

Sara Svensson  
svensson\_sara(at)phd.ceu.hu  
Probationary PhD Candidate  
CEU Department of Public Policy

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Central European University  
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## Prospectus Draft II \*

Implementation of Local Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe:  
The Capacity of Euroregions and the Role of Social Capital

\*I am grateful to the following individuals and groups for taking time to comment extensively on the previous prospectus draft and outlines: Andrew Cartwright (supervisor), Zsolt Enyedi, Erin Jenne, Andreea Nastase, Philippe Schmitter, Nick Sitter, Koba Turmanidze, the Political Economy Research Group (PERG) and participants in the Political Science Prospectus Seminar. While I have not yet been able to allocate time to each suggestion, several ideas have been incorporated into this version to enable further feedback.

## 1. Introduction to the Project

From Lisbon to Helsinki, from Reggio di Calabria to Amsterdam, from Vienna to Sevilla – a tourist in Europe can today drive thousands of kilometers and pass dozens of countries without ever showing a passport at an official border crossing. Often the only noticeable change is the language on signs, whereas the currency, the commercial brands and architecture might be more or less the same. The tourist could easily conclude that she has seen the manifestation of the swiftest and smoothest eradication of borders in history. If she also happened to take a professional or academic interest in contemporary local transborder cooperation around the globe, and would hear about the currently more than 100 institutionalized efforts at creating local transborder economic and cultural spaces in Europe,<sup>1</sup> the conclusion is near at hand that Europe has come furthest down a route that is embarked on elsewhere as well. This makes Europe an ideal setting for investigating the implementation of local cross-border cooperation policies and testing what combination of factors are conducive to successful implementation.

The sunny picture invoked in the opening sentence above must of course be qualified by emphasizing that there are still physical and visible borders: internal borders between Schengen and non-Schengen countries, and external borders to countries not members of the European Union. In addition, borders may be physically invisible but still have real impacts on European citizens living close to them, as they are frequently constrained by borders in various ways, for instance through diverging tax regimes or social insurance policies on each side (Hansen and Serin 2007) or relate to borders by 'passively ignoring the other side' (Struwer 2004). Many have wished to ameliorate constraints and 'make passive citizens active', not the least in the belief that increased mobility of people as well as goods would create economic growth in the border region,

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<sup>1</sup>An excellent map of these can be found on the website of the Association for European Border Regions, which organizes 90 out of approximately 115 current border initiatives, <http://www.aebr.net> (accessed March 19, 2009)

and as a response various forms of institutionalized cooperation have emerged along most of Europe's internal borders. In accordance with the dominant literature on this topic, I refer to these initiatives as 'Euroregions' although they might be labeled differently.<sup>2</sup> As such Euroregions also exist at external borders, the situation can also be complicated by simultaneous processes of encouragement and impediment of cross-border cooperation (Kennard 2004).

Although the Euroregions share many traits, they also 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 can enhance the capacity of Euroregions and thereby contributing to 'successful' cooperation (for exceptions, see discussions by Perkmann 2002, Kramsch and Hooper 2004 and Pavlakovics-Kochi, Morehouse and Wastl-Water 2004, the latter reviewed in Kramsch 2005). The project seeks to address this gap by making a systematic inquiry into potential factors facilitating implementation, including those most commonly mentioned in the literature – economic 'push-and-pull' mechanisms, and cultural proximity (linguistics/ethnicity/history)<sup>3</sup> – 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. I also investigate the argument that only politically relevant social capital should be taken into account when studying phenomena that are political to its nature (La Due Lake and Huckfield 1998). Hence, the research is guided by one 'overarching' and one theory-driven central research question:

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<sup>2</sup> Euroregions is the general term used for formalized cooperation, although such initiatives might be labeled differently, e.g. EUregios or EUregions (Perkmann 2002, Kramsch and Hooper 2004), Working Communities or European Economic Interest Groupings (Dura and Gonzales 2008).

<sup>3</sup> I am not including support and expectations from the European Union since that is usually a factor given as an explanation for the emergence of a Euroregion, not as a factor influencing their subsequent success or failure.

ORQ: What conditions are conducive to Euroregions acquiring the capacity for successfully implementing cross-border cooperation policies?

CRQ: What is the role of social capital in the implementation of local cross-border cooperation policies in Europe?

The dependent variable of the project is therefore the capacity of Euroregions to successfully implement cooperation policies. Success will primarily be defined in relation to self-stated goals by participating actors in Euroregions, but external standards such as aims set by EU and 'reasonable' achievements as defined by me as the researcher will also be taken into account (for operationalization see section 6.2.).

The primary unit of observation is municipalities participating in Euroregions, while the analysis will be made on two levels, participating municipalities and Euroregions. The validity of the theory will be tested by investigating responses to one or two specific policy challenges across units at a singular place in time. Possible areas include environment, business & investment, higher education & research or border control.

The project is expected to provide new theoretical as well as policy-relevant insights. By answering the overarching research question, the project would contribute to the larger literature on borderlands but also feed into knowledge accumulated and utilized by policymakers and practitioners in the field of cross-border cooperation at multiple levels in Europe. Answering the central research question would enhance theoretical understanding of social capital by giving a small but valid contribution to a range of studies done on social capital and regional development.

## 2. Preliminary Remarks on 'Euroregions'

Before embarking on the literature review, a few circumstances and facts related to Euroregions should be laid out and clarified in order to avoid common misunderstandings. Within the European Union the picture of cross-border relations is

both complicated and enriched by the simultaneous processes of a *macro-level regional integration*, including the removal of borders as the prime barrier for the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons, and *micro-level regional integration projects* developing both independently and in symbiosis with the aforementioned process. Contrary to what some might expect, the initial driving force behind Euroregions, defined as “more or less institutionalized collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders” (Perkmann 2002:104), was not the European Union, but the Council of Europe. The latter invented the term and invested considerable energy in the 1980 Madrid Convention on ‘Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities” which stated that such cooperation leads to “improvement and development of frontier regions <...> economic and social progress of frontier regions and to the spirit of fellowship which unites the peoples of Europe”. (Preamble<sup>4</sup>) The first Euroregions were in fact created approximately at the same time as EU itself, established in the late 1950s out of concern with matters of evident cross-border bearing, such as spatial planning, transport and environmental issues, but recently more initiatives have been taken in economic policy, the labor market and social and cultural issues (Perkmann 2002). The diffusion of this type of institution would therefore be a process of ‘true Europeanization’ rather than the de facto EU-ization frequently meant by that term (Wallace 2001), at least in the early decades.

Today, the increasing number of Euroregions is more associated with the European Union, which has supported them financially since the launch of the Interreg program in 1990 (Perkman 2002). Currently funding is available through the European Territorial Co-operation program, as part of EU Regional Policy. In the period 2007-2013, 5.6 billion Euro will be allocated to Euroregions, which can be compared with 1.8 billion Euro for transnational programs (larger areas) and 445 million Euro to interregional projects

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<sup>4</sup> The convention text is available on the website of Council of Europe at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/106.htm> (accessed January 4, 2009)

(between municipalities and regions in different countries not annexing each other).<sup>5</sup> The Phare program, which assisted candidate countries from 1989 onwards,<sup>6</sup> included funding for cross-border cooperation, which created an impetus for creating Euroregions in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Kennard 2004).

It is also worth emphasizing that Euroregions “are not ‘governed’ in a conventional, territorial sense” (Perkmann and Sum 2002:15) if by being governed we understand the deference to decision-making made by one political (elected) body. Most Euroregions are not even steered by one (political) authority, but consist of multiple partnership, where some are singularly public, other private-public, and yet others purely private (i.e. partnerships between business associations or other non-governmental organizations).<sup>7</sup> The term ‘governance’ is more appropriate, as its most distinctive feature is the incorporation of actors and organization from the non-state sector into decision processes (Rhodes 2000). In relation to political frontier regimes, Jean-Philippe Leresche and Guy Saez categorize the *governance* framework of public action as one where public actors (the state, the region, the European Union) and private actors (associations of businesses and organizations) constitute the most important actors (Leresche and Saez 2002:88). Decision-making within Euroregions possess four of five distinctions claimed by Schmitter to be distinctive of governance arrangements, namely “(1) Horizontal interaction among presumptive equal participants without distinction between their public or private status. (2) Regular, iterative exchanges among a fixed set of independent but

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<sup>5</sup> Information about the new program is available on the European Commission Website for Regional policy: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/index_en.htm) (accessed December 16, 2008)

<sup>6</sup> Information on Phare available on the European Commission Website for Enlargement at [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/phare/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/phare/index_en.htm) (accessed January 4, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> The Oresund Euroregion region on the border of Sweden and Denmark can serve as an illustration. It does not consist of one, but a number of partnerships and projects, out of which the most important arguably is the Oresund Committee, a political platform for local and regional authorities. The Committee has been the initiator – although not implementing organization – of other partnerships such as include Medicion Valley Academy, ‘the Oresund University’, Oresund Science Region, Orestat (providing statistics of the integration work) and Oresundsredaktionen (media cooperation), and has also run its own projects on employment, competence development and regional analysis. (Oresundskomiteen 2009)

interdependent actors. (3) Guaranteed (but possibly selective) access, preferably as early as possible in the decision-making cycle. (4) Organized participants that represent categories of actors, not individuals.” (Schmitter 2000:5) The important exception is the fifth criteria, the “capacity to take and to implement decisions binding on all participants and, at least potentially, binding on non-participants as well” (ibid.). Accepting the frequent lack of capacity to make binding decisions, I would however state that Euroregions constitute a separate governance system where citizens on both sides of the borders are significantly affected by cooperation actions on the local transnational level, frequently leading to policy coordination with the help of actors on the national or supra-national level.

Having emphasized the non-EU roots of Euroregions as micro-level integration projects and the particular nature of its decision-making system, I will now turn to the literature that will constitute the foundation of the project.

### 3. Dominant Approaches in the Literature

The aim of this section is to situate the project within studies on borderland relations, which in a broad sense is the literature the project is contributing to, although empirical study will be limited to instances of formalized cross-border cooperation in Europe.<sup>8</sup> However, the aforementioned simultaneous processes of macro- and micro-level integration – unmatched elsewhere on the globe – make the Euroregions an ideal set of cases for testing hypotheses of what works in cross-border cooperation, as I am expecting to find different levels and quality of such cooperation across cases that have been subject to similar incentives.

By definition, the main function of a territorial border is to separate and delimit, but it can also be a possibility for contact between different systems, i.e. it has a *barrier* as well as a *contact* function (Leresche and Saez 2002). The proliferation of cross-border

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<sup>8</sup> I acknowledge the risk that the project through its design might reinforce the existing cleavage between European and American studies on borderland relations (Kramsch 2002). Having said that, it makes it the more imperative to also address the broader borderland debate.

alliances around the world, especially notable in Europe, North America and Southeast Asia (Scott 1999) should not be taken as a sign that borders are vanishing. There seems to be consensus among borderland scholars that the opposite is true; human-created territorial borders are here to stay in the foreseeable future. What is new is that the nature of borders to a larger extent than before seems to be context-dependent and flexible, and is best viewed as part of the processes of 'bordering'.<sup>9</sup> Such processes, including both informal and formal exchanges and forms of cooperation, are increasingly attracting academic interest,<sup>10</sup> although it has been pointed out that there is a disconnect between an abundance of case studies and theory on the matter (Jukarainen 2006).

When it comes to the framework and causal mechanisms for functional political relationships across borders, two interrelated but distinct approaches can be identified. The first is the emphasis of political geographers on *scale* as the most important concept for studying border relations. Scale in this sense has three dimensions, *size*, *level* and *relation* (Mamadouh, Kramsch and Velde 2004), which should be the foundation for analysis of border relations. The impetus for institutionalization of cross-border cooperation can for instance derive from *re-scaling* taking place when established borders no longer match on-the-ground conditions and demands, or in the words of Hansen and Serin, there is a "growing mismatch between existing power structure and institutions" (Hansen and Serin 2007:46). If this takes place in a border area citizens are close in terms of language and/or ethnicity, or have historically belonged to the same state, cross-border cooperation is likely to occur (Hansen and Serin 2007).

The second approach is economic in nature, and views cross-border cooperation as a function of free trade agreements, such as those existing within the European Union (e.g. Brunet-Jailly 2002), push-and-pull factors of different economic conditions on each

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview of recent research, see Jukarainen 2006.

<sup>10</sup> As demonstrated by the increased circulation of the Journal of Borderland Studies, published by the Association for Borderland Studies. The association was founded in 1976 to study interactions over the US-Mexican border but today has a global membership and outreach. (<http://www.absborderlands.org>, accessed March 19, 2009) The Centre for International Border Research at Queen's University in Belfast has a European and International outlook, although the focus has been on research on Irish border relations. <http://www.qub.ac.uk/cibr/>, accessed January 8, 2009.

side of the border, or as response to a financial crisis (Hansen and Serin 2007). Perkmann and Sum point out the neoclassical economics roots of these arguments (2002).

The importance of both these approaches is overstated and misleading according to Olivier Kramsch, who claims that arguments of scale are too state-centric and attached to 'old' notions of power hierarchies. He argues that the institutionalist and sociological dimension of borderland studies should be extended, and in this spirit applies a Marxist, post-colonial and historical theoretical framework to juxtapose borders in Dutch Indonesia during colonial times with contemporary Euroregions along the Dutch, Belgium and German borders (Kramsch 2002).

While I see explanatory value in both the scalar and the economic approaches, I agree with Kramsch on the importance of supplementing this with an institutionalist and sociological dimension. While in general few attempts have been made to develop a theory to explain the function of cross-border cooperation, there is a need to supplement the approaches outlined above and causes that can be derived from these with an analysis of socio-political factors – social capital and political affinity- which has so far been only sporadically mentioned in (case)studies on border cooperation (e.g. Grix and Knowles 2003).

Some might find the absence of any mentioning of the role played by the European Union conspicuous. Clearly, there seems to be a connection between the introduction of funding for Euroregions in the late 1980s and the subsequent proliferation of these in the 1990s. This would indicate a top-down process gaining in strength as opposed to what at least some had seen as a bottom-up process of institution-building. (Perkmann 2002) However, the purpose of the project is to study the implementation rather than the formation or emergence of Euroregions, and on this aspect I have not identified relevant arguments in the literature.

#### 4. Theoretical framework and core concepts

The project shares the perspective on European integration and governance developed by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2001) which is commonly referred to as multi-level governance. This perspective emphasizes how “multiple points of access” are opened up for interests, while at the same time granting privilege to groups with “technical expertise that match the dominant style of EU policy-making” (Kennard 2004:111). Of relevance for local cross-border cooperation is also the view of multi-level governance as a consequence of two simultaneous developments in post WWII Europe, namely European integration and regionalization (Hooghe and Marks 2001).

The key concept of the project is social capital, which has spawned enormous scholarly interest in the last two decades, and there is every reason to handle the concept with precision and care. The term as we know it now is usually attributed to three ‘founding fathers’ - Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert D. Putnam – and consists of a combination of social networks and trust (Baron, Field and Schuller 2000:14). Coleman saw social capital as a collective non-divisible good, and stated that “unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structures of relations between actors and among actors” (Coleman 1988:S98). Putnam utilized the concept in his studies of how regional development in Italy could be explained by variations in the stock of social capital, by which he meant density of social networks combined with the degree of trust in other people and authorities (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 1993), but compared to Coleman his focus is more on civil participation and the importance of associations, and he also acknowledges that social capital can be an individual asset (Putnam 2000). This can be labeled a cognitive approach as opposed to Coleman’s functionalist and structuralist. (Baron, Field and Schuller 2000) While I share Putnam’s view that social capital can be both a collective and a private good, the focus of the project is on its collective manifestation between agents, and how this affects the level of cooperation across borders.

Social capital is usually assumed to contribute to a well-working democracy (and 'good governance') by two parallel mechanisms. The first is an external mechanism of improved flows of political information when individuals freely express their demands on government, and these demands and interests are channeled through associations that in neo-Toquevillian fashion are assumed to lend the represented views a 'clearer shape'. The second is an internal capacity-building mechanism residing in the individuals that engage in civic engagement, resulting in their acquiring "habits of cooperation and public-spiritedness, as well as the practical skills necessary to partake in public life" (Putnam 2000:338).

Of relevance to the regional and development aspect of the project is also the conceptual and empirical work carried out by the World Bank, which in the 1990s launched a large-scale World Bank initiative<sup>11</sup> to investigate the links between social capital and development and which now claims that "increasing evidence shows that social capital is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. <...> Social capital when enhanced in a positive manner, can improve project effectiveness and sustainability by building the community's capacity to work together" (World Bank 2008). In the World Bank understanding, social capital spans five dimensions: groups and networks, trust and solidarity, collective action and cooperation, social cohesion and inclusion, and information and communication (ibid.). I would argue that of these, the first two are the ones most relevant to the project. To include 'social cohesion and inclusion' would risk stretching the concept too far, and the 'information/communication' between people is usually captured by network-related questions. The same can be said about 'collective action and cooperation'. Narrowed in this way, the experience of the World Bank offers much in terms of data and advice on operationalization of the concept of social capital.

In addition, it is necessary to mention the work that has been done in differentiating between different types of social capital. The most common is the distinction between

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<sup>11</sup> See the World Bank Website at <http://go.worldbank.org/COQTRW4QF0> (accessed December 16, 2008)

bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Bonding social capital refers to ties existing in closed networks, whereas bridging and linking social capital emphasize links outside the immediate community. Bonding social capital has often been portrayed as 'the dark side of social capital' (Baron, Field and Schuller 2000:10-11) whereas bridging and linking social capital is supposedly normatively preferable. There have been efforts to assess the roles of these different types of social capital to regional or community development, which in essence is what the project is about but for a cross-border territorial area. According to one view, regional development needs 'creative social capital', which is a mixture of bridging and bonding social capital (Pihkala, Harmaakorpi and Pekkarinen 2007). Another suggestion has been that bonding, bridging and linking social capital represents different types of goods that are needed in different stages of the development (Kolbel 2008). Unlike these authors I do not see this classification as immediately applicable or useful for the project (and I remain skeptical to its usefulness for regional development). Instead I will focus on a distinction that has been applied to the study of a Euroregion on the Finnish-Swedish border, namely between *within-group social capital* and *between-group social capital*. The former is social capital as an asset of a community on one side of the border, whereas between-group social capital is constituted by links and trust across borders (Grix and Knowles 2003). Community in this context refers simply to the municipality in question.

As is natural for a concept that has gained terrain so quickly, the use of social capital as explanatory factor or study variable in social sciences has been criticized on many grounds, more than can be explored in this section.<sup>12</sup> However, of relevance is the rich body of literature investigating the relation between associations and democracy, starting with Tocqueville (1832, 2000) and continued by many scholars. In an overview of this debate, Archon Fung cites writings by Theda Skocpol and Mark E. Warren among others and thoroughly dissects the assumption that abundance of associations in itself

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<sup>12</sup> For critical essays on social capital in general, see essays in Baron, Field and Schuller 2000. For criticism on Putnam, excellent essays can be found in McLean, Schultz and Steger 2002.

leads to democracy or better government (Fung 2003). Others have suggested that only the *political dimension* of social capital should be taken into account when analyzing the link between social capital and democracy/good governance. In an article on democratization in Central America, John A. Booth and Patricia Bayer contend that “in order to have political significance, associational activism must foster attitudes and behaviors that actually influence regimes in some way” (1998:782). They label attitudes and activities that have such effects ‘political capital’, which they attempt to measure by voter turnout, campaign activism, contacting public officials and democratic norms as overall support for liberal democratic liberties expressed in surveys (1998). Ronald La Due Lake and Robert Huckfeldt argue that only some social capital is ‘political relevant’ and use a US national survey of face-to-face communication about politics as an indicator of such ‘politically relevant’ social capital (1998). While none of these conceptualizations seem immediately useful for studying the implementation capacity of cross-border projects in Euroregions, I concur with the authors that the political dimension of social networks should receive extra attention. The project therefore includes a variable tentatively called ‘political affinity’, which is intended to measure the closeness of political structure and/or ideology and its influence on implementation capacity. The underlying mechanism would be that political affinity would strengthen the likelihood of cross-border networks, i.e. a form of between-group social capital.

## 5. Hypotheses and Argument

As indicated by the research questions, the project revolves around the factors conducive for Euroregions to acquire the capacity for successfully implementing cooperation policies. The literature review has identified two conditions which will be investigated together with social capital, which I suggest should be taken into account as well. This section will present the hypotheses, which can be derived from these approaches, and briefly outline the mechanisms supposedly at work.

According to the economic approach we would expect successful implementation where there is a strong incentive for cross-border integration in the form of economic differences between the two sides of the border. Such differences may include consumer prices, wages or housing. The first hypothesis is therefore:

- H1: Diverging economic conditions will increase the likelihood for successful implementation of cross-border cooperation.

The second hypothesis builds on the assumption that successful implementation will take place where citizens are close in terms of language and/or ethnicity, or have historically belonged to the same state, and where nation-states are no longer the optimal arena for dealing with contemporary political issues (*process of rescaling*).

- H2: Closeness in terms of linguistics, ethnicity or previous state-formations will increase the likelihood for successful implementation

While these factors may very well be important, I expect to see variance in the success rate that cannot be explained by them. As outlined above, mainstream theory on social capital (as expressed by the World Bank and by some scholars) predicts that it can improve project effectiveness and sustainability, by an external mechanism of improving information flows and by an internal mechanism of individual capacity-building. Since the project differs between *within-group* social capital (networks and trust within municipalities participating in a Euroregion) and *between-group* social capital (cross-border networks and trust) I will therefore expect that municipalities with high levels of within-group social capital will be more likely to take an active role, for instance by suggesting new projects as well as contribute to existing programs and projects in the Euroregion.

- H3: High levels of within-group social capital increase the likelihood that a municipality will be an active member of the Euroregion.

However, this is not enough for successful overall implementation of a Euroregion. It 'takes two to tango' and I will therefore expect that high levels of within-group social capital on *both* sides of the borders increase the likelihood for successful implementation of Euroregions.

- H4: High levels of within-group social capital on both sides of the border increase the likelihood for successful implementation of Euroregions.

When it comes to between-group social capital, this is clearly something that can be related to the goal of Euroregions in general (creating links and identities) between people. We *should* therefore find between-group social capital as a consequence of a successfully implemented Euroregion - anything else would actually hint at a problem with the definition or measurement of success. The theoretical expectation of the role of different forms of social capital is instead that within-group social capital serves as a *pre-condition* for between-group social capital. It is certainly reconcilable with general theory to find a region with a dense informal cross-border network and/or trust which still fails to achieve any cooperation goals across the border. However, I do not expect to see even such informal networks if the respective communities do not have high levels of within-group social capital. This gives the fifth hypothesis.

- H5: Within-group social capital serves as a pre-condition for between-group social capital.

Finally, in an attempt to investigate if the political dimension of social capital-generating networks carries extra weight, I will also test if cooperation is more successful in border areas where municipalities are run by political coalitions with broadly similar ideologies.

- H6: Where municipalities of both sides of the border are run by politicians or coalitions of the same ideological direction, successful implementation is more likely.

The unit of observation is municipalities (a municipality in a cross-border region in Europe belonging to at least one Euroregion), but the analysis is carried out both on the level of municipalities and that of Euroregions. This construction has ramifications for the fourth and fifth hypotheses. Although unlikely, the level of social capital might vary significantly across the municipalities of the same country. I am tentatively working with the assumption that an average level can be utilized, but that is something that needs further theoretical elaboration.

Finally, it may here be stated again that the role of the European Union will not be analyzed, since European normative, technical and financial support is usually mentioned as a cause promoting the formation of Euroregions, but less so the implementation. An additional reason is that the project is attempting to assess the capacity of Euroregions for successfully implementing policies and since high capacity usually also means ability to attract funding, any relationship between financial support and capacity would be spurious or circular. In this sense, support from the European Union is rather a by-product (an outcome) than a reason (a condition).

## 6. Research Design

### *6.1. Central methods*

The project will apply case-oriented comparative methods, which has been described by Charles Ragin as frequently both ‘historically interpretative and causally analytic’ (Ragin 1987:35) Since a data set of Euroregions that would suit the purposes of the research does not exist, limited time and resources will necessitate a small-N analysis. Four Euroregions and participating 26 municipalities will be selected together with one or two policy-fields/programmatic priorities (see case selection criteria in section 6.3.).

The central method of analysis will be systematic process-tracing, a comparative method examining “the processes unfolding in the cases at hand as well as the outcomes in those cases” (Hall 2003: 393). In other words, if process-tracing is a method focusing on testing as well as refining theory<sup>13</sup> via intensive over-time *within-case* analysis, systematic process-tracing allows for analyzing observations derived from all the selected cases (the set of Euroregions and the set of municipalities participating in Euroregions).

Data will be assembled via interviews with public officials and private actors in cross-border partnerships, official statistics and survey data. I will also attempt to

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew L. George and Andrew Bennet point out that process-training is more frequently used for theory-development than theory-testing, but in this case it will be used for both. (George and Bennet 2005)

identify a set of unobtrusive indicators which is likely to exist for all cases (see the next section). Still 'identical' types of data might be difficult to obtain for each case and the project therefore is likely to face the problem of sketchy or missing data; the technique of data triangulation, referring to gathering data through several strategies will therefore be used. (Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao 2004)

An additional method that might be employed in order to assess the intensity and formation of between-group social capital is social network analysis.<sup>14</sup>

### *6.2. Core variables and their operationalization*

Following the formulation of the overarching research question, the dependent variable of the project is the capacity of Euroregions to successfully implement cross-border cooperation agreements and policies. This raises some obvious questions; as demonstrated by several decades of implementation studies in public policy it is frequently unclear what the dependent variable in implementation studies should be (goal achievement? outcome? output? governing capacity?) and the related issue what constitutes success is even more complicated (e.g. Hill and Hupe 2002, Winter 2006). This is especially the case when there are multiple actors involved in implementation (associated with buzzwords such as 'policy networks', 'stakeholder involvement', 'social pacts/dialogues' or 'governance', the latter already extensively used in this paper), which is true for Euroregions. If partners in different projects and/or networks have different aims, one can rightfully ask: what is success for whom? In spite of this, 'success' is a word that is frequently used and an example of fundamentally different evaluations of success of Euroregions is given by Struwer (2004), who contrasts scholar who have judged various Euroregions as *not* particularly successful (in terms of mobilizing people or constituting new forms of transnational scales of governance) with a document produced by the European Commission, which in relation to Interreg support for cross-

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<sup>14</sup> This method would be used in relation to testing the fifth hypothesis, "H5: Within-group social capital serves as a pre-condition for between-group social capital."

border initiative states that “some 10 years after Interreg’s implementation, the overall success of cooperation is obvious” (European Commission 2002).

For the purpose of this project success will primarily be defined in relation to self-stated goals by participating actors in Euroregions, but external standards such as aims set by EU and ‘reasonable’ achievements as defined by me as the researcher will also be taken into account. The tentative operationalization of implementation success consists of two quantitative components, institutional intensity and mobility, which will be assessed by a number of proxy indicators. For ‘institutional intensity’ potential indicators include number of projects, number of people directly involved and number of people affected. For ‘mobility’ potential indicators include estimated migration and work commute over borders, estimated exchanges of goods and services, and number of students across borders.

For the operationalization of the economic independent variable I will use wage levels, housing prices and consumer prices as indicators, whereas the cultural proximity independent variable will consist of a simple set of dichotomous indicators referring to linguistics, ethnicity and history (while these will not be arbitrary, they will obviously rely on my judgment as a researcher and the reasoning will be explained and justified in each case).

The key ‘independent’ variable is the core concept of the project, i.e. social capital. As mentioned before, the research question will be answered through a two-level analysis. On the first level, the units of analysis is municipalities participating in Euroregions, and I am then primarily interested in *within-group social capital*, i.e. social capital as an asset of a community (municipality) on one side of the border. This will help test if there is a causal link between social capital and emergence/implementation of Euroregions. I will investigate cognitive social capital, which refers to civic engagement, socializing and trust. There is a wide set of common indicators, including voter turnout, number of NGOs, number of friends and trust in government and other people. I will select a number of these that can be estimated based on official statistics and interviews with public officials in the selected municipalities. Where official statistics or survey data

is not available I will try to identify unobtrusive proxies. This can include estimating the number of NGOs from phone books of different years rather than through an official NGO registry, using crime rates as a proxy for trust, and donations of time or money to a specific charity organization that is widely available (e.g. Red Cross) instead of survey data.<sup>15</sup> On the second level, the Euroregions constitute a unit of analysis, and *between-group social capital*, i.e. the links over the borders will be investigated. I will map the links between relevant institutions using social network analysis tools, enabling assessment of the level of between-group social capital.<sup>16</sup> Determining the political affinity of municipal governments will in comparison be based on relatively easily obtainable data, since the required data should be available through official or secondary sources (municipal websites in combination with basic knowledge of a country's political system should in most cases be enough for classification).

### *6.3. Selection of cases and policy fields*

As mentioned, the limited time and resources, together with predicted scarcity of official data, will make a small-N analysis the most viable option. Before selecting the cases I will start with a mapping exercise, collecting basic data (e.g. foundation year, number of citizens in the area, number of participating municipalities) and prioritized policy areas for all Euroregions.<sup>17</sup> This will serve as a basis for selecting one or two policy areas around which the project will be framed, in order to facilitate determining success/failure and ultimately also to enhance the project's policy-relevance. Possible policy fields at this stage include:

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<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Philippe C. Schmitter for suggesting these to me.

<sup>16</sup> It should be emphasized again that the aim on this level is not primarily to establish a causal relation between social capital and successful implementation, since the latter assumes intrapersonal connections over the borders and the relation therefore could be tautological. Mapping the cross-border relations in the Euroregion to assess between-group social capital is partly a descriptive exercise, deriving value from its potential relevance for a non-academic policy audience as well as its relationship to the fifth hypothesis, "H5: Within-group social capital serves as a pre-condition for between-group social capital."

<sup>17</sup> Most of this is available on the websites of the Association of European Border Regions (<http://www.aebr.net/> accessed October 2008-March 2009) and individual websites of Euroregions.

- Environment. This area would be motivated by its long history as an issue of Euroregion involvement (Perkmann 2002). Among environmental issues it should be possible to find one, such as acid rain, that has been dealt with by a number of Euroregions.
- Business & investment. Recessions can serve either as incentive for further cooperation or as an excuse for protectionist withdrawal. I would expect Euroregions with higher levels of social capital to choose the first route, and those with low levels of social capital the second.
- Higher education & research. The knowledge society discourse and its emphasis on the importance of regional clustering in knowledge production seems to have made an imprint on Euroregions and spurred different versions of knowledge networks such as Rector's conferences (e.g. Carpathian Euroregion<sup>18</sup>) or separate research partnerships (e.g. Oresund Science Region<sup>19</sup>).
- Border control. The broadening of the Schengen accord have had profound consequences for Euroregions containing both Schengen and non-Schengen countries.<sup>20</sup>

The selection of Euroregions and municipalities within those will be partly guided by the selection of policy fields, but the field work should in total contain at least four Euroregions and 24 municipalities (6 per Euroregion). In line with much of qualitative research, the project is interested in an outcome, in this case the implementation of institutionalized cooperation policies (Euroregions). There is a well-known argument that selection on the dependent variable should be avoided, whereas the counterargument is that the outcome is precisely what qualitative research is often interested in and

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<sup>18</sup> See website at <http://www.carpathianeuroregion.com>

<sup>19</sup> See website at <http://www.oresundscienceregion.org>

<sup>20</sup> I am planning to attend a one-day conference on this topic arranged within the framework of the Carpathian Euroregion on April 27, 2009.

'selection on the dependent variable' not only unavoidable but logical.<sup>21</sup> Although selection on the dependent variable could therefore be defended, I will choose the more conservative approach and attempt to select cases showing variance on the key independent variable (social capital) as well as variance on the other independent variables. Selection criteria for the municipalities to be studied within the Euroregions will be determined later, but more mundane criteria such as size of the municipalities and responsiveness to inquiries will likely have to play a role.

Finally, I will take a geographic dimension into account. Although it has been pointed out that "geography is no longer destiny, delimitations in space need a better explanation than so called intrinsic relevance" (Hancke forthcoming: 44), at least for the policy-relevant dimension it seems to me that geographical location (or geographical diversity) does have some sort of intrinsic relevance. It would be difficult to credibly claim generalizable findings if all studied areas were located in, for instance, Scandinavia.

#### *6.4. Time-line for data collection and analysis*

Robert Adcock and David Collier have outlined the relationship between concepts and observations as playing out over four levels (background concept, systematized concept, indicators and scores for cases) where the researcher moves down and up in often repeated refinements of level 2-4 before the final analysis. (Adcock and Collier: 2001) Taking this seriously, I intend to supplement the literature review with a few exploratory interviews aiming to probe my initial ideas and 'hunches' against perceptions of stakeholders involved in the process before submitting the research prospectus. For the interviews I will develop a pilot questionnaire (see draft in Appendix 1). Assessing the appropriateness of this questionnaire based on the results of the interviews will be of significant help when later preparing the 'proper' field work. Finally, the interviews will serve as a basis for what characteristics to include in a mapping-exercise that will be

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<sup>21</sup> The debate between the two 'camps' with for instance Achen, Snidal, Geddes, King, Keohane and Verba on the one side and Ragin, Dion, Harvey, Goertz etc on the other, is excellently summarized by James Mahoney and Gary Goertz (2006: 239)

carried out early in the research and serve to outline basic features of all Euroregions.<sup>22</sup> Further theoretical work will then be carried out between June and December 2009, before starting 'real' field work in spring 2010. I envision visiting all selected cases (Euroregions) for around 2 weeks each to conduct interviews and access organizational documents that cannot be obtained electronically or via face-to-face contacts. The costs associated with these field trips would be reasonable and overall relatively modest. External funding will be applied for when possible. Although I plan to write continuously during the time allocated for field work, the finalizing writing process will only begin in early 2011 with the aim to have a first draft ready by June 2011.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have tried to give the reader a sense of the major questions and debates addressed by the proposed doctoral dissertation project, and made a rough sketch of the methodology to be used to answer those questions.

At the same time, it should be recognized that the project faces several severe challenges. The absence of a ready-to-use dataset, the use of an elusive concept (social capital) and a topic intersecting several disciplines (most prominently public policy, comparative political science, and sociology) are inhibiting factors that must be addressed and overcome. It will be imperative to apply a rigorous research design, and as can be inferred from the section above, much work remains to be done in this area. However, if approved and successful, I maintain that this project will be both literature- and policy-relevant.

In terms of academic literature, it will contribute in (at least) two ways. (1) It will add to the growing knowledge of factors facilitating or impeding local cross-border cooperation in Europe, and will thereby also offer hypotheses for studies of borderland

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<sup>22</sup> The first interview is tentatively planned for April 27, 2009, with Brigitta Laszlo, Chairwoman of the International Secretariat of the Carpathian Euroregion.

relations elsewhere in addition to testing globally developed hypotheses in Europe (2)

The distinctive feature of the project is its attempt to assess the relationship between the notion of social capital with the implementation of Euroregions. The link between social capital and project-based local/regional development has been vigorously researched in the past decade and a half. Regardless of the eventual support or non-support for the project's hypotheses, the research would add a small piece to our knowledge of social capital.

The project's policy-relevance is derived from cross-border cooperation policies as an intersection of EU, national, regional and local policy-making converging (or not converging) to promote real transnational cooperation on local level. In its effort to trace how two such policies are institutionalized and implemented in four different Euroregions, generalizable conclusions on what factors favor the implementation of these policies as well as overall institutional capacity of Euroregions should be feasible. Through case-studies of municipalities, the project will especially clarify the impact of what local "governments should do or not to do"<sup>23</sup> when it comes to cross-border relations. If the importance of social capital can be proven, this has profound consequences for the kind of projects that should be prioritized on supranational, national and sub-national levels.

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<sup>23</sup> A classical definition of public policy: "the study of what governments choose to do and not to do." (Dye, 11<sup>th</sup> edition 2005)

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Association for European Border Regions  
<http://www.aebr.net>

Carpathian Euroregion  
<http://www.carpathianeuroregion.com>

Centre for International Border Research, Queens University, Belfast  
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/cibr/>

Council of Europe Official Treaty Website  
<http://conventions.coe.int/>

European Commission Website for Regional Policy  
[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/)

European Commission Website for Enlargement  
<http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement>

Oresund Committee  
<http://www.oresundskomiteen.dk>

Oresund Science Region  
<http://www.oresundscienceregion.org>

World Bank Resource Site on Social Capital  
<http://go.worldbank.org/COQTRW4QF0>

APPENDIX 1 – Preliminary issues to be addressed in pilot semi-standardized interviews, May 2009.<sup>24</sup>

Name:	Employer (private/public):
Position:	As of (year):
Municipality:	Country:
Euroregion/s*:	

*\*One municipality might be a member of more than one Euroregion.*

On cross-border cooperation projects in general <sup>25</sup>
Q1. What are the 3 major problems that were jointly addressed across the border, or that need to be jointly addressed across the border?
Q2. Can you describe the outcome in terms of failure/success?
Q3. What is the approximate time frame of these initiatives?
Q4. Did some of these projects continue to have positive effects even after they were completed or the problems were solved.
Q4. Who were the most active partners? (your country/other country, public actor/private actor)?
On a specific network (or project if less institutionalized/formalized)
Q5. With whom do you interact? (name and affiliation <sup>26</sup> )
Q6. Did you know any of them before? If yes, how? (colleagues, friends, met at a conference)
Q7. Have you ever met any of them afterwards in another setting?
Q8. How frequently do you interact (e.g. weekly, monthly) and in what form (telephone, email, physical meeting)

<sup>24</sup> Note that the purpose of such interviews would not be to directly test hypotheses or answer the research question, but rather to get a 'sense of what is out there' in terms of local-level data and alternative ideas/explanations as well as alternative problems/discourses.

<sup>25</sup> Questions 1-4 and 17-24 have been adopted in modified form from a questionnaire carried out for a thesis on the role of social capital in partnerships for community development in Hungary. (Kolbel 2008)

<sup>26</sup> If this seems to generate more than 2-3 names, it could be the basis to follow up with a social network analysis.

On the Euroregion of which the municipality is a member (or for which the respondent works for directly)
Q9. What is the importance, in your opinion, of EU support for cross-border cooperation?
Q10. What is the importance, in your opinion, of national government support for cross-border cooperation?
Q11. What do you think are the overall effects of the municipality being a member of a Euroregion?
Q12. What do you think are the overall effects of participating in a Euroregion project?
Q13. What is the importance – in your opinion - of the attitude and activities of the actors (the government, the local government, schools private companies) on the 'other side' for cross-border cooperation?
Q13. Do you think that your involvement in the Euroregion will increase or decrease in the next years?
Q14. Do you think that the amount of resources spent and number of activities carried out cross-border will increase or decrease in the next years?

On decision-making processes (can be applied either to the Euroregion as a whole, a partnership or a network)
Q15. Can you describe the decision-making process? Who 'decides'? (voting, other means)
Q16. Who would you say have the greatest influence/power in the network?

Do you think people in the municipality generally trust...	
Q17.	...each other?
Q18.	...local authorities?
Q19.	...national government?
Q20.	...business and other private enterprises?
Q21.	...people on the other side of the border?
Q22.	...local authorities on the other side of the border?
Q23.	...national government on the other side of the border?
Q24.	...business and other private enterprises?
Q25. What do you think about taking part in projects that does not directly benefit the municipality but is good for 'the the other side' or might be good long term for the whole region?	

Other questions
Q26. Do you think that mobility (commuting/shopping/school exchange) over the border will increase or decrease in the coming years? <sup>27</sup>
Q27. Do you see any effects of the financial crisis/recession on cross-border cooperation?

Can the respondent help provide data on? (M=municipality, E=Euroregion)		
M: Voter turnout in the municipality	M: Number of NGOs	M: Number of community events
M: Nr of CBC projects total	M: Nr of current CBC projects	M: External funding for CBC
E: Nr of CBC projects total	E: Nr of current CBC projects	E: resources per funder
E: type of projects	E: nr of involved actors	E: nr of actors/projects per country

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<sup>27</sup> Related to the second component – mobility - of the operationalization of ‘implementation’, see section 6.2.