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ABSTRACT

“A Project Outline - The Capacity of Euroregions and the Implementation of Local Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe”

The paper outlines the design of a proposed research project focusing on networks and trust in institutionalized local cross-border cooperation in Europe, referred to as ‘Euroregions’. There are now more than 100 Euroregions in place and although sharing many traits, these display significant differences in terms of scope, function, outreach, and, not the least, effects on the daily life of people living in these regions. While a number of case-studies of cross-border cooperation (or dysfunctional aspirations to cooperation) have been carried out, there have so far been few comparative studies and we know little about what leads to successful versus unsuccessful cooperation. The project seeks to address this gap by making a **systematic inquiry into potential factors facilitating cooperation policies**, including those most commonly mentioned in the literature – support and expectations from the European Union, economic ‘push-and-pull’ or liberalization mechanisms, and cultural proximity (linguistics/ethnicity/history) – as well as one that has been by and large neglected, namely levels of social capital. I argue that the borderland literature not adequately has utilized the findings from recent studies on the **role of social capital** for local and regional development, much of which I expect to be important for explaining the failure or success of Euroregions as well. The validity of the theory will be tested by investigating responses to specific policy challenges across units at a singular place in time. Tentative policy fields and issues include **environment** (e.g. acid rain), **border control** (e.g. the broadening of Schengen accord), **business & investment** (e.g. consequences of a recession cross-border business cooperation and local government promotion such cooperation) and **higher education & research** (e.g. reactions to the new knowledge society discourse and its emphasis on the importance of regional clustering in knowledge production). The project is expected to provide new theoretical as well as policy-relevant insights.