



***Beate Kohler-Koch***

***INTERACTIVE GOVERNANCE: REGIONS IN THE NETWORK OF  
EUROPEAN POLITICS***

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Prof. Dr. Beate Kohler-Koch

✉ Universität Mannheim, Lehrstuhl für Politische Wissenschaft II,  
68131 Mannheim

☎ +49 - 6 21 / 292 52 87; FAX: +49 - 6 21 / 292 52 89

📧 [BKOHLER@sowi.uni-mannheim.de](mailto:BKOHLER@sowi.uni-mannheim.de)

## ***Interactive Governance: Regions in the Network of European Politics***

### ***Abstract:***

*This paper presents in a condensed version the theoretical approach, the research outline and the main findings of a collaborate research project on the resurgence of territorial politics in Europe. It starts from the assumption that regionalization, i.e. the growing importance attributed to regions, is part of an encompassing restructuring of political space. There is an interdependent process of regionalization and Europeanization which might not just end up in a more complex system of multilevel governance but produce a transformation of the prevalent mode of governance. What we are interested in is the kind of bottom-up institutional change that comes about by the intentional or unintended action of a multitude of decentralized actors and that rests on the dissemination of shared concepts of appropriate and legitimate governance.*

### ***1. A regionalization of Europe?***

The European integration has extended the sphere of the political „beyond the nation state“, and it is a truism that this will not leave political institutions unaffected. The effects are not limited to the level of member state government, nor to those processes and structures that dominate national policy-making. Europeanization, which I would like to define as enlarging the scope of what is considered to be the relevant unit of policy-making, has reached down to the sub-national level. Regional actors have become incorporated into the complex system of transnational decision-making in Europe and they have learned to pursue their interests in the wider context of the European polity.

Few years ago, a lively debate started about the likely outcome of this process of Europeanization in terms of institutional change. „Europe of the regions“ was the popular slogan to capture the image of

the multi-level system of government that was supposed to develop in due time: The transfer of power from the member states upwards to the European level would, by reaction, provoke a transfer downwards to the sub-national level (Paterson 1992:638). The political discourse was slowly crowded out by scholarly research<sup>1</sup> and made way for a more cautious assessment which can best be summarized under the heading of „sceptical reflections on a Europe of the Regions“ (Anderson 1990). Detailed case studies, especially when they have been done on a comparative basis, provide us with valuable insights in the ways and means of regional interest representation. We learn about the successes and failures of regional actors gaining influence, in particular by getting involved in the programming and implementation of EC structural policies. All those studies deepen our knowledge about the multitude of motives of regional actors to have access and voice in European policy-making. Evidence is presented for effective regional lobbying and trans-regional networking through-out Europe. Investigating interest representation is, however, far from being an adequate description, much less an explanation of institutional change and tells us little about the conditions that might give rise to the establishment of a three-level system of government. Likewise, the literature on regionalism is very informative on the motives and aspirations of regional actors to take advantage of European integration to push for greater political autonomy. The argument is very persuasive and supported by empirical studies (Lange 1997; Stolz 1996): Becoming member of the European Union provides a more permissive environment for regionalist aspirations. Especially the economic elite, highly influential in any regional context, is more inclined to be supportive to demands for regional autonomy when the country is integrated in a larger community and has assured access to a huge market. Again, support and demand for institutional change tell us nothing about the likelihood of such change and how it may come about.

Furthermore, a „Europe of the regions“ would amount to a major institutional transformation upsetting the institutional structure of the majority of the EU member states. Apart from the well known fact of institutional inertia and political resistance of a multitude of vested interests to any kind of major

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<sup>1</sup> Our own bibliography lists more than 1.500 titles on the topic of regions in Europe.

institutional change, I discarded the idea of a „sandwich Europe“ (Eser 1991: 9f). I opt for a different view on the kind of institutional change that is likely to take place. I start from the hypothesis that it is the essence of European integration that politics is transcending territorial boundaries. National sovereignty is at stake and because of this, the European Union is conducive to the restructuring of political space. But this does not happen in a way that would just reconstitute the very principle of territorial rule. In other words we will not witness the replacement of nation states by a more encompassing multi-national state that would reproduce - though in a multi-level federal structure the logic of territorial politics. What we may expect is rather a transformation of the nation state. States do not wither away but become deprived of what for centuries has been considered to be the essence of a „state“: the exercise of unlimited power within a territory. When it is true that the principle of territorial government goes out of fashion, we should not interpret a growing appreciation of regions as the reemergence of territorial politics. Instead of looking for a transfer of powers between levels of government, we should take notice of transformations in the modes of governance that go along with that new European polity: Regions just like nation states become members of a „penetrated system“ (Rosenau 1969), i.e. a system which is not just influenced by external actors powerful enough to impose their will from the outside, but a system that makes „external interference“ legitimate. In the EU citizens are forced to comply to laws which are initiated and decided mainly by „foreigners“ and they are asked to extend their (financial) solidarity beyond national borders. Just as citizen rights and duties are extended to non-nationals, citizens have the right and are given the opportunity to participate in trans-national interest representation and policy decisions.

The research we started at Mannheim has been motivated by wanting to know more about the kind of institutional change that goes along with this process of Europeanization. We choose to study regions because we were convinced that Europeanization and regionalization is an interdependent process and that by looking at regions we would learn most about the ongoing process of institutional change. To be frank, I am less interested in the fate of regions - though regionalists have strong arguments to support the notion of „small is beautiful“ - than in the general aspects of institutional transformation. I am

curious to know if it is true that a „new mode of governance“ is emerging and I am keen on testing the soundness of a „reflexive institutionalist“ approach. It is valid to assume that higher order institutional settings are framing institutional change and that ideas play a decisive part? And is it to the point to conceptualize institutional change as a social process, i.e. not a matter of intentional constitutional design, negotiated and implemented by member state governments, but the outcome of a multitude of decentralized actions?

## ***2. Transformation of governance and institutional change***

Independent of the mode of governance, politics is what it used to be „authoritative allocation“. To reach collectively binding decisions is, however, not just accomplished by authoritative decisions taken at the top of a governmental hierarchy but brought about by a process of intermediation aimed at co-ordinating political actions in negotiating systems. In such a setting „governing“ definitely is not synonymous with giving political guidance through „command and control“ over „subjects“. More and more it is a process of co-ordinating multiple players which enjoy a high degree of autonomy while being linked together in a complex setting of mutual dependence. Therefore, governing is as much finding a consensus by negotiating with powerful societal actors, activating their problem solving capacities and coming to agreements over „self-government“, as it is giving direction through legal rules and financial incentives emanating from an authoritative decision-making body, i.e. government.

Governing is always embedded in the particular historic context, and in real life it will embrace many competing elements. For analytic reasons, however, we suggest to reduce the multitude of various kinds of governing to just two ideal types of „systems of governance“, i.e. patterns that relate to particular kinds of governing activities. This typology will be used as a heuristic devise to decide whether a transformation of governance has taken place or not.

**Table 1****SYSTEMS OF GOVERNANCE**

<b>Characteristic features</b>	<b>statist</b>	<b>cooperative</b>
decision-making	centralized top-down	decentralized horizontal
co-ordination	bureaucratic by direction	negotiated by consensus
legitimacy	authority attributed by formal procedures	acknowledged on problem-solving capacity
exerting control	external control based on accountability ensured through sanctions	self-control based on shared norms ensured through reciprocity
conflict resolution	countervailing powers majority rule	multilateral mediation consensus
scope of regulation	general territorial reach	particular functional reach
public-private relations	political primacy	public-private conjunction

How do regions fit in this context? First of all we assume that there is a causal link between the process of Europeanization and regionalization and a change in the system of governance. Europeanization will induce regional actors to enter the European arena and support both an existing trend towards regionalization and network building. Regionalization is used here in the sense of an increase in the capacity of regional actors to unite in joint problem solving and/or external interest representation. Network building refers to the spreading of cooperative governance in regional as well as in European policy networks and embraces both a horizontal dimension in terms of public-private partnerships and a vertical one in terms of including actors from different levels of competence. It is plausible to assume that co-operative governing in networks will spread:

- By introducing yet another actor into the game of political concertation and by providing it with voice and exit options independent of national control, the hierarchical model of governance will further lose in substance.
- Furthermore, there is evidence that just because regions are late-comers in the EU, lack standing and competencies, regional actors - be they regional governments or social and economic actors with strong regional ties - have a strong inclination to push for a network type of governance.

- In addition, there is a well-established political-economic discourse claiming that in the current „post-Fordist“ era economic prosperity can only be brought about by a new public-private partnership in which the state takes the role of a mediator, and that the „regional state“ is best suited for this task and will be instrumentalized in this way in a European strategy aiming at greater competitiveness.
- Last but not least, Community institutions have propagated governing guidelines like the principle of partnership and subsidiarity to achieve an optimum of political responsiveness and administrative effectiveness.

### *3. Concepts of institutional change*

Recent research on the role of regions in European affairs give ample evidence that there are numerous incentives for a change in preferences concerning governing. But just how those incentives might contribute to the actual proliferation of actors in relevant policy networks and push for changes in governing patterns is less clear. There is an implicit assumption about the effects of a „functional logic“. Functional „needs“ and functional „assets“ are supposed to turn into strong push and pull factors to bring about change. At the same time, it is not disputed that change will be shaped by existing institutional frameworks that might constitute constraints or provide varying opportunities for the pace, the scope and the direction of change.

When looking for concepts to understand how changes in governance may come about, we follow a Weberian approach which puts emphasis on the importance of ideas and the social construction of institutions. In our understanding „governance“, i.e. a particular established pattern of governing, is embedded in political institutions. We refer to a broad understanding of institutions that goes beyond the formal organisation of the political process. The latter embraces the formal attribution of power and responsibility to agents within well-defined territorial boundaries and the rules and procedures for taking legally binding decisions. In the tradition of Max Weber, institutions have a broader meaning: Political institutions just like any other institutions are sets of social regulations incorporated in

practices and rules that define appropriate behaviour. Institutions thrive on shared concepts about what is legitimate and effective just as well as on firmly routed routines and patterns of interaction.

These three different elements set the frame for particular patterns of governing. The formal organisation of the political process and the distribution of power between different political bodies will never fully explain the real life of politics. Knowing what are the guiding principles of the decision making process, what is considered to be „good government“ is highly relevant in order to understand what is going on in politics. Likewise, problem-solving capacities integrated in established decision-making strategies and administrative routines will always have a deep impact on the shape and quality of policies.

**Table 2**      *Dimensions of political institutions*

<i>Organisation of politics</i>	<i>Political routines</i>	<i>Concepts of legitimate order</i>
= constitutionally defined responsibilities and rights of governing agents	= established strategies of problem-solving	= guiding principles on good government
= legal rules for decision-making procedures	= routinized procedures in decision-making and implementation	= shared beliefs in adequate problem-solving strategies
= legal criteria for the allocation of resources	= actors regularly involved	= authority voluntarily attributed to actors

Such an understanding of political institutions sheds some new light on processes of institutional change. Institutions of this type will not come about by a single constitutional act based on blueprints drafted by some ingenious political architects. They are rather the product of a social process, they are built and maintained by the interaction of a multitude of decentralized actors. This does not say that intentional institution building is without relevance. We only want to stress the point that this is only part of the picture and that institutional development is as much an un-intended side-effect as it is the product of intentional design.



The differentiation between different elements of political institutions draws our attention to the fact that institutional change is not a one-dimensional affair. We have to look not only for changes that might take place in the organisation of politics but also in daily routines of policy formulation and implementation or in the acceptance of dominant belief systems. In my understanding, the analytical decomposition of what makes a political institution is an important step to understand how political change may come about. As long as we focus our attention only on the formal structure and organisation of a polity, we lose out of sight that there are different ways and means that contribute to change.

From an analytical point we can differentiate between change that comes about

- by intentional constitutional design and agreements reached between the few authorized actors,
- as a consequence of rational decisions taken by a multitude of decentralized actors aimed at the re-organisation of politics or
- as the un-intended consequence of choices motivated by preferences unrelated to institutional change. Actions might be the result of adaption to external force or perceived necessities or of processes of learning and imitation.

We have no difficulties analysing institution building that is based on constitutional politics. Conceptualizing institution building as a social process based on decentralized actions - be they intended or unintended - has to tackle the question how individual institutional preferences will become socially acceptable. Recent accounts rely on the logic of market selection, in particular those employing the theory of transaction cost (Coase 1960; Williamson 1975; North 1990): „Individual economic actors seek to order their exchanges to minimize the costs of these transactions. For these private orderings to become insitutionalized of the community as a whole, there must be some means of generalizing them. Here, the competitive pressure of the market comes into play, selecting those orderings that are best at minimizing costs“ (Knight 1995: 4). However, as North (1995: 23) has pointed out, political markets are prone to inefficiency because it is far more difficult to measure what is being exchanged and because the selection process does not function in a way as conceptualized by

rational choice models. Therefore, I should like to depart from the assumption that it is by the competitive forces of the market that institutional selection takes place. I find it more promising to look at those processes that make institutions socially accepted. The competitive pressure of the market may contribute to select institutions according to transaction-cost efficiency. But how do we explain that just this criteria of low-cost transaction is considered to be the most legitimate criteria for selecting an institution?

There are two plausible hypotheses that relate to just the other two dimensions of institutions: The coordinating effect may be produced by the involvement of a multitude of actors in routinized interactions and/or by the dissemination of governing concepts which rise concurring expectations. This assumption is in line with the broad understanding of institutions we have suggested. When political routines are a constitutive element of institutions it is plausible to assume that initiating new rules and procedures in one policy area will have effects on others: Actors involved are drawn into a process of adaptation and learning that they might transfer into other settings. In particular in cases of overlapping jurisdiction, competing institutions come under pressure to develop congruent practises. The dissemination of ideas, too, is not a matter of free floating intellectual discourse, but it is linked to institutionalized co-operation. International relations theory has made it a case that co-operation only thrives on the partners dedication to the principles and norms that are at the heart of „international regimes“. Those are durable and effective as long as participants share the jointly agreed principles and norms as guidelines of behaviour. Just because in international relations the compliance to rules and procedures can not be enforced, high emphasis is put on attaching partners to shared concepts.

**Table 3**      *How change comes about*

<i>Type</i>	<i>Ways and Means</i>	<i>Affecting</i>
Imposition	constitutional politics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• treaty revisions</li> <li>• formal intergouvernemental or inter-institutional agreement</li> </ul>	the formal organisation of politics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the distribution of rights and responsibilities</li> <li>• defining decision-making procedures</li> <li>• allocation of resources</li> </ul>
Involvement	providing channels for access and participation  incorporating principles in political programmes	patterns of interaction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• structure and composition of networks</li> <li>• established routines</li> </ul>
Supply	propagating appropriate and exemplary concepts	shared beliefs in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• optimal problem-solving strategies</li> <li>• legitimated actors and decision-making rules</li> <li>• criteria of good government</li> </ul>

#### ***4. Institutional politics in Europe***

This approach is particularly pertinent when trying to explain institutional transformation in the European setting. Though in recent years institutional reforms have been on the European agenda, constitutional politics is the exception rather than the rule. First of all, constitutional agreements are a strictly inter-gouvernemental affair to be handled by intergovernmental conferences and in need of ratification by national parliaments. Governments are hesitant to get engaged in such an arduous and unwieldy task. Furthermore, they have to be agreed upon unanimously and, therefore, it is highly unlikely that they will be directed towards a thorough transformation of established patterns of governance. Any direct intervention in the internal constitutional set-up of member-states is touching upon the most vital interest of member states.

Even any indirect attack which might be implied in introducing new rules and procedures not in line with national decision-making is a highly sensitive affair. The Community has the right to define procedural requirements when it comes to the formulation or implementation of EC policies. The European Commission, the supra-national actor mainly interested in substituting inter-governmental

representation by more Community friendly proceedings, has always been very cautious not to raise the suspicion of the member states that jealously guard their procedural supremacy. Only within the well-defined limits of specific EC-programmes Community rules could be introduced that were more to the liking of the European Commission. Within the framework of Community programmes, imposing procedural changes has its limits. There aren't but a few programmes that are left to the full discretion of the Commission. Only these have strings attached concerning procedural rules that are aimed at introducing a cooperative type of governance. And all these programmes leave it to the target groups if they want to participate and, by doing so, comply with the requirements.

When it is unlikely that institutional change will come about by deliberate actions being taken from above, what about the changes in routines resulting from frequent interaction? And what about changes in the cognitive framing of what constitutes „exemplary“ and „appropriate“ political behaviour?

Just because it is highly unlikely that constitutional politics will deliberately push for a new type of governance we have to look for other ways and means. One way to understand the catalytic function „Europe“ may have, is to look at the European supply strategies that incrementally transform routines and promote matching „guiding concepts“.

Changing network structures and influencing shared belief systems is one important way of influencing institutional development. This is bound to bring about new patterns of governing below the threshold of constitutional change. And indeed, it is in this soft way that interventions of the Community in national institutions take place:

(a) Network structures are altered by opening channels of influence and providing incentives for transnational coalitions;

(b) shared understandings are influenced by propagating particular strategies and principles as being the most appropriate for effective problem-solving and legitimate governing.

### ***5. A model of analysis for incremental institutional development***

When „imposition“ is not the way to introduce institutional reform, empirical research should concentrate on a bottom-up approach. Therefore, we chose a model of analysis in which the European Union is conceptualized as opening a „window of opportunity“. It is offering resources of different kinds:

- it provides financial means,
- allocates rights to be represented and have access to decision-making and
- gives legitimacy to political aspirations and
- supports claims of superior problem-solving capacity.

It is a supply which may or may not meet the demand of individual actors. Community agents, in particular the Commission, are very active in propagating generalized concepts combining normative orientations and causal beliefs. The hypothesis is that to the extent to which those will become points of general reference, they will influence institutional developments within member states. Actors will not choose at random as they are constraint by existing competing institutions and pursue interests that are contingent on given situations and perceived opportunities. Nor can actors choose independently, i.e. independent from clients attached to them or their grass root constituency. What they perceive as an attractive opportunity may not be to the liking of their followers, and „nested games“ may restrict their freedom to choose. In addition, opportunities are no free choices.. Financial programmes combine material benefits with procedural provisions and ideological wrapping. This way they are transmission belts that link access to resources with principled objectives and distinct practice. The proliferation of concepts takes place through involvement. Furthermore, the Commission's active networking is attractive because it is opening channels of influence but at the same time it is imposing rules of the game.

These hypotheses are highly plausible. To prove their validity, they have to be tested empirically. After all, it is an empirical question whether involvement will contribute to the dissemination of rules and practices beyond the boundaries of Community programmes, just as it is an empirical question on

which concepts actors' expectations converge, and whether they become translated into the organisation of politics or not.

At Mannheim we started an empirical comparative research project „REGE“<sup>2</sup> to investigate the changing role of regions in European affairs and how it interrelates with transformations in the pattern of European governance. The starting hypothesis was that the particular type of "pro-active regionalism" that was advocated by regions and Community organs alike might give more political weight to regional actors but will not substantially change the constitutional set-up of the European polities. We rather assumed that the upgrading of regions will be closely linked to the expansion of transnational networks and the dissemination of patterns of co-operative governance.

It was obvious that parallel interests might be at work: Regional actors are looking for support to improve their economic competitiveness and political aspirations; Community actors are in need of grass root support and effective transmission belts for their structural policies. It is a plausible assumption that a change in governance systems may come about when guiding concepts match and when regional actors have strong incentives and/or a superior capacity to use the resources offered by the Community.

Starting from this hypothesis the national constitutional setting of a region, endowing it with rights and administrative capacities and the competitiveness of the regional economy are highly relevant. Just to find out how relevant those factors might be in a cross regional comparison, we aimed at a controlled variation of just these independent variables. Therefore, we selected a sample which combined two

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<sup>2</sup> "Regions as Political Actors in European Integration" (REGE) is an international research project I have coordinated and carried out at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), Universität Mannheim. Team members: J. Grote, M. Knodt, F. Larat, S. Umberti (MZES, Universität Mannheim); external cooperation partners: E. Négrier, M. Lacave, W. Génieys, O. Dedieu (Université de Montpellier, Centre comparatif d'Etudes des Politiques publiques et des Espaces Locaux); B. Jouve (Ecole Nationale des Travaux Publics de l'Etat à Lyon, Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires Ville, Espace, Société); Prof. F. Morata, J. Etherington, N. Gomez-Mataran (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona); Prof. S. Loughlin, J. Mathias (University of Wales College of Cardiff, European Study Centre). First results have just been published: Kohler-Koch 1996a, 1996b; Grote/Knodt/Larat 1996; Jouve/Négrier 1996; Knodt 1996; Larat 1996. The condensed findings will be published in a book at the beginning of next year, Kohler-Koch 1997.

kinds of regional properties: constitutional rights and economic strength. Both criteria and the ambition to keep as many other variables as possible constant, provided a selection of 10 regions in 5 different member states.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 4**      *Selection of Regions*

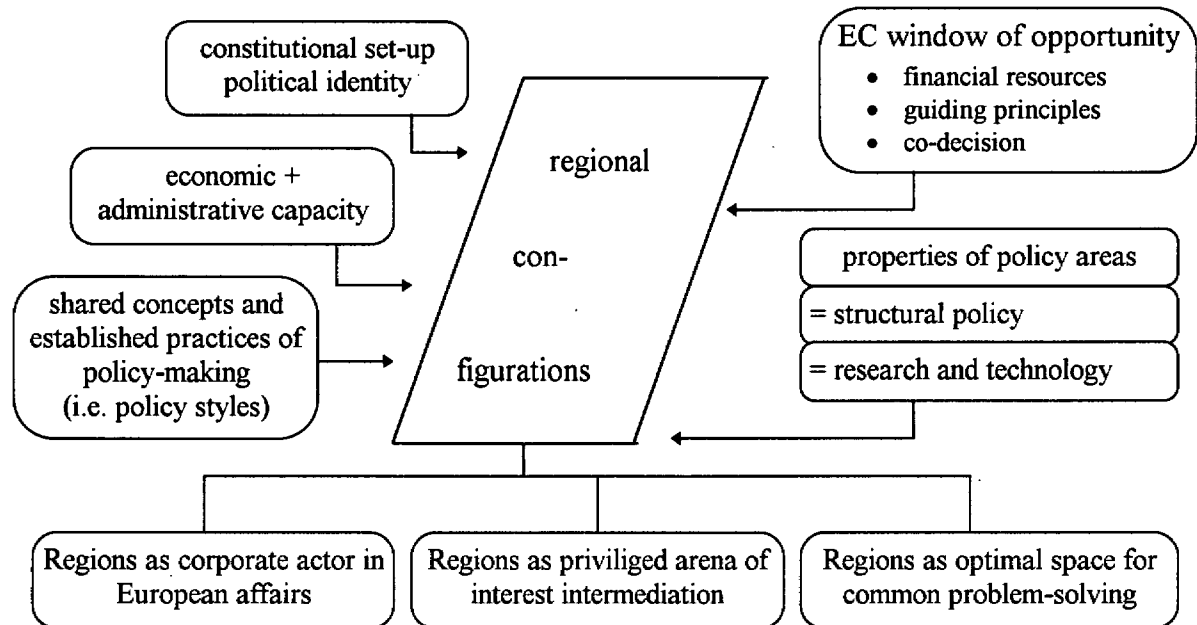
<u>Properties</u>					
constitutional	federal	regionalized (strong)	regionalized (weak)	decentralized	unitarian
economic					
strong	Baden- Württemberg	Catalonia	Lombardy	Rhône-Alpes	Wales
weak	Lower Saxony	Andalucia	Sicily	Languedoc- Roussillon	<sup>4</sup>

Remembering what has been said concerning the transformation of governance, there are strong reasons to believe that any change will be contingent on the particular setting of policy routines and political practices. We, therefore, took reference to the concept of „policy styles“ and suggested that policy styles will not only differ according to national systems but to regions, too (Knodt 1997). Constitutional settings and economic conditions will give it shape but not determine it. Therefore, our choice of regions was only a first approximation to a comparative case design. Because the concept of policy styles had not yet been applied to sub-national units and because there is hardly any literature, and indeed no comparative study that might provide empirical evidence of any relevance, we could construct cases for comparison only after we had produced our own data.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed account of the selection of regions see Kohler-Koch 1992 and 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Due to time and financial restrictions we could not cover the West Midlands, the second British region we had in our sample.

**Table 5 Model of Analysis**



From our theoretical perspective our main interest was put on

- the interdependence of ideas and political practise,
- the relevance of involvement for the dissemination of concepts and routines,
- the correlation of variations in attitudes, strategies and structures with regional properties.

The hypothesis sounds plausible that the greater the support for a particular governing concept, the more likely the widespread existence of concurrent structures. And because learning is based on experience and because political routines get established through becoming incorporated in daily practice, it makes sense to assume that taking part in Community programmes will make a difference. Finally, it is reasonable to expect that variations in a cross-regional comparison will be most pronounced when the regions under considerations are at the opposite end of a spectrum in terms of relevant properties that determine actors' attitudes and actions.

Therefore, it is easy to predict what we expected:



- a co-variance between cognitive orientation and established practices and routines;
- a propensity to support an enhanced role for regions that rises with the benefits to be gained and the capacity to use them;
- a readiness to get engaged in co-operative governance that varies with regional policy styles and European experience;
- a match between intra-regional network-structures and trans-regional patterns of interaction and interest representation.

As we were ready to face „one of the tragedies of life (that) is the murder of a beautiful theory by a gang of brutal facts“ (Benjamin Franklin), we started an ambitious comparative research project<sup>5</sup> that for the first time produced quantitative data to answer a number of pertinent questions<sup>6</sup>. They were addressed to gain information on

- Intervening variables like the cognitive distance between actor categories, political cleavages, etc.,
- inter-organisational relations and the mutual assessment of political weight<sup>7</sup>,
- attitudes, assessments, and accounts of activities.

In accordance with our conceptual framework we were interested to know:

- Is there a shared belief in guiding concepts as propagated by the EU such as
  - the attractiveness of a more important role for regions in European affairs,
  - the benefits of joining the EU's competitive strategies,
  - the superiority of co-operative governance?

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<sup>5</sup> The questionnaires were sent to a carefully selected choice of high ranking actors representing different types of organisations at regional level: regional public administration/government departments; regional assemblies; political parties („public actors“); chambers of commerce; para-public institutions for technology transfer, etc.; research institutions/universities („semi-public actors“); trade unions; social movements; companies; business/professional/employer associations (private actors).

<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire included 45 questions including 280 items.

<sup>7</sup> These data was used for a quantitative network analysis.

- How did regional actors adapt to the deepening of European integration in terms of
  - administrative reforms,
  - a revision of lobbying strategies,
  - getting involved in public-private partnerships?
  
- How does regional-EU exchange look like:
  - to what extent and in which ways do regional actors make use of Community resources offered?
  - what are the difficulties they face?
  - how do they manage to master them?

### ***6. Cognitive convergence, but in regional colours***

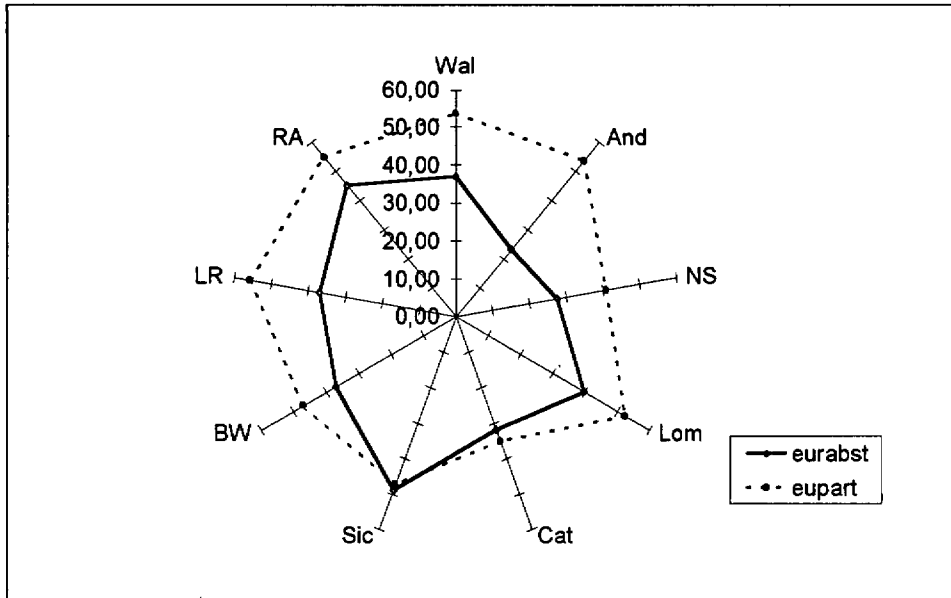
At first sight the data provide striking evidence that there is a dominant, European-wide accepted concept that regions are on the move:

- (1) Any type of actor in any single region attributes high importance to the regional level of government in shaping everyday life within the region.
- (2) The emphasis put on the regulatory force of the market and the strive for economic competitiveness finds wide support in all countries and types of organisations.
- (3) Co-operative government is considered to be attractive and worthwhile investing time and efforts.
- (4) Changes in the organisation of politics are widespread and network building goes beyond boundaries linking regional actors directly to the supranational level and forging transregional coalitions of interest.
- (5) Being involved in European politics strengthens a pro-European attitude and makes administrative re-organisation more likely.

### ***6.1. Pro-European by experience***

Having checked a large number of indicators (Larat 1997), we are safe to say that being involved in European affairs makes a difference. In eight out of nine regions, many more actors claim that they have undertaken measures of internal reorganisation in order to accommodate to the challenges emanating from the European Community when they represent organisations that are directly concerned with European policies - be it in the field of regional development, be it in research and technology. They also confirm more frequently than representatives of other organisations that over the last few years relations between the public sector and the economy have changed because of the increasing importance of European policies. Involvement triggers action, and it changes attitudes. Irrespective of the organisation they belong to, respondents that are involved in European policies have a more pro-European attitude. In the cross-regional comparison neither constitutional nor economic variables have a notable impact on results. There are only two regions where there is hardly any difference in attitudes between those that are involved and those that are not. In Sicily anything that has to do with Europe is held in high esteem because it has the image of being devoid of all those deficiencies that plague the public sphere in Italy. It is an assessment held irrespective of personal experience, which - and this is important to ascertain - only few actors have; Sicily turned out to be that region in which only a small minority of organisations have direct links to the European level. Catalonia is an exception for different reasons. In the Catalan „Autonomous Community“ a pro-European attitude is rather a matter of regional self-awareness than the result of experience and positive cost-benefit analysis. In addition, political cleavages shape the outlook on Europe, which is particularly true for public actors that represent the regionalist party dominant in Catalonia and that is always quarreling about autonomy with the governing party in Madrid.

**Graph 1 Pro-European attitudes**

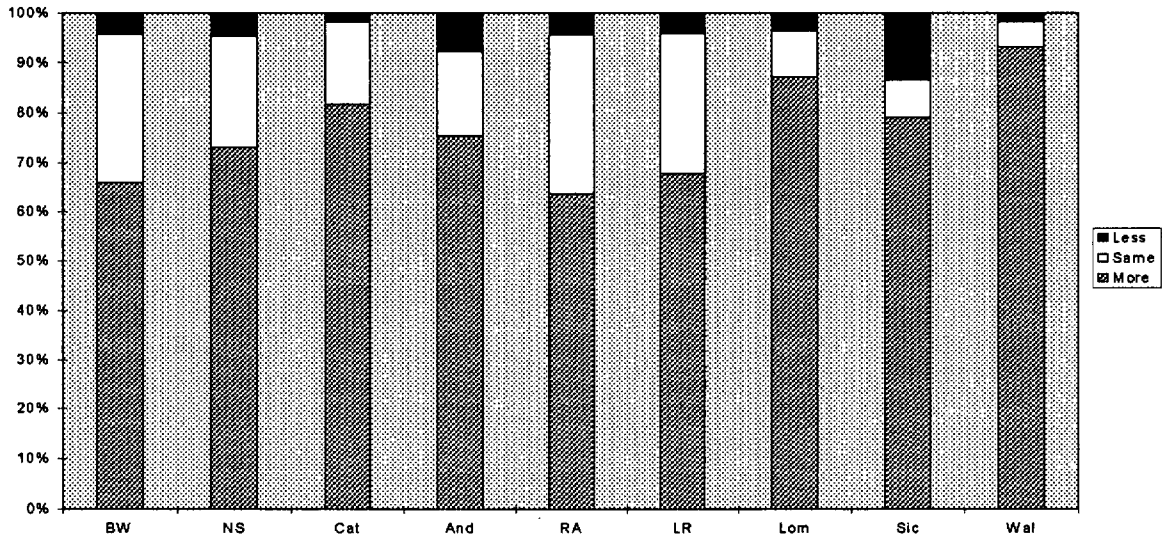


Eupart: involved in European policies Eurabst: not involved in European policies  
 And = Andalusia; BW = Baden-Wurtemberg; Cat = Catalonia; Lom = Lombardy; LR = Longuedoc-Roussillon;  
 NdS = Niedersachsen/Lower Saxony; RA = Rhone-Alpes; SIC = Sicily; WAL = Wales.  
 REGE, MZES, 1996

**6.2. One or two concepts on "Regions in Europe"?**

There is a surprisingly high support for a strengthening of the regions in European affairs. Variations are rather territorial than actor-dependent. As this question is directly related to the image of the political system, we expected to find considerable variations between nations which can be explained by the different allotment of legal competences and minor differences between regions within one country that could be attributed to divergent levels of economic performance. Trends are in line with our argument but not the exact results. When asked what degree of influence within the EU should regions have in the future, the answers were as follows:

**Graph 2 Future influence of regions in Europe**



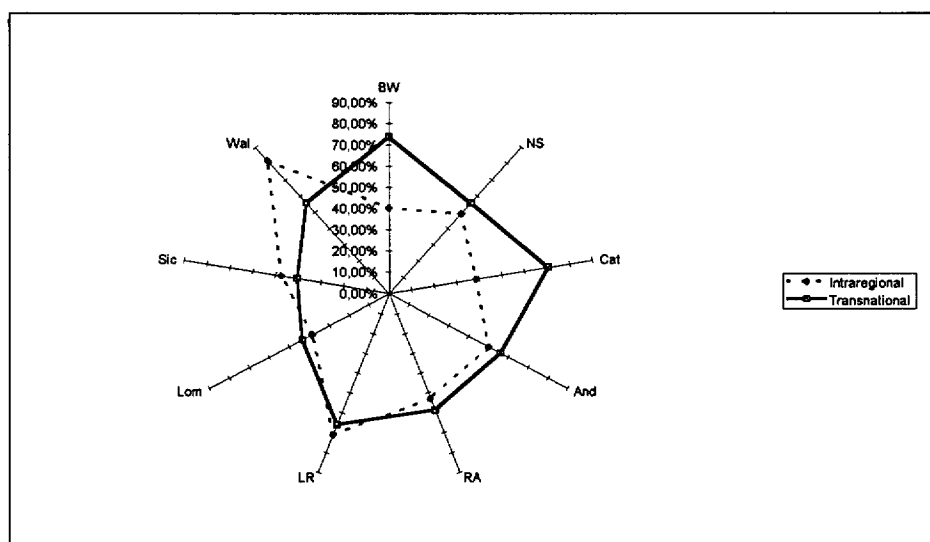
(BW) = Baden-Württemberg; (NdS) = Lower Saxony; (CAT) = Catalonia; (AND) = Andalusia; (RA) = Rhône-Alpes; (LR) = Languedoc-Roussillon; (Lom) = Lombardy; (SIC) = Sicily and (WAL) = Wales. REGE, MZES, 1996

The overall high level of support for regions is a surprise because at the time of the survey popular regionalism was not at its peak. In addition the result may not be explained through referring to the institutional self-interest of public actors: There is little variation between the attitudes of public and private actors.<sup>8</sup>

These findings do not, however, imply a trend towards a "Europe of regions". Rather it is plausible to assume that a "Europe with regions" is emerging. The first evidence to support this hypothesis is that there is a bifurcate development towards strengthening intra-regional networking which goes parallel to an expansion of transnational coalition building. Another one is that all kinds of organizations have established direct links to Community agents irrespective of policy areas.

<sup>8</sup> In the European average 75% private and 79% public actors are in favour of giving more power to the regions..

**Graph 3 Coalition strategies of regional actors**



Asked which of six conceivable strategies are the most promising to enhance one's position in negotiations with the EU, the majority of respondents opted for a functional approach; 59,6% were in favour of „close co-operation among those mainly concerned with EU matters“. „Transnational co-operation with partners in other EU member states“ came second (58,6%) and „a broad coalition of forces at the regional level“ came third (51,4%).

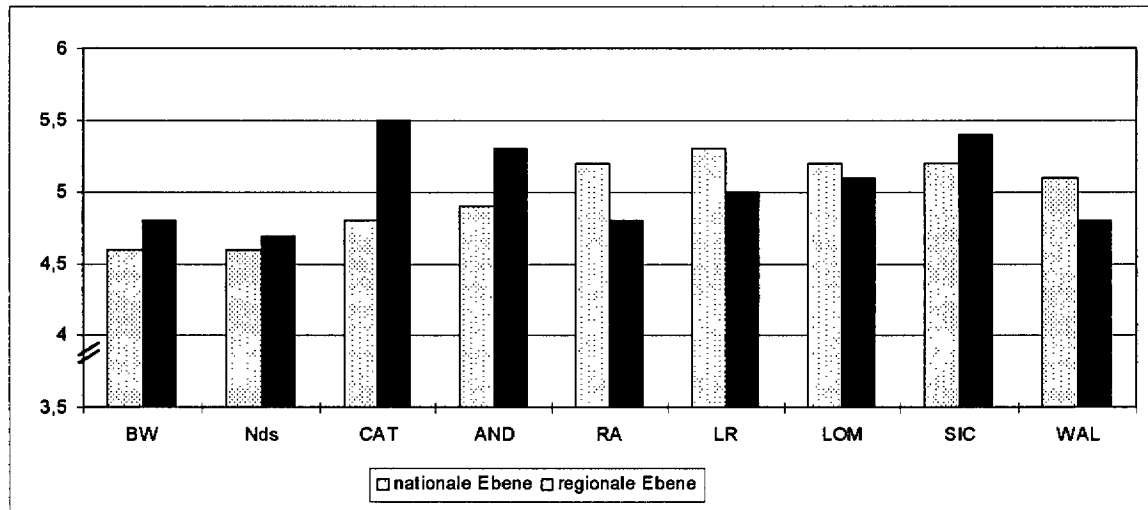
REGE, MZES, 1996

A similar ambivalence exists if one compares the relative position of regions and the nation state in European affairs. "Strengthening the regions" gets high marks, particularly in those countries where the political power is concentrated on the national level. Those, however, are the countries that attribute high importance to any kind of state agency be it on the regional, the national or the European level<sup>9</sup>. It is a distinct "Southern" pattern (embracing Spain, Italy and France) and there is no evidence that the upgrading of the regions should go to the detriment of the state. In other words: despite the strong support for a greater say for regions, there is no strive for a "Europe of regions" coming close to the often cited "sandwich model", i.e. a state squeezed between powerful regions and a powerful EU. All

<sup>9</sup> Actors were asked to assess the importance of the local, regional, national, and European level of governance in respect to shaping the general conditions of life in the region ranging from 1 = not important to 6 = very important.

our indicators and numerous interviews, as well, support the interpretation that regional actors are eager to improve their position not to the detriment of national actors but rather in order to gain additional access and voice in European affairs.

**Graph 4** Importance of national and regional level



REGE, MZES, 1996

There is some more evidence which runs counter to the notion of a hegemonic political concept of European regionalism. What regionalism is about and what kind of strategy for regional development should be pursued is clearly distinct along a north-south divide.<sup>10</sup> In the South, a "Europe of the Regions" is equated with preserving more cultural pluralism and a closer attention to the needs and desires of individuals. Whereas in the North, respondents expect that it will bring about a strengthening of already competitive regions and a counterbalance to centralizing tendencies. This difference in the perception what Europe should be about, has a long tradition. It has to be remembered that though the Federal Republic of Germany always had high political stakes involved in the European Community, it is above all considered to be an element of political co-operation that gains legitimacy through economic performance. This view is even more pronounced in the United Kingdom. European integration has from the very beginning been equated with a „Common Market“, and just because it is a

<sup>10</sup> For further detail see Jouve/Négrier in Kohler-Koch 1997

strictly economic affair that should not entail any transfer of political sovereignty, efficiency is all that counts. For the founding members of the South, democratic representation has been higher on the political agenda. When negotiating the Treaties they made it an issue to have a parliamentary representation.<sup>11</sup>

## *6.2. A Europe of the strong and of the weak*

Regional competitiveness is another concept that gets broad support as a general idea but meets with reservation when applied to individual regions. There is an overall broad agreement that it is useful to follow the market-orientation of the EC's economic policy<sup>12</sup>. When asked whether being subject to EC rules regulating competition may produce harmful effects on one's own region, the answers are more sceptical in particular in the South. An even more clear-cut profile dividing North and South emerged when actors in the different regions were asked which policy positions should have more influence in the regional economy. Independent of their national origin, the "Northerners" were stronger in favour of a strengthening of market forces. In the South, there is a stronger plea for more emphasis put on social cohesion and sustainable growth. Most pronounced is the strong backing for measures of "safeguarding trade", the euphemistic formula used for protectionist measures.<sup>13</sup>

Already in the 80s when launching the Single Market programme, the Community propagated again and again that competition was the key to achieve greater welfare. With the white book on „Growth, Competition and Employment“,<sup>14</sup> just a decade later, the European Commission repeated once again the same credo. When negotiating the Single Market it had, however, to be taken into account that among scholars and politicians alike there are strong dissenting votes. The general wisdom of neo-liberalism that market forces will over time ensure an equal distribution of the economic benefits of a growing

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<sup>11</sup> This is the result of another project just completed at Mannheim on „Governing Beyond the State. Concepts of European Legitimacy in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom“.

<sup>12</sup> 85% in favour.

<sup>13</sup> The phrasing of the questions was adapted to the terminology used by the Commission in its White Paper on Growth, Competition and Employment, Commission 1993.

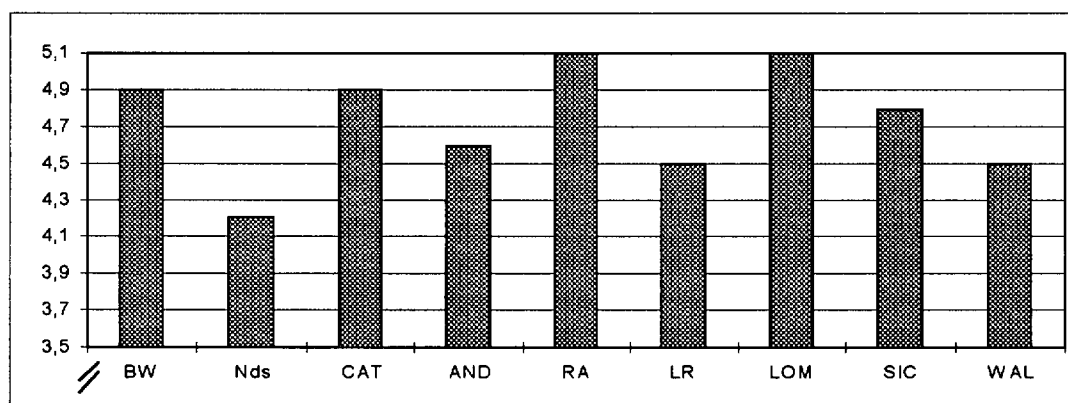
<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



economy meet with reservation in some quarters.<sup>15</sup> Especially among the less developed regions in the European periphery there was a growing fear that they might not be able to face the competitive pressure of European de-regulation. Therefore, it is not to the point when the agreement to include a new chapter on „economic and social cohesion“ in the Community Treaty is interpreted as an economically unjustified side-payment to pay tribute to the joint bargaining power of a veto coalition of member states.

In view of this political and scholarly debate and in face of growing investments of the Community in regional development, it comes as a surprise that the idea of „market-orientation“ met with nearly unrestricted approval in our survey. Asked to what extent it is useful for one’s own region to follow the trend of European economic policy, which was characterized as „very much market-oriented“, an overwhelming majority considered it to be useful (85,4%). When looking for the impact of different variables, our expectations were confirmed that among actor categories the trade unions were least enthusiastic. Economic strength, however, did not produce the variations we expected. Answers do not vary according the cross-European ranking of regions but within member states. The German case is a particular good example to support the hypothesis that actors do not measure the competitiveness of their region in view of the economic performance of other regions in Europe but just in relation to those within their own country.

*Graph 5 Usefulness of market-oriented policy*



REGE, MZES, 1996

<sup>15</sup> This reservation was already written into the White Book on the Single Market.

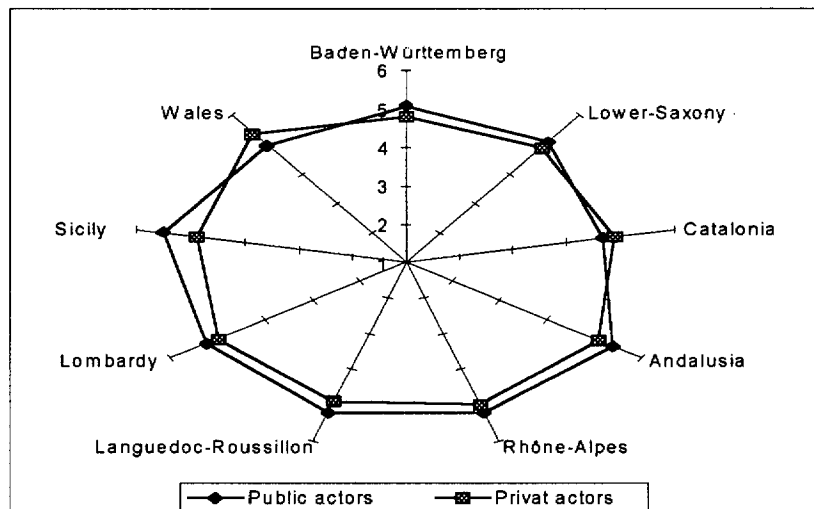
#### ***6.4. Co-operative governance in Europe***

„Co-operative governance“ is another leading idea that gained great prominence in European politics. In the framework of cohesion policy, in particular, Community bodies have propagated with great emphasis the appropriateness of encompassing policy networks be it on the regional level in public-private co-operations or linking the regions to the Community. By introducing the principle of „partnership“, such horizontal and vertical links became part of the regulatory structures of Community programmes. The political rhetoric supporting the new approach was that it would ensure participation, higher efficiency and effectiveness and, therefore, enhance the legitimacy of the policies and actors involved. The principle of partnership was transferred into procedural rules that give sub-national actors a greater say in the formulation and implementation of EC-sponsored projects of structural development. The underlying argument is that co-operation is beneficial in several ways: It will help to take advantage of the know-how and the engagement of the recipients. It is supposed to trigger administrative innovation because local interests will press for more management efficiency in order to get hold of and make best use out of the financial resources offered by the Community. Last, not least the argument was that face to face co-operation between local and Community actors will make the EU more receptive to the actual needs at the sub-national level. Less propagated, though very present in the political discourse, was the argument that the modernizing effect of getting involved in Community programmes and the experience gained in trans-national networking will strengthen a region's position vis-à-vis a national government that is reluctant to pay tribute to regional interests and demands for greater autonomy.

In view of all the investments made on the part of the Community to sell the idea of partnership, it is no surprise that the principle meets with high acceptance. In order not to get trapped into just reproducing „cheap talk“ and interpreting lip-service to a fashionable slogan as a change in governing concepts, we asked a whole battery of questions about the knowledge of and participation in bodies of political co-operation. We wanted to know which experiences had been gained and what is the assessment in terms of shortcomings and benefits. We tested the acceptance of the idea both as a general concept and as a guiding principle in particular policy fields, i.e. regional structural policy and research and technology.

In spite of being very cautious our data give unequivocal evidence that the concept of „co-operative governing“ has gained ground all over Europe. There is an overwhelming support for the argument that a close public-private partnership is a useful approach to problem-solving (85%). Good governing is no longer perceived as decision-making from the top in the sole responsibility of political authorities. Rather, the opinion is widespread that state representatives should take the role of intermediaries, having close and trusting working relations with economic and social actors. There are hardly any differences among actor categories, nor is there any variation with respect to the constitutional properties of regions or between rich and poor regions. Just to give an example: When asked which groups should have a greater say in regional politics, the answers were highly in favour for those that advocate „a close co-operation between state and the economy“, the result was as follows:

*Graph 6 In support for close public-private co-operation*



REGE, MZES, 1996

To take part in consultative bodies and be asked to participate in joint planning and implementation of programmes is considered to be useful. For respondents the most important reason to participate is that they get involved in „important decision-making processes“, next comes the argument that it is for

„gaining information“ and „developing useful contacts“; for only few actors it is an act of sheer symbolic presence<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>There is a striking parallel in the assessment on the part of both public and private interests. Representatives of companies, business associations, chambers of commerce just like their opposites in the public sphere, - be they representatives from regional government, parliaments or parties, be they members of universities, research institutes or other public agencies - , they all share the belief that utilising the experience of a broad range of organizations and interest groups will lead to improved public-policy making. Even among those that are the most aware of the short-comings, i.a. those who believe that participation is time-consuming (33,9%), that no-one might be prepared to accept responsibility (30,1%), and that consultative bodies might just be another talking shop (29.5%) - a majority supports the idea and the practice of political co-operation.

### ***7. A discourse that does not match reality***

This conceptional convergence has, however, to be interpreted with care. We wanted to find out if concepts and the organisation of politics match. The proliferation of consultative bodies and partnership procedures is one indicator of the spreading of co-operative governance. The actual contacts between organisations and the importance they attribute to each other is another one. In order to get a realistic assessment of territorial network structures in the broad field of European economic policies, we listed for each region the 60 to 70 most important organisations on the regional, the national, and the European level and asked our respondents to indicate to which organisation they have regular contacts and which organisations they regarded as important for the development of the region. As our survey included all the regional organisations listed, we could check for reciprocal relations, i.e. get a fair picture of the interactions at regional level. With respect to the external relations, we have to rely on the declaration of regional actors alone. We use the term „network“ only when we talk about those relations that are based on mutual contacts and that were confirmed by both partners. The quantitative

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<sup>16</sup> Valid percents are as follows: 39,9% for codecision, 24,1% to make contacts, 23,1% to get information, 3,5% to be present, other reasons amounted to a total of 3,4%.

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network analysis provided us with data on the density of relations within a region and the position of individual actors within the network (Grote 1997). To get an even more detailed picture, we also investigated with whom regional actors co-operate in the policy field of regional development and research and technology. We wanted to know to what extent individual organisations at the three different levels were helpful in assisting the participation in European policies. And we wanted to know if administrative inefficiency at regional or national level was an obstacle to participate in EC programmes.

### ***7.1. Regional networks***

When looking at our data, we were struck by the evidence presented. It is not so much the density of regional networks than the centrality of particular actors that give rise to second thoughts.<sup>15</sup> Though a broad majority supported the idea that the state should act as mediator in an endeavour of joint problem solving (75%), governing in settings of „public-private partnership“ obviously does not reduce the dominant role of the public actor. The data rather propose an opposite conclusion, namely that it opens up new arenas for state representatives to expand into economic and social life. Looking at the patterns of intra-regional networks, the centrality of public actors is striking. Irrespective of the political issue at stake, in each of the nine regions the most central actor, both in terms of frequencies of contact and attribution of importance, is an agent of the regional state. When differentiating all actors of our sample according to these two criteria and dividing them into separate classes according to density of contacts and level of importance, the upper class is clearly dominated by state actors. Though we found plenty of evidence that the widely propagated and shared philosophy of public-private co-operation and "government by discourses" has been put into practice by setting up many consultative bodies, steering committees, etc., this does not necessarily change the role of public actors. Europeanization contributes to the expansion of regional networks, but it is primarily the public actors that take the initiative and that are in the centre of all activities. Even in Germany, a political system that is in general classified as being more (neo)corporatist than others, both in Baden-Württemberg and Lower Saxony only

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<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed presentation see Grote in Kohler-Koch 1997.

regional ministries and para-public agencies occupy the centre of the regional network. No associations, chambers, trade unions, or private organisations are included. (For further detail see M. Knodt's contribution to the panel.) Therefore, it is open to debate whether the declared belief in a new mode of governance is just a fad with little relevance for actual political behaviour, whether there is just a time lag in the implementation of institutional reforms or whether the position of an actor in a territorial network of contacts is no valid indicator for its political weight.

## ***7.2. External interest representation***

When we asked our respondents to compare their strategy with regard to Europe with how they pursue their interests in their dealings with the national government, the overwhelming majority answered that they have been developing an innovative approach. Only actors in the two Spanish regions declared that they are refurbishing the same methods.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, it is striking how many actors from all different kinds of organisations have established direct links to Community bodies, became members of trans-national associations or have established liaison offices at Brussels themselves. In spite of the multitude of channels and agents of interest representation, our quantitative analysis reproduced patterns of interaction very similar to those in the regional territorial network.

The regional public actors are the main transmission belts of interest representation towards the European level. At least, public actors dominate external relations in quantitative terms. If they just occupy the place of interest representation or if they manage to fulfill the task to the satisfaction of their principals, is another question. It is telling that those actors that are most central in regional networks are not necessarily held in high esteem. When asked what organisations proved to be helpful in assisting the participation in EC-programmes only in Spain the dominant regional actors were considered to be „very helpful“, whereas in Germany and France they were rated just above and in Italy definitely below

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<sup>18</sup> This is easy to explain, because a new system of interest intermediation was developed in Spain in the process of the democratic transformation that went parallel to Spain getting prepared for entry into the European Community.

average<sup>19</sup>. The Commission with the competent General Directories got the highest ranking. Furthermore, it is worthy of note that far more actors considered it to be important to have access to the Community level than managed to get into contact with EC bodies.

These findings call into question two widely accepted assumptions. One relates to the benefits of intra-regional networking, the other to the central position of regional actors in EC affairs. The supposition that dense co-operation structures at the regional level go hand in hand with effective external interest representation does not hold. High levels of contact do not necessarily correlate with a mutual high esteem of the actors involved. Network structures quite obviously do not promote a particular collective behaviour nor can the density of network relations be equated with the formation of a corporate actor. There are good reasons to believe that the causal equation works the other way round: The lack of any central actor that has the capacity to produce a collective good gives rise to a dense web of manifold contacts. The Italian regions, in particular Sicily, are a telling example that the inefficiency of public administration and deep-rooted socio-political cleavages produce a dense and well balanced, i.e. non-hierarchical network system at the regional level. There also is a plurality of channels of interest representation to the European level that reflects the plurality of competing political forces, but this plurality goes hand in hand with a very low capacity to establish a working relationship with the European level<sup>20</sup>. In all other regions, in which state actors have a central position at the regional level they, or rather the regional liaison office in Brussels, occupy a dominant position. They are transmission belts of regional interests, are useful as information pools, provide access and give advice<sup>21</sup>. Again, what is the role of public and private actors with respect to the establishment of these offices. On the basis of numerous case studies, we think it is safe to conclude that the proliferation of

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<sup>19</sup> On a scale ranging from 1 to 6 the evaluation of the most central actor was in Spain - depending on the policy area - just about 5. In Germany and France the rating is oscillating between 3.3 and 4.7; Italy scored the lowest marks in Sicily: 2.3 in structural policy and 2.0 in research and technology. The data reflect a very consistent pattern: the Italian regional actors, in particular in Sicily, claim that they get very little help even from those organizations which they put on top of the list of those that proved to be helpful. The Spanish actors are quite content with the support they get and actors from France and Germany cover a middle ground.

<sup>20</sup> The Sicilian network pattern is quite distinct from all other regions. It is the only region with several intermediary organizations, among them trade unions in the upper class of network actors, and with an active role of these organizations in boundary spanning activities. However, external relations are hardly existent at all in the Sicilian case; it is an outstanding example of regional isolation.

<sup>21</sup> Among all the different organizations located in Brussels they were contacted most frequently by a majority of regional actors. In terms of usefulness they were second to the Commission.

these offices should not be interpreted as a response to functional needs though this is the most popular justification in political rhetoric. They are rather part of a supply strategy of the regional political actors to demonstrate that they know how to meet the challenges of the future and are ready to provide services to home actors. Last, not least they are a useful instrument for regional governments to manage to stay in a central position in intra-regional coalition building.

Is there a plausible link between the concept and the practice of an enhanced role for regions in European politics? The European discussion about a "Europe of the regions" attached a positive connotation to the concept. The propagation of the principle of „partnership“ aimed at regional actors and the introduction of relating rules and procedures by Community bodies, in a time of growing public awareness of the importance of European integration encouraged regional public actors to get engaged in an active European strategy. Community concepts fitted well in an on-going debate and supported their legitimacy. Whether political actors within individual regions were successful to take up these concepts and draw benefit from it, evidently depends above all on the capacity of public actors to deliver, i.e. on administrative performance. There is evidence that social and economic organisations within a region will be inclined to look for that support and get engaged in regional interest intermediation to the degree that regional political actors provide effective service and give the political backing needed.

As far as we know from interviews and case studies<sup>22</sup>, the engagement of regional public actors does not weaken functional interest representation. Regional governments are far from monopolizing external interest representation. Even in structural policy, which is mainly a matter of public actors, and even more so in research and technology, regional public actors do not speak instead of private actors but on their behalf. One may call it an intrusion of territorial public actors into the domain of functional interest representation, but individual and sectoral interests are not at all inclined to subdue to a public regional actor. They prefer a multilevel approach, which corresponds to the logic of the EC system. If

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<sup>22</sup> A telling case is the conflict about the application of EC competition rules on the merger between Mercedes-Benz and Kässbohrer. Because the merger was opposed by the German anti-trust agency and parts of the German Ministry of Economics, the European Commission found it difficult to agree. Apart from the management and labour representatives of both companies, the local and regional trade union associations, local and regional politicians and ministers of the Land government rallied for support (Wirtz 1997).



they manage to use the regional forum to get further support for their case, they will use it. How much they focus on the regional level will depend on the availability and effectiveness of competing channels of interest representation, be they along functional lines, i.e. via economic or social associations, be they political, i.e. via direct support at national or European level.

## **8. Conclusions**

In general we can conclude that the European Community has given regions more prominence in European affairs and has noticeably affected the public-private relationship in the last few years<sup>23</sup>. A more co-operative approach does not, however, result in tipping the balance between the public and the private in a clear-cut way and it is not at all concomitant with a down-grading of state agents.

Regional public actors are now well established in European affairs. They have succeeded in expanding their realm of influence though the actual power they can exert will always be contingent on a number of situational factors. One main effect of this development is that the number of players in the European political game has been increased and the need for concertation as well. Just as it is not a "Europe of the regions" but rather a "Europe with regions" that is about to emerge, there is no zero-sum game in the distribution of power between the private and the public sector.

Although the EU still is definitely closer to an Economic Community than to a Federal State, social and political issues become upgraded. This is where territorial politics comes back in. regional public actors are just part of it. For regions to have a political impact, there has to be a political agent with a mandate. Such a minimal take-off level is the necessary, though not sufficient, precondition for sub-national entities playing a role in European politics. Just because administrative efficiency, which is deeply routed in regional policy styles, is decisive for regional actors taking advantage of the „windows of opportunity“ opened by the Community, it seems hardly likely that by intentional design a European supply strategy may improve their performance and this way turn to the benefit of the weak.

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<sup>23</sup> A majority of about 60% held the opinion that relations between the public sector and the economy have changed because of the increasing importance of the EC and about 80% said that this had a positive effect.

When we try to draw some conclusions relating to our starting hypothesis, the close interdependence between concepts of legitimate governance, political routines and the organisation of politics has to be questioned. For us it seems less a matter of revising theory than methodology. From the very beginning we knew that survey studies are not the best heuristic device to analyse guiding concepts. We may just have captured a rather passing fashion and by looking at our data we can not tell if they reproduce the opportunistic adaptation to a current language or part of a belief system that is relevant for guiding political behaviour. Interviews and detailed text analysis are more appropriate tools<sup>24</sup>, but survey data provide excellent information to generate hypotheses.

Quantitative network analysis together with other survey data on actors' relations and case study material made it quite obvious that designing new consultative bodies will not easily upset established routines of working together and that activity is not politics. Enhancing the regional level first of all has to be equated with giving a greater political weight to regional public actors. This will induce other regional actors that have a stake in EC affairs to accept the region as yet another forum of politics. Just like in the past they have applied a double strategy, i.e. using channels of interest representation at the national and the European level concurrently, they now include the region as a third level. Such strategies will add to the complexity of the European system and make interest representation an even more burdensome exercise. Preferred access is through bureaucratic channels, only when an issue becomes politicized political responsible actors get in. As politics still is a national affair - power is gained or lost at the national level - the political interdependence between the national and the sub-national level becomes highly relevant. In all those cases in which regional public actors are highly dependent on national politics and have limited powers to decide on issue matters, the region will not become an arena of politics where the political battles on disputed issues will take place. It is rather a political space for testing the ground for compromises and forging coalitions for external interest representation.

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<sup>24</sup> In two other projects we try to just apply these methods to analyse „Concepts of Legitimate Governance“ and „Networking as Concept in Research and Technology“. In a cross-regional study covering nine regions far more resources would be needed.

This may explain why the idea of „co-operative governance“ meets such univocal support in a regional context.

To sum it up: The more we know, the less we are sure of what we know.

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