

Crossing borders in higher education? A comparative case study at the intersections of EU regional and higher education policies

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Abstract

Even though the European Union's policy for regional development addresses higher education institutions, there is little research on the relationship between EU regional and higher education (HE) policies. To account for the role of EU regional policy instruments such as the European Territorial Cooperation programmes, i.e. Interreg, in fostering EU HE policy, this paper adopts a theoretical framework that unites assumptions of top-down and bottom-up Europeanisation. Two cooperation initiatives, located in the Greater Region and around Lake Constance, reveal the impact of Europeanisation on cross-border cooperation (CBC) among HE institutions. The data of 34 semi-structured interviews conducted with various stakeholders at the locations of the two initiatives and in Brussels demonstrates that Interreg alters actor constellations and interests in cross-border contexts. When conceived as an opportunity structure, Interreg may foster the CBC efforts of HE institutions. Given that Interreg also displays a constraint, HE institutions attempt to contribute to both EU regional and HE policy development.

Keywords: Europeanisation, cross-border cooperation, regional policy, higher education, Interreg

Introduction

The European Union's regional policy, also referred to as cohesion policy, aims to increase economic growth by decreasing regional disparities. One of the instruments to strengthen regional development is European Territorial Cooperation. Over time, its programs, known as Interreg, have gained in scope - both in terms of funds and in terms of the issues, they address (Piattoni, 2008). Due to its reforms in 2007 and 2013, the EU cohesion policy took a "strategic turn towards the overarching Lisbon and Europe 2020 strategies of the EU" (Heinelt and Petzold, 2018, p. 144). Within the latter, knowledge policies appear "as transversal problem solvers" (Chou and

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Gornitzka, 2014), whereas higher education (HE) is considered central to foster the so-called knowledge society as a key contributor to economic growth (Varga, 2009).

Next to being a critical facet of the EU's broader socio-economic agenda, there are three further elements to the EU's involvement in the area of HE: the policy cooperation framework 'Education and Training 2020', the European Education Area established by the Bologna Process, and funding instruments. These include the Erasmus+ programme and the European Structural and Investment Funds, which serve the implementation of the EU regional policy.

Even though EU regional policy instruments thus address HE institutions, there is little research concerning the relationship between the EU's policy for regional development and specific policy areas such HE. Therefore, this research explores the extent to which the EU regional policy matters in the cross-border cooperation (CBC) among HE institutions. The following questions guide the analysis: How does the EU regional policy alter the constellation of actors and interests in the CBC among HE institutions? How do HE institutions cooperating across borders contribute to the EU policy development?

While HE policy research scrutinises the EU's growing role within this area (e.g. Corbett, 2005; Gornitzka, 2009), the research on European border regions is concerned with day-to-day processes in the 'laboratories' of European integration (Knippenberg, 2004; Stokłosa, 2015). Existing studies on such laboratories among HE institutions either remain at the local level (Giband and Mary, 2018) or merely provide international (Knight, 2014) or European (Malchus, 2008) mappings.

Consequently, this paper departs from previous research in two main ways. First, the different levels of policy-making and implementation are analysed together. Second, its primary focus is the impact of EU-supported regional cooperation on specific policy areas. Answering 'how-Europe-matters' questions (Lehmkuhl and Knill 1999) is the main task for Europeanisation research, which scrutinises the domestic role of the EU. As defined by Radaelli (2004, p. 3):

Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of [...] rules, procedures, policy paradigms, [...] and shared beliefs and norms, which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic [...] discourse, political structures and public policies.

By analysing how the EU policy affects the cooperation of regional actors and vice-versa, this work delivers insights into concrete Europeanisation processes. Given the ever-increasing responsibilities attached to HE (institutions), these processes are not only of scientific but also of societal relevance. The analysis at hand indicates that EU regional policy programs change the existing domestic interests concerning the CBC among HE institutions. In the case of the University of the Greater Region (UniGR), these changes have favoured a cooperation, which would not have emerged otherwise. Even though the International University of

Lake Constance (IBH) was established prior to receiving Interreg funding, the analysis reveals that Europeanisation also matters for the already existing cooperation structures and issues. Moreover, in both cases, the findings demonstrate that cross-border cooperating actors attempt to shape the policies they benefit from.

1. Conceptualising regional encounters with the EU from a two-fold Europeanisation perspective

With “[m]obility and networking [being] areas in which the EU can act without infringing the core education policies and responsibilities of Member States” (Wit and Verhoeven, 2001, p. 201), bottom-up voluntary co-operation between HE institutions is central to the EU HE policy. In a similar manner, the European Commission’s management of structural funding by objectives (Kopp-Malek, 2008, p. 154) guarantees room for manoeuvre for (sub)state actors in EU regional policy formulation and implementation (Stephenson, 2016). This has altered the relationship between the EU and its regions, which face (dis)empowerment, so that they do not only adapt but also attempt to alter the EU opportunity structure (Plangger, 2018).

Analysing the EU opportunity structure is at the centre of Europeanisation research concerned with changes in domestic interests and actor constellations induced by EU policy implementation (Lehmkuhl and Knill, 1999). By considering Europeanisation from a top-down perspective, the analysis focuses on adaptational pressure through compliance-based mechanisms. From a bottom-up perspective, Europeanisation displays an encounter with the EU to pursue (sub)national policy goals (Quaglia and Radaelli, 2007). When reconciling both perspectives, “the study of Europeanisation can bring a researcher to complete the cycle of EU policy emergence, implementation and re-definition” (Exadaktylos and Radaelli, 2015, p. 212).

Following the assumption that EU regional policy instruments addressing HE institutions display both constraining and empowering structures, this work establishes three perspectives on the establishment, design, and outcomes of CBC among HE institutions. Depending on the perspective, not only do the conditions under which Interreg leads to the establishment of CBC among HE institutions change, but also the design and outcome of CBC among HE institutions. Whereas the first two perspectives originate from top-down Europeanisation assumptions concerned with issues of compatibility, the third perspective conceptualises bottom-up Europeanisation to identify patterns of rent-seeking (see Table 1).

Regarding matters of compatibility, one may distinguish between institutional compliance and ideational adaptation. Concerning the former, the analytical focus lies on institutional compatibility and policy legacy (Radaelli, 2003). When assuming that HE institutions cooperating across borders opt for Interreg if the required domestic changes are moderate, their cooperation is designed by adapting existing structures according to Interreg program requirements. The resulting altered

interest and actor constellations reinforce further institutional adaptation. While in terms of treaty provisions, the EU is supposed to merely support member states' (higher) education policies, its actions in the area of HE have gradually expanded over the past four decades (van Wageningen, 2015). Even though (sub)national governments are reluctant to delegating their competences in the area of HE, European cooperation in the area of HE (Dakowska and Velarde, 2018) and cross-border cooperation (Scott, 2014) have become established practices, which renders Europeanisation patterns by institutional compliance likely to unfold in the CBC among HE institutions.

Table 1. Expected Europeanisation patterns in the CBC among HE institutions

		<i>When do HE institutions opt for Interreg to cooperate across borders?</i>	<i>How is Interreg-funded CBC among HE institutions implemented?</i>	<i>What do altered interests and actor constellations result in?</i>
Top-down (compatibility)	Europeanisation by institutional compliance	If the required changes in domestic arrangements are moderate	By adapting existing structures	Reinforced institutional adaptation
	Europeanisation by framing domestic beliefs	If beliefs stemming from the EU level can be accommodated domestically	Along EU strategic planning as mirrored in Interreg programs	Reinforced ideational adaptation
Bottom-up (rent seeking)	Europeanisation by changing domestic opportunity structures	If the existing interest constellation is contested and resources are evenly distributed	By adapting structures and/ or objectives for securing political and financial resources	Regional actors' attempts to influence national and EU policy making

Source: autor's representation

Secondly and still concerning top-down Europeanisation, ideational adaptation is scrutinised by focusing on changes in policy means and preferences (Moumoutzis and Zartaloudis, 2016). As stated, the EU regional policy is bound to long-term EU objectives, so that its instruments are exposed to political strategies cutting across policy issues (Borrás and Radaelli, 2011). Drawing upon discursive approaches to Europeanisation (Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004), one may formulate the assumption that Interreg is opted for in the CBC of HE institutions if EU-level beliefs

are compatible with the regional context. The design of the resulting CBC projects mirrors the EU's overall strategic planning which, by altering interests and actor constellations, reinforces further ideational adaptation. Border studies have found that the most important stimuli for cross-border institution building are general polity and policy paradigms instead of material interdependencies (Blatter, 2003). Europeanisation by framing domestic beliefs is thus likely to shape the CBC among HE institutions if CBC structures and a cross-border regional identity already exist.

Thirdly, Europeanisation research bears the analysis of opportunity structures emerging through EU policy making and implementation (Vink and Graziano, 2008). The principles of EU regional policy favour the participation of authorities, social partners, and civil society at the European, regional and local level in the design, management, monitoring and evaluation of its instruments such as Interreg (Hooghe, 1996). Bottom-level actors find themselves in arenas of decision-making and acquire informational, constitutional-legal, political, and financial resources (Bache, 2010). As the EU regional policy creates 'new spaces or territories of policy-making and programming' (Stead *et al.*, 2016, p. 105), research has found that regional actors consider Interreg projects means to establish activities in new policy areas (Fitjar *et al.*, 2013). One may thus assume that Interreg favours the establishment of CBC among HE institutions if conceived of as an opportunity and resource whereas the institutional and/ or ideational adaptation of CBC projects of HE institutions serves to secure political and financial resources. Acquiring the latter not only changes interests and actor constellations, but also favours regional actors' attempts to influence national and EU policy making. Along these lines, CBC networks are joint political projects of public and private actors (Scott, 2014). How this applies to CBC networks among HE institutions is discussed after addressing aspects of case selection, data collection and analysis.

2. Comparative case study design and analytical framework

In the assessment of Europeanisation processes, intervening variables or mechanisms are identified through comparisons, e.g. across policy areas or member states (Sindberg Martinsen, 2012). To account for the extent to which the EU regional policy instruments contribute to the Europeanisation of HE policy, the research at hand compares cases of CBC in HE, which receive(d) funding through Interreg. The University of the Greater Region - involving six HE institutions from Belgium, Germany, France, and Luxemburg - and the International University of Lake Constance - a cooperation among 30 HE institutions from Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland - were selected for comparison due to the following considerations:

According to a compilation by the Association of European Border Regions, there are around 50 cases of CBC among HE institutions (Malchus, 2008). When cooperating across borders, HE institutions seldom rely entirely on EU funding.

Moreover, the majority of HE institutions benefitting from Interreg do not solely cooperate among themselves but engage in partnerships with private and public actors. This reduces the number of cases to choose from to less than ten examples of Interreg-funded CBC which only involve HE institutions. Considering that in-depth data collection and analysis requires the understanding of documents and interviewees, the University of the Greater Region (UniGR) and the International University of Lake Constance (IBH) were selected for reasons related to accessibility.

Secondly, the following characteristics of the two assessed networks are useful to explore the expected Europeanisation patterns at work. The cooperation formats differ in scope - in terms of the number of HE institutions involved and in terms of the nature of cooperation, ranging from joint study programs to joint research projects. Moreover, the two cases have different starting points in the support provided through EU funds. While the University of the Greater Region was established due to Interreg funding in 2008, the International University of Lake Constance was already established in 1999, prior to receiving EU funding in 2009. These differences are useful to account for patterns of adaptation during the establishment and implementation of CBC. Both cases have received funding in two subsequent periods (Interreg IV: 2007-2013 and Interreg V: 2012-2014), which helps to reveal patterns of participation in the (re-)formulation of the EU policy.

Exchange with the actors who are designing and implementing the policies assessed by this research is essential to understand their outcomes. Thus, next to relying on freely accessible documents issued by European, national, and regional actors, further data was collected by interviewing actors involved in the selected cases for analysis. Data collection has resulted in a rich body of data consisting of 34 semi-structured interviews with HE institution representatives, decision-makers, and other regional policy stakeholders (see the list of the interviews in the appendix). While the evidence from the cross-border contexts was gathered prior to and during field research at the different UniGR and IBH premises in November 2019, a field visit to Brussels in March 2020 served to enrich the regional-level perspectives. All interviews were conducted in German or English and lasted one hour on average.

All collected data were subject to a thematic analysis according to Boyatzis's (1998) hybrid approach of identifying themes in the data inductively and grouping them afterwards by relying on prior theories and research. After the identification of themes, their grouping was based on the experimentalist governance concept (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010), as well as on the governance architectures approach (Borrás and Radaelli, 2011). The model of experimentalist governance details the interrelated political process of EU policy formulation and implementation as follows: EU institutions and member states jointly set policy objectives, which are (semi-) autonomously implemented by the member states and regions, whereas this performance is peer reviewed and reported to the EU level to revise the initial policy objectives (Mendez, 2011). The governance architectures approach serves to go

beyond this heuristic and connects multiple levels of EU governance in a certain policy area both along organisational and ideational components (Borrás and Radaelli, 2011).

3. The relationship between Interreg and cross-border cooperation objectives

Whereas Interreg has accompanied the development of UniGR from its establishment, it only began to play a role in the context of IBH after the first 10 years of cooperation. Comparing if and what difference EU policy and funding makes for the CBC among HE institutions relates back to the role of (higher) education for EU regional development. According to Art. 174 TFEU, the Union is supposed to aim at reducing disparities between its regions and to strengthen economic, social, and territorial cohesion. These generic issues are reflected by the EU's current 'agenda for growth and jobs': Europe 2020. Whereas the notions of 'smart growth' and 'knowledge society' appear as part of the Europe 2020 ideational repertoire, 'Education and training' appear among the eleven priority areas for the 2014-2020 period of the EU cohesion policy (European Commission, 2015).

This is reflected at the policy's program level as follows. Within the Interreg IV Grande Region program, the project 'UGR - Universität der Großregion' (2008-2013) was part of the priority 'People' to address the measure 'Strengthening cooperation in the area of HE' (INTERREG IV A, 2008)¹. The IBH network received funding in 2009 under the Interreg IV Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein program priority 'Regional competitiveness and innovation' to contribute to the measure 'Fostering knowledge transfer' (Interreg IV A ABH, 2016)². Under the current Interreg program, the project received funding twice (2014-2017 and 2018-2020) to address the program area 'Competitiveness, innovation, employment, education' and the measure 'Fostering cross-border research capacities' (Interreg IV A ABH 2019)³.

Beyond these labels, network documents suggest academic, economic, political, financial, and cultural objectives for the CBC among HE institutions. Interview data indicates their specific meaning from the perspective of HE institution representatives and political actors (see Table 2).

According to one council member, IBH is supposed to contribute not only to a specific economic area but also to a space to live, to educate and to conduct research (Interview 24). The further interviewed HE institution actors, who distinguish between academic and economic objectives (Interview 5, 13, 30), reflect this. Political actors referred to these as strongly intertwined by mentioning

¹ Interreg IV A (2008), UGR-Universität der Großregion. Operationelles Programm INTERREG IV A Grossregion.

² Interreg IV A ABH (2016), Abschlussbericht Interreg IV-Programm „Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein.

³ Interreg IV A ABH (2019), Liste aller genehmigten Projekte gem. VO (EU) 1303/2013 Art. 115.

objectives such as developing skills to prevent brain drain (Interview 5, 18, 19, 28). Concerning the academic objectives of CBC, HE representatives referred to research projects given common research interests (Interview 2, 14). With the majority of the conducted research being applied, these have become apparent largely in the case of IBH. Even though research is highly internationalised, both IBH and UniGR representatives mentioned proximity as an asset for joint research projects (Interview 14, 21, 28). Joint course offers were an initial goal in the beginning of both cases. Yet, organisational, legal and practical obstacles concerning different schedules, degree requirements and language barriers were unfavourable to increasing the regional mobility of students and staff. Whereas these barriers are also present in the context of UniGR, the comparatively smaller size of the network and, thus, stronger administrative support has allowed maintaining the existing and establishing new joint study programs (Interview 2, 11, 12).

Table 2. Identified objectives of CBC among HE institutions

Objectives of CBC	Actors	
	HE institution representatives	Political actors
Academic	Increased regional student and staff mobility Joint research projects	Research for innovation Skill development to prevent brain drain
Economic	Provision of labour force	
Political	Internationalisation	Increased national attention towards periphery
	CBC network and/ or region as a national and/ or European role model	
Financial	Increased access to national / EU funding	
Social/ cultural	CBC network as a genuine European University	Management of natural and cultural heritage

Source: autor’s representation

Regarding the political objectives of CBC, HE institution representatives point to the contribution of CBC towards the internationalisation strategies of their institutions. This is especially valid for smaller HE institutions (Interview 5, 17, 21). On the other hand, political actors refer to how the cooperation across borders helps to increase the attention towards areas that are peripheral in the respective national contexts (Interview 6, 18, 29, 31). In this vein, members of both groups of actors have outlined the cooperation framework as a role model (Interview 6, 8), for example, for the effective implementation of innovation policies (Interview 21) or for successful CBC (among HE institutions) (Interview 2, 12, 16, 18, 24).

Regarding financial drivers, HE institution representatives relate to how CBC is a means to increase access to national and/or EU funding (Interview 13, 27). Facilitating actors have stressed how continuous participation in EU programs increases the likelihood of benefitting from further funding (Interview 7, 20).

However, the administrative effort and high co-funding rates of EU funding weakens its role as a driver for CBC as several political and facilitating actors emphasised (Interview 6, 11, 16, 28, 32).

Finally, even though common natural and cultural heritage was hardly mentioned, at least the case of IBH may have benefitted since CBC in the region originated from the need to tackle the low water quality of Lake Constance (Interview 21). The fact that communication and administration is facilitated by the shared language of IBH members (Interview 32) appears to be outweighed by the different roles attributed to HE institutions in the respective national context and by their diverging organisational cultures (Interview 20, 26, 30). These challenges would be less pronounced with the rather homogenous UniGR in terms of involved HE institutions, if UniGR members had a common language (Interview 13). Nevertheless, cultural and organisational differences appear as two sides of a coin in both cases, so that HE institution representatives highlighted the benefits of learning from differences in the approaches to teaching (Interview 14, 23), researching (Interview 13, 17) and providing students with advice on international and professional experiences (Interview 11, 20, 27).

Overall, the respective CBC objectives appear as strongly embedded in the European context. It follows that Interreg was opted for in both cases, since the required structural changes to implement the Interreg funding accordingly were moderate and the beliefs stemming from the EU level could easily be accommodated.

4. The role of Interreg for cross-border cooperation governance

Cooperation across borders has been an intergovernmental practice among subnational political representatives in the regions of the assessed cases for several decades. Individual actors developed the idea for the respective HE network and chose to seek the support of the HE institution at which they were located. This was the case for UniGR while at IBH, actors made use of already granted political support. Whereas the region's federal leaders had already established education as an area for CBC around Lake Constance in 1994, the UniGR network emerged in 2007, in response to a call for proposals of the Interreg program for the Greater Region. At the same time, cooperation across borders in the Greater Region⁴ had been a formalised practice at least since 1969 and HE a matter of concern for CBC since 2005. Funded under the Interreg IV A Greater Region program, UniGR was given a clear pathway at least up until April 2013. After the completion of the

⁴ A German-French intergovernmental commission established the concept of the Greater Region in 1969. Lying at the crossroads of the rivers Rhine, Saar, Meuse and Moselle, it covers the Belgian territories Wallonia, the Federation Wallonia-Brussels and Ostbelgien, Lorraine in the French region Grand Est, Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (Secrétariat du Sommet de la Grande Région 2017).

Interreg project, a Memorandum of Understanding paved the way for UniGR to acquire a legal personality in 2015.

Regarding the development of IBH, the political dependence has been accompanying the development of the network from its beginning. After a pilot phase in 1999-2002, the first IBH body representing the involved HE institutions was founded in June 2002. Shortly thereafter, the political backing of the project was institutionalised by a body concerned with HE within the International Lake Constance Conference (IBK)⁵ - the ‘Education, Science and Research’ Commission. Since its foundation in 2002, IBH has not witnessed institutional change and remains a project at the discretion of the region’s intergovernmental CBC framework. Political support is also important for UniGR, so the governance of both networks relies on political and administrative actors next to HE institution board members (see Table 3).

Table 3. Identified governance bodies of CBC in HE

HE institution board members	Council with presidency or coordination board	Making strategic decisions and planning implementation
Political actors	Political commission / advisory board	Ensuring consistency of network activities with (sub)national policies and with the political will of regional decision makers
Facilitating actors	Central office and/or decentral officers	Coordinating strategic objective implementation Acting as a contact point for network operations Administration and fundraising

Source: autor’s representation

Each group of actors is organised in one or two bodies, whereas the respective council of HE institution representatives has the executive authority. While a smaller group of HE institution board representatives is elected from the IBH council to preside, the UniGR council only includes the institutions’ presidents who formally decide upon the strategic guiding principles of the network. Lower level HE institution board members, who, just like the members of the IBH council

⁵The International Lake Constance Conference (IBK) was formally established in 1994 by the Swiss cantons St. Gallen, Thurgau, Schaffhausen and the German and Austrian Länder Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria (DE) and Vorarlberg (A). The two cantons - Appenzell Innerrhoden and Appenzell Ausserrhoden joined in 1993. Finally, the Zürich canton and the Principality of Liechtenstein became members in 1998, so that by today the IBK has gathered 10 members (Internationale Bodenseekonferenz 2019, Chronologie der grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit am Bodensee).

presidency, meet more often than the council, form the coordination board that is responsible to plan the implementation of strategic planning. While the UniGR statutes foresee a political advisory body to guarantee the consistency of UniGR activities with the HE policies in the Greater Region, its legal personality allows for more politically independent activities. In contrast, a representative from the IBK Commission 'Education, Science and Research', who is based in a state/national ministry for education and research, attends the bi-annual IBH council meetings.

In sum, the above detailed governance bodies illustrate the institutional and ideational impact of EU regional policy funding on the CBC among HE institutions. At the same time, both cases provide evidence that CBC structures and objectives are adapted to secure political and financial resources, which strongly relates to the below scrutinised changes in interest and actor constellations due to Interreg.

5. Accounting for changed interests and actor constellations

Regarding the unfolding of the outlined cooperation structures, the cooperation within IBH follows a project-cycle logic that resembles experimentalist governance. A major step to begin a new project cycle is the development of a performance agreement. To set joint objectives, the IBH office is preparing a concept paper for the strategic planning of the project for the upcoming period. It assesses the status quo, suggests future objectives and recommends funding instruments. The council amends this first draft throughout several readings and agrees upon a strategy. The political body discusses the strategy afterwards. The major issues at this stage are the budget and the framing of the objectives to avoid double funding and collision with state programs for HE and research.

The performance agreement is only finalised once the scope and funding of the future Interreg program is known, so that the IBH objectives are compatible with the program (Interview 1, 4, 25). By explicitly intertwining the strategic and financial planning at the respective state-level with the Interreg funding mechanism, IBH appears to have successfully adapted to the EU regional policy opportunity structures.

This is also valid for UniGR, which has successfully acquired Interreg funding in 2017 for the project 'UniGR-Center for Border Studies' after the completion of the Interreg funding period for the network itself in 2013. Moreover, both UniGR and IBH members have become frequent stakeholders in further Interreg or Erasmus+ funded projects. These may involve some of their IBH or UniGR partners (Interview 14, 16). Alternatively, some new projects go beyond UniGR and emerge under Interreg B (Interview 5) that is targeted at the EU's macro-regions such as the Alpine or the Danube Region.

This institutional and ideational adaptation to the EU's opportunity structures is not without consequences. First, the embeddedness of IBH and UniGR in regions with a tradition in CBC and other existing structures of CBC establishes a cross-

border regional identity that reinforces their activities. Second, being part of different Interreg program periods requires re-formulating the purpose of cross-border activities, which does not only shape the networks' objectives, but also has an impact on the perception of CBC. An IBH council member explained how the growing idea of cooperation and cross-border exchange has turned IBH from a community of rent-seekers into a community of interests, which are increasingly replaced by values (Interview 24). For these values to shape a genuine CBC identity, it is necessary to build mutual trust (Interview 2, 11, 12), which is what both IBH and UniGR have achieved.

In both cases, this increased self-consciousness has extended the task of fundraising, beyond the facilitating actors, towards HE board members themselves, as demonstrated by the European University Initiative (Interview 11, 12). Launched in 2019, it will become an integral part of the new Erasmus programme from 2021 onwards. This initiative was a highly topical issue during data collection that made visible how HE institutions and facilitating actors attempted to shape the EU policy. Yet, it also revealed their lack of success (Interview 15). Despite consulting existing CBC frameworks (Interview 34), the initiative supports and establishes cooperation networks with a broader and more balanced geographical scope (European Commission 2019).

Assessing this development goes beyond the scope of this paper. The initiative nevertheless demonstrates that CBC among HE institutions is subject to Europeanisation patterns not only induced by EU regional policy implementation, but also by further EU policies. For the case of IBH, the potential application for the European University Initiative, together with a prospective change in the eligibility criteria for the new Interreg period have contributed to settle the re-occurring question of the legal personality of the network. Within UniGR, the debates started prior to applying together with other HE institutions for the initiative and continued after receiving the negative results. A process of transferring the submitted proposal has been induced, whereas the revised UniGR objectives mirror the thematic concentration of the newly established European Universities.

This indicates that established and operative CBC frameworks among HE institutions become subject to further Europeanisation processes generated by connected policy areas, such as EU HE and research policy. Detecting overlapping Europeanisation patterns in the context of CBC among HE institutions is evident, given the often-emphasised lack of specific funds for the latter (Interview 11, 15).

Overall, when opting for EU regional policy funding and designing the cooperation accordingly, the interests and actor constellations of CBC among HE institutions change. As a result, the institutional and ideational adaptation of CBC among HE institutions is reinforced, which favours the cooperating actors' attempts to influence EU policy making.

6. The impact of Europeanisation on the cross-border cooperation among HE institutions

The analysis does not only illustrate HE institutions' willingness to cooperate across borders but also the different extents of commitment towards CBC (Interview 10, 23, 26). The HE institution leadership and, thus, the attached role of CBC within strategic considerations acknowledging the size of the institution, its location and its tasks - teaching, research, and innovation - appear central. The findings do not only reflect existing research on CBC among HE institutions (Knight, 2014; Karvounaraki *et al.*, 2018) but also on cross-border institution-building which is found to be guided by polity and policy paradigms instead of functional logics (Blatter, 2003). Moreover, the above detailed governance structures go beyond network bureaucracies implementing the Interreg funding mechanism as suggested elsewhere (Löfgren, 2015). Beyond (dis)proving already existing findings, the above analysis provides evidence that all three assumed types of Europeanisation patterns unfold in the CBC among HE institutions. Both cases show that they are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually reinforcing.

Initially, HE institutions were sceptical towards institutionalising CBC in both cases. Yet, once common denominators were identified, EU regional policy instruments were opted for to support the CBC of HE institutions. The identified objectives of CBC demonstrate that these are mainly of political and economic nature, which favours bottom-up Europeanisation to unfold since structures and goals are adapted for securing political and financial resources.

However, considering that the projects are designed according to Interreg programs that mirror EU strategic planning, ideational aspects should not be underestimated. The above-illustrated IBH implementation-cycle has demonstrated how the combination of institutional and ideational adaptation reinforces itself once regional interests and actor constellations find themselves altered. The review of the networks' governance structures has revealed that existing structures at the level of HE institutions and existing CBC institutional frameworks have been adopted to implement the received funding accordingly. In both cases, this was possible due to the required moderate changes in domestic arrangements and to the ability to accommodate beliefs stemming from the EU level within the respective domestic belief systems, i.e. an existing cross-border region identity.

Finally, Interreg programs have created opportunities for regional-level actors in both cases to gain continued political and financial support for their cooperation. The changed actor constellations due to CBC have thus favoured regional actors' attempts to influence respective sub-national and EU policy making. Along the logic of bottom-up Europeanisation, there are two manifestations of regional actors' attempts to shape the opportunity structures, from which they benefit. First, the gathered evidence suggests extensive awareness of subnational political actors of the assessed CBC frameworks (Interview 6, 19, 20, 29, 31). Second, among actors from

further CBC contexts, UniGR representatives were involved in one of the expert groups designing the European University Initiative, as the newest EU HE policy addition. The Directorate General for regional policy was seemingly less involved (Interview 33, 34) in the exchange between different European Commission Directorate Generals concerning the initiative. Whether this explains the scope of the European Universities going beyond CBC remains an open question.

Conclusion

The paper assumed that due to the EU's long-term socio-economic strategies, regional and HE policies intersect. Based on this assumption, the analysis aimed to determine the extent to which EU's regional policy matters in the CBC among HE institutions. For this purpose, primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with actors in politics, administration, and HE involved in CBC cases of the University of the Greater Region (UniGR) and the International University Lake Constance (IBH). The analysis demonstrates that common beliefs and interests have been essential not only in establishing CBC but also in maintaining cooperation. The identified objectives for cooperation suggest that these common interests are mainly of academic and political nature. Additionally, the idea to fulfil the perceived increasing responsibilities of HE institutions (Interview 1, 2, 13, 31) also played a significant role. This reflects the EU's social investment narrative establishing a 'linear relationship between knowledge [...] and economic performance' (Telling and Serapioni, 2019, p. 401).

The interconnected problems and goals formulations at EU and regional level are not surprising given that both networks receive EU funding through Interreg. Yet, the described patterns of cooperation also illustrate that, by supporting CBC among HE institutions, Interreg contributes to the adaptation of their objectives. Over time, the respective regional belief system incorporates EU-level ideas. Therefore, and given the existing legacy of CBC in the assessed regions, the implementation structures of the assessed networks reflect both the adaptation of existing and emergence of new institutions. The latter find themselves operating dependent on the subnational political will (Interview 11) implying that the CBC efforts among HE institutions are indeed political projects (Scott, 2014). Due to its co-funding element, Interreg is a highly political instrument (Interview 5, 6, 25, 28), which is why both assessed cases reflect 'shadows of hierarchy' (Héritier and Rhodes, 2011), i.e. the option of (sub)state actors to withdraw their support from the HE institutions cooperating across borders. By instrumentalising the CBC settings towards the national and European levels (Interview 13, 30, 33), (sub)national political actors occasionally illuminate these shadows.

There are certain limitations to the analysis: both IBH and UniGR have been able to adapt successfully to the EU opportunity structure and are thus cases for the EU empowering regions. Assessing cases of disempowerment, i.e. unsuccessful

projects ending after brainstorming or pilot phases, would also be useful to counter the overestimation of Europeanisation effects of Interreg on the CBC among HE institutions. Broadening the geographical scope of this study towards Interreg funded CBC frameworks located in the Northern, Southern and Eastern parts of Europe would be the first step in this direction. Yet, the presented results may nevertheless be the basis for investigations concerned with the effectiveness of feedback loops towards the EU-level created by implementation of the EU regional policy addressing HE institutions.

Finally, given the different EU funding sources and logics available to HE institutions (Interview 5, 11, 16, 33), a further avenue of research would be accounting for potentially diverging Europeanisation patterns induced by the different EU policies addressing HE institutions. For example, comparing Interreg-supported CBC among HE institutions with the new Erasmus+-funded European Universities would deliver further insights into the challenge of funding schemes and interconnected stakeholders and experts (Dakowska, 2019) towards the EU's actual supportive and supplementary tasks in the area of HE policy.

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Appendix: List of Interviews

- Interview 1 (IBH facilitating actor, July 2019)
- Interview 2 (UniGR facilitating actor, July 2019)
- Interview 3 (Decentral EU funding body Greater Region, October 2019)
- Interview 4 (Decentral EU funding body Lake Constance, October 2019)
- Interview 5 (UniGR council member, November 2019)
- Interview 6 (UniGR political advisor, November 2019)
- Interview 7 (UniGR facilitating actor, November 2019)
- Interview 8 (former UniGR council member, November 2019)
- Interview 9 (UniGR council member, November 2019)
- Interview 10 (UniGR coordination board member, November 2019)
- Interview 11 (UniGR facilitating actor, November 2019)
- Interview 12 (UniGR coordination board member, November 2019)
- Interview 13 (former UniGR council member, November 2019)
- Interview 14 (UniGR council member, November 2019)
- Interview 15 (former UniGR council member, November 2019)
- Interview 16 (UniGR facilitating actor, November 2019)
- Interview 17 (IBH council member, October 2019)
- Interview 18 (IBH political advisor, October 2019)
- Interview 19 (IBH political advisor, November 2019)
- Interview 20 (IBH facilitating actor, November 2019)
- Interview 21 (IBH council member, November 2019)
- Interview 22 (IBH project partner, November 2019)
- Interview 23 (IBH council member, November 2019)
- Interview 24 (IBH council presidency member, November 2019)
- Interview 25 (IBK facilitating actor, November 2019)
- Interview 26 (IBH council member, November 2019)
- Interview 27 (IBH council presidency member, November 2019)
- Interview 28 (IBK member and IBH political advisor, November 2019)
- Interview 29 (IBH political advisor, November 2019)
- Interview 30 (IBH council presidency member, November 2019)
- Interview 31 (IBH political advisor, November 2019)
- Interview 32 (IBH facilitating actor, November 2019)
- Interview 33 (Commission official at DG Regio, March 2020)
- Interview 34 (Commission official at DG EAC, March 2020)