

# Chapter 8

## Strategic Cooperation Between Regions: Building and Utilising Transnational Relations

David Rylander and Pontus Tallberg

**Abstract** Although cross-border cooperation is often thought of as involving adjacent regions, transnational cooperation is increasingly important, particularly within the European Union and among its European neighbours. Transnational cooperation often involves networks of several participating regions, at a variety of levels: local governments (NUTS 4 and 5 regions), regional governments (NUTS 3) and supra-regional governments (NUTS 2). Looking at NUTS 3 regions in five countries, this paper examines different forms of transnational cooperation and examines their success. Exchange of best practice, networking, learning about the experience of other regions in a similar situation, learning about mistakes to avoid and greater clout in European decision-making are all reasons for transnational cooperation. In some cases, they have started as a way of delivering aid, in the form of goods or training, or sharing experience with new EU member states. However, most of these have evolved into mutual exchanges, offering both sides a chance to learn from each other and share experiences. Some have a narrow focus and are organised in the form of discrete projects with a limited term. Others take the form of ongoing collaboration across a range of fields. As well being mediated through the European Union, some partnerships operate through other European networks, particularly the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). Often, transnational partnerships were originally created by local authorities which were later subsumed into larger regions. These regions have in turn adapted and extended the agreements. Not all partnerships are within Europe: one region has links with Guangdong Province in China, aimed at promoting the development of herbal medicine. Regional propinquity is not a requirement for successful cooperation. Success

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depends more on the focus of the programme and how projects are defined. Successful cooperation often requires a champion or set of champions to push forward cooperation and engagement. They work better if regional authorities have some control over finance and over policy-making.

**Keywords** Transnational networks • Intergovernmental partnerships • Regionalisation • Decentralisation of decision-making • Strategic cooperation

## **Building and Utilising Transnational Relations**

### *Incentives*

In an era, which is characterised by flexibility, fluidity and variation, transnational networks stand in stark contrast to hierarchical government organisations from which region builders wish to distance themselves (Rylander 2004). Before the end of the cold war, national states, alongside international organisations, were the main players in international cooperation. Under pressure originating from the challenges of globalisation and from the development of the European Union, regions have taken on an increased freedom of manoeuvre. The questions are how are the regions making use of these opportunities to build transnational relations in practice and to what extent do they build transnational relations at all. As Beck puts it in his dichotomy of the first and second modernity, in the first nation state modernity, the world consists of national players, and there are only two ways to stability: either equilibrium (terror balance) or hegemony. During the second modernity, globalisation, the apparent alternatives are the loss of national sovereignty or transnational cooperation. The latter implies, among other things, the creation of what are effectively transnational states and transnational regional states (Beck 1997). Transnationality looks at alternatives to a somewhat parochial national outlook and seeks ways to think and act that penetrate the walls around states (Beck 2004). Therefore, in this context, we are not talking about international cooperation between states but about transnational cooperation between regions. Here, there are no players on the central national level but only local and regional players.

Transnational interaction has become increasingly important with the expansion of the European Union. Cooperation with adjacent areas in Russia has intensified, and north-south cooperation has been consolidated within the union. Regions link themselves together to create better opportunities for development and to better position themselves on the global-local axis. European integration gives transnational cooperation political legitimacy and provides growing resources to support transnational cooperation on interregional and interlocal levels. Today a growing number of regions are members of an organisation of European regions. The most important of these are the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).

## ***Decentralisation and Regionalisation***

One clear trend in the process of regional development within the European Union is the delegation of certain areas of responsibility or competences from national to regional and municipal levels. Another is the forming of partnerships between local authorities and the business sector, institutions and associations. In some cases, this leads to a process of integration and the formation of a stronger regional organisation, i.e. to regionalisation. In several countries, some of the national authorities have been moved from the capital city to other regions. This minimises the concentration of advanced skills in the capital and enables these to be spread to other regions. The delegation of responsibilities for an increasing number of tasks and the decentralisation of decision-making processes to local and regional levels mean that municipalities and regions face the prospect of making decisions that carry more weight than previously. This situation has arisen primarily within the areas of primary health care, elderly care and education.

One of the reasons behind regionalisation is efficiency. A large public sector is easier to run if it is divided into units. This allows local adjustments and cooperation with concerned parties. The delegation of responsibility for different operations has fostered a new attitude towards decision-making processes and delivery of services. Local and regional authorities change their work methods. This is partly in response to changes in people's values and expectations and partly in response to technical changes. Local forces work to gain greater influence over those decisions that concern their local communities. Information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure supports this decentralisation process by reducing the costs of transactions needed for people to be kept informed and reach agreements. Increasing importance is being placed on municipalities' abilities to develop strategies for using ICT in a manner, which improves their ability to provide services to citizens, businesses and tourists. In this regard, the development of e-administration and e-democracy is a necessary measure to obtain increased interaction.

Decentralisation can be achieved in a variety of ways. These include staff autonomy, policy autonomy and economic autonomy. Staff autonomy implies that the municipality has the right to select civil servants within its administration. Policy autonomy means that there is a broad-based existing framework for decision-making processes. The more the state governs through laws and directives which are characterised by goals and frameworks, the greater is the freedom enjoyed by lower administrative and governmental bodies. Economic autonomy refers to the lower bodies' authority to collect taxes. Those who pay for the various organisations also govern them (Hadenius 2001).

The decentralisation of decision-making processes may result in a strengthening of the democratic process if the local authorities make use of the opportunities to involve a greater segment of the local community in political processes. Local adaptation is an important argument in favour of decentralisation and small-scale development, as the problems and solutions are not the same in all areas. People with roots in the local environment, who are familiar with the prevailing conditions there,

are in a better position to formulate the public policies which should be applied to that area than officials in a higher level of government. Decision-makers can put their knowledge of various problems and local attitudes to good use. Furthermore, as local representatives of their communities, they will have a popularity and legitimacy which will make it easier to implement public policy. The existence of many decision-making centres which are independent of each other also provides a great scope for initiative. New work methods can be tested and spread throughout the rest of the country if they are successful. Decentralisation may also have a conflict-reducing effect, since the political system then becomes more open and the political arguments less polarised. Minority groups will find it easier to influence and to engage with decision-making processes when political offices at the local and regional levels are at stake. This may be of great significance to segregated societies. Nevertheless, a decentralisation process may be accompanied by disadvantages in the form of duplicate administrative structures and a lower degree of professionalism on the part of the decision-makers. This may lead to a “leaking” of resources as a result of irregularities and mismanagement lower down in the system.

### ***How to Build and Utilise Transnational Relations***

A region's transnational cooperation can include friendship agreements, participation in transnational organisations and participation in different projects. An important step is to create contacts and confidence between authorities, organisations and businesses, thus creating a common ground for long-term development. Creating networks in a variety of fields improves the possibility that common activities will achieve the intended results. The main barriers to joint cooperation are the different national structures of authority, administrative structures and legal systems (Rylander 2004).

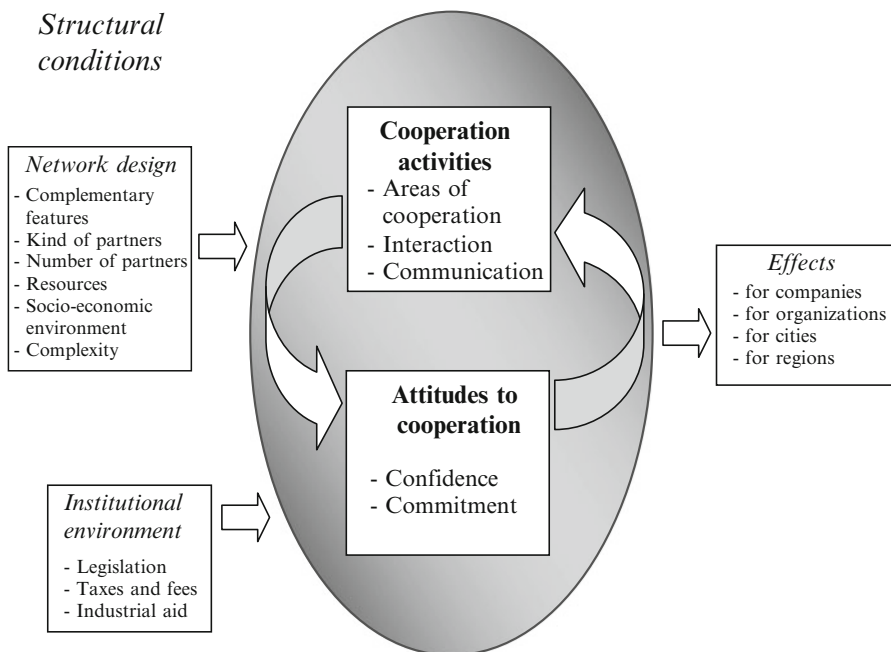
Border regions have often had more or less cooperation with regions on the other side of the border. This type of cooperation has increased and is supported by the EU through different kinds of project funding. Juridical opportunities to formalise cross-border cooperation came into force through an EC regulation (EC regulation 1082/2006). However, in this article, we do not deal with cross-border cooperation. Instead, we focus on cooperation that takes place between regions without physical border between them, i.e. where cooperation is not expected due to geography. Instead, it builds upon features and ideas in common and the goal of reaching some kind of shared decision.

A clear trend is that business life continues to internationalise with consequences for branches of the economy and businesses. This influences how regions work and how they relate to the broader world. If the regional level has a responsibility for development, it should support, investigate and consider different future scenarios. Political mobility, social interplay, cultural attraction and an ability to function nationally and transnationally are some crucial factors for successful regions (Lindeborg 2003; Green-Tallberg 2006). The opportunities for a region to develop

are related to its geography, political circumstances and national policy. An important question is whether the regions have that space of manoeuvre which creates the ability to function efficiently in a national and transnational context. What mandate do the regions have in their national context?

### *Strategic Cooperation*

Strategic cooperation consists of network-based cooperation between industries, public sectors, universities and NGOs with the aim of facilitating and advancing regional development. Strategic cooperation focuses on such activities as business, culture, environment, health, infrastructure, research, development, innovation and social issues. Strategic cooperation includes long-lasting cooperation agreements, participation in organisations and contributions to projects. A strategic aim is of more profound importance for a region's development. Figure 8.1 illustrates how structural conditions form the preconditions for cooperation activities and the attitudes to cooperation. The actors' activities and attitudes interact, and as an outcome, we get different sets of effects for companies, organisations, cities and regions.



**Fig. 8.1** Model for analysis of regional strategic networks (Adapted from Hallén et al. 2009)

## **Five Regions and Their Strategic Transnational Cooperation**

In this section, we examine the character of transnational cooperation practised by five regions. How did it come about and what does it include? A comparative analysis is carried out and followed with conclusions.

### ***Brandenburg***

Germany is a federation with 16 states (Bundesländer). Each state has its own constitution, parliament and government, which means that the states are strong compared to regions in the other cases in this study. However, the federal system could be characterised as a cooperative federal system and not a dual system (Lindeborg 2008) as is the case, for example, in the USA.

As a Bundesland, Brandenburg has comprehensive decision-making powers. The state has a population of about 2.5 million. Brandenburg surrounds Berlin and therefore cooperates to some extent with the city. The state's capital is Potsdam, located just outside Berlin. Economically, Brandenburg and Berlin constitute a single region totalling approximately six million inhabitants. Strong industries in the area include biotechnology and media IT. In cooperation with Berlin, a new, extensive airport is being built, which will increase the connectivity of the region. Brandenburg has an international border with Poland on the Oder River, measuring 250 km, and even though cross-border cooperation mostly takes place between the individual cities on the border, this certainly affects the state.

The state of Brandenburg distinguishes three types of transnational cooperation. The first type is cooperation in clear-cut border areas. The second type consists of cooperation with other regions surrounding a national capital, and in this category is included cooperation with the region surrounding Moscow, with Saitama surrounding Tokyo, with the region surrounding Warsaw and with Île-de-France surrounding Paris. The third type consists of cooperation with a choice of regions and areas such as Kaliningrad, Byelorussia and Dnepropetrovsk region in Ukraine. This type of cooperation is characterised by subsidies from Brandenburg to support training and development and an effort to overcome differences.

The means of cooperation are often joint declarations, and these entail different forms of means for action. In some cases, there are yearly programmes and yearly summits on an executive level. Areas of cooperation typically include certain business areas, tourism, exhibitions, education, artisanship and fishing.

Brandenburg has a trilateral cooperation with Île-de-France in France and Mazowieckie region, surrounding Warsaw, in Poland. The aim is to pursue a deeper level of cooperation. Brandenburg has an office for representation in Brussels and offers cooperation with other regions in Brussels (Hoerschelmann 2004).

## *The Jönköping Region*

Constitutionally Sweden has two levels, the central level and the local level. The local government consists of two tiers: the municipal level (*kommun*) and the regional level the county (*lan*), with a local legislative council (*landsting*).

In the Jönköping Region, the responsibility for regional development is shared between *the county council* (Landstinget) and *the regional council* which was formed in 2005 (region Jönköping). After being founded, the region Jönköping took over some of the tasks from Landstinget concerning business support (Johansson and Rylander 2012).

*The county council* has a department for regional development with activities divided into four parts: education, culture, international relations and international affairs and development. The international department works across the county council and offers a supportive function for the politicians. Transnational cooperation consists of two pillars: political cooperation within the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and cooperation and joint activities with Alytus County (*apskritis*) in Lithuania.

Connected to these two pillars, the County Council of Jönköping participates in EU projects regarding prevention of alcohol abuse, rational use of energy and preservation of cultural heritage.

The County Council of Jönköping became member of AER in 1994, as did other the Swedish county councils in preparation for Sweden's accession to the EU. After 1995, the counties gained increased freedom of manoeuvre within the European Union. The "Europe of regions" was a European byword by the end of the 1980s and was agreed on in the Maastricht Treaty, formally known as the Treaty of the European Union that was signed in 1992. Today, the Assembly of European Regions (AER) consists of 270 member regions from all parts of Europe, including regions in Russia and Ukraine. AER is a process-orientated organisation and has initiated several EU-founded projects.

The engagement of key personnel in the county council has led Jönköping to take a leading role in the AER committee for economic and regional development. The chairman of County Council of Jönköping, Håkan Sandgren, was president during 2009–2010. Jönköping is also active in a second committee which focuses on health care and medical treatment. For Jönköping, the benefit of AER cooperation is the ability to lobby. Membership serves as a springboard to EU projects and helps to make the region's voice heard in the context of the EU.

Cooperation with Alytus County in Lithuania started in 1996. During the first 10 years, it was to a large degree aid oriented, with a focus on transferring used medical equipment and sharing and transferring of work methods. The exchange has since 2007 become more two-sided. It now focuses on learning from each partner's development processes and exchanging experiences. Cooperation consists mainly of cooperation between medical personnel in Alytus and Jönköping, focused mainly on areas of professional development and personal development, in particular to meet gaps in professional skills and experience in Alytus. A two-way learning

exchange has been experienced by medical personal in Jönköping, such as when older but still useful work methods have been rediscovered during visits in Alytus.

Since the mid-2000s, after Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004, Alytus has taken a more active role in cooperation with Jönköping. In 2007, Alytus was ready for the first time to partially finance a project with their own resources, aiming at developing skills through an exchange with the medical care and health service in Jönköping. However, the severe setback caused by the onset of the financial crisis in the Baltic countries put a stop to that turn for the time being, and Jönköping still finances the exchange.

After the elections in Jönköping in 2006 and the change of government, a new letter of intent was agreed upon between the two regions. The new text makes it easier to cancel the cooperation agreement, without a major delay. Alytus County became a member of AER in 2008. Before that Alytus was a stakeholder in the EU project PRESERVE, a project whose initial purpose was to develop methods for preserving cultural heritage. Jönköping County had hesitated to take part in PRESERVE due to its large involvement in the alcohol prevention project. Thanks to Alytus's engagement in PRESERVE and the cooperation between Alytus and Jönköping, Jönköping finally decided to join.

### ***The Region of Southern Denmark (Region Syddanmark)***

In 2007, a major administrative reform took place in Denmark, which led to the country being divided into five regions. At the same time, the number of communes was significantly reduced to 98 from over 200. Danish communes are, among other things, good at transnational cooperation, a strength not shared by Swedish communes to the same extent. The Danish regions have no taxation mandate. Instead, they depend on block financing, mainly from the central government but also from their communes. Their main tasks are health care and regional development. The regions may not themselves reallocate funds between the different competences, and thus do not have the same ability to determine their priorities as those in Sweden.

The main task of the region is health care. In addition, the region has a broader responsibility for regional development. The region has approximately 1.2 million inhabitants.

The region of Southern Denmark cooperates with three regions:

*Guangdong Province* in Southeast China. This is characterised by high economic growth. The cooperation, among other things, aims to facilitate exchanges between research institutions regarding the development of herbal medicine. The cooperation between the region of Southern Denmark and Guangdong is an extension and expansion of an agreement which the county of Fyn concluded with the province in 2004. It included a very broad spectrum of areas of cooperation and was taken over by the region of Southern Denmark. A new agreement was signed in 2007, including first and foremost health care, but also the development and



commercialisation of herbal-based medicine and as well as cooperation related to culture and the environment.

*Olomouc Region (kraj)* in the eastern central part of Czech Republic. This is a transport node and an area of economic growth, especially in industry. The cooperation facilitates a number of initiatives under regional development, e.g. culture, education and tourism. In June, 2008, an agreement was signed, renewing an earlier agreement with one of the counties which is now a part of the region. Cooperation resulted in a range of projects within the environment, tourism, education, culture and business development.

*The Małopolska Region (region)* in southern Poland. With its capital Krakow, this is a centre for education and growth. Cooperation involves regional development, structural funds and health care. The cooperation with Małopolska started in 1991 as a cooperation between the Danish county of Fyn and the city of Krakow (itself an administrative region) and the surrounding Krakow voivodeship. The Małopolska Region was formed following a larger structural reform in Poland in 1998, and the new, much larger region took over cooperation with the county of Fyn. The structural reform of Denmark came into effect in 2007, and the merger of the counties of Fyn, Sønderjylland, Ribe and Vejle resulted in the region of Southern Denmark. Therefore, a renewal of the cooperation agreement was necessary. In March 2008, a south Danish delegation visited Małopolska's capital, Krakow, to sign the agreement. The agreement with Małopolska is mainly a framework for cooperation through projects, most of which are of limited duration, between actors from both regions, incorporating health care, regional development and the use of EU structural funds. The region of Southern Denmark has advocated expansion of the agreement to include more local actors, allowing communes and other local actors within the regions to reap the benefits of cooperation.

In 2007, the transnational strategy of the region of Southern Denmark was approved by the local legislature. It aims to promote a transnational orientation and meet the challenges of globalisation by increasing the transnational connection within public and private partnerships in a variety of ways. The strategy is part of an effort to increase the level of knowledge among citizens, communes, enterprises and institutions for higher education about transnational cooperation. It aims to give the region increased readiness to address the challenges of the future; to increase the awareness of politicians and civil servants in the region; to make a contribution to the increase, on behalf of these actors, of transnational cooperation; and thus to ensure that the transnational possibilities of the region are maintained and developed.

To implement this strategy, clear areas of action have been defined, such as participation in transnational networks, support to enterprises acting internationally or within an EU context, internationalisation of partnerships, internationalisation of the region, internationalisation of the public sector, opening and building cross-border links and using structural funds in a cross-border context (The Region of Southern Denmark 2007).

## *Usti Region (Kraj)*

The administrative reorganisation of the Czech Republic occurred after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and the splitting up of what was the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic in 1993. Following discussions and compromises, an agreement was reached on creating 14 regions. The first regional elections were held in 2000. The Czech administrative system comprises, apart from the regions, a large number of communes (6,243). The relationship between the regions and the central government is described as integral, and the Czech Republic can be described as a centralistic state (Österberg 2008). Usti region lies in the Bohemian part of Czech Republic, between Prague, the Czech capital and Dresden in Saxony. The region has a long border with Germany. The region is heavily industrialised and has a long tradition of coal mining but is striving to modernise its industry and make use of its strategic location between Prague and Dresden. The region has about 800,000 inhabitants and contains 46 towns and 354 villages.

Czech regions are responsible for education, culture, planning and environmental management and planning. In addition, they are responsible for regional development and run hospitals. As well as these roles, they are also obliged to execute some tasks given by government. They have no mandate for taxation. Because the region is located on the border to Germany, there is some border-related cooperation.

Usti has made some attempts at and developed some strategies regarding transnational cooperation. In 2010, Usti region started cooperation with the Banat district of the Vojvodina region of Serbia, specifically with the municipalities of Bela Crkva and Vrsac. A project was developed and implanted, and in 2011, a contract was signed with Bela Crkva and Vrsac, as well as the regional development agency in Zrenjanin and the central employment agency of Serbia. In 2010, the topics were focused on structural funds and the capacity of institutions, especially in rural areas. In 2012, the focus was on employment and investments and trying to get enterprises from the Usti region involved in business in Serbia.

There are also contacts with Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These instances of cooperation have no clear form. They are at an early stage and can be described as having the character of support in topics like tourism and regional development. Usti region is also trying to start cooperation with Croatia, but the negotiations are just beginning. Usti region has in the past not actively sought transnational cooperation but increasingly sees value in such cooperation and exchanges, which lead to more substantial projects of joint interest (interviews with Lucie Kuželová and Josef Svoboda, 22 January 2010, and Lucie Kuželová, 19 June 2012).

The region is represented in Brussels with an office. Its basic mission is to strengthen the ability of Usti region to create and maintain an effective dialogue with the EU institutions and partner regions in order to fully realise the potential of EU membership for the needs of Usti region (Usti Region 2008).

## *The Uppsala Region*

Compared to Jönköping, the model for regional development is slightly different in Uppsala County (*lan*), even though both regions are within Sweden. In 2003, it became possible to create indirectly elected regional development councils in Sweden. It resulted in an asymmetric system. Uppsala Regional Council was created in 2003, but the Uppsala County Council with health care as its main task still exists. Thus, the region parallels the county government. The main actor for transnational cooperation is the regional council. The regional council is not so much a superior administrative body, as one which brings together county and local governments in one single forum and has its own, separate responsibilities.

Uppsala Regional Council is a coordinating body consisting of Uppsala County Council and the county's eight municipalities. It is a political organ, and members are selected by the county council and the municipalities. The county has 331,000 inhabitants and is one of the fastest-growing counties in Sweden. The county is affected by its proximity to Stockholm (60 km) and the fact that its main city, Uppsala, is one of the most important centres for education in Sweden. Under Swedish legislation, the regional council is responsible for, among other things, questions concerning regional growth, which requires that it develop and implement a regional development programme. It is this responsibility which is of interest for strategic transnational cooperation and gives the region its mandate to pursue such cooperation. Still, there exists no obligation for the region to pursue transnational cooperation. The governmental mandate also includes responsibility for the county's infrastructure planning and enables it to participate in the preparation of partnerships for structural funds. Other tasks are given to the regional council by its members.

The regional council lacks a clear strategy but pursues transnational cooperation in the form of cooperation by agreement with Małopolska Region, Poland, and Wallonia, Belgium. The regional council is a member of AER and participates in their work. The regional council is also involved in European cooperation with other regions on ecological innovations. This means that the regional council pursues cooperation in three forms.

Cooperation between the regional council and Małopolska is based on an agreement signed in 2009 and includes the promotion of a beneficial business climate, cooperation between universities and industry, cooperation on renewable energy sources, cooperation on climate and environmental issues, cooperation on education and cooperation on medical and social services. The intention is to pursue common projects within these areas. The current focus is on concretizing the agreement, but one area already in operation is to arrange thematic study trips to examine certain aspects of the corresponding region, for example, innovation.

Cooperation with Wallonia is largely built on a historical link to the so-called Wallonian mills in Uppsala County. A dialogue existed for many years but was only formalised in 2009. The cooperation between Uppsala County and Wallonia is structured in a way similar way to that between Uppsala County and Małopolska

(i.e. exchange of experiences, thematic study trips, Brussels' events, common projects, deepened relationships among sister cities). Wallonia is not represented at KIC InnoEnergy, but cooperation between universities is instead maintained by a Wallonian research attaché at Uppsala University. Together with Małopolska and Wallonia, Uppsala is developing a three-part cooperation in order to, among other things, identify common projects.

Uppsala Regional Council cooperates with 12 other regions in nine countries as part of the ECREIN+ (European Clusters and Regions for Eco-Innovation Network Plus). The aim of this cooperation is to learn from each other and together create a manual for developing practical energy solutions and innovations.

## Comparative Analysis

When comparing the five regions, the first item to note is that the main tasks and degree of independence from the national government vary. Brandenburg, as a Bundesland in a federal state, has far broader independence than some of the other regions discussed in this chapter. Jönköping and Uppsala have the right to tax, despite the fact that the two regions are divided among three authorities. On the other hand, Southern Denmark and Usti present more unified organisations with one regional council but lack the right to tax. All five regions have direct elected regional assemblies (see Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1** Characterisation of the regions' main tasks and independence

	Regional authorities	Main tasks	Election of regional assembly	Right to tax
Jönköping	County council	Medical care and health service	Direct	Yes
	Regional council	Regional development	–	–
	County governor	Regional development	–	–
Usti	Regional council	Regional development	Direct	No
		Medical care and health service		
Uppsala	County council	Medical care and health service	Direct	Yes
	Regional council	Regional development	–	–
	County governor	Regional development	–	–
South Denmark	Regional council	Medical care and health service	Direct	No
		Regional development		
Brandenburg	Federal state government	Culture, schools, higher education, broadcasting, building code, police, medical care and health service	Direct	Shared
	Federal state parliament			

**Table 8.2** Features of transnational cooperation

Region	Areas being in focus for transnational cooperation	Degree of activity	Regulated cooperation
Jönköping	Medical care and health service	Medium	Agreement
Usti	Environment	Low	Development aid
Uppsala	Industry, R&D, medical care and health service	Medium	Agreement
Southern Denmark	Health service, culture, environment, business	High	Agreement
Brandenburg	Comparative experience exchange in many areas	High	Agreement

**Table 8.3** Transnational cooperation within cooperation organisations

Region	Member of CPMR	Member of EARALL	Member of AER	Office in Brussels
Jönköping			X	Yes, together with regions in South Sweden – SydSam
Usti				Yes
Uppsala			X	Yes, together with Stockholm region
Southern Denmark	X	X		Yes, together with the municipalities in the region
Brandenburg				Yes

All of these regions engage in transnational cooperation, which is summarised in Table 8.2. Cooperation often consists of exchanging of experiences, sharing learning processes and comparing development strategies and administration. All the regions have some kind of regional representation in Brussels: an office of their own like Brandenburg and Usti or an office shared with partner regions. Other European regional organisations are important to some of the regions, i.e. Jönköping and Uppsala are engaged in the Assembly of European Regions (see Table 8.3).

The most extensive forms of cooperation are those practised by *Brandenburg*. Being a German state – a Bundesland – Brandenburg is in a strong position, and cooperation borders on quasi-diplomacy. Brandenburg's transnational cooperation is strategic in the sense that the region has chosen to cooperate with other regions surrounding a capital, which are in the same type of situation planning wise as Brandenburg. The purpose of the cooperation is to learn from each other.

*Usti* is a relatively newly formed region and has a weaker national position compared to other more well-established regions. The region does not participate in any comprehensive cooperation agreements but has shown an interest, even if the regional authorities remain passive rather than proactive, and mainly reply to invitations.

*Southern Denmark* engages in many forms of cooperation, including several which have the character of binding agreements. The actors' task is to fill these

agreements with content in the form of concrete projects. The region is also active in several different cooperative projects. Southern Denmark is the region which, together with Brandenburg, has the most clearly defined strategy through a politically adopted strategy. This, in particular, highlights the need for transnational cooperation to strengthen the region's capacity to address future challenges. This gives transnational cooperation strong legitimacy and priority, a fact which is reflected in the extensive amount of transnational cooperation the region is involved in.

*Jönköping* has cooperated with Alytus in Lithuania for some time. Cooperation started as a form of development aid but has broadened and deepened, fostering many exchanges and affecting many in the region. Jönköping also participates in cooperation related to the main task of the region's county council, namely, health care. Jönköping is also an active member of the AER and views this as an important strategic element in its development. Within this and within the wider European cooperation, Jönköping uses its contacts with Alytus in Lithuania to exchange information about new EU transnational projects, in some cases joining together to develop and implement projects.

*Uppsala* has cooperation agreements with the Małopolska Region in Poland and with Wallonia, Belgium. The agreement with Małopolska was created by the former county governor and has, so to speak, been inherited from the earlier main Swedish contracting party. The agreement was signed in 2009. Uppsala also pursues cooperation within a greater European network. However, Uppsala lacks a specific transnational strategy when engaging in transnational cooperation. One of the driving forces behind their cooperation is benchmarking. Uppsala has identified on a strategic level other European regions with conditions similar to the Uppsala region (having a university, being close to a larger city, similar GDP etc.). Both Małopolska and Wallonia are considered to be of strategic importance to Uppsala.

## Conclusions

All the regions examined here engage in some form of transnational cooperation. Even so, there are differences as to the extent, the aims and the prospects of cooperation. In Sweden, approximately half of the communes and three fourths of the counties pursue transnational cooperation, with a focus on regions within the EU (Montin 2010). However, Sweden lacks a basis for assessing the depth of cooperation with other regions and communes. The most clearly developed form of cooperation is that of the state (*Land*) Brandenburg. To a certain extent, it follows logically that a state (or a unit) within a federal system has a stronger position than a region in a centralised state. Even so, the cooperation engaged in by Southern Denmark might be described as well-developed because of the strong and clear political commitment.

All five regions studied here recognise the value of transnational cooperation since it offers an exchange of experiences without involving central government.

However, the nature of cooperation is not always well thought out. They have engaged in transnational cooperation more or less by chance, and often due to the interests of a single actor, or because an actor simply has come into contact with a region and found it interesting to start cooperating. Departments for transnational cooperation have no given role in the organisation of regions. They also lack an obvious aim in their work. Often, they make no decisions regarding strategy. Means of guidance, as well as appropriate competences, have often been lacking when it comes to making good use of the possibilities that exist in a transnational context.

The types of cooperation that can be described as more strategic include several of the projects the regions are involved in. This is especially true for Southern Denmark. Cooperation often consists of limited projects concerning a particular field of practice. The choice of Brandenburg to concentrate on regions in a similar situation is the result of a strategic way of thinking, in order to create circumstances and partners from which they can learn. However, the possibilities that exist for a region to make use of its transnational cooperation for strategic lobbying on a European level seem to be undeveloped. There is considerable future potential for this, and there are already some tendencies towards this. A region gains strong legitimacy through a clear political standpoint.

We are of the opinion that the different types of cooperation which do exist have generally come about by chance, without a clear strategic purpose. Sometimes cooperation is formalised in more or less comprehensive agreements, which subsequently are supposed to be filled in with concrete programmes, aims and objectives by the regions. To pursue cooperation with other regions is advantageous for a region, and depending on its aim and purpose, may take many forms. Formalising and creating institutional support for cooperation may be advantageous, since it may result in regions learning from each other. This gives an opportunity for regions to learn from better and worse examples, and requires that the contracting parties have a good level of knowledge about each other. It demands long-term enduring cooperation, exemplified by the cooperation which has been pursued for a long time by Jönköping. That cooperation started as development aid, and has over the years developed into a more mutual type of cooperation which expanded to a broader European level after the admission of Lithuania into the EU. In this article, we do not discuss to what extent civil society (including enterprises) are involved in transnational cooperation. Still, there is an assumption that these actors ought to be included to achieve the goals often stipulated by formal cooperation. To be able to involve these actors, it is necessary that the region has the legitimacy at home to pursue transnational cooperation. It is noticeable that this is true for the region of Southern Denmark and that there are vague hints of getting at least the communal level involved in Uppsala.

Another form of cooperation, which we found was relatively undeveloped yet of great potential, is more purely strategic cooperation. What we mean by this is a type of cooperation where the region actively seeks to identify the thematic area within which the region (1) wishes to cooperate and (2) actively seeks out a region with which to cooperate. This type of cooperation should, reasonably (at least initially), be limited with regard to its contents and timeframe. The region of Southern

Denmark appears to use this strategy to a rather large extent. This form of cooperation may produce strong learning effects.

A third form of cooperation we have identified as rather undeveloped is to use cooperation with other regions as a means of networking within the EU. This type of cooperation can be developed through either long-term cooperation or be more strategically limited but can be developed from the outset with the sole purpose of working together in different ways at the EU level. In such cases, cooperation would require the region to have an office of representation in Brussels and would depend on how that office searched for cooperative partners among other regions, also represented in Brussels, as well as on the interests of the region.

## Recommendations

Regions should perhaps work with several strategies for transnational cooperation. Long-term cooperation between and among regions can provide deeper understanding and constitute a kind of learning process. Besides such long-term cooperation, there should be strategic and limited cooperation on special matters. This can also develop from long-term cooperation. The third type of transnational cooperation is to be involved in a transnational organisation like AER. From this, cooperation can foster and enhance long-term cooperation and networking at the EU level. We suggest that there are sound reasons for developing long-term cooperation with a region at some geographical distance, focusing on a theme at heart of development for both regions. If the involved regions also differs in several ways it gives fuel to the learning processes.

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