. Regional authorities started to be directly involved in European matters around the 1980s through the

European Regional Development Policy, and this was further deepened by the introduction of the Single European Act in 1986 and by other processes such as the recognition and protection of minority languages through the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1992. The inclusion of Central and Eastern European states in the European Union as a result of the 2004-2007 enlargement, with their complex pattern of minority and inexact ethnic state boundaries, contributed to highlighting the importance of sub-national actors and minorities at the European level (Piattoni, 2010).

1.3.2 The early stages of Cohesion policy

The turning point for the importance gained by subnational actors at the European level, and the source of the observations that became the cornerstone of the development of the multilevel governance approach, however, come from the study of EU's regional policy and the introduction and development of the Cohesion policy and the management of structural funds. Cohesion policy was introduced with the aim of creating convergence and reducing disparities across European states and regions (Brunazzo, 2016). The 1986 Single European Act and the 1988 structural fund reform are the main events that marked the official and direct participation of regional and local authorities in European decision-making processes, through their role in the management of the funds allocated to reach the convergence objectives.

In the early stages of the European integration process, European decision-making did not deal with regional policy, as it was considered an exclusive concern and competence of the Member States. The Rome Treaty only included a few bland instruments to address the issue of regional imbalances, namely the European Investment Bank, the European Social Fund, and the Guidance section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF). Although these instruments proved to be inadequate to pursue convergence objectives, the hypothesis of creating further regional policies at the EU level was deemed unnecessary (Manzella and Mendez, 2009). This view was shared by Member States and the European Commission alike.

A new approach and the idea of the need for a Cohesion policy were eventually adopted in the early 70s. In the wake of the 1970s oil crisis, at the 1972 Conference of the Heads of State and Governments in Paris, European leaders agreed on the need to initiate a process to address regional disparities in the EU. This decision shall be read in the context of the enlargement towards Denmark, the United Kingdom and Ireland in the EU. Overall, rounds of enlargement

would affect the balance between net contributors and beneficiaries of EU funding, and the proportion of regions comparatively disadvantaged.

Ireland and the United Kingdom shifted the political balance of states interested in the introduction of a common regional policy; the latter, in particular, needed to convince its sceptical public opinion and parliament of the advantages of joining the European Economic Community. Moreover, regional disparities were seen as an obstacle in the smooth path towards the creation of the European Monetary Union (Bache, 1998, pp. 36 - 37). The final push was provided in May 1993 by the Thomson Report, prepared by the Commissioner for Regional Policy George Thomson, as a response to the request of Member States during the 1972 Paris Summit that urged the European Commission to analyse the problems stemming from regional disparities in the EEC (Brunazzo, 2016).

The draft for a legislative proposal introducing the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was published by the European Commission two months later, in July 1973. The focus was placed on industry and infrastructure as the key fields of action to promote regional convergence across Member States. The negotiations proved difficult, with Member States voicing their disagreement on the amount of resources to be poured into the fund, the scope of the fund, the geographic criteria for allocation, and the importance of national autonomy in designing the target area (Baun and Marek, 2014, pp. 15 - 17).

The stalemates in negotiations at the political level were eventually overcome at the end of 1974, when Member States agreed on the establishment of the ERDF in 1975. At this point, the control over the management of the ERDF was firmly held at the Member States level, with little to no involvement of subnational actors; national governments had authority over the selection of eligible regions (Brunazzo, 2016). Minor reforms were introduced in 1979, to respond to the consequences of the future enlargement towards Greece, and in 1984, resulting in an increase of resources and in a slight expansion of the European Commission autonomy. The policy, however, still largely resembled a mere transfer-of-payment system (Baun and Marek, 2014, p. 19).

1.3.3 The Single European Act

The following steps forward in the development of the Cohesion policy were two major events that happened in 1986, a watershed in European integration. The enlargement processes resulted in the access of two new members, Spain and Portugal, bringing to 12 the number of Member States. The inclusion of the two Iberian states in the European Communities significantly increased the amount of less developed regions on the European map. Member States were conscious of this fact, especially the ones whose regions were also disadvantaged with respect to the EU's core areas, such as Greece (Brunazzo, 2016).

As a response to poorer Member States' concerns, the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes (IMPs) were introduced. They consisted of budget allocations aimed at assisting disadvantaged regions in the Mediterranean area in adapting to the challenges resulting from the enlargement, facilitating the necessary adjustments. The regions interested by IMPs were located in Greece and the southern regions of Italy and France. The arrangements included in the IMPs would later become the starting point for the successive reforms in European Cohesion policy in 1988, including an enhanced role for the European Commission and a tighter collaboration with regional actors (Hooghe, 1996).

The second major event occurring in 1986 was the adoption of the Single European Act (SEA), a significant step in the process of European integration. The SEA introduced several important changes to the architecture of the European Communities, leading to an expansion of competencies at the supranational level and resulting in a pivotal moment in European history. Among the primary objectives of the SEA was the ambitious project of completing the Single European Market with the introduction of the four freedoms of movement (of goods, services, capital, and people) across the Member States. The European Parliament also came to have a more prominent role, and the expansion of the use of qualified majority voting eroded the veto power of Member States.

From a regional policy standpoint, the completion of the Single Market would result in a further imbalance, rather than convergence, across prosperous and disadvantaged regions in the EU. Jacques Delors, who played a major role in the shaping and success of the Single European Act and the European Single Market, was aware that market-correcting measures were needed in order to have a balanced and orderly development.

This idea eventually found space in the Cecchini report (CEC, 1988), titled “The Costs of Non-Europe”, a study commissioned by the European Commission and led by Italian economist and industrialist Paolo Cecchini. Its primary aim was to assess the potential economic gains and costs associated with the completion of the Single European Market. It suggested that while core regions – the ones with the highest per-capita income – would reap the major benefits coming from the Common Market, peripheral regions could be weakened if not supported by correcting measures (Piattoni, 2010).

1.3.4 The 1988 reform and the partnership principle

These concepts inspired the subsequent reform of the Cohesion policy in 1988. The adoption of the SEA represented an opening to the argument to intervene in the allocation of resources destined to European regions, in order to prevent the more extended and competitive market that was under construction to damage vulnerable and de-industrializing regions (Piattoni, 2010). European leaders agreed on an increase in the total amount of structural funds, which roughly doubled and continued increasing in successive reforms until they went from roughly 9% of the overall budget in 1986 to 35% in 1999.

The 1988 reform signalled the “official” start of the EU Cohesion policy. From a legal perspective, five new regulations were introduced and entered into force at the beginning of 1989. In addition to the remarkable increase in the amount of funding, the reform introduced four basic principles to drive the management of the policy: concentration, programming, additionality, and partnership.

1. The principle of *concentration* stated that EU assistance needed to be circumscribed to the areas of greater need and to be focused on a few objectives, rather than be scattered across projects of less scope and significance.
2. The principle of *programming* states that projects supported by EU funding shall respect a set of criteria, such as analysis, strategic planning, and evaluation, and have to be performed over a multi-annual span in a coherent manner.
3. The principle of *additionality*, which had been in place since the very beginning of the regional policy in the 1970s, was strengthened. It stated that EU funds had to be utilized as an addition, rather than a substitution, of national spending.
4. The *partnership* principle stated that projects carried out under the umbrella of Cohesion policy needed to result from consultation among partners working towards a common goal, namely the Commission, the Member States, and competent authorities specified

by Member States at the national, regional or local level (Piattoni, 2010; Bache, 2008; Brunazzo, 2016).

Moreover, the subsidiarity principle was shortly after introduced in the Maastricht Treaty (1992), stating that “decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen”.

The 1988 reform, and especially the introduction of the partnership principle, marked a significant development for regional policy in the European Union. It came to represent a ‘paradigm shift’ and one of the cornerstones over which the multilevel governance approach was built shortly after. The change marked the development between an ‘old paradigm’, which essentially treated regions from a centralized perspective and tackled the problem of disadvantaged regions through the use of subsidies, towards a ‘new paradigm’ that envisioned continuity and planning in investment strategies (Dąbrowski et al., 2014).

The regional scale started to be considered the ideal scale for economic development, while the subnational authorities in charge of managing and administering these smaller territorial scales were considered ideal as they were acting in the closest proximity to the citizens and their problems, with a deeper and wider knowledge than the ‘distant’ central state authorities. Cohesion policy was the first European-level test to create vertical and horizontal partnerships involving sub- and, after a successive reform in 1993, non-state actors in decision-making processes and strategic planning (Dąbrowski et al., 2014). Moreover, they could profit from unique characteristics present at the regional scale, such as trust, closeness, and the exchange of knowledge among regional participants (Bachtler and Taylor, 2003, p. 15).

The reform implied the involvement of regional actors, but European Member States had different patterns of regionalization in their territorial organization. However, the direct participation of regional authorities embedded in the partnership principle implied the existence of such territorial level for a correct implementation of the allocated Structural Funds. Thus, the reform represented a significant push toward the designation of at least statistical and administrative regions as a minimum common denominator for the implementation of the Cohesion policy. The situation created an additional level for the decentralization and regionalization process that started in Europe in the 1960s (Piattoni, 2010).

At the European level, the designation of regions where they did not previously exist led to the application of the NUTS system (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics, from the French acronym for *Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques*) to the Cohesion policy implementation (Bache, 2008). The system was introduced by Eurostat in the 1970s, and it

includes five levels of territorial subdivision that create a hierarchical categorization. NUTS 2 refers to 'basic regions,' usually drawn on the lines of the pre-existing regions in the Member States; NUTS 1 refers to a grouping of basic regions, while NUTS 3 and NUTS 4 levels refer to smaller subdivisions of the basic regions. The NUTS 5 level describes villages and towns. The NUTS 2 basic regions were the dimension chosen to pursue the objectives of the Cohesion policy. The NUTS subdivision acquired legal status in 2003, when Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 entered into force.

The 1988 reform seemed to imply a loss of sovereignty for the national states, and a threat to their gatekeeping power. The introduction of the principles sparked controversy. The programming and concentration principle suggested that it would not be possible to utilize the funds to create patronage-driven consensus at the local level, as it had been the case thus far in the management of EU funds. The subsidiarity principle was manipulated, altering its meaning to imply that intervention at the supranational or local level should only occur when issues cannot be adequately addressed at the national level. The additionality principle tied to availability of Community funds only when paired with funds provided by Member States, thus correcting the view of structural funds as a compensation for budget contributions (Piattoni, 2010).

The most contentious principle was also the most decisive for the empowering of subnational and, later, non-state actors, and for the development of the European regional policy: the partnership principle. The requirement of the creation of a regional NUTS 2, where it previously did not exist, challenged the autonomy of the states in deciding their internal organization. Moreover, through the partnership principle, subnational authorities were invited to the table of the governance of the funding since their input was fundamental in the creation and realization of the projects funded by the Community budget (Piattoni, 2010). The partnership principle introduced a "local development" approach based on bottom-up inputs that was later extended to other programs, which turned the spotlight to local citizens and organizations and allowed them to participate to decision-making processes (Bache, 2008).

The introduction of the partnership principle, moreover, implied a loss of sovereignty of the central state not only to sub-national entities, but also towards the supranational level. The European Commission showed its ability to overcome national states in their implementation powers, by imposing the involvement of third-party actors in the decision-making processes associated with Cohesion policy (Perkmann, 2000, p.154). The European Commission not only imposed the creation of regional tiers in the states' territorial organization but also empowered

them with power and competencies in the legislative, executive, and budgetary spheres, thus imposing a shift in the hierarchical distribution of authority at the core of the national states (Nadalutti, 2015).

These provisions, therefore, seemingly eroded states' sovereignty twofold, both for the benefit of the supranational level (European Commission) and subnational level (regional and local authorities, non-state actors). The European Commission took important decisions on the scheme of distribution of the Community budget to redistribute it in order to reach Community-level objectives, and lower government level participated in the decision processes on the distribution of such funds. This raised the question of the reasons why the Member States allowed for this shift and the reduction of their sovereignty (Piattoni, 2010).

This prompted the intergovernmentalist explanation, suggesting that the state's actions might be motivated by the objective of achieving a unified single market, as outlined by Moravcsik (1991, 1993), and primarily for efficiency-related reasons, as argued by Pollak (1995). Concurrently, the European Commission's inclination to engage subnational actors in these processes has been supported by technocratic arguments. These arguments posit that authorities at lower levels of government possess a more nuanced understanding of the local population's needs and are better equipped to devise effective solutions (Tommel, 1998).

These visions were challenged by the multilevel governance approach exactly in the context of Cohesion policy, since the creation of the policy and the principles that sustained it provided a good testing ground for the introduction of this theory. Notably, the aspects of Cohesion policy that have most relevance for the development of the multilevel governance approach are the introduction of territorial objectives and the partnership and programming principle (Bache, 2008). Most importantly, it emphasized the role of regional actors by strengthening their role, promoting their development, encouraging the creation of coalitions, and encouraging them to be involved in territorial projects on the cross-border and transnational level (Gualini, 2003).

These processes were accompanied by the introduction or the increased activity of institutional bodies such as the Committee of the Regions, Eurocities, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power (REGLEG), the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CARLE), as well as regional authorities opening their representation in Brussels to be closer to the supranational level both on level of information gathering and direct action.

Through these channels, regional authorities can coalize and exploit the potential offered by their direct involvement at the European level, by exploiting their involvement in the drafting of Single Programme Documents (SPD) and their engagement in Community Initiative Programmes² to advance cross-border cooperation and problem-specific problems. The proliferation of this kind of bodies and institutions exemplifies the multi-layered structured that inspired the theorizing of the multilevel governance approach (Nadalutti, 2015), and their activity on a transnational level and their willingness to stay in proximity to European institutions is a further demonstration at their attempt to by-pass states' authority.

1.3.5 The 1993 reform

Another challenge to the newly acquired power and autonomy of subnational entities, however, came with the following reform of the Cohesion policy in 1993. The context of the reform was the enforcement of the Maastricht Treaty, signed the previous year; the historical moment included the introduction of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), an increase in the amount of structural funds, and another future enlargement, this time to include Finland, Sweden, and Austria. Once again, Cohesion policy was the central instrument to mitigate the consequence of the introduction of the single currency to economically disadvantaged countries. To this end, a novelty introduced by the Maastricht Treaty was the Cohesion fund, specifically dedicated to the Member States whose per-capita GNI was inferior to 90% of the EU average (Brunazzo, 2016).

The reform opened the door to the creation of partnerships with non-state actors, namely economic and social partners (Brunazzo, 2016) such as private companies, universities, and non-governmental organizations. This could be, at a first glance, interpreted as a further dispersion of states' authority, but it also meant a dispersion of the privileged position that subnational entities had acquired so far in the management of Cohesion policy (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a). In addition, the reform introduced a modification of the partnership principle. Article 4.1 of the Council Regulation [EEC] No. 2081/93 of 20/07/93 specified that the partnership principle had to be applied "in full compliance with the respective institutional, legal and financial powers of each of the partners" (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a, p. 84).

This implied that Member States regained authority over the control of structural funds (Bache, 2010). The reform allowed Member States to submit the Single Programming Documents

² i.e. Interreg, Urban, 'Leader plus', etc.

without negotiating with the European Commission. This situation indicated that the central governments wielded significant control over the process, limiting the autonomy of sub-national authorities in the distribution of funds. In addition, sub-national authorities were deprived of the capacity to formulate developmental policies independently, were excluded as active partners, and could obtain funding only by directly addressing the Commission (Nadalutti, 2013). Article 4.1 implied that the Commission should not interfere in national territorial relations (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a), and the reform relegated the Commission to the role of mediator between states' national and sub-national levels (Börzel and Panke, 2007).

1.3.6 Recent evolutions in Cohesion policy

Three main reforms of Cohesion policy followed in 1999, 2007 and 2014. The 1999 reform came only a few years after the 1993 reform, but was motivated by the need to prepare the Eastern enlargement that was expected in the near future, and the introduction of the single currency. The total amount of the structural funds spending was not increased; rather, it was focused on concentration, efficiency, and simplification (Brunazzo, 2016). From a multilevel governance perspective, the reform awarded more power to the lower levels of government, endowing them with increased power in the programs' implementation and monitoring tasks. The Commission took a step back, allowing more action to be taken at the national and subnational levels (Hooghe, 2002).

As the 1999 reform came in preparation for the enlargement of Central and Eastern European countries, the 2007 reform came as an adaptation to this disruptive and major event in the European Union timeline. The Cohesion policy had to be adapted to a European Union that welcomed a large number of countries, relatively poor if compared to the EU15 nucleus, and to the principles set in the recently introduced Lisbon Agenda. Some aspects of the principles were changed: the proportionality principle was introduced as an attempt to create a level playing field for the increased number of Member States, and corrective mechanisms were added to the additionality principle (Brunazzo, 2016).

The reform also broadened the partnership principle to include a wider range of actors, enlarging the multilevel aspect of the policy to more non-governmental participants, such as civil society organizations, environmental organizations, NGOs, and organizations promoting gender equality. Moreover, territorial entities at the NUTS 3 level region became eligible for cross-border cooperation (Brunazzo, 2016). The entirety of the reform had a stronger focus on cross-border cooperation, as the enlargement of the former USSR satellites required an

additional effort for the establishment of networks across borders that were previously isolated. A new Objective of European Territorial Cooperation was established, encouraging regional and local authorities to participate in transnational and interregional projects (Brunazzo, 2016). This will be further discussed in Chapter II.

The 2014 reform, the last major reform in Cohesion policy to date, was the first reform of the Cohesion policy after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, which created a new legal framework and impacted the status of the policy within the European Union legal system. Cohesion policy was embedded in the Lisbon Treaty reform in three articles: Art. 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Art. 174 TFEU, and Art. 175 TFEU. Cohesion policy was included among the shared competencies between the European Union and the Member States in Art. 4 TFEU. This reform also came as a response to the mutated economic situation, which was still heavily affected by the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis, especially in the Mediterranean states and Ireland. Cohesion policy was, in this context, a tool to directly fund the countries that most suffered the damage caused by the crisis (Brunazzo, 2016).

Cohesion policy was an essential event for the development of the multilevel governance approach. It not only provided the grounds for its theorization, but also the possibility to empirically observe and test it. It was through Cohesion policy, most evidently through the introduction of the partnership principle in the 1988 reform, that local and regional actors entered the arena of European decision-making, providing a demonstration of “how actors did in fact move beyond the rigid script supposedly dictated by their institutional role and functional interests to make decisions which created new policy commitments, new spaces mobilization and new political allegiances” (Piattoni, 2016), and thus allowing multilevel governance to emerge as a theory of European integration and state transformation (Piattoni, 2010, p. 108).

1.4 Types of multilevel governance

The discussion around multilevel governance was deepened by the introduction of the concept of two “types” of multilevel governance, namely Type 1 (also described as “vertical” multilevel governance) and Type 2 (also described as “horizontal” multilevel governance). This typology emerged as part of academic efforts to understand the evolving dynamics of governance in the European Union, particularly in the context of increasing integration and the multi-tiered nature of decision-making. This novelty was introduced by Hooghe and Marks (2001b, 2003) to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of governance

within the European Union and similar multi-level governance systems, to better capture the evolving nature of decision-making, power relations, and policy implementation in the complex context of European integration.

The intuition from which the classification of the “types” of multilevel governance was born was that the patterns of governance and the dispersion of authority in lower levels of governance responded to a need for efficiency in tackling specific problems (Hooghe and Marks, 2003). Nadalutti also argued that the development of this typology came as a response to the re-nationalization of funds stemming from the 1993 Cohesion policy reform (Nadalutti 2013, p. 757), which resulted in Member States claiming back their gatekeeping role and control over spending allocation and distribution performed by the subnational actors.

To measure the layers of multilevel governance, counting the sheer number of jurisdictions was not deemed a sufficient scale of measure; rather, the allocation of authorities across policy areas should be considered. Therefore, Marks and Hooghe focused their analysis on how competencies are distributed across jurisdictions, how fiscal power is exercised, and how power relations, both formal and informal, are structured across jurisdictions (Hooghe and Marks, 2003). Moreover, they enriched the academic debate around multilevel governance by further categorizing the degree of specialization, the overlapping of territories, and the stability of jurisdictions, rather than focusing narrowly only on the distribution of authority and competencies (Hooghe and Marks, 2003).

By adopting this approach, a more intricate understanding emerges, shedding light on the central assumption underpinning the concept of multilevel governance. This assumption revolves around the recognition that the dispersion of authority across various jurisdictions increases the efficiency of exercising power. In contrast to a scenario where power is centralized within the state, the distribution of authority allows for a more nuanced response to the diverse scales at which externalities stemming from policymaking exert their influence, ranging from the local to the global.

The ramifications of policymaking impact a large array of scales, each with its unique set of challenges and dynamics. The multifaceted nature of these externalities necessitates governance structures that align with their diverse spatial dimensions. This more complex structure is crucial for the optimal internalization of externalities, responding to a growing demand for flexibility and efficiency in contemporary governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2003).

1.4.1 Type 1 multilevel governance

Type 1 multilevel governance finds its intellectual roots in federalism, a system characterized by the sharing of power among a limited number of governments operating at different levels. In this model, the organization of power involves central governments alongside a restricted number of non-overlapping sub-national governments. Key characteristics of Type 1 governance include the presence of *general-purpose jurisdictions*. These jurisdictions are relatively few in number but are extensive in size, performing multiple tasks to fulfil a general-purpose role. A second important feature of Type 1 multilevel governance is that *boundaries within the state are mutually exclusive*, ensuring that regional boundaries do not intersect.

The structure typically comprises a *limited number of jurisdictional levels*, often organized around local, intermediate, and central levels. The *jurisdictional system tends to be quasi-permanent*, with high costs associated with jurisdictional reform. This stability results in institutions that persist even when the conditions that led to their creation have changed. The architecture of Type 1 governance is robust, and it is usually characterized by an organization of power in three entities: elected legislatures, executives, and court systems. This structure is usually preserved both in larger and smaller jurisdictions (Hooghe and Marks 2001b, 2003).

Being the operational dynamics of Type 1 multilevel governance linked to a limited number of jurisdictions, these types of structures facilitate negotiations within a diverse array of actors. This positions Type 1 structures as the ultimate arbiters in conflicts arising within its territory, casting a “shadow of hierarchy” (Scharpf, 1997) over it. This, in turn, significantly reduces the costs associated with coordination. A pivotal element contributing to the efficiency of Type 1 multilevel governance is its court system, which binds all jurisdictions together.

Designed in a top-down, system-wide fashion, these jurisdictions present permanent borders arranged on a cascading scale. The rigidity of these borders makes structural changes challenging, creating a system intended to last for a long time. Alterations to the system result in high costs, typically involving constitutional changes; when these changes occur, competencies are often reallocated rather than assigned to newly created jurisdictions. Another feature of Type 1 multilevel governance is that territorial boundaries tend to mirror the identity of the inhabitants within that territory. This connection to identity is one of the reasons why changes to the structure of Type 1 structures are considered highly costly (Hooghe and Marks, 2001b).

1.4.2 Type 2 multilevel governance

The Type 2 model builds on Type 1 but introduces a more horizontal and networked understanding of governance. It emphasizes the importance of interactive processes, collaboration, and informal networks among various actors at the same level. This approach better captures the complexity of governance interactions within and across levels. In introducing the concept, Marks and Hooghe mentioned that this governance organization has been described with the acronym “FOCJ” (Functional, Overlapping, Competing Jurisdictions) by Frey and Eichenberger, polycentric by Ostrom, and with the concept of *condominio* by Schmitter (Frey and Eichenberger, 1999; Ostrom, 1999; Schmitter, 1996 as cited in Hooghe and Marks 2001b, 2003).

Task-specific jurisdictions characterize Type 2 multilevel governance structures. These jurisdictions, numerous and independent, are structured around the tasks they perform, tailoring their responses to the specific needs of citizens and territories. Another distinctive feature lies in the *territorially overlapping jurisdictions*. Type 2 jurisdictions do not conform to neatly cut or contained borders within the boundaries of larger jurisdictions. Instead, they dynamically respond to needs, allowing for a more flexible spatial organization. This flexibility allows the alignment of governance structures to the needs of the populations they serve.

Type 2 structures present a *large number of jurisdictions*; this number is tied to the needs they address. Moreover, they are distributed across *many jurisdictional levels*. This results in a system where goods and services are efficiently provided by the entity that can best internalize both positive and negative externalities. This approach results in a system where hierarchy is less rigidly defined and that is rather structured to adapt to the complexity of needs and problems to be solved, allowing for a more widespread distribution of authority, which in turn is intended to increase the effectiveness of governance. Finally, Type 2 jurisdictional systems are *flexible* and designed to react to meet flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness requirements. The jurisdictional levels not only overlay across themselves but also nest within Type 1 jurisdictions.

The emergence of Type 2 structure reflects the broader trends of privatization and decentralization, particularly evident in the case of public services provided by private actors through contracts, such as waste management. Type 2 structures are also prevalent in transnational governance, where a lack of authority to coordinate on cross-border issues is notable. Examples can be found in international environmental treaties ranging from regional

to global scales. Such structures also facilitate cross-border cooperation in frontier regions, addressing common issues that can be tackled jointly.

The design of Type 2 structures is inherently functional, with a flexible architecture intended to serve problem-solving needs. Given their specific goals, these structures typically present lower levels of conflict. Reforming, creating, or dismantling Type 2 structures is relatively easy and does not present significant barriers or costs, since they are rooted on efficiency rather than identity. The coexistence of Type 1 and Type 2 structures is facilitated by their ability to respond to different needs, making them complementary to one another (Hooghe and Marks 2001b, 2003).

As summarized by Skelcher:

Type II governance tends to flourish specifically when there is a need for a tailored governmental body to address an issue that is not susceptible to policy action by a Type I organization, for example, in the international arena and when there are particular functional governance problems. The empirical data [...] show that Type II governance occurs extensively in settings where the high boundary integrity of Type I governmental systems produces a competency constraint, in other words where mainstream governmental organizations are unable to respond flexibly to policy issues that intersect their jurisdictions. (Skelcher, 2005, p. 94)

In the European Union, the European Commission actively encourages the creation of Type 2 networks; an example is the Interreg program. Various forms of regional cross-border governance have also independently emerged, reflecting the diversity within and beyond the European Union's institutional architecture. These will be discussed in Chapter II.

Types of multilevel governance	
<i>Type 1</i>	<i>Type 2</i>
General purpose jurisdictions	Task-specific jurisdictions
Non-intersecting membership	Intersecting membership
Limited number of jurisdictional levels	Unlimited number of jurisdictional levels
System-wide architecture	Flexible design

Table 1.1 Types of multilevel governance. Adapted from Hooghe and Marks, 2003

1.5 Conclusion

This Chapter illustrated the establishment and development of multilevel governance as one of the main theoretical tools for studying governance patterns in the European Union.

Understanding the transformation of the state and the dispersion of authority from the core of the state towards supra- and sub-national entities is fundamental: subnational authorities emerge as central actors in cross-border cooperation, which is turn predominantly financed at the supranational level in the European Union, exemplified by programs like Interreg, which will be further explored in the case study.

The transformation of states encouraged regionalization and increased the autonomy of regions vis-à-vis the central state. Cohesion policy not only provided financial resources but also introduced principles, competencies, and tools, thereby enhancing agency and autonomy in decision-making processes, particularly after the introduction of the Single European Act and the establishment of the partnership principle. As evidenced later in this study, multilevel governance patterns are prominently evident in cross-border cooperation processes, both for the engagement of subnational authorities and for the creation of cross border networks across different jurisdictional levels.

CHAPTER II: CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Chapter II focuses on the history, theory and practice of cross-border cooperation in the European Union, offering a comprehensive exploration of its dynamics. To understand such dynamics and the significance of borders, it's important to comment on the concepts of territoriality, the different meanings that borders carry and debordering and rebordering processes. In the EU, borders within Member States and the EU's own external boundaries have undergone profound transformations, shaped by historical events such as 20th-century wars, including the Cold War, as well as the various rounds of EU enlargement.

Cohesion policy, extensively described in the previous Chapter, presented financial incentives and frameworks for cross-border cooperation activities, creating in border area a fertile ground for multilevel governance patterns to emerge. During time, different patterns and structures for cross-border cooperation emerged. One of them is Interreg, which later became one of the pillars of the EU Cohesion policy, was the first explicitly EU-supported framework for cross-border cooperation activities. The Chapter discusses in detail the emergence and the evolution of this and other cooperation frameworks, which will later be the object of the case study presented in Chapter III.

2.1 Borders and territoriality

In contemporary times, borders are often taken for granted, perceived as neatly drawn lines on maps. We are used to imagining the world like a puzzle of perfectly fitting, irregularly shaped pieces. These lines suggest a cessation of one thing and the beginning of another – different political, administrative, and legal systems, diverse ethnicities, languages, traditions, histories,

art, architecture, flags, and identities. In essence, borders carry a predominantly “physical” meaning, tied to space and territory.

However, these seemingly neat and clear barriers “exist only on maps” (Sendhardt, 2013, p. 34). The reality is far more complex, with borders often serving as dynamic interfaces rather than static dividers. The earliest record of a border in Europe is the border between Spain and Portugal, that remained basically unchanged since the Treaty of Alcañices, which dates back to 1297. This is an exception; European history is marked by the fluidity of borders, subject to frequent and constant changes driven by diplomacy and war. Borders, being often a result of violent processes, have been defined with the picturesque metaphor that describes them as the “scars of history”.

Traditionally rooted in an essentially spatial concept, borders are linked to the idea of territoriality, which is defined as “the attempt by an individual or a group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area” (Sack, 1986, p. 19). The concept of territoriality serves as a fundamental pillar of the modern state. For centuries, humans lacked the tools to define abstract borders and limits. The border between Portugal and Spain, standing with minor changes for centuries, was not contingent on the visual representation on a map, but was able to stand because it could be identified by natural and geological elements, such as rivers and mountains.

The exercise of territoriality needed to be enabled by the emergence and consolidation of certain technologies, such as cartography, geometry, mathematics and printing: “Territoriality is unthinkable without this type of technology, and the modern state in turn without territoriality” (Faludi, 2018, p. 9). The emergence of cartography in the 16th century allowed to conceptualize “a new kind of space” in which “boundaries were made congruent with the cartographic ideal” (Biggs, 1999, p. 387).

As summarized by Sendhardt, “rather than maps being a representation of borders in reality, map lines are actually predecessors of borders on the ground” (Sendhardt, 2013, p. 34). There is a deep relationship between cartography and territorial demarcation. The graphical representation of border lines on maps made possible the conceptualization of territoriality which, in turn, was essential for the construction and consolidation of the modern state, as it allowed authorities to exercise sovereignty over the delimited territory, therefore constituting an important factor in the evolution of statehood, governments and governance structures (Faludi, 2018).

Border studies are characterized by their interdisciplinarity. Early studies were conducted by classical authors such as Ratzel, Kjellén, Simmel and Lösch in fields such as geography, political science, sociology and economics. After the “backlash caused by German geopolitics” and the application of Haushofer’s theories to justify expansionist and irredentist attempts, however, border studies reverted back to “boundary as a geometrical figure and its drawing from a strategic and legal point of view” (Lundén, 2018, p. 102).

2.1.1 A new conceptualization of borders

A revival of border studies and its application to a vast array of disciplines started in the 1960s and increased in the 1990s, also as a consequence of historical events such as the end of the Cold War that led to a restructuring of borders in Europe. The concept of borders is now not only applied to domains where borders have an obvious role, like geography, political science, economics, military strategy, law and sociology, but became a matter of interest of other disciplines, from anthropology to linguistics, to environmental and cultural studies. The diversity of approaches resulted also in the lack of a unified and universally agreed theoretical framework on border studies (Sendhardt, 2013).

There was a shift in the conceptualization of borders, which moved away from their understanding as static and quasi-permanent structures and started to acknowledge their complexity, leading to a complete turn on its original intended meaning: “the drawing of any given state border represents an arbitration, and a simplification, of complex geo-political, political and social struggles. It seldom, if ever, offers a coincidence of economy, polity and culture, but instead represents and often reifies a particular relationship between them that may prove either transitory or durable” (Anderson and O’Dowd, 1999, p. 595).

This shift in the discourse on borders was inspired by shifts in global dynamics, such as the advent of globalization, which made borders more permeable and accelerated the cross-border movement of goods and people. Additionally, historical events, the dissolution of the USSR and the subsequent restructuring of states within the continent and its Eastern neighbourhood, and an increased activity in cross-border cooperation driven by initiatives at the European Union level, further contributed to this evolution.

This renewed focus stimulated the development of innovative perspectives in framing and describing borders within the European Union which, however, resulted contradictory and have yet to be organized in a unitary theoretical framework. Some trends can be recognized

(Sendhardt, 2013): some scholars theorize the emergence of a “Europe without borders”, while others focus on the strengthening of the European Union’s external border, and others emphasize the EU’s efforts on cross-border cooperation at regional level.

The shift led the theoretical question around borders to revolve around the way in which borders are constructed, namely the process of bordering, rather than the meaning of the border per se. The meaning of borders is thus not considered in its qualities as a geographical entity, but on the social and functional processes that allow its construction or deconstruction, considering borders in a dynamic way, subject to change, and its impact on economic development, law, administration, culture, politics, identity, and society.

The literature is very extensive and can only be limited to some examples. Anderson (1996) explored the development of the European Union and transfrontier connections within it, technological advances, and internal regimes in their potential of altering the significance of international frontiers, while technological advancements and international regimes reshape perceptions of frontiers in uninhabited spaces. Anderson and O’ Dowd (1999) furthered the conversation by analysing the detachment of territorial borders from social and communal borders. David Newman and Anssi Paasi published extensively on the social construction and de-construction of borders and their international political implications, while Jan Zielonka (2002) focused on those processes specifically in the European Union, its external frontier and its internal borders.

Aside the traditional meaning of a border as a territorial barrier, different types of borders were identified: Bonacker (2006) distinguished symbolic borders, which revolve around identity matters, while Stetter (2005) focused on functional borders, which separate various systems that serve a specific purpose or function. These types of borders don’t necessarily overlap, which leads to a characteristic “fuzziness” around border areas (Christiansen et al., 2000). This leads to processes of debordering and rebordering as described by Albert and Brock (1996), with debordering referring to the functional and symbolic systems crossing the territorial boundaries, and rebordering as the tightening of already existing or the creation of new boundaries in other areas.

As the ability to physically draw and visualize borders was a key element of the construction of the nation state, processes such debordering and this increased “fuzziness” of border areas represent a challenge for the nation state, which has to come to terms with their territorial borders being subject to functional and symbolic trespassing: “Debordering can then be

considered a decoupling of functional and symbolic borders that were formerly coupled in the form of nation-state and other territorial borders” (Bonacker as cited in Sendhardt, 2013, p. 28). Political entities affected by these processes react with adaptation and adjustment (Sendhardt, 2013), that can result in the distribution of trans-state governance across multiple levels (Albert and Brock, 2000).

2.2 Borders in Europe

2.2.1 Debordering and rebordering in Europe before and after the Cold War

Europe is where the idea of the modern nation state and territoriality emerged. During the centuries, few borders have proven stable: territorial and dynastic disputes kept armies, diplomats and cartographers busy. After 1945, a stronger border appeared, introducing in the continent an ideological and political East-West divide. This division was famously described by Winston Churchill³ as an “Iron Curtain” running “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic”. This symbolic demarcation significantly impacted the regions on either side of this seemingly impassable boundary.

On the Western side of this divide, starting from the 1950s, representatives from border areas gathered to share ideas on how to internalize the negative border effects that affected the areas (Guillermo-Ramirez, 2018). Border regions in Europe are, in fact, usually peripheral and economically disadvantaged, with few transport links, and often present physical, geological, linguistic and psychological barriers. However, they may share natural resources or other characteristics that would present higher potential if jointly managed. These cooperative endeavours were particularly active along the Rhine basin and in Scandinavian countries (Guillermo-Ramirez, 2018).

Border areas were characterized by significant administrative barriers, which translated into serious limits to cooperation, but eventually in 1958 Euregio, a transnational cooperative structure, was founded on the Dutch-German border (see section 2.3.1). Following its success, other Euroregions emerged across borders and additional efforts towards the establishment of cooperation links were pursued. The Council of Europe, along with influential associations like the Association of European Border Regions, was instrumental in this process, together with

³ Although Winston Churchill did not coin the term, it became popular after he used it in a speech delivered in 1946 in Fulton, Missouri.

the engagement of European Union institutions, especially the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Around the 1980s and the 1990s, borders underwent profound transformations, marked by the establishment of the Schengen Area and the implementation of the Single European Market. This era started a new chapter for cross-border regions, which began to blossom across Europe borders (Guillermo-Ramirez, 2018). A major earthquake came with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which led to the breaching of the Iron Curtain and allowed contact between the Eastern and the Western blocs after several decades.

The geography of Europe changed, with new states and new borders emerging in the continent, both in the former Eastern bloc, with new borders being created, like the border between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, or disappearing, like the frontier between Eastern and Western Germany. The increase in the number of states also meant a proliferation of borders, each with its unique characteristics. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, new states violently appeared in the Western Balkans, whose exact boundaries are, in some cases, still disputed.

After the 2004 enlargement, when most of these states were welcomed into the European Union, the whole frontier of the EU moved eastwards, with a significant debordering/rebordering process: while Schengen “melted” the internal borders inside the EU territory, the external border hardened, leading to a situation labelled by some as “Fortress Europe”, with weaker borders inside and a solid frontier against non-members (Lange and Pires, 2018). The resulting map of Europe reflects a significant fragmentation and a relatively high degree of internal borders: this implies that the majority of regions in Europe are located on borders (Pámer, 2018).

2.2.2 The spatial aspect of the Cohesion policy, cross-border cooperation and multilevel governance

Chapter I set out to describe the Cohesion policy and its role in increasing the role, importance and autonomy of regional actors in the European Union. Subnational and local actors were granted the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and exercise control over the allocated funding management. The aim of the Cohesion policy was directed towards addressing disparities among regions, specifically those that were lagging behind in terms of economic and social development, with the ultimate goal of promoting a harmonious and cohesive integration.

Funds were allocated to disadvantaged regions according to a GDP per-capita criterion. In many cases, regions with low GDP levels are those located in peripheral areas; hence, most of them are located on borders. Cohesion policy thus is strictly linked with topics such as spatiality and territoriality in the EU, similarly to the Common Agricultural Policy, which targets rural areas, and Trans-European Networks, which target transport links (Faludi, 2018). In the framework of Cohesion policy, the first Community Initiative dedicated to cross-border cooperation was Interreg I, launched in 1990. The European Union, as a supranational institution, was fundamental for the development of cross-border cooperation as it provided the necessary funding for the projects.

Perkmann defines cross-border cooperation (CBC) as “a more or less institutionalized collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders” (Perkmann 2003, p. 156). Perkmann also identifies four characteristics of cross-border cooperation activities: they belong to the realm of public agency since the actors involved are public authorities; subnational authorities conduct them; they are mostly concerned with practical problem solving and imply institution building in the long-term. The entities that participate in cross-border cooperation are cross-border regions, defined as a “bounded territorial unit composed of the territories of authorities participating in a CBC initiative” (Ivi, p. 157).

This definition gives cross-border regions unique characteristics: they should not be interpreted “not only as [...] a functional space but as a socio-territorial unit equipped with a certain degree of strategic capacity on the basis of certain organizational arrangements” (Ibidem). In his definition of cross-border regions, Perkmann specifies that subnational authorities in cross-border regions can only be concerned with “low politics” since they are not legally equipped with the tools and the authority to conclude arrangements with foreign authorities.

Border regions engaged in cross-border cooperation have been described as soft administrative spaces, where administrative structures allow for a degree of flexibility, collaboration, and mutual decision-making to be able to engage in cooperation projects while overcoming the challenges posed by traditional administrative divisions and agreements undertaken at the central state level with foreign authorities. Cohesion policy contributed to this by “fostering the ‘invention’ of regions as new spaces and arenas for the cooperation through ‘experimental’ territorial programs at the cross-border and transnational level” (Gualini, 2016, p. 507).

Cross-border cooperation thus allows sub-national authorities to “experiment” in these cooperation projects in a unique way and on a variety of themes, cooperating among themselves

on the same level and interacting with the supranational authorities such as the EU to benefit from funding and guidance. Moreover, “cross-border cooperation activities [...] are perceived by sub-national actors as the ‘doors’ which allow them to engage with tasks previously reserved to nation-states exclusively” (Nadalutti, 2012, p. 183). Supporting cross-border cooperation and border regions “has the potential of softening the control of Member States over their territories” (Faludi, 2018, p. 16).

In addition, cross-border cooperation activities contributed to European integration, acting in a bidirectional way, both through bottom-up and top-down processes. Bottom-up processes refer to the activity of cross-border entities engaging in cooperation processes from their own initiative and becoming partners of the European Commission on the implementation of the EU’s regional policy. Top-down processes include the initiatives taken at the level of the European Union and especially of the European Commission with funding and soft policy measures, also seeking partnerships with regional border entities to pursue their own policy goals of integration and harmonization (Basboga, 2020). This led to border regions being described as “laboratories” of European integration (Lambertz, 2010).

To sum up, cross-border territories are areas where the layered structure of multilevel governance identified by Marks and Hooghe and described in Chapter I emerges clearly. Subnational actors, empowered by principles endowed to them by the European institutions, such as the partnership principle, gained the ability to engage with each other and participate in initiatives, albeit of “low politics”, that are usually performed at the national level. Border regions thus have a higher potential of autonomy from central states, and of engaging more intensely and directly with supranational authorities (Perkmann, 2003; 2007): “different political arenas are interconnected rather than nested, and sub-national actors operate in both national and supranational arenas, creating transnational associations and transnational governance” (Knippenberg, 2004, p. 610). In conclusion:

Governance, network and multi-level governance approaches shift attention to the opportunity structure that follows various changes in policy-making. Cross-border regions appear as a realm where the focus on practical problem-solving, interdependence and coordination opens space for unconventional, participatory and less hierarchical policy-making processes. Furthermore, they are multi-level structures that imply a certain transfer of powers and autonomy from the national to the supranational and the subnational level. (Plangger, 2019, p. 160)

In particular, Type 2 multilevel governance patterns based on network governance seem to prevail in cross-border regions:

[...] cross-border cooperation develops horizontally beyond the nation state boundaries and fosters the sharing of professional expertise and best practice among the actors engaged in the cooperation process: i.e. local agencies and government, trade unions, corporations, nation states, the EU. Power shifts downwards (local/regional level) and upwards (supra-national organizations) while autonomous actors interact with each other. (Nadalutti, 2015, p. 43)

Cross-border cooperation, however, is not necessarily a “serious” threat to state sovereignty of states, as specified by Perkmann: “the growing ‘cross-borderization’ in Europe does not necessarily point to an increasing territorial fragmentation of nation-state sovereignty [...] small-scale CBRs in particular are part of the multi-level governance structure of EU policy-making but are far from posing an imminent threat to the authority of the member-states over these policies” (Perkmann, 2003, p. 168). He also makes a point against the construction of a general theory of cross-border cooperation, as each border has a unique history and characteristics. Similarly to border studies, due to a variety of approaches to analysing the subject, also cross-border cooperation lacks a unanimously agreed theoretical framework (Kolossoff and Scott, 2013).

The intensity and the success of cross-border activities depend on a variety of factors belonging to a vast array of domains, including economics, politics, geography, leadership culture, and processes of identity and state formation (De Sousa, 2012), and the history of cooperation efforts in the region. The amount of power and autonomy that is granted to sub-regional and local actors by central governments also plays a role since it tends to be asymmetric on the two sides of the border (Lundén, 2018). It is possible to identify different patterns emerging in European regions; different models were identified by Frédéric Durand and Antoine Decoville (2020):

Model	Mutual trust	Number of cross border activities	Cross border interaction
Eastern European model (Baltic countries, Romania, north and south of Poland, east of Hungary and Slovakia, Greece)	Low	Low	High
Northern European model (Scandinavian countries)	Strong	Low	Low
Maritime model (North Sea, Baltic Sea, Adriatic Sea)	Low	Low	Low
Western Continental model (Rhineland region, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands)	Relatively high	High	High
Central European model	Relatively low	High	High

(west of former Soviet bloc countries and east of German-speaking world)			
Southwestern European model (Portugal, Spain, south of France, western Italy, Croatia)	Relatively low	Low	Relatively low

Table 2.1 Models of cross-border cooperation in Europe. Adapted from Durand and Decoville, 2020

2.3 Overview of cross-border cooperation efforts in Europe: from early attempts to the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation and Macro-regional strategies

In border areas, the structures of governance emerging from cross-border cooperation are defined as cross-border governance. Enrico Gualini provides a definition of cross-border governance concept as “an institutional construct resulting from complex processes of co-evolution. In their current phase of institutionalisation, cross-border governance settings face a struggle that highlights the dialectics between path-dependency and path-shaping, between institution building and institutional design” (Gualini, 2003, p. 43). This definition emphasizes the institutional dimension of cross-border governance, which is embedded in the framework provided by “the emergence of a European pattern of multilevel governance” (Ibidem).

That pattern and frameworks enabled the emergence of this transnational form of governance, but it also responded to specific needs, for example, the enlargement process, which required the formulation of a well-grounded policy to ensure the integration between pre-existing and newly admitted members, flexible enough to adapt to the future round of accession. The need for border security and stabilization was another element (Nadalutti, 2012), since the process of enlargement and the geopolitical changes affecting Europe in the second half of the 20th century caused borders to fall, shift, and re-emerge.

Cross-border cooperation also served the purpose of merging two narratives: on one hand, reconciliation processes, after World War II in Western Europe, after the Cold War in Central and Eastern Europe, and after the fall of Yugoslavia in the Western Balkans; and on the other hand, on the narrative behind the European Union project and its goal of integration, cohesion, and free movement (Reitel et al., 2018). Cross-border governance started to develop from three different domains: outside the European Union framework, with bottom-up, local cooperation initiatives or top-down intergovernmental commissions, and inside the European Union framework with initiatives sponsored by the European Commission, initiated with the introduction of Interreg (Gualini, 2003).

2.3.1 Euroregions

The beginning of cross-border cooperation and the creation of a pattern of multilevel, cross-border governance was informal and came from the initiative of local actors outside of the European Union framework. Local and regional border authorities in Western Europe started to cooperate to solve problems that transcended borders, skipping the step of convincing their central governments and ministries of foreign affairs of their needs (Nadalutti, 2015). In 1958, the response to these needs – on the one hand of practical problem-solving, and on the other hand, of a flexible framework for cooperation with minimal involvement of central state authorities – led to the establishment of the first Euroregion, called Euregio, on the border between the Netherlands and Germany.

Euregio emerged as an association of sub-national and local actors, encompassing a variety of actors, from municipalities to administrative districts. It was established to promote collaborative efforts, mutual understanding, and shared development initiatives across the border. This innovative framework for cooperation was shortly after replicated by other local authorities in different border regions, especially in the Rhine region. Lacking dedicated legal tools for their establishment, Euroregions were created with pre-existing ones, namely twin associations. The interested authorities first create an association, each on their own side of the border, according to national legal tools, and successively join the associations created with a private, rather than public, law agreement (Perkmann, 2007).

2.3.2 The Association of the European Border Regions, the Council of Europe and the Madrid Convention

The number of Euroregion, however, remained relatively low and emerged intensely only in the areas between Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. In 1971, the Association of the European Border Regions (AEBR) was founded, a new forum through which border regions could voice their needs and increase cooperation. The AEBR had a key role in promoting the interest of European border regions, and extended its influence in the EU institutions, especially the Parliament and the Commission, non-EU institutions like the Council of Europe, and national governments (Guillermo-Ramirez, 2018), providing a channel for networking and expertise for local cross border entities. Its activities were complemented by the Association of European Regions, founded in 1985, which advocated for regional interests in a wider sense.

The 1980s were a crucial decade for the emergence of patterns of regional cross-border governance and cross-border cooperation, which continued to be established outside the

European Union legal framework. The AEBR tried to lobby the Commission towards the establishment of a regional policy at the EU level, but its attempts were rejected, probably because of the scepticism of Member States towards the decentralization implied in cross-border cooperation activities (Nadalutti, 2013, 2015).

The AEBR turned its efforts towards the Council of Europe, which was considered a more suitable institution since it was able to conclude bilateral agreements and was capable to “[...] provide an ad hoc solution to respond both to regional authorities’ demands for a cooperation which could overcome ‘border effects’, and to states’ fears of losing sovereignty and control in favour of sub-national actors” (Nadalutti, 2015 p. 89).

The collaboration between the AEBR and the Council of Europe resulted in the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, shortly known as the Madrid Convention, in 1980; additional protocols were included in 1995, 1998 and 2009. The Madrid Convention provided an international legal framework for cross-border cooperation activities, which marked an important step in building institutional structures to channel the cooperation efforts of border entities.

The overall impact of the Madrid Convention, however, was still limited, as it contained rather general provisions and still required the intervention of central governments to function (Nadalutti, 2013, 2015). In this phase, cross-border cooperation was still at an intergovernmental stage, and the result of negotiations involving a limited number of jurisdictional levels (supranational, national and transnational), corresponding to a Type 1 multilevel governance structure (Nadalutti, 2013).

2.3.3 Community Initiatives: Interreg

The 1980s were transformative years for the role of subnational authorities in the EU, as outlined in Chapter I. Major developments were introduced with the Single European Act, which began the establishment of the Single Market, and later the introduction of the partnership principle in the 1988 reform of the structural funds. The reform also introduced the Community Initiatives, which aimed at targeting specific problems relevant to the community and focused on specific aspects of regional development, such as rural areas (Leader), urban areas (Urban, Urbact), and fighting discrimination and inequalities (Equal). Community Initiatives, moreover, endowed subnational and local authorities with relative autonomy, especially in the allocation and management of funds.

The Community Initiative that proved most important for regional cross-border governance was Interreg, officially launched in 1990, which aimed at facilitating collaboration between neighbouring regions by addressing common challenges, supporting economic integration, and promoting social and cultural exchange. Interreg was the first initiative taken at the EU level with an explicit vision of cross-border cooperation at the regional level. Interreg was later developed in different strands with diverse objectives, and after promising results from the first pilot phase initiated in 1989, it was relaunched in different generations, each lasting approximately 6 years.

2.3.4 Cross-border cooperation at the EU's external border

The success of the Interreg initiative resulted in the designing of European Territorial Cooperation as one of the main objectives of Cohesion policy in 2007: in less than two decades, cross-border cooperation proved to be an essential element of the European Union's architecture (Medeiros, 2018). The European Union set similar initiatives for cross-border cooperation at the regional level also on its external borders. 1996 saw the launch of the TACIS initiative, aimed at providing technical and financial assistance to countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

A similar initiative was the CARDS program, which started in 2000 with a specific focus on the regions of South-Eastern Europe. CARDS was later replaced, together with PHARE, a program launched in 1989 to aid Central and Eastern European countries transition to a market economy and prepare to access the European Union, by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) in 2007. In the same year, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) replaced TACIS and the Mésures d'Accompagnement (MEDA), an additional tool that was introduced in 1996 and dedicated to the support of Mediterranean partner countries. These instruments, however, although they, in theory, foresee the involvement of a vast array of actors, usually are conducted mainly by national authorities.

2.3.5 The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation

The main development in terms of institutionalization of regional cross-border governance came with the establishment of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs). In 1994, a new actor came into play for the promotion of regions and regional development, including cross-border cooperation issues: the Committee of the Regions (CoR). A consultative body within the European Union institutional framework, the CoR's role in promoting cross-

border cooperation is enshrined in Art. 265 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), which states that the Council and the Commission can consult the Committee of the Regions in matters concerning cross-border cooperation.

Both the CoR, since its inception, and the AEBR, which by that time had built a strong network and voice over regional matters in the EU, deemed necessary the creation of a stronger institutional framework within the EU for cross-border cooperation projects. Their efforts stemmed from the fact that the existing instruments were considered insufficient: “despite many years of financial support for territorial cooperation, the single market and EMU, national planning authorities, regions, and cities of neighbouring countries have still no opportunity for actively influencing development decisions in neighbouring countries” (Nadalutti, 2015, p. 94).

The framework of the Madrid Convention was, in fact, insufficient, and the lack of a solid structure for cross-border cooperation activity hindered some aspects of the implementation of Interreg projects. The CoR and the AERB thus joined their efforts, each in their own capacity: the CoR as a community body with the capacity to issue its own initiative opinions, and the AEBR as a well-established body for regional representation in Brussels, with a long-standing network and the ability to perform a flexible, fast, and efficient action (Nadalutti, 2015).

The two bodies were able to convince the European Commission and the European Parliament of the validity of their stances, and their efforts resulted in the launch of Regulation 1082/2006 on ‘European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation’ (EGTCs), the first legal basis for territorial cooperation established at EU level. The most important novelty is that the EGTCs have legal personality – even though it is unclear whether the legal personality falls under national or community law (Nadalutti, 2013, 2015).

The members of the EGTCs are considered equals, and the EGTC is able to make decisions on behalf of its members. A variety of entities can become members of an EGTC, both at the national, regional, and local level. They are thus considered a blueprint example of Type 2 multilevel governance, “[...] because it can create a web of transnational jurisdictions involving regional government leaders, government leaders, associations of local authorities, regional council representatives which work on similar competencies and resources” (Nadalutti, 2015, p. 95).

EGTCs allowed to surpass the shortcomings of Interreg and the Madrid Convention: they are permanent structures, while Community Initiative projects last only up to a couple of years, and

they allow their members to conduct cooperation without formal international agreements. When local and regional actors want to initiate a cooperation project, they can take the initiative, thus ‘bypassing’ the authority of the central state. For this reason, their establishment wasn’t welcomed enthusiastically at Member States’ level. States can, however, be members of EGTCs, which is also considered a development towards a multilevel governance framework: “[EGTCs] ...makes multi-level governance effective, putting together as equal actors, authorities which belong to different governmental layers” (Nadalutti. 2015, p. 109).

2.3.6 Macro-regional strategies

The successive step in the realm of cross-border cooperation in Europe was the introduction of Macro-regional strategies. Macro-regional strategies represent yet another innovative approach to regional cooperation, aiming at addressing common challenges and opportunities across specific geographical areas. They consist in a cooperation framework supported by the European Council, which can benefit from various streams of EU funding and are intended to facilitate coordinated action to address challenges that cannot be effectively tackled by individual countries alone.

Similar to the other initiatives, Macro-regional strategies include a vast array of actors from multiple levels, including non-governmental stakeholders, and foresee the participation of non-EU countries. As opposed to the EGTCs, which placed a strong emphasis on the institutionalization of cross-border relations, they rely on a light and flexible institutional structure and rely mainly on networking and coordination. The establishment of Macro-regional strategies didn’t foresee the introduction of new laws, new budgets or new institutions at the EU level (Sielker, 2017).

Macro-regional strategies are usually contracted around areas with common geographic characteristics and aim at addressing issues arising from these unique territorial features. Macro-regional strategies thus emphasize the territorial aspect of problem-solving, which is reflected in their names: the first Macro-regional strategy, launched in 2009, was the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and was followed in 2010 by the Strategy for the Danube Region, in 2014 by the Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, and in 2015 by the Strategy for the Alpine Region.

2.3.7 Regional offices in Brussels

In addition to these instruments, local and regional authorities can exert pressure and promote their interests, including cross-border cooperation, to European institutions with more or less structured activities through individual actions. The Maastricht Treaty envisions the participation of the ministers of regional governments in the Council of the European Union. This instrument, however, is limited since only a handful of regions belonging to federal states and thus relatively autonomous in their own domestic framework, were authorized by their central governments to occupy a seat at the table of the Council of the EU (Bauer and Börzel, 2012). The only subnational governments that currently benefit from the Maastricht Treaty's provision are powerful regions from Germany, Austria and Belgium (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a).

Finally, subnational entities have been opening their own offices in Brussels and engaging in so-called “paradiplomacy” activities. The trend was started by the city of Hamburg and the Saarland region, and they were soon imitated by other regions (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a). Regional offices' functions include lobbying, gathering and sharing information, providing more direct channels between the European Union and their territories, and cooperating with each other. They often focus their activity on funding, including on Cohesion policy, and they provide guidance and expertise on European policies, including on cross-border cooperation.

Cross-border governance thus encapsulates a wide range of actors and cooperation efforts, which act both in a more institutionalized, vertical way and a network- and project-based, horizontal way to implement cross-border territorial governance (Lange and Pires, 2018). Many efforts towards cross-border cooperation and governance foresee the active participation of a vast variety of entities, including subnational authorities and non-governmental actors, interacting from overlapping levels of governance, thus suggesting the existence of cross-border cooperation in the EU in a multilevel governance framework. The stakeholders and structures discussed in the Chapter are summarized in the table below:

Vertical action	Horizontal action
Association of European Border Regions	Euroregions
European Committee of the Regions	Community Initiatives (Interreg)
Regional authorities in the Council of the EU	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
Regional offices in Brussels	Macro-regional strategies
Intermediate	
Action at external borders (PHARE, TACIS, MEDA, CARDS, IPA, ENPI)	

Table 2.2 Horizontal and vertical actions of the various types of cooperation structures

2.4 Interreg

2.4.1 The first stages of cross-border cooperation projects in the EU framework

The EU was relatively late to recognize and encourage cross-border cooperation activities, and provide financing and guidance for them. As outlined above, the first attempts at cross-border cooperation activities came from the mobilization of local and subnational actors which resorted to national legal tools and frameworks to implement collaboration. It was the Council of Europe, rather than European institutions, that helped to create the first, although weak, legal framework for the implementation of cross-border projects; one of the reasons was the resistance at Member States level, which were determined not to lose their ‘gatekeeping’ role in this field.

The idea of cross-border cooperation programs supported at the EU level came after the experience of the “Pôle Economique de Développement”, a project involving the border area between Belgium, France and Luxembourg aimed at industrial reconversion after the crises in the coal and steel sector (Reitel et al., 2018). The financial support for the project came both from the Member States involved and the European Commission. The mid-1985, when this project was implemented, corresponded with the publication of the Delors White Paper on the construction of the Single Market in 1985, where the importance of cross-border areas for the elimination of internal barriers was clearly stated.

Peripheral regional areas were already targeted at the EU level and received financial support through the European Regional Development Fund, but a transregional perspective was

introduced only with the 1988 reform. It was once again the Association of European Border Regions that encouraged the recognition of border areas as unique situations deserving of specific attention and with the potential of accelerating the goal of a “Europe without borders” and the completion of the Single Market (Reitel et al., 2018). The first embryo of what would become the Interreg Community Initiative started in 1989 with the support of fourteen pilot programs in five selected areas.

The results were encouraging, especially on the border between Germany and France; only a year later, in 1990, the Commission officially launched the Interreg Community Initiative, which could benefit from the Structural Funds, which covered half of the projects’ expenses. Cross-border area’s significance changed in the European Commission agenda: “it was now recognised by the EC, that alongside the national states, local and regional actors were artisans of European integration”; this new standing allowed border territories “to gain a pivotal position in the context of a new multilevel governance approach to European integration” (Reitel et al., 2018, p. 10).

2.4.2 The evolution of Interreg

Interreg I run from 1990 to 1993. The eligible entities corresponded to NUTS 3 regions and were managed at supranational, national and subnational levels: the programming was negotiated by the central states with the Commission, while the implementation was handled by the local actors and the Commission, thus opening a direct channel of dialogue between the subnational and the supranational level and marking an important step towards the realization of an authentic multilevel governance structure (Köhler, 2011).

This first Interreg generation was still experimental, focused on a basic level of cooperation efforts, like information exchange and setting the foundations of joint structures at the administrative and institutional level across borders (Esparza-Masana, 2020). Moreover, it strengthened cooperation where it already existed, like the areas around the Rhine basin and the cluster around the borders of Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, France, and Germany, and helped to initiate cross-border contact where it was absent or weak, such as Northern and Southern Europe (Reitel et al., 2018).

The Community Initiative was reconfirmed for another six years, and Interreg II ran from 1994 to 1999. Many projects implemented during the second generation of Interreg focused on overcoming administrative barriers (Esparza-Masana, 2020). New areas became eligible after

the 1995 enlargement, which welcomed Austria, Finland, and Sweden into the European Union, and the inclusion of non-member states regions as project participants. Interreg II also started to distinguish priority areas considered crucial for economic development or cross-border problem-solving (Reitel et al., 2018).

The success of the Interreg programs led the European Commission to include a perspective on spatial planning and territoriality in the EU's regional policy. In 1999, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), a strategic framework aimed at providing a common vision and a set of guiding principles for spatial development in Europe, was adopted at Potsdam. It explicitly recognized the peripheral nature of border regions not only to the core of the national states, but also of the European Union, and recognized evident challenges and difficulties when it comes to establishing connections or communication with the areas or entities located on the opposite side of a border (Martín-Uceda and Vicente Rufi, 2021).

Novelties were introduced with Interreg III, which covered the years 2000 to 2006. The program was divided into three strands: strand A was dedicated to cross-border projects, strand B to transnational projects (which targeted macro cross-border regions, including Macro-regional strategies when they were introduced), and strand C (dedicated to projects in non-adjacent regions in different Member States) to interregional cooperation projects. Strand B and C have a broader geographical scope than strand A, which focuses specifically on border problems. The program was focused on competitiveness and was built taking into consideration the 2004 and the 2007 enlargements, which almost doubled the number of Member States and, thus, of the border regions eligible for funding, which could benefit from Interreg funding since the program's beginning.

With Interreg III, a number of new management principles were introduced, among which the requirement of co-financing by the border region and the inclusion of at least two stakeholders from each side of the border (Reitel et al., 2018). To promote common strategies, a new body known as the Joint Managing Authority (JMA) was established. Tasked with overseeing the management and execution of Interreg projects, the JMA operates independently from central states.

The JMA has a balanced composition involving local, regional, or national authorities, ensuring an equitable representation of all stakeholders involved. The JMA is assisted by the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS), another independent body involving equally all parties, tasked with helping with management and technical evaluation and support. Both bodies directly dialogue

with the European Commission, which contributes to the development of the programs and intervenes for control and evaluation (Nadalutti, 2015).

For the following programming period, Interreg IV (2007 – 2013), additional instruments were introduced: IPA (Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance) CBC for pre-accession countries and ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) CBC for the neighbourhood areas, aimed at strengthening cooperation at the European Union’s external border and at facilitating future rounds of enlargement. Moreover, the European Commission explicitly recognized European Territorial Cooperation as one of the pillars of the EU Cohesion policy, which became structured around three objectives: convergence, competitiveness, and territorial cooperation.

Interreg thus stopped being a mere Community Initiative and found its place as one of the main objectives of the Cohesion policy. The recognition of the territorial dimension of cross-border and regional cooperation was also signalled by the adoption of Regulation 1082/2006 and the creation of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, which marked a shift towards a progressive institutionalization of cross-border activities, as seen earlier in the Chapter.

Interreg V (2014 – 2020) marked the 30th birthday of Interreg projects in the European Union, and was focused on the consolidation of the program rather than in structuring it around cohesion objectives connected to rounds of enlargement and the expansion of the number of borders in the internal and external dimension of the EU. It was included in the “Europe 2020” strategy, built around smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It maintained the structure around the A, B and C strands.

Efforts were made to simplify administrative procedures and increase flexibility in project implementation to streamline the process and make it more accessible to a diverse range of stakeholders; there was an increased focus on achieving tangible results and impact, with an emphasis on monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of funded projects. It was structured around 11 investment priorities and was aimed at funding 17 cooperation programs: 60 under strand A, 15 under strand B, and 4 under strand C.

Strand A: cross-border	Strand B: transnational	Strand C: interregional
60 cooperation projects in internal borders	15 cooperation programs	4 cooperation programs (Interreg Europe, Interact, Urbact, Epson)

12 Interreg IPA – instrument for pre-accession projects		
16 Interreg ENI – European Neighbourhood Investment projects		

Table 2.3 Structure of Interreg

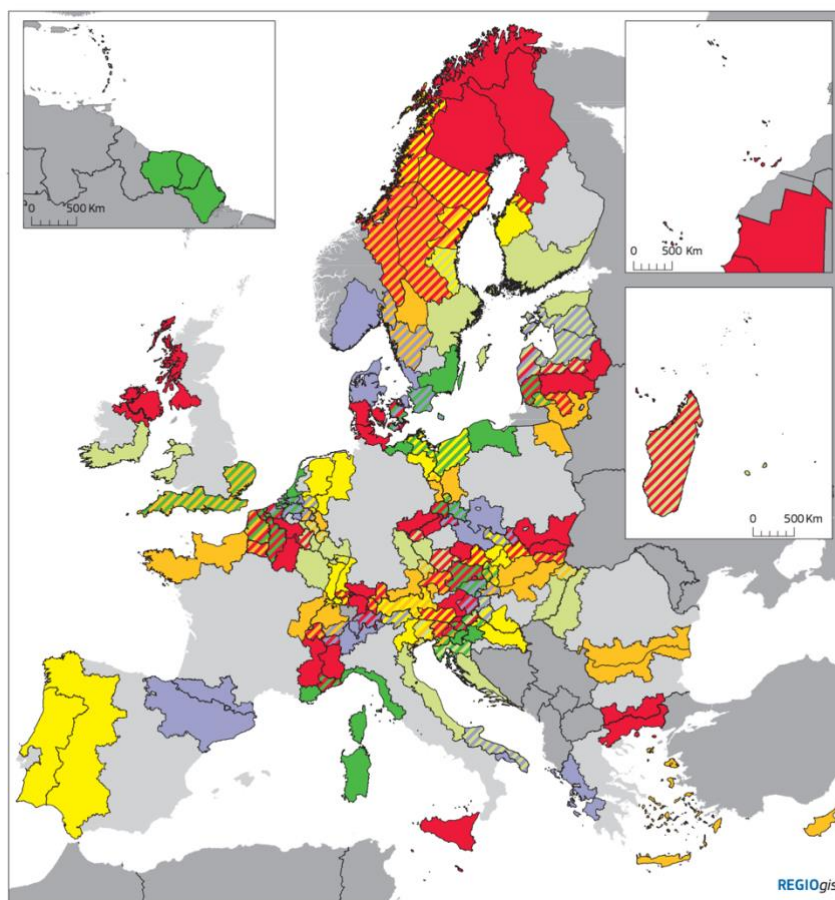


Fig. 2.1 NUTS 3 areas involved in Interreg, source: 8th Cohesion Report

The current Interreg program is Interreg VI, running from 2021 to 2027. The major novelty is the introduction of a strand D, which responds to one of the priorities of the European Commission for 2021-2027, “a stronger Europe in the world”. Strand D is dedicated to the Outermost Regions, allowing regions located outside the geographical borders of Europe to cooperate with their neighbours, with the mandatory inclusion of at least one third country among the partners. The regions involved are Amazonia “Plateau des Guyanes”, the Caribbeans, the Middle Atlantic/Gulf of Guinea, the Indian Ocean and the Mozambique Channel (interreg.eu).

Since 1990, Interreg has progressively included an increasing number of areas and larger budgets, as outlined in the map and in the table below:

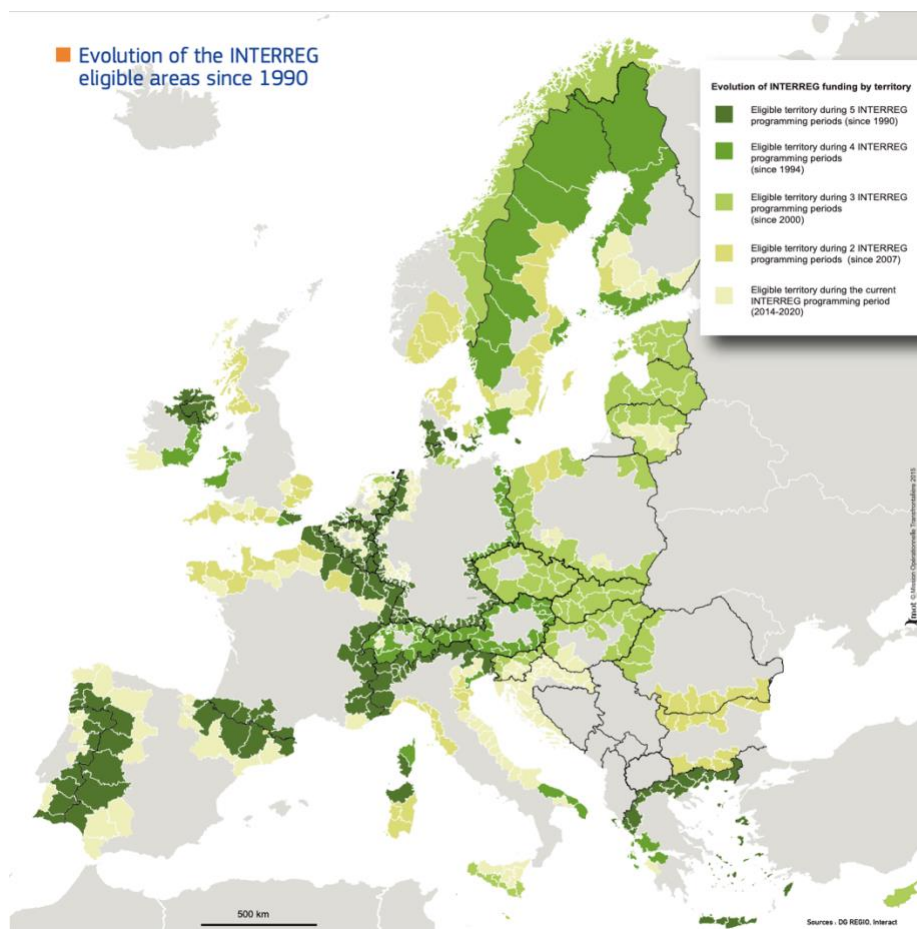


Fig. 2.3 Evolution of the Interreg eligible areas since 1990. Source: Wassenberg et al. (2015), p. 37

Interreg	Phase	N. of Programmes	Funding amount (million EUR in real terms)	N. of EU Member States
0	1988 - 1999	14 projects	0,021	
I	1990-1993	31	1,082	12
II	1994-1999	59	3,500	15
III	2000-2006	79	5,100	25 (after 2004)
IV	2007-2023	92	7,800	27
V	2014-2020	100	10,100	28

Table 2.4 Phases of the Interreg program. Source: Wassenberg et al. (2015), p. 32

Despite the increase in the funding over the years and the inclusion of European Territorial Cooperation as one of the three pillars of the Cohesion policy, this perceived importance is not reflected in the overall funding allocation structure. Interreg IV only received 2,5% of the total funding allocated to EU Cohesion policy, with a small increase to 2,8% in the Interreg V program (Klatt and Winkler, 2020). European territorial cooperation seems to be considered as a complementary policy tool (Medeiros, 2018), despite stakeholders recognizing the significant importance of Interreg in enhancing the development of border regions and fostering territorial cooperation. Cross-border cooperation, namely strand A of Interreg, received the largest share of funding.

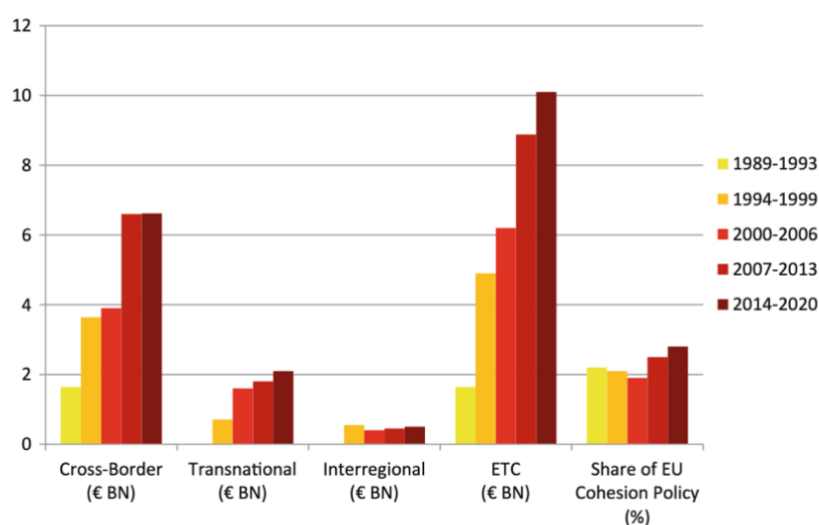


Fig. 2.2 Funding allocation of Cohesion policy. Source: Medeiros (2018), p. 72

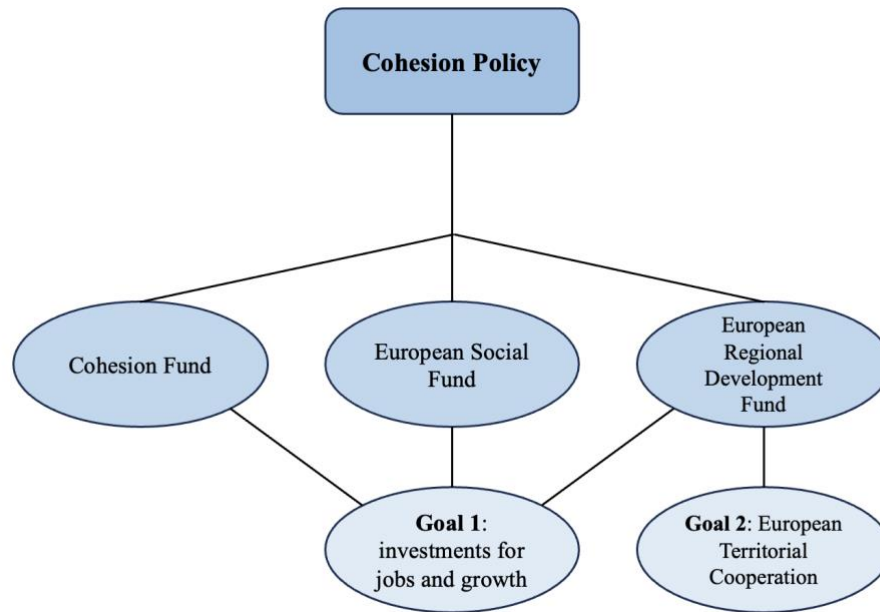


Fig. 2.3 Structure of Cohesion policy

In the specific case of cross-border projects in Interreg (strand A), which will be further analysed in Chapter III, the main goal is to overcome border barriers and obstacles. Such barriers, as discussed at the beginning of this Chapter, can have a heterogenic nature, from administrative to psychological and symbolic barriers. At the time of the inception of the program, in the early 1990s, the perdurance of such barriers was recognized as one of the main elements hindering full integration and territorial cohesion, thus leading the European Commission to formally engage in cross-border cooperation projects in the European Union framework.

This was reflected in the structure of the Interreg programs during the years, which were summarized by Medeiros (2018, p. 81) as follows:

- Interreg I focused on the preparation of border areas in view of the opening of the Single Market.
- Interreg IIA focused on building common strategies for the development of cross-border social and economic centres.
- Interreg IIIA focused on sustainable territorial development.
- Interreg IVA focused on the reduction of negative border effects, including administrative, legal and physical barriers, and strengthening mutual trust and understanding.

- Interreg VA focused again on the challenges and the untapped potential of border areas and embracing cross-border cooperation as one of the key aspects of harmonious development at the EU level.

This structure highlighted how the first phases of Interreg aimed at building the basis for the creation of cooperation structures, while the more recent phases had a stronger focus on identifying and overcoming barriers and negative border effects.

2.5 Strengths and weaknesses surrounding cross-border cooperation

2.5.1 Border obstacles and negative effects

The initiation of cross-border cooperation processes in Europe – as spontaneous initiatives initiated by regional and local entities on the border like Euroregions, and as more structured processes of lobbying at the supranational level such as the efforts of the Association of the European Border Regions, the Council of Europe or the Committee of the Regions – is based on the idea that borders are obstacles that need to be overcome. This concept remained relevant when the European Union took the lead and started injecting resources into cross-border cooperation efforts; the European Territorial Cooperation idea is built on the belief that these borders should not be viewed as permanent barriers but rather as challenges that can be addressed and mitigated through cooperative efforts.

In the initial phases of cross-border cooperation in Europe, circa the 1960s, the need to address these challenges led to an effort to identify these barriers. During this period, citizens in border areas actively pointed out specific barriers that hindered cooperation and affected their day-to-day life as inhabitants of border areas (Guillermo-Ramirez, 2018, p. 27):

- Public administration and planning: different administrative structures, planning organization, and methods.
- Socioeconomic policies: taxation, social security, pensions, training, education, competition, commuting traffic, and utilities.
- Education and labour market: language training and recognition of qualifications.
- Infrastructure and environmental policies: road construction, utilities, infrastructure, and environment.

Further developments within the European Union, particularly the establishment of the Single Market and the Schengen Agreement, made the EU a suitable field for the study of the effects

of border softening. This led to intensified efforts in research and studies aimed at investigating the effects of border opening (Basboga, 2020). This research effort primarily focused on economic effects, with a particular interest in understanding the impact on regional trade. Around the 1990s, at the start of a more comprehensive policy for cross-border cooperation in the framework of regional development at the EU level, there was an increased interest in identifying barriers that were blocking full integration. These barriers were primarily classified as technical, administrative, linguistic, and cultural (Klatt and Winkler, 2020).

At the supranational level, however, an analysis of cross-border obstacles was only conducted relatively recently. Once again, it was the Council of Europe that took the initiative in conducting a comprehensive analysis of cross-border barriers (Reitel et al., 2018), taking the lead by undertaking a survey among its members in 2011. The results were published in 2013, along with an analysis and proposals on how to overcome them (Council of Europe, 2013). Border obstacles were hindering not only integration and cohesion but also the smooth realization of projects financed at the supranational level.

The European Commission followed with an initiative led by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), the ‘Cross-Border Review,’ which consisted of a study, a public consultation, and workshops with key stakeholders and was conducted from 2015 to 2017. The results were published in September 2017 via a Communication, ‘Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions’. The main border obstacles were identified in dissimilar national legislation, incongruent administrative processes, and the lack of harmonious territorial planning (European Commission, 2017a). Some legal obstacles were also identified, such as the absence or shortcomings in EU legislation or the lack of coherence and consistency among the domestic laws of EU Member States (Pucher et al., 2017).

In October 2017, the 7th Cohesion Report – a periodic assessment and reporting exercise on the Cohesion policy – was published, with a section dedicated to the territorial dimension of Cohesion policy. The Report acknowledged the perdurance of cross-border obstacles and identified them as socioeconomic disparities, physical obstacles and poor transport infrastructure, cultural and language differences, and legal and administrative obstacles (European Commission 2017b, p. 126). The most recent Report, the 8th Cohesion Report, published in 2021, heavily focused on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the performance of the Cohesion policy, and highlighted the lack of transport links and connections as a perduring obstacle to the success of cross-border cooperation projects (European Commission, 2021).

Other recent studies confirmed the perdurance of border obstacles, and the fact that regardless of cooperation efforts, they tend to persist in the same domains, especially cultural differences (Capello et al., 2018) and legal and administrative barriers (Camagni, 2019), despite the existence of the Single Market. Psychological barriers, potential disagreements among actors, and unequal distribution of power are some of the most important obstacles to the success of cooperation projects and progress towards a functioning cross-border cooperation policy (Nadalutti, 2015).

These obstacles can be summarized and connected to three essential understandings: political and societal logic, functional logic, and economic logic. The political and societal logic refers to the fact that the process of opening networks and establishing cross-border governance faces challenges at the institutional, cultural, and cognitive levels. Functional logic refers to the coordinating efforts to address legal, administrative, and technical obstacles, the resolution of which needs intervention at the individual border and national levels. Finally, the economic logic acknowledges the long-term benefits of open borders for border regions, but also that this openness needs efforts to be maintained (Reitel et al., 2018, p. 18).

2.5.2 The “added value” of cross-border cooperation

Yet, despite the difficulties in erasing or mitigating negative border effects, the positive impact of cross-border cooperation has also been widely acknowledged. The “added value” of cross-border cooperation processes impacts a variety of areas and can be summarized as follows (Guillermo-Ramirez, 2018, p. 44):

- European added value: cross-border cooperation promotes peace, freedom, security, and human rights.
- Political added value: development of European integration, subsidiarity, and cohesion.
- Institutional added value: involvement of citizens and authorities, promoting the reciprocal knowledge of neighbours and fostering long-term cooperation.
- Economic added value: mobilization of cross-border region potential, participation of a vast number of economic players, opening of the labour market and harmonization of qualifications.
- Sociocultural added value (essential for the establishment of a positive environment for businesses, trade, and services): promotion of reciprocal knowledge of cultures and languages.

The intervention of the European Union has been essential for the promotion of cross-border cooperation activities, and the importance it carries was clearly signalled when European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) was promoted as one of the main objectives of the Cohesion policy. The implementation of cross-border cooperation projects, moreover, relied heavily on the partnership principle, thus promoting the emergence of a regional territorial dimension in the European Union space and the involvement of local and regional actors in the governance frameworks. The EU does not have direct competencies for a regional policy but promotes a “stakeholder policy” approach, giving financial incentives to local actors in order to achieve regional development goals (Ruidisch, 2013).

Even without direct legal competencies, the European Union is the sole entity with the capability to envision frameworks for cooperation that span across borders and operate at various scales. At the subnational level, regional and local actors receive an incentive to engage in cross-border cooperation activities thanks to the existence of frameworks for cooperation and sources for funding, which are provided at the supranational level by the EU, especially through Interreg, thus combining a top-down with a bottom-up approach:

INTERREG can therefore be seen as an essential instrument for legitimating a supranational approach, which has become a vector of European integration by disseminating best practices of multilevel governance between the Commission, the Member States and local and regional stakeholders. The multilevel governance approach to CBC and European integration was therefore particularly strengthened [...]. (Reitel et al., p. 15)

2.6 Conclusion

Chapter II extensively explored the theory and practice of cross-border cooperation. Changes in the conceptualization of borders allow to see borders as opportunities rather than obstacles. Overcoming the barriers represented by borders was, nonetheless, the reason why in the EU territory cross-border cooperation initiatives started to flourish from the 1960s onwards. In the absence of a clear institutional framework, early cross-border cooperation initiatives were bottom-up and focused on problem-solving and regional-specific issues. Later, institutional frameworks were built to allow more or less permanent cross-border cooperation structures to be built. The Chapter discussed Euroregions, the Madrid Convention, Interreg, the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation and Macro-regional strategies.

Cross-border cooperation can create tension in the relationship between central states and their subnational entities, since the engagement of subnational authorities in cooperation activities with foreign actors can be perceived as a way to slip from the control of states’ central

authorities. Hence, cross border spaces are considered ideal spaces to observe the emergence of multilevel governance patterns, described in Chapter I. Finally, it is important to highlight the pragmatic aspect of cross border cooperation. Border areas are often faced with a number of obstacles, from administrative asymmetries to psychological barriers, and cross border cooperation represent a valuable tool not only to overcome obstacles but also to bring added value to border areas as a result of intensified contact and dissemination of best practices.

CHAPTER III: ASYMMETRIES AND THEIR EFFECT ON MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION ON THE BORDER BETWEEN ITALY AND SLOVENIA

Chapter III is built on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter I and II, namely multilevel governance and cross-border cooperation. The Chapter focuses on the cross-border cooperation structures on of the European Union internal borders, the border between Italy and Slovenia. One of the most recent borders in the European Union, this border became one of the EU's internal borders in 2004, when Slovenia completed the accession process. During time, cross-border cooperation structures emerged in the border area: the Chapter discusses the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion, the EUSAIR Macro-regional strategy, EGTC GO and the evolution of Interreg programmes in the area.

Cross-border cooperation in the area, however, is affected by structural asymmetries, notably administrative and hierarchical asymmetries that pose issue in the implementation of certain cross-border cooperation activities. Italy is a regionalized state, with regions usually involved in cross-border cooperation with Slovenia, namely Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto, having relative autonomy in conducting such activities, despite resistances from the central state. Slovenia, on the other hand, is a centralized lacks regional territorial structures other than statistical regions, which don't hold power or autonomy. The scale of the two states, with Slovenia being a small state in comparison to Italy, also plays a role in cooperation dynamics.

The question is, therefore, whether and how these asymmetries between the cooperating entities affect the emergence of multilevel governance in the area and cross-border cooperation patterns and dynamics. To gather information, I performed extended desk research on the behaviour of stakeholders at the institutional level (regional in the case of Italy and national in the case of Slovenia) in the establishment of an EGTC, the Euregio Without Borders, and in the creation

of managing structures in Interreg. Finally, building on existing literature on the topic, I performed a thematic and spatial analysis of Interreg VA, the Interreg cross-border program implemented in the area from 2014 to 2020, to check whether the hierarchical asymmetries discussed are reflected on bottom-up cooperation processes.

3.1 Brief history of the border

To start the Chapter, I am first going to provide a brief overview of the history of the border between Italy and Slovenia, which is the focus of this case study. The border has been a cause of disputes and was one of the borders crossed by the divide between Eastern communist regimes, namely Yugoslavia, and Western liberal democracies on the Italian side. This led to a history of ethnic and political tensions and made a reconciliation process necessary after the disruption of the Yugoslavian federation and the independence of Slovenia; even though, if compared to other borders in Europe crossed by the Iron Curtain, the border under scrutiny was characterised by some degree of permeability.

The territory was under Habsburg rule since 1335, while the coastal areas were under the control of the Republic of Venice, which started its expansion in the region in the 12th century. The formal delineation of borders between Austrian and Venetian territories was established during the Diet of Worms in 1521, through an agreement between Emperor Charles V and Doge Leonardo Loredan, and the “cartographic” demarcation of the border was established. After Napoleon’s conquest of the North of Italy and the fall of the Republic of Venice, with the Treaty of Campoformio, signed in 1797, also the territories previously dominated by the Republic fell under the Austrian rule.

The border underwent minor modifications during the centuries following its establishment. The most important changes occurred after Italy’s signing of the London Pact in 1915, which established a territorial expansion of the Kingdom of Italy, including towards territories inhabited by Slovenian population, i.e. Görz, a large portion of the Carniola province, and the Primorska littoral area. At the end of World War I, diplomatic attempts at the definition of the border between the Kingdom of Italy and the newly created Kingdom of the Serbs, the Croats and the Slovenians (Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929 on) were disrupted by the occupation of the city of Fiume/Rijeka. The dispute resulted in the Treaty of Rapallo of 1920, and a quarter of the Slovenian population was incorporated in Italy’s newly acquired territories (Bufon and Minghi, 2000).

While the Yugoslavian authorities were required to establish protection measures for the Italian minority population, Italy had no such obligation towards the Slavic minority in its territory. This led to a forced and at time violent assimilation and “Italianization” process of the Slovenian minority, which intensified after Mussolini’s raise to power and contributed to ethnic distrust and divide in the area (Nadalutti, 2015).

During World War II, the area underwent intense warfare and changes of rule. In 1941, Italy initiated an invasion campaign towards Yugoslavia, leading to the arrival of the Italian army in Ljubljana. However, after Mussolini's ousting in 1943, the Nazi army occupied the area, which immediately prompted the creation of intense partisan activity aimed at liberating the area from Nazi control. In 1945, communist Yugoslavian forces led by Tito reached Trieste and liberated the city. Communist Yugoslavian rule was established over Trieste for 42 days, marked by violent events, including the tragic *foibe* phenomenon and the exodus of the Italian-speaking population from Istria and the Slovene littoral, resulting in significant changes in the ethnic composition of the region (Nadalutti, 2015).

The aftermath led to a dispute over the “Free Territory of Trieste”. After Tito’s troops withdrew, the territory was divided into Zone A, controlled by Anglo-American forces, encompassing Trieste up to the city of Muggia/Milje, and Zone B, controlled by Communist Yugoslavian troops, extending to the city of Cittanova/Novigrad. The situation froze for almost a decade, until 1954, when the London Memorandum made the demarcation between the two zones the international boundary between Italy and Slovenia: zone A was granted to Italy, while zone B was assigned to Yugoslavia. The London Memorandum incorporated protection measures for the Slovenian minority inhabiting the Italian territory.

In 1975, the Treaty of Osimo sanctioned *de jure* sovereignty over the border and mutual measures of minority protection. After Slovenia’s secession from Yugoslavia in 1991, the border came to divide the Republic of Italy and the Republic of Slovenia without changes. In 2004, Slovenia joined the European Union and in 2007 the Schengen agreement, allowing for the removal of border controls. The border closed and frontier control was briefly tightened during the Covid-19 pandemic, and normally reopened after the cessation of the emergency.

After the tense diplomatic situation at the end of World War II, the situation on the border started to normalize around the beginning of the 1950s. Starting from 1949, Italy and Yugoslavia started to sign a series of agreements that made the border rather permeable, in comparison with other territories crossed by the Iron Curtain. The agreements were primarily intended to

facilitate border crossings for farmers, granting them access to their land, in case it was situated on the opposite side of the border (Bufon, 2003). In 1955, Italy and Yugoslavia signed a bilateral agreement that allowed for citizens' border mobility, in order to facilitated easier movement between the countries, leading to increased travel for personal reasons such as family visits and errands and re-starting economic integration (Faro, 2005).

In the following decades, other cross-border cooperation activities started to be established across the border at the regional or local level. The Trigon cooperation project was established in 1965 to improve tourism and dialogue between the entities involved, which comprised Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Italy), Slovenia (Yugoslavia) and Carinthia (Austria). In 1969, the project was re-launched and re-named called Quadrigon, incorporating Croatia (Yugoslavia) (Nadalutti, 2015). Starting from the 1970s and 1980s, local initiatives were also implemented, such as the *Odprta meja - Confine aperto*, first instituted in 1981, consisting in hiking activities in the territories of Val Rosandra and Dolina Glinščice, a tradition that persists nowadays.

In 1978, the Alps-Adriatic Working Community was established, with the aim of promoting cooperation and regional development in areas such as economic development, tourism, culture, and environmental protection. Working Communities consist in structured aimed at promoting cross-border cooperation, similar to Euroregions, but with a focus on specific thematic areas, a specific involvement of regional and local authorities and organizations, and usually a less formal institutional structure. The Alps-Adriatic Working Community, an entity without legal personality, included members from Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Austria, Hungary, and Germany and Switzerland as active observers.

Starting from the 1990s, EU-promoted cross-border cooperation projects, namely Interreg, started to be implemented in the area; after the independence of Slovenia and its application to become a European Union member, pre-accession instruments were also activated.

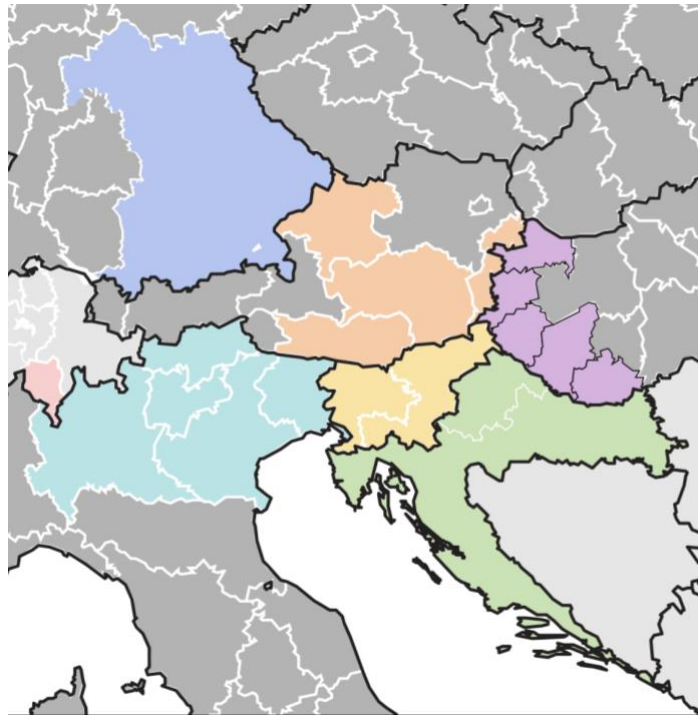


Fig. 3.1 The Alpe-Adria Working Community (own elaboration). Founding members comprised Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, the Region of Veneto, the Socialist Republics of Slovenia and Croatia, the Austrian Landers of Carinthia, Northern Austria, Styria, and, as active observers, the Land of Salzburg and the Bavarian Free State. These members were joined a few years later by the Land of Burgenland (Austria), the regions of Trentino-Alto Adige and Lombardy (Italy), the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas, Somogy, Zala, Baranya (Hungary) and Canton Ticino (Switzerland). (Nadalutti, 2015, p. 11)

3.2 Structures of cooperation on the border

Over time, cross-border cooperation structures started to be established on the border. Many cross-border cooperation activities in the area don't rely on structured cooperation but are based on business or municipal bilateral relations. In this section, I will analyze cross-border cooperation structures present at the European level and previously detailed in Chapter II, namely Euroregions, Macro-regional strategies, EGCTs and Interreg. EGCTs and Interreg will be described in more detail in successive sections.

3.2.1 Euroregions – the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion

At present, there are no Euroregions that include the border between Italy and Slovenia. Some municipalities of Slovenia were, however, involved in the foundation and the establishment of the Adriatic Ionian Euroregion. The Adriatic Ionian Euroregion was founded in 2006 in Pula, Croatia, and currently, its members are regional and local entities belonging to six countries – Italy, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Greece and Albania. The Euroregion was established to further cooperation in the areas of cultural heritage and environmental protection, transport links, economic development, and future EU enlargements. The Slovenian

municipalities of Izola, Koper and Piran have been members of the Euroregion. However, in 2018, only Izola was still participating (Hajdarović, 2018), and currently, no Slovenian regional or local entity is listed among the members of the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion.

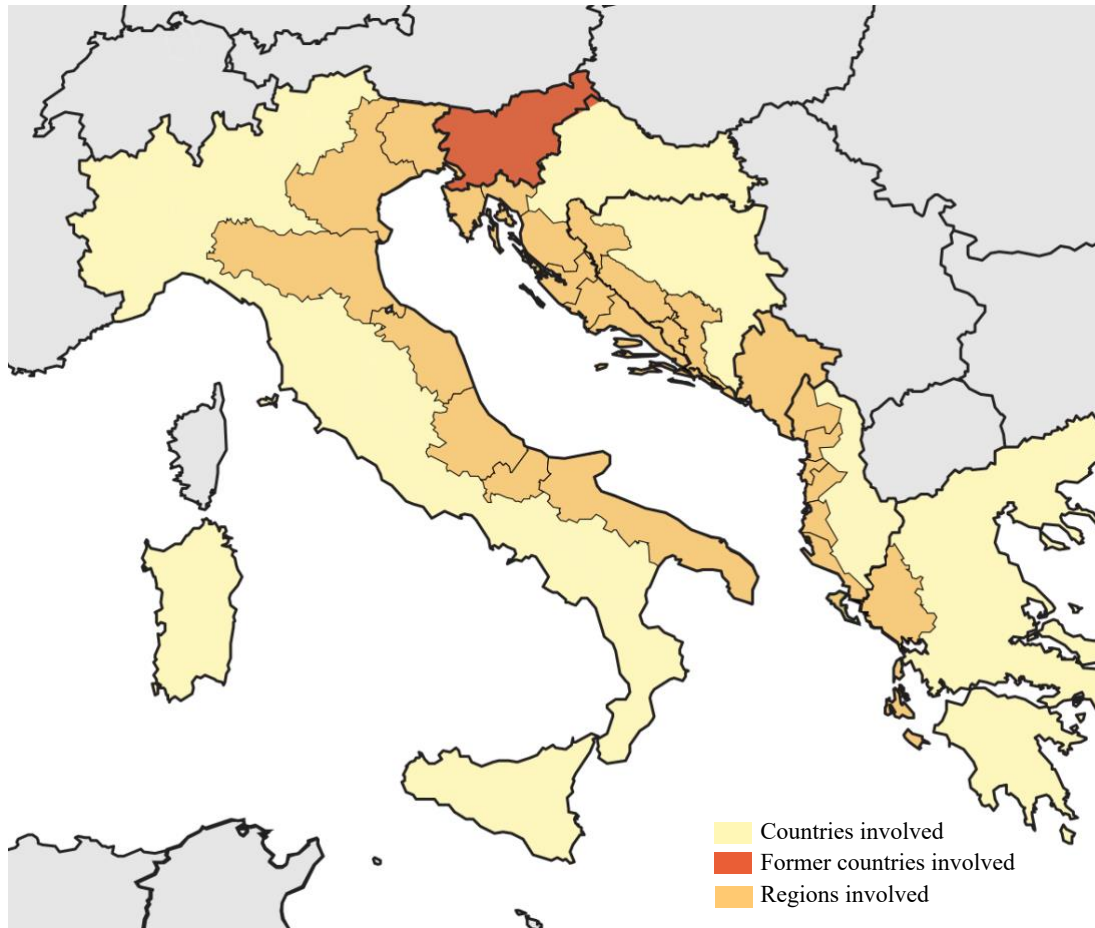


Fig. 3.2 The Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion

3.2.2 Macro-regional strategies: EUSAIR

The area of the border is encompassed in the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), the third Macro-regional strategy to be created by the European Commission and endorsed by the European Council. It focuses on cooperation and sustainable development among countries and regions bordering the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. The EUSAIR was officially launched in 2014 and focuses on four thematic pillars: Blue Growth (maritime and marine issues), Connecting the Region (transport and energy connectivity), Environmental Quality (environmental protection and climate change adaptation), and Sustainable Tourism (tourism development and cultural heritage).

The strategy involves collaboration between EU Member States (Italy, Greece, Slovenia, and Croatia) as well as non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia) that are part of the Adriatic-Ionian region. The region is treated as a functional area, and EUSAIR treats the marine and coastal areas and the terrestrial surfaces as interconnected systems. The Adriatic-Ionian region gained particular importance after Croatia joined the EU in 2013, with the Single Market gaining more access to the sea, making ports and their hinterlands on the eastern coast of the Adriatic new hubs for the movement of people and goods. Moreover, the region includes non-EU Members that initiated the path to accession to the EU; EUSAIR is also seen as a tool for increased cooperation in view of their accession.



Fig. 3.3 EUSAIR

3.2.3 EGTCs: *EGTC GO*

Currently, the only European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation on the border between Italy and Slovenia is EGTC GO, a “micro-EGTC” which comprises the municipalities of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba. Established in 2011, it has a legal personality under Italian public law. EGTC GO was established to counteract negative border effects on a strictly local and municipal level. Border municipalities chose the possibility offered by Regulation (EC) no. 1082/2006 to perform joint operations with a rather unique approach.

The territories of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba are, in fact, in strict continuity, without significant geographical barriers in their urban area, and constituted a single conglomerate before being divided at the end of World War II. As a former inhabitant of the city, it is, in fact, sometimes puzzling to think that houses, graveyards, and even the train station were suddenly on “one” or “the other” side of a border that previously didn’t simply exist. The EGTC was selected as the only legal instrument that allowed for the creation of a shared strategy for urban development, operating across the area regardless of municipal borders, and representing equally the three communities, as if the three cities were a single settlement (EGTC GO website).

EGTC GO is a rather unique example in the EGTC landscape. EGTC GO was granted by the municipal council of the three cities the authorization to choose which country’s laws will be applied when conducting procurement processes for infrastructure projects funded by the EU. Moreover, EGTC GO has the authority to directly carry out shared projects in both Slovenia and Italy, without being constrained by national or administrative borders. Unlike the three founding municipalities, which are still bound by national and administrative borders within their respective territories, EGTC GO has the ability to invest across the shared territory of the cities, facilitating cooperation and development in the cross-border region (EGTC GO website).

EGTC GO can therefore be considered an example of multilevel governance and of how EGTCs can promote the emergence of multilevel governance structures in the European Union, where local authorities resort to instruments granted at the supranational level to pursue their own objectives without the burdens imposed by their national authorities. It is also an example of cross-border cooperation as defined by Perkmann, since it is concerned with practical problem solving, it involves local public authorities, and is concerned with “low policy” matters.

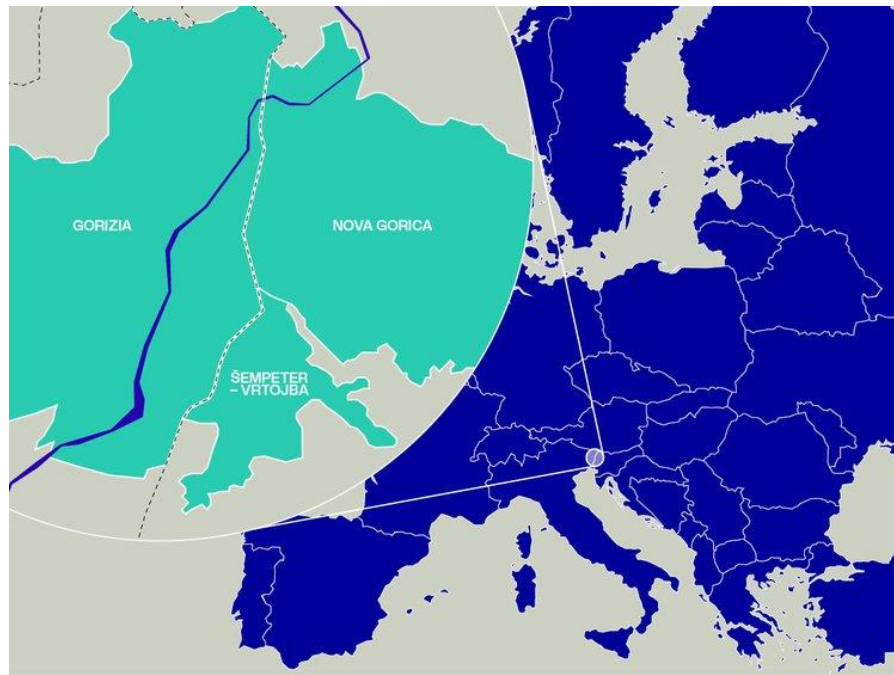


Fig. 3.3 EGTC GO. Source: EGTC GO website

Around the same years of the creation of the Alps-Adriatic Euroregion, there was an attempt to involve Slovenia in the creation of a EGTC in the same area, involving Italy, Austria and Slovenia. Eventually, the EGTC Euregio Witout Borders (Euregio Senza Confini/Euregio Ohne Grenzen) was created involving Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the region of Carinthia in Austria, while Slovenia eventually refused to participate. This will be discussed later in the Chapter.

3.2.4 Interreg

After Slovenia's independence from Yugoslavia, new financial tools for cross-border cooperation sponsored by the European Union became available. PHARE was established in 1994, TACIS in 1996, and shortly after, in 1997, the area of the border between Italy and Slovenia became eligible for funding under the Interreg II programme. There was, however, little legal and procedural coordination between Interreg and Phare, which complicated the development of joint action. Moreover, there was an asymmetry between the stakeholders involved, with Italy having strong regional actors, experienced in Interreg cooperation projects, and Slovenia lacking a regional level and having little experience, which could only rely on the support of the ministerial level and of the Slovenian Agency for Regional Development, a governmental body founded in 1999 by Slovenian authorities (Nadalutti, 2015).

The border continued to be included in the successive rounds of Interreg. Interreg IIIA, IVA and VA were implemented; currently, Interreg VIA is ongoing. The areas involved at the NUTS 3 level slightly differed; for example, during Interreg IIIA the Province of Rovigo was involved, and in Interreg IVA also Provinces belonging to the Emilia-Romagna Region (Ferrara, Ravenna). At the same time, from Interreg V, the scope was narrowed, with only the Province of Venice being involved from the Veneto Region (KEEP.eu). In the programming period that will be later analysed, Interreg VA, the territories involved included 5 Italian NUTS 3-level regions (provinces of Venice, Udine, Pordenone, Gorizia and Trieste) and 5 Slovenian statistical regions (statistical regions of Primorsko-notranjska – Littoral-Inner Carniola, Osrednjeslovenska – Central Slovenia, Gorenjska – Upper Carniola, Obalno-kraška – Coastal-Karst, and Goriška).

Interreg IIIA
Italy: Gorizia, Venezia, Trieste, Udine, Pordenone, Padova, Rovigo Slovenia: Goriška, Obalno-kraška
Interreg IVA
Italy: Gorizia, Venezia, Trieste, Ferrara, Padova, Udine, Ravenna, Rovigo, Treviso, Pordenone Slovenia: Gorenjska, Obalno-kraška, Goriška, Osrednjeslovenska, Primorsko-notranjska
Interreg VA/ Interreg VIA
Italy: Venezia, Udine, Pordenone, Gorizia and Trieste Slovenia: Primorsko-notranjska, Osrednjeslovenska, Gorenjska, Obalno-kraška, Goriška

Table 3.1 Interreg A programmes with involvement of both Italy and Slovenia and their evolution

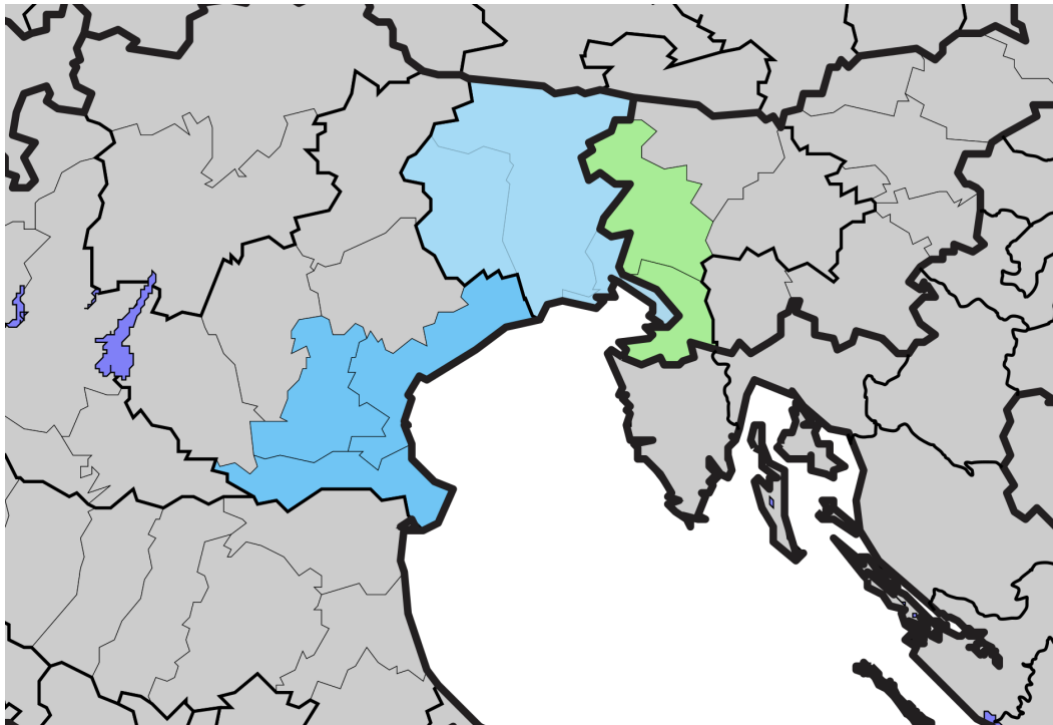


Fig. 3.4 Territories involved in Interreg IIIA

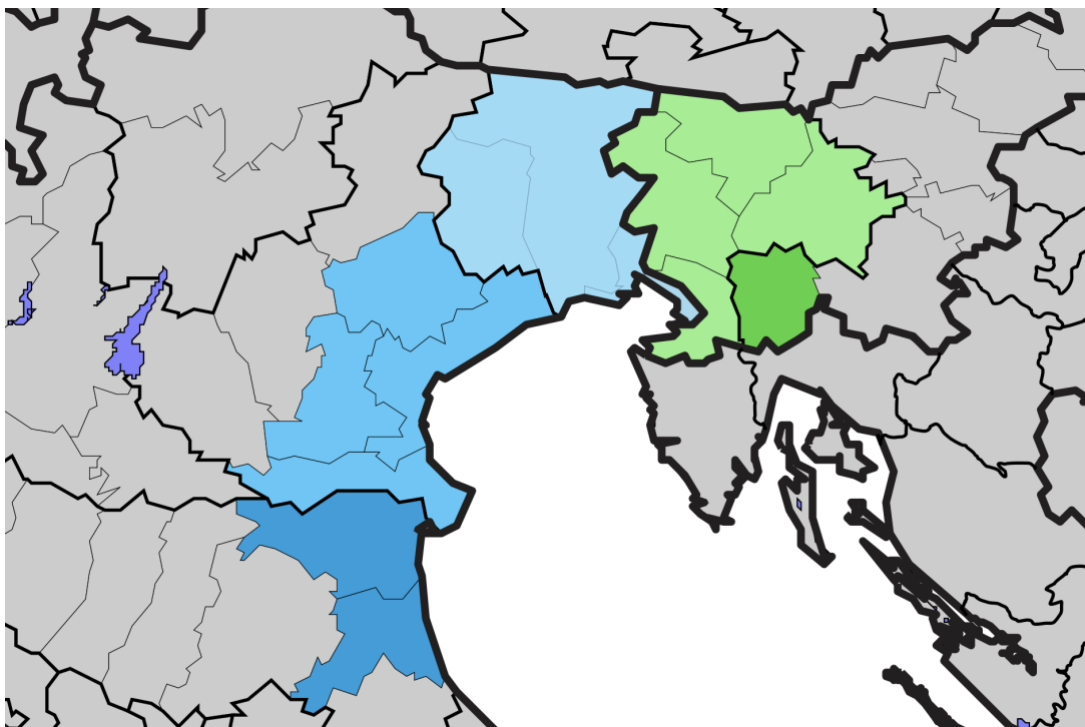


Fig. 3.5 Territories involved in Interreg IVA

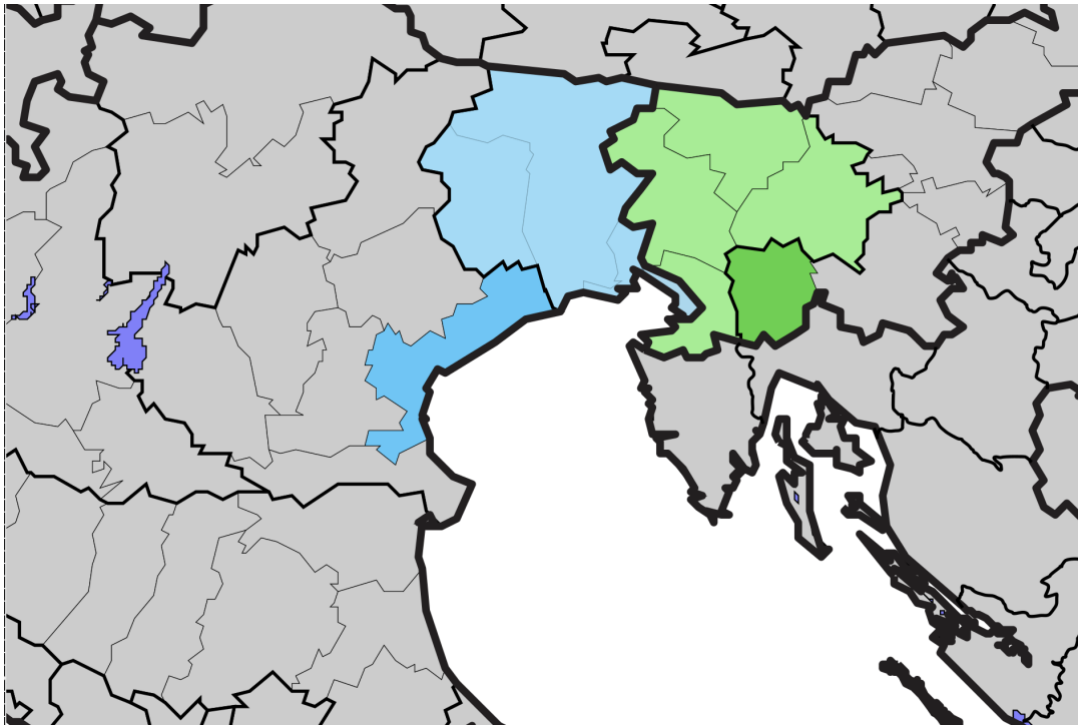


Fig. 3.6 Territories involved in Interreg VA and Interreg VIA

Since the division of the programme into strands A and B, the border has also been involved in transnational projects, encompassing larger areas. Since the introduction of macro-regional strategies, strand B of Interreg has usually been the main source of funding for the projects implemented to pursue their objectives. In particular, Interreg B Adriatic-Ionian (ADRION) and Euro-Mediterranean (MED) are the main sources of funding of both EUSAIR and the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion projects.

Interreg IIIB	
Alpine space	EU: Austria, France, Germany, Italy Non-EU: Slovenia , Switzerland
Interreg IVB	
Alpine space	EU: Austria, France, Germany, Italy , Slovenia Non-EU: Liechtenstein, Switzerland
Central Europe	EU: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy , Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia Non-EU: Ukraine
South East Europe	EU: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy , Romania, Slovenia , Slovakia

	Non-EU: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine
Mediterranean	EU: Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy , Malta, Portugal, Slovenia , Spain, United Kingdom, Non-EU: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro
Interreg VB	
Alpine space	EU: Austria, France, Germany, Italy , Slovenia Non-EU: Liechtenstein, Switzerland
Central Europe	EU: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy , Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia
Mediterranean	EU: Croatia, Cyprus, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Italy , Malta, Portugal, Slovenia , Spain Non-EU: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro
Adriatic-Ionian	EU: Croatia, Greece, Italy , Slovenia , Non-EU: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia
Interreg VI B	
Alpine space	EU: Austria, France, Germany, Italy , Slovenia Non-EU: Liechtenstein, Switzerland
Central Europe	EU: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy , Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia
Euro-Mediterranean	EU: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy , Malta, Portugal, Slovenia , Spain Non-EU: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia
Adriatic-Ionian	EU: Croatia, Greece, Italy , Slovenia Non-EU: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, San Marino, Serbia

Table 3.2 Interreg B programmes with involvement of both Italy and Slovenia and their evolution

3.3 Different levels of centralization and regionalization, hierarchical asymmetries, and their impact on multilevel governance and cross-border cooperation: the case of Italy and Slovenia

3.3.1 Hierarchical asymmetries

Although the area under scrutiny, i.e. the border between Italy and Slovenia, is quite active in terms of cross-border cooperation and can rely on a vast array of tools and funding opportunities, it is affected by a “hierarchical asymmetry”, which can hinder the success of such cooperation efforts. Italy and Slovenia present, in fact, significant differences in their institutional structure; further layers of complexity are added when considering the regional actors involved: on the Italian side, the regions involved are mostly Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the latter being a “special statute” region within the country, thus enjoying a higher level of autonomy and competencies compared to Veneto. Slovenia, on the other hand, lacks comparable competencies at the regional level. These characteristics are interesting from a multilevel governance point of view, but significantly hindered the cross-border cooperation processes in the cases of the creation of the EGTC Without Borders and in the managing structures of Interreg IVA.

Hierarchical asymmetry is defined by Thomas Lúnden as follows:

One of the major, and inevitable, obstacles is the “hierarchical asymmetry,” (Lundén 2009: 135) the fact that the legal authority at a certain level in the domestic hierarchy does not match the authority of the neighbouring trans-border authority at the corresponding, or almost corresponding, level, and this is complicated by the fact that even domestic political hierarchies might be poorly coordinated (Rosenau 1969). (Lúnden, 2018)

This “mismatch” is clearly evident in the situation of Italy and Slovenia. Italy is a rather decentralized, quasi-federal state, where regions have competencies in a vast array of areas and elect a regional council and president. Among the 20 Italian regions, 5 of them have additional autonomy and competencies, including Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the region that shares the border with Slovenia. Slovenia, on the other hand, is a firmly centralized state, where regions don’t hold much power or significance other than for statistical purposes. Elisabetta Nadalutti, in her book “The Effects of Europeanization on the Integration Process in the Upper Adriatic Region” (2015), explored the effects that this asymmetry has in the implementation of cross-border cooperation projects, in the consequences over the behaviour of subnational authorities and in the resulting multilevel governance structures.

3.3.2 Institutional structures in Italy and Slovenia

In Italy, regions hold competencies across different areas, including healthcare, education, transportation, environment and natural resources, economic development, culture and tourism, social services, urban planning and development, and civil protection and emergency management. Special statute regions, such as Friuli-Venezia Giulia, have additional autonomy in the legislative, administrative and financial domains. The central state still holds the power over foreign policy, but the regions were granted, in 2001, the possibility to make treaties with other states (although they need to inform the state, that can block the procedure if it interferes with national foreign policy) (Nadalutti, 2015). Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto, the two Italian regions engaged in cross-border cooperation with Slovenia, also have active and well-functioning representation offices in Brussels.

Slovenia, like most states of Central and Eastern Europe, is a centralized state, and a regionalization process hasn't yet taken place. Slovenia was required to undergo a regionalization process by the European Commission, as it was believed it would be the best way to apply the subsidiarity principle. However, with the implementation of the Phare and Interreg programmes, power was decentralized towards the municipal rather than the subnational level. Slovenia's regionalization plan, presented in 2000, was rejected by the European Commission as the subdivision proposed by Slovenia was considered unbalanced (Nadalutti, 2015).

Slovenia is currently divided into two statistical NUTS 2 level regions, Western Slovenia/Zahodna Slovenija, which includes the capital Ljubljana, and Eastern Slovenia/Vzhodna Slovenija, and 12 statistical NUTS 3 regions. They were introduced for analytical purposes and don't have any political representation or operative powers; they are mainly used for statistics by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Eurostat and Government Office and Institute for Macro-Economic Research and Development. This means that Slovenia has basically only two administrative levels, the state and the municipalities (Lipott, 2014).

Thus, it is the state that deals with policies at EU level and holds authority over cross-border cooperation activities (Andreou and Bache, 2010). Municipalities have the capacity to engage in cross-border activities and often do so, sometimes with excellent results, as exemplified by the engagement of Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba in the EGTC GO. This example, however, is an exception rather than the norm, and Slovenian municipalities can't be compared

with Italian regions in terms of resources, capacities, experience and bureaucratic framework: “Slovenian municipal and national officers [...] feel to be ‘weaker’ vis-à-vis their western SNAs counterparts which are perceived as stronger actors, able to rely on a longer cross-border cooperation experience and thus able to make a better use of EU tools” (Nadalutti, 2015, p. 129).

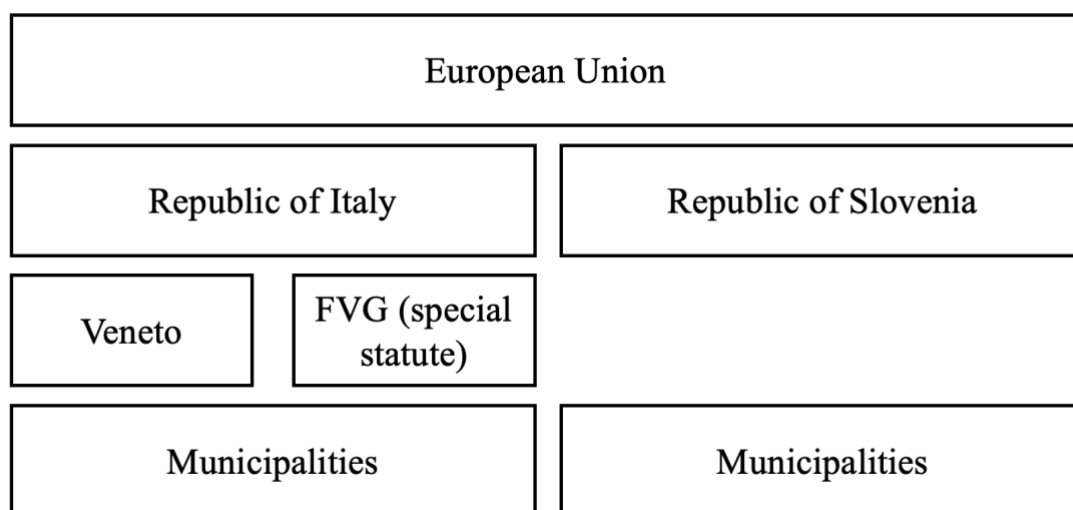


Fig. 3.7 Institutional mapping of states considered

3.3.3 Hierarchical asymmetries affecting cross-border cooperation: the case of EGTC Euregio Without Borders

The negative effect of these asymmetries emerged during the creation of the EGTC Euregio Without Borders. The aim of the creation of this cross-border entity was to increase cooperation in the Alps-Adriatic area, and came from the engagement of Jörg Haider, the governor of the Austrian region Carinthia, Riccardo Illy and Giancarlo Galan, the presidents of respectively Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto. The first steps for the creation of a cross-border cooperation structure initially envisioned the creation of an Euroregion gathering the territories of Carinthia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Slovenia, and Istria and Primorje-Gorski in Croatia, and were taken around the years 2004-2006. A first “Declaration of intent” was signed in 2005 in Villa Manin and was sent to Slovenian authorities (Lipott, 2014).

In the meantime, the EGTC tool became available, and a second meeting took place, again in Villa Manin in 2007. A “working group” was established to explore the possibility to create an EGTC headquartered in Trieste, followed by the signing of a Trilateral Protocol of Cooperation

between Carinthia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto. The statute and the agreement for the EGTC Euregio Without Borders was eventually signed in 2012, and shortly thereafter was approved by national authorities. In 2013 the statute was approved and the EGTC started operating in 2014 (Lipott, 2014). Slovenia and Croatia, although originally included in the project, eventually didn't join the EGTC.

The absence of Slovenia from the EGTC leads to considerations about multilevel governance in cross-border cooperation and the hierarchical asymmetries described above. Issue started to rise after the signing of the first Declaration of intent on both the Slovenian and the Italian side. The Declaration was sent by Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia to central state authorities for approval. However, Department of Regional Affairs of the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not sign the declaration, arguing that Slovenia lacked government bodies or agencies that have authority over territorial matters within the country, and therefore, the two Italian regions were not permitted to sign bilateral agreements with Slovenia. Italy, in fact did not ratify the added protocols of the Madrid Convention that would have enabled it (Nadalutti, 2015).

Italy has, in fact, tried to maintain its 'gatekeeping' role over the empowering of its sub-national authorities, especially in foreign policy matters. There is a rather uncollaborative and suspicious attitude from the central governments to the shift in power towards the sub-national level. This emerges clearly in the engagement of active sub-national actors, such as Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto, in "foreign policy" and cross-border cooperation activities. Other than the missed ratification of the added protocols of the Madrid Convention, Italian authorities were reluctant to apply the EGTC regulation.

Moreover, the process of authorization for the creation of EGTC in Italy is extremely burdensome from a bureaucratic point of view, requiring the involvement of a great number of state actors – the Presidency of the Council of the Ministers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Economy and Finances, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Department for Community Policies and the Department for Regional Affairs (Ibidem).

In addition, political and legal consideration are further elements that explain the state's hesitation on the application of these cross-border cooperation structures. One of this is the engagement of regional actors with extra-EU countries, which is also the explanation of the missed participation of Croatia in the EGTC Euregio Without Borders project: Croatia was, at

the time, a third country, since it joined the EU in 2013. Moreover, while the direct engagement of Italian region with third countries, especially with the neighbouring Western Balkans, would be beneficial, it would also represent an official recognition of regional foreign policy activities (Ibidem).

A second issue comes with the institutional set up offered from the creation of EGTCs. In EGTCs, all members are equals, and EGTCs can manage transnational projects within the EU legal framework. States can join EGTCs in their entirety: “this means that states and SNAs can be on an equal level within this new legal institution” (Ivi, p. 125). In the case of the EGTC Euregio Without Borders, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the city of Trieste would serve as the location where the office of the EGTC would be established: “By saying that ‘all actors are equal’, it is implied that Friuli-Venezia-Giulia puts itself on the same level as national ones, given that Slovenia would join the EGTC as a whole” (Ivi, p. 127). Even among the regions, moreover, there was some tension between Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia for the protagonist role in the EGTC, showing an attitude of competitiveness rather than unquestioned collaboration (Ibidem).

Similar reluctance in joining the EGTC was showed on the Slovenian side, as joining the EGTC as a state and being considered equal to the other members would signify being on the same level of sub-national authorities: “[...] Friuli-Venezia-Giulia would play a ‘strategic’ role, with the city of Trieste-Trst as the ‘capital’ of this Euroregion-EGTC. Slovenia, which would enter the EGTC as a ‘unitary state’, would hardly accept that the official capital of the EGTC was going to be a regional capital. Apparently, the Slovenian state perceived the possibility of losing political ‘prestige’ in officially recognizing Trieste-Trst as Joint Managing Authority of the EGTC” (Ivi, p. 133). Slovenia thus suggested Ljubljana as the seat for EGTC’s office, but eventually refrained from joining the project, which was set between same-level Italian and Austrian subnational authorities.

From a multilevel governance perspective, this case shows how Italy tries to keep its gate-keeping role over its sub-national authorities, and perceives the sharing of power and authority with actors at lower governmental levels as a zero-sum game. On the other hand, Italian regions are willing to use European Union cross-border cooperation tools to gain more autonomy and “state-like” status, as exemplified by the attempt of Friuli-Venezia Giulia to be considered at the same level as a small state like Slovenia. On the Slovenian side, national authorities were reluctant to be considered on the same level as a sub-national authority, perceiving a lack of prestige and authority in their role as a state.

3.3.4 Hierarchical asymmetries affecting cross-border cooperation: the case of Interreg

Nadalutti also studied similar tensions in the implementation of Community Initiatives, namely Interreg IV. Since Interreg IIIA, Friuli-Venezia Giulia is the Joint Managing Authority (JMA) of the Interreg programs, with Trieste as headquarter. Friuli-Venezia Giulia was reappointed in this role also in the successive generations (IV, V) of Interreg, and is currently JMA of the Interreg VI Italy-Slovenia program. Friuli-Venezia Giulia, as JMA, is able to operate independently from the central state government, and the city of Trieste is the managing centre of all cross-border cooperation activities, representing equally all actors involved. This equal representation in functions, however, was not reflected – at least for the programming period 2007-2013 – by an equal representation in the personnel, which was composed of Italian employees (Ibidem).

Again, there was a direct jurisdictional “equalization” between a region (Friuli-Venezia Giulia) and a state (Slovenia): “This significant finding leads to the conclusion that actors, which belong to different levels, have been to some extent ‘equalized’ to the same level in dealing with this Programme. [...] What comes to the fore is a sort of confusion, an overlapping of different jurisdictions where sub-state jurisdictions claim to be comparable to national jurisdictions” (Ivi, p. 122).

Nadalutti describes the role of Slovenia as a “dual” role in cross-border cooperation programs like Interreg, as it behaves both as a ‘state’ and as a ‘region’. Lacking a regional level, Slovenia participates in Interreg as a state. While Friuli-Venezia Giulia, as the JMA, deals directly with the European Commission at the supranational level, Slovenia dealt with the three Italian regions involved – Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Emilia Romagna – at the ‘regional’ level in matters concerning the expenditure of budgets, but it also dealt with Italy at the ‘national’ level in matters concerning national budgets. Finally, in the implementation of the projects, the Slovenian central state deals directly with municipalities, without a regional “meso-level”: “The asymmetrical network arrangement, which connects Slovenia to both the Italian regional and national levels, creates quite a few unbalanced relationships and jurisdictional con-fusion” (Ivi, p. 132).

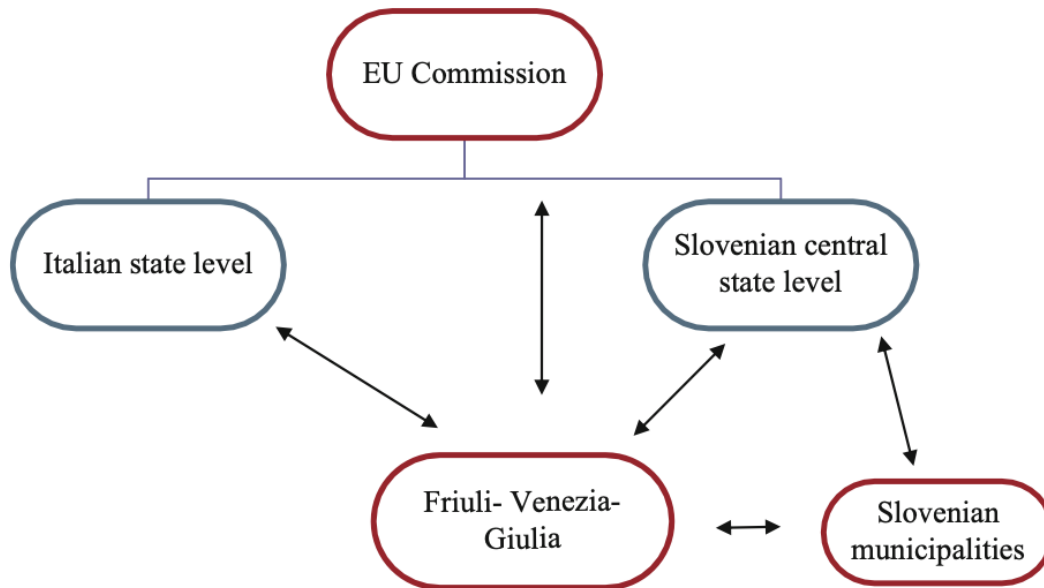


Fig. 3.8 Interrelationship between national, sub-national and supra-national actors in the border Italy-Slovenia. Source: Nadalutti (2015), p. 131

This leads to the following conclusion:

“[...] these findings provide evidence that a watershed has occurred due to cross-border cooperation activities in conceiving governance. It is apparent that the clear-cut division between the prerogatives due to a ‘state’ and to a ‘region’ has been blurred, and the ‘traditional’ way of thinking about ‘the state’ is ‘revolutionized’. On one hand, a ‘sovereign nation-state’ (Slovenia) plays both the role of a state and a ‘region’. On the other hand, a powerful region (Friuli-Venezia-Giulia) aims to behave as a ‘quasi-state’, to develop foreign relationships and to become a direct interlocutor of the EU.” (Ivi, p. 132)

In terms of the multilevel governance theoretical framework, the type of multilevel governance that seems to emerge in the border area between Italy and Slovenia is a Type 1 multilevel governance, with states intending to preserve their ‘gate-keeping’ role in terms of prestige and preserving control over their sub-national authorities, especially when they engage in cooperation with foreign actors.

Hierarchical asymmetry and the different administrative set-ups and distribution of power play a role in the tensions that emerge when actors at different governmental levels engage in cross-border cooperation activities: in the case of the EGTC Euregio Without Borders, the final set-up of the EGTC involves actors at comparable levels, namely Carinthia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto. EGTC GO, a successful example of cooperation on the border, similarly involves actors at the same level, namely municipalities, with a clear aim and a problem-solving oriented mandate.

3.4 Case study: Interreg VA (2014-2020)

The objective of this section is to analyse the behaviour “on the ground” of stakeholders involved in Interreg, in particular Interreg VA, and see whether the institutional mismatch of Italy and Slovenia has some effect on the actual participation in and implementation of projects on the ground. Participation in Interreg projects is considered a form of bottom-up mobilization, and the fundamental idea behind the program itself is based on a best practice, “learning from good examples” approach (Chilla and Lambracht, 2023). Analysing the cooperation dynamics and of a specific Interreg program in the border considered could result in additional information on whether the hierarchical asymmetries discussed above have visible effects in the projects implemented.

3.4.1 Methodology

This analysis is built on previous research works conducted on Interreg cross-border cooperation projects aimed at analysing cooperation dynamics between borders with administrative asymmetries during the programming period 2007-2013. The dynamics of cross-border cooperation between France and Spain was analysed by Feliu et al. (2013); building on the methodology used, Jańczak and Martín Uceda (2018) analysed the border between Germany and Poland, while a comparative study of the borders between Austria and Italy, Spain and Portugal, Spain and France and Poland and Germany was conducted building on the results of the previous analyses (Castañer et al., 2018). For the use of the KEEP database, the methodological path follows some aspects of the study conducted by Chilla and Lambracht (2023), who analysed the patterns of cooperation across the German border in Interreg VA.

The source of data used is the KEEP portal (keep.eu). The KEEP portal is a platform designed to facilitate access to information about projects funded by EU programs and initiatives; it offers a comprehensive database of projects, including details about their objectives, partners, funding, and outcomes. The Interreg VA program was selected as it was concluded in 2020, therefore is the most recent concluded program, and has relatively complete data on KEEP, gathering information from 55 out of 58 (94.83%) projects implemented. Where information was lacking or unclear, it was completed through desktop research on the program website (ita-slo.eu) and on the websites of the specific projects and partners involved.

I also performed a mapping exercise to display cartographically certain aspects of the patterns of cooperation. The maps present in this section and the other maps I elaborated for the other sections on this Chapter were created by downloading map templates and manipulating them

with a simple graphic software, Inkscape, which is able to process and elaborate svg (vectorial) files, and the map tool of Microsoft PowerPoint. I don't claim for exact maps accuracy in this exercise, as the tools utilized are rather rudimentary; they are simply used as a graphic tool to better showcase the geographical distribution of resources and partners.

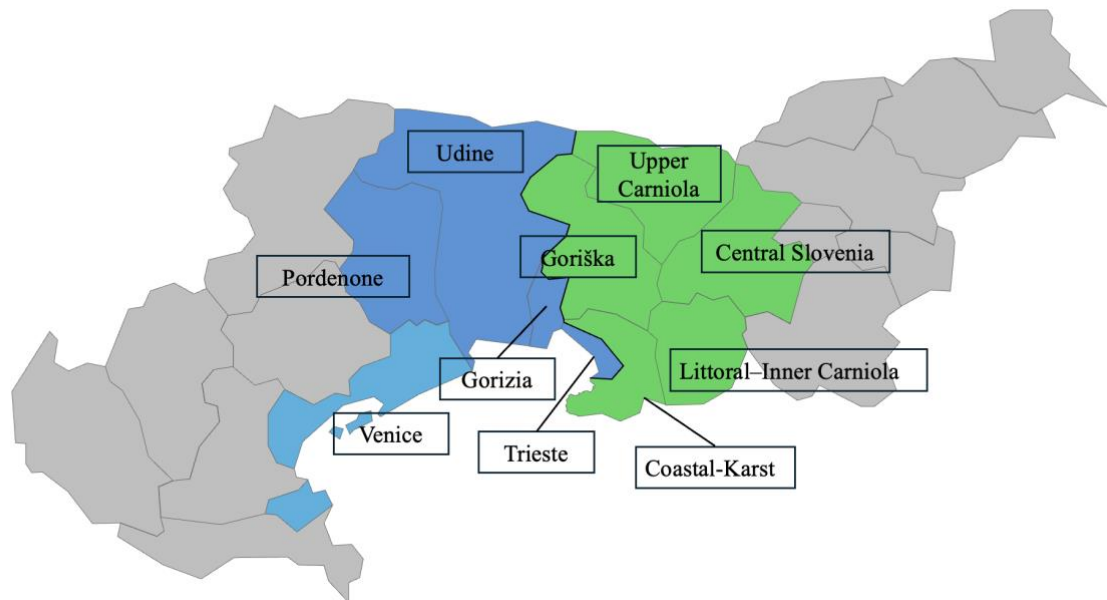


Fig. 3.9 Map template used

Building on the results of the studies conducted for the 2007-2013 Interreg A programmes on the borders mentioned above, the analysis will focus on the Interreg A programme on the border between Italy and Slovenia during the programming period 2014-2020, and aims at exploring the thematic composition of the projects, as well as commenting on the spatial distribution and other characteristics of the leaders and project partners.

The thematic composition and distribution of funding suggest the area where the stakeholders involved identify a need or an adverse border effects. Stakeholders seek European funding to tackle those needs, i.e. financial instruments not provided elsewhere that can facilitate cross-border the resolution of perceived issues. Often border regions are peripheral, rural and underdeveloped areas with respect to the core of the states, but this is not the case because the area is rather economically developed. Therefore, these funding-seeking activities can be rather seen mainly as tools to respond to specific cross-border needs rather than uniquely as a way to address underdevelopment (Castañer et al., 2018).

The geographical distribution of the project leaders and the projects partners is, on the other hand, a way to analyse the structural imbalances and administrative asymmetries of the countries divided by the border involves. In the studies mentioned, the border divided countries with different level of (de)centralization, e.g. decentralized Spain vs centralized France, centralized Poland vs federal Germany. In the border considered, such structural asymmetries were reflected on the spatial distribution of leaders and partners, which highlighted that one part of the border was more active than the other both in terms of leaders and partners (Castañer et al., 2018, p. 85). Moreover, cooperation was overall denser in the border area, with a larger intensity of project being conducted by stakeholders in the immediate proximity of the border.

The role of project leaders is particularly important as they have more responsibilities in terms of project management, coordination, financial and risk management and stakeholder engagement: “[they] not only have more administrative responsibilities regarding project organization and management, they also represent more dynamic structures equipped with resources and representing (pro)active attitudes” (Ivi, p. 82). The following analysis aims at exploring the cooperation dynamics of another border, also characterized by administrative asymmetries.

3.4.2 Thematic analysis

The Interreg VA program was structured around four priority axes, each sub-divided into thematic objectives, specific objectives and investment priorities. The priority axes were:

- Priority Axis 1: Promoting innovation capacities for a more competitive area.
- Priority Axis 2: Cooperating for implementation of low carbon strategies and action plans.
- Priority Axis 3: Protecting and promoting natural and cultural resources.
- Priority Axis 4: Enhancing capacity building and cross-border governance (ita-slo.eu).

The categories of the objectives and of the investment priorities are, however, quite vast and difficult to categorize; the projects in the KEEP database are classified according to one, two or three out of 42 themes. Therefore, I based the thematic analysis on a different categorization, based on data from the KEEP database and desktop research on the Interreg and projects

websites. The categorization proposed follows the one used by Chilla and Lambracht⁴ (p. 7) in their analysis, and refers to the following categories:

- Energy
- Society and culture
- Spatial development and transport
- Agriculture and forestry
- Environment and climate change
- Governance
- Economy and research
- Health
- Tourism

To facilitate the analysis and the reading of the results, I assigned each project to only one thematic category.

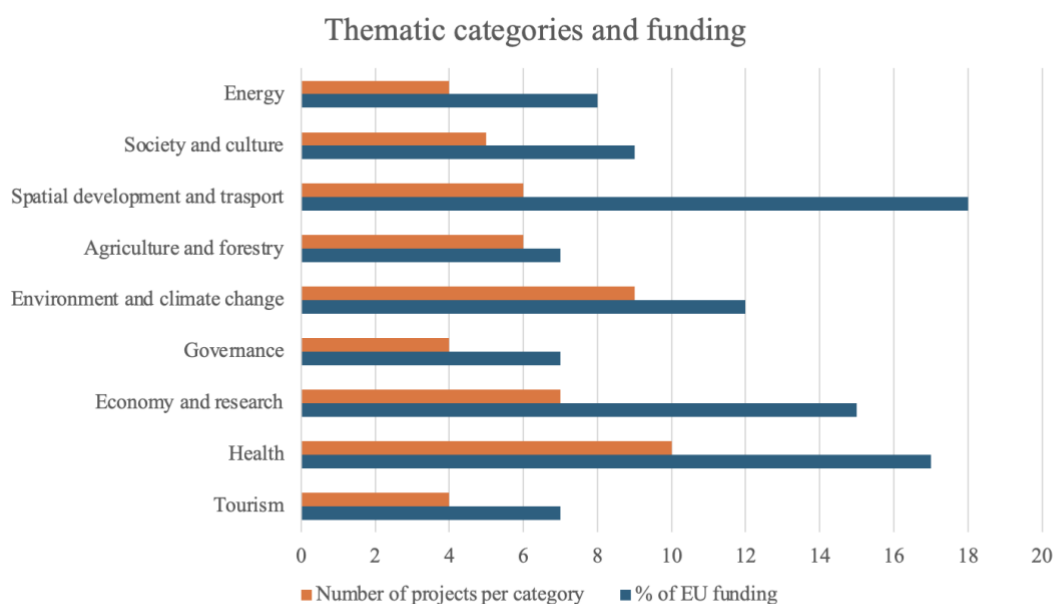


Fig. 3.10 Thematic categories and funding

The results of the analysis of the thematic distribution of projects suggest that there is no category that evidently stands out; the theme that received the most attention is health, closely followed by environment and climate change. Spatial development and transport is the thematic

⁴ Chilla and Lambracht's categorization is slightly different: instead of "society and culture", they included "society and labour market", and they included a "culture" category, which I removed. I added the category "energy". These modifications were introduced to better reflect the themes of the projects in consideration.

area where a high quantity of funding was associated to low volume of projects, suggesting that a few project attracted a large amount of resources.

Another nuance I wanted to explore was the distribution of lead partners per thematic category, to see where Italian and Slovenian partners were most active as lead partners. The results are as follow:

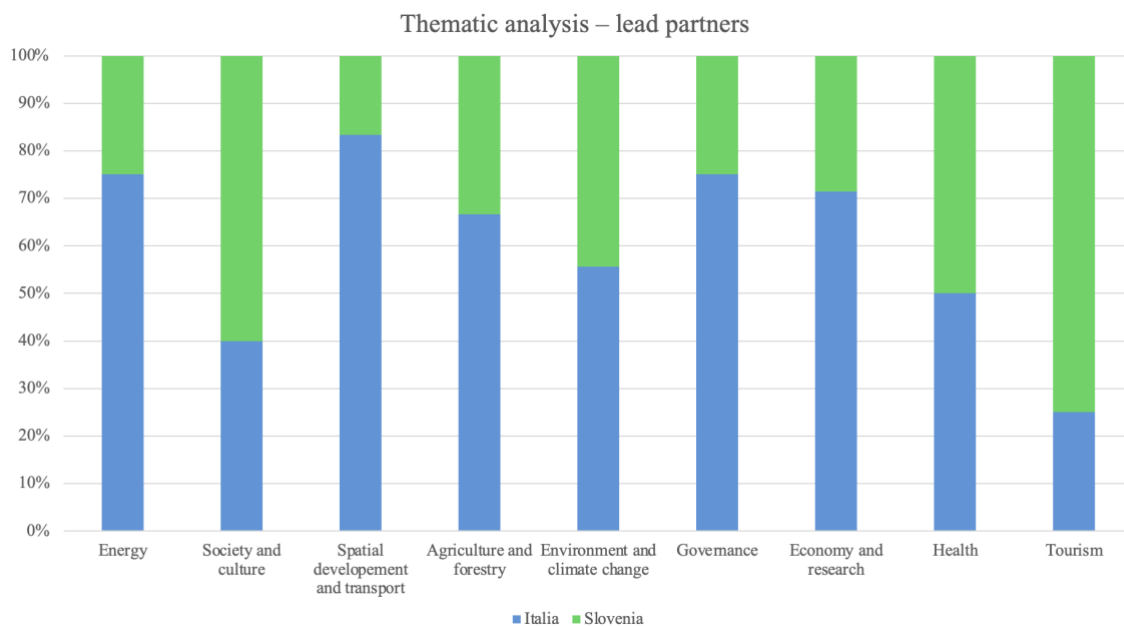


Fig. 3.11 Thematic analysis – lead partners

- *Energy*: the projects in the energy thematic area were mostly conducted by Italian leaders; energy is the thematic area where the partnerships were mostly composed of partners located very close to the border, with a specific focus on problem-solving at the local level, especially in the areas of energy efficiency and improvement of the street lighting networks. Municipalities were particularly active, and universities were also often involved.
- *Society and culture*: Slovenian lead partners were more active in this thematic category. The projects conducted covered a vast area of project types, from improving cross-border student mobility to the valorisation of the common linguistic and historical heritage, in particular related to World War I. For the projects related to education, partners were more concentrated on the border area, while the other collected partners from vast networks. The transferability of best practices and the creation of common tools in education is another characteristic of the projects conducted in this thematic category.

- *Spatial development*: this thematic area attracted the largest amount of funding, since it involved the creation of stable infrastructures; Italian lead partners were prevalent. Two out of six projects were dedicated to the improvement of port coordination and safety in the Upper Adriatic area between the ports of Venice, Trieste and Koper. Regional authorities (in the case of Italy) and ministerial authorities (in the case of Slovenia) were heavily involved in those projects, since their implementation required the participation of stakeholders at the institutional level.
- *Agriculture and forestry*: also in this thematic area, Italian leaders were prevalent. The projects touched on common issues present in the areas, such as the improvement of viticulture techniques in the Collio area and sustainable fishing and agriculture in similar natural environments. Projects related to innovation played an important role in this thematic area, with the creation of lively collaboration networks between the public and the private sector and universities and research institutes on both sides of the border.
- *Environment and climate change*: this thematic area attracted a large number of projects, with an almost equal distribution of leaders from the Italian and Slovenian side. Some projects were related to nature and biodiversity protection in specific cross-border area, while other involved partners from larger networks, e.g. universities, to respond to the need of know-how and topic-specific capabilities. Universities, municipalities, and local and regional development agencies from both part of the borders were heavily involved in the implementation of projects in this thematic category.
- *Governance*: in the governance thematic area, the majority of the projects were led by Italian partners. The projects were focused on the sharing of best practices and the creation of networks to tackle common cross-border issues and capacity building in emergency situations. In this thematic area, public authorities from all government level were involved, from the municipal to the regional and ministerial level (respectively in Italy and Slovenia).
- *Economy and research*: projects in the economy and research thematic category absorbed a large quantity of funds and were mostly led by Italian stakeholders. The projects were focused on the share of best practices and the strengthening of cooperation in innovation in mature sectors and in the promotion of small and medium enterprises and start-ups. A common feature of all the project was the creation of networks between public and private stakeholders, to promote knowledge transferability and the construction of synergies. University, research centres and enterprises were particularly involved in projects in this thematic category.

- *Health*: the majority of projects were conducted in this thematic category, with an equal distribution of Italian and Slovenian partners. Universities, clinics, and hospitals gathered to create networks for sharing best practices and know-how on health issues shared by the two sides of the borders, dedicated especially to fragile population, children and people of old age, the treatment of tumours and cancer and post-disease rehabilitation. The high number of projects and the even distribution of leaders signal a strong dedication to create common, cross-border strategies to tackle health issues, as well as the capacity of the various stakeholders to participate in innovation and knowledge-sharing in this sector.
- *Tourism*: the projects in this thematic category were mostly led by Slovenian stakeholders. Tourism is a mature sector in the area, and the projects aimed at strengthening cooperation in some already-developed areas, such as food and wine and cycling tourism. The projects weren't necessarily concentrated in the border area, but included larger stakeholder networks. Municipalities and local and regional development agencies were the most active stakeholders, but there was participation also from universities and private enterprises.

Across different thematic areas, projects within the INTERREG framework demonstrated a slightly unbalanced distribution of leadership between Italian and Slovenian partners, with Italian partners more present in leading positions.

Certain thematic areas exhibit a prevalence of leaders from one country, while in some other the distribution was more even. Overall, the thematic analysis showed a commitment to mutual cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and joint problem-solving, fostering cross-border strategies for regional development. When looking closely at the projects, however, the know-how and best practices sharing was mostly directed from Italian to Slovenian stakeholders, rather than the other way around.

The range of stakeholders involved was rather vast; universities and research centres and institutions were among the most active partners, being represented in partnership across all the thematic categories. In some thematic categories, like energy and agriculture and forestry, the stakeholders were more concentrated on the border area, while in thematic categories focused on the share of best practices and know-how, such as economy and research and health, the partnership were not necessarily composed of stakeholders in geographic proximity.

Assuming the problem-solving aspect of cross-border cooperation and the bottom-up nature of Interreg projects, the strong participation in the areas of health and economy and research signals a perceived need of funding and partnership in those area, while the high concentration of funding in the spatial development category is a sign of a lack of financial availability that pushed stakeholders to seek funding in EU-sponsored programs.

3.4.3 Spatial analysis

When it comes to the spatial analysis, in the literature considered it was possible to observe the following features: (1) a concentration of project leaders on one side of the border; (2) a concentration of project partners from the same side of the border that had more project leaders; (3) a more intense activity of stakeholders located in the near proximity of the border. The concentration of project leaders and partners was observed on the side of the border of the most decentralized country. The explanation was reconducted to the institutional asymmetries related to the (de)centralization level of the countries involved: in the decentralized countries, regional and local actors tend to have more autonomy, power, agency, and administrative capacity, and are thus both more eager and capable to engage in cross-border cooperation activities, both in leadership positions and as project partners. The objective is to see whether these results are reproduced in the border taken into consideration.

Distribution of project leaders

As was highlighted in the thematic analysis, most project leaders are located on the Italian side of the border: 60% of projects had an Italian leader, while 40% of project had a Slovenian leader. In terms of spatial distribution, at the NUTS 3 level the most active areas in terms of leading capacity are Trieste on the Italian side and the Coastal–Karst statistical region on the Slovenian side. The Central Slovenia region was also particularly active, due to the presence of the capital, Ljubljana. This result is in line with the case studies found in the literature, where the most decentralized state tends to have a prominent position in terms of leading partners. The strong activity in the Trieste area is an additional signal in this direction, since it is the region capital of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a region that enjoys additional administrative and financial authority due to its “special statute” status.

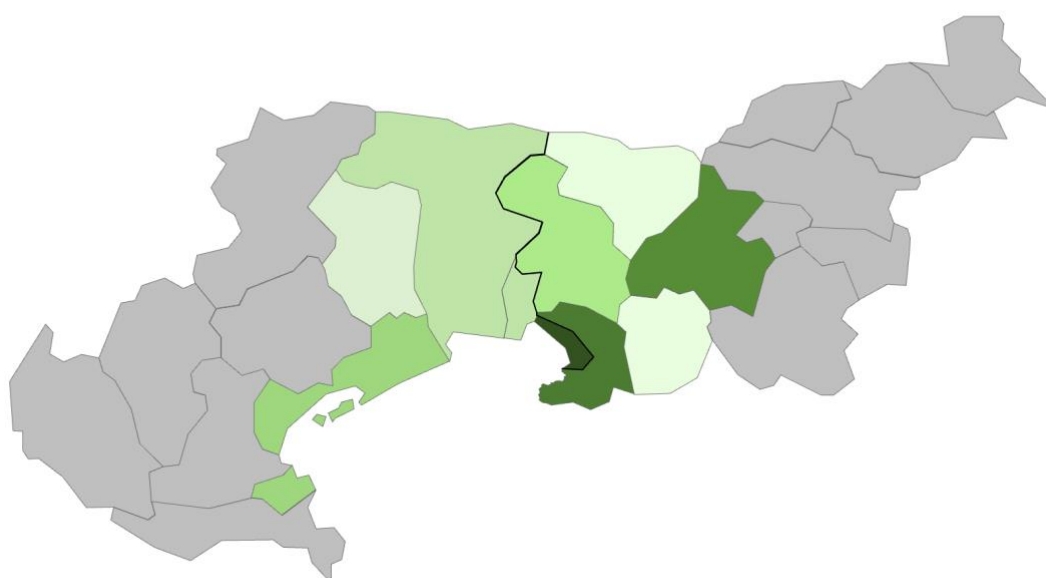


Fig. 3.12 Distribution of project leaders – graph and map

Distribution of project partners

In the examples found in the literature, the country that was most active in terms of project leaders was also the most active in terms of project participants when analysing the joint participation of all stakeholders. In the case under scrutiny, however, the distribution of project

participants is much more even, with 51% Italian participants and 49% Slovenian participants. Although there is a minor prevalence of Italian partners, the distribution is almost equal. This suggests a balanced cooperation approach, with an equal capacity and interest in engaging in cross-border cooperation activities despite the underlying asymmetries.

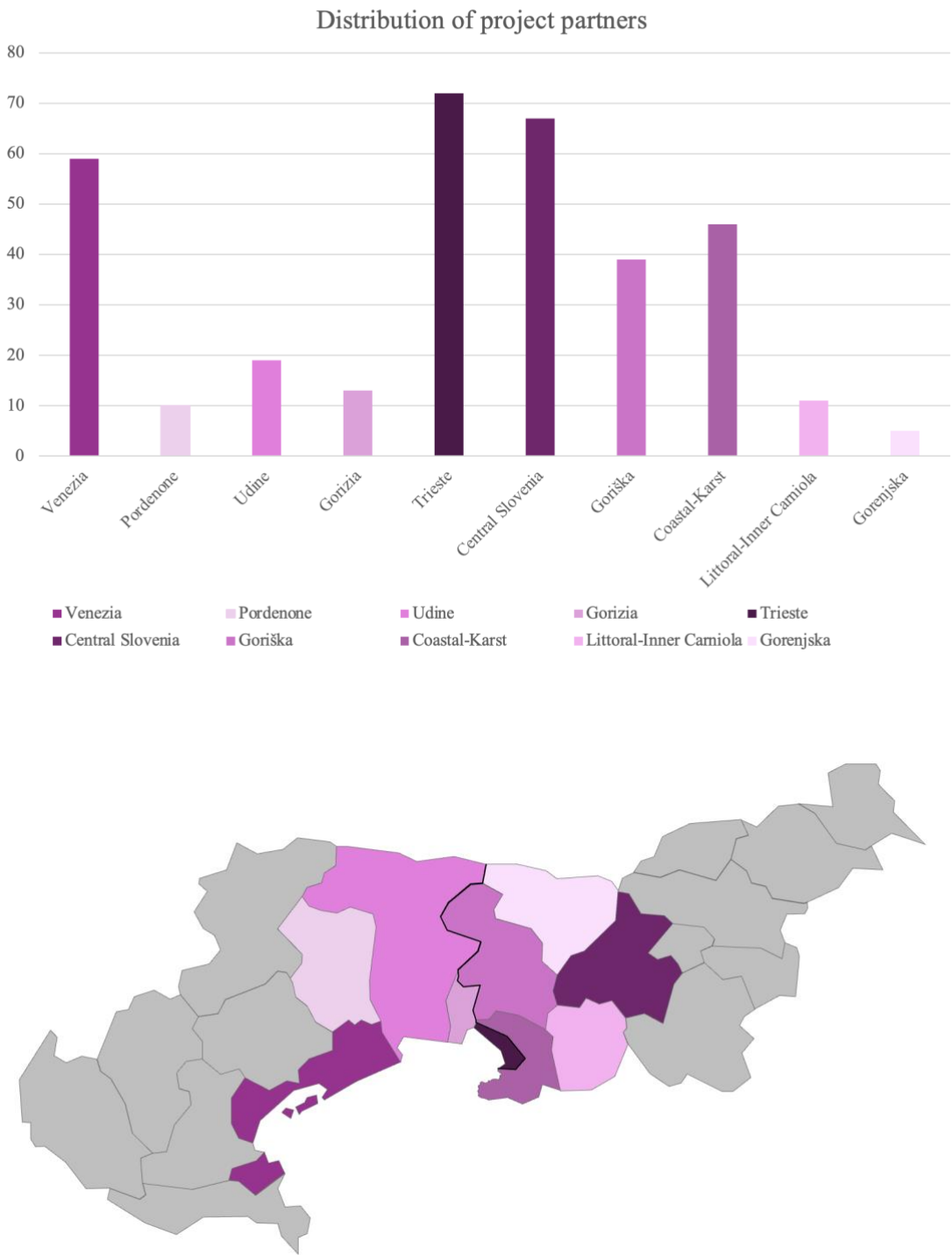


Fig. 3.13 Distribution of project partners – graph and map

The Trieste area proved again to be the most active in terms of participants, this time closely followed by the region of Central Slovenia, again for the presence of the capital city, where the vast majority of stakeholders active in that region was located. The areas of Venice and the Coastal–Karst region were also quite active. Although not visible from the map, on the Italian side of the border 83% of participants were located in the biggest cities (Trieste, Udine, Venezia, Pordenone, Gorizia), while on the Slovenian side of the border 73% of participants were located in the biggest cities (Ljubljana, Koper, Nova Gorica, Kranj and Postojna).

On the Italian side there is a higher concentration of participants in urban areas, while on the Slovenian side, although the difference is not striking, participants from smaller centres and from rural areas were more active. This could also be tied to (de)centralization trends, where on the Italian side, NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 have more power and administrative capacity and therefore their “capital cities” tend to be more active, overshadowing the capacity of smaller centres, while in Slovenia smaller municipal and local actors from rural areas are more able to gather the capacity and the resources to participate.

The map also reveals the concentration of the stakeholders’ activity: while in the cases provided by the literature there was a higher intensity of cooperation in the areas in close proximity to the border, in the Italian-Slovenian case this only seems true for the southern section of the border, in the area of Trieste and Koper. This can be explained by a strong functional integration of the area, that is also more densely populated and economically active than the central and northern part of the border, characterized by a mountain environment and scarcely populated in comparison to the coastal area. The intense activity of areas relatively remote from the border, such as Central Slovenia and the Province of Venice, can be reconducted to the tendency of seeking partners that can bring added value to the projects, especially in terms of know-how (e.g., universities) and administrative capacity, regardless of their proximity to the border.

The results of the case studies considered in the literature, especially the study by Castañer et al., presented the results in terms of “dominance” of one side of the border over the other: “The presence of more actors (especially leaders, who are required to have more duties but also enjoy skills and benefits) creates a situation in which some regions exhibit dominance over their partners. This dominance [...] poses the question of cross-border cooperation as a venue for creating new inequalities and multiplying both structural asymmetries and imbalanced potentials” (Castañer et al., 2018, p. 87).

In the case under scrutiny, although the concentration of project leaders in Italy can be correlated to the decentralized nature of the state and the higher degree of power and autonomy granted to the regional level, the patterns of “dominance” are not reproduced when considering the overall participation, suggesting that cross-border cooperation in the area, when conducted via bottom-up, EU-financed initiatives like Interreg, tends to create equal and evenly distributed cooperation networks.

3.5 Conclusion

The historical overview conducted at the beginning of the Chapter highlights that the border was the background for military and ethnic conflict, and was one of the borders crossed by the Iron Curtain; this allowed for the development of cross-border cooperation structures only in recent times, although the border was relatively permanent during the Cold War. Cross-border cooperation activities started with the accession process of Slovenia in the European Union and the implementation of Interreg, and later developed with the participation in the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion, the EUSAIR Macro-regional strategy and the creation of an EGTC around the cities of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba, which is considered a very successful and peculiar example of both cross-border cooperation and multilevel governance.

The disruptive potential of hierarchical asymmetries, however, has been a factor that hampered the success of cross-border cooperation in the process of establishing a larger EGTC, the Euregio Without Borders. In this case, tensions between Italian subnational entities and the central governments of both Italy and Slovenia eventually led to the exclusion of Slovenia from the participation in the EGTC, which was instead established by the regions of Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia in Italy and the region of Carinthia in Austria. Similar tensions emerged in the establishment of the institutional framework of the Interreg programme, where Slovenia, due to its small size and the lack of a regional level, comes to play an ambiguous role, interacting as a ‘state’ with Italy and the European Commission and as a ‘region’ with the other Italian regions.

When considering the role of hierarchical asymmetries in network-based cooperation structures such as Interreg, however, the picture is different. The thematic analysis highlighted the “needs” to which stakeholders try to respond to with the use of funding opportunities at the EU level; the themes that received the most attention are health and environment and climate change. The role of projects leaders was taken into consideration since it tends to reflect the hierarchical asymmetries, creating a situation where stakeholders from the most decentralized country tend

to have more authority and resources at the local level, increasing their capacity to assume a leader position which implies more administrative and financial burdens.

This was confirmed in the spatial analysis: the majority of project leaders were located on the Italian side of the border. When conducting a comprehensive analysis of all the participants, however, the distribution of stakeholders is almost even in the two sides of the border, signalling that asymmetries don't play a significant role in the creation of cross-border cooperation networks and that Italian and Slovenian stakeholders have a similar willingness and the capacity to participate to projects. When creating horizontal networks and consortia-based cooperation structures, stakeholders on the two sides of the border don't reproduce the tension created by administrative asymmetries that emerge in decision-making processes at higher institutional levels.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the role of hierarchical asymmetries in the context of cross-border cooperation and multilevel governance and analyse cross-border cooperation patterns on the border of two European Union member states, Italy and Slovenia. The main research tools utilized were desk research and data from the KEEP database, serving as source material for the cross-border cooperation analysis. The first two Chapters served as the theoretical basis for the analysis conducted in the third Chapter, which aimed at an in-depth examination of multilevel governance and cross-border cooperation dynamics patterns present on the border, taking into account the administrative hierarchical asymmetries present in the two states under consideration.

Multilevel governance proves to be a convincing theoretical approach when analysing cross-border cooperation areas. The involvement of subnational authorities as important stakeholders in cross-border cooperation projects, along with the use of financial tools provided at the supranational level, highlights the agency gained by the subnational authorities of the Member States thanks to the initiatives of the European Union, especially the European Commission. These entities eventually gained financial opportunities and decision-making chances over their territories to address needs that are not considered at the central state level.

The evolution of cross-border cooperation structures in the European Union further supports this direction. The research highlighted that cross-border cooperation structures emerged in own-initiative, bottom-up processes and were only later acknowledged by the European Union. The European Union began to endorse and encourage such efforts to further European integration and eliminate border obstacles that hindered goals set at the supranational level, such as harmonization during the various stages of the enlargement process and the smooth implementation of the Single Market. Despite receiving little attention in mainstream political

discourse, the tools provided by the European Union enable peripheral and often economically disadvantaged areas to pursue their needs from a cross-border perspective. This allows for a response to the specific needs and goals not only of the European Union but also of the subnational authorities present in cross-border areas.

The Cohesion policy and its evolution played a significant role in this dynamic, providing not only financial tools but also legal principles to enable subnational entities to engage in cross-border cooperation activities. The partnership principle introduced with the 1988 reform, as illustrated in Chapter I, was a watershed moment, specifically acknowledging the participation of regional and local authorities as equal partners in the implementation of Cohesion policy goals. The evolution of Cohesion policy instruments and the tension it created at the Member States levels also highlight the efforts of Member States to maintain their 'gatekeepers' role and react to the implied loss of sovereignty resulting from the principles introduced.

The recognition of cross-border cooperation as a legitimate goal at the European Union level led to the consolidation and creation of various types of cross-border cooperation structures, as highlighted in Chapter II. Cross-border cooperation in the European Union territory originated as a bottom-up, problem-solving oriented process, aimed at addressing adverse border effects that affected the day-to-day lives of citizens living on the border. It later evolved into different structures and financial frameworks at the European Union level, with varying aims. These ranged from smoothing the inclusion of new Member States in the enlargement process, particularly in welcoming countries previously separated by the Iron Curtain, to large macro-regions and the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, a highly institutionalized type of cross-border cooperation structure promoted by the European Union with the introduction of Regulation 1082/2006.

Chapter III illustrated the cross-border cooperation structures present on the border between Italy and Slovenia. Despite being one of the border areas crossed by the Iron Curtain and affected by ethnic conflict in the aftermath of World War II, the border was relatively permeable even before Slovenia's independence, with cross-border cooperation attempts starting as early as the 1970s. European Union financial tools were introduced first as a preparation for enlargement, and Slovenia was included in the Interreg framework even before joining the EU. However, one of the most common obstacles to cross-border cooperation is the difference in administrative structures on the two sides of the border.

The area considered is a prominent example of such hierarchical asymmetries, with Italy being a decentralized state with a strong regional level, particularly in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, enjoying

additional autonomy thanks to its special statute status. In contrast, Slovenia is a small, centralized state lacking a regional level. Since cross-border cooperation is mainly conducted at the subnational level, such hierarchical asymmetries have disruptive potential. The aim of the research was to observe the role of such hierarchical asymmetries in cross-border cooperation patterns in the area and in the interaction of the stakeholders involved.

The aspect of multilevel governance in the cross-border area was addressed through desk research on the establishment of a European grouping of cross-border cooperation in the area, namely the EGTC Euregio Without Borders. The findings highlighted how asymmetries played a significant role in this case, as the failed participation of Slovenia in the EGTC was due to Slovenia being required to join the EGTC as a state, thus interacting on the same level as the other partners involved, namely regions. The absence of a regional level in Slovenia and the hierarchical mismatch of the EGTC participants were the main reasons why the creation of such a cross-border cooperation structure failed.

Furthermore, the EGTC Euregio Without Borders case also highlighted the shortcomings of establishing a multilevel governance framework in the cross-border area: the Italian state was hesitant and attempted to maintain its ‘gatekeeping’ role, while the Slovenian state perceived a loss of prestige in being considered at the same level as subnational authorities inside the EGTC. Comparing this case with the only existing EGTC on the border, namely EGTC GO, reveals interesting insights. Not only was an EGTC established, but it is also considered a successful case of cross-border cooperation. The reason for the success of EGTC GO, when considered in the illustrated framework, is that no asymmetries hindered its creation since all actors involved were municipalities acting at the same institutional level.

More ambiguous results emerged when analysing bottom-up processes, particularly the cooperation dynamics in Interreg VA. The research aimed to contribute to the findings obtained by other researchers who analysed borders similarly affected by hierarchical asymmetries and different levels of centralization, such as the borders between Spain and France, Spain and Portugal, Germany and Poland, and Italy and Austria. Their findings suggested a “dominance” of the more decentralized state over the centralized state, both in terms of project leaders and project partners. The role of leaders was deemed particularly significant since subnational and local authorities, the main stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation, enjoy increased agency and autonomy in decentralized states when compared to their counterparts in centralized states. While this was confirmed in the analysis of project leaders, considering all participants

jointly led to a slightly different picture, with almost even participation of stakeholders from both countries, suggesting the creation of balanced networks.

To perform the analysis, I sourced data from the KEEP database, a European Union tool that collects data on the Interreg cross-border cooperation programs. One of the main shortcomings of the analysis has been the data accuracy and the type of data collected in KEEP. While a precious source of data on cross-border cooperation programs and an extraordinary open access and free source, there is room for improvement in the type and accuracy of data collected, since performing the analysis often required further interventions and research on the partners or project websites to obtain correct information.

Another shortcoming in the research is an overall lack of similar research attempts, which made it more difficult to accurately formulate the research question and compare the results with similar works. Conversely, this matter should receive more attention, as researching the effects of administrative asymmetries and their impact on cross-border cooperation could lead to the formulation of new policy approaches on how to overcome such barriers and implement more efficient cooperation structures. Given their importance in advancing the integration process and improving the lives of citizens inhabiting such peripheral areas, as highlighted in section 2.5.2, cross-border cooperation brings added value both locally and from a European integration perspective, and should thus be given more attention both in research and policy formulation efforts.

In conclusion, the main finding of the case considered is that hierarchical asymmetries can play a role in the establishment of cross-border cooperation structures, but it is appropriate to make some distinctions. When considering top-down processes and the involvement of higher institutional levels, as highlighted by the establishment of the EGTC Without Borders, such asymmetries are an important factor to consider and can not only hinder but also block the establishment of cross-border cooperation structures when the partners involved are not acting at the same institutional level. In this case, hierarchical asymmetries not only proved to be an obstacle for cross-border cooperation, but also for the emergence of a multilevel governance framework. This is further confirmed by the successful establishment of EGTC GO, where the partners involved were acting at the same institutional level.

On the other hand, when considering bottom-up processes like the creation of Interreg consortia and partnerships, while stakeholders from the most decentralized state still had some advantage when considering leadership positions, the patterns and dynamics of cooperation reveal a more even distribution, suggesting that different levels of centralization and regionalization do not

necessarily translate into unbalanced networks and do not automatically reproduce the patterns of “dominance” observed in other cases.

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