

Understanding Macro-Regional Strategies

The EUSDR and Existing Forms of Governance and Cooperation in the
Danube Region

Karsten Aust

Veileder

Dr. Stefan Gänzle

*Masteroppgaven er gjennomført som ledd i utdanningen ved
Universitetet i Agder og er godkjent som del av denne utdanningen.
Denne godkjenningen innebærer ikke at universitetet inntår for de
metoder som er anvendt og de konklusjoner som er trukket.*

Forord

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Karsten Aust

Summary

Macro-Regional Strategies (MRSs) revel in noticeable attention in the debate on EU politics. MRSs for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and the Danube Region (EUSDR) were launched in 2009 and 2011, respectively. MRSs are anticipated to be a suitable tool to encounter economic, social and environmental challenges within its regions. For Brussels, this new approach represents a more efficient instrument for the utilization of existing resources.

This thesis focuses on the EUSDR by examining its impact on existing modes of governance and cooperation in the Danube Region. Drawing on a multi-level-governance approach, this research is premised on the assumption that the EUSDR will elicit significant mobilization among subnational authorities, non-governmental actors and participating non-EU members. The ambition is to identify the degree of mobilization along the polity, policy, and the politics level of analysis.

The research is divided in two main parts. The first one is descriptive and provides the necessary theoretical, methodological, and contextual background, whereas the second part attempts to determine the degree of mobilization among relevant actors. Additionally, it aspires to identify the mechanisms behind this form of macro- regional cooperation.

The study concludes that the EUSDR has a differentiated impact on existing governance arrangements, varying across actors and policy sectors. The degree of mobilization is rated as moderate, and activities are predominantly present at the policy level of analysis. Based on the empirical observations and the following discussion, it appears reasonable to suggest that the current governance arrangements are favourable for high-performing actors with sufficient resources. Furthermore, the EUSDR clearly entails a top-down character in its governance structure, through which it places the Commission in a position to extend their role from coordinating the strategy to operating it.

Zusammenfassung

Derzeit genießen Makro-Regionale Strategien (MRSs) spürbare Aufmerksamkeit im europäischen politischen Diskurs. MRSs für den Ostseeraum (EUSBSR) und den Donaauraum (EUSDR) sind 2009 bzw. 2011 ins Leben gerufen worden. Mit diesem neuen Ansatz für regionale Kooperation glaubt Brüssel ein effektives Instrument gefunden zu haben, das den sozial-ökonomischen Herausforderungen sowie Umweltproblemen zu Genüge trägt.

Im Zentrum dieser Magisterarbeit steht die EUSDR und ihr Einfluss auf existierenden Formen von Governance und Kooperation im Donaauraum. Basiert auf einem Multi-Level Governance Ansatz geht diese Arbeit davon aus, dass die EUSDR weitreichende Mobilisierung bei subnationalen Behörden, non-governmentalen Akteuren und teilnehmenden nicht EU Mitgliedern bewirkt. Das Ziel ist es den Grad Mobilisierung festzustellen, entlang der drei Analyseebenen; politische Struktur, politischer Inhalt und politischer Prozess.

Die These besteht aus zwei Hauptteilen. Während der erste, beschreibende Teil die nötigen theoretischen, methodischen und kontextuellen Hintergründe liefert, versucht der zweite Teil den Grad der Mobilisierung relevanter Akteure zu bestimmen und dabei die Mechanismen dieser macro-regionalen Kooperation zu identifizieren.

Die Arbeit kommt zu dem Schluss, dass die EUSDR einen differenzierten Einfluss auf das existierende Governance System hat, der sich je nach Akteur und Politikfeld unterschiedlich ausdrückt. Der Mobilisierungsgrad ist als moderat bewertet und Aktivitäten sind zumeist auf die Analyseebene des politischen Inhaltes beschränkt. Basiert auf den empirischen Funde und der darauf folgenden Diskussion, kann angenommen werden dass die EUSDR, in ihrer jetzigen Form, voreilhaft ist für Akteure mit ausreichenden Ressourcen. Außerdem weist die Strategie eindeutige Zeichen auf, die auf einen top-down Charakter ihrer Governancestrukturen schließen lassen, die es der Europäischen Kommission ermöglicht ihre Position als Koordinator der Strategie zum Betreiber zu erweitern.

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List of Abbreviators

| | |
|--------|--|
| AP | Action Plan |
| CF | Cohesion Fund |
| CoDCR | Council of Danube Cities and Regions |
| CSOs | Civil Society Organisations |
| DCSF | Danube Civil Society Forum |
| DR | Danube Region |
| EAFRD | European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development |
| EaP | Eastern Partnership |
| EMFF | European Maritime and Fisheries Fund |
| ENP | European Neighbourhood Policy |
| ENPI | European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument |
| ERDF | European Regional Development Fund |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| EU | European Union |
| EUSAIR | European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionic Region |
| EUSBSR | European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region |
| EUSDR | European Union Strategy for the Danube Region |
| HLG | High Level Group |
| ICPDR | International Convention to Protection of the Danube River |
| IOs | International organisations |
| MLG | Multi-Level-Governance |
| MRSs | Macro-Regional Strategies |
| NCP | National Contact Point |

| | |
|------|----------------------------|
| PA | Priority Area |
| PACs | Priority Area Coordinators |
| SNAs | Subnational Authorities |

I. Thesis Outline

1.0. Introduction

Currently, Macro-Regional Strategies (MRSs) revel in noticeable attention in the debate on EU politics. MRSs for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and the Danube Region (EUSDR) were launched in 2009 and 2011, respectively, and other potential strategies, such as the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR), are under development. MRSs are expected to be a suitable tool with respect to the economic, social, and environmental challenges within its regions. Via MRSs, Brussels believes to have found an instrument for a more efficient utilization of existing resources.

The notion of macro-region, as it is used here, is understood as a functionally and territorially defined region within the EU in which several EU members and partner states cooperate (Schymik, 2011). As a concept, MRSs are innovative (Schymik, 2011) because they present cooperation at the transnational level, beyond conventional sub- or bi-national regional policy. These strategies are also distinctive since they treat the areas as one single entity, rather than as an administrative space for numerous modes of cooperation (Bengtsson, 2009). The objectives and tasks for the strategies will vary according to the demands of the region in question. A pivotal principle is that all stakeholders – e.g. the EU, national, or regional authorities, along with actors from the third or private sectors – are invited to participate in the projects in a way that strengthens the functioning of the regions (Samecki, 2009). Given the multitude of actors at different levels who are involved in these projects, the governance arrangements are expected to be predominately complex (Dühr, 2011). The effective range of these strategies has its validity within particular regions with existing forms of regional cooperation and governance arrangements. These arrangements comprise various administrative levels of government from different countries, including civil society actors, as well as transnational and international regimes and organizations. Central to this thesis is the EUSDR, in which 14 countries – including nine EU member states, three accession countries, and two neighbouring countries – cooperate. The aim of this research is to examine the impact that the EUSDR triggers on existing modes of governance and cooperation in the Danube Region. It investigates the scope of mobilization of subnational authorities (SNAs), civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as transnational and international actors in the EUSDR context.

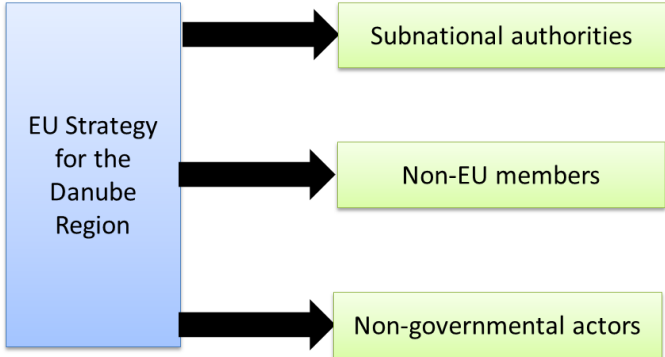
1.1. Research Question

MRSs are concepts of mobilization at all levels of governance; therefore, they do affect existing governance arrangements and cooperation schemes, and they stimulate new forms of institutional interplay. It can be assumed that the more the dynamics of macro-regions develop, the more will these linkages affect the governance construction. In the Danube Region, there has been a significant development within MRSs in the past years. Therefore, against this backdrop, I would like to formulate the following overall research question for this project:

How and to what extent does the EUSDR affect existing governance arrangements in the Danube Region?

To answer this question, attention is drawn to actors from civil society and international organizations (IOs), from SNAs of EU member states, and from authorities from non-EU countries (figure1). The analysis examines their involvement in the processes of setting the agenda and shaping, making, and implementing policy. The main focus is on investigating the degree and quality of mobilization of these actors, by analysing how far their activities align with the EUSDR’s objectives and principles.

Figure 1: Research question



The research question postulated here and the chosen case are theoretically and empirically relevant and interesting due to the existence of various forms of regional cooperation and governance arrangements within the Danube Region (DR) prior 2011 and the strategy’s significant external dimension. In order to investigate the effects that the strategy might trigger, I will apply a multi-level governance (MLG) approach as the analytical tool for this project. The objective is to identify the linkages that affect the governance architecture, by focusing on (1) political mobilization (within the participating member states, sub-regions, and non-EU countries), (2) the relationship between the domestic and the international sphere, and finally (3) the relationship between state and society.

1.2. Terms and Definitions

1.2.1. EU Macro-Regional Strategies

The Single European Act of 1986 introduced the objectives of economic and social cohesion. The Treaty of Lisbon, signed in December 2009, eventually established territorial cohesion as a third dimension of EU cohesion policy. The overall purpose of this policy is “...to promote more balanced, more sustainable territorial development” (Commission, 2012d p 1). Now, with all three dimensions in place, the EU sees itself as being in the position to expand its toolbox and to develop instruments to attain its cohesion goals. Therefore, the introduction of MRSs is closely linked to this background.

The term macro-regions has been used in different contexts, e.g. to describe large groups of states, such as the EU or ASEAN, but also groups of administrative regions within a country. The definition of a macro-region is strongly influenced by how the term region is defined. A region is very often associated with an administrative entity or a functional space. These areas are not a given; they are instead a constructed product of deliberated activities, and the process of regionalization signifies an interest-driven strategy of power expression (Dubois et al., 2009). As mentioned above, the notion of macro-region, as it is used here, is understood as a functionally and territorially defined region within the EU in which several EU member and partner states cooperate (Schymik, 2011). The former Commissioner of Regional Policy, Pawel Samecki (2009 p 1), described a macro-region as “... an area including territory from a number of countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges”. This definition includes two dimensions, a territorial one and a functional one. With regards to the territorial dimension, macro-regions embrace EU member states, non-member states, as well as sub-regions thereof (figure 2). The latter is clearly visible in case of Germany, which participates in both macro-regions; in the Baltic Sea Region with the Länder Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg Vorpommern, as well as in the Danube Region with Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. Through the involvement of some of their sub-regions, Russia and the Ukraine are examples of non-member state participation. Despite the implication of having third countries, MRSs are not primarily aimed towards non-member states.

Figure 2: EUSBSR and EUSDR

| | EUSBSR | EUSDR |
|-------------------|--|--|
| EU member states | Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany: HH, MV, SH | Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany: Bavaria, BW |
| Non-member states | Norway, Russia: northern sub-regions | Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Moldova, Ukraine: (Odeska, Chernivetska, Ivano-Frankivska, Zakarpatska Oblast) |

As stressed by the Commission (Samecki, 2009), the borders of macro-regions are supposed to be flexible and depend upon functional needs. The biophysical features are the primary, but not the only criteria for the geographical scope of MRSs; a number of common issues, or in other words, a certain degree of multi-functionality determines a macro-region. The functional component is mainly informed by the characteristics of the regions, namely geography, topology, or biophysical elements. Therefore, macro-regions are affiliated with sea basins, river systems, or mountain areas. The physical boundaries are not firmly defined, often varying according to the relevance of the policy at stake. Arguably, however, functionality does not express itself, as some of the functions are constructed. Instead, functionality is a matter of good argumentation, or as Stead noted (2012 p 2), “*new spaces are often contested*”. Hence, the degree of genuine functionality will highly depend on the nature of the issue in question.

The geographical scope of these strategies is limited to just certain parts of the EU; thus, MRSs cannot be clearly assigned to either the national or the supranational level; rather, they need to be placed between these two. In short, the EU’s macro-regional approach is organized along three dimensions: horizontal (sectorial), vertical (various levels of government), and territorial (transcending administrative borders).

MRSs appear to increase the differentiation of the EU’s MLG system, caused by the alleged emergence of a new level of decision-making placed between the nation states and the supranational institutions (Schymik, 2011). However, given that the concept of MRSs is based on the “three No’s”, implying that there are neither additional funds from the EU budget, nor new legislation or new institutions to support these strategies, there is no substantial evidence for assuming that these strategies represent an additional level of European multi-level governance. MRSs are initially intended to make use of resources that are already in place, by more efficient exploitation of existing funds, laws, and institutions. Nevertheless, inevitably MRSs have an impact on the EU’s governance structure; they display a shift from territorial to

functional regions (Kern & Gänzle, 2013). Furthermore, it remains to be seen whether the paradigm of the “three No’s” will be softened up or questioned in the future. In a nutshell, MRSs are supposed to improve the EU’s functioning without further constitutional advancement; they are an instrument for cooperation between regions, member states, and the EU.

1.2.2. The Danube Region

For centuries, the DR has been the home to a variety of peoples, languages, cultures, and religions. Despite the fact that the riparian states of the Danube River have been closely linked to each other since the 16th century and the Middle European part of this region was embedded in the Habsburg Empire until the beginning of the 20th century, fragmentation along with cultural and religious diversity are key features in this region. This is also true in terms of socio-economic developments. Today, this area, with a total population of about 115 million people, unifies the highest as well as the least developed regions of Europe. The 14 countries within the Danube basin emerged from different political, economic, and social contexts, which is clearly expressed in varying capacities to develop sustainable policies. In this highly heterogeneous region, we can observe a gradient from the west to the east along the Danube River; on the one hand in the west we find longstanding democracies with successful market economies, but in the east, on the other hand, we find young consolidating democracies with economic systems in transformation (Klemm & Langer, 2013; Kodric, 2011). For historical reasons, cooperation within this region has for a long time not been high on the agenda. During the Cold War era, all initiatives for enhancing integration within the DR have had little success. Therefore, numerous cleavages, rather than the spirit and the identity of a common region, shape the reality within this region (Bos, 2011). The end of the Cold War can also be considered as the beginning of a new wave of interaction within the DR, and like the River Rhine after 1945, the Danube River now has the potential to become the symbol of European integration (Àgh, 2010a). The cooperation fever in the early 1990s resulted in the launch of various forms of cooperation with and within the transformation countries. The reach of this variety of initiatives extend from bi- or multilateral arrangements, to intergovernmental and supranational modes of cooperation, as well as the inclusion of civil society and other non-governmental actors (Bos, 2011). Initiatives such as the Visegrád group, the European Free Trade Association, the Central Europe Initiative, and the Danube Region Working Community can be considered as cases of macro- regional cooperation within the DR (Bos, 2011; Gál, 2009). At the international level, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and the Danube Commission

are examples of intergovernmental organizations within the DR concerned with Danube's navigation and environmental protection. However, compared with the Baltic Sea Region, the institutional infrastructure in the DR is by far not that developed.

The gradient along the Danube River is not only limited to the socio-economic dimension. Owing to the heritage of the socialist political system, a common feature of the transformation countries within this region is their poorly developed subnational administration and the lack of a well-functioning civil society. Several initiatives have been launched to conquer these shortcomings. The Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CoDCR) for instance, founded in 2009 as an umbrella arena for regional and local authorities, is regarded as a decisive organization intended to foster the development of competences and good governance in the DR (Langer, 2012). In the attempt to involve the third party, the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) must be highlighted as a kind of structure for civil society participation. In sum, the DR is a highly heterogeneous area that lacks a shared identity or culture. Characteristics of this region include asymmetries in socio-economic and political terms between new and old EU member states as well as non-EU countries. Overcoming this division necessitates cultivating a regional identity.

1.3. State of Research and Literature

MRSs are very present in the debate on EU politics. Literature regarding this topic has emerged at the interface of several disciplines, such as spatial planning, political science, and European studies. Early contributions on MRSs (Àgh, 2010b; Àgh et al., 2010; Dubois et al., 2009; Dühr, 2011; Schymik, 2011) have been concerned with the evolution and development of strategies, as well as their set-up, challenges, and the political consequences. Carsten Schymik (Schymik, 2011) provides a study comprised of a very detailed description of the creation process of the two test cases, along with a comprehensive overview on the theoretical function and practice of macro-regions. Stefanie Dühr (2011 p 3) detects a “*macro-regional fever*” in Europe. She emphasises transnational co-operation and sub-regionalism in Europe, and draws attention to the potential as well as the challenges one is faced with when implementing and administering MRSs. Rikard Bengtsson (2009 p 1) notes that macro-regional cooperation has now become “*standard vocabulary*” within the EU. His focus is on the pre-conditions for a successful strategy implementation and the challenges for macro-regions, such as efficiency, governance, commitment, and their external dimensions. The research focus of Attila Àgh (2010a) is regionalization and their various types. The main argument is that a “*new multilateral world order*” (Àgh, 2010a p. 1240) has emerged and that

the EU can only succeed as a global actor if it organizes its own regionalized neighbourhood. Despite the fact that MRSs are not primarily aimed towards third-EU countries, according to Àgh, these strategies are a suitable tool to overcome what he calls the EU's "carrot crises". Even though MRSs are a relatively new phenomenon, their theoretical basis is rooted in regional cooperation, which can be traced back to the early years of the European integration project. Dubois et al. (2009) identified two waves of large-scale regional integration. In the first one (late 1940s to mid-1960s), regional cooperation was driven by international security challenges. The second wave (1980s–1990s), on the other hand, has been viewed as the result of the globalization process, with the focus on trade and common political and economic development. Ricardo Cappellin (1998 p 1) and his "*flexible geometry approach*" identifies the European territory as "*a set of overlapping transnational macro-regions*". Within these regions, administrative entities cooperate, while at the same time competing with other macro-regions. These regions are characterized by a complex web of urban centres. For Cappellin, it is important to emphasise that the boundaries of these regions should be rather flexible. In contrast to the macro-regional approach emphasised by the EU, Cappellin stressed that cooperation goes beyond simple territorial and functional interdependencies. In his view, macro-regions have the potential to create a regional identity. Much of the basis for MRSs can be found in Andrews Cottey's new European sub-regionalism (Cottey, 2000). He maps the spectrum of new sub-regional groups and co-operating modes in Europe during the 1990s, which could be observed all over Europe. He argued that these new sub-regional groups "*...provide an important framework for addressing the growing agenda of soft-security challenges...*". The attention is directed towards democratization, human and minority rights, economics, environment, and cross-border crime. Furthermore, he describes the role of these groups as an "*indirect approach*" to security, caused by the "*soft*" nature of their cooperation modes (Cottey, 2000 p 24).

A growing body of literature is directed to the governance construction within the macro-regions (Baad Berkan et al., 2009; Kern, 2011; Kern & Gänzle, 2013). Kern and Gänzle (2013) observed that MRSs are embedded in the EU system of multi-level governance, as well as a change from territorial to functional regions. Authors like Dominic Stead (Stead, 2011, 2012) approach macro-regions from a spatial planning perspective. He stresses that these strategies represent not just a simple altering of power across different levels of decision-making; it also changes the opportunity structure for intervention and generates new actor constellations. Moreover, the formation of what he calls "*soft spaces*" or multi-area sub-regions as part of spatial rescaling process can be observed. The emergence of "*fuzzy*

boundaries”, which might challenge pre-existing working patterns, is an additional element of this process. In the light of globalization and global challenges, Stead argues for such “soft” and “fuzzy” approaches towards European regional policy (Stead, 2011 p 163).

1.4. Framework of Analysis and Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to exam the impact that the EUSDR has on existing forms of regional cooperation and governance arrangements in the DR. It investigates the scope of involvement of national and subnational authorities, CSOs, and transnational and international actors in the EUSDR context. The main focus is to determine how far these actors align their activities with the strategy’s objectives and principles. This analysis emphasises the interaction of various actors belonging to different administrative levels from several countries. Therefore, the MLG approach is useful to this project. MRSs are “...*place based, inclusive and, in principle prepared and implemented on a multi-level basis*” (Samecki, 2009 p 3); they stimulate mobilization at the European, national, and subnational levels, making MRSs appear as “tailor-made” for an analysis via the MLG lens. The development of well- functioning MLG structures within macro-regions is challenging, caused by the intersection of various governance systems, from both the nation states and the EU. This is especially true in the EUSDR, with its significant external dimension. Hence, when drawing on a MLG approach, I will take a closer at the mobilization among SNAs, participating non-EU members, as well as CSOs and IOs within the DR along the three levels of analysis; polity, policy and politics.

The data in this thesis are mainly based on document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The document analysis consists of official documents, reports, and scientific articles. The interviews have been conducted in the period from March to September 2014 with officials of participating countries, international organizations, and representatives of civil society within the DR.

For measuring mobilization, I will use variables extracted from organizational theory. In order to determine the degree of mobilization, an integrated model will be introduced, on which I then place the variables.

1.5. Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows: The first chapter provides the reader with an overview of the thesis, including the research question and conceptual explanations. The second chapter describes the project’s theoretical basis, accounting for the theoretical approach in its entirety, together with the theoretical expectations of the empirical findings. Chapter three is concerned with the methodological approach of the thesis, discussing the

research design, the sources and collection of data, and the methodological challenges. In chapter four, I will present the case of this thesis, the EUSDR – its development, its organizational set-up, and governance architecture. The empirical findings and their interpretation with respect to the theoretical framework are at the centre of chapters five and six, followed by a concluding seventh chapter.

II. Framework of Analysis

2.0. Introduction

There are several theoretical tools available for examining the phenomenon of MRSs. Theoretical approaches applied to MRSs, such as regionalism or cross-border cooperation, as well as European integration theories like intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism are mainly concerned with explaining the emergence of macro-regions and the driving forces behind them; they direct their attention towards the fundamentals of this type of collaboration. This thesis aims to analyse the impact of the EUSDR on existing governance arrangements within the DR. The focus is on mobilization and stakeholder involvement at different levels, including the subnational, national, and European level, and their role in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping/making, and implementation. In order to answer the research question, I will apply an MLG approach.

MLG does not address the issue of European integration, nor is it concerned with explaining the genesis of phenomena; rather, MLG is concerned with decision-making processes, emphasising the role of actors at different levels of governance (Bache & Flinders, 2004; Piattoni, 2009a, 2010). Nevertheless, MLG as a theoretical approach is not identical with a multi levelled governance architecture as displayed, for instance, in the EU system or MRSs. However, an analysis of MRSs via the MLG lens is useful to this project, given that these strategies are characterized by overlapping competences at various decision-making levels, the involvement of multiple actors across these levels, and a complicated and intertwining relationship between them.

The European Union displays a complex system of policy shaping/making and implementation. The gradual developments within the EU gave birth to a variety of theoretical propositions and viewpoints. For many decades, the toolbox for understanding and explaining the EC/EU contained theories extracted from the field of international relations. The two main strands of European integration theories – namely intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism – have alternately dominated debates on the essence and speed of European integration (Bache & Flinders, 2004). Consequently, elements of both theoretical approaches are clearly visible in the EU today. The intergovernmental perspective argues that nation states are the decisive factor for European integration; decisions made at the EU level are the result of bargaining between member states, based on the lowest common denominator among different national preferences (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). National governments believe that they maintain control over the negotiation processes and their outcomes. For proponents of

this state-centric approach, European cooperation is a question of pooling rather than of transferring sovereignty. A neo-functionalist, by contrast, emphasises the role of supranational institutions in the process of European integration. The core concept for this scholar is that a spillover process will generate new political goals (Jensen Strøby, 2010). The essence of spillover is that cooperation in one area will lead to further cooperation in another. According to this approach, institutions at the European level are the driving forces in the integration process.

During the course of development, whether driven by intergovernmentalism or neo-functionalism, the European integration process produced new dynamics. This was clearly demonstrated by the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986. This revision of the Treaty of Rome completed the internal market, but also modified the modes of governance within and between European institutions (Commission, 2010c). This treaty changed the decision-making procedures within the European Council and increased the power of both the Commission and the Parliament, as well as extended the Commission's responsibilities. The processes of policy shaping/making and implementation eventually became increasingly complex. To capture these new dynamics, other modes of thinking, such as MLG, were required.

2.1. Multi-Level Governance

The contemporary world of transnational cooperation and globalization has caused governments to yield degrees of sovereignty in favour of new forms of governance. This transfer of sovereignty is closely linked to changes in both society and government. Kooiman (Kooiman, 2003) described basic changes in society, noting an increased degree of diversity in the form of cultural and economic heterogeneity. Moreover, technological advancements and demographic changes make societies less predictable. These changes generate an increasingly complex system, which is hard to manage with traditional ways of governing. However, it is not only society that has been in a process of change. According to Rhodes (1996), government has also changed; in addition to hierarchies as a dimension for governing, we can now also add markets and networks. The changes are characterized by the internal delegation of power from the centre to the periphery; agencification, meaning that public authorities have been moved to autonomous agencies; devolution by transferring power to other territorial levels; and privatization, whereby public tasks have been moved to the market or voluntary sectors. According to Rhodes (1996), one result of these developments is the "hollowing out" of the state. Consequently, moving power away from the state makes

traditional top-down forms of government no longer viable. Hence, new concepts of governing have been introduced.

Governance is a very broad concept comprising various meanings and forms. It is not a synonym for government; rather, it signifies a change in the meaning of government. While government focuses on hierarchies and institutions, governance emphasises the role of different actors and their interaction (Kooiman, 2003). The transition from government to governance displays a change towards more process-oriented dialoguing activities between public and private actors (Dubois et al., 2009). In short, governance includes governmental actors as well as actors from the private and the third sectors in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping/making, and implementation.

Due to developments in society, governments have allocated authority from the state at the national level up to supranational institutions, as well as down to subnational or regional governments. This form of power distribution led to the introduction of new political terms, among them the notion of multi-level governance. This term, which was coined by Gary Marks in his study on structural policy (Marks, 1992), is composed of three parts. “Multi-level” refers to a vertical dimension, implicating the interplay and mutual dependence between several governments at various territorial levels. “Governance” points to a horizontal dimension, indicating the increased involvement of non-governmental actors and their relationships with the authorities at different territorial levels (Bache & Flinders, 2004). Hence, an MLG approach is not limited to the supranational or the national levels of decision-making; in addition, it directs its attention towards the subnational and regional levels as well as towards all the actors involved, and a broad-based participation in political processes is envisioned (Piattoni, 2009b). According to Lähteenmäki (2005), a characteristic of the MLG concept is its ability to generate a more flexible system of steering, which is expressed in the creation of new opportunities for sub- or transnational actors.

A common understanding of how a modern system of governance should be organized is that it should be divided across multiple decision-making levels (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). This concept enables the government to operate in a wider range, in order to detect variations in the territorial scope of policy externalities. Among scholars there is an ongoing debate concerning how public goods can be created and delivered under the umbrella of MLG. However, common to all these approaches is the core MLG argument: the distribution of governance across various jurisdictions is more flexible than the concentration of governance in just one jurisdiction (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). In other words, the dispersion of governance across multiple jurisdictions is more efficient than, but also from a normative point of view

preferable to, central state autonomy. In Marks' understanding, MLG is defined as a “*system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers, supranational, national, regional and local...*” (Hooghe & Marks, 2003 p 3). However, when it comes to how multi-level governance should be organized, there are disagreements between scholars. Hooghe and Marks (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, 2003) contribute to this debate by raising questions about the architecture of jurisdictions: (I) should they be designed around specific communities or specific challenges?; (II) should competences be bundled or prevalent?; and finally (III) should the jurisdictions be designed to last or be fluid? The authors describe two contrasting models of MLG, called simply Type I and Type II.

2.2. Types of MLG

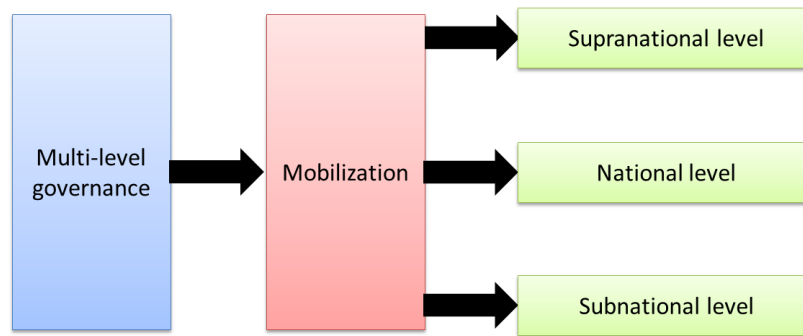
Type I MLG describes general purpose jurisdictions that are spread out across a limited number of levels. They pool a variety of functions and responsibilities, and memberships within these jurisdictions do not intersect (Hooghe & Marks, 2003, 2004, 2010). This type of MLG has its theoretical foundation in federalism, emphasising cooperation between central and subnational governments rather than focusing on specific political tasks. Institutions within Type I MLG are often rigid, and attempts to alter governance arrangements can be expected to be difficult. Changes are associated with high costs, and therefore the institutional set-up is designed to last. Although Type I governance emphasises the role of central and subnational authorities, it does not deny the importance of transnational movements and public-private partnerships (Hooghe & Marks, 2003, 2004, 2010).

The credo of Type II MLG is that “*...each public good and service should be provided by the jurisdiction that effectively internalizes its benefits and costs*” (Hooghe & Marks, 2010 p 21), a notion that has its roots in neoclassical political economy and public choice theories. The characteristics of Type II MLG are that the number of jurisdictions is multiple and operate on several territorial levels; they are task specific, flexible in design, and intended to respond quickly to changes in citizen preferences, and intersecting membership is possible. This type is widespread at the local level, as well as proliferating in the international arena with the non-hierarchical involvement of a variety of public and private actors in shifting coalitions (Hooghe & Marks, 2003, 2004, 2010). Generally, governance Type II is embedded in Type I, although the mechanisms differ (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). As Piattoni (2009b p 171) noted, both types of governance co-exist in a “*negotiated order*”, which can be illustrated by the attempts of the EU to become institutionalized in an environment that is still dominated by existing institutions.

With regard to macro-regions, MRSs cannot be clearly assigned to either of these ideal types of governance because they embody attributes of both. The strategies are not single-purpose jurisdictions. The governance structure is multi-level, comprising a variety of institutions and civil society actors at different levels. They have a system-wide architecture, covering more than just one individual state. Further, macro-regions are arranged along a number of main objectives within a given territory, which makes them multifunctional. Decision-making and negotiation are divided among supranational, national, and regional authorities, as well as civil society actors. In contrast, tasks within priority areas are specified and have a single purpose, with multiple independent jurisdictions performing various functions. The tasks range over an unlimited number of levels, instead of accurately defining supranational, national, and regional layers. These tasks are typically designed to respond flexibly to changes within the context, and adjust rapidly to new functional requirements. To handle MLG in both its versions, a certain degree of coordination is necessary because such arrangements are, according to Piattoni (2010), characterized by complex policy- and decision-making structures, consisting of increasingly dense networks of public and private as well as individual and collective actors.

According to Piattoni (2010), policy making as a process of MLG demands the simultaneous involvement of more than two levels and non-governmental actors. The role of non-governmental actors is to weave the different levels together. Crucial for MLG processes is the interdependency between civil society and (at least three) levels of government. The innovation is the non-hierarchical relationship that develops among them. However, it may be assumed that in such a constellation, on many occasions a variety of different or even contradictory interests or preferences will need to be negotiated. Therefore, the novelty of “non-hierarchical” relations between all actors raises questions about the distribution of power among them. Moreover, it is highly debatable if all stakeholders are equally involved and if they all have access to the decision-making arenas. However, MLG stimulates activities at all levels of governance (figure 3) and generates dynamics which affect politics, policy, and polity (Piattoni, 2009a). Therefore, MLG can be viewed as a concept of mobilization.

Figure 3: theoretical model



2.3 Dynamics of MLG

The essence of MLG, the involvement of multiple governmental and non-governmental actors across various levels of governance, has the potential to disrupt established processes and hierarchies, as well as create new power constellations. The focus is on how different levels are interlinked with each other and on how the actors “...moving rather freely across (...) traditional levels and spheres of authority” (Piattoni, 2009a p 7). These arrangements necessitate a fundamental rethinking of contemporary rules and structures, as well as a normative reflection about the conditions under which MLG decisions gain widespread acceptance. This challenges the classical concept of the nation state and its gate-keeper function and includes changes in political mobilization, policy-making arrangements, and the structure of the state (Piattoni, 2010). Consequently, Piattoni (2010) claims that multi-level governance will (1) generate political mobilization at all levels of governance; (2) blur the line between the domestic and international spheres; and (3) blur the boundaries between state and society.

2.3.1. Hypotheses

MLG as political mobilization

According to Piattoni (2010), nation states are under pressure from below, from above, and from within. The first challenge to the state derives from below. The development of regional mobilization, regional nationalism, linguistic minorities, and ethno regionalist parties are challenging the cultural homogeneity of the state by demanding more autonomy or even independence. Hence, subnational levels of government and actors from civil society are needed in decision-making processes. Nation states, no matter whether they are unitary, regionalized, or federal, have in common that they transfer tasks to lower administrative levels. A consequence of this development is the strengthened role and increasing competence of subnational levels of governance. The recognition of the importance of territory, as well as the evolution of social and political organizations and profitability in economic terms,

depends critically on social and political conditions at the local level. MRSs are concepts of mobilization, and they are based on cooperation between different levels of government belonging to different countries. National governments are not in a position to provide these strategies with all essential means, and the participation of other actors is required; hence, MRSs change the distribution of power from the central state to multiple actors at different levels. Therefore, it can be expected that the dynamics of MRSs stimulate the involvement of authorities at the subnational level. Based on this, I propose my first hypothesis:

H₁: Drawing on the MLG approach, we expect the EUSDR to trigger significant mobilization of authorities at the subnational levels in participating countries

MLGs blur the line between the domestic and international spheres

The second challenge to the nation state and its autonomy comes from above, referring to developments beyond the reach of state control. Nation states do not exist in a vacuum. Although international relations theory treats states as autonomous entities, in reality they are trapped in a web of mutual interdependencies that limits their capacities to act independently. These interdependencies are partly created by the states themselves, because there is a need for cooperation with others in order to solve major challenges such as dealing with environmental problems, controlling immigration, or countering terrorism. In this way, sovereignty is transferred upwards into binding decisions, and a large number of actors, both national and international, appear to influence the decision-making processes of supposedly sovereign states. Power resources of all kinds are distributed among an increasing number of actors who are not directly controlled by the national government. As a result of this development, the lines between domestic and international politics become less visible. In order to be able to influence these processes, as well as to maintain a certain degree of control over them, nation states strive to engage actively in these developments.

MRSs have been created with the aim of solving common challenges, and they emphasise functional solutions. National governments are exposed to pressure from the Commission, which coordinates MRSs, and from the sub-regions and private actors, who are needed to implement strategies. Agenda setting, policy shaping/making, and implementation under the umbrella of macro-regions all require an interplay between different governance structures from various countries, and this new system of governance reduces the power of national governments. Therefore, it may be expected that domestic authorities increasingly engage in the elaboration of policies that reach beyond their national scope, and it becomes difficult to

identify where the state ends and the international level begins. EU members are deeply integrated in the European governance architecture. Hence, attention should be directed towards non-member states and their administrations – more specifically, how and to what extent their governance systems are involved in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping, and policy making in the EUSDR context. Against this background, a second hypothesis may be proposed:

H₂: According to the MLG approach, we expect participating non-EU member states become actively involved in the EUSDR-related processes of agenda setting, policy shaping and policy-making, as well as policy implementation

MLGs transform the boundaries between state and society

Finally, the third challenge to the nation state evolves from within, deriving from the alteration of the distinction between state and society. The classic differentiation of interests within a nation state is the distinction between the interests served by the state and those conducted by all the other institutions, organizations, or individuals. In other words, it is a distinction between general purpose state interests and particular societal or private interests (Piattoni, 2010). The boundaries between these interests have been weakened since the 1970s, when society began to share tasks with government. Concepts like new corporatism, a form of societal or bottom-up corporatism, have been introduced. For reasons such as cost reduction and the improvement of social conditions, states saw the need to include society in the process of governing. These developments can be analysed along three dimensions: (1) a self-driven reawakening of civil society; (2) the emergence of transnational social movements, encouraged by new supranational or international structures; and (3) by investigating the role of CSOs in policy-making processes at the local, national, or supranational levels. In the context of MRSs, CSOs as well as international organizations (IOs) assumed a decisive role through their involvement in the composition of strategies, and further engagement is desired when it comes to agenda setting, policy shaping/-making, and policy implementation. The focus in this thesis is directed towards the advancement of CSOs and IOs within the Danube Region, particularly their attempts to become an active part of the strategy as well as their potential to be “captured” by the EUSDR in order to develop input to the project and to conduct implementation or monitoring tasks. Consequently, the third hypothesis will be as follows:

H₃: Finally, the MLG approach directs our attention to the inclusion of non-state actors, such as CSOs, as well as IOs and we expect that these actors take actively part in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping/-making and implementation of the EUSDR

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate whether the EUSDR causes mobilization at different administrative levels, and if so, to what degree. The theoretical basis of this project is rooted in Hooghe and Marks' MLG approach (2001), while the hypotheses are extracted from research focusing on the dynamics of multi-level governance developed by Piattoni (2010).

Figure 4: Summarizing hypotheses

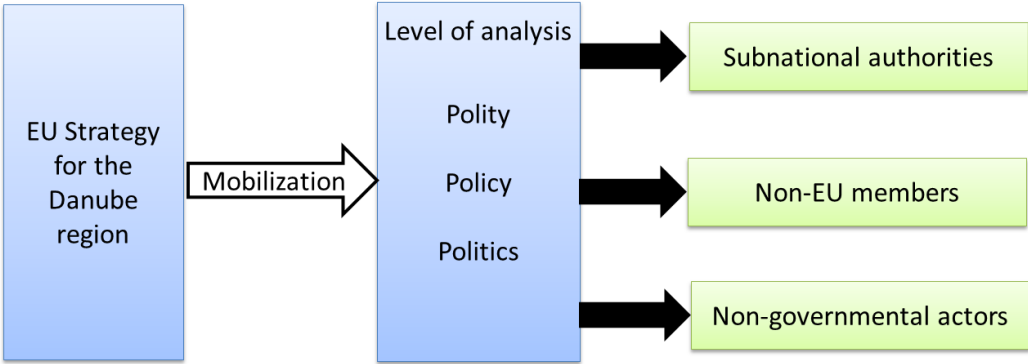
| |
|--|
| H₁ |
| Drawing on the MLG approach, we expect the EUSDR to trigger significant mobilization of authorities at the subnational levels in participating countries |
| H₂ |
| Drawing on the theoretical framework, we expect participating non-EU member states become actively involved in the EUSDR-related processes of agenda setting, policy shaping and policy-making, as well as policy implementation |
| H₃ |
| Finally, the MLG approach directs our attention to the inclusion of non-state actors, such as CSOs, as well as IOs and we expect that these actors take actively part in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping/-making and implementation of the EUSDR |

III. Methodology

3.0. Introduction

The research question paves the way for a descriptive analysis, where the challenge is to determine whether the EUSDR has an impact on existing forms of cooperation and governance arrangements in the DR, and if so, to what extent. This means that in order to investigate the scope of mobilization and the involvement of different actors in the context of the EUSDR, a mapping of different players must be performed based on selected indicators. The main focus is to determine how far these actors align their activities with the strategy’s objectives and principles. Hence, I will examine the degree of mobilization along the polity, policy and politics level of analysis, focusing on three dimensions: (1) SNAs; (2) authorities of participating third countries; and (3) civil society and international organizations within the DR (figure 5). Consequently, there will be more emphasis on variables that can confirm an impact and less on variables that explain why it may have occurred. The underlying aim of this thesis is that its findings should shed light on the interplay of diverse actors at multiple layers of governance, and thereby contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms and modes of operation of MRSs.

Figure 5: methodological model



3.1. Research Design

At the centre of this thesis is the EUSDR. Due to this special focus, the nature of this project can be characterized as a single case study with the aspiration of an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, from which the findings can be put into a more general context. To understand a “real-life phenomenon” and its context in depth, the use of a single case study method is beneficial because it provides the researcher with the opportunity to adopt a comprehensive approach towards the study object (Yin, 2009).

For several reasons, I believe that the chosen research design serves as a suitable procedure for answering the research question. First, in a single case study, the contextual circumstances are tightly linked with the phenomenon under study. Second, the intention of this work is to detect changes among various actors in the DR with respect to the EUSDR. These changes can be studied at an individual or group level, including changes in the strategy, tasks, or structure (Jacobsen, 2012). To capture these changes in their entirety, and to understand the mechanisms as well as their effects, would be difficult without the consultation of relevant stakeholders. A simple identification of participating actors or the counting of activities or initiatives has very little validity with respect to the quality of such involvement; furthermore, it has no informative value about how the involvement came into being. A profound understanding of the problem can therefore easily be missed in a quantitative approach. Third, mobilization at different administrative levels is highly dependent on the contexts in which the actors operate. To identify these contexts and their influence on the process of mobilization, direct contact with the actors involved is preferable. Hence, alongside the examination of documents, interviews will constitute a main source of information in this project.

3.2. Data Collection

As previously mentioned, the data used in this project were extracted from the analysis of documents and from interviews with relevant stakeholders. At the beginning of this project a thorough analysis of existing literature was conducted to obtain necessary insights about the topic and knowledge about possible theoretical approaches. This enabled the formulation of the research question and the development of appropriate hypotheses and variables. The document analysis included primary and secondary literature in the form of official documents and websites from the EU, nation states, and subnational authorities, as well as from civil society and international organizations. The access to internal documents was made possible by the involvement of some of the interview partners. Furthermore, a great amount of the literature can be classified as scientific articles, conference papers, theses, and official reports.

Interviews as sources of information have been decisive to this project. In a period between April and September 2014, five telephone interviews were completed. Two of these were with representatives of third countries, with individuals who were accredited to the missions of their states to the EU in Brussels. One interview was carried out with a representative of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the most

important and most influential IO within the DR; one with a representative of the Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CoDCR), an umbrella organization for regional and local authorities in the DR; and one with a representative from the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), a melting pot for NGOs and CSOs in the Danube area. The work of these interview partners is strongly connected to the EUSDR, and they all possess extensive knowledge and insights into the strategy.

The interviews can be described as semi-structured, using an interview guide prepared in advance. The interview questions were pre-formulated with respect to the research question, the theoretical framework, and the operationalized variables. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they maintain the focus on the topic, but at the same time they allow the interviewer to ask additional “open” questions, or even to adjust the guide when needed. All interview partners received an information sheet in advance, which described the research project. The interview partners were informed that the conversations would be recorded, and that all information would be treated as highly confidential. During this research the anonymity of the informants was safeguarded, and the thesis will only refer to institutions, not to individuals. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and the data were prepared for analysis.

3.3. Operationalization

As mentioned previously, the thesis aims to investigate the extent to which the EUSDR is able to mobilize various actors at different administrative levels. The objectives here are manifold and complex. First, it is necessary to be very clear about what this research seeks to measure. Therefore, a definition of mobilization, along with a clarification of its usage in the context of this thesis, will be given. Furthermore, after answering the *what* question, attention must be directed towards *how* to measure mobilization. In this regard, the concept of participation will be explained. Thereafter, the concepts of mobilization and participation will be brought together in an integrated model and deployed in the EUSDR context. This will include the presentation of different variables, their operationalization, and a justification of their selection.

3.3.1. What is being measured: Mobilization

For the purpose of this research, the use of the term mobilization is inspired by the definition given by Amitai Etzioni (1968), who views mobilization as a process where a social entity, over a relatively short period of time, acquires control over resources it previously did not control. The concept has been applied to several forms of collective change, such as political unification or civil rights movements; common to all these cases is that they always implicate transformation within the social system involved in the process. The more resources are utilized jointly, the greater the increase in the capacity of the unit to act collectively. Improving these capacities, rather than gaining legal ownership, is the ultimate logic of this concept (Etzioni, 1968). The process of mobilization in itself is first of all associated with costs, in the sense that some capacities must be employed to mobilize new resources. However, one must make allowances for the fact that the capability to mobilize is limited, and therefore every social unit has its mobilization barrier (Etzioni, 1968). These barriers are dynamic rather than static; they depend on numerous factors, they appear in various forms, and they differ over periods in time. The majority of resources are under the supervision of individuals or small social units; they are not controlled by the society. Hence, in general the level of mobilization is rather low. The degrees of mobilization or mobilization barriers can be measured as, for example, the percentage of GDP allocated to certain projects or the percentage of personnel assigned to certain tasks, as well as the level of identification with certain projects, authorities, or sub-units. As high level mobilization is rare, it is more useful to investigate different levels of mobilization and compare them with each other, rather than to examine the fuzzy image of full mobilization (Etzioni, 1968).

In the context of this thesis, mobilization is understood as the process by which multiple actors at different administrative levels gain access to and control over resources in order to align with the objectives and principles of the EUSDR. The first challenge is to identify these processes and then to detect the different degrees or qualities of mobilization. This automatically leads to questions about how to measure mobilization.

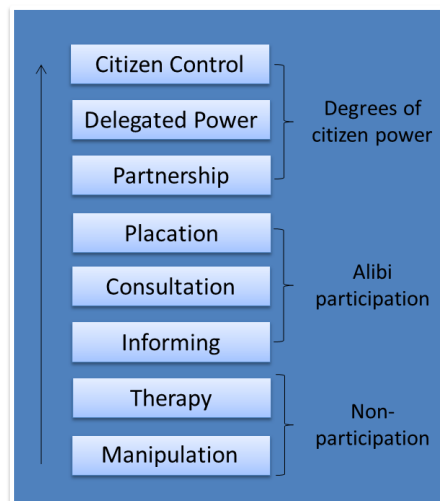
3.3.2. How to measure mobilization: Participation

According to the MLG approach, mobilization occurs at all levels of governance and includes the involvement of more than just supranational, national, or subnational authorities. The challenge with respect to the EUSDR is to encourage public actors, along with actors from the private or third sectors and individuals, to become involved in the strategy. Hence, mobilization can be viewed as a form of participation, and with the help of Arnstein's

“Ladder of Citizen Participation” (Arnstein, 1969) it is possible to determine the degree of mobilization (figure 6).

According to Arnstein (1969), citizen participation is another word for citizen power, with the potential to include the otherwise excluded into political and economic processes. The essential mark of participation is that the lack of real power redistribution converts the concept into an empty gesture. Arnstein distinguishes between three kinds of participation: (1) non-participation, (2) alibi participation, and (3) citizen.

Figure 6: Ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969)



Each of these categories is graded differently, displaying several degrees of participation. At the lowest level, non-participation, we find *manipulation* and *therapy*, in the sense that the power holders rather try to indoctrinate citizens rather than to enable them to participate in the processes of planning and exercising policies. The next level describes alibi participation, in which the affected actors have a voice and may be heard. Key features within this level are *information* and *consultation*. However, because of a lack of “muscle”, the actors have no power to ensure a change in power distribution. At this level, at best the affected actors are allowed to advice, but the right to make decisions still lies with the power elite. The third level, citizen power, features several degrees of decision-making influence, ranging from *partnership*, including negotiation and trade-offs, *delegation of power*, and *citizen control*, where the citizens gain the majority in decision-making processes.

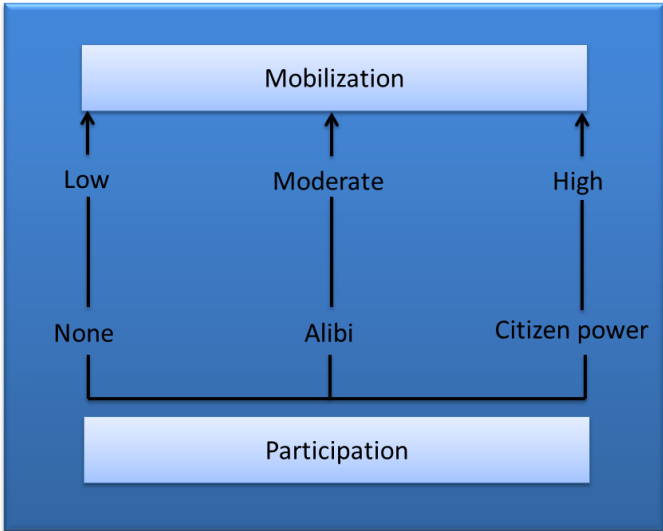
Although this model was originally developed to measure the degree of citizen participation, it is possible to transfer it to an organizational or institutional context because each organization consists of individuals, and all organizational decisions are made by individuals.

Moreover, as the degree or quality of participation of individuals in political processes is distinct pronounced, so is that of organizations or institutions, and it can therefore be measured with the help of the same model. In the context of this research, the model will serve to determine the degree of involvement of relevant actors in the EUSDR.

3.3.4. Integrated model

Using the participation ladder to examine the concept of mobilization is useful for answering the research question. In this case, mobilization will be the underlying concept, and with the help of the participation ladder, the degree and the quality of involvement will be determined. For the purpose of this thesis, drawing from Arnstein’s model, participation is presented as a scale. At one end we find non-participation, corresponding to low mobilization, while at the other end citizen power indicates high degree of mobilization. In the middle of this scale, alibi participation complies with mobilization of moderate degree. Next, the selected variables will be accordingly assigned to the model.

Figure 7: integrated model



3.3.5. Variables

The investigation of the degree of participation will be conducted at the analytic levels of polity, policy, and politics. At the *polity level*, which is concerned with structural and institutional aspects, the selected variables are closely linked to organization theory and the organizational set-up of relevant actors. The *policy level* is concerned with the content of the political process, and the tasks as well as the objectives of relevant actors. The variables at this level are associated with implementation of policies and the communication of the strategy. At the *politics level* the focus is directed towards political development and how

relevant actors pronounce and enforce their interests. The variables are affiliated with budgeting and policy adaption.

Polity level of analysis

Formal structure

Nowadays, organizational theory treats organizations as systems consisting of four basic, interdependent elements: (1) tasks, (2) people, (3) technology, and (4) structure (Jacobsen, 2012). Furthermore, organizations are also conceptualized as instruments aiming to achieve certain goals, and from this perspective, their actions and the actions of their members are purposeful and rational. This instrumentality is distinctly expressed in the organizational structure, which provides the frame that simultaneously enables and limits the ways in which the members of the organization can act (Christensen et al., 2009). The organizational set-up is based on a target-means assessment and has a strong influence on the behaviour of the employees. Structural changes or adjustments are first of all associated with costs, and they are intended to last. Hence, changes or adjustments in the organizational set-up of relevant actors with respect to the EUSDR are a strong sign of faith in and commitment to the strategy. It allows them to engage in the EUSDR from a position of strength, and to participate actively. On the scale of participation, the formal structure variable would be placed at the right-hand end, and the degree of mobilization of this variable is therefore characterized as high.

Tasks and people

Tasks and people are parts of the so-called manufacturing core of an organization (Jacobsen, 2012). The admission of new tasks has the potential to modify the focus of an organization, and they have a direct influence on the behaviour of its members. It can be assumed that if an organization, as a rational actor, changes or extends its tasks, as well as assigns additional personnel to these new responsibilities, a certain degree of commitment towards these new challenges must be present. However, both the tasks and the personnel assigned to them must be the subject of a thorough assessment. Here, the view is directed towards the scope of tasks related to the EUSDR and the calculated working hours necessary to cope with them. In other words, there must be a distinction between part-time and full-time tasks and positions. Due to the state of the EUSDR's development, we can expect more part-time than full-time tasks and positions. The degree of mobilization of these two variables will vary depending on the

context in which they are deployed. Therefore, these variables will be placed on the scale between moderate and high.

The value of these three variables will be measured by identifying the structural changes, new tasks, and new positions with respect to the EUSDR.

Policy level of analysis

Meetings

Within this category, the focus is on how relevant actors take part in political development – how they pronounce and enforce their preferences. The proper channels to achieve this are conferences or meetings of all kinds. This type of gathering is often of an informative or consultative nature, and says little about the contributions made by different actors. Mere attendance at meetings or conferences is therefore regarded as alibi participation. Thus, this variable will be placed at the left-hand end of the scale, between low and moderately active.

Initiatives

The essence of cooperation for any rational actor is to translate their own preferences into common interests. These capabilities are often expressed through the inauguration of initiatives. The development of such activities allows the actors to remain pro-active and gives them a certain degree of control, or at least influence, over the political process. In other words, it puts them in the “driver’s seat” and they become actively involved, although a distinction must be made between suggested initiatives and those that have actually been carried out. The development and launch of initiatives with respect to the EUSDR is evidence for resources made available to engage in the strategy. Accordingly, this variable will be placed at the right-hand end of the scale.

Implementation and evaluation of EUSDR policies

Implementation and evaluation are the last stages in a political process. According to the MLG approach, those who are affected by particular policies should carry out them. In theory, this leads to increasing activation of actors at lower administrative levels. However, implementation and evaluation tasks are very often affiliated with economic incentives, in which economic gains rather than identification with the policy are the driving force. Moreover, this stage of the political process has little to do with the shape of the strategy or its decision-making. This variable is considered to be a form of alibi participation, and it will therefore be placed in the middle of the scale.

Politics level of analysis

Budgeting

A budget is the accumulated sum of expenditures and incomes for a certain period of time. It is an indispensable instrument to prioritize spending. While public actors administer tax revenues, private actors mostly manage funds generated via their business activities. It is characteristic of all financial resources, whether public or private, that they are limited and their usage must be justified to taxpayers or shareholders. Hence, financial resources need to be handled carefully. A solid financial frame is the backbone of every enterprise; therefore, allocating financial resources with respect to the EUSDR enables any actor to take an active part in the strategy. Consequently, this variable will be placed at the right-hand end of the scale as an expression of high mobilization.

Policy adoption

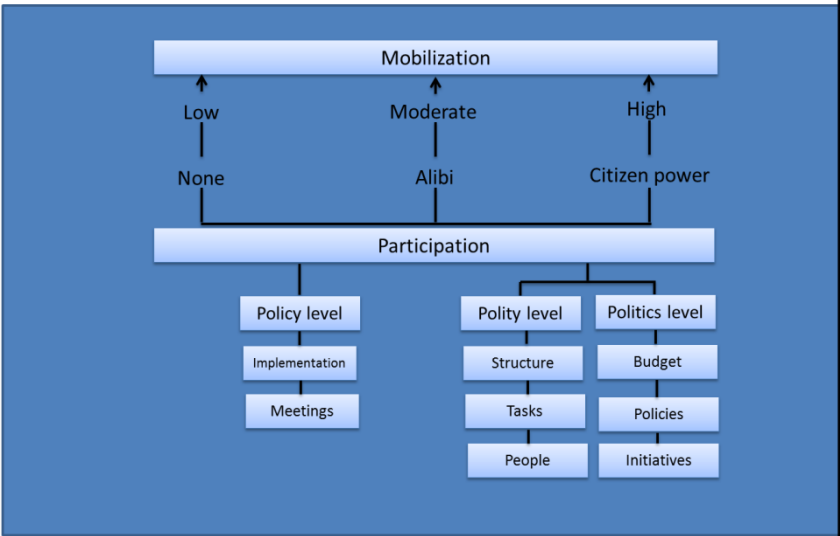
The alignment of relevant actors with EUSDR objectives and policies, or the adaptations of these into national legislation, is an unambiguous sign of identification with the strategy. Simultaneously, it is also expressive of the impact of the strategy on its participants. The presence of this variable must be regarded as mobilization of the highest quality, and it will consequently be placed at the right-hand end of the scale.

Figure 8: Variables

| Variable | Operationalization | Value | Source | Time period |
|------------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Formal Structure | Structural changes/ adjustments in respect to the EUSDR | Existence | Interview Documents | 2010- 2014 |
| 2. Tasks | EUSDR- related tasks (full/part- time) | Existence | Interview | 2010- 2014 |
| 3. People | Personal assigned to the EUSDR | Existence | Interview | 2010- 2014 |
| 4. Budget | Budgeting in respect to the EUSDR (full/part- time) | Existence Volume | Interview Documents | 2010- 2014 |
| 5. Policy adoption | Adoption of EUSDR policies | Existence | Interview Documents | 2010- 2014 |
| 6. Initiatives | Contribution of initiatives to the EUSDR | Existence | Interview Documents | 2010- 2014 |
| 7. Implementation Evaluation | Implementation/ evaluation of EUSDR policies | Existence | Interview, PA reports | 2010- 2014 |
| 8. Meetings | Attendance in EUSDR related fora | Frequency | Interview | 2010-2014 |

The three levels of analysis impact differently with respect to the degree of mobilization (figure 9). I consider the polity and politics level to be more influential than the policy level. The fact that the variables assigned to these levels of analysis represent an allocation of fundamental resources suggests that actors believe in the strategy and are committed to it.

Figure 9: integrated model and the variables



3.4. Methodological Challenges

In every scientific project, whether of a qualitative or a quantitative nature, the researcher is confronted with a potpourri of challenges. Among them are certain requirements with respect to the project’s validity and reliability. The challenge of validity directs attention towards the variables and whether they really measure what they are intended to measure, thereby avoiding bias in the data sample. Reliability is concerned with the data’s accuracy and the possibility of conducting the same enquiry and achieving the same results (Hellvik, 2011). The researcher will face these challenges at different stages of the work; they are constantly present, whether in the selection of the variables or during data collection and processing.

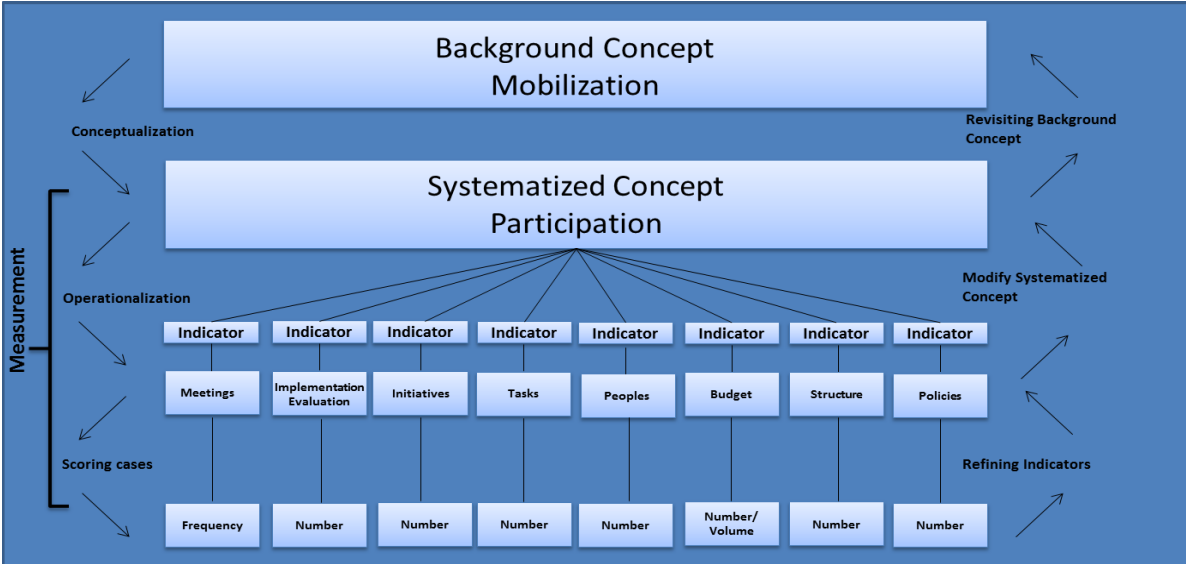
3.4.1. Validity and variables

When selecting variables, the objective is to ensure that the chosen indicators reflect the research question in the best possible way. In the case of this thesis, the challenge is whether the selected indicators really measure the degree of mobilization.

Adcock and Collier (2001) provide an instruction manual for measuring any term or concept (figure 10). First, the phenomenon must be operationalized. The point of departure is the theoretical background concept, which in this case is mobilization. Even though a definition of this term exists, at this point and in the context of the research question the term is

associated with multiple meanings and its measurement is not distinct. To overcome this ambiguity, the background concept must be made more specific. This concretization is expressed in the systematized concept – in this study, the concept of participation, including a particular definition of the phenomenon. It is important to find the right balance between the observations and the systematized concept. For the purpose of this thesis, it is advantageous to exploit the kinship between the concepts of mobilization and participation. Participation can be viewed as a form of mobilization, and the degree of mobilization can be revealed through the degree of participation. To measure the degree of participation, several indicators or variables, which reflect the systemized concept, must be selected. In this case, participation is further operationalized or translated into eight indicators or variables, which are then placed on the scale as described above. The last step is to develop scores for each indicator/variable in terms of numerical ratings or qualitative classifications. According to Adcock and Collier a measurement is valid when “...the scores derived from a given indicator can meaningfully be interpreted in terms of the systemized concept that the indicator seeks to operationalize” (Adcock, 2001 p 531). In this case, that means the scores from the indicators/variables must mirror the concept of participation accurately and thereby ensure a valid measurement of the background concept, i.e. mobilization.

Figure 10: Operationalization of mobilization, taken from Adcock and Collier (2001 p 531)



3.4.2. Validity and data collection

As mentioned above, the main sources of information in this project are document analyses and semi-structured interviews. The use of such sources requires that they become the subject of a thorough assessment.

The written sources are composed of primary and secondary literature and public documents, and their use imposes a number of challenges for the researcher. First, secondary literature is based on the interpretation of a primary source. Therefore, one must consider that these interpretations reflect the subjective views of the author, which creates the possibility of misinterpretation (Repstad, 2004). Second, the fact that some documents are categorized as public does not necessarily mean that one should trust them implicitly. Therefore, to ensure the credibility of written documents, the selected literature for this project was extracted from several sources, and their content was compared with each other and cross-checked against the empirical data.

Another challenge that arises is related to conducting interviews. One of the basic rules is to realize that the interview partner is not obliged to be objective or to tell the truth. Furthermore, interviews always carry the risk that the interview partners may be biased, or that they may tend to exaggerate their own role (Berry, 2002). Also, the position of the interviewee and their organization with respect to the research object is of importance. One observation I made was that organizations tightly linked to the EUSDR at the European level were almost euphoric and free of criticism in terms of their positions towards the strategy, while organizations at lower levels addressed a number of flaws. The challenge for me has been to find the right balance during the encoding of the interview transcripts to allow an objective analysis of the findings. To overcome this challenge, the use of multiple sources is recommended (Berry, 2002).

Criticism of qualitative research methods is often directed towards the use of small data samples and their prospects for drawing general conclusions, which of course also applies to this work. But the use of a small number of interviewees can be justified by some general considerations. First, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the impact of the EUSDR on existing modes of cooperation and to determine the degree of mobilization of relevant actors at several administrative levels. In this context, it must be acknowledged that while there are many actors, only a small number of them are of relevance. Second, interviews are not an end in themselves. A large number of interviews which do not contribute new data are of little value. The small number of interviews may be considered as a weakness of this research, although one should keep in mind that two of the interview partners were umbrella organizations, providing insights from a wide range of actors from SNAs and CSOs, and the others represented public actors from participating non-member states.

To avoid possible errors in source selection, data processing, or other methodological weaknesses, I compared the information extracted from the document analysis with that from the interviews. This strengthened the validity and reliability of the work.

3.4.3. Critique and limitations

In virtually all scientific studies, including the present research, one may find potential limitations and weaknesses of the research. Bearing in mind that the EUSDR is at a very early stage of its development, sufficient data on its effects do not yet exist. As mentioned above, the selection of few interview partners could perhaps be considered as the Achilles' heel of this work. It was necessary for me to choose between carrying out numerous interviews, covering as many representatives as possible belonging to the dimensions under investigation, and focusing on data collection with specially selected partners. To meet the expectations of a MA thesis and to cope with the limited resources available, I decided on the latter approach. Using umbrella organizations like the CoDCR or the DCSF provided general insight of the conditions under which these institutions work and an understanding of the realities they face. However, the risks of placing too much reliance on their statements or of a particular phenomenon being overlooked are always present. To avoid the use of contentious data material, it is wise to carefully evaluate the findings, and if possible to verify the content through other sources. In this research, I endeavoured to find references in the literature or in other interviews that could confirm my findings. Taking this into account, I am confident that I have been able to draw a picture that accurately reflects the conditions in the DR.

IV. The EUSDR

4.0. Introduction

The political changes in Eastern Europe in 1989/90 had a profound impact on the continent's political map. These developments culminated in the EU's expansion in the period between 2004 and 2007. This "big bang" enlargement can be seen as a historical starting point for EU MRSs (Schymik, 2011). By 2007 both the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region, which until 1989 were located at the periphery of the European Community, were now surrounded by EU members. Within the EU, the development of macro-regions is a movement of the periphery (Schymik, 2011), considering that all ten Middle and Eastern European enlargement countries participate in the strategies. Another consequence of the enlargement is that the EU, in addition to its enrichment by twelve new member states, has been exposed to significant socio-economic, environmental, and cultural challenges, which is especially true with respect to the DR. Therefore, the EUSDR can be viewed as a response by the EU to the cross-border challenges that the region faced in areas such as transport, security, environment, and energy security.

4.1. The development of the EUSDR

The EUSDR was adopted by the European Commission in December 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in June 2011. The overall purpose of the strategy is "*...to reinforce the efforts to overcome the economic crisis in a sustainable manner*" (Commission, 2010b p 3). The decisive momentum for the strategy's implementation can be traced back to the national as well the European level. The Commission, and especially the DG Regional, which called in October 2008 for the development of a strategy for the Danube region, proved to be a progressive force at that time. However, the real credit in the case of the EUSDR belongs to multiple actors, among them the governments of Romania, Austria, Serbia, and the German state Baden-Württemberg (Schymik, 2011). In addition, the Hungarian government declared the Danube strategy to be a priority project during its presidency of the EU in the first half of 2011.

In June 2009 the European Council formally asked the Commission to initialize a comprehensive strategy for the DR, and in 2010 a series of extensive consultations were held. During this process five stakeholder conferences were organized, including participants from the EU and the national and subnational authorities, as well as representatives from regional, international, and civil society organizations (Commission, 2010b). The consultation period saw great interest and engagement from the region's member states, which manifested itself

in their extensive contribution of open position papers (Schymik, 2011). The role of non-EU member states was also noteworthy. Countries like Serbia, Ukraine, and Croatia (a member since 2013) contributed detailed position papers and were involved on an “...equal footing in the consultation process alongside with EU member states” (Stojovic et al., 2012 p 18). The main messages from these conferences, as formulated in the communication of the Commission (Commission, 2010b p 5), were “(1) this is a welcomed initiative to reinforce the integration of the Region in the EU; (2) Member States and Third Countries (including candidate countries and potential countries) commit themselves at the highest political level; (3) the Commission is the key in facilitating the processes; (4) existing resources can be much better used for the strategy objectives; and (5) the strategy must deliver visible, concrete improvements for the Region and its people”.

4.2. The EUSDR’s Set-up

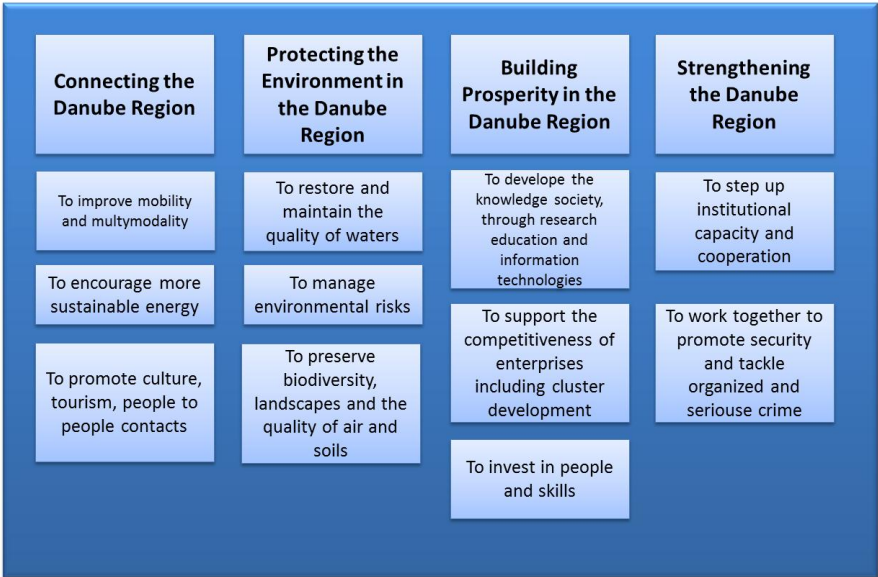
Although MRSs do not involve the creation of new funds, new legislation, or new institutions, they still require a governance structure for their implementation. With the development of the EUSBSR the Commission succeeded in creating a strategy transferable to other regions, which was clearly reflected in the set-up of later strategies (Schymik, 2011).

The EUSDR is based on a “rolling” Action Plan (AP), indicating that it can be adjusted and altered if the circumstances require it. The core of the strategy is expressed in the following four main objectives: A) *Connecting the Danube Region*, with a focus on transport, energy security, and culture and tourism; B) *Protecting the Environment of the Danube Region*, focusing on water quality, managing environmental risks, and preserving biodiversity, landscapes, and the quality of air and soils; C) *Building Prosperity in the Danube Region*, emphasizing economic development, innovation, the competitiveness of enterprises, and education; and finally D) *Strengthening the Danube Region*, with a focus on institution building, promoting security, and tackling organized crime. The main objectives cover a wide range of policies; they are interlinked and interdependent (Commission, 2013e). In order to implement the strategy efficiently, the above-mentioned main objectives have been broken down into eleven priority areas (PAs).

Due to the anticipated participation of several actors from all administrative levels, in general the governance architecture of MRSs is very comprehensive. The European Council, as the EU’s ultimate political body, is the highest panel of the EUSDR; it conducts the strategic planning for the strategy, while the EU’s executive body, the Commission, serves as coordinator and facilitator. Its responsibilities range from preparing the strategy, its

assessment, and feasible changes in the Action Plan. The Commission receives assistance in the realization of these duties primarily from the DG Regional. Another crucial partner for the Commission is the High Level Group (HLG), consisting of representatives from all twenty-eight member states. This board is concerned with potential strategy modification and monitoring tasks (Commission, 2014a).

Figure 11: EUSDR main pillars and priority areas



Each priority area is covered by one member state, which is responsible for the implementation of EU policies in the context of the strategy. They are administrated by so-called priority area coordinators (PACs), assigned from two different countries, whose role is to launch ideas, support policy implementation, and provide technical assistance and advice. They work closely together with the Commission and all other stakeholders, such as national or subnational authorities and international or transnational bodies (Commission, 2014a). The Commission emphasizes that the work of these coordinators is country- and sector-transcending (Commission, 2010b). The PACs are supported by steering groups. These groups constitute a pooling of all relevant stakeholders, and it is preferred that representatives from all EUSDR countries participate in them. Within some priority areas, steering groups have installed working groups, in which non-governmental actors also participate in addition to representatives from national and subnational institutions (Setzen, 2013).

Moreover, each participating country has been asked to designate national contact points (NCPs) (Commission, 2010a). The purpose of NCPs is to ensure the implementation of the objectives of the EUSDR, through promotion of the strategy as well as through information from relevant stakeholders about key events (Commission, 2014a).

Other important parts of the governance structure are the so-called laboratory group and the INTERACT Point Vienna. The laboratory group is composed of representatives of the EU Cohesion Programmes, the Commission, and interested PACs. This is a platform for exchanging ideas concerned with the EUSDR’s operational aspects, as well as for providing a forum for discussion on issues related to the strategy (Commission, 2014a). The INTERACT Point Vienna was initiated by the Commission and some member states in 2003, with the purpose of implementing cross-border or transnational subsidy programmes (Interact, 2014). Facilitating the laboratory groups is only one of the many tasks of INTERACT.

Figure 12: EUSDR set-up



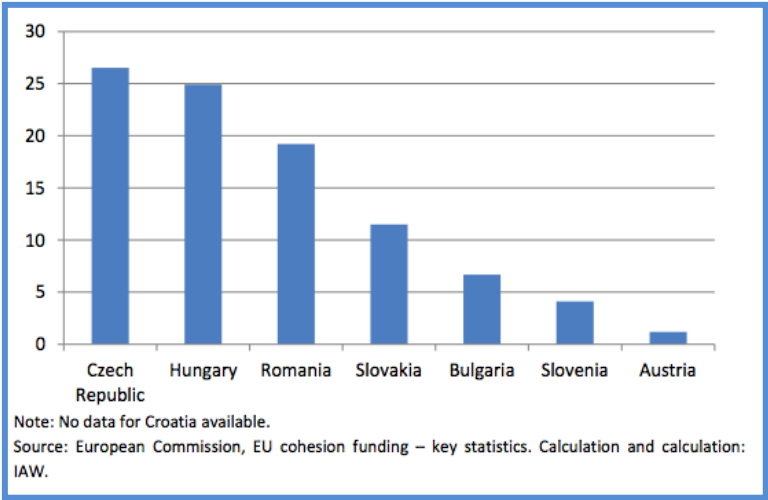
4.3. Funding the EUSDR

Prospects for the successful implementation of major ventures like the EUSDR are negligible in the absence of a sufficient financial framework. However, MRSs do not dispose their own budgets, which is clearly expressed in the “three no’s”. To realize the strategy’s objectives participants are compelled to draw on their own resources, as well as on existing European or national subsidy programmes or private investors.

The European subsidy funds belonging to the EU cohesion policy represent about 32% the largest tranche in the EU budget, and are composed of three main funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Cohesion Fund (CF) (Commission, 2014b). During the previous budget period (2007–2013) the Commission announced that the DR, with exception of the German states Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, would receive an overall financial frame of about 95 million euro, which substantially derived from Structural and Investment Funds, mainly the ERDF and the

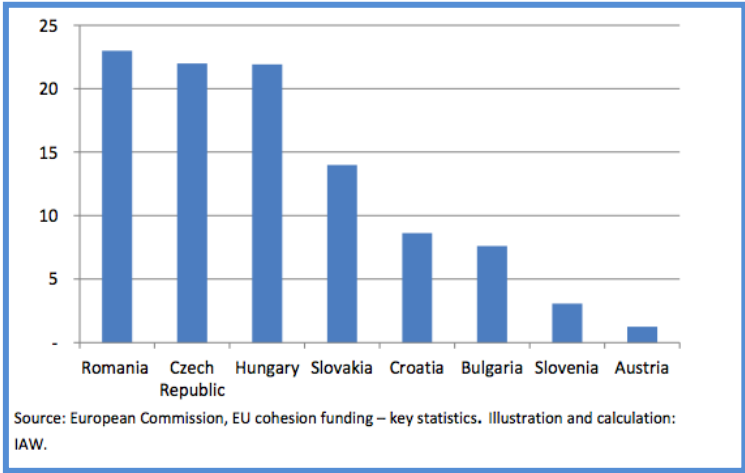
CF (Achtnicht et al., 2014; Schymik, 2011). Moreover, the Commission supplemented these regional policy budgets and made additional financial instruments available. Among these were the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the ESF, as well as the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (Schymik, 2011).

Figure 13: Cohesion policy allocation for Danube countries 2007-2013 in millions euro (Achtnicht et al., 2014)



The current budget period (2014–2020) appears to be increasingly “Danube friendly” (Setzen, 2013 p 18). Subsidy funds in an amount of approximately 202 million euro are set aside for the DR, again with the exception of the two German states (Achtnicht et al., 2014; INTERREG, 2014). The investments from these funds are distributed to all eleven PAs. Funds from the EFRD are mainly invested in the PAs 1 to 4; the ESF has its main focus on PAs 8 to 11, while the investments of the CF go mainly to PAs 4 to 7 and 11 (Commission, 2014b).

Figure 14: Cohesion policy allocation for Danube countries 2014-2020 in millions euro (Achtnicht et al., 2014)



EU non-member states have no access to these funding sources. Candidate countries or potential candidates like Croatia (at that time), Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro are eligible for funding from the Instrument for Pre-Accession. Moldova and the Ukraine, which are embraced by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), are eligible for assistance deriving from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) (Achnicht et al., 2014). To supplement this variety of funds, additional funding provided by private investors or international finance institutions is also envisaged.

V. Empirical Data and Analysis

5.0. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to present the empirical findings, and second, to thoroughly analyse them. Bearing in mind that the EUSDR is still at a very early stage of its development. Thus, I did not expect to find fundamental, radical changes in the sphere of its reach that were triggered by the strategy. Rather, I expected that the EUSDR's dynamics would produce some rethinking and changes in behaviour among the actors under investigation.

In general, the overall findings are as follows: Firstly, the EUSDR has had a differentiated impact on existing modes of cooperation within the DR. Secondly, participation of SNAs, CSOs IOs and non-EU members is primarily visible at the policy level of analysis, and largely limited to attendance in meetings and to implementation tasks. On these grounds, it seems reasonable to rate the degree of mobilization on the integrated model as moderate. Thirdly, mobilization is also differentiated with respect to the actor and the policy area at stake. The empirical inquiry suggests that involvement of actors in the EUSDR is dependent upon financial and administrative resources, political willingness and commitment to the strategy and relations vis-à-vis the EU. The latter has shown to be particularly true for non-EU members.

In the following sections, the three hypotheses will be analysed in light of the eight variables.

5.1. Subnational authorities

I proposed in my first hypothesis that the dynamics of the EUSDR would trigger significant mobilization among regional and local authorities in the DR. According to this hypothesis, these actors would increasingly align their activities with the strategy's fundamental principles and objectives. During this part of the examination, the Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CoDCR) has been identified as core object for the research. This platform is an umbrella organizations directly linked to the EUSDR. The CoDCR represents more than fifty cities or regions in the DR.

As noted earlier, key attributes of the DR are its diversity in terms of its socio-economic development, the degree of decentralization, its administrative capacities at all levels of government, and the role of civil society. In addition, the middle and lower parts of the region in particular are characterized by political instability. With respect to these issues, there is a gap between the west and the east, with the more prosperous regions situated on the shores of the Danube. This is clearly mirrored in my findings.

Polity level of analysis

Formal structure, tasks, and people

Crucial issues during the ongoing implementation phase of the strategy are the “*inadequate or non-existent competences within regional administrations and institutions, especially in the middle and lower parts of the Danube Region*” (Interview#4; Klemm & Langer, 2013). It may be observed that following the Danube River from the west to the east, administrative capacity decreases. In the upper part, especially in Baden-Württemberg, cities like Ulm or Neu-Ulm are in the fortunate position of being able to create special EUSDR structures; however, in the middle and lower parts of the region this remains “*no more than wishful thinking*” (Interview#4). These kinds of structures include the employment of personnel who are concerned with EUSDR issues. The Danube Office in the city of Ulm is a concrete example of such a structure, and similar offices in Regensburg and Ingolstadt are under development (Interview#4). In the attempt to assess EU activities to counter these unequal administrative capabilities, the role of the CoDCR must be stressed.

Improvements in institutional capacities, as well as the creation of special EUSDR structures, are just two of the many functions of the CoDCR (Interview#4). On the one hand, there is “*relatively concrete employment within SNAs solely concerned with issues related to the strategy*” (Interview#4), although these are limited to regions in the upper part of the Danube. In this respect, cities like Ulm, Neu-Ulm, and even Vienna, must be mentioned for their role model function. On the other hand, in most parts of the DR the institutions are either not able or not willing to build these kinds of structures. To comply with the desire for such structures, the CoDCR has stepped in to try to fill this gap as the organizational link between SNAs and the EUSDR. As the result of these time-consuming attempts, the CoDCR is now in the position of maintaining regular communication with direct contact partners all over the DR. Despite their shortcomings in administrative terms, countries like Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia are now able to cooperate at the mayoral level with respect to the EUSDR via the CoDCR network (Interview#1; Interview#4). The CoDCR perceives itself as a compensator for poorly developed administrative capacities, and as an enabler for regional and local authorities to become more effectively involved in the strategy. However, in its current state of development the CoDCR serves rather as a hub for networking, since it is not capable of providing large-scale expertise regarding EUSDR issues.

In sum, SNAs in the middle and lower parts of the Danube usually engage with the EUSDR through the CoDCR as their organizational link. In the upper part of the river, regional or local authorities that possess sufficient political willingness and resources also use the

CoDCR network, although they have also been able to create their own EUSDR structures in terms of organizational set-up, employees, and working tasks. Thus far, SNAs within the DR have only been partially able to create special EUSDR structures, which is a clear indicator of a differentiated degree of mobilization.

Policy level of analysis

Meetings

The engagement of SNAs in the strategy's decision-making processes is also mainly restricted to PA10, and for various reasons it is highly diverse. It appears that the predominant line of communication is between the Commission and the nation states, and in cases of federal states between the Commission and the federal governments (Interview # 1-4). Access to decision-making arenas is very difficult for SNAs to achieve, and regional and local administrations often assume the role of order receivers. Again, the exceptions are Vienna and Baden-Württemberg. Regarding the latter, which like all German states has the constitutional right to engage directly at the European Council level, the "*local government attaches great value to an intensive and continuous dialogue with subnational institutions*", and a representative of the CoDCR holds an advisory position at the responsible ministry. It follows that this channel is a potential gate for the SNAs to access decision-making (Interview # 4).

Furthermore, the cooperation between the PA10 and the CoDCR is very intensive, and both bodies have recently maintained a joined office. Participation in steering group meetings happens on a regular basis. In addition, the CoDCR also holds its own conferences and information meetings concerned with EUSDR-related issues (Interview # 4). However, the activities of the CoDCR, which clearly benefit from the capacities of its partners in the west, should not be overrated. For most of the regional and local administrations it is difficult to participate in the discourse and to attend meetings, due to financial constraints and limited numbers of qualified personnel (Interview # 2-4; Langer, 2012; Lütgenau & Schneider, 2013). Therefore, the degree of mobilization varies.

Implementation

As noted earlier, the activities of the CoDCR are mostly limited to PA10 policies, in terms of its aspect of administrative capacity building. To strengthen these capabilities and develop "Good Governance" in the DR, the CoDCR has implemented a twinning project between Danube cities from Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. This project includes training courses or seminars aimed at creating

so-called “Danube Managers”. These seminars are jointly facilitated by the European Danube Academy in Ulm, FH Campus Vienna, and the University of Ruse. Another concrete example of EUSDR policy implementation is the “Dribe” project, aimed at the sustainable improvement of governance and communication systems in the DR. As part of knowledge transfer, the development of shared standards within regional and local administrations in the frame of the EU integration process is envisioned. The focus here is on the development of e-government in the DR, as part of bureaucracy degrading (Interview # 4; Klemm & Langer, 2013).

Politics level of analysis

Initiatives

The CoDCR has made several contributions to the EUSDR in the form of proposals or initiatives, both at the preparation stage and in the current implementation phase. First, it is necessary to point out that the EUSDR’s emergence has its origin at two levels. The momentum for the strategy came from both top-down as well as bottom-up processes. On the one hand, in 2009 the Danube Cooperation Process, operating at the foreign ministry level, finally resulted in a concrete proposal by the governments of Romania and Austria to create the EUSDR. On the other hand, commencing in the 1990s, several activities and initiatives at the regional and local levels in the DR, the so-called “Ulm-process”, had already been launched. One of the initiatives in this process was the foundation of the CoDCR in 2009. Moreover, the Danube conferences at the embassy of Baden-Württemberg in Brussels in 2006, 2008, and 2010, and the Ulm Summit in 2009, must be seen as crucial events in the run-up to the decision to establish the EUSDR. In other words, the existence of the strategy itself can be partly traced back to the engagement of SNAs in the DR (Interview # 4; Klemm & Langer, 2013).

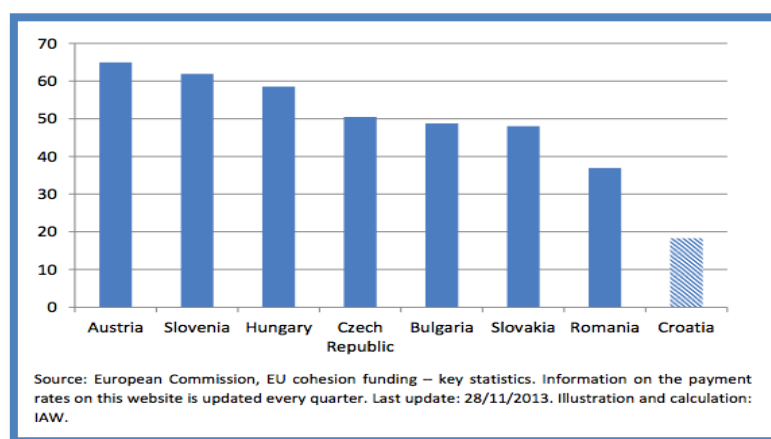
Furthermore, the CoDCR position paper (Gönner & Langer, 2010) contained several concrete initiatives and projects related to challenges in the region. Among them were projects focusing on the integration of the more than six million Roma in the DR, gender equality projects (“Netzwerk Frauen und Bildung in der Donauregion”), diverse youth and education projects, and initiatives concerning media freedom. In sum, regional and local authorities and their representatives from the CoDCR have been very active in terms of developing initiatives and projects related to the EUSDR. However, it is striking that most of these initiatives are in the context of PA10; administrative capacity building and similar activities in other PAs cannot be observed (Interview#4). This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the AP of

the EUSDR (Commission, 2010a) recognizes the CoDCR as a strategic partner of the Commission, in respect to information exchange and the transfer of know-how. Hence, it follows that the CoDCR, as a network of municipalities, cities, and regional authorities, found its main area of activities here (Interview#4).

Budgeting

In order to create well-functioning institutions and structures that are effectively linked to the EUSDR, financial support is necessary – and again, the west-east differences become clearly visible. In Baden-Württemberg small budgets exist, at least for technical support for the EUSDR (Interview#4). The purpose of these budgets is to support the work of institutions like the Danube Office. The cities of Ulm and Neu-Ulm jointly bear the costs for employees that are working with the strategy (Interview # 4). Unfortunately, these advantageous conditions are extremely rare and cannot be found in other parts of the DR. In contrast with the majority of regional and local authorities within the DR, only a few German and Austrian SNAs have thus far been able to allocate financial resources to the EUSDR. This variation must be understood as a sign of differentiated mobilization among SNAs in the DR. Although, it is important at this point to mention that in the previous budget period, EU members in the DR showed a sad record with respect to the utilization of cohesion funds. The absorption rate ranged only between around 37% and 65%, and five countries from the DR belong to the group of seven EU member states with an absorption rate below 50% (Achtnicht et al., 2014).

Figure 15: Cohesion policy absorption rate 2007-2013 in millions euro, (Achtnicht et al., 2014)



Policy adoption

The CoDCR has clearly assumed a key role in the realization of the objectives formulated in PA10 of the AP's fourth pillar. The main objective, to step up institutional capacities and cooperation, has been adopted into the CoDCR's day-to-day work, and into that of SNAs

form Austria, Bavaria and Baden Württemberg, in order to counter different traditions in terms of the rule of law, transparency, democracy, market economy, and political stability in the region (Interview#4; Langer, 2012). Thereby, cities and regions from the upper part of the river in particular have a pioneering position, exporting their knowledge and experience to accelerate the construction and development of well-functioning administrations in other parts of the region. Therefore, the degree of mobilization also appears to be differentiated within this category.

5.2. Non-EU members and the EUSDR

Despite the fact that the inclusion of third countries is the rule rather than the exception, MRSs are essentially internal strategies of the EU (Schymik, 2011). With regard to the EUSDR, “*a strong external dimension*” (Kodric, 2011 p. 15) is evident and is demonstrated by the inclusion of candidate countries, potential candidates, and countries embraced by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Similar to the DR in general, its external dimension is highly diverse in socio-economic terms. In addition, its institutional infrastructure is poorly developed. Given this background, one of the main challenges of the EU is therefore to convince the third countries of the strategy’s necessity and the value, despite the “three No’s”; the other is to incorporate these countries into the project. The latter generates new challenges for the EU, for instance the balance in the relationship between member states and non-EU countries, the financial and institutional capacities of these states, their commitment to the strategy, and mobilization at the subnational and civil society levels in non-EU countries. Therefore, my second hypothesis, drawn from the MLG approach, predicts that the evolution of the EUSDR will trigger significant mobilization among non-EU member states, and their authorities will become actively involved in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping, policy making and implementation.

In general, it has become clear that after the almost euphoric beginning, the activity of non-EU member states is now at best described as modest. It appears that, besides the financial and administrative aspects, involvement is highly dependent on their own preferences, political willingness and their status vis-à-vis the EU.

Polity level of analysis

Formal structure, tasks, and people

According to the AP of the EUSDR, a National Contact Point (NCP) has to be installed in each participating country. All the six non-member states at the time responded to this

requirement. It is quite interesting to note where the individual states placed their NCPs. While countries with membership prospects, like Croatia (a member since 2013), Serbia, or Montenegro, placed their NCPs in ministries or bodies with a clearly European orientation, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Ukraine placed their contact points in ministries of sectoral relevance (Commission, 2014d). However, in all six cases the NCP positions and associated tasks are embedded in other areas of responsibility. In other words, none of the NCPs are solely concerned with EUSDR issues. Moreover, only Serbia (PA1b/PA7) and Moldova (PA9) are co-responsible for PAs, while Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and the Ukraine have for some reason chosen not to engage actively in this part of the implementation (Commission, 2010a). Common to all non-member states is that concrete organizational arrangements with respect to the EUSDR do not exist. But there have been rudimentary efforts to counter the negative effects of the absence of such structures. In the case of Serbia, “*regular communication between the NCP and the PACs on the strategy’s progress*” has been established (Interview#1). Moreover, a group of inter-institutional experts has been created in Moldova. This so-called inter-ministerial group, headed by the coordinating Ministry of Development and Construction, is a platform for experts belonging to the corresponding ministry on the issues concerning each of the PAs (Interview#2). Nevertheless, it should also be noted that none of these experts are full-time EUSDR experts, and the tasks related to the strategy are additional.

Policy level of analysis

Meetings

The national authorities of non-member states maintain a constant dialogue with their EUSDR partners, at all levels. However, the frequency of attendance at these meetings varies. For instance, meetings of the High Level Group have been visited by representatives from third countries on a regular basis (Interview#1-2). In contrast, attendance at meetings at lower levels is dependent on factors such as travelling costs or the presence of competent staff (Interview#1-4). Non-member states suffer greatly from financial and administrative constraints, which is clearly demonstrated in participation in this type of event, and on several occasions it has not been possible for them to take part. Non-member countries “*prefer to attend meetings that are close to their home countries*”; for financial reasons Moldovan officials would rather travel to Romania than to Germany (Interview#2). The authorities in all five countries struggle with the consolidation of their finances, which is a key condition for the participation of their national experts in the different fora (Interview#1, 2, 4). The same

considerations also apply when non-member countries are asked to host an event. The organization of meetings, workshops, or consultations can only be carried out under the premise of no or minimal financial expense (Interview#2, 4). In sum, third countries strive to participate in or organize meetings. However, due to their lack of sufficient financial resources and adequate numbers of competent staff, they are compelled to prioritize strictly. Therefore, non-member states exert less influence, they contribute less, and consequently they benefit less from the strategy.

Implementation/evaluation

All eleven PAs are coordinated by two EUSDR members, and the implementation of their objectives requires the involvement of a dense network of key players and stakeholders from all participating countries. Therefore, it is only natural that the non-member states are involved in realizing a number of projects. In addition, Serbia and Moldova are bound to comply with their obligations as PACs. The preferences of the individual states also play a decisive role. Some of the non-member states “*are extremely interested in launching more projects in cooperation with EU members in order to share costs*” (Interview#2). These projects are envisaged in particular areas, such as infrastructure, transport, energy security, and communication. In a few examples of non-member state involvement in implementation, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro have been active in PA5, environmental risks, by participating in flood management, flood forecasting, flood rescue, and civil protection. The Ukraine is highly involved in projects deriving from pillar B, in cooperation with the ICPDR (Studennikov, 2014), but also in the “Innovative Danube Wesel” project coordinated by PA1a (PA1a, 2014). Moldova is active in, among others, PA11, security, by participating in cooperation of police authorities in the DR, enforcing measures against river-related crimes (PA11, 2014). In other words, the authorities of all five non-member states are involved in implementing and evaluating EUSDR policies.

Politics level of analysis

Initiatives

Contributions from non-members to the strategy have been patchy. During the preparation phase, non-member countries were highly active in submitting numerous detailed position papers, and their proposals were taken into consideration (Interview#1-2; Kodric, 2011; Schymik, 2011; Studennikov, 2014). However, the further the strategy advanced, the fewer

the contributions from non-member states. Besides the early position papers, to date the non-EU countries have not produced any further proposals or initiatives (Interview#1-2).

Budgeting

Like the DR in general, the external countries are especially exposed to the negative effects of limited financial resources. European financial instruments are only fully accessible to EU member states. In contrast, non-members have to be content with bilateral assistance from the EU. Due to these financial constraints, none of the five non-member states has been able to allocate funds towards the strategy. In other words, special EUSDR funds or budgets do not exist (Interview#1-2).

Policy adoption

Pillar B, Protection of the Environment in the Danube Region, has partly found support in national legislation. This is clearly true for the issues expressed in PA4 and PA5. However, the reasons for this cannot necessarily be attributed to the EUSDR. The five non-member states are, like all the other EUSDR countries, members of the International Commission to Protect the Danube River (ICPDR), as well as signatories of the Danube Convention, and the objectives of the abovementioned PAs are almost identical with the tasks of the ICPDR. The reason for the adoption of these policies is therefore the ICDPR rather than the EUSDR. In other words, there is no evidence to suggest that third countries have adopted EUSDR policies into their own legislation.

5.3. Non-governmental actors and the EUSDR

The core assumption of my third hypothesis has been that due to the dynamics of the strategy, CSOs or international bureaucracies within the DR take an active part in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping, and implementing EUSDR objectives. In addition, attention has been directed towards the potential of IOs to be “captured” by the EUSDR in order to develop input to projects, to provide the necessary data, and to conduct implementation, monitoring, or evaluation tasks. To put it briefly, according to the MLG approach it should be expected that CSOs and IOs will become vigorously involved in the strategy.

The focus in my investigation at this point has been on the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), an umbrella organization which brings together about eighty CSOs from the area and one particular international organization that operates in the DR, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR).

5.3.1. CSOs and the EUSDR

Article 11 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) emphasises the role of civil society actors. According to this Article (TEU, 2010 p 21) European institutions are obligated to provide citizens and representative organizations with the opportunity “*to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action*”. Also, “*the institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society*”. The EUSDR’s Action Plan envisaged the formation of a civil society platform in the region. The Foster Europe Foundation for Strong European Regions, an independent, non-partisan, private Austrian charitable foundation working towards further regional decentralization, rural development, and federalism in Europe, played a dominant role in building the Danube Civil Society Forum. Already in 2009 they began to connect different civil society actors from the region with each other, and in 2011, on the very same day as the EUSDR was launched, the DCSF was founded. However, it must be stressed that the creation of this forum was not initiated by the EU; rather, it was a bottom-up process triggered by the EUSDR that led to the DCSF’s development. In this sense, the EUSDR certainly had a significant impact on civil society in the DR (Interview#3).

A general finding within this category has been that the development of civil society in the DR is highly variable. The west-east differences mentioned earlier also provide evidence of the state of civil society development.

In contrast, the engagement of CSOs can be explained neither in geographical terms, nor in terms of EU membership and its duration. The reasons for engagement have to be sought in the contextual conditions in which these organizations operate. Civil society actors are extremely active when they receive support, as in Baden-Württemberg, or when they replace weak governmental authorities, as in the Ukraine or Bulgaria. These actors are fragile in cases where a whole country is disinterested in certain issues, like the Czech Republic with respect to the EUSDR, or when national authorities try to control them, as in Hungary (Interview#3). However, considering the DR as a whole, there is no evidence to indicate the advanced participation of CSOs in the EUSDR (Interview#3; Lütgenau & Schneider, 2013).

Polity level of analysis

Formal structure, tasks, and people

The DCSF sees itself as the organizational link between the CSOs and the EUSDR, although it does not assume a gatekeeper function (Interview#3). Of course, CSOs are not obliged to use the DCSF network to engage in the strategy. Nevertheless, CSOs within the DR which

have the capability to develop their own EUSDR structures are rare, and even those who could, like the WWF, have chosen to join the forum and use the structures facilitated by this network (Interview#3). In addition to their inability to create their own EUSDR structures, none of the thousands of CSOs operating in the DR have “*either the willingness or the capacity to assign their staff solely to the strategy; this role has been fulfilled by the DCSF*” (Interview # 3). Still, it is important to stress that all the work of the DCSF is conducted on a voluntary basis. The use of the forum enables CSOs to engage in the EUSDR, and it must therefore be perceived as their organizational structure facilitating entry into the strategy. However, it must be taken into consideration “*that not all CSOs in the DR are active to the same extent*” (Interview#3). For example, the participation of Czech CSOs is almost non-existent. In contrast, German CSOs, especially those from Baden-Württemberg, are very active. The same can be said of CSOs from Austria. It is worth mentioning that Ukrainian CSOs, despite that country’s non-EU membership and its current state of crisis, are extremely dedicated to the strategy. NGOs and scientists have founded their own platform within the DCSF framework, with more than 45 members and with a focus on the EUSDR (CRS, 2014; Interview#3). A similar process is ongoing in Bulgaria, where governmental institutions have de facto withdrawn from the strategy. A network of about 150 NGOs, which in the near future will join the DCSF, is highly involved in EUSDR activities in the areas of tourism, infrastructure, and education (Interview#3). In other words, increased CSO activities attributed to the EUSDR can be observed in at least some parts of the DR. However, these positive examples cannot obscure the fact that CSOs’ access to the strategy is limited. The EUSDR has not yet been able “*to create functioning structures and cooperation modes that allow for the sufficient inclusion of civil society actors*” (Interview#3). As with the majority of SNAs, CSOs have not yet been able to create their own structures with respect to the EUSDR, and they mostly use the DCSF in order to become involved in the strategy. Hence, we also find a differentiated degree of mobilization among civil society actors.

Policy level of analysis

Meetings

As mentioned above, the DCSF has no permanent staff and all its work is on a voluntary basis. It is only natural that this has a negative impact on its operation. Only very few well-established CSOs have direct access to EUSDR structures. They have special knowledge and expertise. Therefore, they are sectorally connected to one particular PA (Interview#3). At the same time, the majority of CSOs are not in a position to engage in political and technical

debate concerning the strategy. In contrast to state actors, businesses, or lobbyist groups, they can barely raise travelling costs and are in many ways excluded from the process (Interview#3). It is important to clarify that officially, on paper, the DCSF is active in four functioning working groups. However, due to its limited financial resources the forum only has the capacity to conduct partial tasks (Interview#3; Lütgenau & Schneider, 2013). Hence, the presence of civil society actors in steering or working groups is highly dependent on the policy at stake, and as mentioned above, relatively good cooperation only exists in PA9 and PA10.

Implementation

Regional and local actors are by far the largest group of operational partners in the strategy; almost 70% of all implementation is executed by them (Interview#3; Lütgenau & Schneider, 2013). The MLG system in several participating countries is not sufficiently developed, and the financial and administrative constraints aggravate civil society involvement. Within its capabilities, the DCSF is very active in implementing EUSDR policies. Cooperation with PA9 and PA10 is the most advanced. In addition to administrative capacity building, the focus is on citizen participation in planning processes, which used to be an unknown phenomenon especially in the middle and lower parts of the Danube. The aim is to develop equal and transparent cooperation between local administrations and civil society. Concrete projects are the aforementioned “Danube Managers”, as well as the Master’s programme in Danube Studies, a university degree on theoretical and practical approaches to DR issues (Interview#3; Klemm & Langer, 2013). Furthermore, the DCSF is highly involved in projects in the Ukraine to strengthen civil society, assisting the government with implementing the strategy (Interview#3).

Politics level of analysis

Initiatives

Already by 2010, the stakeholder process, initially intended as an open forum for interested parties, revealed the difficulties and challenges for civil society actors. This is especially true with respect to participation at the five stakeholder conferences. Participants had to register in advance, and travelling and accommodation costs were not covered by the EU. This was unfortunate particularly for small NGOs, which were de facto excluded from this process from the very beginning. Most of the speakers at these conferences had a background in the Commission, the European Parliament or national parliaments, or other public or

governmental institutions; less than 4% were associated with civil society actors (Interview#3; Lütgenau & Schneider, 2013). Another hurdle has been, and still is, linguistic in nature. Almost all communication is conducted in English, which consequently requires excellent language skills, something that cannot be offered by all actors (Lütgenau & Schneider, 2013).

Budgeting

To ensure an active involvement in the EUSDR, solid financial resources are needed. Nonetheless, “*there is not a single CSO in the DR which is able to allocate special funds towards the EUSDR*” (Interview#3). Even the DCSF lacks a sufficient financial basis for working efficiently with the strategy. The contingent of 50 euro per year, contributed by about 80 organizations, cannot even cover its most basic needs (Interview#3). In other words, budgets with respect to the EUSDR among CSOs and their representatives do not exist. CSOs struggle with the consequences of understaffing and underfinancing. These constraints have an aggravating effect on civil society contributions, and they are especially unfortunate with respect to travelling costs and the holding of meetings, workshops, and conferences, which in turn negatively impacts the strategy’s effectiveness (Interview#3).

Policy adoption

The DCSF is mainly concerned with the development of civil society actors in the DR and its EUSDR involvement is therefore predominantly related to PA10 issues. However, a closer look at the data indicates that there is no evidence that the DCSF has adopted EUSDR policies.

5.3.2. ICPDR and the EUSDR

The ICPDR, created in 1998, has been a firm advocate for policies and collective priorities in order to improve the condition of the Danube and its tributaries. The work of the ICPDR is based on the Danube River Protection Convention (DRPC), the major legal instrument for cooperation and trans-boundary water management in the Danube River Basin. The selection of this organization is relevant for several reasons. First, all 14 EUSDR countries have agreed on and ratified this convention. Second, the ICPDR is one of the most advanced IOs in the region, and third, the main targets of the ICPDR are strikingly identical with the objectives formulated in the three PAs of pillar B of the AP. In other words, there is an overlap in terms of participants and objectives.

Polity level of analysis

Formal structure, people, and tasks

The main objectives of the ICPDR are (1) safeguarding the Danube's water resources for future generations, (2) naturally balanced waters free from excess nutrients, (3) no more risk from toxic chemicals, (4) healthy and sustainable river systems, and finally (5) damage-free floods (ICPDR, 2014). The structure of the organization, including the technical expert groups and the range of tasks, corresponds with its five core functions. Despite the fact that the ICPDR maintains communication and cooperation with the EUSDR, there is no indication of the creation of special "EUSDR structures", and no signs of changes in working tasks or evidence of personnel adjustments towards the strategy (Interview#5). In short, the ICPDR has not undertaken any changes in the abovementioned variables which could be attributed to the EUSDR.

Policy level of analysis

Meetings

As established earlier, one of the ICPDR's tasks is to become involved in the EUSDR. Various forms of communication exist between these two platforms (Interview#5). The ICPDR invites the affected PACs to its regular meetings, and representatives of the ICPDR secretariat and their experts participate in the meetings of the PA steering groups. Moreover, the ICPDR secretariat also conducts intense consultations with the NCPs of participants within PA4 and PA5. In addition, the International Commission, the governing body of the ICPDR, is regularly briefed on the progress of the initiatives and also has a very strong interest in being involved in the decision-making process of new initiatives, new projects, and activities promoted by the EUSDR (Interview#5). In sum, the ICPDR communicates at all of its levels on a regular basis with relevant actors from the EUSDR.

Implementation and evaluation tasks

Among the most important activities of the ICPDR and its contracting parties is the implementation of the Danube River Convention. The ICPDR is responsible for the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Flood Directive, including the management of basin-wide flood protection measures. With regard to the EUSDR, there is a reference, open for interpretation, that the ICPDR should become involved in the strategy (ICPDR, 2014; Interview#5). Moreover, ICPDR objectives are strikingly identical with EUSDR issues addressed in pillar B. However, despite the overlap of competences and even

references of implementation in PA-rapports, according to ICPDR officials, explicit indicators that suggest implementation of EUSDR policies do not exist (Interview#5).

Politics level of analysis

Initiatives

Pillar B of the EUSDR AP, Protection of the Environment in the Danube Region, clearly shows a certain level of agreement with the ICPDR's objectives. This consistency is clearest in PA4 and PA5 (Commission, 2010a; ICPDR, 2014). Nearly all of these tasks are "*in the area of responsibility and within the ICPDR's mandate*" (Interview#5). They were promoted during the consulting phase, and the ICPDR has succeeded at getting these initiatives incorporated into the EUSDR.

Budgeting

The ICPDR is mainly funded by the contributions of its contracting parties. Its total annual budget amounts to a little over 1 million euro. Due to the fact that a great amount of ICPDR work is carried out by the member states, their allocation of staff and material must be taken into account, even though it is not visible in the budget (ICPDR, 2014; Interview#5). To summarize, with respect to its role and responsibilities, the ICPDR has a very small budget at its disposal, and such financial restrictions call for careful handling of the funds.

The data collected show that there are no posts in the current budget that are earmarked to the strategy. In other words, the ICPDR does not allocate financial funds from its annual budget towards the EUSDR.

Policy adaption

As mentioned above, the ICDPR's work is based on the DRPC, signed in June 1994 and enforced in October 1998. This convention constitutes the legal instrument for cooperation and transnational water management in the Danube River Basin, and its aim is to ensure that surface waters and groundwater within the Danube River Basin are managed and used sustainably and equitably. This includes (1) the conservation, improvement and rational use of surface waters and groundwater, (2) preventive measures to control hazards originating from accidents involving floods, ice or hazardous substances, and (3) measures to reduce the pollution loads entering the Black Sea from sources in the Danube River Basin (DRPC, 1994). ICPDR targets are derived from these objectives and have been translated into legally

binding policies (ICPDR, 2014). There are so far no indicators that the ICPDR has adopted additional policies which are associated with the EUSDR.

5.4. Summarising the findings

The empirical material shows that the EUSDR has a differentiated impact on existing governance structures and forms of cooperation. Effects are most visible at the policy level of analysis and therefore is the degree of mobilization considered to be moderate. Moreover, mobilization varies across actors and the policy area at stake.

The main purpose of the MRS approach has been to foster regional development. A key element for the success of this endeavour is a broad-based governance architecture, which enables all stakeholders to become actively involved in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping/making, and implementation.

The data analysis has vividly demonstrated that regional and local authorities, as well as CSOs, are the weakest link in the EUSDR, mainly as a result of their limited resources in terms of funding, staffing, and communication. The main line of communication is between European and central governmental institutions. Actors at lower levels assume the roles of recipients of orders or executors of policies, and despite all official assurances to the contrary, they are largely excluded from decision-making processes. The EUSDR has thus far not been able to install effective and transparent mechanisms that allow subnational actors to become actively involved in the strategy.

The data analysis revealed an extremely diverse state of development among the multiple actors and their behaviour towards the EUSDR. It cannot be denied that all four units of analysis are, in one way or another, involved in the strategy. However, this involvement presents itself as highly differentiated, and the majority of activities only rank at the two lowest levels on the ladder of participation.

It is striking that the scores on the variables (variables 1-3, 5, 6, figure 16) that most distinctly express mobilization are confined to SNAs, and even among them the ratings differ. The development of specific EUSDR structures or the provision of financial support is only evident in the well-developed upper part of the Danube, particularly Vienna and Baden-Württemberg. Furthermore, all four units of analysis score on the variables number four, initiatives. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the preparation of initiatives, position papers, or proposals varies among the different actors, according to their preferences, their capacities, and their commitment. Moreover, levels of these activities were extremely high during the consulting process in 2010.

Essentially, the implementation of the strategy involves all four units of analysis to different degrees, even if the ICPDR’s self-perception suggests otherwise. More than 70% of all the implementation of EUSDR policies (variable 7) has been conducted by actors from the subnational level. This relatively high percentage in respect to decision-making processes might suggest that actors at lower administrative levels have assumed a role as recipients of orders rather than equal partners.

Figure 16: Findings

| Variables | Hypothesis 1 | | Hypothesis 2 | Hypothesis 3 | |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------|----------------|-------------------------|-------|
| | SNAs | | Non-EU members | Non-governmental actors | |
| | GER/AUT | Others | | CSOs | ICPDR |
| 1. Formal structure | yes | no | no | no | no |
| 2. Tasks | yes | no | no | no | no |
| 3. People | yes | no | no | no | no |
| 4. Initiatives | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| 5. Budget | yes | no | no | no | no |
| 6. Policies | yes (PA10) | no | no | no | no |
| 7. Implementation | yes | yes | yes | yes | no |
| 8. Meetings | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |

The findings also demonstrate that all actors are willing to participate in arenas for the exchange of views. However, due to their financial and administrative constraints, only a very few actors are able to attend these numerous meetings. Only the well-funded and well-staffed organizations are in a position to channel their resources in order to gain access to these fora. The majority of actors are compelled to prioritize, and the opportunities for meaningful sharing of opinions and expertise decline accordingly. Hence, participation in meeting arenas also varies among the different actors, depending on their financial and administrative capacities and the policies at stake.

In sum, activities indicating high mobilization are only evident in a very few cases, limited to SNAs from the upper part of the Danube. In contrast, activities that indicate low or moderate mobilization are widely spread over the DR.

Overall, the findings clearly demonstrate that the EUSDR does not possess a governance architecture that corresponds with the theoretical MLG approach applied in this study. As a

result, it is extremely difficult for non-governmental actors, SNAs and non-EU members become actively involved in the strategy. The current governance system takes little consideration of the context in the DR and clearly benefits well-developed and well-equipped actors.

VI. Discussion

6.0. Introduction

Through the lens of MLG, MRSs are seen as concepts that foster mobilization at all levels of governance, and broad-based participation is essential to the successful implementation of these strategies. The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the degree of mobilization among SNAs, third country authorities, CSOs, and IOs in the regions by analysing the extent to which their activities align with the principles and objectives of the EUSDR at three levels of analysis, namely polity, policy, and politics.

MRSs not only bring a multitude of actors from different administrative levels together; they also transcend existing forms of cooperation and steering mechanisms. As a result the governance arrangements are extremely complex, characterized by compound policy and decision-making structures and consisting of increasingly dense networks of public and private as well as individual and collective actors. In order to ensure a proper interplay within such architectures, a certain degree of coordination is necessary. The MLG approach predicts that these actors will become actively involved in the processes of agenda setting, policy shaping/making and implementation.

However, the findings presented in the previous chapter clearly demonstrate that the mobilization among SNAs, non-member states, CSOs, and IOs is at best moderate. Their involvement in the strategy varies across sectors and seems to be dependent on actor preferences and capacities as well as on their commitment, and it is predominantly evident at the policy level of analysis.

Like most theories or analytical frameworks, MLG describes an ideal type, whereby the rise of multi-level steering presents itself as an inevitable evolutionary process with few references to contextual conditions. Hooghe and Marks (2003) outline a common understanding of how a modern system of governance should be organized; it should be divided across multiple levels of decision making. MLG has been praised for its ability to enable the government to operate across a wider range and for its capability to identify challenges earlier than traditional modes of governing. Moreover, Piattoni (2010) argues that the nation state and its sovereignty are under pressure from several directions, which is regarded as the basis for the emergence of MLG structures.

However, to be able to exert pressure, actors need to be equipped with resources, expertise, and commitment, and the reality in the DR clearly reflects that the necessary conditions for an efficient MLG system to unfold and prosper are not (yet) in place. As mentioned in previous chapters, in contrast to the EUSBSR, the EUSDR is characterized by extreme socio-economic

diversity, insufficiently developed institutional infrastructure, and a significant external dimension. With the exception of SNAs from the upper part of the Danube River, regional and local authorities, CSOs, and IOs, as well as non-EU countries face similar challenges: suffering from weak development, as expressed through limitations in their administrative and financial capacities. In turn, both these aspects, together with political willingness and commitment, appears to have a significant impact on all kinds of activities; they are decisive in whether these actors pursue an engagement, and if so, to what extent. It is evident that the EUSDR has not been able to design effective mechanisms that put actors operating under such conditions in a position to become involved in decision-making processes.

This chapter intends to answer the research question posed in chapter one by discussing the findings in light of the theoretical framework. I will discuss the findings and their importance for the phenomenon under investigation, and I will attempt to explain why the degree of mobilization is not as extensive as initially predicted by the hypotheses.

6.1. MLG and SNAs

As mentioned in chapter two, a theoretical approach informed by MLG directs our attention towards the regional and local level, and envisions a broad-based participation in the political process. According to the theory, MLG has advantages, on the one hand, of increasing quality in decision making due to the permanent exchange of information and knowledge among different actors, and on the other hand, of decreasing implementation resistance by including of as many stakeholders as possible.

The findings revealed that only a few SNAs from the upper part of the Danube, particularly from Austria and Baden-Württemberg, scored on those variables that are considered to constitute the foundation for active participation in the strategy. Regional and local authorities from the middle and lower parts of the river either had no political willingness, or they have not been in a position to create organizational structures, including the allocation of staff, working tasks and funds towards the strategy. None of them made efforts to adopt EUSDR policies. Clearly, the absence of these indicators hinders effective contribution to the strategy, such as the promotion of one's own ideas and preferences or the exchange of expertise. The governance system has been designed primarily around the supranational and national levels, as well as with reference to sectorial preferences. While decisions are made in the HLG and the Commission (see chapter 4, figure 12) dominated by European or national officials, the earliest access point to the strategy for subnational actors is through the PACs and their steering-groups, with the exception of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg which have the

constitutional right to intervene directly at the European level due to the federal system in Germany. However, the PAC and steering group level is more concerned with implementation than with decision making, and due to the abovementioned constraints, participation in these fora is not guaranteed. Consequently, arenas for policy shaping and decision making are primarily dominated by national or European institutions, while subnational actors, with a few exceptions, are involved in activities mainly related to the process of implementation.

Regional and local authorities, represented by the CoDCR, are highly involved in the objectives of PA10, which is a sort of horizontal PA in the EUSDR structure. Since PA10 is primarily concerned with institutional development, it is only logical to locate the CoDCR's work there. The direct connection between the CDCR and PA10 has been strengthened by the opening of a joint office. Even though this is an example of well-functioning cooperation, it must not be overlooked that SNAs are underrepresented in other PAs at the same time. Moreover, it is striking that the engagement in PA10 is mainly driven by well-developed SNAs from the upper part of the Danube, particularly from Vienna and Ulm.

It seems that the predicted role of the EUSDR, to mobilize regional and local actors, is closely linked to the state of development at the subnational level. Increasing the capabilities of SNAs would most certainly contribute to an enhanced position vis-à-vis the EUSDR. On the one hand, a number of SNAs complain about the inadequate financial frame they have to operate in and the constraints deriving therefrom. On the other hand, during the previous budget period, Danube countries (EU members) only used a little over 50% of the funds allocated to the region. Municipal and civil society actors have to answer the question of whether they made the best use of their possibilities. Undeniably, SNAs from the old member states are in a better position in terms of financial and administrative capacities, as well as access to expertise. It proves to be true that subnational actors, equipped with comprehensive resources and constitutional freedom, are more likely able to engage in activities like the EUSDR. Nevertheless not all of them are active in the strategy to the same extent. A well-functioning administration alone is no guarantee of involvement in the EUSDR. In addition, SNAs must show commitment to the strategy and the political willingness to implement it, which the cases of Austria and Baden-Württemberg vividly demonstrate.

6.2. MLG and the External Dimension

The MLG approach implies that nation states do not exist in a vacuum. They are trapped in a web of mutual interdependencies that limit their capacities to act independently. The necessity

for cooperation with others in order to solve major challenges compels states to transfer sovereignty according to binding decisions. The EUSDR addresses objectives of a border-transcending nature, and therefore the inclusion of non-EU member states is required. As outlined in chapters four and five, the Danube strategy possesses a strong external dimension, consisting of candidate states, potential candidates, and neighbouring countries. To implement the EUSDR successfully, it is crucial for the EU to convince non-EU countries of the strategy's necessity and value, despite the "three No's". Member states are already deeply embedded in the complex EU system. The challenge for the EU is to develop mechanisms that properly incorporate third countries into the governance architecture of the strategy.

Similar to participation in any project, involvement in the EUSDR first of all requires investment, particularly the allocation of resources in order to prepare and present preferences and positions. The degree and the quality of activities of non-member countries with respect to the strategy will therefore highly depend on their financial and institutional capabilities, their commitment to the strategy, their position vis-à-vis the EU, and the conditions for cooperation provided by the EUSDR.

Moreover, MLG suggests that decision making is equally divided among supranational, national, and subnational levels of governance. During the preparation phase, the Commission requested countries "*...to work as equals with neighbours*" (Commission, 2013f p 1). However, the reality in the DR demonstrates that this request has proved to be unrealistic. Despite the fact that non-EU countries were involved on an equal footing during the consultation process (Interview#1, 2; Kodric, 2011; Stojovic et al., 2012), there is a common understanding among the Commission and non-member states that the EUSDR framework is not designed as an egalitarian partnership (Interviews#1–2). Nevertheless, EU member states stress the importance of non-EU countries and emphasise their best possible involvement at the working level in order to deal with border-transcending challenges (Interview#1; Interview#2; Kodric, 2011). In an attempt to describe the nature of involvement of non-EU countries in the EUSDR, terms such as "joined ownership" have been frequently used. However, there is a general perception by officials from the Commission, EU members and non-members that the EUSDR is an EU project essentially designed for its members, which is confirmed by the remains of decision-making authorities by EU institutions (Interview#1, 2; Kodric, 2011).

Nevertheless, the shared responsibility for the PA between EU members and non-member countries, along with the fact that each EUSDR country is responsible for implementing its own proposals, can be interpreted as at least some degree of "joint ownership" (Interview#1;

Kodric, 2011). Regardless of how the relationship is labelled, its asymmetrical nature makes it difficult for non-EU countries to become fully involved in the strategy. Arguably, limited financial and administrative capacities, different degrees of commitment to the strategy on the part of non-members, and their status vis-à-vis the EU may all account for their lack of involvement. However, it appears that officials from non-EU countries estimate their own position realistically. They expressed their understanding of the situation, and at the same time, they ensured that they do not expect any different treatment on the part of the EUSDR, given the circumstances within which they operate (Interview#1, 2).

As mentioned earlier, non-EU member states struggle with limited resources just like subnational actors do; they are still in a period of administrative development and consolidation of their financial capacities. It seems that there is an imbalance between member states and non-members with respect to access to EU funds. One of the rationales behind the creation of MRSs has been the request for a better utilization of existing funds. But this request is not substantially relevant for non-member states, because they have no a priori entitlement to these funds. Non-EU countries do not qualify for assistance from the ESF. While candidate or potential candidate countries are entitled to support from the IPA, neighbouring countries receive assistance from the ENPI (Achnicht et al., 2014). Nonetheless, even when combined with their own resources, these funds are not sufficient and consequently their use is subject to strict prioritization (Interview#2).

Another challenge for the EU in its attempt to include non-member states into MRSs is the commitment of these non-members. According to the MLG approach, in order to be able to influence political processes on the international stage or at least maintain a certain degree of control over them, nation states are striving to engage actively in these developments. However, this presupposes that the corresponding political processes are of significance for the state. Consequently, commitment to these processes and their importance are closely linked. The findings have demonstrated that, aside from specific sectorial interests, the engagement and attitude of countries oriented towards the EU differ from those of states with other preferences. The former do not perceive the EUSDR only as a strategy to foster development in the DR. Officials from candidate countries and potential candidates emphasized that their governments understand the macro-regional approach as a stage and a key tool in the European integration process. The EUSDR may be viewed as a training ground for their administrations, facilitating the learning process on the mechanisms within the EU; consequently, an active involvement has only beneficial effects for them (Interview#1, 2). At the same time, countries without a clear EU orientation and low membership prospects

display a rather more reluctant position towards the strategy. It seems that the strategy does not represent such an attractive proposition to countries like Ukraine (even before the crisis), Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This impression is strengthened by the fact that none of these countries have made efforts to become responsible for a PA.

The successful implementation of the EUSDR requires the active involvement of third countries. However, to date the strategy has not been able to create mechanisms that set efficient and profitable incentives for non-EU countries and thereby facilitate their participation. In contrast to the EUSBSR, the Danube strategy is disposed over a significant external dimension, which perhaps requires a slightly different approach in order to incorporate these countries into the strategy.

6.3. MLG and non-governmental actors

As outlined in chapter two, MLG merges a vertical and a horizontal dimension. While the vertical dimension is concerned with several governments at various territorial layers, the horizontal dimension refers to the increased involvement of non-governmental actors. My third hypothesis predicted that CSOs and IOs will obtain an important role in the EUSDR.

Piattoni (2010) argued that policy making as a process of MLG demands the simultaneous involvement of more than two administrative levels and non-governmental actors. The role of non-governmental actors is to weave the different levels together, thereby becoming an active part in the political process. Since a political process consists of at least four parts – agenda setting, policy shaping, decision making, and implementation – this raises the question of whether the governance structure of the EUSDR is or is not an instance of MLG. The findings demonstrate that overall, non-governmental actors assume the position of policy implementer rather than policy shaper/maker. In other words, the participation of non-governmental actors in political processes is predominantly limited to implementation tasks.

Furthermore, Piattoni (2010) emphasised the potential of MLG to foster non-hierarchical relationships among different actors; thus, it is tempting to assume that within these arenas there is a prevailing climate of equality, harmony, and consensus. This contrasts with the view of power constellations and the possibility of the formation of interest coalitions and goal displacement. Clearly, power within these fora is not evenly distributed, as was vividly demonstrated during the strategy's consulting phase, when subnational actors, especially representatives from CSOs, expressed their discontent with the execution of the consultations. Smaller and less equipped organizations were considerably disadvantaged, not least because of the associated expense, and were de facto excluded from the process (Interview#3, 4;

Kodric, 2011). Thus far the EUSDR has not yet been able to establish effective mechanisms and forms of coordination that comply with the demands of non-governmental actors; their integration into decision-making processes, as well as the provision of necessary funds for them, has been largely unsuccessful.

Another issue with respect to non-governmental actors is the role of IOs and their potential to become “captured” by the EUSDR in order to develop input to the project and conduct implementation or monitoring tasks.

As described in chapter four, the institutional infrastructure in the EUSDR differs from that in the EUSBSR. In the latter, transnational cooperation has a long tradition. Institutions like HELCOM have become highly influential in policy and decision-making processes (Dühr, 2011). The Marine Strategy Framework Directive, adopted in June 2008, basically rests on several regional sea conventions, among them HELCOM (Commission, 2014c). Due to the congruence of objectives, it appears that the EU “uses” HELCOM to implement and monitor its environmental policies for the Baltic Sea Region (Gänzle & Kern, 2011; Kern & Gänzle, 2013).

By contrast, as noted in chapter one, in the DR cooperation between European institutions and IOs is not yet so far advanced. However, the area of responsibility mandated by the ICPDR coincides with the objectives formulated in the EUSDR AP, particular PA4/5 of the second pillar. The relation between HELCOM and the EUSBSR is very much institutionalized, but the EUSDR and the ICPDR are still in a phase of defining theirs (Interview#5). This addresses the question of how these two actors, constituting the legal, institutional, and technical platform for cooperation on water management in the Danube basin and the broader political and supporting platform, should work together to meet their common objectives. Until now, their relationship has been no more than a fortunate overlap of interests that requires an effective mode of coordination, but this has yet to be established. The lack of such a coordinating mechanism has consequent risks, not only of work duplication but also of hindering the equal reflection of ICPDR priorities in EUSDR structures.

At present it is difficult to label the relation between these two actors, illustrated by the different interpretation of facts. According to the PA report (EUSDR, 2012) the ICPDR conducts implementation tasks for EUSDR objectives, which has been denied by ICPDR officials. In their perception, they only perform ICPDR core business (Interview#5). It is therefore debatable whether the EUSDR is in a position to “capture” the ICPDR in order to achieve its objectives. From an ICPDR perspective, this is not a question about who has the potential to “capture” whom. It is rather a question of how to enable these two platforms to

combine the technically mandated, highly institutionalized objectives of the ICDPR with the socio-economic goals of the EUSDR. These are two parallel avenues that should find the best possible way to utilize the advantages of cooperation. They need to generate synergies in order to increase implementation efficiency and speed in reaching the objectives of both systems. The ICPDR expects that the EUSDR will contribute political and financial support to ICPDR projects, rather than making the ICPDR assume an agency-like role (Interview#5); this role can more likely be filled by the EU. The ICPDR, already responsible for realizing the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Flood Directive, including the management of basin-wide flood protection measures, certainly has the potential to perform the role of a “contractor” on behalf of the EU, or become a PAC for environmental issues in the DR.

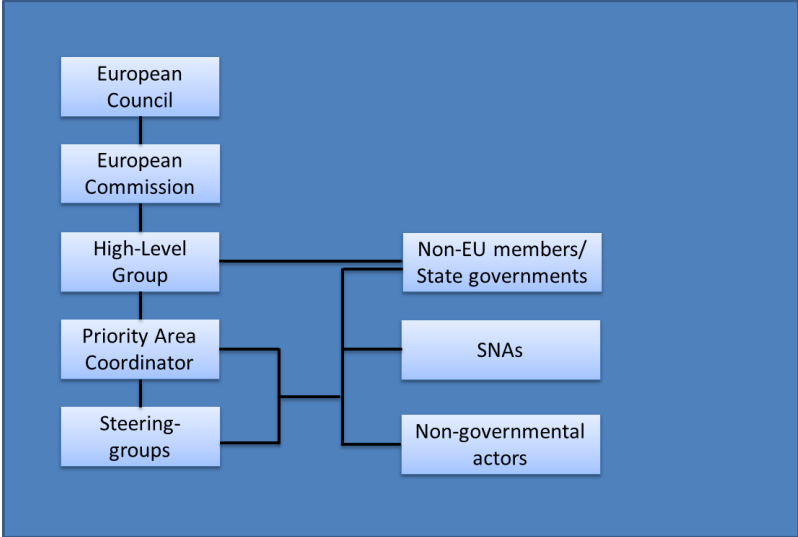
6.4. MLG and the EUSDR

It has become obvious that the EUSDR triggers moderate mobilization among SNAs, CSOs, IOs, and participating non-EU members. The two-tiered governance structure, with the Commission as lead coordinator and the participating states as strategy implementers, limits the role of other actors in becoming active parts of the strategy. There seems to be compelling reasons to argue that the role of Commission extends far beyond that of a mere coordinator. The available evidence suggests that the EUSDR displays a hierarchical structure where the Commission delegates operational tasks via participating countries down to the regional and local levels, while opportunities for bottom-up influence hardly exist. This mode of cooperation most likely benefits well-developed and well-equipped actors from the upper part of the Danube. The evidence shows that owing to their capabilities and their commitment to the EUSDR, actors from Austria and Baden-Württemberg have obtained a position that allows them, together with national governments and European institutions, to significantly shape the strategy. Actors like the state government of Baden Württemberg recognize the value of the strategy and pursue a type of paradiplomacy to preserve its regional interests. Therefore, it is not surprising that Baden Württemberg has been chosen to facilitate the newly created Danube Strategy Point, a coordination office for the strategy. By contrast, other actors often experience dominance by national and European institutions in terms of knowledge, expertise, and administrative and financial resources. They are unable to compete with them, with the result that their interests are not adequately promoted and considered, which in turn increases indifference or even the risk of actors withdrawing from the strategy (Interview#2, 4, 5).

Moreover, the predominant line of communication proceeds between the European and the national level. Actors not belonging to the European or national level have no direct access to

the decision-making arenas. It seems that responsibilities are more likely to be delegated downwards to the regional and local level (Interview#3–4), which contradicts the essence of an MLG-based approach with its emphasis on non-hierarchical relations among actors.

Figure 17: Actor access to the EUSDR fora



The EUSBSR’s governance structure serves as the blueprint for MRSs without further consideration of contextual differences in the respective regions. Regarding the EUSDR, the largest obstacle for the strategy is the high heterogeneity in terms of socio-economic, financial, and administrative development in the DR, as well as the differentiated commitment to the strategy. In the long term, of course, implementing policies such as PA10-related objectives is of great importance for countering these shortcomings, although it is extremely time-consuming. Therefore, while these deficiencies are not corrected, the EU should provide options that allow bottom-up actors to participate in the strategy, which perhaps questions the “three No’s” paradigm.

MLG as a theory, according to chapter two, produces hypotheses that predict mobilization at all administrative levels. In turn, this mobilization generates certain advantages. In practical terms, the EUSDR with its present governance arrangement is not in a position to fully exploit these advantages of MLG. Thus far, the strategy does not provide the environment necessary to foster a well-functioning and prosperous MLG system in which all relevant actors can become involved in the agenda setting, policy shaping, decision-making, and implementation processes. At this point it may be convincingly argued that the EUSDR displays a “top-down” governance structure, which rather strengthens the position of the executive at the European level.

VII. Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

With the introduction of MRSs, the EU created an additional instrument for cooperation between regions, member states, and the EU. Macro-regions bring together various actors from different countries and different administrative levels. The essence of the EU's MRS approach is to foster social-economic and territorial development through increased efficiency and an improved utilization of existing funds, legislations, and institutions.

This master's thesis, with its focus on the EUSDR, intends to contribute to a better understanding of MRSs and their functional principles. The aim of this work is to investigate the impact that the EUSDR has had on existing forms of governance and cooperation in the DR. It examines the degree of mobilization among SNAs, CSOs, IOs, and the authorities of non-EU members. Therefore, attention is directed towards three levels of analysis: the polity level, the policy level, and the politics level. The project deploys MLG as an analytical framework, and drawing on this approach it has been predicted that the EUSDR will provoke significant mobilization among the abovementioned actors with respect to the strategy. In order to measure the degree of mobilization, an integrated model bringing together the concepts of mobilization and participation was introduced, to which eight variables, associated with the three levels of analysis, were applied.

7.2. Summarizing the Findings

Before I direct my attention towards a summary of the findings, I would like to discuss some thoughts about weaknesses in this thesis. As outlined in chapter three, this work contains some methodological limitations. The first weakness is concerned with how the degree of mobilization is measured. I decided to combine the related concepts of mobilization and participation in order to develop a model, which then made it possible to measure the individual variables. Of course, there are several appropriate ways to measure this phenomenon, which may have resulted in different conclusions. This means that all the findings in this thesis are based on this methodological choice. The other weakness is related to the collection of data. With respect to the available time and resources within the frame of an MA thesis, I was only able to rely on a relatively small number of interviews. However, due to the multitude of actors involved in the DR and particularly in the EUSDR, it was important for this research to find relevant interview partners who were in a position to provide sufficient, comprehensive information about the strategy's mechanisms, and who also corresponded to the scope of my hypotheses. Therefore, I saw it as beneficial to use

representatives from umbrella organizations, which cover a majority of actors, as well as some officials who could provide insights from non-EU members with regard to the EUSDR. In addition, I was not able to carry out quantitative validation, which could have strengthened my findings.

The data presented in chapter five and discussed in chapter six demonstrate that the research resulted in three main findings. First, the overall finding is that the EUSDR has had an impact on existing governance arrangements in the DR, although the effects vary across actors and policy sectors. This means that not all relevant actors in the DR are involved in the EUSDR to the same extent, nor do they engage in all objectives addressed by the strategy. The open interpretation of engagement allows the participants to “pick and choose” from the EUSDR menu; while countries from the middle and lower parts of the Danube prefer the enforcement of large-scale infrastructure projects, actors from the upper part of the river are also concerned with issues such as the environment or institutional development.

Second, the degree of mobilization among SNAs, CSOs, IOs, and non-EU members is considered to be moderate at best, it expresses itself differently, and the engagement of these actors is particularly apparent at the policy level of analysis. The majority of the actors under investigation have been concerned with implementing EUSDR policies. Only activities from actors in Austria, Bavaria, and Baden-Württemberg could be classified at the polity and politics levels of analysis. They have been in a position to create organizational structures with respect to the strategy, and they have been able to allocate personnel and funding to the EUSDR. To compensate for the absence of these kinds of structure, a majority of actors from SNAs and CSOs engage in the strategy via their respective umbrella organizations, the CoDCR and the DCSF. Furthermore, at the moment the relation between the ICPDR and the EUSDR is no more than an overlap of interests. However, they are about to explore ways of bringing these platforms together in order to achieve common goals.

Third, whether an actor becomes involved in the strategy and to what extent seems to be contingent on several interdependent factors. The findings demonstrate that political willingness and commitment to the strategy, the financial and administrative resources available, and the relation vis-à-vis the EU, particularly with respect to non-member states, are all important aspects that determine EUSDR engagement. Political willingness is the foundation of commitment. To generate political willingness, it is therefore important to identify and communicate the strategy’s added value, both in general and for each individual actor. Actors who recognize the necessity and value of the strategy tend to become actively

involved. This is clearly visible in the case of Austrian and German actors, who, due to their extremely strong commitment, assume a pioneering role in the strategy's development.

Financial and administrative capabilities have a substantial influence on the quality of work in any organization. The heterogeneity of these resources is a key attribute of the DR. To become an active part of the strategy, a certain contribution in financial and administrative terms must be made. Due to insufficient endowment of these capabilities, only well-funded and well-staffed actors are able to promote their interests and preferences within the EUSDR, while the majority of actors are compelled to prioritize their scarce resources, reducing opportunities for a meaningful exchange of views and expertise accordingly. The present governance system in the EUSDR clearly benefits well-funded and well-equipped actors. In light of these disparities, however, it must be noted that it is also part of the reality of the DR that the utilization of funding allocated to this region (although only to EU members) is highly inadequate, with absorption rates between 37% and 65%. Nevertheless, one should consider that poor acquisition of funds and weak institutional capabilities affect one another.

Besides the already mentioned factors, the involvement of non-EU members depends significantly on their relation vis-à-vis the EU. Countries oriented towards the EU, like Serbia and Moldova, indicate more interest and engagement in the strategy than countries who may not necessarily choose a European future, which is underpinned by the fact that Serbia and Moldova are the only countries from the external dimension that have applied for co-responsibility for a PA. These countries interpret the EUSDR as more than just a strategy; in their perception it is a further stage in European integration, and particularly a learning process for their administrations. The behaviour of other non-EU members suggests that the strategy is not as attractive for them.

In sum, the EUSDR has an impact on existing forms of governance and cooperation in the DR. The effects vary across actors and policies, the degree of mobilization is rated as moderate, and activities are predominantly evident at the policy level of analysis. The current governance arrangements are favourable for high-performing actors with sufficient resources. The EUSDR clearly entails a top-down character in its governance structure and thereby places the Commission in a position to extend their role from coordinating the strategy to operating it. This certainly implies a reinforcement of the executive at the European level. In order to increase the degree of mobilization and to expand stakeholder activities to the polity and politics levels of analysis, it would be necessary to adjust the governance structure of the EUSDR with respect to the reality in the DR.

7.3. The Way Forward

MRSs are a relatively new phenomenon and there are lots of avenues to explore. Taking this thesis as starting point, it would be interesting to see in which direction these developments are heading. After a certain amount of time, similar research should be conducted in the future to find out whether there have been any changes. The findings in this thesis suggest that the degree of mobilization depends on several aspects, which necessitate further research. Hence, another possible research project related to this thesis would be to thoroughly examine why the degree of mobilization is only moderate and what is needed to improve it.

MRSs are dependent on actor involvement, although my findings show that bottom-up actors in particular are mainly active in the processes of implementation, which creates the question of how a well-functioning governance system should be designed to include bottom-up actors and non-EU members. Another possible research direction could be to explore how to make MRSs attractive for non-EU members, which is highly relevant for the EUSDR as well as for the EUSAIR with its balance of members and non-members.

The MLG system within the EU's macro-regional approach is challenging the relation to legitimized democratic arenas. Like all kinds of cooperation, MLG fosters the redistribution of power, which generates potential opportunities as well as risks for democracy. Therefore, how compatible are MRS decision mechanisms with democratically elected institutions?

Moreover, MRSs are based on the "three No's". One of them is 'no to new institutions'. However, MRSs need mechanisms for moderation and coordination. Hence, it would be interesting to investigate the role of the PACs, looking at how they become institutionalized at the working level.

These research suggestions are questions that have emerged during the work on this thesis but which could not be answered. There is always the need to go deeper into the phenomenon under investigation, to enhance the data and to capture nuances.

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Appendix – interview guide



The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR):

What impact does it trigger with regards to existing forms of governance in the region?

Interview guide

Project summary: With the macro-regional strategies (MRSs) for the Baltic Sea region (EUSBSR) and the Danube region (EUSDR), the European Union (EU) has introduced a new approach to foster territorial cohesion. It is the aim of this research project – which is part of a thesis conducted at the University of Agder (UiA), Kristiansand, Norway – to examine the EUSDR’s impact on existing forms of regional cooperation and governance arrangements in the Danube area. It investigates the scope of involvement of both national and subnational authorities, civil society organizations (CSO) as well as transnational and international actors in the context of the EUSDR. The main focus is to determine in how far these actors align their activities with the objectives and principles of the Strategy. Hence, I will take a closer look into the formal and informal arenas along three dimensions; (1) the political mobilization among sub- national authorities, (2) the authorities of participating non- member states, and (3) civil society and international organizations within the Danube Region.

Explorative (phone) interviews with representatives from national/ subnational authorities and civil society organizations from EU (non-) members and international organizations are the main source of information of this project. The interviews will not take more than 20 minutes and they will be carried out on a strict confidential basis, in which the anonymity of the respondent is guaranteed.

The interview is divided into three main parts focusing on your background, the general involvement of your organization in the strategy and the impact that the EUSDR has *vis-à-vis* your institution (and *vice versa*).

Name: Karsten Aust, MA student, University of Agder (UiA), karsta09@student.uia.no

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Stefan Gänzle, Associate Professor (UiA), stefan.ganzle@uia.no

Questions;

General

- Can you tell me about your current position and your professional background?
- Could you provide me with a general account of your organization’s involvement in the EUSDR thus far? Who is responsible for the cooperation with the EUSDR?

Structural and institutional links between the institution and the EUSDR

- Has your organisation, at any administrative level, carried out adjustments or changes of the formal structure in respect to the EUSDR?
- On what basis are EUSDR related tasks distributed? Are there officials particular assigned to the strategy? (if so, on what basis; permanent, full-time, part- time)

Policy development links between the institution and the EUSDR

- What kind of steps has your organisation undertaken in order to align with the strategy or to support it? Have, for instance, (national) funds been allocated towards the

EUSDR? What kinds of (national) programs have been developed in respect to the strategy?

- Are there any examples of EUSDR policies, which have been adopted into national legislation in your country?

Content and policy links between the institution and the EUSDR

- Can you provide some information about concrete EUSDR implementation/ evaluation tasks, carried out by your organisation/ national/ sub- national authorities or civil society actors from your country?
- How do officials from your organisation interact with the EUSDR? Can you tell about the participation in annual conferences, steering group meetings or their interaction with the priority- area coordinators?
- During the consulting and preparation phase, various actors have expressed their views in position papers or other material. Can you tell about the contributions made by your organisation?

Personal evaluation

- During the European Commission consultation and preparation phase of the EUSDR, there has been a general sense among non EU member states that they have been adequately included. How is the situation, in your opinion today?
- Where do you see potential/ need for improvement in order to enable your organization to become more involved in the strategy