

MARKO MÄLLY

International Cooperation Organizations of Regional Governments (ICORGs) in the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) System of the Baltic Sea Macro-Region

A Q Methodological Study





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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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What added value do the international cooperation organizations of regional governments (ICORGs) bring to member regions? How can clear goals and targets be defined for ICORGs? Civil servants and politicians from member regions sometimes raise such questions in the meetings of ICORGs. These questions are not new – they were first asked nearly three decades ago when these cooperation organizations were established. Since the birth of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), local and regional actors have held great hopes of increasing their impact on macro-regional cooperation. I first encountered these issues while working as executive secretary for the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission in the mid-2000s. These questions are considered again recently – this time from the perspective of the regional governments' role and status in the macro-regional system as the European Commission is preparing to start the next update process of the EUSBSR. Moreover, the ICORGs' working context has drastically changed since the early 1990s, so the answers to these questions, too, might have become different.

The recurrence of these questions pushed me, in my journey as a PhD student, to explore in more detail what happens under the surface of ICORGs, which have also been largely neglected in academic research. In this dissertation, I seek answers to these oft-raised questions and contribute to research on ICORGs by examining their role, status and relevance to the building of the Baltic Sea macro-region in the context of the multi-level governance (MLG) system. The results from the subjective views of ICORG representatives and their Finnish and German member regions, however, show that ICORGs still face several challenges. In addition, the findings emphasise that the Baltic Sea macro-region's existing MLG system does not yet function properly from the perspective of ICORGs and their member regions.

Conducting PhD research while working full time for the Regional Council of Päijät-Häme created its own challenges to meet the timetable and expectations at work and university. The chosen theme, though, supported the progress of my PhD studies as work at the Regional Council and University of Tampere complemented each other. I accumulated knowledge and expertise I could use to

efficiently deliver results in my work in international affairs with the Council. In my PhD studies, I could reflect on my broad experience in my working life, bringing important insights to academic research.

I am most grateful to my thesis instructor Pami Aalto, who gave me his full support and professional guidance throughout the PhD journey. He understood the challenges to preparing a PhD dissertation while working and always made his own working timetable flexible to help me accomplish important steps. I also like to acknowledge Hanna Ojanen for her encouragement and valuable comments during the internal evaluation process. My pre-examiners Kristi Raik and Stefan Gänzle gave highly valuable feedback on the thesis manuscript, for which I am most grateful.

Furthermore, I thank Iida Jaakkola for transcribing the interviews; my PhD student colleagues in Lahti for important peer sessions; and all my colleagues in the Finnish regions, North-German Länder, and ICORG secretariats around the Baltic Sea for valuable discussions on the themes and encouragement to finalise the PhD work. Their support made me realise the value this academic dissertation brings to ICORGS and member regions themselves.

I express my gratitude to the Education Fund for funding my research, Padasjoen Säästöpankki Foundation for supporting my proofreading costs, and my employer Regional Council of Päijät-Häme for the flexibility to have annual study months and to focus all my energy on this dissertation.

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Marko Mälly

Lahti, 29 June 2018

ABSTRACT

This study has international cooperation organizations of regional governments (ICORGs) in focus and examines their role in the present multi-level governance (MLG) system of the Baltic Sea macro-region while also seeking to develop MLG system further. The study focuses on ICORGs representing regional governments, analysing two specific country-cases: elected political bodies of Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany, and nominated political bodies of Regional Councils in the unitary Republic of Finland. In particular, the study examines the subjective views of representatives of the ICORG secretariats, Finnish regions, and German Länder in relation to the regional, national, and EU levels of MLG.

In this work, I evaluate MLG through different theoretical approaches, reflecting the ongoing debate over the definition and contents of MLG arising from different interpretations and applications of the concept in the literature. I critically assess and examine the partnership principle, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (i.e., European Spatial Planning Observation Network/ESPON) *Handbook for Territorial Governance*. These policy instruments serve as the empirical context of the study, and hence documents concerning their activities form part of the primary material enabling the methodological analysis of the current role of the ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-regional MLG context.

I use a Q methodological approach to study the subjective views of representatives of the ICORGs studied and of their Finnish and German member regions. Based on the results of the methodological analysis and the factor interpretation, four factors were extracted: (i) “Builders of the MLG through the EUSBSR,” (ii) “Facilitators of Strategic Projects,” (iii) “Lobbyists for Regional Development Objectives,” and (iv) “Promoters for Smart Specialization in their Member Regions.” The factors reveal ICORGs’ tasks, respond to their coordination problems, and meet the need for them to change their working methods within the changing operational context in the Baltic Sea macro-region. The clusters of the “consensus-like-items” shared by all factors opened up for the ICORGs challenges in visibility and commitment to horizontal and vertical

communication; in macro-regional coordination and cooperation with intergovernmental organizations (IGOs); in commitment to the EU financing instruments; in geographical representativeness and the political legitimacy; and in efficient use of resources.

This study shows that the ICORGs currently suffer from several problems and have not yet fully adapted to the current EU policy instruments and processes or to the changing operational environment in the Baltic Sea macro-region. The findings also make obvious that the current MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region can be defined as rather state-centric and top-down driven, and does not function properly from the ICORGs' and their member regions' points of view. The tensions indicated by the theoretical dichotomy between intergovernmental and MLG approaches to EU policymaking prevail also in policy practice. Political and constitutional contexts clearly influence the mandates and responsibilities of the ICORG member regions in their respective countries, how they act in the ICORGs, and what kind of position they allow the ICORGs to have in the MLG system. The current reform of health, social services, and regional government in Finland provides an interesting example of how changes in political and constitutional contexts could increase the chances of the regions working through the ICORGs within the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

Finally, the academic results concerning the subjective views of the respondents, uncovered by means of Q methodology, are discussed on the more practical level to propose seven policy recommendations for regional actors. Earlier research on the IGOs, and the theoretical discussion in the study, also inform this more practical application of the results. These recommendations are made to provide an impetus for the future development of the ICORGs' work and possibly to inspire them to reconsider their priorities and cooperation schemes within the MLG structure.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämän tutkimuksen keskiössä ovat aluetason hallitusten kansainväliset yhteistyöorganisaatiot. Tutkimuksella valotetaan niiden toimijaroolia Itämeren makroalueen monitasoisessa hallintojärjestelmässä ja sen jatkokehittämiseksi. Tutkimuksen kohteena olevat organisaatiot edustavat aluetason poliittisia päätöksentekuelimiä analysoiden kaksi maaesimerkkiä: vaaleilla suoraan valittuja päätöksentekuelimiä federalistisen Saksan osavaltioissa, ja vaalien perusteella nimitettyjä poliittisia päätöksentekuelimiä unitaristisen Suomen maakuntien liitoissa. Tämä Q-tutkimus selvittää aluetason hallitusten kansainvälisten yhteistyöorganisaatioiden sihteeristöjen sekä saksalaisten ja suomalaisten jäsenalueiden edustajien subjektiivisia näkemyksiä näiden yhteistyöorganisaatioiden roolista alueellisella, kansallisella ja Euroopan unionin tasoilla.

Arvioin työssäni monitasoista hallintojärjestelmää erilaisten teoreettisten lähestymistapojen valossa. Samalla peilaan keskustelua monitasoisen hallintojärjestelmän määritelmästä ja sisällöistä suhteessa niistä kirjallisuudessa esitettyihin erilaisiin tulkintoihin ja soveltamistapoihin. Kriittisen tarkastelun kohteena on kolme keskeistä politiikan välinettä, joita käytetään Itämeren makroalueen monitasoisessa hallintojärjestelmässä: kumppanuusperiaate, Euroopan unionin Itämeri-strategia ja Euroopan aluekehittämisen seurantaverkoston (ESPON) käsikirja alueellista hallintajärjestelmää varten. Nämä politiikan välineet luovat sitä empiiristä kontekstia, joka mahdollistaa aluetason hallitusten kansainvälisten yhteistyöorganisaatioiden nykyroolin analysoinnin Itämeren makroalueen monitasoisen hallintojärjestelmän kontekstissa. Samalla yllä mainitut politiikan välineet muodostavat arvokkaan lähdemateriaalin tutkimuksen metodologian tueksi.

Aluetason hallitusten kansainvälisten yhteistyöorganisaatioiden sekä niiden suomalaisten ja saksalaisten jäsenalueiden edustajien subjektiivisten näkemysten tutkimiseen käytän Q-metodologiaa. Metodologisen analyysin tulosten perusteella löytyi neljä faktorina (i) ”Monitasoisen hallintajärjestelmän rakentajat EU:n Itämeri-strategian avulla”, (ii) ”Strategisten hankkeiden edistäjät”, (iii) ”Aluekehittämistavoitteiden edunvalvojat” ja (iv) ”Jäsenalueiden älykkään erikoistumisen edistäjät”. Faktorit ilmentävät yhteistyöorganisaatioiden tehtäviä,

koordinaatio-ongelmia monitasoisessa hallintojärjestelmässä sekä työskentelytapojen muutostarpeita Itämeren makroalueen muuttuvassa operationaalisessa viitekehyksessä. Faktoreille yhteiset konsensusväittämäklusterit toivat esiin lukuisia näiden yhteistyöorganisaatioiden toimintaan liittyviä ongelmia: näkyvyydessä ja sitoutumisessa horisontaaliseen ja vertikaaliseen viestintään; makroalueellisessa koordinaatiossa ja yhteistyössä kansallisen tason hallitustenvälisen yhteistyöorganisaatioiden kanssa; Euroopan unionin rahoitusvälineiden hyödyntämisessä; maantieteellisessä edustavuudessa ja poliittisen legimitetin puolustamisessa sekä voimavarojen tehokkaammassa käytössä.

Tämä tutkimus osoittaa, että aluetason hallitusten kansainväliset yhteistyöorganisaatiot kohtaavat useita ongelmia, ja etteivät ne ole vielä täysin sopeutuneet Itämeren makroalueen muuttuvaan operationaaliseen viitekehykseen, eivätkä Euroopan unionin nykyisiin politiikan välineisiin ja prosesseihin. Tulokset osoittavat myös, että nykyistä Itämeren makroalueen monitasoista hallintojärjestelmää voi luonnehtia melko valtiokeskeiseksi ja ylhäältä alaspäin ohjatuksi. Monitasoinen hallintajärjestelmä ei ole optimaalisesti toimiva aluetason hallitusten kansainvälisten yhteistyöorganisaatioiden eikä niiden jäsenalueiden näkökulmasta. Dikotomia hallitustenvälisyyden ja monitasoisen hallintojärjestelmän teoreettisten lähestymistapojen välillä ilmentää jännitteitä eri politiikan osa-alueilla, eri politiikkojen laidinnassa ja käytäntöön soveltamisessa. Poliittinen ja perustuslaillinen viitekehys vaikuttaa myös selkeästi yhteistyöorganisaatioiden jäsenalueiden valtuuksiin ja vastuisiin omissa maissaan, ja siihen, kuinka ne voivat toimia niissä, sekä siihen millaisen aseman jäsenalueet mahdollistavat näille yhteistyöorganisaatioille monitasoisessa hallintojärjestelmässä. Käynnissä oleva Suomen sosiaali-, terveyspalvelu- ja maakuntaudistus tarjoaa mielenkiintoisen esimerkin siitä, kuinka muutos poliittisessa ja perustuslaillisessa viitekehyksessä voisi vahvistaa maakuntien toimintamahdollisuuksia aluetason hallitusten kansainvälisten yhteistyöorganisaatioiden kautta Itämeren makroalueen monitasoisessa hallintojärjestelmässä.

Tutkimuksen tuloksiin pohjautuen esitän lopuksi seitsemän yleisesti sovellettavaa politiikkasuositusta aluetason toimijoille. Suositukset perustuvat tämän Q-tutkimuksen osallistujien subjektiivisiin näkemyksiin, teoreettiseen keskusteluun ja aiempiin tutkimuksiin kansallisen tason hallitusten välisistä yhteistyöorganisaatioista. Poliittikkasuositusten tarkoituksena on esittää aloitteita aluetason hallitusten kansainvälisten yhteistyöorganisaatioiden työn jatkokehittämiseen, sekä niiden prioriteettien ja yhteistyömuotojen uudelleen arviointiin monitasoisen hallintojärjestelmän rakenteissa.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Arctic Council
AFLRA	Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities
B7	Baltic 7 Islands Network
BASTUN	Baltic Sea Trade Union Network
BCCA	Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association
BDF	Baltic Development Forum
BEAC	Barents Euro-Arctic Council
BONUS	The joint Baltic Sea research and development programme
BSC	Baltic Sea Commission
BSPC	Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference
BSSSC	Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation
BSR	Baltic Sea Region
BSRUN	Baltic Sea Region University Network
BUP	Baltic University Programme
CBSS	Council of Baltic Sea States
CF	Cohesion Fund
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
CPMR	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions
CSO	Committee of Senior Officials (CBSS)
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EMK	Europaministerkonferenz
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ENI CBC	European Neighbourhood Instrument for Cross-Border Cooperation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESPON	European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

EV	Eigenvalue
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HA	Horizontal Action (EUSBSR)
HAC	Horizontal Action Coordinator (EUSBSR)
HELCOM	Helsinki Commission
HLG	High-Level Group
ICORG	International Cooperation Organization of Regional Governments
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
INTERREG	European Territorial Cooperation (ETC)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISSSS	International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity
LAU	Local Administrative Unit
LEADER	Links between development actions of the rural economy
LTP	Long Term Perspective (VASAB)
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MLG	Multi-level Governance
NC	Nordic Council
NCM	Nordic Council of Ministers
NCP	National Contact Point
ND	Northern Dimension
NDEP	Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership
NDPC	Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture
NDPHS	Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being
NDPTL	Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NGO Forum	Baltic Sea Non-Governmental Organizations' Network
NSC	CPMR North Sea Commission
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP	Operational Programme

PA	Policy Area (EUSBSR)
PAC	Policy Area Coordinator (EUSBSR)
RegLeg	Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power
SCANBALT	Activity platform for research, education, and innovation
SNA	Subnational Actors
SOA	Spheres of Authority
TA 2020	Territorial Agenda 2020
TANGO	Territorial Approaches for New Governance
TNC	Transnational Corporation
UBC	Union of the Baltic Cities
VASAB	Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea

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1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The idea for this research on international cooperation organizations of regional governments (ICORGs) was born through my previous work as an Executive Secretary in one of the studied organizations from 2003–2006. This practical work raised several questions about the mandates and interests of subnational actors, like the ICORGs and their member regions, in the international arena. The nature of the relationships among multiple stakeholders – some representing the interests of national organizations; others, organizations representing the Baltic Sea macro-region¹; and still others focused on individual regions or municipalities – seemed also an interesting topic for scientific research. Back then, MLG was a newly established concept and, hence, not yet widely used in the political discussion in the Baltic Sea region. Already in the first half of the 2000s, however, there was debate about the linkages between the different administrative levels of governance and the new mandates and responsibilities of the regional level. MLG appeared on the agenda of the ICORGs because of the EU cohesion policy² and because most countries around the Baltic Sea macro-region had become members of the EU. Even before that, in the 1990s, treaties of the EU had launched a discussion of subsidiarity³ at the subnational level, also in the Baltic Sea macro-region. The

¹ I will treat the Baltic Sea region in this study as a macro-region as defined in the macro-regional strategies of the EU (cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016a). “A macro-regional strategy is an integrated framework relating to Member States and third countries in the same geographical area, addresses common challenges, and benefits from strengthened co-operation for economic, social, and territorial cohesion” (European Commission 2013).

² “Cohesion policy can be understood as the governing principles of various funding instruments aimed at addressing social and economic inequalities in the EU. It focuses in particular on developing disadvantaged regions in the context of market integration, and the structural funds are the main financial instruments for this purpose” (Bache 2012, 629).

³ “Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level” (EUR-LEX 2010, article 5).

subsidiarity principle was about bringing the Union and its decision-making as close to the citizens as possible.

This study will reveal the subjective views of representatives of ICORGs and people closely involved in their work in the Baltic Sea area: how they see the role of the ICORGs in the current context of the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region in relation to regional, national, and EU levels, and how the work of the ICORGs could be improved in the future. In this study, the current policy instruments of the EU form the empirical framework with which to analyse their subjective views regarding the functioning of the MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region. These policy instruments concern cohesion policy, including the partnership principle, the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and territorial cohesion, all of which are integral parts of the ICORGs' working context. These policy instruments have a twofold role for this thesis. First, they form an important part of its empirical context of interest. More precisely, they function as tools for the ICORGs and their member regions to employ in their day-to-day work, helping them operate within the evolving MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. Second, these policy instruments form an important source material for the methodological work of this thesis. On this plane, it is of interest how the representatives of the ICORGs – including members of ICORG secretariats representing the whole Baltic Sea area and representatives of Finnish and German member regions – subjectively view these policy documents.

The main research question of the study is: Can ICORGs act as intermediators or linkages between and within MLG levels to support the interests of their member regions? I address this question by examining ICORGs and their member regions from two different state systems – unitary Finland and federal Germany – to use as empirical examples in a Q methodological analysis. The study focuses on ICORGs that represent regions and their regional governments with either elected or nominated political bodies. German “Länder” (in German) serve as examples of elected political bodies on the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) Level 2.⁴ Finnish Regional Councils (Finnish: *maakunnan liitto*), examples

⁴ “The statistical nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) regions are key instruments that render possible comparisons between various states and regions which are sometimes meaningful historical units or ad hoc units created for the purpose of governance” (Paasi 2009, 134). “The current NUTS 2013 classification is valid from 1 January 2015 and lists 98 regions at NUTS 1, 276 regions at NUTS 2 and 1342 regions at NUTS 3 level. The NUTS classification (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU for the purpose of the collection, development and harmonisation of European regional statistics; socio-economic analyses of the regions (NUTS 1: major socio-economic regions; NUTS 2: basic regions for the application of regional policies; NUTS 3: small regions for specific diagnoses;

of nominated political bodies, represent the NUTS 3 Level. These two state systems represent potentially different contexts for subnational activity in the MLG system. Neither of the two levels of the German federal system has the mandate to limit nor expand the competences of the other levels (i.e., competence-competence applies) (Laufer-Münch 2010, 17). In the Finnish unitary system, however, where none of the levels has full competence-competence, the subnational level is more like a playground of the central state (cf. Laufer-Münch 2010, 19). This study cannot comprehensively examine the varieties of MLG in all Baltic Sea States, but the selection of the Finnish and German cases may give hints about the overall functioning of the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region (reviewed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3). Hereby I assume that the political and constitutional contexts of the chosen regions would influence: (i) the mandates and responsibilities of regions in respective countries, (ii) how they act in the ICORGs, and (iii) what kind of position they allow the ICORGs to have in the MLG system.

In this study, states are seen as one level among several others, interacting both with them and with various other stakeholder groups. The target is to study both how the ICORGs are connected to the MLG system and the linkages between the levels and the processes of the MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region. As Gänzle and Kern (2016a, 14) define, “the macro-regional strategies affect existing institutions at the macro-regional level and stimulate the creation of new forms of interinstitutional comprehensive points of reference for pre-existing institutions operating on the macro-regional level.” Macro-regions create new cooperation opportunities for various stakeholders across different policy levels of the EU (Schymik 2011, 5). Four EU macro-regional strategies,⁵ covering several policies, have been adopted so far: the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR, reviewed in Section 4.2) in 2009, the Danube Region (EUSDR)⁶ in 2011, the

and regional typologies and local information) and framing of EU regional policies. Regions eligible for support from cohesion policy have been defined and the cohesion report has mainly been prepared at NUTS 2 level” (Eurostat 2016a).

⁵ All adopted macro-regional strategies contain a “rolling action plan” that is regularly updated in the case of new, emerging needs and changing contexts (European Commission 2017d). The four macro-regional strategies concern 19 EU member-states and 8 non-EU countries (ibid.).

⁶ “The EUSDR targets 14 countries which are part of three ‘micro-regions’: (i) two western participants (the German Länder of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, and Austria), (ii) seven new Member State countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) and (iii) five non-EU states (from the western Balkans: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia; and also from eastern Europe: Moldova and the four westernmost oblasti of Ukraine). The new Member State countries are the ‘central’ participants, both territorially and socially” (Ágh 2016, 146).

Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR)⁷ in 2014, and the Alpine Region (EUSALP)⁸ in 2015 (European Commission 2017d). The inceptions of a number of other potential ‘EU macro-regions’ – such as the North Sea, the Atlantic Arc and the Carpathian Mountain ‘regions’ are under discussion (Gänzle 2017, 1). Of these strategies, the EUBSR is the first, in some sense flagbearer initiative, but its establishment “has not yet led to the establishment of new institutions, new legislation, or new funding schemes, although it has generated a governance architecture which already affects the existing institutions on the macro-regional level” (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 125).

There is no previous academic research on NUTS 2- or NUTS 3-level ICORGs or on their roles in the MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region. I intend to contribute to the research on these ICORGs by examining their relevance for the building of the Baltic Sea macro-region. These actors are often left in marginal roles in the scientific literature. Literature on interest group influence beyond the state generally bypasses regional authorities (Tatham 2015, 387). This study intends to go some way towards filling this gap by addressing all stakeholders. It makes visible the views of officials and politicians working with ICORGs and IGOs whilst at the same time wishing to interact with the scholars already studying these organizations. The aim is to make an empirical contribution to help researchers better understand the role of the subnational regional actors in the MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region. It is of note here how member regions make considerable financial and human investments in their respective ICORGs even though the received added value is under constant evaluation. This study intends to make a contribution to that discussion.

⁷ “The EUSAIR represents a novelty among EU macro-regional strategies due to the weight of its external dimension as a result of the proportion of non-EU states involved. In addition to the EU member states Croatia, Greece, Italy, and Slovenia, the EUSAIR embraces the non-EU countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia (which are all aspiring to become EU member countries)” (Cugusi and Stocchiero 2016, 170).

⁸ The EUSALP involves seven countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, and Switzerland (European Commission 2017d).

1.1 Theoretical Framework

In this section, I will briefly introduce the more generic parts of the theoretical framework for this study. (The theoretical approach will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.) I will first shed light onto theoretical approaches expressing state-centric views, then shortly describe the big picture of MLG-related EU studies before moving closer to the theoretical approaches of MLG. I will draw on this theoretical work later when I discuss the empirical reality within which the ICORGs are working.

At first, MLG focused on intergovernmental relations, highlighting the role of subnational governments in EU politics (Bache 2012). In the context of EU studies, the phrase “multi-level” usually refers to the vertical interactions governments at different territorial levels have, and “governance” to how governments and non-governmental actors interact (Bache 2012, 630). In the 1990s, EU studies and comparative politics witnessed a “governance turn” – a historically significant shift during which “a set of explanations combining both formal and informal processes emerged that did justice to the EU’s character as a unique set of multi-level, non-hierarchical and regulatory institutions, and a hybrid mix of state and non-state actors” (Paterson, Nugent, and Egan 2009, 407). As of today, the concept of MLG is present within competing perspectives on EU politics such as liberal intergovernmentalism, federalism, poly-centric governance, network governance, and new modes of governance (Eising 2015, 165).

In European integration studies, MLG and regionalism have challenged the traditionally state-centric approach of intergovernmentalism. I will account for the regional and political contexts of the Baltic Sea macro-region with theoretical approaches based on the constitutional frameworks of unitary and federal states. My thesis is arguably not a typical study representing mainstream theories or approaches in the international relations discipline, which tend to focus on the role of states in the international field. In my study, subnational actors are at the core of macro-regional cooperation, and I examine their roles in relation to actors on the national and EU levels. This study, therefore, finds itself in the terrain of comparative politics, between the disciplines of international relations, political science, and regional studies. Making a contribution to mainstream MLG research or any other of these disciplinary bodies of knowledge, however, is not the primary goal of this thesis. This thesis is concerned with the investigation of the subjective voices of representatives of ICORGs and their member regions. The MLG theoretical approaches have an instrumental role in the study. They help to

interpret the empirical findings of the study and define the role of the ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-regional MLG system.

Concerning the theoretical literature, I will first approach liberal theories that recognize subnational players only if the states involve them in the processes of forming their interests. These approaches can reflect on the role of the regional level in the unitary states like Finland. Liberal intergovernmentalism might provide the best example of the systems where states play the central role in decision-making (Moravcsik 1993). Domestic actors may influence how states define their foreign policy interests and behave in the international arena. This approach shares with intergovernmentalism the idea of the central role of Member States in the European integration (Tiilikainen and Palosaari 2007). Gebhard (2009) notes, however, that liberal intergovernmentalism offers a rather limited approach to explain the MLG system in the Baltic Sea region. According to George (2004, cf. Benz 2010), the theoretical debate concerning the nature of the EU should be called an intergovernmental multi-level governance debate.

Within this context, I will also describe MLG using different theoretical approaches. In general, there is an ongoing debate over the definition of MLG based on different interpretations, and the concept is applied in rather different ways in the literature (Bache 2004, 2010, 2012; George 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2001, 2003, 2010; Laufer and Münch 2010; Marks and Hooghe 2004; Peters and Pierre 2004; Piattoni 2009, 2016; Raunio 2007; Rosenau 2003, 2004, 2007; Stephenson 2013; Tiilikainen 2007). Stephenson (2013) has identified five main conceptions of MLG that have emerged in research since the birth of the concept: (i) original conceptions from 1993, (ii) functional conceptions from 1997, (iii) combined conceptions from 2001, (iv) normative conceptions from 2003, and (v) comparative conceptions from 2007 onwards. The references to MLG in this study are, broadly speaking, in line with the main conceptions mostly relating to the (i) original conception of MLG, looking to the legal jurisdictions of authority and efficiency as the ICORGs represent elected or nominated regional governments and (ii) functional conceptions of the policy – country and (in this study) macro-region, and implementation studies that explore MLG through three different policy instruments (partnership principle, EUSBSR, and territorial cohesion) as well as co-ordination and learning processes (e.g., capacity-building measures established through the EUSBSR). This study also refers briefly to regionalization and the (iii) comparative approach to global governance, taking into account that the ICORGs and their member regions in the Baltic Sea macro-region are targets of the globalization process as well (reviewed in Section 2.4).

Peters and Pierre (2004, 80–84) note that the focus of MLG is evident in its process and outcomes. In the MLG approach, the Member States of the EU are not the principal actors in European politics; multiple actors representing regional and national governments, parliaments, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and private interest groups play their respective relevant roles (Benz 2010, 215). “Macro-regions are deeply embedded in the EU’s system of the MLG and can therefore be interpreted from multi-level, multisector and multiactor perspectives” (as quoted in Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 12; cf. Hooghe and Marks 2010). To date, the horizontal and vertical linkages between the ICORGs and other stakeholders, and how they can or should be improved, have not been properly studied. Benz (2010, 214) argues that the MLG concept generally features interdependence among European, national, and subnational policymaking in the political system of the EU. Piattoni (2016), in turn, recognizes a theoretical core in the MLG that explains many policy and institutional developments as well as mobilization in the EU: The sovereign states are challenged by international cooperation, subnational articulation, and transnational mobilization, as most of the EU dynamics are a construct of this three-dimensional analytical space (*ibid.*). Reflecting these different theoretical aspects, one of my research questions is: How may the ICORGs and their member regions deal with the different forms of MLG in the Baltic Sea EU macro-region?

I also will briefly introduce views on how globalization as a process has further challenged MLG and regionalism, which – together – reflect the multilevel reality of the ICORGs. The globalization process and European integration have created new forms of functional areas that increase mutual dependency between different territorial levels (Böhme et al. 2011; Rosenau 2004, 2007). Cross-border cooperation is one of the dimensions to manage within the challenges of globalization (Piattoni 2016). World affairs can be conceptualized as being governed through a bifurcated system of world politics: one a system of states and their national governments, and the other a multicentric system of diverse types of collectives that cooperate, compete, and interact with the state-centric system (Rosenau 2004, 31–35). States are no longer the only key participants on the global stage (*ibid.*). MLG conceptualizes different governmental levels of hierarchy as “vertically structured layers of authority” if there are increasing demands for governance also being applied horizontally (*ibid.* 39–41). The manner in which MLG is constructed at the global level differs from other MLG systems (Zürn 2012, 741). Weak or absent relationships between the global level and the societies

of the constituent members result in considerable shortcomings in global governance as does the missing location for policy coordination (*ibid.*).

Moving to the Baltic Sea context of the theoretical framework, Baltic Sea regionalism is another research area dealing with the role of regional organizations and the subnational level in the Baltic Sea region and the EU. “Its goals can be defined as broad international and intercultural cooperation for environmentally sustainable, economically competitive, and democratic development” (Scott 2002, 137). Formal and informal cooperation of Baltic Sea regionalism can be defined with several organizing principles: a forum of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), issue-specific interorganizational forums and NGO networks, multilevel EU policies and programmes with project incentives, global regional development concepts, and local projects and initiatives (*ibid.* 142). Gebhard (2009) created an overview of networks and clusters within the framework of Baltic Sea regionalism. The overview includes the ICORGs and involves different actors at various levels of action; state-level cooperation plays a central role (*ibid.*).

In this context the notion of “New Regionalism” is relevant. It differs from “Old Regionalism” as it is supported not only by state-level, top-down-driven hegemonic policy but also by many different organizations, institutions, and political movements (Williams 2007, 51). “New regionalism is not confined merely to formal interstate regional organizations and institutions, but is also characterised by multidimensionality, complexity, fluidity, and nonconformity, as well as by the fact that it involves a variety of state and non-state actors that often come together in rather informal ways” (as quoted in Paasi 2009, 127). Paasi (2009, 123; cf. Lehti 2009) conceptualised regions “as processes which achieve their boundaries, symbolisms, and institutions in the process of institutionalisation.” After the post-2009 emergence of the macro-regional strategies of the EU, Gänzle and Kern (2016a, 6) suggested the concept of macro-regionalization: “It aims at the construction of functional and transnational spaces among those (administrative) regions and municipalities at the subnational level of EU member and partner countries that share a sufficient number of issues in common.” Macro-regionalization is a comprehensive approach across policy sectors, and as an EU-wide process “it can be conceived as a prototype of territorial differentiation in European integration, which also makes a significant impact on its constituent macro-regional parts” (*ibid.* 10).

Yet further approaches exist that, broadly speaking, can be related to “multi-level governance.” The practice of foreign relations or “paradiplomacy” of subnational governments and subnational influence on multilevel politics have

been targets of scientific research focused on the relations between European regions and the institutions of the European Union (Blatter et al. 2008; Tatham 2015; Tatham and Thau 2014; cf. Van Hecke, Bursens, and Beyers 2016).

1.2 Defining Regional Cooperation at the Subnational Level

It is important to recognize and react to the incoherent use of the term “region” in the primary and secondary literature and materials. In the documents used in this study, the term is used in multiple ways. It can describe regional cooperation on a national level, on a Pan-Baltic (macro-regional) level, on the subnational level, or even between the levels. One, therefore, needs to keep in mind the precise definition of the terminology regarding MLG, where the core idea is to express the interaction between the stakeholders, between the levels vertically, and on the levels horizontally (cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 13–14). The word “regional” might be rather confusing; e.g., in the EUSBSR, the word “regional” is used for everything that refers to the macro-region, including all governance levels of the MLG. The “regional organization” stated in the EUSBSR can be a cooperative organization on the national level like CBSS or HELCOM, or on the subnational or local level as represented by CPMR BSC, BSSSC, or UBC. To differentiate between state and non-state organizations, the term “regional non-state organization” is used in the EUSBSR, but it may still become mixed with the terms ICORG and NGO (cf. European Commission 2015, 160). As Paasi puts it:

In international relations and political science, debates on regions which normally deal with state and suprastate units discuss the interstate system as a target of regionalist activities. The idea of ‘region’ can refer in current debates to both sub- and suprastate units, and to how regions are results of processes taking place at and across various levels. (Paasi 2009, 122)

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) defines the term *region* in its statutes: “The term ‘Region’ covers in principle territorial authorities between the central government and local authorities, with a political representation power as entrusted by an elected assembly” (AER 2016). This kind of wide definition does not make much sense in the case of cross-border cooperation formed between the regions of some EU Member States or in the matters regarding regions’ influence on the EU integration process (Laufer and Münch 2010, 228). In these cases, a more detailed definition of the term – comprising also the mandates and capacities of these regional levels – should be applied (ibid.). According to the definition,

these regional units are regions that “are located immediately below the central government but over the municipal level and which have a meaningful organization of administration and have – in this framework – decision-makers who do not directly represent the central state and who have their defined tasks” (as quoted in Laufer and Münch 2010, 228).

Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel (2010, 4) use their definition for a region in a pragmatic manner, which can be unequivocally applied for the research purposes: “A region refers to a given territory having a single, continuous and non-intersecting boundary; subnational regions are intermediate between local and national governments; a regional government is a set of legislative and executive institutions responsible for authoritative decision-making.” The same authors (2010, 4) further specify a minimal definition for their study: “A regional government is the government of a coherent territorial entity situated between the local and national levels with a capacity for authoritative decision-making.”

In this study, I use Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel’s (2010) definitions for a region, a regional level, and a regional government. To describe precisely the studied organizations, I combine the elements of these definitions using the term *international cooperation organizations of regional governments* (ICORGs) to describe the regional governments cooperating as members of the organizations in the interregional¹⁰ context. This definition is not connected with geography but is MLG-level specific. It differentiates the ICORGs from the other cooperation schemes and organizations like NGOs, which possibly mix their members from different MLG levels, are from their nature issue-specific, and do not presuppose homogenous membership with an elected government. This definition also differentiates the ICORGs from conventional IGOs at the national level.

⁹ In the MLG context of this study, the term “international” is used not only to refer to the inter-state (i.e., national-level) relations but also in a wider sense to include the interregional (i.e., regional-level) relations below the national level. According to Aalto, Harle, Long, and Moio (2011, 7), “the term ‘international’ can be defined in different ways, as can concepts such as ‘state’ and ‘nation’, and ‘agency’ and ‘actor’. With this we mean frequently appearing concepts such as international system, hegemony, international society, empire, and global governance are all predicated upon different assumptions of what the ‘international’ is, and which actors populate that domain. Hence, for practical reasons it will be helpful to keep open the links between ‘international’ and state...In short, the term international is best understood as a dynamic social and political process” (ibid.).

¹⁰ Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt (2000, 34) define the Baltic Sea Commission of the Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) as an “interregional” council. The term “interregional” has also its conventional use in the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) through the Interreg Europe Programme helping through interregional cooperation regional and local governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policies (Interreg Europe Programme 2015).

State-centric conceptual approaches to MLG use the EU decision-making system as an example. They often divide MLG into three levels – the EU, national, and subnational – that interact with each other, or they may describe a two-level collaboration between the institutions of the EU and those of national levels (see e.g., Egeberg and Trondal 2016; Jachtenfuchs 2010; Scharpf 2006, 2010). In the geographical context studied here, subnational cooperation is far more manifold. To do justice to the wide subnational cooperation, MLG demands far more attention to detail in the context of both interregional cooperation and cooperation between the cities and municipalities.

In this research, the term *macro-region* is used to symbolize the whole geographic macro-region of the Baltic Sea (as used in the EUSBSR). The subnational level is further divided into the regional NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 levels, and to the former NUTS 4 and 5 levels – Local Administrative Units (LAU).¹¹ The territorial units of the German Länder with their regional governments represent the NUTS 2 level, and Finnish Regional Councils have their homes on the NUTS 3 level. Further, the local levels of cities and municipalities create the LAU. The core target group of organizations under study in this thesis are the Baltic Sea macro-region-wide working ICORGs that represent their member regions on subnational NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 levels with elected or nominated decision-making bodies. To be clear, the target group of this research is neither the Baltic Sea macro-regional intergovernmental cooperation organizations on the national level (NUTS 1), the macro-regional NGOs, nor other thematic cooperation organizations. These stakeholders, as well as the organizations of the LAU (i.e., cities and municipalities), are used only as references.

Subnational mobilization within the EU varies greatly from country to country (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 91). The financial, political, and organizational powers of subnational governments vary immensely across the Member States (ibid.). The Baltic Sea region has a high density of cooperative arrangements; therefore, it is one of the most well-networked regions in Europe (Gebhard 2009, 22). The field of international organizations is very heterogeneous around the Baltic Sea basin, where there is a dense network of different cooperation schemes on different levels of the MLG. Baltic Sea cooperation has grown stronger, especially in the aftermath of the Cold War (Etzold and Gänzle 2012, 1). This cooperation currently covers various policy sectors and involves both public and private actors (i.e., state and

¹¹ “The upper LAU level (LAU level 1, formerly NUTS level 4) is defined for most, but not all of the countries, and the lower LAU level (LAU level 2, formerly NUTS level 5) consists of municipalities or equivalent units in the 28 EU Member States” (Eurostat 2017).

nonstate stakeholders) from European, national, subnational, and local levels (ibid.). Numerous international regional institutions emerged in the early 1990s on the national level: the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Barents-Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Arctic Council (AC), the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), the Baltic Sea Region Energy Cooperation (BASREC), and Baltic 21 (Etzold 2010, 2–3). Due to the heterogeneous systems of the regional administration of the different Baltic Sea States, it is not possible to examine the current situation in all networks or all regions of the Baltic Sea States in this study. Instead, the focus is on the regions and their memberships in the ICORGs in the unitary state of Finland and in the federative state of Germany.

1.3 The Studied Organizations

This study focuses on a group of the ICORGs established during the same time period – the early 1990s – at the subnational level of the Baltic Sea macro-region: the Baltic Sea Commission of the Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR BSC), the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), and the Baltic Sea Seven Islands Cooperation (B7), which all represent regional NUTS 2 or NUTS 3 levels with political mandates. The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC), representing the local level of the Baltic Sea macro-region, and the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), representing the national level of the Baltic Sea macro-region, serve as additional, supportive reference material for this study. These two latter organizations do not directly represent NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 regional levels.

The ICORGs studied in this work all formed in different ways for different reasons, but all of them were established within a new political landscape in the Baltic Sea macro-region. The Soviet Union had collapsed, the Baltic States had become independent, Germany was reunited, and the EU had spread into northern Europe as Finland and Sweden joined its membership. This expansion opened a new era for intense regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea macro-region (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 4). Baltic Sea-wide cooperation had prevailed for hundreds of years, but fifty years of division in Europe had closed down many cooperative structures. The ICORGs shared common goals but also faced huge joint challenges at the time of their establishment. Now, 25 years later and after the Baltic States and Poland have become members of the EU, living standards have risen drastically in these new democracies, and the EU macro-regional Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was created to help the ICORGs face the

challenges in the new situation, where their goals and work needed discussion (cf. Etzold 2010, 3–4).

Common features of these subnational cooperation organizations are significant. They are represented by the leading politicians and officials of the regional governments of their member regions. The organizations focus their work on joint regional and local development challenges and represent their interests as to the EU and the national levels of their respective countries. The work is organised through annual conferences, work of the boards or executive committees, permanent or rotating secretariats, and different thematic working groups and projects. These organizations are rather heterogeneous in their size, tasks, or working methods. The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission is also part of the Pan-European cooperation organization of the CPMR.

The budgets of the ICORGs are based mainly on the annual membership fees and voluntary financial and human resources contributed by the member regions. One exception among the ICORGs is the BSSSC, where membership fees are not paid – instead, the budget is based totally on voluntary contributions made by the participating stakeholders and contributions from the hosting region of the chairmanship and secretariat. A challenge for the ICORGs has been insufficient financial and human resources and weak structures to deal with project work, as the ICORGs are very dependent on the contributions by host regions. The secretariats have relative small staffs – typically not more than ten persons and often only one or two – and membership fees are insufficient to enlarge and widen the activities. Secretariats are often run for limited periods of time by each host region.

As the institutional context of northern Europe is complex and multifaceted, with possibly overlapping tasks, problems of coordination and efficient division of labour are important issues (Etzold 2010, 248). The most relevant earlier studies focus on the regional cooperation of the main IGOs working on the national level in northern Europe: the Arctic Council (AC), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt (2000) comprehensively described these four organizations, mapped the areas of overlap among them, discussed their mechanisms of coordination, and suggested improvements to those systems. They recognized several coordination problems, including similar work being done several times, insufficient exchange of information, and unclear responsibilities (ibid. 40). According to Aalto (Aalto et al. 2012, 2; cf. Aalto et al. 2017, 155), these four organizations operate in several overlapping sectors. My assumption is that

the ICORGs have similar coordination problems that need to be resolved in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region as well.

In a recent study, Aalto et al. (2017) examined the coordination of policy priorities among these four IGOs and argued that an institutions-coordination dilemma characterized their cooperation. Previously, the coherence of the work of these organizations had been examined in the area of EU Northern Dimension policy (Aalto et al. 2012, 2017) and in the context of the EUSBSR (Etzold and Gänzle 2012). The EU and other partner countries are encouraged “to draw regional actors closer to the decision-making process and to utilize their potentials as platforms within a coherent system of regional cooperation” (Etzold and Gänzle 2012, 1).

Etzold (2010) investigated the adaptability and the endurance of the CBSS, the Nordic Council (NC), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) in the changing external circumstances and conditions. Yet, several parallels can be recognized that correspond to the cooperation of the ICORGs on the subnational level as well. Etzold (2010, 310) states that IGOs need to specify their intentions in future cooperative efforts, especially when there are other organizations working in the same or similar issue areas. They also need to fit and adapt to the changes in the wider institutional framework (*ibid.*). Dangerfield (2016) studied intergovernmental regional organizations (subregional groupings) in Europe, including the CBSS and the NC of the Baltic Sea macro-region, focusing on their role in the establishment of macro-regional strategies.

1.3.1 CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (CPMR BSC)

The CPMR BSC represents subnational levels (i.e., NUTS 2 and NUTS 3) of the Baltic Sea macro-region and serves as one of the core organizations of this study. The BSC, one of six Geographical Commissions of the CPMR, was founded in 1996 and now brings together 19 regions from the six Baltic Sea States of Estonia, Finland, Germany, Norway, Poland, and Sweden (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2017a).¹² The overarching organization, CPMR, was founded in 1973 and represents around 160 regions within 25 European countries (CPMR 2017). In its dealings with EU institutions and national governments, the CPMR targets its actions at ensuring that the needs and interests of its member regions are

¹² It is possible to be a member of several of the geographical commissions (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2017a).

considered in all policies of the EU with a high territorial impact. The CPMR focuses mainly on social, economic, and territorial cohesion, maritime policies and blue growth, and accessibility. Further European governance, energy, climate change, neighbourhood, and development also represent important areas of activity. The CPMR is independent of EU institutions (*ibid.*).

The CPMR BSC defines itself as an international, independent organization of regional authorities at the subnational level in the Baltic Sea region (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2017a). It actively contributes to the reflections by the CPMR and to the preparation of its policy positions; at the same time, it acts as a think tank and as a lobby for the regions around the Baltic Sea. The member regions of the CPMR BSC work closely together to ensure that EU institutions and national governments take account of their shared interests. The CPMR and its geographical commissions have their own decision-making mechanisms, with annual assemblies for all member regions and a board in each organization. Additionally, the work is organised into European and geographical commission-based working groups that also run projects to some extent. The CPMR BSC has a strong emphasis on territorial work, and each member region is represented by leading elected politicians. The CPMR BSC and its member regions support the main goals of the EUSBSR and work for a stronger involvement of regional stakeholders in its governance and implementation. Other central interests include strengthening territorial cohesion, enhancing the European maritime dimension, and boosting the accessibility of Europe's territories. The CPMR BSC currently runs three working groups: energy, maritime issues, and transport (*ibid.*).

The decision-making bodies of the organizations are led by the office-holding politicians from the regional governments of the member regions, who are nominated to their positions every two years (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2016a).¹³ The CPMR BSC has neither a permanently nominated executive secretary nor a secretariat – the executive secretary is nominated every two years as well. In the CPMR BSC, the same region hosts both the executive secretary and the secretariat, whose costs are based on the annual membership fees and voluntary financial contributions by the member regions and the hosting region (*ibid.*).

¹³ “The Baltic Sea Commission brings together the Presidents or persons exercising an equivalent function, of the Member Regions. The Presidents, who may delegate their own representative, should be appointed by the Regional Authorities immediately below the level of Central Government” (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2016a).

1.3.2 Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC)

The BSSSC is a political network of decentralised authorities (regions) in the Baltic Sea region (i.e., NUTS 2 and NUTS 3). The organization was founded in 1993 based on the Stavanger Declaration and as an answer to the establishment of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS; BSSSC 2003). Participants in the BSSSC are regional authorities (i.e., at the level directly below the national-level authorities) of the ten Baltic Sea Region states: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden (BSSSC 2017; cf. BSSSC 2014). The BSSSC is a political network whose main organizational bodies are: the chairperson (elected by the board on a rotational basis for a two-year period); the board, consisting of two regional representatives of each of the BSR countries; the secretariat that follows the chairperson; and ad hoc working groups (ibid.). The BSSSC is a non-fee-based network organization, which means that the BSSSC does not have a conventional membership like the fee-based organizations (BSSSC 2014). The costs are paid by the host region and voluntary contributions of participating regions. The main BSSSC event is the annual conference (ibid.).

The BSSSC cooperates closely with other key Baltic Sea macro-regional and European organizations and institutions (BSSSC 2017; cf. BSSSC 2014). It renewed its Declaration of Common Interest with the Committee of the Regions in 2012 and has opened its network for other BSR organizations on local and regional levels to become participants. The mission of the BSSSC is to use its role as a political network organization and a regional partner to CBSS, and to promote and advocate the interests of the regions of the Baltic Sea area towards decision-makers such as national governments, the EU institutions, and IGOs. The BSSSC acts as a Pan-Baltic organization open to all regions around the entire Baltic Sea area, bringing added value to regional cooperation and providing expertise, best-practice examples, and networking opportunities. It acts as an open, non-partisan political network organization that will represent the common interests of all regions around the Baltic Sea area (ibid.).

1.3.3 Baltic Islands Network (B7)

The B7 is a cooperative organization of the seven largest islands in the Baltic Sea, which belong to five different countries (B7 2014a). B7 (2014b) defines in its charter with the long-term vision: “Baltic Islands Network will, by exchange of experience, lobby and projects, facilitate for the islands in order to make a

difference and to make the island life more attractive and sustainable.” When cooperation started in 1989, partners of the B7 were Bornholm (Denmark), Gotland (Sweden), Hiiumaa (Estonia), Rügen (Germany), Saaremaa (Estonia), Åland (autonomous region in Finland), and Öland (Sweden) (B7 2014a). Since 2014, cooperation has continued with five islands (i.e., without Bornholm and Öland). B7 focuses on the development of the islands and the design and implementation of large and small projects, events, conferences, and exchanges. B7 participates in developing strategies and solutions for tackling key island issues such as transport, communication, marine environment, and energy. B7 has a rotating chairmanship and secretariat (ibid.).

The mission of the B7 is to use its strengths to promote the strategic goals of the islands (B7 2017). Islands can better serve their interests and achieve more as a cooperative than alone. B7 has two decision-making bodies: (i) the steering committee, which is the political body made up of leading politicians from the islands; and (ii) the coordinators’ group, which is the management body and is comprised of senior executives from public administration. The organization’s biannual conference is a forum meant to convene all the members of the B7 to review the past two years and agree on plans for the coming years within the framework of the B7 strategy. Conferences consist of a steering committee meeting, a coordinators’ group meeting, and open plenary sessions for debate and discussion (ibid.).

1.3.4 Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)

The UBC is a voluntary, proactive network founded in 1991 to mobilize the shared potential of its member cities (LAU) for democratic, economic, social, cultural, and environmentally sustainable development of the Baltic Sea region (UBC 2017). The UBC has around 100 member cities in all ten countries surrounding the Baltic Sea (ibid.). It is a fee-based organization (UBC 2013). Its general conference meets biannually, and its executive board consists of representatives from one member city from each of ten countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. The UBC has a permanent secretariat. According to its statutes, the UBC aims to promote, develop, and strengthen cooperation and exchange of experience among the cities in the Baltic Sea region. It advocates for common interests of the local authorities in the region; acts on behalf of the cities and local authorities in common matters towards regional, national, European, and international bodies; strives to achieve

sustainable development and optimal economic and social development in the Baltic Sea region with full respect to European principles of local and regional self-governance and subsidiarity; and contributes to joint Baltic identity, cohesion, and common understanding in the region (*ibid.*). The UBC runs commissions which are also active in project work: cultural cities, inclusive and healthy cities, planning cities, safe cities, smart and prospering cities, sustainable cities, and youthful cities (UBC 2017).

1.3.5 Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)

The CBSS was established through the Copenhagen Declaration in 1992 “with the aim of co-operating to encourage democratic development in the region, greater unity between the countries involved, and favourable economic development” (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 20; cf. Etzold 2010, 87–88). A reform process took place in the CBSS between 2007 and 2010 that stressed its broad mandate (Etzold and Gänzle 2012, 4–5). As the changing circumstances in the Baltic Sea region created the need for increased cooperation, the CBSS formed as an overall political forum for regional intergovernmental cooperation (NUTS 1) on the highest political level (*ibid.*). The members of the CBSS are the 11 states of the Baltic Sea region (i.e., the nine Baltic Sea littoral states, Iceland, and Norway) – Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, and Sweden – and the European Commission (cf. Etzold 2010, 93–96). It is noteworthy that the CBSS remains the only northern intergovernmental cooperation organization in which Germany enjoys membership status (Aalto et al. 2017, 153).

The Council consists of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs from each CBSS member state and a representative of the European Commission (CBSS 2017a). The presidency of the Council rotates among the Member States on an annual basis. The Council serves as a forum for guidance and overall coordination among the participating states. The foreign minister of the presiding country is responsible for coordinating the Council’s activities and is assisted in this work by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO). The Council does not have a general budget or project fund: Members are responsible for funding common activities and for seeking and coordinating financing from other sources (*ibid.*). The CBSS has a traditional IGO structure (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 20). Since 1998, the CBSS Member States have jointly financed the Permanent International Secretariat

of the CBSS in Stockholm (ibid.; cf. Etzold 2010, 92). According to the CBSS transition initiated in 2008, there also have been attempts to activate the CBSS in the implementation of the EUSBSR (Aalto et al. 2012, 22). Heads of government gave a declaration on CBSS reform at the 7th Baltic Sea States Summit in Riga in June 2008 (Etzold 2010, 98). Member States wanted to make the CBSS more project-oriented to increase its impact (Aalto et al. 2017, 154). In June 2014, the CBSS decided to streamline the five long-term priorities approved in 2008, creating three renewed long-term priorities: regional identity; sustainable and prosperous region; and safe and secure region (CBSS 2014).

The CBSS acts as an important link in integrating Russia into the EU Baltic Sea regional cooperation network (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 131). “The latest crisis in Ukraine and the changing relationship between Russia and the EU have had a negative impact on the integrative role of the CBSS” (ibid.). The CBSS cooperates with other Pan-Baltic organizations by granting them observer status, which allows them to participate in and follow selected activities. The CBSS cooperation with actors on subnational and local levels, parliamentary actors, and the business community is fairly close (Etzold 2010, 283).

Since 2001, the CBSS has intensified efforts to coordinate its activities with other organizations actively working to advance regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea area (CBSS 2017b). It has taken the initiative to organise annual coordination meetings, which are presided over by the CSO Chair with the participation of other Baltic Sea regional organizations. This meeting provides a more structured channel for allowing the region’s strategic partners to voice their concerns and coordinate their efforts. The CBSS currently has 17 strategic partners from all levels of the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region (ibid.). All the organizations included in this study are strategic partners of the CBSS.¹⁴

¹⁴ The strategic partners of the CBSS are B7, BASTUN, BCCA, Baltic Development Forum, Baltic Sea Forum, BSPC, BSRUN, BSSSC, BUP, Business Advisory Council, CPMR, HELCOM, IOM, NGO Forum, OECD, ScanBalt, and UBC (CBSS 2017b). “Third party participation, in the case of organizations as strategic partners, strengthens the potential of the CBSS by improving the Council’s capacity for practical action and its overall ability to advance regional co-operation and serves as a means to disseminate information about co-operation in the Baltic Sea region” (CBSS 2009). The CSO arranges annual consultations with the strategic partners (ibid.).

1.4 Research Questions

The overall aims of this study are to explore the subjective views of representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions, to examine the role of these organizations in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region, and to demonstrate to the ICORGs potential ways to improve their operations. The results of the study will reflect the subjective voices of the civil servants and politicians of the ICORGs and their Finnish and German member regions that form the empirical core of this study. My intention is not to offer a comparative analysis of the ICORGs selected for this study as such; however, at the end of this thesis, a list of generally applicable recommendations is offered with aim at helping them develop their work that is based on the subjective views of their representatives and on earlier research.

To summarize the research questions and aims of this study:

1. My first research question intends to explore whether the ICORGs could act as intermediators in the current context of the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region between and on the MLG regional, national, and EU levels. By *intermediating*, I refer to building linkages, acting as a bridge, and increasing coherence, communication, and cooperation between and on the different MLG levels.
2. The second research question is intended to find out how the ICORGs manage to deal with different forms of the MLG system as it is applied in the Baltic Sea macro-region.
3. My third research question is whether the member regions are in favour of changing the way the ICORGs work.

Based on existing research on IGOs and related debate, I make two basic assumptions regarding the MLG context of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

Assumption 1: The political and constitutional contexts and the different MLG types influence the mandates and responsibilities of the ICORG member regions and their respective countries; how the member regions act in the ICORGs; and what kind of position they allow the ICORGs to have in the MLG system. The current reform of health, social services, and regional government in Finland provides an interesting case: How could the change in the political and constitutional contexts in Finland influence the work of the ICORGs and their Finnish member regions in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region?

Assumption 2: The ICORGs recognize similar coordination problems in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region as do the IGOs such as the Arctic Council (AC), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM).

This study also contributes to the research on international cooperation organizations of regional governments (ICORGs) by examining their relevance in building the new Baltic Sea macro-region, where, in several Baltic Sea States, administrative reforms on the subnational level are currently in progress or were finalized in recent years.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The first chapter of this study sets the theoretical and contextual framework and defines the studied organizations. It is particularly important to recognize and to react to the incoherent use of the term “region” in the primary and secondary literature and materials and to establish the necessary definitions of the regional level and the studied organizations in the Baltic Sea macro-regional MLG context for the purposes of this study. This study focuses on a group of the ICORGs established in the early 1990s at the subnational level of the Baltic Sea macro-region: the Baltic Sea Commission of the Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR BSC), the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), and the Baltic Sea Seven Islands Cooperation (B7), all of which represent regional NUTS 2 or NUTS 3 levels with political mandates.

The second chapter discusses the theoretical framework that was preliminarily sketched above in Section 1.1. I will first shed light on the theoretical approaches regarding state-centric concepts, then briefly describe MLG in relation to the mainstream EU studies. Next, I move on to the theoretical approach concerning the MLG system itself, which I will use later to discuss the empirical reality within which the ICORGs are working. In the processes of European integration, MLG and (macro-)regionalism have challenged the traditional state-centric approach of intergovernmentalism. The theoretically possible, different forms of MLG are presented in the form of a typology and reveal how the examined ICORGs are positioned in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. As part of this discussion I will also briefly refer to views on how globalization as a process has

further challenged the MLG system and regionalism and hence influenced the multilevel reality wherein the ICORGs operate.

In the third chapter, I will define in more detail how the institutions of the EU, the European Commission, and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) have created the context of the MLG in the EU framework. This elaboration is needed to better understand the manifoldness and challenges of the MLG concept. The CoR has been very active in defending the rights of European municipalities and regions and in promoting the concept of the MLG in Europe. I will also discuss the arguments of the White Paper on Multi-Level Governance by the CoR (2009). At the same time as CoR has been working on strengthening the MLG practice, the European Commission (2009, 2015) has been initiating and promoting the macro-regional strategies of Europe. As a follow-up to the 2009 White Paper, the CoR has also created a tool – the Scoreboard on Multi-Level Governance – to monitor the development of MLG at the EU level on an annual basis (Committee of the Regions 2011). The CoR (2014) also initiated the Charter of Multi-Level Governance in Europe, which was adopted in April 2014 and opened in May 2014 for the signature of all EU cities and regions. It calls on public authorities at all levels of governance to use and promote MLG in their future undertakings.

In this context, it is also necessary to describe how Finnish and German regions may reflect the approach of the MLG system in their administrative practices. According to Blatter et al. (2008, 466), studying only constitutional competencies does not give a comprehensive picture about the foreign relations of subnational governments, as several activities take place outside the framework of the constitutional and nationwide rules. Regions appear to have two basic strategies to deal with the European MLG system: a “Let-us-in strategy” for promoting their rights of participation in the decision-making procedures of the European policies, and a “Let-us-alone strategy” for securing their share of competencies (Laufer and Münch 2010, 206). The use and success of these strategies cannot be decided by the regions only; this is the nature of MLG as they depend on the judicial and institutional mandates of the EU and of the respective EU Member States. The example of the German Länder shows that the choice of strategy underlies the dynamics, which also depend on the use of the initiative and efficiency of the respective Länder. The relevant differences between the EU Member States can be recognized in how the extent of competences on different levels influences the organization of the state. In unitary systems like Finland, Ireland, or Greece, the bodies on the level of national state decide on the transfer of mandates to the EU, and they are met with the consequences of it as well. By contrast, in the few

federally organised states, the situation is fundamentally different (ibid.). The current reform of health, social services, and regional government in Finland, when finalized, will change the political and constitutional context. A new three-tier system of central government, autonomous regions, and local government would be established (Valtioneuvosto 2015a). The Finnish regions could gain new possibilities for work through the ICORGs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

Marks and Hooghe (2004) divide their model MLG into two types, where Type I is based on federalism. By the comparison of MLG Types I and II, it will be possible to recognize vertically (i.e., between the levels) and horizontally (i.e., on the levels) the linkages which should be strengthened to enable a better-working MLG system on the macro-regional basis of the EU (cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016a). The Länder find themselves in a constitutional structure of a real-life MLG that is regulated through constitutional jurisdiction. In Chapter 3, I will also discuss the MLG debate with the fundamental principle of German cooperative federalism – “Einheit in Vielfalt [Unity in Diversity]” – to explain the role of German Länder in the MLG system. Laufer and Münch (2010, 16–20) explain that in the federal state, the whole unity as its parts are on one hand independent, but are on the other hand very tightly connected to each other. A federalist state system has one relevant difference from other forms of state systems: In a federal system, neither of the two levels (in Germany: Bund and Länder) has the competence to limit or expand the competences of the other levels (i.e., competence-competence). The independent rights of a party can only be changed on the grounds of mutual understanding. In the unitary states, on the other hand, the subnational level is always the playground of the central state. Furthermore, federalism differs from regionalism, where the goal is to take the needs of regions better into account in the EU independent of their concrete judicial status (ibid.). German federalism differs in several respects from the structures and processes of MLG of the EU (Benz 2010, 216). Compared to the German type of joint decision-making, the EU can be defined as a loosely coupled multilevel system that allows members to escape the deadlocks in the decision-making process by taking advantage of the flexibilities of complex institutional settings and interinstitutional processes (ibid.; cf. Benz 2000). Kull (2008, 65) studied the MLG system in the making through the EU’s Community Initiative LEADER+ in the Finnish and German contexts. There are several similarities between the theories of federalism (especially in the Federal Republic of Germany) and MLG. For example, the federalist approach and the concept of MLG both focus on characteristics such as the principle of

subsidiarity, the bottom-up principle, and – above all – the inclusion of the subnational level (ibid.).

In Chapter 4, I will evaluate three relevant policy instruments: the partnership principle, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (i.e. European Spatial Planning Observation Network/ESPON) *Handbook for Territorial Governance*; together, these instruments are used for creating, implementing, and managing the MLG system in the Baltic Sea region.¹⁵ These three policy instruments contribute to the implementation of the two key strategies – the Europe 2020 strategy and the Territorial Agenda 2020 (TA 2020) – which play a major role for the ICORGs and their member regions regarding regional development and spatial planning in the EU macro-regional context (cf. European Commission 2010; Council of the European Union 2011). The operational context has changed during the last two decades, especially in recent years through the macro-regional strategy of the EUSBSR. Working under the assumption that ICORG member regions are in favour of making changes to their work, I will discuss the applicability of all three policy instruments initiated by the European Commission to the work of the ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-region and its MLG system. The concept of the MLG was first developed to explain EU structural and cohesion policy, and with these policy instruments, the Commission tried to empower the regional level (Bauer and Börzel 2010, 257).

First, in Chapter 4, I will assess the role of the partnership principle (Bache 2004, 2012; Bauer and Börzel 2010; Hooghe and Marks 2001; Lang 2003; Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000; Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996; Piattoni 2009). Partnership principle was cofounded in 1988 by the European Commission and the national, regional and local level authorities while drafting, implementing and monitoring EU financed development programmes. Later, the partnership was enlarged to include economic and social partners as well. The MLG was applied in the EU context through the partnership principle before the establishment of macro-regional strategies. The partnership principle has been applied in the

¹⁵ Authors of the ESPON TANGO research project are Nordregio (Peter Schmitt, Lisa van Well, Stefanie Lange, Mitchell Reardon), Delft University of Technology / OTB Research (Dominic Stead, Marjolijn Spaans, Wil Zonneveld, Alexander Wandl); Politecnico di Torino / POLITO (Umberto Janin Rivolin, Francesca Governa, Marco Santangelo, Giancarlo Cotella, Nadia Caruso, Alberta De Luca); University of Newcastle upon Tyne (Simin Davoudi, Paul Cowie, Ali Madanipour, Geoff Vigar); Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Science (Ilona Pálné Kovács, Cecília Mezei, Zoltán Grünhut); University of Ljubljana Faculty of Civil and Geodetic Engineering (Alma Zavodnik Lamovšek, Nataša Pichler-Milanović, Marko Peterlin, Maja Simoneti; ESPON 2013a).

Member States and their regions in the framework of the cohesion policy, bringing elements of MLG to the management and implementation of the EU financing programmes.

Next, I will discuss the EUSBSR, which plays an important role regarding the MLG debate in the Baltic Sea macro-region (Ahner 2016; European Commission 2013, 2014a, 2015; Etzold and Gänzle 2012; Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 2016b). The latest major update to the strategy was made by the European Commission in June 2015 through revision of the Action Plan of the EUSBSR. The earlier horizontal action (HA) of the EUSBSR, “Involve,” launched several studies about MLG in the context of the EUSBSR. These studies were made by Nordregio – the Nordic Centre for Spatial Development (Lange Scherbenske and Hörnström 2013) – and by the coordinators of the HA Involve: Region Västerbotten, Region Förbundet I Kalmar Län, and Baltic Sea NGO Network (Moretti and Martinsson 2013). Moretti and Martinsson (2013) noted that the local and regional authorities have a weak role in the governance and implementation of the EUSBSR.

Finally, I will introduce one of the most current approaches of implementing MLG, which brings the cohesion policy and the territorial cohesion of the EU closer together: the ESPON *Territorial Approaches for New Governance* (TANGO) *Handbook: Towards Better Territorial Governance: A Guide for Practitioners, Policy and Decision-Makers* (ESPON 2013a). It is an extension of the more-established multilevel concept that adds explicitly territorial and knowledge-related elements to the operational MLG. Even though the *ESPON Handbook* serves at first glance as “territorial governance,” its findings and recommendations are well applicable to the practice of MLG in general. From the European territorial development point of view, the ESPON-applied research project “Territorial Approaches for New Governance” (ESPON 2013b), led by Nordregio and completed in February 2014, assessed current trends in territorial governance and developed a typology and a framework of good governance practices.¹⁶ A central goal of the project was to identify and deduce innovative and promising practices of territorial governance across Europe (ESPON 2013b). The handbook was created for practitioners, policy- and decision-makers to consider their efforts to promote good territorial

¹⁶ The ESPON 2020 programme is continuation for the ESPON 2006 and 2013 programmes: “The revised version of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme was adopted on the 26 May 2016 by the European Commission. The ESPON 2020 Programme aims at promoting and fostering a European territorial dimension in development and cooperation by providing evidence, knowledge transfer, and policy learning to public authorities and other policy actors at all levels” (ESPON 2017).

governance (ESPON 2013a, 14). From the beginning of the current EU financing period running from 2014 to 2020, a place-based territorial approach – a relevant element of the *ESPON Handbook* and MLG – has been applied in the cohesion policy (cf. Barca 2009; Bachtler 2010; ESPON 2013a).

One must remember that none of the three – MLG as a theoretical approach, the partnership principle, or the EUSBSR – are legally binding or normative in their nature as policy instruments. They refer to arrangements designed to implement EU policies and intended to be used to support and promote more efficient cooperation in the Baltic Sea macro-region. In other words, none of these three are individually able to change the current constitutional reality of different Baltic Sea States, but they may facilitate concrete actions (e.g., projects, processes, and improved multilevel cooperation), which in turn may provide examples that facilitate structural changes in various EU Member States.

In Chapter 5, I will present the Q methodological principles and procedures used in the study to approach and systematically examine the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions (Aalto 2003; Brown 1980; McKeown and Thomas 1988; Watts and Stenner 2012). Q technique and its methodology were invented and designed by William Stephenson to examine human subjectivity (Brown 1980). Q methodology is a body of theory and principles that guide the application of technique, method, and explanation (ibid. 6). It features a hybrid research process including characteristics of quantitative and qualitative analysis (Aalto 2003, 118). The purpose of the Q methodological approach in this study is to reveal the subjective views of the representatives of ICORGs and their member regions concerning the current and future role and status of these organizations in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region and to examine how these views may cluster together, expressing agreement and commonality and hence, policy convergence.

The Q methodological research was started by collecting textual research material, which was available mainly in narratives produced by the ICORGs. The gathered research material was then processed into a set of items. The Q set was designed with the help of the matrix tool with seven parameters capturing several features of the operating environment of the ICORGs: On the one hand, in terms of policy areas – the multi-level governance thematic in general, the cohesion and regional policies, and other sectoral policies expressing more detailed policy processes wherein the ICORGs are drawn – and on the other hand, different levels of aggregation – the municipal and regional levels, interregional Baltic Sea level, national level, and EU level. A large body of textual material was compiled and

arranged with the matrix tool formed in this way, finally resulting in 40 Q-set items. I chose the items representing the themes of cohesion and regional policy because this policy field presented a joint interest for all the studied ICORGs as well as for the Finnish and German member regions. Thirty-two representatives (i.e., “participants” in the Q methodological terms) of the secretariats of the ICORGs and Finnish and German member regions participated in the research interviews conducting Q sorting. Each individual participant sorted the 40 Q items into a Q-sorting distribution, whereby they were asked their subjective views on the Q set. In the quantitative part of the analysis, the results were examined with the help of factor analysis techniques. For the extraction of the factors, PQ Method software was used to provide a basis for interpreting four factors representing different points of view.

In Chapter 6, I will present the results of the factor interpretation together with clusters of consensus-like items on which the participants agreed. The factor extraction produced four factors that indicate how the participants prioritize the core tasks of the ICORGs in the MLG system: ICORGs should (i) use the EUSBSR more efficiently to promote MLG; (ii) be active in their project work; (iii) continue lobbying regional development interests, and (iv) bring forward the smart specialization of their member regions. Methodologically, the factors represent different groupings of participants who share similar views on the specific items. Their contents reflect the ICORGs’ work in a heterogeneous environment where the organizations must respond to the different expectations and needs of their member regions. The factors furthermore elucidate how the ICORGs should consider different EU policy instruments and the different constitutional frameworks of their member regions when planning their strategies and activities.

There was a rather high correlation among the extracted factors; hence, only 25 out of 40 items in the study were selected to explain the specific meanings of each of the factors. Moreover, there were several items for which participants on all factors had shared views – sometimes even a high consensus. These clusters of consensus-like items echo a shared understanding among participants on several key issues regarding the current state of development of the ICORGs. First, participants have recognized in these items not only the ICORGs’ most relevant challenges but also the areas in which their joint work could be further developed: horizontal and vertical communication; mutual cooperation and coordination in the macro-regional context; cohesion and regional policy and related financing instruments; geographical and political representativeness; and financial and human resources.

In Chapter 7, I will shed light on the current role and challenges of the ICORGs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. I will also discuss the results of the factor extraction together with clusters of consensus-like items in light of three different approaches: (i) how the subjective views of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions relate to the theoretical approach of MLG (reviewed in Chapter 2); (ii) how the current context and features of MLG are reflected in the day-to-day administrative practices in the Finnish and German member regions of the ICORGs (reviewed in Chapter 3); and (iii) how the three available policy instruments – the EUSBSR, the partnership principle, and *the ESPON TANGO Handbook* (reviewed in Chapter 4) – assist in the interpretation of results, and what kind of role they play in the future work of the ICORGs. I will pay special attention to how and on which conditions the ICORGs could use the EUSBSR process for applying the MLG system to the advantage of their member regions. The EUSBSR has become the dominating policy instrument regarding MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region. Furthermore, I note that the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions seem to have completely new expectations for the work of the ICORGs as the financial support through the cohesion and regional policy instruments for the regions has been diminishing in the Baltic Sea macro-region.

The in-depth analysis of the interviews, conducted as part of the Q-sorting experiments, was useful for explaining why respondents clustered together to form the four identified factors and how agreement among them accounted for the consensus-like items. The discerned consensus reflects on the challenges requiring changes in the working methods and attitudes of the ICORGs. Throughout the discussion in Chapter 7, I will look at the current challenges and problems facing the ICORGs as noted by the respondents – i.e., insufficient communication and coordination; weak division of labour and overlapping work; narrow geographical representativeness and political legitimacy; and limited financial and human resources. All of these are vital elements regarding the functioning and further development of the multi-level governance system. Similar challenges have been recognized in the earlier research, which, however, has mainly focused on the IGOs of the Baltic Sea macro-region. Reflecting the subjective views of the respondents based on the four extracted factors and the consensus-like items, I will discuss changes to the ICORGs' operational environment in the Baltic Sea macro-region, and how the interviewees of the Q methodological study think the ICORGs could act and possibly develop their role in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

After discussing these conclusions, in Chapter 9 to respond to the ICORGs' current challenges identified in the study, I list seven recommendations accompanied by specific tasks aimed at helping the ICORGs convert the results of this study into common action. These recommendations synthesize the empirical findings and results of this Q methodological research and the earlier research on the IGOs. I use MLG theories to support the process of drafting the recommendations.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In international relations (IR) theories, the role of states has traditionally been very strong. When studying the roles and activities of the subnational actors in the international arena, it is rather challenging to place them and non-governmental organizations as independent players within the context of IR theories (cf. Ojanen 2007; Tiiilikainen 2007). At the same time, close and regulated connection of regional communities to opinion-building and decision-making in the domestic politics of the Member States and on the European level is part of the natural characteristics of the European political processes (Ryyänen 2012, 162). This reality differentiates regional communities from the traditional conduct of international relations. Because of the lack of a single decision-making centre, new, non-hierarchical steering principles and approaches (e.g., MLG) have emerged. On the more practical level, the realization of the real MLG has always been the strategic focus of the work of the CoR, which has set it as a prerequisite for good European governance (*ibid.*).

In this chapter, I will first shed light on state-centric theoretical approaches before focusing, in Section 2.2, on the theoretical approach of the MLG, which I will use later to discuss the empirical reality within which the ICORGs are working. Through European integration, MLG and (macro)-regionalism have challenged the traditional state-centric approach of intergovernmentalism. In Section 2.3, I will introduce several forms of the MLG typology that appear in the Baltic Sea macro-regional context and play a relevant role in the work of the ICORGs. In the last section of chapter, I will introduce views on how the globalization process has further challenged MLG and regionalism which, together, reflect the reality in very particular ways on more than one level of governance for the ICORGs.

2.1 From State-Centric Intergovernmental Approach to MLG

Until the 1980s, there was a strong division in integration theory between approaches of neofunctionalism reflecting “integration as a self-reinforcing and transformative process that escapes to some degree the control of the member

states” and intergovernmentalism as “a process that remains firmly under the control of states” (Paterson, Nugent, and Egan 2009, 401). Thereafter, neofunctionalism was transformed into supranationalism, and intergovernmentalism into liberal intergovernmentalism (*ibid.*). MLG has a link to the neofunctionalists’ concept of functional spill-over,¹⁷ which “deepens and widens integration by working through interest group pressure, public opinion, elite socialization of other domestic actors, and processes” (as quoted in Moravcsik 1993, 475).

The spill-over process started as the national governments took the initial steps towards integration and swept the governments along further than they had anticipated going, as modern industrial economies consist of interconnected parts without possibility to isolate one sector from others. If Member States integrated one sector of economy, the interconnectedness would lead to a spill-over into the other sectors. (George 2004, 108–109)

The common feature for different applications of the wide and manifold approach of intergovernmentalism is the decisive position of Member States in the European integration and its system of powers (Tiiilikainen and Palosaari 2007, 46). This position does not support the empowerment of the subnational level in MLG. Liberal intergovernmentalism, however, assumes that state preferences are a result of domestic bargaining, which hypothetically means that regional IGOs are driven by the preferences of their Member States (Galbreath and Gebhard 2010, 4). These approaches claim that domestic actors affect how states define their foreign policy interests and behaviour in the international arena (Panke and Risse 2007, 93–94).

Liberal theories of international relations focusing on state-society relations propose that national interests are formed through domestic political conflict in competition for political influence: national and transnational coalitions are formed, and governments recognize new policy alternatives (Moravcsik 1993, 481;

¹⁷ “The neo-functionalists’ central prediction was that European economic integration would be self-sustaining. The theoretical basis for this prediction was the conception of ‘spillover,’ whereby initial steps toward integration trigger endogenous economic and political dynamics leading to further co-operation... Neo-functionalists identify two sorts of spillover: the first, functional spillover occurs when incomplete integration undermines the effectiveness of existing policies, both in arenas that are already integrated and in related sectors of the economy, thereby by creating pressure for deepening and widening policy coordination. Functional spillover is economic: it reflects the tightly interlinked nature of modern economies, in which government intervention in one sector engenders economic distortions elsewhere... The second political spillover occurs when the existence of supranational organizations sets in motion a self-reinforcing process of institution-building. The regulation of a modern integrated international economy requires technocratic oversight by supranational authorities” (Moravcsik 1993, 474–475).

cf. Benz 2000). “An understanding of domestic politics is a precondition to the analysis of strategic interaction among states” (ibid.). According to the intergovernmental view, national governments accept the EU polity only if their powers over domestic level are made stronger and if it helps them to attain otherwise infeasible objectives (Moravcsik 1993, 507). The efficiency of interstate bargaining is hence increased, and the autonomy of national political leaders strengthened (ibid.). Gebhard (2009, 167) notes that a liberal intergovernmentalist approach offers a rather limited view on complex political actions and developments in a transnational region like the BSR. Liberal intergovernmentalism has a strong focus on the EU polity system but has its limitations outside a strictly EU-wide context (ibid.).

George (2004, 112–113; cf. Benz 2010) suggests that in the theory debate on the relationship between MLG and “intergovernmental/supranational dichotomy,” MLG has replaced neofunctionalism as the alternative theory to intergovernmentalism. MLG unites all the main elements of the neofunctionalists’ theory, except the central emphasis on functional spill-over (ibid.). Therefore, the theoretical debate on the nature of the EU should be termed the intergovernmental MLG debate (ibid.).

The approach of the MLG can analyse the elements relevant for the decision-making processes of the EU with considerably higher diversity than neofunctionalism or institutionalism based on intergovernmentalism. MLG, therefore, provides a more detailed framework for considering the more unofficial stakeholders influencing the decision-making processes (Tiiilikainen 2007, 50).

Coming closer to the day-to-day EU politics of the Baltic Sea macro-region, one cannot avoid the state centrality and its influence on the theoretical approach of the MLG. The intergovernmental MLG debate still reflects the strong role of the states in MLG. This study will expand the theoretical focus from the state-centric intergovernmental MLG debate to the subnational level.

2.2 MLG Theoretical Approach

The term “MLG” was first used by Gary Marks, a researcher in political science, in his writings analysing the structural funds of the EU published in 1992 and 1993 (Raunio 2007, 117). Since then, some key strands of MLG research have dealt with the role and status of regions and lobbying organizations. Research on globalization and dynamics of federal states had earlier pointed out the increased

interdependence between decision-making levels and policy contents. The concept of the MLG has been criticized as too wide and descriptive, but it is still the only comprehensive theoretical framework to explain the political system of the EU (ibid. 118). A few decades after the introduction of the term *multi-level governance* by Gary Marks, through the emergence of the macro-regional strategies, the term MLG is now widely used in political discussions in the EU and its bodies, and on the macro-regional level it is used with reference to corresponding strategies. Additionally, the MLG discussion has also reached the political decision-makers on the subnational (regional) level and those in the international interregional interest organizations like the ICORGs. Decision-making processes of the Member States and the EU are bound together, and various stakeholders (e.g., private and public national and multinational networks) participate in these decision-making processes (Tiilikainen and Palosaari 2007, 26; cf. Jeffery 2000). Through the approach of the MLG, we can analyse several questions connected to political networking and increasing mutual dependency between local and regional governments as well as between the governments and NGOs (ibid.).

In the 1980s, subnational actors (e.g., regional governments) became active and formed alliances to stop the transfer of their core competencies in the EU treaty negotiations (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 90). Regional governments came to realize that if they stayed outside of the European integration, they could not influence and control international agreements even though they would be the ones to implement them. A systemic basis for MLG was created from 1988 on, (i) when an active role for the cohesion policy was added to the EU agenda; (ii) with the establishment of the CoR in the Maastricht Treaty; (iii) with the establishment of representations of regions in Brussels and (iv) with the birth of a dense network of the transnational organizations since the early 1990s (ibid.). Since then, subnational governments do not nest exclusively within states any more: “They have formed dense networks of communication and influence connecting them with supranational institutions and subnational governments in other countries” (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 89). Hooghe and Marks (2001, 3–4) see that MLG is built on three principles. First, decision-making competencies are shared among several decision-making levels. Second, that collective decision-making process involves a significant loss of control for individual national governments. Third, the political arenas are interconnected rather than nested (ibid.). Despite its reference to networks, intergovernmental relations were stressed in MLG during its early developments, and the role of subnational governments as the “third level” in EU politics was highlighted (Bache 2012, 630). Benz (2000, 22) points out that the

logic of intergovernmental relations in the EU and the dynamic interplay between the European and national structures have to be taken into consideration to better understand MLG. Bache (2012, 630) points out that in the cohesion policy and more generally in EU studies, “multi-level” increasingly refers to vertical interactions between governments working at different territorial levels, while “governance” refers to the intensification in how governments and non-governmental actors interact.

The MLG approach differs from traditional intergovernmental approaches by focusing first on systems of governance involving transnational, national, and subnational institutions and actors; focus shifts next to negotiations and networks for institutional relationships, followed by the role of organizations not formally part of the governmental framework, and finally by making no normative prejudgments about a logical order between different institutional tiers. The shift towards MLG can be considered a gradual development in which states still play a defining role in the governance. (Peters and Pierre 2004, 77)

The concept of governance in the MLG was not defined by Marks, Hooghe and Blank (1996) in detail. Subsequently, Eising (2015, 167) concludes that their analysis is related to the “governance turn” in the 1990s in EU studies and comparative politics. A “governance turn” means that “a set of explanations combining both formal and informal processes emerged that did justice to the EU’s character as a unique set of multi-level, non-hierarchical and regulatory institutions, and a hybrid mix of state and non-state actors” (Paterson, Nugent, and Egan 2009, 407). Consequently, EU studies were mainstreamed into international relations and comparative politics (ibid.). Eising (2015, 165) further elaborated the concept of the MLG by positioning it into the boundary surface on various EU politics such as liberal intergovernmentalism, federalism, poly-centric governance, network governance, and new modes of governance. It can be seen as a reactive outcome of increasing societal segmentation, which has its roots in socio-economic dynamics and institutional evolution (ibid, 167). Furthermore, globalization has altered the boundaries between domestic and international, which calls for a much wider analytical toolkit (Paterson, Nugent, and Egan 2009, 407). From state’s point of view, more networked governance, and an emergence of new European agencies and institutions, is needed. The governance approach is multilayered, including at least two central elements: (i) a formation of the EU as an example of MLG, and (ii) the regulatory approach characterizing the EU as a regulatory power responsible for the execution of various policies (ibid.).

MLG research has played an innovative role in three subfields of political science: European integration, comparative federalism, and international relations (Zürn, Wälti, and Enderlein 2010, 5). MLG as a theory allows the creation of falsifiable hypotheses and test propositions that can be used to study policymaking and its outcomes in a multilevel context. Alternatively, MLG can be seen as a device concept that can be used to examine new polities and ultimately to develop a full-scale theory (ibid.). Research on governance of the EU MLG has identified several governance modes: hierarchy, networks, competition and negotiations (Eising 2015, 180). Hereby according to Blatter (2004, 531), political institutions have a solely instrumental approach neglecting the constitutional role institutions for political actors and communities have. The MLG theory provided “a conceptual leverage,” connecting EU studies to wider social science developments (Eising 2015, 167). In MLG theories, emphasis is on the interactions between institutional structures, interaction strategies, and policy outcomes, and can be described in far more general than unique theories of European integration (Eising 2015, 180).

MLG’s typology of general-purpose and functional jurisdictions highlights the structural ensemble of public institutions and actors involved in governance arrangements. Its emphasis on the territorial dimension of governance arrangements distinguishes it from ‘polycentric governance’ that describe several formally independent centres of decision-making performing important governance functions in the same area; from ‘network governance’ that stress the role of private actors and the interactions among private and public actors in these arrangements; and from the study of ‘new modes of governance’ that investigate the political shift away from the ‘parliament-executive nexus’ and the growing resource to non-hierarchical policy instruments such as self-regulation, benchmarking and private dispute resolution. (Eising 2015, 170)

At this point it has to be noted that in the MLG research examining the EU and its institutions, in addition to the three-layered approach, MLG may even refer most narrowly to the two-level collaboration between the institutions of the EU and national-level bodies only; in this collaboration model, the subnational level is totally absent (see e.g., Egeberg and Trondal 2016; Jachtenfuchs 2010; Scharpf 2006, 2010).

Stephenson (2013) has identified five main foci of MLG research during the last couple of decades, keeping in mind that they are interconnected and overlapping in the literature:

- (i) original conceptions from 1993 onwards: legal jurisdictions of authority and efficiency, Europeanization and regionalization;
- (ii) functional conceptions from

1997 onwards: problem-solving, coordination and learning; policy/country studies and implementation studies; (iii) combined conceptions from 2001 onwards: new institutionalism and principal-agent theory; new modes of governance; (iv) normative conceptions from 2003 onwards: legitimacy, democracy, accountability, and identity politics; and (v) comparative conceptions from 2007 onwards: global governance and international institutions as well as EU and regionalism. (Stephenson 2013)

In the extensive MLG literature it is, however, difficult to set exact time periods for the main conceptions of the term, as many scholars have consistently used MLG for the same purposes and because considerable disunity prevails in the existing debate and exchange (ibid. 819). According to Stephenson, MLG is no longer a highly isolated, three-layered, Eurocentric policymaking system without interaction with external actors in global governance (ibid. 829).

This study finds itself interconnected among the main MLG research foci described by Stephenson. The references to MLG in this study are, broadly speaking, in line with those main conceptions, mostly relating to three key ideas. The first is the (i) original conception of the MLG looking to the legal jurisdictions of authority and efficiency, as the ICORGs represent elected or nominated regional governments (MLG typology created by Hooghe and Marks, cf. Hooghe and Marks 2001, 2003, 2010; Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996); the second are (ii) functional conceptions of the policy, country, and (in this study) macro-region, and implementation studies that e.g., explore MLG through three different policy instruments (partnership principle, EUSBSR, and territorial cohesion), and the third are co-ordination and learning (capacity building measures through the EUSBSR, cf. Bache 2010, 2012; Egan 2009; Gänzle 2017; Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 2016b; Milio 2010). This study also refers briefly to regionalization and the (iii) comparative approach to global governance, taking into account that the ICORGs and their member regions in the Baltic Sea macro-region are targets of the globalization process as well (reviewed in Section 2.4).

MLG is not necessarily seen as an alternative political process within states and between domestic and supranational actors, but rather as a regulatory framework complementing intergovernmental relations (Peters and Pierre 2004, 76). The concept of the MLG refers to a particular kind of vertical and horizontal relationship between several institutional levels. “Actors, arenas, and institutions are not ordered hierarchically in MLG; instead, they form a more complex and contextually defined relationship” (Peters and Pierre 2004, 79; cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 13–14). Gebhard (2009, 170) notes that “MLG focus on polity (i.e.,

institutional set-up) at different levels, or rather across various political action layers, and meets an important specificity of the Baltic Sea case.”

The oft-cited typology of Marks and Hooghe (2004, cf. Hooghe and Marks 2010) divides MLG into two types. Type I is based on federalism, which is concerned with power sharing among governments operating system-wide, at just a few levels and with a durable architecture (Marks and Hooghe 2004, 17). Type I is characterized by a limited number of jurisdictional levels, and it is common to recognize a local, an intermediate, and a central level, although the number of levels varies (*ibid.* 18). The system-wide and durable architecture in Type I has a structured jurisdiction with an elected legislature, an executive, and a court system (*ibid.* 19). If a change in the structure occurs, it happens by reallocating policy functions across existing levels of governance (*ibid.*). Type I also has general-purpose jurisdictions where decision-making powers are dispersed across jurisdictions and are bundled in small packages (e.g., as in Europe) in the case of local governments with a wide range of functions (Hooghe and Marks 2010, 18). Finally, Type I has non-intersecting memberships that appear usually in the territorial dimension (e.g., regional and local governments in national states). Memberships of jurisdictions at lower levels are fully encompassed in those of higher levels (*ibid.*). In Europe, Type I MLG has progressed by the simultaneous empowerment of supranational and subnational institutions which follow the logic of Type I – not Type II (Marks and Hooghe 2004, 23; Hooghe and Marks 2010, 22). The EU is an exception as a Type I jurisdiction beyond the national state in the international arena (*ibid.*).

In Type I governance, every citizen is located in a Russian Doll set of nested jurisdictions, where there is one and only one relevant jurisdiction at any particular territorial scale. Territorial jurisdictions are intended to be, and usually are, stable for periods of several decades or more, though the allocation of policy competencies across jurisdictional levels is flexible. (Hooghe and Marks 2003, 236)

Type II MLG is an alternative form of MLG in which jurisdictions operate at numerous levels. Type II MLGs are task-specific rather than general-purpose, and they fulfil distinct functions; they have flexible designs to respond to changing citizen preferences and functional requirements, and they have intersecting memberships (Hooghe and Marks 2010, 20–21). Multiple independent jurisdictions fulfil distinct functions with intersecting memberships where jurisdictions partly overlap (Marks and Hooghe 2004, 20).

Piattoni (2016, 87; cf. Piattoni 2009) has recognized a theoretical core in MLG which explains many policy developments in the EU, among them mobilization

and institutional developments. Most of the EU dynamics can be situated into a three-dimensional analytical space challenging the sovereign states by international cooperation, subnational articulation, and transnational mobilization.

This is a space for political mobilization (i.e., politics) occasioned by policymaking (i.e., policy), which obviously has repercussions on the institutional set-up of the EU and the Member States (i.e., polity). In this sense, MLG theory bypasses the controversy between intergovernmentalists and neofunctionalists as to whether the initiators of integration are necessarily national governments or societal forces. They can be both, but – once started – the process tends to activate other actors as well as other levels of government which, depending on the nature of the arrangements that are thus created, provoke in turn reactions and counter-mobilization dynamics. (Piattoni 2016, 87)

Even if MLG has been understood and its conceptions applied among scholars in quite different ways with no single broadly accepted definition, scholars emphasizing ‘levels’ and Type I relations (i.e., generally, those who are more state-focused) are distinguished from those who are more interested in the ‘governance as networks’ and Type II dimensions (Bache 2012, 634).

The intention in this study is to explore the ICORGs and their member regions – i.e., the subnational and public actors in the Baltic Sea macro-regional context – and to examine how the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions envision their cooperation organizations’ role and status in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. Making a contribution to the mainstream of MLG research or to individual theories is not the primary goal of this thesis. The focus is rather on the subjective voices of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions. The MLG theories help to interpret the empirical findings of the study from the point of view of these regional actors and to define the role of the ICORGs in the macro-regional MLG system in the Baltic Sea region.

2.3 Forms of MLG in the Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Context

MLG Types I and II introduced in the MLG typology by Hooghe and Marks (2004, 2010) are highly relevant in the analysis of the work of the ICORGs in the European and Baltic Sea macro-regional context and the related MLG system. The EU and the Federal Republic of Germany are examples of Type I MLGs (see Table 1). Type I governance can be found in conventional territorial government up to the national level (Hooghe and Marks 2010, 22). Characteristic for the Type I governance are general-purpose jurisdictions, typically territorial, non-intersecting

memberships in national states and regional and local governments, a limited number of jurisdictional levels, and system-wide and durable architecture (ibid. 18–19). These two MLG types do not exclude each other but rather coexist in modern institutional set-ups: “formal, general purpose institutions of government operate alongside, and create, special-purpose bodies designed to carry out particular tasks” (Bache 2012, 631).

Table 1. Types, characteristics, and contrasting virtues of multi-level governance

Type	Characteristics	Contrasting virtues	Examples
Type I	General-purpose jurisdictions		Type I: Decentralized national states, federal states (e.g., the Federal Republic of Germany), the EU
	Non-intersecting memberships	Intrinsic community	
	Jurisdictions organized on a limited number of levels	Voice	Mixing Type I and II: EU macro-regions (EUSBSR)
	System-wide architecture	Conflict articulation	Type II in the EU: Governance systems for different policies (cohesion and regional policy, partnership principle, territorial governance), independent European agencies, variable territorial jurisdictions
Type II	Task-specific jurisdictions		Type II at the national/international frontier: national governmental organizations (e.g., WTO, IMF and World Bank); cross-border regions (e.g., problem-driven jurisdictions, task forces)
	Intersecting memberships	Extrinsic community	
	No limit to the number of jurisdictional levels	Exit	
	Flexible design	Conflict avoidance	Type II at the local level: associations for specialized services

Note. Compiled by the author based on Hooghe and Marks 2010; Piattoni 2016.

The European Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the European Parliament are the Type I main operators in the EU (Bache 2012, 631). A vast array of Type II bodies includes agencies, partnerships, and quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations (ibid.). In their classification of the EU and the Federal Republic of Germany under Type I governance, Hooghe and Marks (2004, 2010)

see the EU as a major exception beyond the national state in the international arena: “It bundles together policy competences which in other parts of the world are handled by numerous, overlapping and functionally specific jurisdictions” (Hooghe and Marks 2010, 23). The European MLG system though differs from federal states (Jachtenfuchs 2010, 204). Even if the European institutions and territory are uniform in structure, they are internally more variable than most federal states (ibid.). The EU serves with relevant functional subsystems with a different territorial scope along with different polities and decision-making rules (ibid.). Examples of these subsystems are, e.g., Eurozone, with a common currency, and the Schengen system consisting of Member States without border controls among themselves (ibid. 205). Furthermore, instead of a joint decision-making system characteristic of German co-operative federalism, the EU has a loosely coupled multilevel system (Benz 2010, 216). The flexibilities of complex institutional settings and processes between the institutions helps them avoid acute deadlocks (ibid.; see Section 3.3).¹⁸

In the EU context (reviewed in Section 3.1), MLG means a coordinated action by the EU, the Member States, and the regional and local authorities according to the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, and partnership. Between these levels, there is operational and institutional cooperation in setting and implementing EU policies (Committee of the Regions 2014, 3; cf. 2009). In the EU, the MLG system ensures that the principles of openness, participation, responsibility, effectiveness, and coherence are implemented, maintained, and enhanced (cf. European Commission 2001, 7–8). The principle of subsidiarity indicates responsibilities at all MLG levels and prevents decisions from being restricted to a single tier of government, thus guaranteeing that policies are conceived and applied at the most appropriate levels (Committee of the Regions 2009, 13).

“Federalism can be defined by the relationship between central government, and a tier of non-intersecting subnational governments, where the unit of analysis is the individual government, rather than the individual policy” (Hooghe and Marks 2003, 236). It is also an organizational principle for a divided unity where

¹⁸ “The joint-decision mode’ combines aspects of intergovernmental negotiations and supranational centralization. It applies in most policy areas of the ‘first pillar’ that includes the market-making as well as the market correcting competencies. ... If member governments are united in their opposition to Commission initiatives or ... national interests are strongly divergent, European solutions will be blocked. The role of supranational actors will be significant, if constellations where national interests diverge but are not highly salient ... or where member governments disagree, but still would prefer a common solution over the status quo” (Scharpf 2010, 73; cf. Scharpf 2006).

equivalent and independent parts of a constitution have joined together to make a comprehensive political unity (Laufer and Münch 2010, 16). German federalism (previewed in Section 3.3) differs in several areas from the structures and processes of MLG in the EU (Benz 2010, 216). The German model of joint decision-making represents a simple form of the MLG, with two levels of Federal and Länder governments in vertical and horizontal interaction compared to governance in a regionalized EU (Benz 2000, 23).

Piattoni (2016, 90) argues that “MLG I and II are ideal types that are never actually observed in their pure forms.” The importance of the macro-regional strategies lies in their ability to mobilize institutional and non-institutional actors towards the policy goals of the EU and to recombine the institutional structures to manage and implement these policies in new and flexible ways (ibid.). Type II MLG can be found in legal frameworks determined by Type I jurisdictions resulting in numerous, relatively self-contained, functionally differentiated Type II jurisdictions (Marks and Hooghe 2004, 24).

EU macro-regions like the EUSBSR have features of both Type I and Type II MLG. They mix these ideal institutional constellations in new ways: hierarchically nested general-purpose political institutions (Type I MLG) and overlapping single-purpose functional jurisdictions (Type II MLG) at both extremes. Their governance structures can be described as multilevel because they encompass territorial institutions at different jurisdictional levels and functional non-governmental organizations. (Piattoni 2016, 89; cf. Hooghe and Marks 2010, 23)

Hooghe and Marks (2010, 23) note that some features of EU architecture are consistent with Type II governance, like distinct governance systems or pillars for different policies. With this logic, the governance structure of the partnership principle for cohesion policy has features of Type II. The approach for territorial governance has only unofficial policy status in the EU, but it owns features of Type II as well.

Later in this study, I discuss three policy instruments (reviewed in Chapter 4): the partnership principle, the EUSBSR, and *the ESPON TANGO Handbook* on territorial governance; all of these are built on the MLG approach supporting Type I MLG governance but have features of Type II governance. The partnership principle (reviewed in Section 4.1) implies close cooperation between public authorities at national, regional, and local levels in the member states and with the private and other sectors in close connection with the MLG approach and the subsidiarity and proportionality principles (European Commission 2014b, 2). The macro-regional EUSBSR (reviewed in Section 4.2) covers eight EU Member States

of Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Germany (i.e., three German Länder of Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Schleswig-Holstein) and cooperates with two partner countries (i.e., the Russian Federation and Norway) (European Commission 2013, 2014a, 2015). MLG is an overall guiding principle of the EUSBSR with an integrated methodology for all implementing stakeholders (European Commission 2015, 152). *The ESPON TANGO Handbook* (reviewed in Section 4.3) considers “territorial governance” to be an extension of the more established multilevel concept by adding explicitly territorial and knowledge-related elements to the operational MLG (ESPON 2013a).

Already prior to the emergence of macro-regional strategies, the approach of the Baltic Sea regionalism recognized “the need for new organizational patterns of cooperation to meet the challenges of globalization and the opportunities for enhanced European cooperation which were recognized by states and regions in the Baltic Sea region” (Scott 2002, 148). The new macro-regional strategies of the EU, such as the EUSBSR, have become the framework of the actions for the stakeholders on different levels regarding the policies of the EU. Schymik (2011, 5) defines the macro-region “as a greater region within the EU defined in terms of territory and function, in which a group of Member States co-operate to achieve specific strategic goals.” As transnational-level cooperation, a macro-region exceeds the conventional framework of subnational and binational regional policy in an innovative way (ibid.). On the more practical level, territorial cohesion, spatial planning, and cross-border cooperation are still highly relevant parts of macro-regional cooperation that respond to the challenges of the globalization. Here, MLG shows its elementary role in the horizontal and vertical policy integration with a territorial dimension (Böhme et al. 2011, 25).

Before moving to the context of the study and to the features of the MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region, I will shed light on the globalization process and regionalism and on their relationships to MLG.

2.4 Globalization Challenges MLG and Regionalism

Rosenau (2004, 34; cf. 2007) places MLG into a wider perspective, considering globalization when analysing the “framegration.”¹⁹ He argues that to understand

¹⁹ Rosenau uses the term “framegration” to define “swelling demands for governance derives from extent to which the emergent epoch has unleashed simultaneous, diverse, and contradictory forces

global life currently is “to view it through fragmentative lenses, to treat every circumstance and every process as an instance of fragmentative dynamics” (Rosenau 2007, 136). According to Rosenau (2004, 39), MLG is not fully able to analyse the complexity of the current political world. Using the example of the EU, the definition of the concept of the MLG refers only to governmental levels (Rosenau 2004, 31–32). The ruling systems of governments (i.e., local, regional, national, and international) can be seen as formal structures addressing issues that confront the people. Governance, compared to MLG, is a broader concept that refers to any collectivity – private or public – and employs informal and formal steering mechanisms. World affairs can be conceptualized as a bifurcated system: the worlds of world politics (ibid. 32). This bifurcated system consists of (i) a system of states and their national governments, and (ii) a multicentric system of diverse types of other collectivities that have emerged as competitive sources of authority cooperating, and interacting with the state-centric system. The interstate system will continue to be central to world affairs for decades and centuries to come. In the growing fragmentative dynamics and neoliberal economic policies stressing the centrality of markets, states are losing their control of the flows of goods, money, pollution, people, ideas, drugs, and crime crossing their state borders (ibid. 35).

Rosenau divides transnational governance into six general forms which involve governance and government on a transnational or global scale: unidirectional (vertical or horizontal) top-down governance, bottom-up governance, market governance, multidirectional (vertical and horizontal) network governance, side-by-side governance, and Mobius-web governance. He further specifies eight types of collectivities²⁰ that crowd the global stage (2004, 41–42). ICORGs could be defined to act in the network governance model which, according to Rosenau, “involves bargaining among equal (i.e., non-hierarchical), formally organized collectivities, between governments, within business alliances, or between NGOs and INGOs; this bargaining ensues when the impetus for governance stems from common concerns about particular problems” (ibid.).

that can be summarized in the clash between globalization, centralization, and integration on the other hand and localization, decentralization, and fragmentation on the other in order to capture these intricate links between the polarities” (Rosenau 2004, 34).

²⁰ Rosenau (2004, 41–42) defines eight types of collectivities at the global stage: (i) public subnational and national governments, (ii) for-profit private transnational corporations (TNC), (iii) intergovernmental organizations (IGO), (iv) subnational and national not-for-profit non-governmental organizations (NGO), (v) international or transnational not-for-profit NGOs, (vi) markets that have both formal and informal structures, (vii) elite groups, and (viii) mass publics.

The ideal structural environment for ICORGs, however, would certainly be the Mobius-web model:

In this model, the coordination of actions derives from levels of aggregation among TNCs, INGOs, NGOs, IGOs, states, elites, and mass publics. These actors constitute a hybrid structure in which the dynamics of governance are so overlapping among several levels that they form a web-like process. (Rosenau 2004, 43)

National and subnational actors may find themselves in any or all of the six forms, but they are interdependent, with issues and developments beyond their national or subnational jurisdictions (*ibid.*). Typologies are only aids to organize thoughts, and they do not resolve the problems of legitimacy, accountability, transparency, and effectiveness that loom large in the conduct of MLG (*ibid.* 46). The Mobius-web governance model is able to cope with deepening complexity and might become the dominant mode through which rule systems generate future compliance, offering creative solutions to both local and global problems (*ibid.* 47).

Cross-border cooperation is one of the dimensions for individual states or regions to manage with challenges of the globalization (Piattoni 2016, 79). In the globalization process, national frontiers lose their importance, and people have to act beyond political borders and cultural barriers (*ibid.*). Through the processes of globalization and European integration, new forms of functional areas emerge at different territorial levels, thus increasing mutual dependency among various regions (Böhme et al. 2011, 26).

Moving from the global perspective to the regional context, globalization may cause notable effects at EU, national, regional, and local levels (Council of the European Union 2011, 4). Territorial characteristics play, therefore, an important role for regions dealing with and recovering from external shocks. The place-based approach to policymaking contributes to territorial cohesion, and through the principles of horizontal coordination, evidence-informed policymaking, and integrated functional area development, this approach implements the subsidiarity principle (*ibid.*). Böhme et al. (2011, 17) express their concern that even if territorial dimension for growth is valued among Member States, there have not been serious attempts to link the territorial development in the EU Member States (i.e., European Spatial Development Perspective, TA 2020) and EU cohesion policy (i.e., Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies, Europe 2020) more efficiently.

Regional development and spatial planning belong to the core tasks of the regional authorities on the subnational level.

The EU has contributed to the macro-regional coherence through formal policies, *the acquis communautaire*, informal networks, and visionary spatial notions. Since the 1990s, the EU and its Member States have emphasized spatial metaphors such as networks, regions, nodes, links, gateways etc., which have created a sense of strategically interlinking communities. (Scott 2002, 140)

The goal of regionalism is for the EU to take into better account the needs of regions independent of their concrete judicial statuses (Laufer and Münch 2010, 20). In the Baltic Sea context, “regionalism is characterized by a highly symbolic and visionary cooperation discourse” (Scott 2002, 145). Scott defines regionalism by five organizing principles of transnational cooperation:

(i) the creation of intergovernmental institutions, (ii) interorganizational forums and NGO networks organized around specific issues, (iii) the existence of EU policies and programs that encourage interstate cooperation at all levels and provide project incentives, (iv) global regional development concepts, and (v) local projects and initiatives. (Scott 2002, 142)

As an example, the INTERREG Community was launched in 1990 to support European border regions in challenges related to their specific geopolitical positions (Gebhard 2009, 98). The first generation of INTERREG programmes strived for cross-border cooperation (e.g., between the NUTS 3 regions on both sides of a common border) (Böhme et al. 2011, 15). Beginning with the fourth generation of INTERREG programmes, which launched in 2007, INTERREG became a part of the mainstream cohesion policy of the EU under the heading “European Territorial Cooperation” (ibid.).²¹ In wide transnational areas, the interdependencies do not necessarily emerge between neighbouring regions (ibid. 26).

Already in the early 1990s, the European Commission had published the Europe 2000 and Europe 2000+ communications (Böhme et al. 2011, 15). In 1991, the spatial planning ministers started to develop the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), which was launched in 1999 (Gebhard 2009,

²¹ During the current EU financing period the European Territorial Cooperation consists of four types of programmes in the Baltic Sea macro-region: Interreg cross-border V-A programmes (South Baltic: Poland-Denmark-Germany-Lithuania-Sweden; Germany-Denmark; Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak: Sweden-Denmark-Norway; Estonia-Latvia; Central Baltic: Finland-Estonia-Latvia-Sweden; Botnia-Atlantica: Sweden-Finland-Norway; Nord: Sweden-Finland-Norway; Northern Periphery and Arctic; Germany/Mecklenburg-Vorpommern-Brandenburg-Poland; Latvia-Lithuania; Lithuania-Poland; Sweden-Norway), transnational V-B programme (Interreg Baltic Sea Region), interregional V-C (Interreg Europe Programme), and Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) cross-border collaboration programmes with the partner countries (Belarus and the Russian Federation) (European Commission 2016c).

97). It symbolized the official commitment of the EU to territorial cohesion enhancing the vision of horizontally integrated geographic territories (ibid. 98). “The European planning cooperation gives strength to the regional level and to territorial perspectives and it challenges the sector divide between planning and development” (as quoted ibid.). In the Baltic Sea region, Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea 2010 (VASAB 2010) was adopted in 1994 (Böhme et al. 2011, 15). Currently VASAB, together with the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), coordinate the EUSBSR horizontal action (HA) “Spatial Planning – Encouraging the use of maritime and land-based spatial planning in all Member States around the Baltic Sea and develop a common approach for cross-border cooperation” (European Commission 2015, 164–165). In October 2009 the ministers responsible for spatial planning and development of Baltic Sea States adopted the VASAB long-term perspective (LTP) for the territorial development of the Baltic Sea region, which supports actions of the HA Spatial Planning. The LTP deals with issues which require transnational solutions (i.e., urban networking and urban-rural cooperation, improving external and internal accessibility, and maritime spatial planning). It also aims to diminish territorial disparities and socioeconomic divides in the Baltic Sea region (ibid.).

The ESPON (European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion) was established in 2002 by the EU Commission and Member States to strengthen the ESDP application process with a knowledge base and a platform for research (Böhme et al. 2011, 15). In the EU context, the objective of the TA 2020 with its action-oriented policy approach is to strengthen the strategic dimension of the territorial cohesion and integrate it with different policies on all MLG levels (ibid. 13).

Recently, scholarly responses to these trends include studies on territorial governance in European policy (Stead 2013, 2014) and macro-regional strategies from the perspective of territorial cooperation (Sielker 2016a). Macro-regions support effective policymaking and spatial development with a strong stakeholder-based nature (ibid. 2009). This enables the creation of transnational place-based strategies for cooperation areas (ibid.). In the field of political geography and planning studies, Stead (2013, 2014, 1380) has recognized three features that separate territorial governance from ‘plain’ governance: (i) territorial development management is in focus, (ii) territorial impacts are monitored and assessed, and (iii) different policy questions or problems are dealt with by delineating boundaries. She argues that these features are “core values” of planning, and closely links spatial development, its management, and spatial planning practice (ibid.).

This chapter has shed some light on several fields of research conducted in different disciplines on the evolving MLG system. This body of research has grown tremendously during the past few decades and features highly different research interests. The theoretical dichotomy between intergovernmentalist and MLG approaches to EU policymaking described in the beginning of this chapter remains, however, helpful for analytical purposes, supporting the analysis of the empirical findings of this study. In the next chapter I will take a step towards the EU policy context around MLG and look into how the EU and its decision-making bodies have promoted MLG, and in what kind of MLG context the ICORGs and their Finnish and German member regions are working within on the subnational level. I will also look into the German variant of federalism in more detail in Section 3.3.

3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY AND FORMS OF THE MLG IN THE BALTIC SEA MACRO-REGION

MLG has been enhanced by the EU and its decision-making bodies in various ways. First, I will shed more light onto the goals set by the CoR for MLG and explain how this institution would like to see MLG implemented in Europe. In June 2009, the CoR adopted the White Paper on Multi-Level Governance, which – after public consultation – was further developed into the Charter for the Multi-Level Governance in Europe in April 2014. It is most relevant to the effectiveness of the decisions and laws of the EU, that the views of the implementing levels are considered when regulations and laws are drafted and decided (Ryynänen 2012, 154). The European Commission stated its approach to MLG in 2001 in its White Paper on Governance.²² The European Commission specified its position to MLG as the first new macro-regional strategies were created. The European Commission report concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies will be dealt in more in detail in Section 4.2, when the policy instruments for implementing MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region are presented.

Second, in the following sections (3.2 and 3.3), I will reflect on the constitutional realities of the Finnish and German regions, and evaluate how they are able to work with MLG through their law-based mandates. As readers will note, the surrounding context for the ICORGs to work with the concept of the MLG is challenging, as their member regions are committed directly or indirectly to MLG in multiple ways, and the constitutional frameworks define and limit the space for actions.

²² European Commission White Papers are documents containing proposals for EU action in a specific area (EUR-LEX 2016). “In some cases, they follow on from a Green Paper published to launch a consultation process at European level. The purpose of a White Paper is to launch a debate with the public, stakeholders, the European Parliament, and the Council in order to facilitate a political consensus. The Commission's 1985 White Paper on the completion of the internal market is an example of a blueprint that was adopted by the Council and resulted in the adoption of wide-ranging legislation in this field” (ibid.).

3.1 The MLG Context in the EU and the Subnational Level

The need to bring the different views on regions and municipalities into the decision-making procedures of the EU was the driver for the establishment of the CoR in 1992 by the Treaty of Maastricht (Ryynänen 2012, 154). The statements of the CoR underline these views of the regional and the local governments for the European Commission, Council of the European Union, and European Parliament (ibid.). The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe – another institution which is important for the regions and self-rule of the municipalities – has adopted two important documents: European Charter of Local Self-Government and European Charter of Regional Democracy, recommendation 240/2008 (ibid. 155). The latter document has political importance as it stresses the self-government of regions and their sufficient mandates and resources as core elements for realization of democracy in each country, thus confirming regionalism, subsidiarity, and federalism as European development tendencies (ibid.). Regional democracy is, from this perspective, an important element of the constitutional “checks and balances” system, which can be recognized not only in federal state structures but also cumulatively in the MLG system of the EU, national states, regions, and municipalities (ibid. 201).

MLG is defined in the new charter for MLG (Committee of the Regions 2014, 3; cf. 2009) as “a coordinated action by the EU, the Member States and regional and local authorities according to the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and partnership, taking the form of operational and institutional cooperation in the drawing up and implementation of the EU’s policies.” The White Paper states that MLG serves the fundamental political objectives of the EU: a Europe of citizens, economic growth and social progress, sustainable development, and the role of the EU as a global player (Committee of the Regions 2009, 9). MLG is a dynamic process with a horizontal and vertical dimension, which does not dilute political responsibility, but helps with appropriate mechanisms and instruments to increase joint ownership and implementation (ibid. 12). As the new charter is not legally binding, the CoR is only able to ask the signatories of the charter to commit to explain and promote the principle of the MLG, commit the signatories to make MLG a reality in day-to-day policymaking and delivery, and respect the fundamental processes that shape the MLG practices in Europe (cf. Committee of the Regions 2014, 1).

The White Paper on Governance lists five principles underpinning good governance: openness, participation, responsibility, effectiveness, and coherence

(European Commission 2001, 7–8). The MLG system ensures that these principles are implemented, maintained, and enhanced (*ibid.* 29). MLG promotes the implementation of the European and national goals on the local and regional levels, and translates the strategic priorities of the local and regional governments into the strategies of the EU level (Böhme et al. 2011, 15). The treaties allow the regions, in accordance with their respective national constitutional structures, to participate in the activities of the Council of the EU (Committee of the Regions 2009, 16). The representatives of the regions concerned can be members in Member State delegations, to be authorised to lead the national delegation, and, where necessary, to assume the presidency of the Council (*ibid.*). This is more obvious in the federal state systems where, for example, one of the German Länder could have this position.

The subsidiarity principle proposes that a new, more participatory decision-making process is needed – especially on regional and local decision-making levels – in order that citizens understand contents and consequences of the decisions, and so the local and regional levels have the freedom to choose forms of implementation of the decisions of the EU (Ryynänen 2012, 161–162). According to this premise, the German Länder had already requested during the negotiations of the Treaty of Maastricht that the subsidiarity principle be included in the Treaty as the establishment for the use of competencies (Laufer and Münch 2010, 224). Now, the European Commission has to prove in every initiative of law that the European Commission will better regulate the material concerned by the law initiative than will Member States or regions (*ibid.*). The EU Member States recognized for the first time in the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon that they must take in account the needs of the regions (including Länder) and municipalities in the European policies, and that the most important improvement is recognizing the principle of subsidiarity control (*ibid.* 225–227). As a consultative body, the CoR lacks real political authority, and is only able to be reactive by taking positions and urging the local and regional levels to act to defend the subsidiarity (Bauer and Börzel 2010, 257).

The scoreboard of the CoR has also observed, since 2011, how EU institutions have accepted the MLG principles at the early stage of the policymaking cycle within a clearly defined timeframe (Committee of the Regions 2013, 4). As a result, the CoR presented concrete practices with recommendations on how to bridge gaps and how to increase the potential of a MLG culture throughout the EU policy cycle. The scoreboard collects best practices in six categories: three categories of procedures (information and consultation; stakeholders' involvement; and

responsiveness) and three categories of content (territorial/integrated approach; smart regulation mechanisms; and innovative instruments for implementation) (ibid. 4). The scoreboard recognized, as one of the 21 best practices, the allocation of administrative resources by local and regional authorities (LRAs) efficiently to contribute to open consultations (ibid.). An example of this is the LRA participation and support of territorial associations and networks like the Pan-European subnational territorial organizations (ibid. 7).

3.2 Finnish Regions and MLG

Finland is a unitary state organised on a decentralised basis. Finland has three levels of governance: central, regional, and local (Committee of the Regions 2016b). Local self-government dates back to 1860s legislation, which remains the basis for the current system. With the independence of Finland from Russia in 1917, new legislation was adopted and introduced universal direct suffrage at the municipal level. In addition, the Aland Islands have been granted a special autonomous status since 1921. Finland comprises 19 regions – 18 of them on the mainland plus the Aland Islands, which are autonomous – and 313 municipalities (ibid.). The Finnish regional system was reshaped in 1994 as part of the national strategy to fulfil the EU's regional system (Paasi 2009, 143; cf. Bachtler 2010, 58).

Finland's Regional Councils (in Finnish: “Maakunnan liitto”) are statutory joint municipal authorities operating according to the principles of local self-government (FINLEX 1999, 2014). The Councils operate as regional development and planning authorities and look after regional interests. Planning for a region includes a strategic regional plan, a regional land use plan and a regional development programme and its implementation plan (ibid.). The international role of the Regional Councils has expanded accordingly, and international relations and interregional cooperation between the actors have become part of day-to-day routines (Paasi 2009, 143). The Councils are involved in developing the EU's regional policy, drafting, and also partly implementing the operational programmes of EU structural funds for their own regions (ibid.). Many Regional Councils also have their own permanent representation in Brussels in addition to the representation of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA; in Finnish: “Kuntaliitto”) (AFLRA 2015a).

A strategic regional plan forms the basis for regional development (AFLRA 2015b). Based on the municipal democracy, these strategic documents address

common regional needs and promote the material and cultural well-being of their regions. Regional Councils fulfil numerous other tasks besides statutory responsibilities. The delegates to the decision-making bodies of the Regional Councils are appointed by the member municipalities based on the outcomes of local municipal elections. The emphasis of the Regional Councils' work is on both long-term planning and fast reaction to the current issues. Besides the decision-making, the Councils also implement and coordinate numerous national and EU projects (ibid.).

In Finland, regional development is a shared responsibility between the municipalities and the state (FINLEX 2014). Regional Councils, as the authorities for regional development, are responsible for the tasks regarding the regional development in each region. Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and for the Environment (in Finnish: "Elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskus – ELY-keskus")²³ promote regional development by taking care of the implementation and development of law-based tasks in their respective regions. Regional Councils are responsible for the strategy of regional development; they promote cooperation between municipalities and regions and take care of international affairs and contacts through their tasks (ibid.).

So far, MLG in the Finnish administrative system is rather undeveloped compared to German federalism. Regarding the legislative process, the information is provided to the local and regional authorities to the extent it is published on the Parliament's website (Committee of the Regions 2016a). The AFLRA may participate during the legislation preparation in committees and working groups set up by the central government to enable the local and regional representatives to have an influence on the drafting of the legislation. In any action regarding regional development, the Regional Councils must be consulted by the central authorities. Municipalities may set up joint authorities – independent legal public entities governed by municipal legislation – to perform specific functions on a permanent basis. In addition to the Local Government Act, the Ministry of Finance supervises

²³ The Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment are responsible for the regional implementation and development tasks of the central government (Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment 2017). "Finland has a total of 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment, which are tasked with promoting regional competitiveness, well-being and sustainable development and curbing climate change. They have three areas of responsibility, which they can also manage on each other's behalf: business and industry, labour force, competence, and cultural activities; transport and infrastructure; environment and natural resources. The Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment steer and supervise the activities of the Employment and Economic Development Offices" (ibid.).

the municipalities and ensures that the principle of local self-government is respected when legislation of local relevance is prepared (*ibid.*).

For the Finnish regions and municipalities, the work in the CoR does not cause conflicting interests back home. The Finnish delegation is composed of nine members and nine alternates (Committee of the Regions 2017). The members represent municipalities, towns, and Regional Councils. The members are appointed for five years at a time by the Council of the EU on proposal by the Finnish Government (*ibid.*). When the European Committee of the Regions was established in early 1994, Finnish local and regional government decision-makers were made official representatives to the EU instead of government authorities (State Provincial Office) (AFLRA 2015a). Contrary to the states that have federal or regional administrative structures, Finland does not have a tradition of vertical division of public powers in the atmosphere of subsidiarity (Ryynänen 2012, 153). Municipal decision-makers do not become easily aware of the work of the CoR (or Economic or Social Committee) unless they actively and voluntarily look for information, for instance, on the respective web sites (*ibid.*).

Compared to the German Länder, the Finnish Regional Councils do not have their own legislative, executive, tax, or constitutional powers except for the Åland Islands, which enjoy extensive power sharing due to their autonomous status (Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel 2010, 143). The Regional Councils' political representatives are nominated from the elected representatives in each municipality. Hence, contrary to other Nordic countries (*i.e.*, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark), direct elections of the regional representatives do not exist (Paasi 2009, 143). The member municipalities pay their shares to the annual budget of the Councils based on the number of inhabitants (AFLRA 2015c). These elements make the Finnish regions less powerful compared to the German Länder (*ibid.*; *cf.* FINLEX 1993).

In the Finnish political framework, the long history of the country as a centralized, unitary state, which creates strong hindrances to more radical state reform initiatives and to the more far-reaching regionalization process, has to be taken into account (Ryynänen 2012, 195). The request for stronger participation of citizens obviously implies that the levels of influence and multilevel democracy should be enhanced (*ibid.* 194). The state system based on federalism offers stronger possibilities for controlling and influencing the functioning of administration to its citizens than the unitary system (*ibid.*). There is a firm tendency toward empowerment of the regions and decentralization in Europe by transferring public tasks to the lower administrative levels, which are

democratically legitimated and have political responsibility of their own. This phenomenon does not apply only to the federal states but also to several countries that move into the direction of quasi federalism (ibid. 198). The conventional reference made in the Finnish administrative environment is that no new administrative levels are needed; in comparison with the European standard, Finland has a strong municipal self-government. The administrative system does not, though, have sufficient democratic steering: regional state administration and the large joint municipal authorities have distanced themselves from the municipalities (ibid.).

The Sipilä government has set the reform of the regional governance as a goal during the current election period (Valtioneuvosto 2015b, 32). The health, social services, and regional government reform will establish the new counties and reform the structure, services, and funding of health and social services as well as transfer new duties to the counties (Alueuudistus 2017a). The aim is to transfer the organization of healthcare, social services, and other regional services to autonomous regions as of 1 January 2021 (ibid.; Valtioneuvosto 2018).

When the reform is implemented, the public administration in Finland will be organised on a three-tier system as follows: central government, autonomous regions, and local government (Valtioneuvosto 2015a). The number of joint statutory organizations (i.e., different local authorities and healthcare and social welfare service providers) will be reduced from nearly 190 different designated authorities to 18 autonomous regions. The existing regional divisions will be the basis for dividing the country into autonomous regions, where a council elected by direct vote will exercise the highest decision-making power in each autonomous region (ibid.).

Tarasti et al. (2016, 5) state in their report that the starting point was a clear and uniform structure for new county governments. As a rule, county councils and county executives will have the same duties in all counties, as the duties of the county administrative agencies will differ from each other. Duties requiring political discretion would be decided by the county council or county executive as a rule. Other issues (i.e., those involving the mere application of the law) would be carried out by decisions of officeholders in the county administrative agencies (ibid.).²⁴ Currently, the Regional Councils are responsible for regional development as their law-based task, defined by regional political guidance and decision-making; these tasks are to be transferred to the new counties (ibid. 43).

²⁴ In the English summary of the report by Tarasti, the word "County" is used for a new autonomous region. In the Finnish language, the current use of word "maakunta" will remain.

The Finnish Government decided as a result of its discussions on 27 June 2018, to continue the health, social services, and regional government reform so that the reform will enter into force on 1 January 2021 (Valtioneuvosto 2018). County elections will be held in May 2019 (ibid.).

3.3 German Länder, German Federalism, and MLG

According to Hooghe and Marks (2003, 236), federalism has the intellectual foundation for Type I MLG, with power sharing among a limited number of governments operating at just a few levels. “Federalism can be defined by the relationship between central government and a tier of non-intersecting subnational governments, where the unit of analysis is the individual government rather than the individual policy” (ibid.). Federalism can be defined as an organizational principle for a divided unity, where equivalent and independent parts of constitution have joined together to make a comprehensive political unity (Laufer and Münch 2010, 16). A fundamental characteristic of federalism is the “Einheit in Vielfalt [Unity in Diversity]” – where the parts as the entire unity are independent on one side, but – on the other side and at the same time – very tightly connected to each other. In the federal system, it is not enough to find an appropriate solution to a political problem; it always has to offer a solution to a federal problem (ibid.).

Federalism requires a certain amount of homogeneity of its parts because, without a minimum of similarities, it is not possible to build unity (Laufer and Münch 2010, 16). On the other hand, besides the common characteristics, interests, and beliefs, each party also has to have its own characteristics which prevent total fusion into a unitary state (ibid.). In principal, federalism can be seen in terms of a continuum, where one end of the extreme would be the order of the centralised state and the other end would be very independent states that would hardly exhibit any features of unity (ibid. 17). Through this model, federalism can be understood as a quantity which moves between these two extremes with the goal to find a balance between the unity and its parts. To be able to speak of a federal state, different characteristics must be recognised: the state powers have to be divided at least on two levels; the parts (i.e., states) have a decision-making competence and economic independence in certain areas accompanied with corresponding responsibilities. They also have their own constitutionally secured rights to participate in the formation of the political will of the central state. In a

federal system, neither of the two levels has the mandate to limit or expand the competences of the other levels (i.e., competence-competence) (ibid.). In the unitary states the subnational level is always the playground of the central state (ibid. 19).

In the Federal Republic of Germany, there are 17 governments at work: one government on the federal level and 16 governments on the Länder level (Schmidt 2011, 200). Division instead of concentration of powers is a feature of the German federal system, as each Bundesland has attributes of state: an independent government with a Land-specific administration, a parliament, a constitution, and its own court system (ibid.).

Since the end of the 1960s, two terms are often used to describe the developmental tendencies of the structure of the German federal state: interlocking politics²⁵ and cooperative federalism (Laufer and Münch 2010, 181; cf. Benz 2000; Schmidt 2011; Sturm 2001, 2013a, 2013b; Sturm and Zimmermann-Steinhart 2005). Cooperative federalism, particularly, characterizes the day-to-day political life in the German federal state as vertical cooperation and coordination between federal and Länder levels, and horizontal interaction between the administrations on the Länder level (ibid. 182).²⁶ As most laws are issued by the federal level, and Länder are mostly performing administrative functions implementing the laws, a continuous decision-making and negotiation procedure is needed between the

²⁵ The English term “interlocking politics” for “Politikverflechtung” used by Benz (2000, 23).

²⁶ Bund is responsible mostly for the law making (alone or in cooperation with the Länder) as the Länder are mostly responsible for the implementation of the laws and organization of the administration (Sturm 2013a, 14; cf. Laufer and Münch 2010, 124–131; Sturm 2001, 2013b, 20–21; Sturm and Zimmermann-Steinhart 2005). Länder influence to the law making and administration of the Bund and to the EU affairs (article 50 constitution) through Bundesrat. Länder are also equal with Bund in the election of the organs of the Bund and work since decades in German federalism always closer together (ibid.). The division of competences between Bund and Länder are regulated through the constitution, and the competences which belong alone to the Länder are regulated in the own constitutions of the Länder, when the constitution of the Bund (article 73) defines the responsibilities of the Bund and its tasks (ibid. 15). Through the competitive law making (konkurrierende Gesetzgebung) Länder have the mandate to make own laws as long as the Bund does not decide to make a law of its own. Up to the latest federalism reform in 2006 it was possible for the Bund of the same reasons to make in numerous areas so called framework laws (Rahmengesetze), but the system of framework laws failed as the Bund already defined the law frameworks for the Länder so detailed that there was not any more needed space for the Länder to make independent decisions. The abolition of the system of framework laws in 2006 is a good example of the tensions which may emerge in the German federalism. The cooperation is the main feature of the cooperative federalism but the cooperation should not be expanded that much that it becomes one sided and restricted. The reform of federalism in 2006 led also to a new kind of law making, so called “Abweichungsgesetzgebung,” this should give the Länder the space through own understanding to make exceptions to the federal laws (ibid. 20).

levels of the federal system (Grützmacher 2013, 14–15). The interlocking politics means a web of overlapping responsibilities, coordination, and decision-making patterns, as well as formal and informal mandates of cooperation, which have developed in the environment of cooperation of different state actors between Länder and the federal level (Laufer and Münch 2010, 182; Schmidt 2011, 214; cf. Sturm 2001, 2013a, 16; Sturm and Zimmermann-Steinhart 2005). The Federal Republic of Germany has a strictly coupled federal system compared to MLG in the EU (Benz 2010, 217). Intergovernmental relations in Germany require negotiations between all governments due to constitutional rules, while policies of European, national, and subnational institutions are often coordinated in informal rather than compulsory multilateral negotiations (*ibid.*).

The cooperative federalism in Germany finds various forms of cooperation in the mixed administration (*Mischverwaltung*), which consists of formal networks and a wealth of informal contacts between the administrations of the Bund and the Länder (Laufer and Münch 2010, 187–188; cf. Schmidt 2011, 216). Informal networks are often more important for the function and efficiency of the system than the formal networks. Bund and Länder are networked through numerous instances where the experts from federal and Länder ministries meet. For instance, there are Bund-Länder task forces to draft laws for Bund and Länder and the so-called Länder representations are to secure the interests of the respective Länder on the federal level and guarantee that the interests and opinions of respective Länder are taken into account in the federal structure of Germany (*ibid.*).

German federalism differs in several areas from the structures and processes of MLG of the EU (Benz 2010, 216). Compared to the German type of joint decision-making, the EU can be defined as a loosely coupled multilevel system, which allows members to escape the deadlocks in the decision-making by taking advantage of the flexibilities of complex institutional settings and interinstitutional processes (*ibid.*; cf. Benz 2000). The German model of joint decision-making represents a simple form of the MLG with two levels of Federal and Länder governments compared to governance in a regionalized EU (Benz 2000, 23). The German Länder have always made efforts to influence the European unification process and balance the possibilities of action on domestic grounds: the goal of the Länder was to soften the tense relations between the German federalism and European integration so that in the integration lost elements could be compensated by new negotiation forms in the framework of the so-called “participative federalism” (*Beteiligungsföderalismus*) (Laufer und Münch 2010, 208). At the same time, the Länder defended the federal construction of the EU, as federalism means

not only a federal structure between the European Communities in relation to the Member States but also “the recognition and further development of the existing sub-state levels in each member country” (ibid.). In MLG of the EU, simultaneous negotiations with large numbers of actors at the national and subnational levels would be impossible and are, thus, replaced with sequential processes of policymaking (Benz 2010, 216). In that situation, the European Commission can act as an independent agenda setter and administration (ibid.).

The existence and effect of the third level of Europe (i.e., subnational level) was, for the first time, established when the principle of subsidiarity and institutions like CoR were included into the Treaty of Maastricht (Laufer und Münch 2010, 213). This change in the regulatory basis of the EU was strongly lobbied by the German Länder and other European regions (ibid.). MLG creates an increased need for vertical and horizontal coordination in the German Europe policy (Schymik 2011, 6). It gives the Länder the right to appeal to and to defend themselves against the European law-making if the transfer of the mandate from the Länder to the European level were to take place to a larger extent than what is specified in the treaties of the EU (Laufer and Münch 2010, 226–227; cf. Sturm 2013b, 29). The CoR or Bundesrat can withdraw an action in the European Court of Justice or, alternatively, the Bundesrat may try to collect one-third of the national parliaments of the EU on its side against the European law-making; this can lead to a new drafting of the law (ibid.). As the Länder and regions did not succeed in their attempts to include broader institutional regulations and regulations of technical procedures into the Treaty of Maastricht back in the early 1990s, the German Länder tried later on to secure their own position in the German federal legislation (Laufer und Münch 2010, 213). The federal government, however, defended itself by referring to the federal constitution (art. 32), stating that only the federal level has the competence to have relations with the foreign states. From the aspect of the German Länder and opposing the view of the Bund, the relations with the European communities no longer were a matter of foreign affairs (ibid.). According to the current integration process, “European politics is not any more foreign politics but European domestic policies in the common Europe [translated from German by the author]” (as quoted in Laufer und Münch 2010, 213).

In the federal Germany, the Länder have a certain amount of influence on the EU decision-making with their link to the federal government through the

Bundesrat (Bundesrat 2014).²⁷ The federal government has to follow the decisions of the Bundesrat in the European Council meetings concerning the affairs that are under mandate of law-making of the Länder or that deal with the establishment of administration for implementation or the administrative procedures (Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland art. 23 [5], Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, 2016). Article 23 of the federal constitution builds the bridge between the German constitution and European law, and regulates the cooperation between Bund and Länder as well as between the federal government, the parliament, and the second chamber in the EU affairs (Laufer und Münch 2010, 214). It gives the constitutional judicial basis for the integration of the German federal republic to the EU (ibid.). The Länder, as the actual implementation level of Germany, are an important discussion partner for the EU Commission as most areas of the regional structural policy and most regulations concerning the structural funds are overseen by the EU Commission, and implemented by the Länder (Funk 2010, 372). The problem for the Länder is that they do not have “friends” in the EU with similar rights and status. This became evident in the negotiations of the Lisbon Treaty, where hardly any other member state of the EU but Germany was willing to expand the powers of their own regions (ibid.).

In the CoR Germany has 24 seats, but CoR has not become a substitute for the Länder on the European level for several reasons (Laufer and Münch 2010, 220). First, the German Länder are the only group among the regions from the other 27 EU Member States having diminished rights in the CoR compared to what they have domestically. Second, the representatives from regions from other Member States without a federal constitution or decentralized system are a very heterogeneous group and mostly represent municipalities comprising the majority in plenary of the CoR. Third, the way CoR works is different from that of the Bundesrat, and the politicians cannot be replaced with the officials. Finally, the

²⁷ “In the performance of their tasks in the German federative system the Bund (national level) and the Länder should work within a mutual checks-and-balance system but also practice mutual cooperation and consideration” (Bundesrat 2014). “The main difference between the German form of federalism and other federative systems when it comes to the division and execution of tasks is that the individual federal state governments participate directly in the decisions of the national state (i.e., federation). In the German federative system, this is done through the Bundesrat. Within this system of division of power and combined performance of tasks, the Bundesrat has three central functions: it defends the interests of the Länder vis-à-vis the Bund and indirectly vis-à-vis the EU; it ensures that the political and administrative experience of the Länder is incorporated in the legislation and administration of the Bund and in EU affairs and like in the other constitutional organs of the Bund. The Bundesrat also bears its share of the overall responsibility for the Federal Republic of Germany” (ibid.).

CoR is not a law-making institution of the EU, and its influence is limited to giving opinions during the decision-making process, which together make a substantial and likely most decisive difference to the Bundesrat (*ibid.* 223–224; cf. Benz 2003, 86; cf. Sturm 2013b, 28–29). As a consequence, an interregional grouping of RegLeg²⁸ was formed in the CoR, bringing together the regions from federal or decentralized member countries. This did not, however, much improve the position of the Länder. In the Bundesrat, in contrast to the CoR, the Länder have the opportunity to change or stop the law-making process if it is not favourable to the Länder (e.g., the question of the mandates of the Länder to be transferred to the EU level) (*ibid.*).

The “let-us-in strategy,” which promotes participation of regions in the political decision-making procedures on the national and European levels, emphasizes the need to become heard as subnational actors in the EU institutions. This is a sharp contrast to the “leave-us-alone strategy” of the German Länder, which does not count on the European influence (Laufer und Münch 2010, 224). By contrast, it aims at strengthening the action space of the European regions (i.e., establishing and widening their law-making and administrative competencies which they could work on with their own responsibilities and without the interference by the EU institutions) (*ibid.*).

In addition to the CoR, the Länder have several other domestic channels to influence the EU. The regional level of Länder is committed to the approximately 300 Bund-Länder delegations that operate between the national and the regional levels (Laufer and Münch 2010, 187; Sturm 2013b, 30). The Bund-Länder delegations contribute to the German positions to the European Commission and Councils of Ministers (*ibid.*). Through the Chamber for the European Affairs, established in 1992, the Bundesrat may react more quickly to the European decision-making (Laufer and Münch 2010, 208; cf. Sturm 2013b, 30). Not to forget is that the Länder not only influence decision-making of Germany regarding the EU but also carry the responsibility for the possible mistakes in the implementation of the decisions made. The German Länder have noticed at the early stage of the European integration that the European decision-making processes include a multitude of informal ways of working. To be able to have all

²⁸ Regions and states of the federative or decentralized systems with legislative powers have already for years raised their profile in lobbying e.g. through establishment in year 2001 of the RegLeg cooperation in the CoR (Ryynänen 2012, 156–157; cf. Laufer and Münch 2010, 223). In the EU, there are 73 such regions which have parliaments elected through direct election and which own legislative powers representing 43,5 percent of the inhabitants of the EU. The CoR and RegLeg have numerous joint projects and operative cooperation (*ibid.*).

the necessary information and contacts to the bodies of the EU, all the governments of the German Länder have established responsible units in their administration, or even the posts of the ministers for European affairs, to take care of these tasks. To support this, the Europaministerkonferenz (EMK) was established in 1992 to defend the interests of the Länder towards the national level and the EU in the decision-making of the European activities of the Länder as well as in coordination of the communication policy of the stakeholders in promotion of the European idea. Already in 1950s, the thematically based institution of the Observers of the Länder (Länderbeobachter)²⁹ was established in Brussels (ibid.). Since 1989, every German Land has its information office in Brussels comparable to their offices in Berlin on the national level (ibid. 210; Grützmacher 2013, 65; cf. Sturm 2013b, 31–32). The competence and the rights of the national level regarding the Foreign affairs are not touched by these Länder activities as European politics has become largely “domestic politics,” as it regulates policies which belonged earlier to the national competence (Sturm 2013b, 31). The information offices are not only lobbying organizations; they also provide the politicians and the enterprises in the home Länder with updated information on the European affairs (ibid.).

A further important field for the Länder to defend their interests is the interregional cooperation with other regions and states of Europe. This form of cooperation in the field of foreign affairs is constitutionally guaranteed for the Länder in the German constitution (art. 24 [1a] and 32 [3]) (Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz 2016). The Länder may sign agreements with foreign states as long as it is done in common understanding with the federal government. Such interregional cooperation across state borders was made easier with the change in the federal constitution in 1992 (Sturm 2013b, 31). Good cooperation between the ministries of the federal government in Berlin, too, is a prerequisite for efficient decision-making (ibid.).

In the German federal system, there is a regular information exchange between the national level of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and regional level of the

²⁹ The Beobachter der Länder bei der Europäischen Union (Länderbeobachter – Observer of the Länder) is a common institution of the 16 German Länder (Länderbeobachter 2014). "It's task is to support the Bundesrat when obtaining its rights concerning EU affairs and to inform the Länder about processes which are significant for them in the European context. The Länderbeobachter's main duty is to attend and report on the meetings of the Council of the EU. Thus, the Länder are able to control how the resolutions of the Bundesrat were considered and adopted by the Federal Government in the negotiations. The Länderbeobachter works closely with the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany to the EU; its office is located in Brussels" (ibid.).

Länder. This information flow is not directly based on the legislative responsibility of either side, but rather is based on mutual interests. When it comes to the cooperation with the ICORGs of the Baltic Sea region, there are no legally binding regulations between the North German Länder and the national level. The federal state is represented in the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Länder in various ICORGs. Both levels are, hence, able to follow the current affairs in the BSR. A long tradition on cooperation having its foundations in practical issues prevails between the three North German Länder Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and the national level (Grützmacher 2013, 88–89). This tradition serves also the cooperation with the CBSS (*ibid.*).

In this chapter I described some of the various ways in which MLG has been enhanced by the EU and its decision-making bodies. The European Commission has published a White Paper on Governance to be implemented, maintained, and enhanced through the MLG system, and the CoR actively works to promote the implementation of the system. The EU Member States recognized in the Treaty of Lisbon that the needs of regions and municipalities have to be taken into account in European policies. The unitary de-centralised state system of Finland with three levels of governance (central, regional, and local) and the Federal Republic of Germany with a strictly coupled federal system represent potentially different contexts for subregional activity in the MLG function in this study.

The German model of joint decision-making represents a simple form of MLG with two levels of Federal and Länder governments compared to governance in a regionalized EU (Benz 2000, 23). In the MLG system of the EU, simultaneous negotiations with large numbers of actors at the national and subnational levels would be impossible and are replaced with sequential processes of policymaking (Benz 2010, 216). This study focuses on three relevant instruments of EU policymaking that play an important role for the ICORGs and their member regions: the partnership principle, EUSBSR, and territorial governance. These policy instruments are presented in Chapter 4 and discussed in more detail in the Baltic Sea macro-regional MLG context in Chapter 7.

4 POLICY INSTRUMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING MLG

In this chapter, I will introduce three policy instruments for the implementation and management of MLG: the partnership principle, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and *the ESPON TANGO Handbook* on territorial governance. These policy instruments have a twofold role for this thesis: First, they form an important part of the empirical working context of the studied organizations. Second, the documents of these organizations are used to develop the Q methodological instrument used in this study. It will be important to introduce these three policy instruments before discussing the methodological solutions where the same policy instruments will function as important source material (reviewed in Chapter 5). In Chapter 7, I will then discuss the role and applicability of these three policy instruments and how the ICORGs could use them in promoting MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region. That discussion will be put into the context of the findings of the Q methodological study carried out here. To assess the status of these three policy instruments in the current context of the Baltic Sea macro-region, one must keep in mind the two key EU-reference strategies from the current financing period of the EU: Europe 2020 and TA 2020 (European Commission 2010; Council of the European Union 2011). The three policy instruments contribute to the implementation of the two strategies, which play a major role for the ICORGs and their member regions regarding regional development and spatial planning in the EU macro-regional context.

The Europe 2020 strategy aims at smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth in Europe until 2020, and integrates EU efforts with its main focus on economic development through more efficient coordination of national and EU policies (Böhme et al. 2011, 12). Even though territorial cohesion is mentioned in the Europe 2020 several times, it does not make any concrete proposals for the territorialisation of its priorities or consider the territorial consequences of its actions (ibid. 13). The TA 2020 is an action-oriented policy approach which strengthens the strategic dimension of the territorial cohesion and integrates it with

different other policies in the MLG system.³⁰ These two strategies have different political statuses: the Europe 2020 was officially adopted by the Council of the European Union as about the TA 2020 was only informally decided by the EU ministers responsible for territorial cohesion and spatial planning (ibid. 12).

4.1 Partnership Principle

The partnership principle comprising the Commission (supranational level), the Member States (national level), and regional/local authorities (subnational level) was introduced already in 1988 when the reform of structural funds was decided upon. It represented the multilevel thinking that had gained ground in the EU (Bache 2012; European Commission 2014b; Hooghe and Marks 2001).

The partnership principle implies close cooperation between public authorities at national, regional, and local levels in the Member States and with the private and other sectors, and it must be seen in close connection with the MLG approach and the subsidiarity and proportionality principles: each level of government should play its role, and action should be taken on the right level and be proportionate to the objectives. (European Commission 2014b, 2)

Hooghe and Marks (2001, 83–84) state that one channel for regional influence runs through the European Commission. Of the highest relevance for the adoption of partnership principle are the EU structural and cohesion policies, which aim to reduce inequalities among regions in the EU (ibid.).

The reform of the structural funds formalized “partnership” among the Commission, national authorities, and regional and local authorities in preparation, implementation, and monitoring economic development programmes. (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 84)

The partnership principle was established in 1989 (Bache 2010, 59) and became a powerful instrument for the Commission to use to break its bilevel relations with each national government and move into multilevel relations among supranational, national, and subnational governments (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 84; Marks,

³⁰ Priorities of the TA 2020 are (i) promoting polycentric and balanced territorial development; (ii) encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions; (iii) territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions; (iv) ensuring global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies; (v) improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities, and enterprises; and (vi) managing and connecting ecological landscape and cultural values of regions (Council of the European Union 2011, 6–8).

Hooghe, and Blank 1996, 368–369). This allowed subnational actors to be formally given a role in the EU decision-making process, which was central to the MLG concept (Bache 2012, 629). Since then, two broader revisions have been made to the partnership principle. First, the 1993 revision of cohesion policy widened the concept of partnership to include economic and social actors in addition to regional and local governments. Second, the 1999 revision further broadened the concept by extending it to social partners (e.g., trade unions) and advocates using partnership for purposes unrelated to territorial relations, such as promoting gender equality (*ibid.*). This wider cross-sectoral dimension in EU governing arrangements strengthened the governance dimension of MLG as well (Bache 2012, 629). The partnership principle does not compete with other institutions but cooperates with them (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 14). Bauer and Börzel (2010, 255) note that partnership is a valuable instrument for the Commission, allowing them to enhance relations between the national governments and their regions that intend to replace structural policy with a process of multilevel, cooperative policymaking. Partnership was strengthened with “the additionality principle” requiring member states to use EU funds in addition for any planned expenditure (Bache 2012, 629).

Authorities across all different MLG governance levels as well as societal actors participate in the day-to-day implementation of the EU cohesion policy, drafting of multiannual programmes, project selection, and evaluation of programme results (Lang 2003, 154). It covers the preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the operational programmes (European Parliament 2014, 10).³¹ Compared to the policies of the local and regional levels, “the structural funds policy model” is far more detailed and rigorous. The cohesion policy implementation preconditions resources for extensive cooperation among actors (Lang 2003, 155). The European Parliament has expressed concerns about insufficient practice of this kind of administrative approach: “A key principle specific to the governance of the Structural Funds is the partnership principle, which has made for more transparent, more open, and more integrated governance of cohesion policy. However, it is not yet applied anything like as widely as it should be” (European Parliament 2008).

³¹ The Study requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development was prepared by the authors from Metis GmbH: Alice Radzyner, Herta Tödting-Schönhofer, Alexandra Frangenheim; and EPRC University of Strathclyde: Carlos Mendez, John Bachtler, David Charles, Kaisa Granqvist (European Parliament 2014).

Under optimal conditions, the partnership principle can promote policy effectiveness in programme implementation, increase legitimacy and transparency of decision-making, and also lead to better commitment to and ownership of programme results (European Parliament 2014, 10). Typical challenges for the partnership are the limited experience of decentralization and limited capacity of subnational actors; lack of resources for involvement and influence of nonpublic sector bodies combined with complexity of cohesion policy rules; changes in priorities, EU-domestic relations, and declining cohesion policy allocations; the high administrative costs of complex administration behind policy development and implementation; and the democratic deficit if the role of democratic institutions is marginalized (ibid. 11). The decentralized actors seem to be embedded in the policy implementation of the domestic agenda, and to a lesser extent in the EU “structural funds” institutional context, thus having very limited influence on the revision of regulations at the European level (Lang 2003, 172). The European Commission and national-level ministries, not responsible for the implementation, negotiate the revisions, which mean that the structural funds regulations might appear as “an external demand” for the implementing actors (ibid.). Bache (2004, 167; cf. Piattoni 2009) notes that “the amount of MLG through partnership across EU Member States is in large part shaped by the pre-existing territorial distribution of power.” Strong governments retained considerable powers to control the domestic impact of structural policy, as in less centralized states there was greater evidence of the emerging MLG through the partnership principle (ibid.; European Parliament 2014, 11). In addition to governments controlling the input of subnational authorities, the role of social partners was often limited and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were largely absent from partnerships (ibid.).

Partnership principle as a policy instrument for empowerment of regions through structural policy has shown its limitations (Bauer and Börzel 2010, 255). Regions vary significantly in their institutional and political capacities to use the partnership principle. Additionally, the central governments have resisted the transfer of any real decision-making powers to regional actors (ibid.). The empowering effect of the structural policy depends largely on constellations in intrastate politics (ibid. 256; cf. European Parliament 2014, 33).

4.2 EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

The first macro-regional strategy of the EU – the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) has dominated the MLG discussion in the Baltic Sea macro-region since its approval in 2009 (European Commission 2013, 2014a, 2015). In June 2015 the updated Action Plan of the EUSBSR was published. Section 7.3 will describe the role of the subnational actors in the EUSBSR in more detail when reflecting on the findings of the Q methodological study.

The EUSBSR covers eight EU Member States of Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Germany (i.e., three German Länder of Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Schleswig-Holstein) and cooperates with two partner countries (the Russian Federation and Norway) (European Commission 2013, 2014a, 2015).³² The Action Plan of the EUSBSR was updated in 2015 to reflect objectives, targets, and indicators of the strategy that were fully in line with and contributed to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, which was preceded by an extensive consultation with concerned Member States and stakeholders in the Baltic Sea region in 2014 and early 2015 (European Commission 2010, 2015, 8). It is more streamlined and focused, and includes a chapter on the role of regional organizations and networks (*ibid.*). The initiative of the EUSBSR was mainly based on intergovernmental cooperation, which meant that no new EU legislation was needed with the exception of possible national legislation for the implementation (Ahner 2016). Member States were not willing to give any additional funding for the EUSBSR's development and implementation but requested better coordinated and more efficient use of existing EU funds and national, regional, and local sources (*ibid.*). This finally resulted the 'three Nos': no new institutional structure, no new EU legislation, and no new EU funds (*ibid.*; cf. European Commission 2013). Schymik (2011, 5) wonders if these "three Nos" could be turned into "three Yeses," and a new policy level would emerge between the nation states and the supranational community.

As the EUSBSR cannot impose action on third parties, it rather indicates areas where cooperation is desirable, and proposes platforms for discussion and cooperation (European Commission 2015, 9). It is evident that many of the issues can only be addressed in cooperation with the external partners, however, a key element of success for the EUSBSR is the integrated and coordinated governance of the Baltic Sea region, between sectors of society as well as between regional and

³² "The EUSBSR is applied to Russian regions adjacent to the Baltic Sea, but the Russian Federation is not an equal partner in the planning of the policy" (Aalto et al. 2017, 136).

local authorities in their respective countries. Thirteen policy areas and four horizontal actions are included into the EUSBSR to tackle main challenges or seize key opportunities in the Baltic Sea region (see Table 2). Member States coordinate policy areas or horizontal actions, and work on the implementation in close cooperation with the European Commission and stakeholders (i.e., other Member States, regional and local authorities, intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies). Other actors may also be nominated to coordinate policy areas or actions. Coordinators need to ensure that the Action Plan is consistent with all EU policies, and in particular the Europe 2020 strategy (ibid.; European Commission 2010).

Table 2. Objectives, policy areas, and horizontal actions of the EUSBSR

Objectives		
Save the Sea	Connect the region	Increase prosperity
Policy Areas		
Bioeconomy	Energy	Culture
Hazards	Transport	Education
Nutri		Health
Safe		Innovation
Secure		Tourism
Ship		
Horizontal Actions		
Capacity, Climate, Neighbours, and Spatial Planning		

Note. Compiled by the author based on European Commission 2015; EUSBSR 2017a.

The European Commission made a recommendation before the update of the EUSBSR Action Plan that it does not wish for itself alone a role as a driving force in the governance of the EUSBSR (European Commission 2014a, 4; see Table 3). The macro-regional strategies need a more balanced leadership between the participating Member States and regions and the European Commission (ibid.). As well as leadership, a sense of ownership is important; the European Commission sees the general strategic leadership in participating countries at ministerial levels where ministers hosting the National Contact Point are the ultimate decision-makers (ibid. 5). The stakeholder involvement including parliaments at different levels, regional governments, and civil society needs to be strengthened to secure the leadership and provide a sense of ownership (ibid.). The most important goal for stakeholders when getting involved in macro-regional cooperation is to set

agenda and bring functional challenges into the discussions among policy-makers (Sielker 2016a, 2008).

The European Commission has maintained its role as the driving force with Member States behind the policy process in implementation of the EUSBSR (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 130). Compared to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region adopted in 2011, steering groups were established from the beginning, which consisted of stakeholders from all MLG levels (ibid.). EU Member States' willingness to harness macro-regional strategies with sufficient resources plays the most important role in creating "the sense of ownership" (ibid.140).

Table 3. Governance hierarchy of the EUSBSR

Member States		
National Coordinators		
Policy level actors	Coordination level actors	Operational level
European Council	Policy Area Coordinators	Programmes/Financial instruments
European Commission	Horizontal Action Coordinators	Flagship projects and processes
High-Level Group	Policy Area/Horizontal Action Focal Points	Flagship Leaders

Note. Compiled by the author based on European Commission 2015; EUSBSR 2017b.

When defining roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders of the EUSBSR, there is a broad consensus that each main implementing, concerned stakeholder should commit and take the minimum activity. Although not mentioned explicitly, it is important that stakeholders at local and regional levels are involved, when relevant, among the main stakeholders of the EUSBSR (European Commission 2015, 11). A considerable number of regional organizations, networks, and initiatives are involved in the EUSBSR. The list includes Pan-Baltic organizations and networks from different governance levels (i.e., national, regional, and local) and from academia (ibid. 20–31).³³ In the framework of the strategy process, annual forums are organised which provide networking and discussion opportunities for policy makers and stakeholders about the EUSBSR and its implementation (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 126). Macro-regional strategies open

³³ CPMR BSC, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), Baltic Sea NGO Network, BSSSC, Baltic Development Forum (BDF), BONUS, CBSS, HELCOM, Northern Dimension (ND), ND Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS), ND Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL), Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP), ND Partnership on Culture (NDPC), NCM, UBC as well as VASAB.

new political perspectives for the regional level: “Transnational networks established by the subnational authorities, can develop into constitutive elements of macro-regions” (ibid. 133).

The EUSBSR stresses that all regional organizations play an important role as policy area and horizontal action coordinators, and by implementing flagship projects³⁴ and other activities (European Commission 2015, 20). The EUSBSR provides these organizations with a wider strategic and institutional framework, and benefits from their experience and expertise (ibid.). By providing a common reference point,³⁵ the EUSBSR can promote the coherence of cooperation and better division of labour among existing networks to avoid overlaps and strengthen synergies (ibid. 21). Intergovernmental Pan-Baltic organizations function as important links and communication channels between the local and regional levels and the national level by maintaining good contacts with national authorities (Lange Scherbenske and Hörnström 2013, 21).

An important development regarding the MLG discussion in the revised Action Plan of the EUSBSR is the horizontal action called “Capacity – Capacity Building and Involvement,” coordinated by the Baltic Sea NGO Network, the Union of the Baltic Cities, and the Swedish Institute which continues the work of the horizontal action “Involve” (European Commission 2015, 149). The horizontal action “Involve” had a strong regional character at the subnational level, as it was coordinated by Region Västerbotten, the Regional Council in Kalmar County, as well as the Baltic Sea NGO Network (Lange Scherbenske and Hörnström 2013, 4).³⁶ As the EUSBSR coordinates strategies and funding in order to efficiently address the challenges for the Baltic Sea region, it means that the people and

³⁴ “The EUSBSR is implemented e.g. with flagships which are projects and processes demonstrating the process and progress of the EUSBSR, and they may serve as pilot examples for desired change” (European Commission 2015, 17). “A flagship points out the ambition of a policy area/horizontal action in a specified field e.g. developing key solutions, new methodologies, practises, be a network looking for new forms of cooperation or represent key investments of regional importance” (ibid.).

³⁵ “ ‘reference point’ is indeed a more appropriate term for describing the strategy than ‘framework’ as the latter might be understood too narrowly ... there are several frameworks for Baltic Sea cooperation already ... reference point could also more easily be accepted by non-EU members, such as Russia” (Etzold and Gänzle 2012, 7).

³⁶ The Regional Councils in Kalmar and Västerbotten stressed the importance of the MLG in the EUSBSR Annual Forum in Tallinn in October 2010 that the regional and local levels could contribute their all potential in the implementation of the EUSBSR (EUSBSR 2017c). A successful implementation prerequisites close cooperation between the different MLG levels. In the end of October 2010, the European Commission, DG Regio, initiated an idea of a new Horizontal Action in the EUSBSR on the topics of the MLG. The Commission asked the Regional Councils in Kalmar and Västerbotten to make a short reflection paper on the content and to take the leadership for such an action (ibid.).

organizations involved in the implementation of the EUSBSR in its policy areas need to understand the MLG system of the region and the programming and funding structure of the 2014–2020 programming period (European Commission 2015, 150). The horizontal action “Capacity,” using MLG as an overall guiding principle, offers capacity-building support for the implementing stakeholders, who are divided into five groups: (i) policy area coordinators and horizontal action coordinators; (ii) policy area focal points and members of steering committees/groups; (iii) flagship leaders, project developers, and project managers; (iv) managing authorities and other representatives of financial programmes; and (v) local and regional authorities, NGOs, business, and academia in the Member States (ibid. 151). Furthermore, the target of this horizontal action is to integrate the local and regional authorities better into the implementation of the EUSBSR (ibid.). The horizontal action “Involve” published a mapping report on the EUSBSR which recognized the low involvement of the local and regional actors in the leadership of the flagship projects (Moretti and Martinsson 2013, 11). The mapping took into account the identities of the actors involved in the realisation of the strategy; the different roles of each actor group to determine if there was a pattern explaining the evolution of the roles; information on the governance system in the implementation of the EUSBSR; and a brief reflection of the governance directing the strategy (ibid. 2). In 2016 among the finalized 60 EUSBSR flagship projects, 17 have been led by the regions or regional institutions (Tikka 2016).

4.3 ESPON TANGO Handbook “Towards Better Territorial Governance”

The ESPON TANGO Handbook considers “territorial governance” as an extension of the more established multilevel concept by adding to the operational MLG the explicitly territorial and knowledge-related elements (ESPON 2013a). It is argued that territorial governance became most explicit by incorporating two dimensions which have knowledge as the overarching mechanism, and also locating the factors of place and territory into the MLG practices (ibid.).

The place-based approach³⁷ to policymaking contributes to territorial cohesion based on the principles of horizontal coordination, evidence-informed

³⁷ “A place-based approach to development policies refers both to the context-dependent nature of the efficiency and equity problems that the policy deals with, and to the fact that the design of

polymaking, and integrated functional area development (Council of the European Union 2011, 4). It also implements the subsidiarity principle through the multi-level governance (ibid.). The TANGO project (ESPON 2013a, 12) defines territorial governance as “an extension of the more established MLG concept by adding explicitly territorial and knowledge related elements, thus focusing on a place-based and territorial sensitive approach.” According to this definition, MLG has five dimensions: the first three operative dimensions deal with the conventional approach of the MLG; the two remaining dimensions are territorial and knowledge-related and expand the concept of the MLG (ibid. 13; see Figure 1). The current policy analysis focuses on governance (i.e., MLG), tracing vertical and horizontal linkages and integration of relevant stakeholders (particularly from the bottom-up) into decision-making and polymaking processes; less attention has been paid to the “territorial” dimensions of governance or on adaptability and use of place-based and territorial specificities and impacts (ESPON 2013b, 54).

The definition of territorial governance depends on the features that are in focus (ESPON 2013a, 7). The TANGO project defines territorial governance as the formulation and implementation of public policies, programmes, and projects for the development of a place and territory by (i) co-ordinating actions of actors and institutions, (ii) integrating policy sectors, (iii) mobilizing stakeholder participation, (iv) being adaptive to changing contexts, and (v) realising place-based territorial specificities and impacts (ibid.). The interplay of the first three dimensions have coordination as the overarching mechanism, but territorial governance becomes most explicit when incorporating the last two dimensions (i.e., knowledge and factors of place and territory) into the MLG practices (ESPON 2013c, 9). The fourth and fifth dimensions distinguish territorial governance from MLG and include the territorial and knowledge-based perspective (ibid. 10). The territorial governance approach may create several added values (ESPON 2013c, 10–12):

integrated interventions must be tailored to places, since it largely depends on the knowledge and preferences of people living in it” (Barca 2009, 5–6). Barca defines the place-based development policy as “a long-term development strategy aimed at reducing the underutilization of resources and social exclusion of specific places, through the production of integrated bundles of public goods and services, determined by extracting and aggregating people’s knowledge and preferences in these places and turning them into projects, and exogenously promoted through a system of grants subject to conditionalities and multi-level governance. A place is not identified by administrative boundaries, nor by any other ex-ante functional criteria, rather a place is endogenous to the policy process, it is a contiguous area within whose boundaries a set of conditions conducive to development apply more than they do across boundaries” (as quoted in Böhme et al. 2011, 17).

(i) It pays attention to the distribution of power across levels and makes a distinction between regulative power (i.e., ability to make laws and regulations in harder administrative “governmental” spaces) and normative power (i.e., ability to frame visions and strategies in “softer” functional spaces).

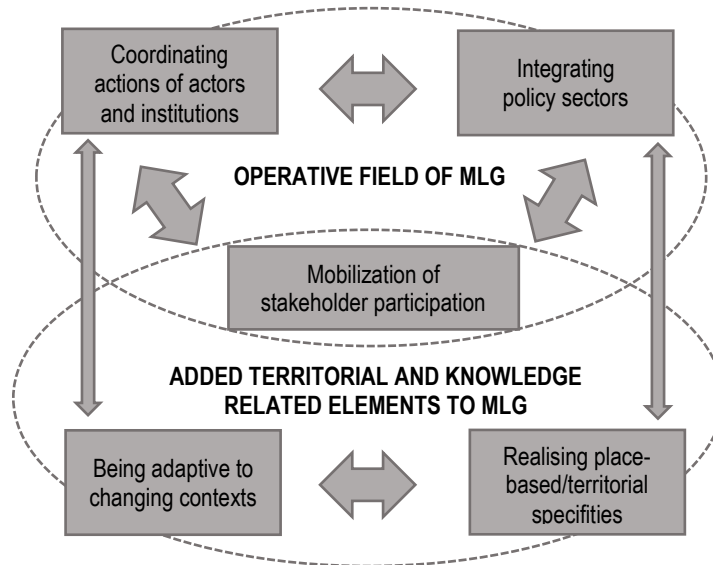
(ii) When dealing with sectoral conflicts, territorial knowledge of different sectors as well as knowledge of various stakeholder values and principles is required; intersectoral synergies can be facilitated through dialogue, partnerships, and networks, but the national, regional, and local administrative structures also need to be adaptable enough to enable intersectoral work.

(iii) A territorial governance approach can efficiently and equitably mobilise stakeholder participation by ensuring the allocation of both human and financial resources to make participation in the interests of stakeholders.

(iv) The territorial governance approach is adaptive to changing contexts, enabling national, regional, and local authorities to respond to crises by “thinking outside the box” in the search for quick and long-term solutions. Softer governance structures may appear flexible and learnings could be transferred to harder (i.e., stricter) administrative structures.

(v) Place-based, territorial specificities and impacts will acknowledge that a functional territorial approach can challenge prevailing perceptions and routines of actors and institutions in “hard” spaces.

Figure 1. ESPON TANGO territorial governance approach and multi-level governance connection



Note. Compiled by the author based on ESPON 2013c, 13.

I will discuss the applicability of *the ESPON TANGO Handbook* as an instrument to draw together all the necessary elements for improving the role of the ICORGs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

One outcome of the TANGO research project is a framework of 12 specific indicators for assessing territorial governance. These are related to the proposed five dimensions of territorial governance and are intended to feed into the development of both qualitative and quantitative methods for assessing good and bad territorial governance (ESPON 2013a, 34; see Table 4). The indicators create a conceptual framework upon which assessments can be developed: “It is suited to include other instruments in a more comprehensive system of indicators for analysing territorial governance” (ibid.).

The Handbook is based on 12 European case studies which present projects or smaller-scale thematic or sectorial cooperation (ESPON 2013a). Because of the very heterogeneous case studies in different cultural and administrative contexts behind the ESPON study, I believe it may provide much understanding of the MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region as well. In this study, the reference check list and 12 indicators for assessing the performance of territorial governance are horizontally applied to review the elements needed by the ICORGs for the functioning MLG system.

Table 4. Five dimensions of territorial governance and twelve indicators for assessing its performance

Dimensions of territorial governance	Indicators for assessing the performance of territorial governance
<p>1. Co-ordinating actions of actor and institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which actors at all levels are needed to organize and deliver the territorial goal at stake? • What types of existing platforms or forums are available to facilitate coordination? • Do existing platforms/forums have the capacity and legitimacy among actors and institutions to achieve the territorial goal at stake? • What is the formal and informal distribution of power / room for manoeuvre? • What types of territorial knowledge do actors and institutions have? 	<p>1.1 Governing Capacity 1.2 Leadership 1.3 Subsidiarity</p>
<p>2. Integrating policy sectors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which policy sectors are needed to be able solve the issue at hand? • What are the potential or real sectoral conflicts? • Who is able to discuss the topic? Who has a stake in this? • What are the potential synergies that could be realized by intersectoral cooperation? 	<p>2.1 Public policy packaging 2.2 Cross-Sector Synergy</p>
<p>3. Mobilising stakeholder participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have all relevant groups been considered (e.g., inhabitants, policymakers, interest groups)? • How can new or previously excluded groups be included in participation processes? • How could stakeholders be encouraged to participate? • How are stakeholders given insight into territorial governance processes? • Are there processes or mechanisms in place to use the territorial knowledge gained through stakeholder participation? 	<p>3.1. Democratic Legitimacy 3.2 Public Accountability 3.3 Transparency</p>

(continued on next page)

Dimensions of territorial governance	Indicators for assessing the performance of territorial governance
<p>4. Being adaptive to changing contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can individual and institutional learning be encouraged? • How can forward-looking and/or experimental decisions be made? • In which ways can new territorial knowledge be integrated into the process? • Have contingency plans been made, and what is the scope of flexibility? 	<p>4.1 Reflexivity 4.2 Adaptability</p>
<p>5. Realising place-based/territorial specificities and impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the place-based specificities that are most relevant for the issue? • How has the area of intervention been defined? Are the boundaries “soft” or “hard”? • How can territorial knowledge (expert or tacit) be utilized in achieving the goal? • How are the territorial impacts of policies, programmes and projects evaluated? 	<p>5.1. Territorial relationality 5.2. Territorial knowledgeability and impacts</p>

Note. Compiled by the author based on ESPON 2013a, 14 and 34.

The EU’s cohesion policy, including the partnership principle, the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and territorial governance, are integral parts of the ICORGs’ working context and connote a built-in MLG structure. At the same time, regions vary in their institutional and political capacities; in the more centrally steered states, real decision-making powers are not transferred to regional actors. To this is related to how the partnership principle and the EUSBSR are also criticised for their state-centric approach, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. These three EU policy instruments form an important corpus of primary material for the application of Q methodology in this study. It is the subjective views of the representatives of ICORGs and their member regions of the functioning of MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region, uncovered with Q methodology, that will be the focus in Chapter 5.

5 USE OF THE Q METHODOLOGY IN THE RESEARCH

William Stephenson invented and designed Q technique and its methodology to assist in the examination of human subjectivity (Brown 1980, 5). Subjectivity, according to McKeown and Thomas (1988, 12) is “a person’s communication of his or her point of view; as such, subjectivity is always anchored in self-reference.” The techniques and associated statistical methods of the Q methodology found their initial use in psychology, but they have also been applied in the areas of political science and policy analysis (ibid.). Q methodology covers both theory and principles and guides the application of technique, method, and explanation (ibid. 6). As a hybrid research process, it includes characteristics of quantitative and qualitative analysis (Aalto 2003, 118). From the analytical point of view, Q methodology can be divided at the core into (i) the philosophical and theory-methodological principles that make up the qualitative basis of Q methodology and (ii) the – in many aspects, less significant – technical principles and analysis techniques that make up the quantitative basis of the Q methodology (ibid. 119). As the terminology used in the Q methodology has developed from the times of Stephenson’s writings, to avoid misunderstandings and incoherence in the use of the terminology, I follow in my study the terminological choices used by Watts and Stenner (2012).

A more conventional and traditional methodological solution might have consisted of varieties of text interpretation. For example, a combination of Chaim Perelman’s argumentation theory (Perelman 1996; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971) and Quentin Skinner’s methodological “programme” with context analysis (Skinner 1988; Tully 1988) could have served as an alternative methodological framework for studying the primary material produced by the ICORGs. The focus in Q methodology is instead on subjectivity, and texts serve only as an instrumental purpose for measuring subjective views. Therefore, interviews provide a more natural comparison in terms of alternative methodological solutions.

As the focus of the study is on subjectivity and the understanding of experiences, opinions, attitudes, values, and processes, semi-structured or unstructured interviews might have offered a possible option as an alternative

methodology (cf. Rowley 2012; Tiittula and Ruusuvuori 2005). Structured interviews might have appeared somewhat limited; in this technique, only a restricted number of questions are asked more characteristic of a questionnaire (Rowley 2012, 262). Focused interviews belong to the most well-known techniques of semi-structured interviews, where the same themes are discussed with all respondents but the form and order of questions may vary (Tiittula and Ruusuvuori 2005, 9; for expert interviews see Alastalo, Åkerman, and Vaitinen 2017). Unstructured interviews (i.e., open interviews) are based on a limited number of topics or issues, emphasizing the active role of the respondents around a theme and allowing the interviewer to adapt questions and their order in accordance to respondents' answers (Rowley 2012, 262; cf. Tiittula and Ruusuvuori 2005). The challenge with unstructured interview techniques, however, might have been the comparison and integration of the series of interview transcripts (ibid.).

Q methodology has some advantages in relation to methods of textual interpretation and interviews. It offers a suitable solution for giving voice to the regional actors and for analysing their views. Q methodology also offers a systematic research design that includes the classification of the textual material of interest – here, documents pertaining to the three policy instruments of the EU – and allows for a more systematic comparison of the views of the regional actors than the other techniques would normally offer.

The Q methodological process starts qualitatively, where the researcher collects the research material which represents the social structure to be studied (Aalto 2003, 119). In most cases, the most applicable research materials are texts which are collected and selected together, and developed into a Q-set design with theoretical or empirical criteria (ibid.). The primary research material used in this study consists of material produced by the ICORGs of the Baltic Sea macro-region from their establishment in 1991 until the year 2011: the Baltic Sea Commission (BSC) of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) and the B7 Baltic Islands Network. In addition, I used materials from the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) on the national level and the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) on the municipal level (LAU) as references and for creating stimuli items for the Q set. Material was available mostly in the Internet archives of the studied ICORGs as well as the CBSS and the UBC. In the case of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, the materials were received in electronic form from the CPMR and CPMR Baltic Sea Commission secretariats as the materials are not archived on their Internet sites. The cohesion and regional policy was one focus in the study, as it has reflected the MLG approach through

empirical examples since the end of the 1980s, and has played a key role in the work of the ICORGs since their establishment.

Primary material consists of written narratives: minutes of board meetings with appendices, minutes of the annual meetings with appendices, strategies, action plans, annual working programmes, resolutions, political statements, annual working reports, newsletters, and various speeches. Primary material is heterogeneous. Most of the primary text material consists of minutes and appendices – approximately 1600 written documents – from the 274 board meetings and annual meetings organized from 1991 to 2011 by B7, BSSSC, CPMR BSC, UBC, and CBSS (see chapter “References” for more details for the primary material). As primary text material mainly included meeting and conference documents, it also consisted of much repetitive content as the ICORGs work with similar issues. The purpose, though, has been to cover the primary material of the studied organizations from the beginning of their existence from the 1990s. All ICORGs have not produced the same quantity of coherent material, but the primary material includes political statements about MLG and cohesion and regional policy from all studied ICORGs during that time period, and also covers thoroughly the studied theme and the ICORGs.

5.1 Pilot Q Study

I conducted a pilot study in autumn 2010. The purposes of the pilot study were to test the methodology in the study of the thematic and to learn the use of the methodology in practice. The results of the pilot study were also presented and discussed in the ISSSS Q-methodology conference workshop in Birmingham (UK) in September 2011.

I used the materials and results of the pilot study in designing the Q set. The materials (i.e., items and interviews) and results of the pre-study served to make the Q set of the main research. For the pilot study, five persons were interviewed in the state administration of the German Land Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in September 2010; two more persons were interviewed during autumn 2010 in two Finnish regions (Päijät-Häme and Itä-Uusimaa), as was one representative of the ICORG secretariat (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission). The items were picked from two contexts with help of a theoretical matrix: the role of the ICORGs in the MLG system and their role in the cohesion and regional policy lobbying. The role of the ICORGs was studied in relation to the EU, national, regional, and local levels. On

first hand, the newer primary text material from 2000-2010 was used for forming the items as this material showed the highest relevance regarding the cohesion and regional policy, and the MLG debate. The Q set was reduced from 88 to 30 items gathered altogether from the primary text material. As the 30 items were selected by dropping items with similar contents, some of these 30 items were further modified to appear somewhat more stimulating in the eyes of the participants for the purposes of the experimentation.

Participants in the pilot study received the items at the beginning of the interview. They were asked their subjective views regarding the Q set of 30 items. Participants completed two Q sortings: first while representing the official approach of their organizations, and then while reflecting their personal views. Both times, the condition of instruction was followed in the same way. To gather post-sorting information, a post-sorting interview was conducted with every participant. Participants were asked questions regarding the research thematic, as well as general questions about their work, experiences with, and subjective views about the ICORGs of the Baltic Sea macro-region. Results of the interviews were very important during the qualitative analysis when used to interpret the three factors. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis to obtain more information about the role of the ICORGs in MLG and to deepen the understanding of the subjective views presented by the participants of the Finnish and German member regions and by the ICORG secretariat. The information gathered during the pilot study, helped to further focus the research thematic of the main study and to develop the items. The interpretation was followed by analysing Q sorts through factor analysis with the software programme developed for Q analysis whereby I combined Varimax and by-hand rotation techniques.³⁸

It was obvious that the number of persons interviewed in the pilot study was far too low to receive representative results in relation to the regions of Finland and Germany, and to the ICORGs represented in the research. It was apparent that a third grouping of the participants could have been created among the representatives of the ICORG secretariats, as their approaches seem to be rather different than those of the representatives of the regions. As was to be expected,

³⁸ PQMethod version 2.35 (updated 10 November 2014) is available for download, free of charge and courtesy of Peter Schmolck, from <http://schmolck.userweb.mwn.de/qmethod/downpqwin.htm> (accessed on 25 November 2016). For the pilot study, the earlier version 2.11 was used. "Varimax is an excellent means of revealing a subject matter from viewpoints that almost everybody might recognize and consider to be of importance. By-hand rotation and its factors, on the other hand, can reveal a subject matter in more original and surprising ways; ways that might be seen as important by somebody or anybody with a little more local knowledge" (Watts and Stenner 2012, 126).

the regional approach towards the ICORGs is rather different in the regions of the unitary and federal states; however, the basic division and starting point of the research seemed to be rather fruitful.

The pilot study was helpful in recognizing the most important issues at stake in the work of the ICORGs, which guided the preparation of the research interviews of this main study. Several new items were created and included in the main study based on the pilot Q sortings and interviews with the representatives of the ICORG member regions and the secretariat. During the pilot part of the research interviews, participants' availability for a retest in later stages of the research was determined. All participants showed much interest towards the research, and promised their availability for the further research interviews. In the next sections, I will go through the use of the methodology in the main study.

5.2 Q-Set Design

Operationally, the discussion universe is understood in the Q methodology as a universe covering all the items regarding the studied thematic (Aalto 2003, 119). As in all item universes, there is basically an infinite number of items with subjective material, and the researcher intends to create a design of the most representative items in item universe. Researchers may try to build a theoretical model to reflect the main line of discussion in the research area, or – alternatively – just to collect items based on how representative they are regarding the research problem (ibid.). “In the structured Q set, the researcher begins the sampling process by breaking down the relevant subject matter into a series of component themes or issues either on the basis of some preconceived theory or simply through research and observation” (Watts and Stenner 2012, 59; cf. Brown 1980).

The exact size of the final Q set will be dictated by the subject matter itself, typically consisting of 40 to 80 items (Watts and Stenner 2012, 61). A smaller number of items may risk comprehensive coverage; if a greater number is used, too many items can make the sorting process very demanding (ibid.). I used a balanced-block approach of 40 items. My Q set was hybrid, as it combined naturalistic and ready-made items (cf. McKeown and Thomas 1988, 25). The naturalistic items originated from the research interviews of the pilot study, and the ready-made items from the primary material of written narratives. McKeown and Thomas (1988, 25) state that “the naturalistic Q set greatly reduce the risk of missing the respondent's meanings or confusing them with alternative meaning

deriving from an external frame of reference.” As nearly half of the items are naturalistic, the Q set was comprehensive to mirror the subjective views of the persons performing the Q sorts, which assisted both the Q-sorting process and “the attribution of meaning” as the items were partly based on the respondents’ own communication (cf. *ibid.*). Out of the final 40 items, 18 were from the pilot research interviews, which were conducted originally in English, Finnish, or German. All items from written narratives were originally in English, including six items from conference resolutions, six from position papers, five from strategy documents, two from speeches, two from minutes of the meetings, and one from an annual report.

Structured Q sets are composed more systematically, and they also contribute to the theory testing by introducing hypothetical or theoretical considerations into the Q set with a deductive design (McKeown and Thomas 1988, 28). I conceptualized Q-set items in terms of seven parameters: (i) multi-level governance; (ii) cohesion and regional policy; and (iii) additional policy sectors as well as (iv) regional level/NUTS 2 and NUTS 3, (v) interregional level of the Baltic Sea macro-region including ICORGs, (vi) national level including intergovernmental cooperation organizations, and (vii) supranational EU level. The process of compiling the Q items was organized using a combination of these parameters to twelve cells. In the next step, I collected the items for the final Q set from the primary material with the matrix tool, with four rows expressing the levels of the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region (i.e., regional level, Baltic Sea interregional level where ICORGs operate, national level, and EU level) (see Table 5). The two contexts – of multi-level governance, and cohesion and regional policy – created two columns in the matrix tool. It was possible to find, with this combination of parameters, a sufficient number of items (i.e., from three to nine) for each cell except with the parameter “national level – cohesion and regional policy (Cb),” which does not directly belong to the policy priorities of the IGOs in the Baltic Sea context (cf. Aalto et al. 2012; Etzold 2010; Etzold and Gänzle 2012; Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000) Because of this remaining parameter, a third column was created for the other relevant policy sectors. In this case, the “extra cells” of other sectoral thematic policies shared by the ICORGs were used for finding the missing items to item matrix on the national level with the parameter “national level – other sectoral policies.” The “other sectoral policies” column, however, produced some useful additional items for the parameters Ac, Bc, and Cc as well. Because sufficient items were found with the parameters “EU level – role of the international regional organizations of the Baltic Sea macro-region (Da),” and “EU level – cohesion and

regional policy (Db),” the “other sectoral policies” column was not needed for finding extra items, and so the cell (Dc) remained empty.

Table 5. Matrix tool

MLG levels	Context		
	a. Role of the international cooperation organizations of the regional governments of the Baltic Sea macro-region	b. Cohesion policy – structural funds (regional policy)	c. Other sectoral policies
A. Regional level (Finland/NUTS 3, Germany/NUTS 2)	<u>Aa (9):</u> 2, 3, 4, 15, 16 , 19 , 24, 45, 46 , 57, 91, 92 , 99, 102 , 106 , 107, 108, 110 , 113 , 117, 121, 130, 131 , 133	<u>Ab (6):</u> 43, 54, 55, 56, 58, 105 , 62, 76, 78 , 103 , 114 , 128, 138 , 149	<u>Ac (1):</u> 86 , 88
B. Interregional level of the Baltic Sea macro-region (ICORGs)	<u>Ba (6):</u> 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 18, 20, 22, 25, 26, 33, 39, 40, 42, 44, 48 , 60, 65, 66 , 94, 96, 101 , 111, 115 , 116 , 119, 120, 127 , 129, 134, 135, 136, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145	<u>Bb (4):</u> 1, 5, 12 , 27, 29, 30, 38, 49, 90 , 98 , 100 , 122	<u>Bc (2):</u> 84 , 85 , 87
C. National level (IGOs)	<u>Ca (4):</u> 80, 81, 82, 83, 93, 95 , 104 , 126 , 132 , 150	<u>Cb (1):</u> 63	<u>Cc (2):</u> 146, 147 , 148
D. EU level	<u>Da (3):</u> 10, 13, 17, 32, 36, 37, 68, 69, 70 , 97 , 109, 112, 118	<u>Db (3):</u> 6, 21, 23, 28, 47, 51, 53, 59, 61, 67 , 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 79, 123, 124 , 125	<u>Dc (0)</u>

Note. Item numbers are from raw Q items. Bolded items were selected to the study.

The primary material was analysed with this matrix tool. As mentioned earlier, at the pilot stage, the process first produced 88 raw items, which were reduced to 30

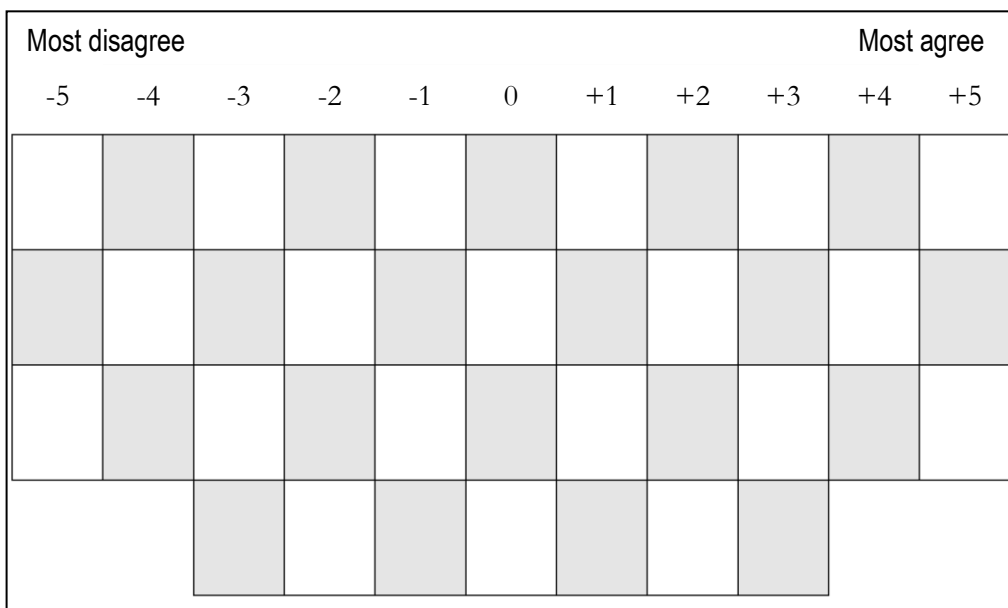
items for the pilot interviews. The pilot interviews conducted during the autumn of 2010 produced 29 additional new raw items for the main study. After the pilot stage, the primary material was worked through further with the same matrix tool. Altogether, for the main research, 150 raw items were gathered with the matrix tool from the primary written material and from the transcribed pilot interviews. These 150 raw items were reduced to 40 items (see Table 5, bolded numbers in the matrix). In the final Q set, 18 items originated from the pilot interviews. As the 40 items were selected by dropping out items with similar contents, these 40 items were further modified to better stimulate the participants. The text and content of the final 40 items follow, as much as possible, the text parts in the primary material or the statements made in the pilot interviews. The item cards were also translated by the researcher from English (Appendix 6) into Finnish and German (Appendices 7 and 8).

In the pilot study, the sorting process during interviews took between 90 minutes and two hours. It was obvious that the sorting time would be increased with a higher number of items. Forty items with this thematic appeared in the upper limits regarding the time used, from two to three hours, with two sortings and one post-sorting interview in the end after the sortings. The pilot study helped to clarify the wording of the individual items, reduce duplication, generate new items, and ensure that the Q set provided adequate coverage of the relevant grounds (cf. Watts and Stenner 2012, 61).

In the test situation, the participants perform a Q sorting of items to the Q-sorting distribution with the goal of modelling their subjective thinking towards the collected items (Aalto 2003, 121). The goal of the Q methodology is to let the respondents model their viewpoints on the studied matter of subjective importance “through the operational medium of a Q sort” (McKeown and Thomas 1988, 12). Respondents create the “model” by “systematically rank-ordering a purposively sampled set of stimuli – a Q set – according to specific condition of instruction” (ibid.). In Q technique, through “a set of procedures, a sample of objects is placed in order of significance with respect to a single person” (Brown 1980, 5). Most typically, the design involves items of opinion (i.e., Q set) that an individual rank-orders in terms of some condition of instruction (ibid.). Normally, the participant performs the Q sorting individually, but the task can be made also in groups (Aalto 2003, 119). I used an 11-point (-5 to +5) forced-choice frequency distribution (3 3 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 3 3) for these 40 items (see Figure 2). This distribution is designed for use with a set of 40 items and, hence, contains 40 spaces or ranking positions (cf. Watts and Stenner 2012, 17). A somewhat shallower distribution was used because

the participant group was particularly expert and knowledgeable. A flatter distribution of this type clearly offers greater possibility to make fine-grained discriminations at the extremes of the distribution – “a strategy that allows us to maximize the advantages of our participants’ excellent topic knowledge” (Watts and Stenner 2012, 80).

Figure 2. An 11-point (-5 to +5) forced-choice frequency distribution



List of the Q items. The original raw Q-item numbers are in parentheses (see Table 5).

1. (12) I want that ICORGs initiate and promote practical and useful projects.
2. (16) Strong local and regional involvement in the ICORGs gains much wider public participation and support for European cooperation.
3. (19) ICORGs of the Baltic Sea Area need support from as many regions as possible.
4. (46) Private actors in the BSR must play an important role in the implementation process of EU strategies.
5. (48) Task is now through EUSBSR to encourage organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline existing structures in order to strengthen their impact and to avoid double work.
6. (66) I think that ICORGs should review a possible solution for alternative membership in countries where regional structures are undergoing changes and the regional level is disappearing.

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7. (67) It is evident that ICORGs create awareness among EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities when drawing up European policies and legislation.
8. (70) I truly think that ICORGs have significantly changed the position of regions as regards the building of wider Europe and contributed to the creation of transnational and intra-European cooperation.
9. (78) The territorial excellence policy (smart specialization) as a part of the future cohesion policy should apply in all European regions in order to optimize each region's own potentials.
10. (84) The task of the ICORGs is to support a joint strategy on infrastructure and transport covering the entire Baltic Sea region.
11. (86) There has to be the regional commitment and encouragement to implement measures agreed in the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) in order to reach and maintain good ecological status of the Baltic Sea.
12. (87) It is the task of the ICORGs to raise public awareness of energy and climate change issues in the BSR.
13. (90) I think that it is very difficult task for the ICORGs to find common nominators in the EU cohesion policy.
14. (92) ICORGs are not able to promote regional development objectives of their member regions within EU institutions, national governments and other Baltic Sea organizations.
15. (95) Better division of labour in different policy fields should be introduced between national and regional levels.
16. (97) ICORGs should increase their cooperation outside of the BSR and even globally.
17. (98) ICORGs should take a role in implementing the EUSBSR.
18. (100) In cohesion policy lobbying ICORGs are stronger than regional offices in Brussels.
19. (101) BSR ICORGs tend to have missed an ambitious goal for their work.
20. (102) ICORGs should seek division of labour among their members for acting in sectors where strongest.
21. (103) ICORGs should contribute in abolishing weaknesses of regions and not supporting strengths.
22. (104) National level (e.g., ministries) of the BSR is not interested in the views presented by the ICORGs.
23. (105) Economically strong regions have too much power in the ICORGs.
24. (106) Member regions are unable to find suitable and capable persons to work in ICORGs.
25. (110) My regional politicians discuss regularly in their meetings about the work in the ICORGs.
26. (113) My region would be prepared to invest more resources into ICORGs to make their work more efficient.
27. (114) Regions do not have resources to participate in implementing the EUSBSR.
28. (115) It is not possible to include Russian regions into ICORGs as equivalent partners because Russia is not an EU member state.

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29. (116) The decision-making in the ICORGs is very much based on few individuals instead of joint thinking of member regions.
30. (118) It is unrealistic to create a MLG system in the BSR.
31. (124) It is crucial to create the best possible relationship and synergy between rural development efforts locally, regionally, nationally and in relation to the EU funded effort (Structural funds programmes and the rural development programmes).
32. (125) The EU Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration has been and must remain a major source of funding for research and innovation in the regions and municipalities of the BSR.
33. (126) The Northern Dimension (ND) offers a special platform for cooperation with the non-EU members of the BSR. The ND activities should complement EUSBSR in order to provide a common approach of all Baltic Sea actors to mutual objectives and challenges.
34. (127) To strengthen the implementation process of the EUSBSR the ICORGs suggest creation of a new model of governance which combines the top-down and bottom-up processes of the MLG. This strategic instrument supports the EUSBSR and creates a catalyst for further development of the region.
35. (131) Cities shall play a crucial role in the process of creation and implementation of the EUSBSR. Their particular strength is the closeness to the inhabitants.
36. (132) From our consultations with other actors during past years – be they intergovernmental, governmental, non-governmental, academic or in the private sector – it has become clear that the CBSS is regarded as one of the leading organizations facilitating cooperation in the BSR. It is important for the CBSS to retain this role and develop it further.
37. (138) Regional and local levels should be strongly involved in the debates of the future regional policy as well as in implementation and administration of the structural funds.
38. (147) Development of tourism is an important field of the CBSS cooperation that promotes the economic development based on the common cultural heritage of the populations.
39. (148) CBSS stated the importance of the development of favourable framework conditions for entrepreneurship and innovation in order to strengthen potential regional business clusters.
40. (149) Particularly concerning territorial cooperation strands, decisions on programmes and projects should be mainly a responsibility of the subnational levels.

5.3 The Participant Group (P Set)

The next step of the research process was to select a suitable group of participants from the studied population (cf. Aalto 2003, 119). Typical for the Q method is that it operates with small numbers of participants (McKeown and Thomas 1988, 11). It has more broadly philosophical than pragmatic reasons (ibid.). As subjectivity is responsive to empirical analysis, the small P sets sustain meaningful generalizations about behavioural dynamics (ibid. 36). Persons can be selected for the study based

on theoretical relevance, according to their special relevance to the goals of the study, or by pragmatic approach, where anyone will apply (ibid.; cf. Watts and Stenner 2012, 71). In this study, the special relevance of the selected persons played a decisive important role. The participant group was built of representatives of Finnish regions, German Länder, and the secretariats of the ICORGs. The German participants represented all the North-German Länder (i.e., all the German member regions of the ICORGs). The Finnish participants represented eight out of nineteen Finnish regions, but all the participating regions were active in the ICORGs and represented all the largest Finnish regions but also included medium-sized regions geographically in different parts of Finland. All six Finnish member regions of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission were represented in the study. These regions are active in the BSSSC as well. Additionally, one participant represented the Finnish member regions in the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. The participants of the ICORG secretariats represented all the studied ICORGs: BSSSC, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, and B7 Baltic Islands, as well as in addition one representative of the UBC as a reference. The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission is a fee-based organization, while the BSSSC is a non-fee-based network organization. Its activities are open to all regions of the Baltic Sea macro-region. B7 Baltic Islands, BSSSC, and CPMR Baltic Sea Commission have secretariats hosted by one member region or by two on a shared basis. BSSSC and CPMR Baltic Sea Commission secretariats are nominated on a biannual basis; the B7 Baltic Islands Secretariat biannually since 2016, but annually prior to 2016. The rule has become that one or two regions hold the secretariat in the case of the BSSSC and the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission for two periods (i.e., four years).

As I have been working for four years (2003–2006) as the Executive Secretary in the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and have been taking part for ten years (at the time of the interviews) in the activities of various ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-region, I could evaluate the knowledge base of the participants and use my personal contact network to invite the participants to the research interviews. I recruited the participants whom I knew to have lengthy experience and comprehensive knowledge about the work of the ICORGs. The secretariats were also hosted by Finnish and German regions; it was, therefore, possible to interview representatives of secretariats of both countries. Finnish regions and German Länder selected in the research are represented in the ICORGs by a politician or a civil servant representative as mandated by the political decision-making body of the Finnish region or German Land (see Table 6). ICORGs are represented in the

research by members of the secretariat of each organization representing the whole Baltic Sea area. The person set includes leading politicians and officials of Finnish Regional Councils and German Länder as well as officials and politicians of the ICORGs. The interviews of the participants of the ICORG secretariats were conducted, in addition to those from Finland and Germany, in Denmark, Norway, Poland, and Sweden. The secretariats and their chairmanships have been located in these countries as well because of the rotation rule.

Table 6. Regions and ICORGs represented in the main study

Name of the region (if available, name in English in parenthesis) or the ICORG	Number of participants
Finnish regions (8): Häme, Kymenlaakso, Pirkanmaa (<i>Tampere Region</i>), Pohjanmaa (<i>Ostrobothnia</i>), Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (<i>Oulu Region</i>), Päijät-Häme (<i>Lahti Region</i>), Uusimaa (<i>Helsinki-Uusimaa Region</i>), Varsinais-Suomi (<i>Southwestern Finland</i>), and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (<i>AFLRA</i>)	12
German Länder (3): Hansestadt Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Schleswig-Holstein	10
ICORG Secretariats (4): Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (CPMR BSC), Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), B7 Baltic Islands Network, and as a reference Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)	10

The requirement in the selection of participants to the person set was that the participants work in, or have actively taken part in activities in, one or several ICORGs included in the research, and that they know well the thematic of the Q items. Most of the participants have several years' working experience in these ICORGs in leading positions. As the ICORGs' work in the political context and the member regions should be represented in the ICORGs – based on their statutes – by the elected or nominated politicians, the aim was to include politicians and officials in the participant group of 32 persons in a balanced way, but recruiting politicians to the research appeared to be a challenge (see Table 7). Some politicians (i.e., seven officials and five politicians) participated in the research in Finnish regions, (i.e., seven officials and three politicians) in the ICORGs, but German Länder are represented in the research only by officials, not by politicians.

This reflects the way German Länder work with ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-region. All German board members of the ICORGs are officials. Further, the P set included persons in different kinds of positions in the regional administration and in the ICORGs (i.e., experts, directors, executive secretaries, and politicians). Persons also work in different departments of their employing organizations and use fruitfully different approaches to look at the role and work of the ICORGs. The final person set represented rather well the selected ICORGs, their secretariats, and their member regions for the purposes of this study. Within this group, 22 out of 32 participants represent ICORGs' member regions and have varying working backgrounds on different MLG levels: regional (civil servants or politicians in administration or decision-making bodies of Finnish Regional Councils or German Länder), national (members or civil servants of Finnish Parliament), and European (civil servants of regional EU representations in Brussels and politicians in the European Committee of the Regions).

Table 7. List of participants

	Code (Pseudonym)	FI/DE/ICORG	Gender	Status
1.	VaOr/Pe01M (Erkki)	Finnish region	Male	Official
2.	VaOr/Pe02M (Kurt)	ICORG	Male	Politician
3.	VaOr/Pe03M (Mathias)	German Land	Male	Official
4.	VaOr/Pe01F (Ursula)	German Land	Female	Official
5.	VaOr/Pe02F (Aino)	Finnish region	Female	Politician
6.	VaOr/Pe04M (Seppo)	Finnish region	Male	Official
7.	VaOr/Pe05M (Marti)	Finnish region	Male	Politician
8.	VaOr/Pe06M (Helmut)	German Land	Male	Official
9.	VaOr/Pe07M (Peter)	ICORG	Male	Official
10.	VaOr/Pe08M (Karl-Heinz)	German Land	Male	Official
11.	VaOr/Pe03F (Charlotte)	ICORG	Female	Politician
12.	VaOr/Pe09M (Leo)	Finnish region	Male	Official
13.	VaOr/Pe10M (Jani)	ICORG	Male	Official

(continued on next page)

	Code (Pseudonym)	FI/DE/ICORG	Gender	Status
14.	VaOr/Pe04F (Jenni)	Finnish region	Female	Official
15.	VaOr/Pe05F (Gertrud)	German Land	Female	Official
16.	VaOr/Pe11M (Florian)	ICORG	Male	Official
17.	VaOr/Pe06F (Katarina)	German Land	Female	Official
18.	VaOr/Pe12M (Petri)	Finnish region	Male	Official
19.	VaOr/Pe07F (Ella)	ICORG	Female	Official
20.	VaOr/Pe13M (Veikko)	Finnish region	Male	Politician
21.	VaOr/Pe14M (Juhani)	Finnish region	Male	Official
22.	VaOr/Pe15M (Kristian)	ICORG	Male	Official
23.	VaOr/Pe16M (Markus)	Finnish region	Male	Politician
24.	VaOr/Pe08F (Monika)	German Land	Female	Official
25.	VaOr/Pe17M (Pentti)	Finnish region	Male	Official
26.	VaOr/Pe18M (Ulrich)	German Land	Male	Official
27.	VaOr/Pe19M (Thomas)	German Land	Male	Official
28.	VaOr/Pe09F (Astrid)	ICORG	Female	Official
29.	VaOr/Pe20M (Aaro)	ICORG	Male	Official
30.	VaOr/Pe10F (Ritva)	Finnish region	Female	Politician
31.	VaOr/Pe11F (Sabine)	German Land	Female	Official
32.	VaOr/Pe21M (Rudolf)	ICORG	Male	Politician

Note: The names of the participants have been changed to guarantee the confidentiality of the research and the anonymity of the participants. Each interview is titled in the research material with a code.

The research interviews were conducted from February to June 2012. Each participant was contacted beforehand in order to explain the contents of the research and to schedule the interview time. Interviews were done in most cases in the workplace of the participant. Condition of instruction was sent to the participant a couple of days before the interview so that the participant could get acquainted with the structure of the interview. In most cases, participants were able to reserve the needed time for the interview without a limitation. Because of this, item cards were given to the participants first at the beginning of the interview.

Only in two cases, because of the time limitation, were item cards sent to the participants by e-mail beforehand in order to shorten the interview length.

Item cards were originally written in English as the primary material of the ICORGs is in English, but item cards were translated by the researcher into Finnish and German too. The participants could decide at the beginning of the interview which language to use with item cards, though many Finnish and German participants preferred to use item cards in English because the working language of the ICORGs is English. The discussions during interviews were conducted in English, Finnish, or German. Most interviews lasted from two to three hours, and the longest one ran over five hours. No time limitation was set for the participants.

5.4 Condition of Instruction

Condition of instruction was sent to the participants by e-mail before the interview (Appendices 3–5). The document was written originally in English but was also translated into Finnish and German. The condition of instruction briefly explained the research question and content of the research. Further, the document explained how the interview would proceed. All participants were acquainted with using English in their day-to-day work with the ICORGs as officials or politicians, because English is the working language of the ICORGs. The translated documents functioned more as a supportive material to guarantee full understanding of the goals of the research and items. As part of the items deal with content that is rather detailed with different policies, it proved to be important that participants had the opportunity before the Q sorting to ask questions to make sure that they fully understood the terminology. The items in the original English language were also available for all participants, but some Finnish and German participants preferred to use item cards translated into their mother tongues. Several participants also wanted to see item cards in the original English language before the sorting. The Q-sorting process demands significant concentration, and some participants felt that it was easier to do the sorting and answer the questions by the researcher in their own mother tongue, whether in Finnish or in German. In contrast, some participants insisted on using English during the entire interview, as they were used to using English in their day-to-day work with the ICORGs. Only one of the participants spoke English as a mother tongue.

Doing Q sortings in person was the best solution in the studied thematic, as the items' content was rather complex and included detailed information; therefore, it was very important to hear the comments of the participants on the items during the Q sorting, and be able to respond to them with further questions. In the beginning of all interviews, the condition of instruction was reviewed with the participant so the smooth flow of the Q sorting was guaranteed. Before item cards were given to the participants, they did receive the texts of items on three A4 sheets so the participants could first get acquainted with the contents of items and make clarifying question if needed, without hurrying.

Participants were asked to freely make comments about item cards during the sorting process, but it appeared that the most practical method was to first let the participants to make the three piles of item cards signifying disagreement, neutral position, and agreement; and by sorting of item cards to the Q-sorting distribution, the participant could start to comment on them. This led in a favourable way to participants commenting on every item card when sorting them. Some of the items about the role of the ICORGs seemed to create among the participants a consensus-like way of distribution and discussion, so it was most important that participants commented on these items, as the argument could have been very different when different participants put the same item into the same ranking position (reviewed in Section 6.5). In the end of the Q sorting, participants were asked once more to look and go through the Q sort, and were told they could freely change the ranking positions of the items if needed. Participants were also asked to tell if they recognized any patterns in how they had sorted the items. To document the data, the researcher photographed the finalized Q sorts, and made exact copies by hand of the original distribution sheets into the blank distributions provided at the outset after the post-sorting interview.

Many participants recognized different patterns and strategies in how they had made their Q sortings. It was common for policy issues or thematic to create their own groupings of items, or sometimes certain principles were used to another end. It was also noteworthy that many participants distanced themselves from the partly modified, stimulating items, placing them on the "most disagree" side of the grid. This also reflects the expertise of the participants and confirms how knowledgeable they are in their work as officials or politicians.

Without exception, all participants showed much interest towards the research, even though only one of the German participants had participated in a Q research before. Q methodology was a new way of working for the participants, and in several interviews participants had some doubts in the beginning, but those doubts

were forgotten very soon when Q sorting was started. In many cases, participants gave very positive feedback: If they had been working with the studied thematic for many years, now – for the first time in a very long time – they had started to think about the connections of issues of the studied thematic in a completely new way.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. In this kind of thematic it was very important to hear participants' arguments when they ranked items at the different positions on the distribution. In the end, a post-sorting interview was held with questions regarding the studied thematic. It also helped the researcher to receive additional information if the complete answers could not be covered during the discussion when participants sorted the items. This post-sorting information appeared very important for receiving more information about the subjective views of participants as not all detailed questions could be made during the sorting without disturbing the participant's thinking process, because sorting requires great concentration from participants. During the post-sorting interviews, discussion concentrated more on the thematic issues, as participants argued the items and decisions regarding how they placed the items on the Q-sorting distribution.

In addition to the discussion about the ranking the items during the Q sorting and thematic of the study, participants were asked seven questions during the post-sorting interview to gather supportive information for the research about the relevant policy areas. The questions related to: the level of participants' and organizations' commitment to the work in the ICORGs; the ICORGs' work, goal-setting, and future; and the conditions for international work of the organizations represented by the participants. Post-sorting interview questions were not shared with the participants beforehand (see Appendix 9).

5.5 Factor Extraction

In the quantitative part of the study, the researcher analyses the results of these individual or group tasks (e.g., with factor analysis), and then the research is moved again towards the qualitative direction (Aalto 2003, 119). Factor scoring helps in understanding and interpreting the meanings of factors in two ways: through construction of the factor array; and through determination of items whose values in the arrays are statistically different in any pair of factors (McKeon and Thomas 1988, 13).

In Q methodology the presence of several independent factors is evidence of different points of view in the person-sample (or participant group). An individual's positive loading on a factor indicates his or her shared subjectivity with others on that factor; negative loadings, on the other hand, are signs of rejection of the factor's perspective. (McKeon and Thomas 1988, 17)

For extraction of the factors, I used the software programme PQ Method.³⁹ In the factor extraction, eigenvalues, so-called Kaiser-Guttman criterion, have been used as indicative of a factor's statistical strength and explanatory power. Low factor eigenvalues (EV) – specifically, less than 1.00 – are often used as a cut-off point for the extraction and retention of factors (Watts and Stenner 2012, 105). This cut-off point means that an extracted factor with an EV of less than 1.00 actually accounts for less study variance than a single Q sort, and hardly constitutes an effective reduction of the correlation matrix (ibid. 106). Two further parameters have been used to determine an appropriate number of factors: (i) accepting those factors that have two or more significant factor loadings following extraction, and (ii) Humphrey's rule, which states that a factor is significant if the cross product of its two highest loadings (ignoring the sign) exceeds twice the standard error (ibid. 107). The same rule can also be applied less strictly by insisting that the cross-products simply exceed the standard error (ibid. 108).⁴⁰

Through the condition of instruction, participants made two Q sortings during the interview. The first Q sorting was done as a representative of their organizations. The participant made each decision to rank item based on how he or she makes decisions under the rules of the employing organization in day-to-day working life (e.g., writing materials, participating meetings, making decisions). For the first Q sorting, the participants were reminded that they represented their regions or organizations, and that they were not taking part in the ICORG activities as individuals during this sorting. The idea behind this first sorting of items was to create a reliable understanding of how the ICORGs work in the MLG system and what kind of thinking lies behind day-to-day organizational work in the ICORGs and in the member regions, as well as in the interactions between them.

Interesting, though, was whether there was any difference in acting and making the Q sortings if the participants may act and think freely through their own personal standpoints. This is why, through the condition of instruction, the

³⁹ For the main study, the PQMethod version 2.12 was used.

⁴⁰ A significant factor loading at the 0.01 level has been calculated using the following equation (Brown 1980, 222-223): significant factor loading for the study = $2.58 \times (1 \div \sqrt{\text{no. of items in Q set}})$ = $2.58 \times (1 \div \sqrt{40}) = 0.4079$ rounded up to ± 0.41 . The standard error is calculated as follows (ibid.): standard error for the study = $1 \div (\sqrt{\text{no. of items in Q set}}) = 1 \div (\sqrt{40}) = 0.1581$ rounded up to 0.16.

participants made a second sorting of items as individuals, disregarding the rules, policies, and instructions of the employer.

The factor extractions for the Q sorts through the organizational and personal points of view were made separately. A challenge during both approaches for the factor extraction was that most Q sorts are located in a wide and coherent group, close to each other, between the factor axes. This was the case in both Q sorts (i.e., from organizational point of view as well as from the individual point of view). This implies that there has to be rather large consensus about the general lines about the items, but the distance of the points on the opposite sides of the group was rather wide; it would be possible to find separate groupings of Q sorts by looking into and dividing the wide and coherent group which appeared first. This consensus is certainly a fact which guides the organizations and their decision-making and builds a firm basis for their existence. Splitting the wide group of Q sorts may also better show the original standpoints of participating regions or organizations, as we have to be aware that the primary material of this study is often highly discussed and rewritten in the ICORGs to reach a consensus approach with the most content participants and member regions can agree upon. During the factor extraction, a consensus-like thematic discussion around several items among factors was recognized, and will be analysed in more detail in coming chapters.

Factor extraction of the Q sorts, arranged through the organizational point of view, was conducted with the result of five factors by hand rotation after the Varimax procedure starting with six centroids. Five factors resulted in a 48% variance. The correlations between factors are rather high, which could be expected to happen, although the extracted factors explain and give detailed views about the ICORGs in the MLG system.⁴¹ The factor extraction was made with the same technical process for the Q sorts distributed through the second sorting through the personal point of view, which resulted in a four-factor solution with study variance of 47%.⁴²

⁴¹ In the five-factor solution through the organizational view the Factor I resulted 11 % study variance with five sorts (VaOr08M, VaOr03F, VaOr08F, VaOr11F, VaOr21M), Factor II with six sorts 10 % study variance (VaOr03M, VaOr01F, VaOr07F, VaOr18M, VaOr19M, VaOr10F), Factor III with five sorts 11% study variance (VaOr05M, VaOr13M, VaOr15M, VaOr16M, VaOr20M), Factor IV with four sorts 8 % study variance (VaOr02F, VaOr07M, VaOr09M, VaOr17M) and Factor V with two sorts 8 % study variance (VaOr04M, VaOr05F).

⁴² In the four-factor solution through the personal view Factor I produced study variance of 17% with eight sorts (VaPe01M, VaPe04M, VaPe06M, VaPe09M, VaPe12M, VaPe13M, VaPe16M, VaPe20M), Factor II study variance of 7% with three sorts (VaPe11M, VaPe07F, VaPe18M), Factor

The four-factor solution through the personal view appeared content-wise rather similar to the five-factor solution of the organizational approach. The defining sorts in the five-factor solution through the organizational point of view appear to be more reliable and representative than in the four-factor solution through the personal point of view. Many participants had already said during the interview that they have difficulties distinguishing between their professional and personal views, and no big differences between the two Q sortings of each person were expected, but still it was interesting to see the results as participants came from countries with different administrative traditions – not only from Finland and Germany, but among the representatives of ICORG secretariats from Denmark, Norway, Poland, and Sweden.

Regarding the aim of the study to clarify the role of the ICORGs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region it is most relevant to understand the subjective views of participants as the representatives of their regions and organizations. Because of this, only the results of the factor extraction from the organizational point of view are discussed in this study in more detail.

Each factor will be analysed through the role of the ICORGs in the MLG system (i.e., through relationships of the ICORGs to the regional levels of NUTS 2 and NUTS 3, to the Baltic Sea interregional level, to the national level and to the EU level). Factor interpretation is made based on the Q sorts and interviews done with the participants as well as the earlier research about MLG, EU policy instruments, and cooperation of IGOs in the Baltic Sea macro-region.

As a result of factor interpretation, only four factors of the five-factor solution through the organizational point of view are presented. Reflecting the contents of the fifth factor to the other four factors, it was not possible to recognize any own specific features regarding the MLG discussion which would have made a relevant difference through the factor scores and contents of the in-depth interviews which would not have been presented in the other four factors. The Factor V is presented only by two Q sorts and in most of the relevant items regarding MLG and cohesion and regional policy of the EU, these significant loadings could be found for the other factors as well. It was not possible to find an independent feature for the fifth factor which was not already covered by the other four factors. My decision was to include the relevant points of this statistical Factor V into the other four factors and condense the results after the factor interpretation to the four

III study variance of 14 % with six sorts (VaPe02F, VaPe05M, VaPe07M, VaPe05F, VaPe08F, VaPe19M) and Factor IV study variance of 9 % only with two sorts (VaPe14M, VaPe11F).

main factors. As the Factor V did not exist substantially independently, leaving it out did not affect the remaining four factors.

I also participated at this stage of the research in workshops at the ISSSS Q-methodology conference in Amsterdam (NL) in September 2013, where I had the opportunity to present the preliminary results of the main study and discuss the challenging points of the factor interpretation with other PhD students and Q-methodology scholars.

In this chapter I introduced the quantitative part of the Q methodology with Q-set design, design of the participant group, condition of instruction, and principles for making factor extraction. I move next to present the qualitative part of the Q methodology – the factor interpretation process.

6 FACTOR INTERPRETATION: ICORGS' TASKS IN THE MLG SYSTEM OF THE BSR

The qualitative part of the analysis is based on the quantitative clustering of the subjective views of the 32 Q-sorting participants within the four distinct factors. These 32 participants were the ones who were selected into the final person set. I considered a five-factor and a four-factor solution, but a four-factor solution was selected to avoid high intercorrelations among factors.⁴³ The four rightmost columns in Table 8 express the participants' associations with each factor, through their degrees of agreement or disagreement with the factors. The values are called factor loadings. Statistically significant factor loadings are shown in parentheses. Q sorts that possess a significant factor loading in relation to more than one of the study factors are defined as confounded, and typically they are not used in the construction of any of the factor estimates (Watts and Stenner 2012, 129). The significant factor loading as calculated in Section 5.5 has the value $\pm 0,41$. Because of this value, five Q sorts were recognized as confounded: Erkki (1); Jani (13); Jenni (14); Juhani (21); and Astrid (28).

⁴³ When comparing the Q-sort values of the items between the factors, the fifth factor mainly stressed the lobbying role of the ICORGS which is also the main content of the Factor III and the smart specialization policy which is stressed in the Factor IV. It was not possible to create a unique content for the Factor V which would have made a distinction compared to the other four factors.

Table 8. Participants and factor loadings

	Pseudonyms of participants	Finnish region/ German Land/ ICORG	Gender M=male F=female	Status	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
1.	Erkki (C)	Finnish	M	Official	0.3853	-0.0368	0.4455	0.5282
2.	Kurt	ICORG	M	Politician	0.1512	0.1157	0.0599	0.3953
3.	Mathias	German	M	Official	0.0092	(0.4227)	0.1399	-0.0285
4.	Ursula	German	F	Official	0.2893	(0.5460)	0.3258	-0.1128
5.	Aino	Finnish	F	Politician	0.2075	0.3558	0.2906	(0.4516)
6.	Seppo	Finnish	M	Official	0.1464	0.0025	0.3789	0.2793
7.	Martti	Finnish	M	Politician	0.1588	0.1627	(0.7587)	0.1215
8.	Helmut	German	M	Official	0.3433	0.2332	0.2843	0.0693
9.	Peter	ICORG	M	Official	0.0523	0.1402	0.2339	(0.4951)
10.	Karl-Heinz	German	M	Official	(0.5939)	0.1105	0.1848	0.3032
11.	Charlotte	ICORG	F	Politician	(0.4045)	0.3237	0.3073	0.2747
12.	Leo	Finnish	M	Official	0.2378	0.3455	0.2820	(0.4282)
13.	Jani (C)	ICORG	M	Official	0.4371	0.3353	0.0890	0.0549
14.	Jenni (C)	Finnish	F	Official	-0.2847	0.5153	0.1395	0.3769
15.	Gertrud	German	F	Official	0.1179	0.2083	0.0438	-0.0043
16.	Florian	ICORG	M	Official	-0.0039	0.2082	-0.1486	-0.2743
17.	Katarina	German	F	Official	0.3772	0.0816	0.2734	0.0854
18.	Petri	Finnish	M	Official	0.1660	0.1479	0.0666	0.3629
19.	Ella	ICORG	F	Official	0.3206	(0.5280)	0.1081	0.1511
20.	Veikko	Finnish	M	Politician	0.0281	0.1043	(0.4694)	0.1370
21.	Juhani (C)	Finnish	M	Official	0.5655	0.1751	0.3754	0.0384
22.	Kristian	ICORG	M	Official	0.3190	0.0083	(0.6270)	0.1370
23.	Markus	Finnish	M	Politician	0.3014	0.3103	(0.6933)	0.2377
24.	Monika	German	F	Official	(0.4785)	0.3810	0.1500	0.3031
25.	Pentti	Finnish	M	Official	0.1355	0.0860	0.1438	(0.5213)
26.	Ulrich	German	M	Official	0.0116	(0.6571)	-0.2772	0.2595
27.	Thomas	German	M	Official	0.0751	(0.4502)	0.3491	0.2808
28.	Astrid (C)	ICORG	F	Official	0.5370	-0.0987	0.2626	0.0751
29.	Aaro	ICORG	M	Official	0.2489	0.1370	(0.5872)	-0.0017
30.	Ritva	Finnish	F	Politician	0.1585	(0.6158)	-0.1154	0.0827
31.	Sabine	German	F	Official	(0.6030)	0.3387	0.1309	0.0613
32.	Rudolf	ICORG	M	Politician	(0.5266)	0.0863	0.2253	0.2832

Note: Defining Q sorts are marked in parenthesis. FV was deleted in the qualitative analysis of the factor interpretation. C = confounded.

Participants on these factors have defined their subjective meanings of the role of the ICORGs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. They have reflected the current organizational and political context as well as their

professional knowledge and working experience with the ICORGs when forming their subjective views about the items. Each factor can be assumed to represent different lines of the mainstream thinking about what role the member regions expect the ICORGs to take in the MLG system. The characteristics of each factor are interpreted with the help of Q-sort values on each factor, which result in an idealized Q sort for each factor (Table 9). The first two factors are defined mostly by the participants from German member regions, and the third and fourth factors mainly by the participants from Finnish ICORG member regions.

Table 9. Q-sort values for each item in four-factor solution from organizational point of view

Item	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
1. I want that ICORGs initiate and promote practical and useful projects.	1	5	3	-1
2. Strong local and regional involvement in the ICORGs gains much wider public participation and support for European cooperation.	-1	2	4	-1
3. ICORGs of the Baltic Sea Area need support from as many regions as possible.	4	-1	4	4
4. Private actors in the BSR must play an important role in the implementation process of EU strategies.	3	3	0	4
5. Task is now through EUSBSR to encourage organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline existing structures in order to strengthen their impact and to avoid double work.	3	4	2	-3
6. I think that ICORGs should review a possible solution for alternative membership in countries where regional structures are undergoing changes and the regional level is disappearing.	5	5	-1	0
7. It is evident that ICORGs create awareness among EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities when drawing up European policies and legislation.	4	-1	3	1
8. I truly think that ICORGs have significantly changed the position of regions as regards the building of wider Europe and contributed to the creation of transnational and intra-European cooperation.	-1	0	4	3
9. The territorial excellence policy (smart specialization) as a part of the future cohesion policy should apply in all European regions in order to optimize each region's own potentials.	0	1	3	5
10. The task of the ICORGs is to support a joint strategy on infrastructure and transport covering the entire Baltic Sea region.	3	-3	5	1
11. There has to be the regional commitment and encouragement to implement measures agreed in the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) in order to reach and maintain good ecological status of the Baltic Sea.	1	1	1	4
12. It is the task of the ICORGs to raise public awareness of energy and climate change issues in the BSR.	3	-1	0	1

(continued on next page)

Item	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
13. I think that it is very difficult task for the ICORGs to find common nominators in the EU cohesion policy.	-2	-3	-2	-5
14. ICORGs are not able to promote regional development objectives of their member regions within EU institutions, national governments and other Baltic Sea organizations.	-5	1	-5	-3
15. Better division of labour in different policy fields should be introduced between national and regional levels.	1	-2	1	2
16. ICORGs should increase their cooperation outside of the BSR and even globally.	-3	-5	-1	-2
17. ICORGs should take a role in implementing the EUSBSR.	5	3	2	3
18. In cohesion policy lobbying ICORGs are stronger than regional offices in Brussels.	0	-4	-1	-2
19. BSR ICORGs tend to have missed an ambitious goal for their work.	-5	-3	-5	-1
20. ICORGs should seek division of labour among their members for acting in sectors where strongest.	2	4	0	0
21. ICORGs should contribute in abolishing weaknesses of regions and not supporting strengths.	-3	-2	0	-5
22. National level (e.g., ministries) of the BSR is not interested in the views presented by the ICORGs.	-3	-1	-2	-3
23. Economically strong regions have too much power in the ICORGs.	-4	-4	-4	-3
24. Member regions are unable to find suitable and capable persons to work in ICORGs.	-5	2	-1	-2
25. My regional politicians discuss regularly in their meetings about the work in the ICORGs.	-2	-5	-3	-5
26. My region would be prepared to invest more resources into ICORGs to make their work more efficient.	-3	-5	2	-4
27. Regions do not have resources to participate in implementing the EUSBSR.	-2	0	-4	-1
28. It is not possible to include Russian regions into ICORGs as equivalent partners because Russia is not an EU member state.	-4	-3	-3	-4
29. The decision-making in the ICORGs is very much based on few individuals instead of joint thinking of member regions.	2	2	-5	3
30. It is unrealistic to create a MLG system in the BSR.	-4	0	-3	2
31. It is crucial to create the best possible relationship and synergy between rural development efforts locally, regionally, nationally and in relation to the EU funded effort (Structural funds programmes and the rural development programmes).	4	4	2	3
32. The EU Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration has been and must remain a major source of funding for research and innovation in the regions and municipalities of the BSR.	2	-4	-3	0

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Item	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
33. The Northern Dimension (ND) offers a special platform for cooperation with the non-EU members of the BSR. The ND activities should complement EUSBSR in order to provide a common approach of all Baltic Sea actors to mutual objectives and challenges.	0	1	1	2
34. To strengthen the implementation process of the EUSBSR the ICORGs suggest creation of a new model of governance which combines the top-down and bottom-up processes of the MLG. This strategic instrument supports the EUSBSR and creates a catalyst for further development of the region.	1	0	-2	-4
35. Cities shall play a crucial role in the process of creation and implementation of the EUSBSR. Their particular strength is the closeness to the inhabitants.	-2	-2	-4	2
36. From our consultations with other actors during past years – be they intergovernmental, governmental, non-governmental, academic or in the private sector – it has become clear that the CBSS is regarded as one of the leading organizations facilitating cooperation in the BSR. It is important for the CBSS to retain this role and develop it further.	2	2	-2	-2
37. Regional and local levels should be strongly involved in the debates of the future regional policy as well as in implementation and administration of the structural funds.	5	5	5	5
38. Development of tourism is an important field of the CBSS cooperation that promotes the economic development based on the common cultural heritage of the populations.	0	3	1	1
39. CBSS stated the importance of the development of favourable framework conditions for entrepreneurship and innovation in order to strengthen potential regional business clusters.	-1	-2	3	0
40. Particularly concerning territorial cooperation strands, decisions on programmes and projects should be mainly a responsibility of the subnational levels.	-1	3	5	5

I started the factor interpretation by introducing crib sheets for all five factors, which were created from the Q sorts expressing the organizational point of view (Table 10). Watts and Stenner (2012, 150) stressed that “the crib sheet is a kind of security blanket used to ensure that nothing obvious gets missed or overlooked, but it also provides a system of organization for the interpretative process and encourages holism by studying every item in a factor array.” The creation of crib sheets enables us to understand a factor’s overall viewpoint and provides a template including all the information needed to deliver the final factor interpretation (ibid. 153).

Table 10. Example of the use of a crib sheet

Items ranked +4/+5: 3, 6, 7, 17, 31, 37

- 6.** I think that ICORGs should review a possible solution for alternative membership in countries where regional structures are undergoing changes and the regional level is disappearing. **(+5)**
- 17.** ICORGs should take a role in implementing the EUSBSR. **(+5)**
- 37.** Regional and local levels should be strongly involved in the debates of the future regional policy as well as in implementation and administration of the structural funds. **(+5)**
- 3.** ICORGs of the Baltic Sea Area need support from as many regions as possible. **(+4)**
- 7.** It is evident that ICORGs create awareness among EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities when drawing up European policies and legislation. **(+4)**
- 31.** It is crucial to create the best possible relationship and synergy between rural development efforts locally, regionally, nationally and in relation to the EU funded effort (Structural funds programmes and the rural development programmes). **(+4)**

Items ranked higher by Factor I than by any other Factor: 7, 12, 17, 18, 25, 32, 34

- 17.** ICORGs should take a role in implementing the EUSBSR. **(+5)**
- 7.** It is evident that ICORGs create awareness among EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities when drawing up European policies and legislation. **(+4)**
- 32.** The EU Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration has been and must remain a major source of funding for research and innovation in the regions and municipalities of the BSR. **(+2)**
- 34.** To strengthen the implementation process of the EUSBSR the ICORGs suggest creation of a new model of governance which combines the top-down and bottom-up processes of the MLG. This strategic instrument supports the EUSBSR and creates a catalyst for further development of the region. **(+1)**
- 12.** It is the task of the ICORGs to raise public awareness of energy and climate change issues in the BSR. **(+3)**
- 18.** In cohesion policy lobbying ICORGs are stronger than regional offices in Brussels. **(0)**
- 25.** My regional politicians discuss regularly in their meetings about the work in the ICORGs. **(-2)**

Items ranked lower by Factor I than by any other Factor: 8, 9, 24, 30, 33, 38, 40

- 24.** Member regions are unable to find suitable and capable persons to work in ICORGs. **(-5)**
- 30.** It is unrealistic to create a MLG system in the BSR. **(-4)**
- 8.** I truly think that ICORGs have significantly changed the position of regions as regards the building of wider Europe and contributed to the creation of transnational and intra-European cooperation. **(-1)**
- 40.** Particularly concerning territorial cooperation strands, decisions on programmes and projects should be mainly a responsibility of the subnational levels. **(-1)**
- 9.** The territorial excellence policy (smart specialization) as a part of the future cohesion policy should apply in all European regions in order to optimize each region's own potentials. **(0)**
- 33.** The Northern Dimension (ND) offers a special platform for cooperation with the non-EU members of the BSR. The ND activities should complement EUSBSR in order to provide a common approach of all Baltic Sea actors to mutual objectives and challenges. **(0)**
- 38.** Development of tourism is an important field of the CBSS cooperation that promotes the economic development based on the common cultural heritage of the populations. **(0)**

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Items ranked -4/-5: 14, 19, 23, 24, 28, 30

- 14.** ICORGs are not able to promote regional development objectives of their member regions within EU institutions, national governments and other Baltic Sea organizations. **(-5)**
- 19.** BSR ICORGs tend to have missed an ambitious goal for their work. **(-5)**
- 24.** Member regions are unable to find suitable and capable persons to work in ICORGs. **(-5)**
- 23.** Economically strong regions have too much power in the ICORGs. **(-4)**
- 28.** It is not possible to include Russian regions into ICORGs as equivalent partners because Russia is not an EU member state. **(-4)**
- 30.** It is unrealistic to create a MLG system in the BSR. **(-4)**

Note: FI based on Q sorts from organizational point of view (23 November 2012). The factor score value is always in parentheses.

The crib sheet includes four basic categories with the highest-ranking items at +5 and +4; items ranked higher by Factor I than by any of the other study factors; items ranked lower by Factor I than by any of the other study factors; and the lowest-ranking items at -5 and -4. Another obvious advantage of the crib sheet method is its ability to identify items of potential importance ranked towards the middle or zero point of the distribution (Watts and Stenner 2012, 154). It might be assumed that a zero or near zero ranking in a distribution is indicative of neutrality, total indifference, or a general lack of significance of meaning (ibid.). Sometimes though, an item sitting right in the middle of the distribution can act as a fulcrum for the whole viewpoint being expressed (ibid. 155).

The correlations between factors are rather high (see Table 11). Already, the first drafts of the crib sheets showed that many factors would be rather similar. First, it has been a good decision to make the crib sheets in order to understand the entire content of the factor array, and to recognize the differences in content between the factors. In addition, the post-sorting interviews have played a very decisive role to reach this understanding of each factor, as the arguments for ranking the same items in the same positions on the distribution may have been rather different (e.g., from Finnish, German, or the ICORG secretariats' point of view).

Because of the high correlation of the factors, several items were clustering on related issues and received similar Q-sort values on the extracted factors. I decided to present separately the clusters of these consensus-like items, sorted on consensus and disagreement, as these items reflect well the current challenges of the ICORGs.

Table 11. Correlations between factor scores

	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
FI	1.0000	0.4968	0.5589	0.5576
FII	0.4968	1.0000	0.3165	0.4583
FIII	0.5589	0.3165	1.0000	0.5107
FIV	0.5576	0.4583	0.5107	1.0000

The clusters of “like-items” among the extracted factors are analysed in Section 6.5, and discussed more in detail in Chapter 7. According to the varying consensus on the items, it is worth analysing the score values of the items of potential importance ranked towards the middle or zero point of the distributions (Watts and Stenner 2012, 154). Because of the strong clustering of the emerging factors, and to support the factor interpretation, I also created Table 12 based on the materials produced by the PQMethod software programme and the individual Q sorts to better recognize the individual rankings of items in relation to the four factors and items sorted by consensus or disagreement. I will present in Section 6.5 selected item-specific tables of score values on all factors, but also rankings by all Finnish and German member regions’ and the ICORG secretariats’ participants, which are based on Table 12. It also helped to recognize the participants’ negative loadings, which are signs of rejection of the factors’ perspective.

Beside the consensus or disagreement, the item-specific observation enables analysis of the possible country- or ICORG-specific differences in rankings of specific items by all participants. This will support not only the interpretation of factors but also the Q-sort values of specific items through the unitary, federal, and organizational ICORG context. It also helps to recognize among all participants shared approaches (e.g., in favour of the implementation of the EUSBSR [light grey colour] or critical towards the lobbying activities of the ICORGs [dark grey colour]). The group of 32 persons interviewed was carefully selected, and all of them presented high expertise, knowledge, and comprehensive working experience about the ICORGs. Their shared subjective views do matter and make an important contribution to the discussion about the development of the ICORGs. As the items are mostly direct citations from the interviews of the pilot part of this research or from the written documents of the ICORGs, they reflect authentically and naturalistically the discussion in the BSR around MLG.

In the next sections I will briefly present the main contents and distinctive points of the four factors and the five clusters of consensus-like items. In Chapter 7, I will discuss in detail the meanings of different factors in relation to the theoretical approach, context of the MLG of the Baltic Sea macro-region, and different policy instruments presented in this study. In Chapter 7, the consensus-like items are discussed in Section 7.1; Factors FI and FII in Section 7.3 regarding the EUSBSR; and Factors FIII and FIV in Section 7.4 in connection to the changing operational environment.

6.1 Factor FI: Builders of Multi-level Governance Through the EUSBSR

Factor I is defined by three representatives of the German Länder (Karl-Heinz, Monika, and Sabine) and two representatives of two individual ICORGs (Charlotte and Rudolf). The factor has an explaining variance of 11%. Characteristic for the German interviewees loaded on Factor I is that they work with MLG on a daily basis in their organizations, which are state chancelleries of the two German Länder. These two North-German coastal Länder also act as policy area coordinators in the EUSBSR (European Commission 2015). From this perspective, they gave valuable insights into the practical organization and functioning of MLG in the German federal system. Charlotte and Rudolf frequently deal with MLG-

related issues in their work at the two ICORGs. The participants on Factor I shared the similar subjective views on four items (see Table 13).

Table 13. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Items 5, 17, 30, and 34

Item	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
(5) Task is now through EUSBSR to encourage organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline existing structures in order to strengthen their impact and to avoid double work.	3	4	2	-3
(17) ICORGs should take a role in implementing the EUSBSR.	5	3	2	3
(30) It is unrealistic to create a MLG system in the BSR.	-4	0	-3	2
(34) To strengthen the implementation process of the EUSBSR the ICORGs suggest creation of a new model of governance which combines the top-down and bottom-up processes of the MLG. This strategic instrument supports the EUSBSR and creates a catalyst for further development of the region.	1	0	-2	-4

The participants on Factor I could be characterized as MLG enthusiasts. They thought that the MLG approach is a well-functioning concept for the ICORGs and their member regions (30).⁴⁴ MLG debate in the ICORGs has existed since the start of the macrostrategy process of the EU. The ICORGs welcomed the initiative of the European Commission to introduce the Baltic Sea strategy (BSSSC et al. 2008). A majority of the participants, including the participants of Factor I, see MLG as a possibility and as a relevant administrative approach in the Baltic Sea macro-region (34).⁴⁵ They also expressed a wish that ICORGs could further promote MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region through the EUSBSR (17).⁴⁶ On this point, there was a high consensus on all factors, which will be discussed in more detail in the cluster of consensus-like items on stronger macro-regional cooperation (CII). A stronger role for the ICORGs in the EUSBSR is also pointed out in the latest meeting documents of the ICORGs (cf. BSSSC 2015; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2016b).

⁴⁴ Item 30 was presented by a representative of a German member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

⁴⁵ Item 34 was presented in a joint position paper (BSSSC et al. 2008).

⁴⁶ Item 17 was presented by a representative of a German member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

That would be nice if the EUSBSR could contribute to make first of all the work of the organizations transparent and bring the organizations of one level to work together. Then ok we work all for the same thing, ok, you make this, we make that but look time to time where we are, this was actually a bit promised in the Baltic Sea strategy... more successful the EUSBSR would be, the organizations would gain more importance, one would say that let's commit with the work of the ICORG, because it seems that they work ahead in the Baltic Sea region, and at the same time I could expect that the structures could be simplified. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

After all, the EUSBSR is one of the most-discussed issues in the ICORGs. The MLG enthusiasts urged the ICORGs to take a more active role in the implementation of the EUSBSR. They see the EUSBSR as a useful platform where different ICORGs could meet and exchange their views (e.g., on division of labour, joint tasks, and project work). They foresee that this would contribute to the better division of labour between different MLG levels and raise awareness of EUSBSR and its possibilities in the regions. They also envision that the EUSBSR could encourage organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline the existing structures. This would further strengthen the organizations' impact and help them to avoid double work (5).⁴⁷ Factors I and II share rather high consensus on this item, which stresses the practical approach in the work of the ICORGs.

In general discussion, MLG is understood among participants in rather different ways as a governance model for states, the EU, or macro-regions like the EUSBSR. MLG, however, can be understood also as a governance model for smaller units like border cooperation or sectoral cooperation in the form of Type II MLG (Hooghe and Marks 2010, 25).

Little bit theoretical the outcome of the whole process is new mixture of MLG, and well many people always talk about MLG, I think we have one possibility for really interesting new structures and this is the proposition of the possibility offered by the EU of forming these territorial cooperation units. I think this is a unique example of good piece of legislation of the EU that kind of regions. To the border can be formed a loose administrative structure something we can already see in the Western part of Europe. We have such kind examples between Germany and Netherlands; Germany and Luxembourg; and Germany, France, and Switzerland. This could be a creative way to organize regional cooperation and I think when it really comes to permanent cooperation between regions this might be a model, but actually it is not covering areas like the whole Baltic Sea region but smaller areas. I see there is relatively high interest in developing such planning areas as well. (Helmut, German Land, original English)

⁴⁷ Item 5 was presented in a conference resolution (BSSSC 2008a, 2).

6.2 Factor FII: Facilitators of Strategic Projects

Factor II is defined by four participants of German Länder (Mathias, Ursula, Ulrich, and Thomas), one participant of the ICORG secretariat (Ella), and one participant of a Finnish region (Ritva). Factor II has explaining variance of 10%. “Project promoters” of the second factor have a strong and clear desire to promote practical projects through the ICORGs. Just as with Factor I, the representatives of German regions form the majority on this factor.

The project promoters share similar subjective views on four items (see Table 14). They stress that ICORGs should become more active in the project work and could function as platforms for regions to meet and initiate projects (1).⁴⁸ According to these promoters, project work is an invaluable way to support the realization of the strategic goals of the ICORGs and also combine their goals with those of the EUSBSR. Ulrich (German Land) states that with the help of the EUSBSR, the ICORGs could provide thematic project platforms and meeting places for stakeholders and regions.

The project promoters emphasize efficiency and want the EUSBSR to help in streamlining the structures and abolishing the double work (5). This sextet does not put much value on the achievements of the ICORGs as lobbying organizations (7, 18).⁴⁹ The ICORGs also do not receive a strong note in cohesion and regional policy lobbying and awareness raising of territorial specificities.

If these organizations would not do practical and useful things, that is maybe projects, but also conferences, meetings and so on, then no one would put aside resources for these organizations. (Ulrich, German Land, translated from German)

⁴⁸ Item 1 was presented in an Action Plan (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2003, 5).

⁴⁹ Item 7 was presented in a strategy document (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2010b, 1). Item 18 was presented by a representative of a German member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

Table 14. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Items 1, 5, 7, and 18

Item	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
(1) I want that ICORGs initiate and promote practical and useful projects.	1	5	3	-1
(5) Task is now through EUSBSR to encourage organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline existing structures in order to strengthen their impact and to avoid double work.	3	4	2	-3
(7) It is evident that ICORGs create awareness among EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities when drawing up European policies and legislation.	4	-1	3	1
(18) In cohesion policy lobbying ICORGs are stronger than regional offices in Brussels.	0	-4	-1	2

Mathias (German Land) explained that the German Länder have seen cohesion and regional policy lobbying as an instrument to influence the funding programmes. In his opinion, however, the funding programmes should be reshaped to help establish new projects that support the goals of the ICORGs. He sees cohesion and regional policy lobbying of the ICORGs as an instrument for the interregional, bi- and multilateral project work that is facilitated by the ICORGs.

The North-German Länder are most active of the ICORG member regions in the implementation of the EUSBSR. They have taken the coordinating roles in the policy areas of education, culture, and tourism (European Commission 2015). The policy area coordinators may also influence the implementation of the goals of the policy area of the EUSBSR, as they own the right to give flagship status for the projects.

ICORGs should help to organize competencies and knowledge through projects for example. But the Baltic Sea strategy is also a means to gather resources, to bring people together who work in the same field, so in a way there is a kind of coherence, and if, if organizations are able to have projects and to organize working groups, that focus on the specific strengths or topics, then they should also, let's say, involve these structures, projects, networks, working groups and so on, in the implementation of the Baltic Sea strategy but this does not happen to a large extent, in my understanding, so this is somehow paradoxical. (Mathias, German Land, translated from German)

6.3 Factor FIII: Lobbyists for Regional Development Objectives

Factor III is formed by three representatives of Finnish regions (Markus, Martti, and Veikko) and two representatives of the ICORG secretariats (Aaro and Kristian). The explaining variance of Factor III is 11%. Traditional lobbyists, as this group is called, strongly supports the historically fundamental task of the ICORGs – that is, political lobbying. Dominated by the participants from Finland, this factor echoes the views of the Finnish regions on the ICORGs in the MLG context. According to Benz (2010, 219) in the EU, “the actors from the periphery serve as a counterforce against the conservative tendencies of collective actions in agreements and policy outcomes of the core networks, and prevent them from turning to tightly coupled pattern of cooperation.” The wider relationship of the ICORGs with the stakeholders on regional and local levels was tested with Item 2,⁵⁰ that strong local and regional involvement in the ICORGs would gain much wider public participation and support for European cooperation (see Table 15).

Table 15. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Items 2, 7, 8, and 14

Item	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
(2) Strong local and regional involvement in the ICORGs gains much wider public participation and support for European cooperation.	-1	2	4	-1
(7) It is evident that ICORGs create awareness among EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities when drawing up European policies and legislation.	4	-1	3	1
(8) I truly think that ICORGs have significantly changed the position of regions as regards the building of wider Europe and contributed to the creation of transnational and intra-European cooperation.	-1	0	4	3
(14) ICORGs are not able to promote regional development objectives of their member regions within EU institutions, national governments and other Baltic Sea organizations.	-5	1	-5	-3

According to traditional lobbyists, ICORGs should also promote wider public participation of the citizens at the local level for strengthening support for European cooperation. They should create awareness of the need for their member regions among the EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities. The lobbyists feel that ICORGs should focus on raising decision-makers’

⁵⁰ Item 2 was presented in an Action Plan (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2003, 7).

awareness of the regional development objectives of their members (7). ICORGs play an important role in strengthening the position of regions. According to traditional lobbyists, ICORGs have fairly effectively strengthened the position of regions in terms of building a wider Europe and creating transnational and intra-European cooperation (8).⁵¹ ICORGs are also promoters of regional development objectives of their member regions, and they strengthen the position of regions in international and interregional cooperation. They also rely on ICORGs in strengthening the public support for European cooperation and making the regional development objectives as well as the territorial specificities and needs of the member regions visible on different levels of the MLG system (14).⁵²

Through our organizations we are able to help the people to understand and through that to help the EU to get more legitimacy for anything to do. The limit to that is that the reason why we are active in some fields is not AS SUCH to raise public awareness in the end, it is rather to influence what is going on at the EU level so it is the same with the EU projects, it's a tool to raise public awareness or to do EU projects, it's a tool for us to have influence on the EU level. (Kristian, ICORG, original English)

Markus (Finnish region), for instance, points out that ICORGs' member regions in the old EU Member States have been acting as "role models" for the regions in the newer Member States, like Finland, where the regions have been quite inexperienced. Other examples given by this group are the successful contribution of the ICORGs to the negotiations on the cohesion and maritime policies, as well as the active participation of representatives of the European institutions in the assemblies and meetings of the ICORGs and their interest towards the ICORGs activities. The traditional lobbyists also argue that the ICORGs have always actively collaborated with the regions of the non-EU countries. Aaro and Kristian (participants of the ICORGs) point out that for many member regions, the ICORGs are a channel to support the implementation of their regional development objectives (14), particularly in the context of the negotiations on structural funds, for example. The challenge for the ICORGs, though, is the heterogeneity of the member regions and their interests.

⁵¹ Item 8 was presented in a strategy document (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2010b, 2).

⁵² Item 14 was presented by a representative of a German member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

6.4 Factor FIV: Promoters for Smart Specialization in Their Member Regions

Factor IV is represented by three participants of Finnish regions – Aino, Leo, and Pentti – and one representative of the ICORG secretariat – Peter. The explaining variance of the factor is 8%. This factor is characterized by views emphasizing the different needs and characters of the regions in the BSR and the EU. “The promoters of smart specialization⁵³” argue that the roles of EU financing vary from region to region and that this should guide the activities of the ICORGs. Again, like the traditional lobbyists, the promoters of smart specialization echo the views of the Finnish member regions.

The promoters of smart specialization position the territorial excellence policy in the core of the cohesion policy (that should apply in all European regions) (9)⁵⁴ (cf. European Commission 2012; see Table 16). As Pentti (Finnish region) notes, every region should have its “own keys to the success.” Peter (ICORG) continued that politicians should promote the competitive advantages of their regions and develop niche strengths of their regions as a part of the cohesion and regional policy. In this context, they argue that ICORGs should support specialization and cultivating the strengths of member regions (21).⁵⁵ These participants believe that finding common nominators in the EU cohesion policy is not difficult for the ICORGs (13).⁵⁶

⁵³ “National or regional research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3 strategies) are integrated, place-based economic transformation agendas that do five important things: they focus policy support and investments on key national/regional priorities, challenges and needs for knowledge-based development, build on each country/region’s strengths, competitive advantages and potential for excellence; support technological as well as practice-based innovation and aim to stimulate private sector investment; get stakeholders fully involved, encourage innovation and experimentation; are evidence-based and include sound monitoring and evaluation systems” (European Commission 2014c).

⁵⁴ Item 9 was presented in a joint resolution (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and North Sea Commission 2008, 2). Smart specialization has been proposed as an “ex ante conditionality” meaning that every member state and region must have a well-developed strategy before they can receive structural funding for their planned innovation measures (European Commission 2012, 9).

⁵⁵ Item 21 was presented by a representative of an ICORG secretariat during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

⁵⁶ Item 13 was presented by a representative of a German member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

Table 16. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Items 9, 13, and 21

Item	FI	FII	FIII	FIV
(9) The territorial excellence policy (smart specialization) as a part of the future cohesion policy should apply in all European regions in order to optimize each region’s own potentials.	0	1	3	5
(13) I think that it is very difficult task for the ICORGs to find common nominators in the EU cohesion policy.	-2	-3	-2	-5
(21) ICORGs should contribute in abolishing weaknesses of regions and not supporting strengths.	-3	-2	0	-5

Like Aaro (ICORG, FIII) noted, even though standing strongly for regional smart specialization, participants on the Factor IV also recognize that this issue divides subjective views within the ICORGs. To simplify, there are regions close to the core, with knowledge-based cohesion and regional policy, and more peripheral regions are still developing. The more-developed regions seem to support knowledge-based cohesion and regional policy, while the still-developing and peripheral regions favour more solidarity-based cohesion.

Related to Factor I, on Factor IV the participants seemed to be rather EUSBSR-friendly regarding the cooperation opportunities as well, but they had a more hesitant approach to the concept of MLG compared to the enthusiastic atmosphere of Factor I.

For me MLG is not a new form of governance, it is a concept which you are able to understand how decisions are made and how one gets influence, it is a concept or a way to understand how power structures could work, so that you could get out the best out of the situation. We are living in the part of the world where we believe in lots of organizations we have strong network of associations, local government. MLG means a way to understand things better. I think it is damaging to sell it as a new model of governance. It is a way to understand how governance can work best and it is necessary as a strategic instrument. The EUSBSR will work if everyone plays their part and understand what their role is, it is maybe small but when all these all small bits added up that is what will make the strategy to success, for me the strategy is a framework to enable us to better work together to achieve goals where all the countries around the Baltic Sea have to be involved. (Peter, ICORG, original English)

6.5 Clusters (CI-CV) of Consensus-like Items Among Extracted Factors

In the next five sections, I will give short descriptions of the clusters of the “consensus-like-items” which support the factor interpretation and open up the thematics of several items which are shared by all of the factors in most clusters. The thematics of the clusters of the “consensus-like-items” are discussed more in detail in Chapter 7.

6.5.1 (CI) Better Visibility and More Commitment with the Vertical and Horizontal Communication

The majority of the participants urge more commitment and visibility from the ICORGs. Coherence, division of labour, and coordination appear as relevant challenges in the work of international organizations of the Baltic Sea macro-region, and these challenges have been the focus of the earlier studies on the intergovernmental cooperation organizations as well (cf. Aalto et al. 2012, 2017; Etzold 2010; Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000). Regarding Item 22, “National level (e.g., ministries) of the BSR is not interested in the views presented by the ICORGs,” consensus prevails among the four factors (see Table 17).⁵⁷ It deals with vertical communication between the ICORGs and the national level. Even stronger consensus prevails among the four factors which disagreed on Item 25 (see Table 18). It deals with the weak horizontal communication on the regional level inside the member regions of the ICORGs as explained below.⁵⁸

The Item dealing with the relationship between national level and ICORGs (22) indicates that the visibility of the ICORGs on the national level is rather country-specific. In the current MLG system, the information exchange between the ICORGs and the national level lies very much within the activities of the individual member regions. The day-to-day communication from the ICORGs is concentrated towards the contact persons of the member regions and the cooperation partners on the EU level. All the four factors share the view that the

⁵⁷ Item 22 was presented by a representative of a Finnish member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

⁵⁸ Item 25 was presented by a representative of a Finnish member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011. The original wording of the representative was that “My politicians never discuss about the work in the ICORGs” but Item was modified to its final form to appear a bit more simulative for the participants.

ministries on the national level welcome the communication with the ICORGs. When looking more closely at how individual participants have sorted the Item, from the German member regions' point of view, the communication with the national level seem to function, as all the German participants disagree with Item 22. Mathias and Karl-Heinz (German Länder) reported that Länder had received the best response from the national level through the joint statements and position papers of the ICORGs. The communication difficulties seem to exist more between the Finnish member regions and the national ministries. Most Finnish participants disagree with this Item as well.

If the policies of governments and MLG are to work, it has to be a joint responsibility between international and regional levels. Local municipalities and regions within the country often have to be better communicating with their governments, and working together. The national level has the responsibility for agreeing with the European Commission and the local level has the lobbying function. They lobby towards the national level to decide how the programmes should end up. It has to be cooperation and it is one of the reasons why there is the concept of the MLG. If you have understanding of its benefits what one could gain, you could get it work properly. (Peter, ICORG, original English)

Table 17. Factor I-IV Q-sort values on Item 22

(22) National level (e.g., ministries) of the BSR is not interested in the views presented by the ICORGs.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 22		-3		-1		-2		-3			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE		2	2	2	3	1					
FI	1		4	1	1		1		1	3	
OR	2		2	1	4				1		

The participants loading on the four factors disagreed with Item 25: “My regional politicians discuss regularly in their meetings about the work in the ICORGs” (see Table 18). They indicated the opposite – that regional politicians do not discuss the work in ICORGs regularly in their meetings. All the factors shared this view. ICORGs do not appear to focus on the local and regional politicians' interests. When looking at the Q sorts of all participants, it can be noted that some German test persons talk about the active politicians and local discussions in their member regions, as Finnish participants do not share this view.

Table 18. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 25

(25) My regional politicians discuss regularly in their meetings about the work in the ICORGs.											
Factors	FI			FII			FIII			FIV	
Factor Q-sort values for Item 25	-2			-5			-3			-5	
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE	4	1		1		1	1	1			1
FI	4	3	3		2						
OR	2	3	1			1	1	1		1	

ICORGs could contribute in strengthening the democracy principles, active participation in the Baltic countries and making the added value visible for the local and regional level and in this way to try to influence the internal discussion of regions. ICORGs have to become more efficient in addressing some specific policy issues like organising public debates which are interesting to their politicians, making strategic projects with political impact (e.g., in the energy sector). It should be more political addressing policy issues rather than developing cooperation projects without political objectives, also meeting with national level, organization of public events in Brussels, meeting with MEPs, making official letters to the EU Commission signed by the politicians. (Kristian, ICORG, original English)

So for me this is the main reason to have this close cooperation on, between people, between politicians, to overcome stereotypes, to build this united, well, Europe or Baltic Sea region to, you know, because I believe that we easily, especially younger generation, we easily forget that democracy and that freedom of speech and that peace, it is not something that is given to us. (Ella, ICORG, original English)

6.5.2 (CII) Stronger Macro-regional Cooperation

Participants were also looking forward to the improved macro-regional cooperation. It was expressed in different points of views in the cluster of several consensus-like items. All factors favoured the stronger role for the ICORGs in the implementation of the EUSBSR (cf. BSSSC et al. 2008; BSSSC 2011a). Item 17 – “ICORGs should take a role in implementing the EUSBSR” – has its strongest defenders on Factor I, but the Item also receives support on all other factors as well (see Table 19). Three North-German Länder – Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Schleswig-Holstein – participate actively in the implementation of the EUSBSR already. It is logical when looking the individual distributions; nearly all German participants have wished that the ICORGs had a stronger role in the EUSBSR. The Finnish participants were most divided regarding how they

ranked this item on the distribution. I will discuss this matter more in detail in Section 7.3.

Table 19. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 17

(17) ICORGs should take a role in implementing the EUSBSR.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 17		5		3		2		3			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE					1		2	2	1	3	1
FI		1	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	1	1
OR			1		1	1				4	2

Item 20,⁵⁹ “ICORGs should seek division of labour among their members for acting in sectors where strongest,” is related to the previous Item 17 regarding the implementation of the EUSBSR and to the macro-regional cooperation more widely, which presupposes possible division of labour among the ICORGs themselves and their members (see Table 20). This item cannot be valued as a clear consensus item. It receives strongest support on Factors I and II related to the EUSBSR implementation and project work, where the division of labour is clearly seen as significant. Interestingly, Factors III and IV give the value zero, “a kind of consensus” around the middle of the distribution area. As such, the factor value zero could be regarded as insignificant, meaning that the division of labour is not held as important. This might also reveal the challenge so far to organize the discussion about the division of labour among the ICORGs. This thematic has been an issue for the joint meetings of the ICORGs for over a decade. The Item does not create a strong opposition either. There seem not to be any relevant differences in the individual Q sorts between the Finnish, German, and the ICORG participants.

⁵⁹ Item 20 was presented by a representative of a Finnish member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

Table 20. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 20

(20) ICORGs should seek division of labour among their members for acting in sectors where strongest.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 20		2		4		0		0			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE					3		3	2		1	1
FI					2	4	2		3	1	
OR				3		1	2	1	2		1

The role of the Russian regions plays an important part in the Baltic Sea macro-regional cooperation. Item 28,⁶⁰ “It is not possible to include Russian regions into ICORGs as equivalent partners because Russia is not an EU member state,” could also be located in the next group of geographical representativeness; in this cluster, however, the relations with the ICORGs are emphasized (see Table 21). The Russian regions receive strong support on all four factors as a part of ICORG cooperation. When looking at the individual Q sorts of the participants defining the factors, it can be noted that the issue also divides the subjective views. On the other end, on the negative side of the distribution are those for whom the issue is self-evident, but there are participants around the middle of the distribution area, which most likely does not see the issue completely without challenges.⁶¹ The Q sorts around the middle of the distribution which disagree with the factor values might tell more about hesitation than insignificance. The role of Russian regions around the EUSBSR cooperation also created some hesitation, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter as well.

⁶⁰ Item 28 was presented by a representative of a German member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

⁶¹ On the Factor I Charlotte from an ICORG secretariat gives value +3; on the Factor II Ulrich from a German Land gives value 0 and Ritva from a Finnish region gives value +1; on the Factor III Veikko from a Finnish region gives value +1; and on the Factor IV Peter from an ICORG secretariat, and Leo from a Finnish region give both a value 0 (see Table 21).

Table 21. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 28

(28) It is not possible to include Russian regions into ICORGs as equivalent partners because Russia is not an EU member state.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 28		-4		-3		-3		-4			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE	2	5				2		1			
FI	4		1	1	2	2	2				
OR	3		2	1	1	2			1		

Beside subnational cooperation, there is manifold cooperation between the IGOs in the Baltic Sea macro-region (cf. Aalto et al. 2012, 2017; Etzold 2010; Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000). Item 36⁶² deals with the role of the CBSS in the BSR cooperation and moves on the surface of the regional cooperation between these two levels of national and subnational (see Table 22). The Item brings the role of the CBSS forward as a facilitator for the macro-regional cooperation (cf. Schymik 2011, 22). The Item divides the factors and implies a divided approach on the issue. Two factors (I and II) defend the role of the CBSS and two factors (III and IV) slightly resist. As the factor Q-sort values imply, most individual Q sorts seem to gather around the middle area of the distribution (i.e., from +2 to -2), which might explain the challenging nature of this issue. This item is closely connected to the other items in this cluster, and will be discussed in more detail in Section 7.1.

Table 22. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 36

(36) From our consultations with other actors during past years – be they intergovernmental, governmental, non-governmental, academic or in the private sector – it has become clear that the CBSS is regarded as one of the leading organizations facilitating cooperation in the BSR. It is important for the CBSS to retain this role and develop it further.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 36		2		2		-2		-2			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE		1	1			1	2		3	2	
FI			1	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	
OR		1	1		3	1		2		2	

⁶² Item 36 was presented in a speech (Jurgaitiene 2009).

6.5.3 (CIII) Stronger Commitment to the EU Regional Policy through Financing Instruments

One of the central lobbying tasks of the ICORGs since their establishment has been defending the interests of their member regions in the EU cohesion and regional policy; another task has been territorial cooperation, which has concretized through several joint resolutions of the ICORGs (cf. B7 et al. 2004; BSSSC et al. 2008; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and North Sea Commission 2008; BSSSC, B7, and UBC 2010). The context of the cohesion and regional policy has, however, changed from the beginning of the 1990s when the ICORGs were established. The EU funding of ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), ESF (European Social Fund), and EARFD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) on NUTS 2 or NUTS 3 levels for several member regions has diminished essentially, and other financing programmes have won more importance. Item 37,⁶³ “Regional and local levels should be strongly involved in the debates of the future regional policy as well as in implementation and administration of the structural funds,” gathers unanimous support on all four factors and participant groups for the idea that ICORGs should continue active lobbying for the future regional policy (see Table 23).

Table 23. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 37

(37) Regional and local levels should be strongly involved in the debates of the future regional policy as well as in implementation and administration of the structural funds.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 37		5		5		5		5			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE					1	1	1		2		5
FI							1	1	2	2	6
OR		1						2		3	4

Defending interregional cooperation as part of EU regional policy is – besides the cohesion and regional policy – one of the important tasks for the ICORGs as well. Item 40,⁶⁴ “Particularly concerning territorial cooperation strands, decisions on programmes and projects should be mainly a responsibility of the subnational

⁶³ Item 37 was presented in a communication (B7 et al. 2004, 2).

⁶⁴ Item 40 was presented in a communication (B7 et al. 2004).

levels,” expresses strong consensus on Factors II, III, and IV (see Table 24). Factor I takes a more cautious position as to the role of the subnational level regarding decisions on programmes and projects. Factor I is represented mostly by German participants, and Rudolf and Sabine, participants on the Factor I, argued that the decision-making should be done in cooperation with the national level.

Table 24. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 40

(40) Particularly concerning territorial cooperation strands, decisions on programmes and projects should be mainly a responsibility of the subnational levels.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 40		-1		3		5		5			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE		1		1	1			3	1	1	2
FI				1	1			2	2	1	6
OR	1	1			2		1	1	2	1	

Item 31,⁶⁵ “It is crucial to create the best possible relationship and synergy between rural development efforts locally, regionally, nationally, and in relation to the EU-funded effort,” serves as an example of the changing context of the EU regional policy, including cohesion policy for the Baltic Sea macro-region (see Table 25). ICORGs should be more active in defending the interests of their member regions regarding other financing programmes as well the traditional ERDF and ESF funding on NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 levels. ICORGs’ stronger roles in questions of the EAFRD funding gathers support on all factors. The Council of the European Union represents this approach as well: that cohesion, regional policy, and rural development policy are key instruments for the balanced territorial development of the EU (Council of the European Union 2011, 9).

⁶⁵ Item 31 was presented in a position paper (BSSSC, B7, and UBC 2010, 5).

Table 25. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 31

(31) It is crucial to create the best possible relationship and synergy between rural development efforts locally, regionally, nationally and in relation to the EU funded effort (structural funds programmes and rural development programmes).											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 31		4		4		2		3			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE				1		1	1	2	4	1	
FI			1			3	1	5	1		1
OR	1				1	1		2	3	1	1

6.5.4 (CIV) Defenders of Geographical Representativeness and Political Legitimacy

Geographical representativeness and political legitimacy have been discussion themes in the ICORGs during recent years and during the interviews for this study as well. The traditional target – to receive support from as many regions as members as possible – receives strong support on Factors I, III and IV on Item 3⁶⁶ (see Table 26). Participants urge ICORGs to be active in recruiting new members and find the balance in the membership between different Baltic Sea states, as the nonparticipation of the regions is partly based on the administrative structural difficulties like weak regional administration, centralized state systems, or regional reforms on the subnational level. Factor II appears more indifferent, as it stresses the project activities. Ulrich (FII) commented that it is more important to have active regions as members than having as many as possible. In the individual Q sorts, the majority of the participants agreed with this Item as well. The division among the German participants can be explained through the different values between Factors I and II, as these factors were mostly represented by the German participants.

⁶⁶ Item 3 was presented in an Action Plan (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2003, 8).

Table 26. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 3

(3) ICORGs of the Baltic Sea Area need support from as many regions as possible.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 3		4		-1		4		4			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE				2	2	1	1		2	2	1
FI						1	1	2	4	1	4
OR							1		2	3	2

One possible solution has been presented: to think about alternative memberships for regional authorities in countries where regional structures have drastically changed (e.g., Latvia and Lithuania). Item 6⁶⁷ receives strong support from Factors I and II, but Factors III and IV are hesitant to look for alternative memberships (see Table 27). The administrative structure in the various countries of the Baltic Sea states varies a lot, which sets big challenges for the ICORGs; their membership should clearly represent the regional level and be politically mandated. The two latter factors are represented by the traditional lobbyists, who find lobbying tasks and specialization of regions important – especially the political role of the regional governments.

Table 27. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 6

(6) I think that ICORGs should review a possible solution for alternative membership in countries where regional structures are undergoing changes and the regional level is disappearing.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 6		5		5		-1		0			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE				1		2		1	1		4
FI		1	3			1		1	4	1	2
OR				1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1

⁶⁷ Item 6 was presented in a report (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2009, 1 and 27).

6.5.5 (CV) More Efficient Use of Resources

Even if the ICORGs and their member regions show low activity in the EUSBSR process, participants saw that regions do have resources for the implementation of the EUSBSR in Item 27,⁶⁸ “Regions do not have resources to participate in implementing the EUSBSR” (see Table 28). Factor III clearly shows that regions have resources for the implementation, as Factors II and IV landed close in the middle of the distribution area. The value zero of Factor II can be interpreted through the approach for receiving funding through project activities. Factor II is dominantly represented by participants from German Länder. None of the factors expressed that there would be no resources available for the EUSBSR, but the issue definitely divides subjective views among individual Q sorts on the factors, which is discussed more in detail in Section 7.3.

Table 28. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 27

(27) Regions do not have resources to participate in implementing the EUSBSR.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 27		-2		0		-4		-1			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE			1	3	3		1	1			1
FI	2	1	3	3	1		1		1	1	
OR		2	2	2			1	1	1		

Regions do have resources, and it is not always about the resources, but it is to be noted that they participate in the implementing of the EUSBSR, it does not need to be always about the new projects, regions participate also through own casual working activities by exchange of information, discussions, sharing best practices inside these networks promoting the regional integration and developing cooperation. (Jani, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

Through the EUSBSR the ICORGs could find compromises of specific thematic disputes between regions and their stakeholders. If the ICORGs could find this role, the regions would certainly be interested to invest more resources, when they could see that the activities for common good would bring results. Further if the ICORGs would have a role in selected thematic issues, it would also improve the communication what happens in different parts of the Baltic Sea area and raise awareness about these thematic issues and regions would understand what they are active working with. (Juhani, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

⁶⁸ Item 27 was presented by a representative of an ICORG secretariat during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011.

Item 26 stated that regions are prepared to invest more resources into the ICORGs to make them more efficient (see Table 29). Factors I, II, and IV clearly resisted more financial contributions to the ICORGs, as Factor III was slightly favourable. Especially Factor II – represented by the German participants who put high priority on the project work – was very resistant to investing more resources. In contrast, Factor III represented by the Finnish regions defended more the regional development interests, smart specialization, and territorial cohesion – the traditional working activities of the ICORGs – and participants recommended investing more resources.

Table 29. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 26

(26) My region would be prepared to invest more resources into ICORGs to make their work more efficient.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 26		-3		-5		2		-4			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE	3	2	1	2	1	1					
FI	1	2		2		3		3		2	
OR		2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		

Markus (Finnish region) noted that this investment requires, of course, active discussion, interest, and understanding in the member regions about the actions in the ICORGs. Most of the ICORGs have rather light administrative structures; for larger projects or activities, the investments and resources from member regions are needed. More resources could be invested (e.g., through projects which create jobs and growth in the regions). Also, the ICORGs could show more efficiency in their work and the results could be seen more concretely in the region; naturally, however, it is also a question of political will and priorities. There are also regions which are already investing quite a lot through high membership fees (based on the number of inhabitants of the member region), issue-specific voluntary contributions, hosting secretariats, or chairmanship of working groups.

Without a sufficient project budget, the cooperation organizations have challenges in running and coordinating projects properly (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 11). As Factor II foresees, the increased project activities of the ICORGs would also require more financial and human resources. Project work may overburden the current structures of the ICORGs. Accordingly, this project work should happen in cooperation with the member regions: combine their

interests, get regions to work for common strategic goals, and activate politicians in the effort.

This is difficult for us, because we are a nonfee organization ...involving in practical project would mean that one region has to take responsibility. But it would be good to have partners from different countries. One reason is that it would be a project with regional added value ...cooperation between regions and regional offices ... the first reason would be that there would be something created, something what respond to the need of the regions, members of the ICORGs, the second one the organization would be integrated more around one goal, and maybe the third reason would be that us, as people working in this organization, politicians and also people who are behind, we could cooperate closely ... this is also MLG created in this way. (Ella, ICORG, original English)

It is worth comparing the two previous items (i.e., 26 and 27) to Item 5, which encouraged organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline existing structures in order to strengthen their impact and avoid double work (see Table 30). Item 5 comes from the 2008 BSSSC resolution, and refers to all organizations and networks of MLG (Item reviewed on the Factor I in Section 6.1). Factor I would like to see active ICORGs in the implementation of the EUSBSR, the streamlining of the structures, and no more financial resources invested into the ICORGs before the double work is abolished. Factor II follows the same approach, and additionally would increase resources through the projects. Factor III, which is favourable for investing more resources, would also prefer to have more efficient work. Factor IV represents a different approach. The ICORGs serve, for Factor IV, only a special niche of work in territorial specificities through a place-based approach. The core interest of the factor is promoting the cohesion and regional policy targets.

Table 30. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 5

(5) Task is now through EUSBSR to encourage organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline existing structures in order to strengthen their impact and avoid double work.											
Factors		FI		FII		FIII		FIV			
Factor Q-sort values for Item 5		3		4		2		-3			
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE	1					1		5	1	2	
FI				1	3	2	2	3		1	1
OR	1			1			1	1	1	2	2

In the future, the ICORGs should invest into lobbying and project activities. The projects should produce added value to the member regions (strategic) and the value should not only be of doing projects but look there the possible cooperation with other organizations like the CBSS. If the cooperation in the ICORGs would be really strong and there would be clear division of labour and member regions would invest into the work and clear profit could be seen, more resources certainly would be invested. If the EUSBSR would be successful and the structures would be streamlined would the importance of these ICORGs actually grow. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

The study shows, so far, that the EUSBSR plays a highly relevant role for the ICORGs, and there are strong wishes expressed in the factors' views that the macro-regional strategy should bring some change to the work of the ICORGs. In Section 7.3.1, I will discuss the governance and implementation of the EUSBSR in more detail.

In this chapter the qualitative part of the analysis was conducted based on the quantitative clustering of the subjective views of the 32 Q-sorting participants within the four distinct factors and in the clusters of consensus-like items. In the Q methodological experiments, the participants on the four extracted factors defined their subjective views of the role of the ICORGs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. They furthermore reflected on the current organizational and political context and utilized their professional knowledge and working experience with the ICORGs when forming their subjective views about the items. Each factor represents different lines of thinking about the roles the member regions would expect the ICORGs to take in the MLG system; importantly, such lines of thinking can be assumed to prevail more widely beyond the group of participants selected for this study. The main contents and distinctive points of the four factors and the five clusters of consensus-like items were briefly presented. In the next chapter, I will discuss in more detail the meanings of the factors and clusters of consensus-like items in relation to the theoretical approach, the context of the MLG of the Baltic Sea macro-region, and different policy instruments of interest to this study.

7 DISCUSSION: TOWARDS BETTER COHERENCE, COOPERATION, AND COORDINATION IN THE MLG SYSTEM OF THE BALTIC SEA MACRO-REGION

In this chapter, I will discuss the subjective views of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions on the present role of the ICORGs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. The four extracted factors introduced in the previous chapter revealed how these respondents prioritize the core tasks of the ICORGs in the MLG system; ICORGs should (i) use the EUSBSR more efficiently to promote MLG; (ii) be active in their project work; (iii) continue lobbying for regional development interests; and (iv) bring forward the smart specialization of their member regions.

Methodologically, the four factors represent different groupings of the respondents who share similar views on the specific items. Their contents reflect ICORGs' work in a heterogeneous environment where the organizations have to respond to the different expectations and needs of their member regions. Next, they elucidate how the ICORGs should take different EU policy instruments and different constitutional frameworks of their member regions into account when planning their strategies and activities.

The first two factors are represented by the MLG enthusiasts. Moreover, the perspectives expressed by these factors are mostly shared by the German representatives and representatives of the ICORG secretariats. The two latter factors represent more traditional tasks of the ICORGs dealing mostly with the lobbying aspects of the regional development, which give them their unique character and differentiate them from the other organizations and cooperation structures in the Baltic Sea macro-region. These latter two factors are represented mostly by the Finnish representatives. The division of Finnish and German representatives into specific factors also implies the influence of the state systems and their regions' position within the EU on their subjective meanings.

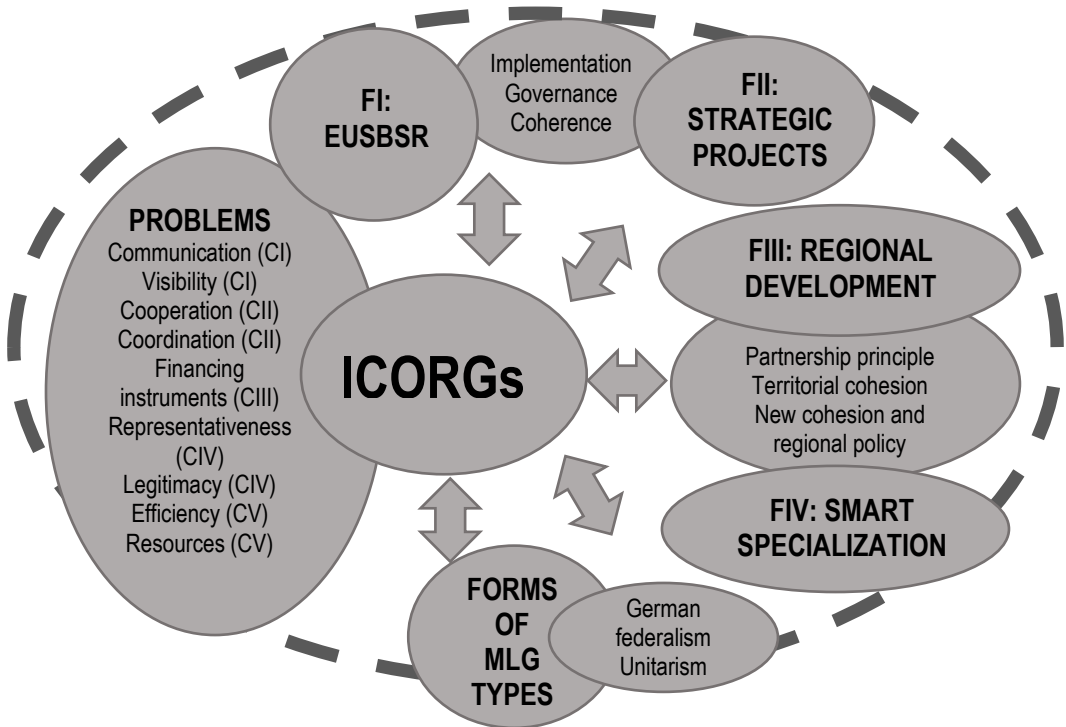
There was a rather high correlation between the extracted factors; hence, only 25 out of 40 items in the study were selected to explain the specific meanings of

each of the factors. Moreover, there were several items for which the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions on all factors had shared views – sometimes even a high consensus – while sometimes partial consensus was reached among the respondents. These clusters of consensus-like items (reviewed in Section 6.5) echo a shared understanding among interviewees on several key issues regarding the current state of development of the ICORGs. First, these items give a solid basis for the further development of the ICORGs' joint work, which could strengthen them. Second, they reflect a shared understanding of their most relevant challenges: horizontal and vertical communication; mutual cooperation and coordination in the macro-regional context; cohesion and regional policy and related financing instruments; fairly narrow geographical and political representativeness; and limited financial and human resources available.

I have organized the discussion in this chapter based on the (i) research questions and assumptions regarding the ICORGs' work in the Baltic Sea macro-regional MLG context and (ii) results of the factor interpretation (see Figure 3) by starting with analysis of the clusters of consensus-like items among extracted factors. I will analyse all findings in the light of different approaches of MLG theory and of the theoretical discussion on a state-centric intergovernmental approach, globalization, and macro-regionalization presented in Chapter 2. I have supplemented this discussion with an in-depth analysis of the post-sorting interviews, exploring how the subjective views of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions relate to the role of the EU on the subnational level, state-centric governance, and German federalism reviewed in Chapter 3. As these horizontal challenges expressed in the clusters of consensus-like items – which were clearly recognized during the Q sortings and in the post-sorting interviews of the respondents – influence the functioning of the whole MLG system, it is important to discuss them first before starting to analyse the four extracted factors. This later analysis will be performed in Sections 7.3 and 7.4.

The in-depth analysis of the interviews decisively explains why respondents correlated on specific factors and consensus-like items. The items sorted on consensus or disagreement – sometimes only partially but still significantly – will bring forward challenges requiring changes in working methods and attitudes of the ICORGs. I will also further use the extracts and subjective views of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions (marked in parentheses) to describe the issues in question.

Figure 3. Respondents' views on ICORGs in the multi-level governance context of the Baltic Sea macro-region



Note: Numbering refers to factors and clusters of consensus-like items (reviewed in Chapter 6).

First, I will look at communication, coordination, and division of labour, which are vital elements of the functioning multi-level governance system. Challenges regarding them have been recognized in the earlier research, which, however, has mainly focused on the IGOs of the Baltic Sea macro-region. For instance overlapping between the northern regional intergovernmental cooperation organizations regarding themes and geography seems to be the rule, rather than the exception (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 5). Etzold (2010, 249) has recognized preconditions for the international organizations' adaptability and endurance: adaption to a wider institutional framework, added value in relation to other institutions, close cooperation with other regional and international organizations (especially the EU), and coordination of tasks. A clear division of labour and better coordination could secure the endurance and relevance of international organizations (ibid. 276).

Second, I will look at how the features of the MLG and the recognized challenges are reflected in the day-to-day administrative practices in the Finnish and German member regions (reviewed in Chapter 3). The relations between regional and national levels in the respective states play a relevant role for the ICORGs. This section will also contain many extracts from the post-sorting interviews with the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions, and represents a mainly empirical approach. It is, however, important to present the challenges in the working of the political system of the ICORG member regions, and how those challenges directly influence the work of the ICORGs.

Third, it is essential to look at how and on which conditions the ICORGs could use the EUSBSR strategy process for applying the MLG system to the advantage of their member regions (reviewed in Chapter 4). The EUSBSR has become the dominating policy instrument regarding MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region. This has happened through the establishment of the macro-regional strategies by the EU since 2009 (European Commission 2015). The first macro-regional strategy of the EU has taken a decisive role as a policy instrument in enhancing the cooperation in the Baltic Sea macro-region and promoting MLG (ibid. 152). The ICORGs are now, if not done earlier, obliged to at least rethink their roles in relation to the EUSBSR.

Fourth, I will proceed by discussing the ongoing changes in the operational environment of the Baltic Sea macro-region which has set the ICORGs in a largely new working context. The extracted four factors and clusters of consensus-like items reflect the new needs of the member regions. The ICORGs should be able to respond to these requirements in their future work. In addition to the emergence of macro-regional strategies, the regional policy instrument of the EU has gone through a major metamorphosis as well, shifting from the traditional goal of reducing interregional disparities through redistributive measures to promotion of economic growth, thereby making regions more competitive (Bachtler 2010, 3; Perron 2014, 399; cf. Barca 2009). According to this, the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions have now complete new expectations for the work of the ICORGs as the importance of the financial support through the cohesion and regional policy instruments for the regions has been diminishing in the Baltic Sea macro-region. I will also discuss the role of the partnership principle created in 1998 by the European Commission to enhance the multilevel management and implementation of the EU regional policy, especially the structural funds (cf. Dabrowski, Bachtler, and Bafoil 2014; Hooghe and Marks 2001, 83–85; Perron 2014).

Horizontally, throughout this discussion chapter, I will reflect how applicable the EUSBSR, partnership principle, and *ESPON TANGO Handbook* are for the ICORGs to promote MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region (reviewed in Chapter 4). ICORGs may actively use all these policy instruments, which are initiated by the European Commission in their work for implementing MLG. The authors of *the ESPON TANGO Handbook* have intended it to be used in sharing and improving operational learning that is a progressive, never-ending process. I will exercise freedom to discuss the instructions of *the ESPON TANGO Handbook* in the systematic approach of the MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region from the ICORGs' point of view, in the light of its five dimensions and checklist of territorial governance.

Finally, in Chapter 9, I will formulate a list of recommendations based on the respondents' views on the development of the ICORGs' work in the future and findings of the earlier research.

7.1 Challenges of the ICORGs' Work in the MLG System of the Baltic Sea Macro-region

In this section, I will anchor the discussion in five clusters of consensus-like items (previewed in Section 6.5) which share consensus or disagreement on all factors; in some cases, the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions have sorted the items into the middle of the distribution area, which needs to be explained in more detail. In addition, it is also worthwhile to look at the distributions of each participant; in some items, the constitutional system seems to influence how item is sorted on the Q-sorting distribution. Interviewees shared subjective views on these Q items following features of MLG, which were especially discussed during the Q sorting and in the post-sorting interviews. These challenges recognized through the consensus-like items seem to appear in the previous research on the Baltic Sea IGOs as parallels.

Items 22 and 25 deal with horizontal and vertical communication (cluster CI); Items 17, 20, 28, and 36 (cluster CII) deal with cooperation and coordination activities in the Baltic Sea macro-region. Items 3 and 6 (cluster CIV) share the challenge of geographical and political legitimacy as the subnational level has been under reforms in several Baltic Sea states. These items also include the role of stakeholders (e.g., regions of non-EU countries) in border areas of the institutionalized MLG structures like the EUSBSR. Items 5, 26, and 27 (cluster

CV) on more efficient use of resources will be discussed in Section 7.3; Items 31, 37, and 40 (cluster CIII) on the EU cohesion and regional policy will be discussed in Section 7.4.

7.1.1 Horizontal and Vertical Communication

Communication and interaction are relevant features for MLG and cooperation between international cooperation organizations of regional governments (cf. B7 2002, 2007, 2013; BSSSC 2001, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2013, 2014). These features have been widely discussed in the previous research as well. In intergovernmental cooperation, the existing organizations have an important facilitator role in information exchange, but it can be further expanded in the “direction of more permanent arenas for exchange of information and experience” (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 14–15). Transnational institutions have direct communication links with subnational actors, which are at least as important as the formal allocations of powers among levels and politics (Peters and Pierre 2004, 83–84). The informality and absence of structural constraints are often seen as very attractive features of the MLG since they are believed to produce a more accommodative and efficient governance (ibid. 84). Most intergovernmental relations probably require a formal, constitutionally defined exchange and an informal, contextually defined exchange (ibid. 89). Informal exchange promotes the more formal communications and help lower-tier institutions implement decisions by institutions higher up in the hierarchy. High-level institutions also need information about the implementation of their policies on the lower levels in order to design future policies (ibid.).

Communication between the IGOs of the Baltic Sea macro-region happens through informal channels. Subject-area related contacts between the secretariats, ministries of foreign affairs, and direct contacts of working groups are the ways of communication (Aalto et al. 2012, 27). Actors linked to MLG coordinate their decisions primarily by communication and exchange of information rather than formal commitments (Benz 2010, 217). Through multilevel structures, the policymaking in the EU aims at a rather flexible combination of cooperation, competition, and control, instead of applying strictly binding coordination rules in a hierarchical setting (ibid. 220).

Etzold and Gänzle (2012, 3) define coherence of the Baltic Sea cooperation “as a process embracing both the output and input dimension of a political process. It refers to how different actors and stakeholders are integrated into policymaking processes” (ibid.) MLG is a model of governing which largely ignores structure, instead focusing clearly on process and outcomes (Peters-Pierre 2004, 84). MLG serves for a wider network, including actors from public and private sphere, compared to traditional intergovernmental relations (ibid. 82). Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt (2000, 14) noted that in enhancing cooperation with EU institutions and programmes, institutional arrangements should be open and flexible, and coordination at the operational level should be promoted.

The ICORGs have concentrated traditionally on the communication and interaction between the regional and EU levels and, to some extent, on the communication at the Pan-Baltic macro-regional level. Kristian (ICORG) said that it is also in the interests of the European Commission to listen what the ICORGs have to say since the European Commission participates in the working group meetings of the ICORGs regarding specific issues to provide information for the regions.

The joint statements of the ICORGs certainly receive more attention in Brussels if when every ICORG approaches the Commission with own papers. ICORGs have certainly been building the international cooperation between the regions in the enlarged Europe but much more could be done, there is still much unused potential. The work of the ICORGs is still often rather inefficient, the organizational structures and professionalism are still rather undeveloped. Often the policy sectors to be dealt with are rather complicated, and it prerequisites resources and professionalism. (Jani, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

In the new macro-regional context, the communication is too limited. Communication in federal and unitary states is also established differently. The tradition of exchanging information and negotiating between regional and national levels often follows the constitutional tradition (cf. Benz 2000, 2010). Following the definitions of the formal and informal information exchange earlier in this section, in the case of the ICORGs the informal exchange of information plays the most relevant role. The ICORGs work with the information which is contextually defined. The ICORGs have to be aware that their member regions work in different constitutionally defined information exchange systems with their national level. It is necessary, therefore, that ICORGs understand and are able to adapt to the different communication needs of their member regions in their specific national contexts.

Communication challenges, though, have been recognized by the interviewees regarding Item 22 about the vertical communication between the ICORGs and the ministries on the national level (reviewed in Section 6.5.1). According to that Item, the national level would not be interested in the views presented by the ICORGs. The Item was presented by a participant in the pilot interview from a Finnish region. In this main study, all factors disagreed with Item 22. But when looking the individual sorts of respondents, it can be noted that several Finnish representatives (i.e., five out of twelve) had agreed with this view, but no German representative sorted this item in agreement. These findings might reflect the differently organised communication in the Finnish unitary and German federative systems, where the situation might be more satisfactory than in Finland. Mathias (German Land) noted that the multichannel communication system in the federal system enables also the information flow about the ICORGs from the Länder to the federal ministries on the national level. In Finland, an equivalent interlocking system does not exist (cf. Benz 2000, 2010). This finding has also relevance as many of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions implied in the interviews that the communication between the regional and national level is the responsibility of the regions.

German member regions of the ICORGs may also offer good communication practices and models to be adapted in the work of the ICORGs. The multichannel communication and interaction between Länder, Bund, and the EU, which is based on the interlocking politics, offers models to be used in the communication of the ICORGs. Not only are the models useful, but the German federal system itself may also function as a channel for the ICORGs to communicate and create awareness.

Based on the empirical findings, one explanation for the weak communication about the ICORG affairs towards the national level might be the limited human resources. Another cause could be the absence of the ICORGs in those frameworks where the national level is active.

But it is the weakness of disunity, and this is why the abolition of double work of the organizations is important and then the joint division of labour, states in relation to the other stakeholders ... this should be brought in order in the future. ... It is outmost challenging to influence on the European decision-making, it presupposes large entities, efforts, resources, and when we think influencing the decision-making of the state level, the discussion with the state organizations is of outmost importance.... (Markus, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

A further communication challenge has been recognized by the respondents regarding Item 25 related to the horizontal communication on the level of the member regions (previewed in Section 6.5.1). This item points out the limited amount of discussion by the regional politicians in their meetings about the work in the ICORGs, and was presented by a participant in the pilot interview from a Finnish region. In this main study, all factors disagreed with Item 25. They confirmed that the discussion in the member regions among the politicians is very limited. Again, it was very interesting to view the personal sorts of the respondents of the ICORGs and their member regions. All Finnish respondents sorted this item with disagreement and confirmed the limited communication, but few German respondents (i.e., three out of ten) had agreed with this view. Again, this might indicate better-functioning communication channels in the federal system. But, generally, all factors show that the ICORG-related issues are not discussed widely among politicians and other stakeholders in the member regions. The views of the member regions towards the ICORGs often only thinly represent the real political discussion back home. This limited discussion on the regional level itself seems to be a problem in both states' systems. The limited communication inside the member regions is, of course, a major concern; the political commitment in the regions should create a firm basis for the legitimacy of the ICORGs, yet causes challenges for structuring goal-oriented work with the ICORGs. The limited communication also might imply that the local and regional politicians only possess rather superficial knowledge about the larger processes like the EUSBSR or MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region. A parallel challenge can be recognized on the national level as well. Regarding the cooperation between the intergovernmental cooperation organizations, the level of internal communication in the ministries of foreign affairs could be improved such that one country could take "consistent positions across all organizations" (Aalto et al. 2012, 27).

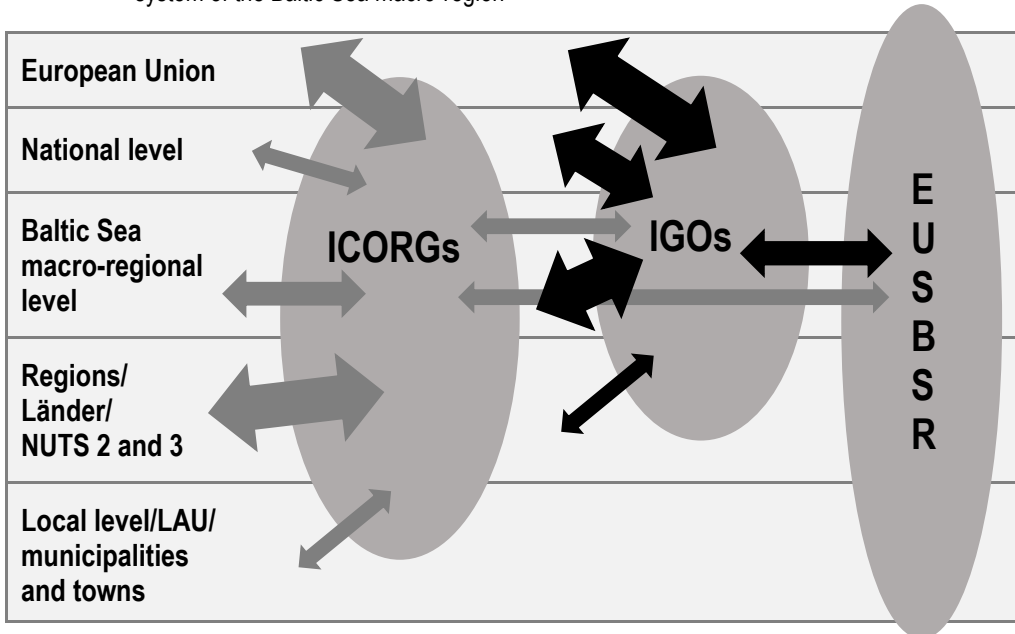
Mathias (German Land) said that ICORGs always need active individuals to conduct their work: "Politicians want to win the elections, and with Baltic Sea issues they will not gain this goal, the Baltic Sea cooperation is not in the politicians' regional consciousness." One threshold for active communication in the member regions is the limited space for participation and communication in the decision-making processes. The decision-making on ICORG-related issues is not widely communicated in the meetings of boards of regional governments. This causes hindrances for raising awareness about the ICORGs on the regional level. The problem may lie also in the decision-making system of the ICORGs (e.g., how well different position papers and statements are circulated during the drafting

process among the members before the final decision-making, and how actively the members participate in the drafting process).

In the board of the Council should be discussed much more what kind of issues and messages the responsible person takes to the ICORGs. Basically, there is no discussion at all. There are direct channels for influence but there is no goal setting in the region towards the international organizations. In the respective regions should be discussed and the goals should be set together, the representatives again work with in international organizations. Many Finnish Councils have acted wise and concentrated to be active only in couple of organizations but then this work should be done planned and coordinated. (Ritva, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

These findings show the need for the ICORGs to increase visibility and commitment with the vertical and horizontal communication of MLG. This is reflected through Figure 4, which shows the current weight of linkages of the ICORGs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. This figure with connections between different MLG levels are built based on the findings of this study through factors, items, interviews with the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions, and earlier research related to the IGOs. ICORGs do exchange information and cooperate with each other horizontally to some extent. ICORGs occasionally organise joint meetings and prepare joint position papers on selected thematic issues. The good will for joint cooperation is included in strategies and work plans of the ICORGs (BSSSC 2001, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b; B7 2002, 2007, 2013; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2013, 2014). The cooperation linkage between the ICORGs and other Pan-Baltic organizations representing the national level (e.g., Council of Baltic Sea States [CBSS]) is formally organised with status of strategic partners. The cooperative relationship between the CBSS and the ICORGs is based on annual meetings conducted mainly for information exchange (reviewed in Section 1.3.5). The role of the ICORGs, except the UBC and B7, on the local municipal level is very limited.

Figure 4. ICORGs and their cooperation linkages in the multi-level governance system of the Baltic Sea macro-region



Note. Compiled by the author based on the results of this study regarding the ICORGs (dark grey arrows) and earlier research literature used in this study regarding the IGOs (black arrows). The size of the arrow reflects the relative weight of the connection to the each MLG level or to the EUSBSR.

The EUSBSR stresses the vital need of communicating the achievements and results of the macro-regional strategy on all levels of the MLG to all possible target groups (European Commission 2015, 34). In the governance of the EUSBSR, the basic responsibility for dissemination, information, and communication should be a key task for everyone – including the implementing stakeholders (*ibid.*). Because of the passivity of the regional stakeholders and the ICORGs in the implementation of the EUSBSR, the strategy might still be far too unknown among the stakeholders, especially on the regional level.

The horizontal action “Capacity” of the EUSBSR has recognized this weakness and has started the capacity-building programmes for the implementing stakeholders of the EUSBSR: local and regional authorities, NGOs, business, academia, and civil society organizations (European Commission 2015, 149–150). As MLG is an overall guiding principle for the EUSBSR, it is also an important part of the platform for capacity building as a combination of knowledge, competencies, and leadership capabilities (*ibid.*). The horizontal action “Capacity” is definitely needed as the awareness about the EUSBSR and MLG is rather limited

on the local and regional level. The awareness is restricted mostly to the stakeholders working with the EU project management or implementation (cf. Moretti and Martinsson 2013). The HA Capacity offers for the ICORGs a suitable partner and an instrument for involving local and regional authorities in the EUSBSR. As it is evident that the capacity building programme will work with limited financial resources, the ICORGs could adapt similar working methods to their activities. The ICORGs would not just be channels and intermediators between and on the MLG levels, but would also activate the local and regional stakeholders (i.e., their member regions) into the MLG system.

Then when the next level knows which kind of strengths the regions own, where are the needs for research or where are the certain competencies, then they can be promoted and strengthened. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

At the moment, the current situation shows that the ICORGs are rather abstract in presenting their views and invisible among the citizens on the local and regional level. Sabine (German Land) said that it is also difficult for the ICORGs to receive visibility in the press and the media when they have meetings in regions. Ulrich (German Land) added that regions should be more active in announcing their participation in the international activities to the public and, thus, receive visibility for their work in the international organizations.

Well, I think that the connection of local and regional stakeholders with the ICORGs may strengthen the public participation and European cooperation, when one work together and when there is a joint goal setting then all participating stakeholders may receive something positive and especially connect the regional goal setting with interregional and European levels. (Ursula, German Land, translated from German)

Regarding the work of the ICORGs and the participation of the member regions in the work of the ICORGs, the communication linkages between the different levels are the most important elements for the successful work in the MLG system. As stated in the ESPON Handbook (ESPON 2013a, 30), “a constant flow of information throughout the process increases significantly engagement and involvement between stakeholders. It also helps to create routines and spread territorial governance practices beyond the policy, programme, or project boundaries” (ibid.). Weak linkages between the levels of the MLG lead to communication problems, insufficiently organised division of labour, and inefficiency with double work.

Monika (German Land) explained that different working and administrative cultures can be recognized in the decision-making work of the ICORGs: “If the ICORGs would be strong, they would also attract the politicians. Now in the decision-making bodies there are rather many persons from bureaucracy and they use the ICORGs for their own working purposes.” German Länder work goal-oriented inside their decision-making system, and they are committed to communicating the results back home to the politicians as well as to the other levels of the federative system. The activities of individual representatives also imply the administrative culture of the participating organizations in member regions.

As myself being able to recognize the use of policy instrument, I’ll let my position accepted by the organization, and then it finds its way somehow to Brussels, I have saved lots of work, and this is the easiest way to make lobbying for own interests and then you may recognize regions whose representatives also sit in the Board and does not make anything. They just travel around without any use for their regions could be recognized despite the personal advantage to learn to know all the Baltic Sea regions and taste the various national delicacies of kitchen from meeting to meeting but it is difficult to understand that somebody is paid to do that without any specific mission. Actually those persons should really think about this that somebody acts like this as the financial resources are so limited. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

Charlotte (ICORG) said that the weak goal-setting of the regions in policymaking have led to situations where political representatives of the regions present statements in the ICORGs as their own opinions or the opinions of their political parties, without ensuring that they are confirmed in their regional political bodies. As a result, decisions of the ICORGs in these situations are brought back to the home regions for discussion.

The preparedness for discussion in the board meetings was very heterogeneous, some of the country representatives had background discussions back home for statements and in the other end there were country representatives unable to participate the discussion because of the weak language skills. (Charlotte, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

Markus (Finnish region) stated that, instead of thinking the models of governance, the priority is to build cooperation between the ICORGs, strengthen the cooperation between different levels and stakeholders, and create division of labour between the ICORGs and the national level. On top of these goals, the most important thing is to secure the bottom-up influence.

7.1.2 Coordination of Cooperation

Following the analysis of Peters and Pierre (2004, 78–79), it makes more sense to talk about a division of labour among institutions at different levels than a hierarchy: In the concept of MLG, actors, arenas, and institutions have a more complex and contextually defined relationship in both horizontal and vertical directions. Egeberg and Trondal (2016) recognized a coordination dilemma on the national level, where national agencies collaborate with the EU institutions and with partners from other member states, “partly bypassing national ministries. This partial de-coupling shows that stronger coordination across levels may counteract strong coordination at the national level” (ibid.). Etzold and Gänzle (2012, 13) stressed that the interaction and coordination of activities between different structures have to be ensured on all levels of the MLG system.

The ESPON Handbook on Territorial Governance recognizes an important rule: “territorial governance is not limited to opening territorially relevant decisions to participatory and collaborative actions (i.e., series of consultation, mediation, or participation mechanisms)” (ESPON 2013a, 36–37). It promotes participation, cooperation, coordination, and control with innovative tools in different territorial settings. The governance approach stresses involvement of numerous actors of the public sphere, and strengthening of the suitable decision-making level, in opposite to the traditional government model that may also enhance power concentration (ibid.).

This is true, there should be better division of labour but also this depends very much on not so much on regional discussion but in discussion on between regions and their national governments, and to the best of my knowledge regions develop an increasing self-confidence derived from their cooperation in the Baltic Sea region to formulate their interests towards their national governments...I think the ICORGs cannot act themselves towards the national governments, I think ICORGs can organize kind of themselves and they can organize their interests towards Brussels, I think when try to act towards national governments they are beyond their capacities, I think the fight between regional and national government has to be fight between individual region and national government. (Helmut, German Land, original English)

For the ICORGs, the most natural way of starting to improve coordination and strengthen the linkages with the national level in the macro-regional context are through the intergovernmental Pan-Baltic organizations. Item 36 provides the facilitator role for the CBSS in the Baltic Sea macro-region (reviewed in Section 6.5.2). The core idea in Item 36 was to discuss the role of the IGOs in facilitating

cooperation in the Baltic Sea macro-region (e.g., the CBSS). The Item received only partial agreement, as Factors I and II mildly agreed with it, and Factors III and IV viewed Item mildly negatively. In general, the respondents of the ICORGs and their member regions distributed the Item around the zero distribution area between the scores -2 and +2 (i.e., 18 out of 32). This result might imply a general uncertainty regarding the leading role of the CBSS. The earlier research on the Baltic Sea intergovernmental cooperation organizations showed that, for example, the European Commission has been rather frustrated with the passive role of the CBSS in the implementation of the EUSBSR (Aalto et al. 2012, 31). The CBSS has recently, however, activated itself regarding the EUSBSR by taking responsibilities as policy area coordinator in several issue areas. The CBSS secretariat has taken on the following roles in the implementation of the EUSBSR: policy area coordinator for PA Secure, horizontal action co-coordinator for HA Neighbours, and horizontal action coordinator for HA Climate (CBSS 2016). It also participates on the taskforce of the communication of the EUSBSR (ibid.).

It can also be noted from the individual Q sorts that most German respondents (i.e., seven out of ten) have agreed with Item 36 – five respondents scoring it higher than Factors I and II – compared to Finnish respondents, where only a minority agreed (i.e., four out of twelve). The scores logically follow the representation on the factors, as Factors I and II are represented mostly by German respondents and Factors III and IV by Finnish respondents. The difference is explained through the amount of awareness of the CBSS in German and Finnish regions.⁶⁹ Länder closely followed the work of the CBSS through the communication exchange with the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, where the Länder have the ability to inform the federal level about the ICORG affairs; in Finland, a similar regular exchange between the ministry and Regional Councils does not exist. In addition, at the time of the research interviews, Germany had hosted the one-year CBSS presidency from 2011–2012 (Etzold and Gänzle 2012).

There has been much discussion in recent years about whether the CBSS could also facilitate the cooperation between the regional level and ICORGs and the national level. The CBSS could make the regional voices better heard on the national level, but on the other side this study shows that the structure of the CBSS might not yet be strong enough to work as a kind of umbrella organization in the

⁶⁹ The establishment of the CBSS in 1992 was also originally the initiative by German foreign minister Genscher and Danish foreign minister Ellemann Jensen (Williams 2007, 226). “Still the CBSS is for Germany the only institution with access to northern regional cooperation with its full membership” (Aalto et al. 2017, 153).

Baltic Sea macro-region. Aalto et al. (2012, 5) note that the Member States of the CBSS have conflicting expectations, and the CBSS is criticized for a lack of policy coherence. The CBSS secretariat's ability to work coherently has been compromised by the budget difficulties and reliance on financial contributions (e.g., for projects) by its members and other donors (ibid.). The revision of the long-term priorities of the CBSS and inclusion of the new priority of regional identity in 2014 strengthened again the German and Russian interests towards the CBSS (CBSS 2014; Aalto 2017 et al., 153). The efforts of the CBSS Member States to make the organization more project-oriented have at the same time strengthened the role of its secretariat (Aalto et al. 2017, 154).

Astrid (ICORG) said that it is easier for organization on regional and local levels of the Baltic Sea macro-region to communicate with one unit, which includes the national authorities. So, if the national authorities were not cooperating, they would not be as interested in doing something jointly in the region, and that will affect the whole system. She thinks that CBSS is an important factor for keeping the focus on the Baltic Sea. The CBSS has a role as a sort of body to gather all the organizations together once or twice a year. It facilitates the dialogue and brings the interests together as a platform and meeting point. The CBSS could take this responsibility. In that sense, it is a good way to communicate then between regions and national level in the CBSS framework. National authorities can then bring messages, of course, back into the system of European affairs in the different ministries.

The CBSS could facilitate the communication between the national and regional levels if so far it has been rather formal but it could be developed further. This could be one channel for the ICORGS to deliver the message to the national level and other way round as now the communication of the ICORGS exists in the first hand only towards the regional level to their members and to the EU. (Jani, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

Katarina (German Land) said that CBSS itself has been searching for its role in the Baltic Sea macro-region, as all the Baltic Sea States have entered into the EU except Russia, and so CBSS started a reform process. The role of the CBSS has been very much working quite abstract on the national level, although it has a wide web of partners of organizations on the regional level for cooperation and information exchange. The foreign ministries of each Baltic Sea States have the national contact points of the EUSBSR, but the CBSS itself has not had a visible and practical role in the EUSBSR process. The EUSBSR plays a very important role in the regional level and the ICORGS. This lack of visibility has created doubts

about the CBSS in its current form being able to support the communication and cooperation between national and regional levels across the Baltic Sea. Etzold and Gänzle (2012, 5) stress that the CBSS significantly promotes the integration of Russia into Baltic Sea cooperation and contributes in building bridges between Russia and the EU: “The CBSS could create a platform for cooperation at the intersection of EU internal and external policies for Russia as an equal partner in the Northern Dimension and in the EUSBSR” (cf. Etzold 2010, 296).

The CBSS has developed in a good direction and their strength is the cooperation with Russia and the EU. They also have developed project oriented activities and cooperation with ICORGs and citizens’ initiatives (NGOs). The CBSS could maybe work as platform and facilitator for other organizations but it cannot take them under its umbrella. I do not believe into the fragmentation of the organizations, there are not in the end many of the Pan-Baltic organizations. Most of the organizations and networks are theme or sector specific of their working nature. The diversity also represents the manifoldness of the society. (Jani, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

Juhani (Finnish region) said that it supports the CBSS cooperation in its own way and that the regions receive a clear mandate. If there is cooperation between the governments of the Baltic Sea states, this will filter down to the regional level and open new doors. It is certainly easier to receive national funding if the national level is committed to the cooperation. Kristian (ICORG) added that it is wise to cooperate with the CBSS. Often the regions are quite weak, so it is better to cooperate than fight against the more powerful.

The CBSS can be a sounding board for regional policy development, especially the new challenges which apply to the whole region. The CBSS is a unique possibility to have the Member States involved and the CBSS seems to be quite open to integrate the regions, so that would be the possibility to have the direct link between ICORGs and the national governments, so that’s might be interesting that CBSS could be kind of umbrella organization. (Helmut, German Land, original English)

Karl-Heinz (German Land) stressed that the strength of the CBSS is its relationship to Russia. The CBSS could be a promoter or facilitator in the bundle of the national level, regional level, EUSBSR, and Russia. It could have a role bringing EUSBSR and Russia closer together and help regional voices be better heard on the national level of the Baltic Sea States as well as in Russia. The CBSS could strengthen the role of the ICORGs in getting the Russian regions and national level more engaged in the cooperation through the MLG system. The EUSBSR needs to be developed in association with Norway and Russia, as they

play important roles in the development of the region (BSSSC et al. 2008, 3; BSSSC 2011a, 3). Involvement of the ICORGs and the CBSS could offer some solutions to these issues (B7 et al. 2012, 3; BSSSC et al. 2008, 11).

Item 28 dealt with this thematic, and stated that it is not possible to include Russian regions into the ICORGs as equivalent partners because Russia is not an EU Member State (reviewed in Section 6.5.2). The Item evoked strong disagreement on all factors, though – when looking the individual Q sorts – Item also gathered many rankings (i.e., 14 out of 32) around the zero distribution area (i.e., from -2 to +2). The item yielded a joint consensus, and among the groupings of the respondents regarding nationality or the ICORG representation, no relevant differences could be recognized.

Raik (2016, 250) notes that “the EU has aimed to build its Eastern policies on the liberal ideas of shared norms and a win–win game of interdependence but it has clashed with realist worldviews and competition over spheres of influence.” Aalto et al. (2017, 153) also remind us that “the CBSS is for Russia yet another forum where Russian diplomatic interests in national sovereignty and unanimous decision-making predominate.”

The CBSS Secretariat and the Turku process have become coordinators of the EUSBSR horizontal action “Neighbours,” which promotes cooperation with the neighbouring countries (cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 137). Its main goal is to promote dialogue and cooperation between multilevel stakeholders in the EU, the Northwestern Territories of the Russian Federation, Belarus, Norway, and Iceland (European Commission 2015, 161). Dialogue and exchange of experiences enable discovery of common solutions to mutual challenges (ibid.). In the framework of the HA Neighbours, in addition to the intergovernmental cooperation of the Baltic Sea macro-region, the regional nonstate organizations provide useful cooperation platforms (ibid. 160).

I think Russian regions participating in the ICORGs, I think that is, these organizations are kind of not appreciated too much neither in Russia nor in Moscow, but if the CBSS bundles in a way the regions, regional organizations under the umbrella I think then this can bring Russian regions into the debate in Brussels. (Karl-Heinz, German Land, translated from German)

I will discuss the further challenge of representativeness of the ICORGs in the next section.

7.1.3 Geographical Representativeness and Political Legitimacy of the ICORGs

In their strategies and work plans, the ICORGs wish to act as organizations representing the islands and regions of the subnational level of the whole Baltic Sea area (B7 2002, 2007, 2013; BSSSC 2001, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2013, 2014). As reviewed in Section 1.3 the ICORGs have different kinds of practices for including regional authorities in their activities. The BSSSC does not have a fee-based membership but works as an open network organization organising annual events and working group activities (BSSSC 2016). The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission is a fee-based organization with a membership. As a suborganization of the European organization of the CPMR, the Commission's members are accepted both by the CPMR Political Bureau and the BSC Executive Committee, and are also members of both organizations (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2016a). The B7 Baltic Sea Islands is a fee-based organization representing the Baltic Sea Islands (B7 2014b).

It is also possible that some regional authorities are active in two or more of these organizations at the same time. In other words, the participation of the member regions is often overlapping. Only the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and B7 Baltic Sea Islands, as organizations based on membership fees, hold lists of members. In practice, these organizations never had the whole subnational level as members; the highest numbers have been around 30 member regions of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2004, 13), and there are currently 19 members (e.g., the whole Estonian regional level is included as one member) (CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2017b). B7 had all the seven largest islands as members until 2013 (B7 2002), currently five of them (B7 2017). The various structural regional reforms in different Baltic Sea states have also diminished the number of member regions as regions ceased to exist or they were annexed to larger regional entities. In many Baltic States, the regional level has been abolished. In several other countries, including Finland, regional or municipal reforms are in a continuous transformation process. Currently, ICORGs are strongly represented by the regions from Germany and from three Nordic countries (i.e., Finland, Sweden, and Norway), and are underrepresented in the other six Baltic Sea states (i.e., Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Russia); there are only a few member regions, or members are totally missing. In the Baltic States, especially in Latvia and Lithuania, the economic crisis in 2008 and

the regional reform in its aftermath has made it very challenging to reintegrate the regional and local levels into the Baltic Sea cooperation.

The representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions expressed their concern about the diminishing representativeness of the ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-region. As the ICORGs have lost their footing on the regional level in many Baltic Sea countries, it is uncertain if the ICORGs may represent and speak with one voice for the whole Baltic Sea macro-region. It has become a question of legitimacy and credibility.

Thomas (German Land) stated that there is a democracy deficit regarding the lobbying activities as well. In the current macro-regional context, the ICORGs are struggling to keep their membership geographically and politically as representative of the Baltic Sea states as possible so that they can speak for the whole Baltic Sea region.

The absence of Baltic States would be a serious problem for these organizations, when relevant parts of the Baltic Sea Area would stay outside. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

Losing footing on the ground, however, does not only make the geographical representativeness narrower. It also creates lack of political legitimacy. The central feature of the ICORGs is that they are only international organizations which represent regional political decision-makers on the subnational level (BSSC 2014; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2016b). Most boards of the ICORGs are represented by mixed systems of civil servants and politicians. Political positions in boards have been replaced by the civil servants if there was not the ability to nominate a political representative from the decision-making system of the member regions.

The political dimension is written as a guiding principle in the statutes of the ICORGs. Gebhard (2009, 86–88) has analysed the patterns of cooperation of the CBSS' strategic partners including the ICORGs, listing: the year of establishment; type of actor; organising principle; degree of institutionalisation; policy fields and working agendas; linkages to EU, non-EU states, and actors; identity or pragmatism as well as vision or strategy. She, however, does not take in account in her study the political dimension of the ICORGs, which is the distinguishing element compared to many other cooperation structures. According to their statutes, ICORGs should be represented by the politicians of their member regions in their decision-making structures.

In day-to-day practice in the decision-making mechanisms of the ICORGs, Finland has a mixed system of politicians and officials where the officials often take the lead. German Länder are mostly represented only by the officials. It is important that the politicians are the central actors in the ICORGs. Juhani (Finnish region) fears that losing the political representativeness in the decision-making mechanisms of the ICORGs may create a risk of losing acting mandate in the regional decision-making back home in the member regions. Participation in the ICORGs may be endangered if there is not sufficient support by the regional politicians. The decisions should also be connected to the regional and national political decision-making system.

Rudolf (ICORG) stressed that the recruitment of new members should be continuous work. The narrow representativeness of the regional level in the ICORGs makes it a great challenge for them to defend and strengthen their role in the MLG system. Item 3 states that the ICORGs need support from as many regions as possible (reviewed in Section 6.5.4). The Item gathered clear consensus with a score of +4 from three Factors (I, III and IV) as the Factor II showed a hesitant point of view towards it with the score of -1. Factor II stresses the active project work in the ICORGs. It seems more important to have interested and active regions as members rather than just as many as possible. Factor II is also in this respect result orientated. The individual Q sorts show that of all interviewees only few German respondents (four out of ten) oppose the Item. These findings show that ICORGs should continue active working to increase the membership in Baltic countries, Poland, and Russia. As discussed in the previous section, all factors defended the importance of including the Russian regions into the ICORG activities regarding Item 28.

Item 6 tested the subjective views of the respondents of the ICORGs and their member regions on whether the ICORGs should also accept alternative memberships in addition to the regional authorities which have political mandate in their respective regions (reviewed in Section 6.5.4). This item did not receive consensus. Factors I and II clearly supported more flexible membership, and Factors III and IV were more hesitant. In individual Q sorts, it was not possible to recognize any dividing lines between Finnish regions or German Länder. The first two factors seem to have a more pragmatic and result-oriented approach regarding the implementation of the EUSBSR and project activities; the two latter factors approach the theme through lobbying of regional interests and territorial specificities which are labelled more through political activities and are more region-specific. As the political and economic context has changed significantly

during the last 20 years, the ICORGs should also look more directly to their statutes to meet the current challenges. Monika (German Land) and Charlotte (ICORG) said that “it is a democratic deficit for the ICORGs if Baltic States are not represented. It is a severe problem for the legitimacy of the ICORGs that geographically large part of the regional level of the Baltic Sea macro-region is not represented in the ICORGs.”

I can't see that any document can be presented as a document of the Baltic Sea region or of the whole organization, if one third of countries or regions are missing. (Ella, ICORG, original English)

The representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions proposed, in the post-sorting interviews, that as possible alternatives members could be organizations of the municipalities, organizations representing regions, social and economic partners, specialized agencies of national ministries like labour or transport ministries, or that a thematic approach could be used to attract individual persons from regional levels. In these ways, regional stakeholders could be encouraged to get interested in the ICORGs.

Aaro (ICORG) stated that it is important to keep stakeholders in the Baltic States informed about the ICORGs as well as social and economic partners and local actors. Accordingly, the ICORGs should focus in the current MLG system in strengthening their governance capacity. This includes strengthening their cooperation and communication with the national level and with their member regions. It also requires human, financial, and intellectual resources (ESPON 2013a, 34).

Leadership is also crucial. It should have a clear role as to the various actors and an understanding of local traditions of territorial governance practices and the ability to enhance the social capital of actors. For this purpose, the capacity to introduce effective methods of dialogue and discussion among different actors and interests is decisive. (ESPON 2013a, 23)

Markus (Finnish region) noted that “the members have to represent the regional or local level, also if they are nonpolitical. There is no sense to have national level represented in these organizations.” ICORGs were established in the political context of the early 1990s with the mandates of the members; now, the organizations should be able to adapt their membership statuses to the current political contexts and mandates of their members. Markus (Finnish region) continued, saying that “ICORGs should also be in continuous discussion about the importance of the regional administration and especially with countries where

regional reforms are undergoing. The participation of the regional level is crucial in the work of the ICORGs.”

The political level is very important to maintain in these organizations, there is no much sense to go much downwards to the practical level as there are already many thematic cooperation structures in the Baltic Sea area. ... So the political level is definitely very, very important to have in any, in any kind of cooperation. Like we have found this possibility for youth cooperation and, and of course we have our board member, adult board member even though we have youth board members in our board. ...if they have political support, they are much more recognized at the board. (Ella, ICORG, original English)

Monika (German Land) stated that in the statutes, it should be written that the member regions have to be active in selected policy sectors and their memberships, and make contributions. Ulrich and Ursula (German Länder) remind us that the day-to-day work is carried on by the active members. This means, according to them, that not all regions need to be represented, but enough regions should be represented from the Baltic Sea macro-region that it makes sense to keep up these organizations.

In reality we are representing a very, very small part of this region. And that's the main problem. It's a problem of justification of these organizations. How can, how dare they speak for all this, all this region, how dare they speak for development of society, which it is in the end. There is another point connected to that, so that the first point could be named, we do not include the real actors, we do not include the real stakeholders and the real money. We are only doing sand, sand games, children's games in the sand box. A second point is, it's very easy to write down things. My favourite example is, I think the Baltic Sea strategy says somewhere, we should abolish trafficking in human beings, that's clear, no one would really support the idea that, that young Russian, Ukrainian girls are transferred to make it in Berlin or Stockholm. But one we are sincere and ask ourselves, what should be done to do anything and that's the problem. We should enforce maybe our law, we should impose controls on these establishments and so on what we do not do. That's easy to write it down in strategy, but what happens in the end, is close to nothing. (Ulrich, German Land, translated from German)

The non-EU member regions have been always welcome as members, and the ICORGs have also – since their establishment. – worked to attract Russian stakeholders on the subnational level to join the ICORG activities (BSSSC 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2013, 2014). Item 28, on the participation of the Russian regions, was reflected in detail in Section 6.5.2. Ulrich (German Land) made the argument that “in the very

centralized administrative system of Russia ICORGs are strongly labelled as lobbying organizations towards to the EU, and participation by Russian regions would change possibly the nature of the discussions in the ICORGs.” Monika (German Land) claimed that there has to be an attitude change in Russia; otherwise, ICORGs are not able to do much more. “It also seems to be that regions have successful bilateral cooperation with Russian regions in Finland and Germany but there should be a clear added value and concrete results for Russian regions and cities to participate in the work of the ICORGs,” said Ursula (German Land). Markus (Finnish region) proposed that ICORGs could be supporting the democratic development in Russia.

Jani (ICORG) stated that in the ICORGs, the strong central governance in Russia is the challenge. The regions make the decisions in the ICORGs unanimously, and Russian regions were not often able to participate in decision-making without permission. For example, in the Turku process, the cooperation occurs on the municipal level, and municipalities seem to have clear mandates and can, therefore, achieve concrete results. Aino (Finnish region) said that in the EUSBSR process, the inclusion of Russia should be considered thoroughly as Russia is part of the Baltic Sea macro-region and it would also be of great importance for Finland.

Sabine and Monika (German Länder) stated that Russia should be better included in cooperation and promotion of mutual understanding where prejudices are still present: “Integrating Russia, Baltic States and Poland into cooperation would diminish the huge gap between old and new Member States. It is not economics mainly but also political culture all kinds of things where we may learn from each other. It is a whole identity question.”

If, however, the ICORGs were able to establish their place in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region, they would have to understand the constitutional context of their member regions as well. The regional level (i.e., the member regions of the ICORGs) does not have equal opportunities to act in their state systems. As discussed in the earlier sections about communication and coordination, the ICORGs are the stakeholders which also may fill the gaps and strengthen the weak communication and coordination between, for example, the regional and national levels in the macro-regional MLG context. MLG works also as a tool for the member regions of the ICORGs in their respective national systems to promote communication between the administrative levels. I will discuss next how the different state systems influence the work of the ICORGs in the MLG system within the day-to-day work of the member regions.

7.2 How Unitary and Federal State Systems Influence the Work of the ICORGs

In these sections, I will discuss the limitations and possibilities which the constitutional contexts have set for the studied regions acting in the MLG system. I will describe the current situation of the Finnish regions and German Länder in relation to the ICORGs. These two sections are mostly based on the empirical findings based on the factor interpretation and subjective views of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions presented in the post-sorting interviews. The communication work of the ICORGs is challenging because of the different constitutional contexts of the member regions with federal or unitary backgrounds. The constitutional context seems to influence member regions primarily in the interaction between regional and national levels vertically. The horizontal communication on a regional level seems to be based much more on voluntary and informal communication.

Compared to the multilevel structure of the federal Germany in Finland the informal and voluntary cooperation structures between the national and regional levels as well as on the regional level seem to be rather undeveloped. In particular, in Finland the constitutional context does not support efficient communication exchange of information between national and regional levels on EU affairs. In federal Germany, communication is guaranteed on a voluntary and legislative basis but in Finland national level represents with its legal powers Finland towards the EU and is not obliged to listen to the views presented by regions. The communication challenges of the regions in the Finnish unitary system can be explained by the jurisdiction and relatively weak role of the Finnish Regional Councils and their lack of law-making and taxation powers. As a result, the national level has strong steering power towards the regional level.

A shared problem between Finnish regions and German Länder seems to be the communication horizontally on the regional level inside the member regions. In Germany, the administrative structure promotes the communication horizontally between the Länder through various informal and formal communication and cooperation patterns. In both countries, the communication inside the member regions appears to be rather restricted and undeveloped according to the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions of the study.

Constitutional systems seem also to give their own flavour to the management of the cohesion and regional policy; and the implementation of the partnership

principle in Germany and Finland. MLG in the context of the cohesion policy leans on the partnership principle (European Parliament 2014, 10). Countries with more centralized government structures seem to also have more central steering in managing cohesion policy than federal countries (ibid.11). Looking to the preparation of the operational programmes (OP) during the financing period of 2007-2013, the most autonomous role of the regions in the OP development was in a federal context, as in the unitary Finland where the programming decisions were made on the regional level but within the programming framework that was guided and steered by the national actors (ibid.12). In the programme management, the federal Germany has regional managing authorities as in Finland the managing authority (MA) is located on the national level, but the practical functions are shared with the regional government or administration (ibid. 13). The monitoring of the operational programmes was decided by the member state and the MA in the monitoring committees (MC), but all included representation from national, regional and local government bodies (ibid. 14).⁷⁰ The context of the cohesion and regional policy as well as the partnership principle will be discussed more in detail in Section 7.4.

7.2.1 Finnish Regions

From the Finnish point of view, the results of the study tell about the rather weak role of the regions in the MLG system and the need for using ICORGs as a channel to make the needs of regions visible on the EU level. The Finnish respondents also see the role of the ICORGs rather differently compared to the respondents from the German Länder. As the German respondents correlate with Factors I and II and see the EUSBSR and the strategic projects for the ICORGs as instruments to promote MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region, the Finnish respondents correlate on the factors III and IV representing the tasks of the ICORGs close to the regional development interests and territorial cohesion.

Tarasti et al. (2016) noted in their report that the undergoing reform of the regional governance will make elementary changes to the role and mandate of the regions by empowering them. They recommended that the current tasks of the regional councils should be transferred to the new regions as they are (ibid. 43).

⁷⁰ In the report of the European Parliament the case studies of the operational programmes of the administrative NUTS 2 regions in Finland and Germany are Southern Finland and Land Nordrhein-Westfalen (European Parliament 2014).

The work around the reform has concentrated mainly on the reorganization of social welfare and health care services, as they form the largest share of the future regional budgets, and the discussion around the future international tasks of the new regions has been very limited. The reform might offer a unique possibility for the new regions to become a functioning part of MLG of the Baltic Sea macro-region. There are though warning examples as large regional reforms were implemented in the Baltic Sea region. In Lithuania the County Governor's administrations were abolished in 2010 in order to make the public administration more efficient (Gaule 2011, 420). Along with the reform of the municipal structure, the regional structure in Denmark was reformed by closing down 14 counties and opening up five new regions in 2007 (Danish Ministry of Health 2005, 13). In both cases the ICORGs of the Baltic Sea macro-region lost their member regions in these countries.

Finnish regions are much weaker administratively and politically than German Länder. As described earlier, in Finland the councillors are not directly elected, but rather are nominated by the member municipalities. The work content and structure is much thinner in Finnish Regional Councils. In the Finnish system, the boards of the Councils take care of the day-to-day political work and decision-making. The assembly of the Council discusses and decides the strategic guidelines for regional development and land use planning and rarely discusses the day-to-day political issues.

Markus (Finnish region) stated that in Finland regions should cooperate more for forming opinions and statements towards the national level and discuss issues with the representatives of ministries when needed, with support of international organizations; at least these organizations are visible and known on the national level. Now, on the EU level, Finnish regions may represent in the international organizations completely opposite views compared to those that representatives of Finnish ministries represent. This implies the missing discussion link between regions and national levels in Finland. In the Finnish political system, there are no structural restrictions or limitations that regions could not strengthen through their international mandate; it is a question of the political will on the regional level.

Often, we are in the situation that the state passes by very fast the regions in contents where it looks that it has the full mandate to act and then it does need to listen to the regions... and this sets a challenge that on the other side we want as regions to make lobbying towards the EU system through the ICORGs, so on the other side we have to get the discussion with our own national state in order. There has to be the same kind of messages, as every member state has its own member regions in the ICORGs, I think that the division of labour should be found. In

other words the member region of the ICORG should be able to negotiate with its own national ministries and not work with contradictory messages from each level. ... national level would this way also respect these organizations. (Markus, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

Martti and Markus (Finnish regions) said that the reform of the regional level could be seen as welcome where regions would be stronger with more powers and responsibilities to negotiate with the national level. In Finland, the regions should be more active towards the national level, and formulate common interests on division of labour.

In Finland, we definitely should strive for division of labour between national and regional levels, if there are own roles on different levels but at least discuss who is doing what regarding the Baltic Sea politics, where we may find common interests, what can be done, and how we may use the skills of others. (Jani, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

We never came as an ICORG representative in to the Finnish Ministries to tell our own opinions or comment statements, they did not hear statements from us. There we had the feeling that it is far easier to influence to their decision-making in Brussels through our own channels than have the opportunity to discuss here in our own Ministries. (Charlotte, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

The weak mandate of regions extends to the status of the politicians as well. This sets challenges, as the ICORGs should be represented by the regional politicians of their member regions. The regional politicians are those who are responsible for the decision-making in the ICORGs.

Leo (Finnish region) stated that in the Finnish political system, the challenge is the divided mandates. Politicians represent their municipalities as local politicians or on the national level as members of parliament, while at the same time representing their regions, too. Few politicians identify themselves only as regional politicians representing their Councils. Martti (Finnish region) added that at least in the Finnish political system, regional politicians are in their first role politicians in their municipalities and additionally participate in the working life – often full time – which means that they only have limited time resources for political activities. The domestic and regional affairs appear to receive the primary importance, and the international comes as secondary.

Pentti (Finnish region) continued by noting that the Finnish system of dividing mandates in political parties is not seen as very advantageous for politicians hoping to compete for international positions on a regional level. In the ICORGs, the chairpersons in other leading positions should have manifold experience of

different leading positions but the Finnish system of equal distribution of political mandates (i.e., one person cannot be chosen to several positions) seems not to support regionally the building of international political carriers of qualified individuals in the long run. The coordination of substance in lobbying activities of Finnish member regions has been rather limited, which has caused political representatives of regions to travel to meetings rather unprepared. In recent years, there have been efforts to improve the communication between the regions. The budgets of the Councils are also limited, which again restricts the activities in the ICORGs. The language skills of the political representatives are often so limited that without an interpreter, it is not possible to follow the meetings or understand the meeting materials.

According to Aino (Finnish region), in the Finnish political system, local and regional level mandates are shared through parties and municipalities. If an elected politician on the municipal level is interested in international affairs but will not be nominated to the Regional Council, the opportunities for that politician to be politically active in international affairs are very limited. The reality is, again, that in the Councils, politicians are chosen for the international positions despite frequently not being at all interested in these activities. The hierarchy and rather inflexible political selection process often does not support the selection of persons based on skills and merits to the political positions.

Especially in Finland we make in the following way that after the elections we choose the decision-makers of the municipalities like chairmen for boards and Councils and after this we look at the Regional Council based on the result of the election, which parties receive which positions, then in which municipalities these positions sit well, then we check the male and female distribution, and first after all this we look what kind of persons we did put to different positions. Then it may happen that we put a complete inexperienced newcomer also to central positions, and we send him/her to negotiate to the international arena with experienced professionals, then we get to impossible situations in other words it has to be said that we have a problem in our administrative culture. (Markus, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

Juhani (Finnish region) explained further that the basic problem in Finland is that the politics on the national level is seen as more important than the politics on the EU level; this is directly reflected on the regional level.

This has led to the situation that we do not have regional politicians – they are MPs who at the same time take care of regional and local tasks but we have a very small group of politicians who would be interested in regional tasks. (Juhani, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

This also creates a situation where the tasks of the different levels are mixed. It is a built-in problem for which neither the national nor the regional level is to blame. Then again, it is up to the will of the politicians to see the “Europe of Regions” as either important or less so. It also is a question of human and financial resources. If there is the will, there are then all the possibilities to influence. International affairs have not often received sufficiently high status in the regional political culture. It is regarded as a sector where civil servants are active, and typically the responsibilities lie with very few people.

The reform of regional and municipal governance systems might offer a true chance to empower the regional level in Finland. The reform would clarify the mandates and administrative powers on the regional level. The regional level would receive an autonomous status with its own executive powers in the new three-tier system of central government, autonomous regions, and local government as reviewed in Section 3.2. As the reform is still at the preparation stage (June 2018), many dimensions of the reform are still open and yet to be decided. Even after the reform, it is possible that new Finnish regions may remain rather weak compared to stronger regions in other European countries, including German Länder. The new Finnish regions will not gain new legislative, taxation, or constitutional powers. The economic resources provided to the new regions will be transferred not from municipalities, but from the state budget. This means that, from the economic point of view, the national level would have strong steering powers towards the regional level in the future. In any case, the reform would bring elements of MLG in which the importance of independent regional decision-making would remarkably grow. In this new three-tier system, the division of labour between the levels would become clearer, which could improve communication between the levels in the Finnish administrative system.

If the Finnish regions are rather weakened from their powers in the unitary state system, they nevertheless have had a mandate until now to act and represent their regions in the international arena. The current law of regional development recognizes the task for international activities for Regional Councils as one of the law-based primary tasks (FINLEX 2014). In the proposal by the Finnish government for a draft law for establishing the new regions, the international tasks are removed from the list of the law-based primary tasks and classified as voluntary tasks that the new regions “can additionally” take care of. “Regions can additionally take care of international and EU affairs, and contacts which are connected to their tasks” (FINLEX 2017, 697). In the explanatory part of the draft law, it is stressed that the new regions could take care of only such international and EU affairs

which are connected with their law-based tasks, presuming that the regions have sufficient financial resources in use (ibid. 324).

This new proposal differs from the original proposal of the Finnish government 4.6.2016 to transfer the law-based tasks to the new regions as such including the tasks for international and EU affairs (AFLRA 2017). The current Regional Councils are committed to international cooperation through regional development and EU tasks in manifold ways, and the biggest worry seems now to be guaranteeing the financial resources for the international activities in future annual budgets. Looking ahead, the financial resources will be transferred from the state budget instead of municipalities. Classifying international affairs as voluntary tasks on the regional level unfortunately seems to follow the top-down logic of a unitary state in the MLG system. AFLRA and Regional Councils have reacted to this issue by sending a request to the Finnish government and Finnish Parliamentarians to move this task from the list of voluntary tasks to the list of law-based tasks in the final version of the new law for regional governance (AFLRA 2017).

Just as, through the reform, the number of parallel joint statutory organizations would be markedly reduced and these functions transferred to new autonomous regions, the reform would also promote and simplify the decision-making procedures as well as coordination and management of different thematic areas in the new regions. For the first time, the political decision-makers would be directly elected to the new Regional Councils. Also, the importance of the political mandates in the Regional Councils and boards would grow remarkably compared to the current split system of numerous parallel joint municipal authorities with their own political decision-making systems. The new political mandates would certainly be attractive, and the importance of regional political decision-making would grow.

7.2.2 German Länder

The cooperative federalism drives cooperation and coordination of the administrations between federal and Länder level vertically as between the administrations on the Länder level horizontally (Laufer and Münch 2010, 181–182). The Länder are embedded through the jurisdiction in a constantly regulated communication with the federal level. Several aspects presented in the theory (see Section 3.3) characterize the functioning of the German cooperative federalism and its interlocking politics; Laufer and Münch (2010, 182) describe it as the web of

overlapping responsibilities, coordination, and decision-making patterns, as well as formal and informal mandates of cooperation. The ICORGs must be able to act in the contextually defined environment with member regions from constitutionally defined jurisdictions. The ICORGs have to be able to use the channels of informal and formal communication to promote the cooperation and division of labour. The cooperative federalism, therefore, may offer good examples for ICORGs to build on in the MLG system.

There are numerous formal and informal communication schemes vertically between Länder and the national level (Bund), Länder and the EU level, and horizontally on the Länder level (Laufer and Münch 2010, 208–212). German Länder have, through the multilevel system of the German federalism, several efficient lobbying channels (e.g., through Bundesrat and its chamber for European affairs to the Bund [national level] and to the EU; through Europaministerkonferenz [EMK]; through the thematic-based institution of the Observers of the Länder and information offices in Brussels) (ibid.). This communication framework also includes the affairs of the ICORGs; Länder, as member regions, are able to exchange information in a coordinated way with the national level and the EU levels through the federal system.

Mathias (German Land) confirmed that in the German federal system, there is multichannel cooperation between the national level (Bund) and regional level (Länder), partly because the communication is based on the law-based activities (e.g., through Bundesrat), but partly through different cooperation structures between East German or North German Länder, different Länder committees, through political parties, through regional offices in Brussels, and so on. In every case, however, it is practical wisdom to communicate with all levels and all parties.

Factor I uncovered in this study is represented mostly by the German respondents. It implies strongly the German wish that the ICORGs take a stronger role in the EUSBSR and use it as an instrument when developing the MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region. German Länder understand the importance of an efficient communication system between the MLG levels. The Länder have used the EUSBSR to their own advantage from the very beginning. The new macro-regional strategies have altered the communication between levels in MLG, but the country-specific situation seems to be rather different from the Finnish and German points of view.

Items 15 and 22 show, in an interesting way, the difference in cooperation and communication with the national levels in the German and Finnish systems. In the German federal system, the Länder inform the Bund about their activities in the

ICORGs. By contrast, in the Finnish unitary system, this kind of inbuilt communication system does not exist and this kind of route of information is lacking.

It cannot be said that the national level would not be interested at all... we have contact to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and I think that they listen to us... there is no divided responsibility or something like that, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is represented in the CBSS, regions in the ICORGs and in theory we would not need to share information at all, there is no obligations, no law based or constitutional prerequisite to share. From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs it is done naturally as they were always worried that Länder would start to make their own foreign policies... this is something what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not accept „Nebenaussenpolitik.“ Länder are interested to hear which decisions are taken in the CBSS, if there is something new on the EU level regarding the Baltic Sea policies. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

Monika (German Land) explained that the EUSBSR has improved the communication between the regional and the national levels in Germany. All the positions and statements have to be decided jointly with the federal government and the Länder. The Baltic Sea macro-region however, is not the first priority for either the federal government or the Länder politicians (cf. Etzold 2010, 95; Grützmacher 2013, 92–93). As a result, it is difficult to see that the resources would increase in the future. The federal government is eager to transfer responsibilities to the Länder but is not interested in providing them with resources. Regarding the implementation of the EUSBSR, it is a question of the legal and financial competencies. The German Länder have wide range of competencies. In the end, it is a question of financial resources, which set limits for the activities.

According to Monika (German Land), the Länder make their positions known to the national government through the Bundesrat or other cooperation structures between the national government (Bund) and Länder. The implementation of the EUSBSR has provided a good example of the functioning cooperation between the Länder and the Bund. Monika wishes that this good practice of cooperation could be transferred to the other policy areas as well. The Länder representations in Brussels do not always have the task of communicating the opinions to the EU Commission. The communication between the Bund and three Länder is open, but the political interest in investing resources is not strong. Mathias (German Land) explained that in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, for instance, the communication depends on the ministries; some of them limit their communication to the federal level, but some also use the international organizations. It is challenging, though, to

communicate with the national level politicians via officers to put important issues on their agenda.

The German respondents strongly wished on Factor II that the ICORGs would facilitate important strategic projects. As the Länder own rather strong communication and lobbying channels at the national and EU levels, they have started to use the EUSBSR from the beginning with this same purpose. It is evident that the role of lobbying by the ICORGs does not play as strong a role for the German member regions. In the interviews, the expectations for the practical results and financial outputs by the ICORGs could be recognized. This means that the ICORGs could be more visible by doing projects which benefit the regional level, involve private actors, and facilitate economic growth; in this way, ICORGs can create awareness of their beneficial actions locally. Consequently, the politicians would discuss these issues. If the ICORGs are defined in their statutes as political organizations, all member regions are not able to send politicians to represent their regions in the boards of the ICORGs.

Karl-Heinz (German Land) confirmed that the discussion about the ICORGs in Germany is very limited. In the Länder, there is criticism towards the cooperation between the institutions. The Länder Parliaments see that they are left out of the communication towards the EU which also affects the information flow from and to the ICORGs. Most of the contacts between the Bund and Länder as well as within the Länder are made between the members of the governments or civil servants of each respective ministerial bureaucracy (Laufer and Münch 2010, 184–185). Because of the informal character of the cooperation meetings, the parliaments are not always sufficiently informed about the results. As a consequence, cooperative executive federalism, Länder parliaments, and in fact the federal parliament, see their capability to act restricted in two ways: (i) the decisions of the executives of the Bund and Länder restrict the space of influence of the parliamentarians (of the government fractions) as often the only way to act is to take these decisions for granted and accept them; and (ii) the executive federalism restricts the control function of the Länder parliaments as the Länder governments have the ability – through the work in the Bundesrat as well as through the practice of the cooperative federalism – to influence work and materials which do not belong directly to the responsibilities or mandates of the Länder (ibid.).

The regional politicians have not that much found charm on these ICORGs, more concentrating on their political meetings of the South Baltic Parliamentary Area Conference, quite a lot of links with the CBSS, but there are not so many links between the ICORGs and the South Baltic Area Parliamentary Conference, this is

pity but this is the fact in the Northern Germany. (Helmut, German Land, original English)

The North-German Länder provide a good example of the informal horizontal cooperation on the Länder level between the administrative units among civil servants active in the ICORGs. Mathias (German Land) said that the North-German Länder form a group and meet regularly with the officials of the Foreign Ministry. Depending on the topic (e.g., projects), there are also contact persons from the responsible ministries on the national level. In Germany, the Baltic Sea affairs are regarded as a kind of bottom-up process, and they are not taken automatically into the administrative system. Länder make their projects and have their own ideas on the Baltic Sea affairs, but they often lack continual support from the national administration and politicians. The MLG discussion through the EUSBSR has slowly come to Germany. The federal system is already based on MLG, and the strong role of the Länder on the regional level is exceptional compared to the other Baltic Sea states. It would be favourable if ICORGs would be active towards the ministries. Even on the Länder level, it is sometimes difficult to involve sectoral ministries; the same applies to the national level.

Sabine (German Land) explained that the weight of Baltic Sea affairs differs in communication between national and regional levels in Germany and Finland, presenting a contradictory situation. In Germany, the communication between the national and regional levels seems to be the standard, but the national level does not prioritize the Baltic Sea affairs. In the Finnish case, the situation seems to be the opposite. The Baltic Sea affairs are prioritized on the national level, but large information exchange between the national and regional levels does not seem to be a standard way of working.

As the Baltic Sea affairs are not a priority for the German federal government, the role of the North-German Länder has increased in Baltic Sea cooperation. It is logical that the North-German Länder are in favour of strengthening the role of the CBSS. They see the possibility of improving the cooperation between national and regional levels where CBSS could have a role in the whole Baltic Sea macro-region.

Schleswig-Holstein initiated the idea (i.e., Heckström-Engholm-Model) of the “Baltic Council” as a counterproposal for the establishment of the CBSS cooperation in the beginning of the 1990s, with an idea that the cooperation would not just be intergovernmental cooperation, but would include all levels of the Baltic Sea region including national, regional, and local stakeholders (Williams 2007, 225–228). Sabine (German Land) stated that the Länder would like more active

participation by the national level in the Baltic Sea affairs, as now the Länder are the only active stakeholders, and basically feed information to the national level.

Despite the multifaceted communication channels of the German federal system, the discussion among politicians about the ICORG-related issues in the Länder is rather restricted. Sabine (German Land) also stated that in German Länder, where politicians may play a stronger role, the individual top politicians (e.g., ministers) may change and strongly influence international affairs and put more weight on Baltic Sea issues. Communication between politicians and administration works in Germany, and Baltic Sea issues are quite high on the agenda in North German Länder. Ulrich and Monika (representatives from German Länder) continued that the issues which are on the agenda in the ICORGs are not very actively discussed among politicians in the Länder. The ICORGs are not strong enough to attract the politicians in Germany.

They should discuss more, but we have the political administration, we have to involve them a little bit more, and as we have a part-time Parliament, this is not very easy, there is only two handful of politicians which are dealing with whole area of Europe and international relations, there are very few interesting this kind of regional development. (Helmut, German Land, original English)

Baltic Sea affairs are discussed among the politicians but not ICORG related. If the ICORGs do not become stronger, they are not notified among the politicians. (Ursula, German Land, translated from German)

7.3 FI/FII: The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

The EUSBSR offers a possibility for regional organizations and the EU to promote their cooperation and find synergies: “The launch of the strategy has provided post-enlargement Baltic Sea cooperation with a fresh impetus and incentive” (Etzold and Gänzle 2012, 6). Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt (2000, 11) presented a similar function for the EU Northern Dimension and its Action Plan for coordination among complex organizations and networks as discussed for the EUSBSR in this study. According to them, coordination could happen through top-down assignment of tasks, coordination between actors at the implementation level, and by monitoring of output (ibid.). Aalto et al. (2012, 2017) have elaborated the coordination of policy priorities in the Northern Dimension cooperation between four IGOs: the Arctic Council (AC), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). The coordination challenges among the IGOs recognized in

these studies appear to be rather similar to the ones between the ICORGs: sectoral overlapping, limited coordination of activities, and lack of leadership (cf. Aalto et al. 2017).

The main challenge for subnational actors of the federal states in the macro-regional strategies is to achieve improved cooperation horizontally among different states, but also vertically with the federal level (Schymik 2011, 30). German Länder may demonstrate that the subnational level may be as efficient as the national level in contributing to the success of the EUSBSR (ibid.). As indicated in the previous chapters, the respondents of the ICORGs and their member regions on Factors I and II strongly insisted that the ICORGs should participate more actively in governing and implementing the EUSBSR. Intensified activities also led to the discussion among respondents about the financial and human resources available. In the latter part of this section, the cluster (CV) of consensus-like items (5, 26, and 27) are reflected, regarding the resources of the ICORGs for implementing the EUSBSR and making the existing organizational structures more efficient.

The stronger involvement of the ICORGs in the EUSBSR is closely connected to the improved macro-regional cooperation which was discussed in Section 7.1.2. Item 17 (CII) regarding the stronger role of the ICORGs in the implementation of the EUSBSR was supported by all four factors.

We have to take care of that the interest towards the EUSBSR is kept up, if we lose the political commitment, it is very difficult to get it back. The Baltic Sea area is a forerunner in macro-regional strategies in Europe, and we have to take advantage of that. (Jani, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

MLG enthusiasts of Factor I believe in the empowerment of regional and local levels in addition to the national level. They urge the ICORGs to actively use the EUSBSR as an instrument for promoting MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region. They wish that this would also, in the longer run, lead to streamlined structures and strengthen the impact of the ICORGs' work. Factor I is represented by the German respondents. The German Länder can influence the decision-making regarding the EUSBSR on the national level. Mathias (German Land) explained that it is a question of political priorities: Currently, the EUSBSR is seen as important, and resources are invested there. Mathias also wondered why the ICORGs have not activated themselves regarding the EUSBSR. ICORGs have been active in the drafting process of the EUSBSR, and they still actively participate in the follow-up process (e.g., the annual EUSBSR conferences). The ICORGs have prepared several individual and joint positions on the development of the EUSBSR (B7 et al. 2012; BSSSC 2011a, 2013b; BSSSC et al. 2008; CPMR

2014). Nevertheless, none of the ICORGs representing the subnational level has, so far, taken responsibility for coordinating a policy area or horizontal action of the EUSBSR. The ICORGs have recognized, however, the state-centric approach in the EUSBSR and have asked the national level for more action space in the management and implementation of the EUSBSR (cf. BSSSC 2015).

The respondents on Factor II – mostly representing the German Länder – saw that the ICORGs should be more eager to make project work to achieve their strategic goals. This is logical, as the EUSBSR does not have any of its own funding. The goals set for the EUSBSR are meant to be implemented regionally, cross-border, and transnationally through different financing instruments of the EU. The key funding sources are the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF; European Commission 2015, 32). The EUSBSR can also be financed with numerous other financing instruments including national, regional, and private sources (*ibid.*).⁷¹

The operational environment in the Baltic Sea macro-region has been in constant change during the last two decades and hence, during the existence of the ICORGs. The emergence of the macro-regional strategy EUSBSR has been a part of this change. To the European Commission and the Member States, the EUSBSR has been a way to become active and strengthen their roles in the macro-regional cooperation. The ICORGs have been in a challenging context with heterogeneous mandates and interests of their member regions towards the EUSBSR. As indicated in the previous sections, the state system also has played a decisive role in how actively the subnational level has participated in the EUSBSR process. The North-German Länder have taken an active role in the implementation of the EUSBSR as the Finnish regions with weak mandates have remained rather passive. Regarding the active participation of the North-German Länder in the EUSBSR, as the most visible representatives on the subnational level, they are able to show that macro-regional policy can also be sustained by subnational regions and cities (Schymik 2011, 21).

As was explained in Chapter 2, the state-centric approach in the framework of the EU has been recognized in the theories of intergovernmentalism and MLG. According to Moravcsik (1993, 507), national governments may accept the EU

⁷¹ Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme provides a seed money facility, which supports the preparation of projects in line with the Action Plan of the EUSBSR (Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2017). With this seed money support, projects can be prepared for any funding source available in the Baltic Sea region (*ibid.*).

polity structure, only if it does not weaken Member States' control over domestic field. A decade later, George (2004, 125) noted that "multi-level governance needs to be seen as one voice in a debate with state-centred intergovernmental perspectives." It is well evident that the intergovernmental cooperation between the EU Member States does not disappear even if the MLG system appears beside it, and the intergovernmental cooperation will be a part of MLG.

The EU has adopted a new dimension in transnational cooperation, cohesion, and regional policy by adopting the EUSBSR in 2009 (Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 3). In the current context, it serves as a macro-regional instrument for coordinating the cooperation in the MLG system, as the EUSBSR clearly represents an approach of cooperation between the various levels and stakeholders, where the EU Member States play the key role. Macro-regions offer a platform for national governments, subnational regional bodies within the EU, regions and states beyond the EU outer borders, and cross-border regional organizations which contain EU and third countries (Schymik 2011, 9).

From the European Commission's and Member States' points of view, the more tempting approach with the initiative of the EUSBSR has been the more efficient use and simplified management of the EU funding in the Baltic Sea macro-region than pushing forward a well-functioning MLG system (cf. Ahner 2016).

The main intention behind the macro-regional strategies is to make change on the ground through the implementation of projects which effectively contribute in a coordinated way to the achievement of objectives of the macro-regional strategies. There had only been on scarce involvement of those authorities which were responsible to implement the strategies in the framework of the EU, national, or regional programmes, most of them without any additional money or human resources. The involvement of those authorities responsible for the implementation of the strategies from the very beginning would be necessary and important. (Ahner 2016)

EU macro-regional strategies are not single-issue and focused regarding the policies or limited only to the intergovernmental cooperation; instead, they aim to mobilize existing funding schemes, expertise, and stakeholders from all levels of the EU's multilevel system (Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 4).

In the EUSBSR process, the European Commission (European Commission 2014a, 5) stresses that countries and regions involved should take general strategic leadership at ministerial level. Ministers hosting the National Contact Point (NCP) should be the ultimate decision-makers, and together establish a regular decision-making formation (ibid.). From the definition of the European Commission, we

may recognize the clear state-centric approach in contradiction to the White Paper and Charter on MLG by the CoR (2009, 2014). This serves as a relevant example how the intergovernmentalist approach still characterizes the formation of states' interests in the current MLG debate in the EU. So far, the macro-region model experiment has been an intergovernmental project (Schymik 2011, 14).

As Marks and Hooghe (2004, 23) noted, “the EU represents Type I MLG bundling together policy competencies that in other parts of the world are handled by numerous, overlapping, and functionally specific jurisdictions along the type II MLG“ (reviewed in Section 2.2). The concept of the MLG appears for the ICORGs and their member regions through different kinds of policy instruments and contexts. MLG is the core element of the partnership principle (cf. Bache 2004, 2010; Bauer and Börzel 2010; Hooghe and Marks 2001; Lang 2003) and the EUSBSR (cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 2016b; Hooghe and Marks 2010). INTERREG programme on interregional networks along EU's internal and external borders, “forming cross-border arrangements show a tendency to evolve in a Type I direction under the influence of relatively resource-rich, general purpose local and regional governments” (as quoted in Hooghe and Marks 2010, 25). MLG is regularly used in the “project world” in different thematic cases (e.g., EU-financed projects or studies, which deal with sector-specific issues; or simply fulfilment of the eligibility criteria of the financing programme when MLG stakeholders of all levels representing MLG are gathered together) (cf. ESPON 2013b, 2013d). The number of projects (e.g., Baltadapt, Baltic Deal, Best Agers, BSR TransGovernance, Ecovillages, MOMENT, NEW BRIDGES, PartiSEApate, and Stardust) implemented in the BSR address MLG and its elements of policy integration, and vertical and horizontal coordination, delivering important results that can be presented to respective authorities at the national level (Lange Scherbenske and Hörnström 2013, 20–21). “Depending on the theme, aim and scope of each particular project, MLG is case and context sensitive – there is not one MLG-model that fits all” (ibid.).

A more serious problem associated with MLG is a consensus dictated by the stronger players (Peters and Pierre 2004, 87). Formal and legal arrangements are often seen as complicating where inflexible political decision-making mechanisms often provide the less powerful with formal means of combating the more powerful. Constitutional principles tend to ensure some equality of power for all states or regions in a federal structure. In the informal MLG of the EU, significant differences could be created among different local and regional authorities with

regard to their access to EU funds due to differences in their political access to the lobby within the EU (*ibid.*).

An example of these inequalities noted by Peters and Pierre can be recognized in the access of the local and regional authorities to the EU funding of cross-border and transnational programmes. During the EU financing period 2007–2013, in the projects financed by territorial cooperation programmes (i.e., Baltic Sea Region Program, Central Baltic Program, and South Baltic Programme), the regional level represented only 5% of the actors involved in the flagship projects leadership, in terms of flagship projects implementation is more satisfying (19%) (Moretti and Martinsson 2013, 11). These actors are often already involved in Pan-Baltic organizations and probably beneficiaries of the network they created through this involvement (*ibid.*).

One piece of evidence on the state-centrism of the EUSBSR process is that the subnational level including the ICORGs and their member regions do not have a fixed role in the political steering of the process. During the drafting phase of the EUSBSR, the regions around the Baltic Sea and their organizations were strongest and most active players providing most input and manpower (BSSSC 2011a, 6). As the EUSBSR reached the implementation phase, the Commission turned more to the national level of the Member States (*ibid.*). As the horizontal action “Involve” (now after revision of the EUSBSR called “Capacity”) pointed out, the role of regional and local authorities is still strongly seen in the implementation side in the revised EUSBSR Action Plan. The EU Member States coordinate the network of national contact points (NCPs), assisting and coordinating the implementation on the national level (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 130). The European Commission and all Member States belong to the High-Level Group, which contributes to the policy formulation of the macro-regional strategies (*ibid.* 131). The European Commission recommends that the transnational cooperation programmes should be used to support coordination and implementation of the EUSBSR providing a platform for the involvement of civil society, all levels of the MLG, and parliamentary debate (European Commission 2014a, 9). The reduced participation of local and horizontal actors in the leadership and implementation as partners in the cross-border and transnational INTERREG programmes in the Baltic Sea macro-region calls into question the adaptability of the EUSBSR for them because it also impacts the governance system of the strategy (Moretti and Martinsson 2013, 12). Indeed, the capacities of municipal and regional actors are very variable depending on the member region and their government system (*ibid.*; cf. Jeffery 2000, 13–14).

The representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions criticised that the implementation process of the EUSBSR has been problematic and complicated. Gertrud (German Land) and Peter (ICORG) claimed that it is evidently a top-down practice from the EU Commission, and there is no understanding that there are different administrative systems in the Baltic Sea macro-region. The division of labour between the different levels is not transparent, and there are continuous problems with the communication.

The EUSBSR will work if everyone plays their part and understand what their role is, it is maybe small but when all these all small bits added up that is what will make the strategy to success, for me the strategy was a framework to enable us to better work together to achieve goals where all the countries around the Baltic Sea have to be involved. (Peter, ICORG, original English)

Peter (ICORG) continued by saying that for the local or regional politicians, it is difficult to see the benefits of the EUSBSR. It is difficult to prove what the EUSBSR achieves in policy areas and if the economic progress in the region is stimulated by the EUSBSR actions.

It is very unclear what the EUSBSR is achieving. There are lots of pressures and the fears might be same as in any other programme and the strategy is not succeeded in being to be able to present its results or to define what results it is achieving in terms connecting the regions, saving the sea, increasing prosperity. It is certainly not able to show results within the policy areas, so where is you can see how the economy of region is progressing. It is in practical terms difficult for ordinary politicians to see the benefits. There is a little bit of frustration towards the strategy at the moment. (Peter, ICORG, original English)

It is very important that regionally and macro-regionally relevant Pan-Baltic organizations are now explicitly mentioned in the revised EUSBSR Action Plan. Still in only three policy areas (culture, education, and tourism) and two horizontal actions (Capacity and Neighbours), regions or local stakeholders are responsible for coordinating the actions. Regarding policy areas, the responsible regional stakeholders are (i) the North-German Länder of Hamburg with Norden Association for education, research, and employability; (ii) Mecklenburg-Vorpommern for reinforcing cohesiveness of the macro-region with tourism; and (iii) Schleswig-Holstein for culture and creative sectors. From the local level, the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC – also a reference organization in this study) and Baltic Sea NGO Network have taken responsibility for the horizontal action HA Capacity, and City of Turku for the horizontal action HA Neighbours.

Only few regions have taken responsibilities on the implementation like policy areas or projects, most responsibilities of the policy area coordination of the EUSBSR are carried by the national level. (Charlotte, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

The EUSBSR has, from the beginning, been built from a mobilisation of the national actors; approximately 53% of the leading actors are national agencies, ministries, or national decentralized authorities (Moretti and Martinsson 2013, 6–7; cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 134). Further, the distribution of the policy area coordinators (PAC) and flagship leader roles has been realized in cooperation between the national level and the European Commission. The participation of horizontal and local actors in the leading activities is quite weak (i.e., 5% for the regional actors, 2% for the local actors, and 10% for the NGOs, 7% businesses). Some intergovernmental Pan-Baltic organizations like HELCOM, Council of Baltic Sea States, and Nordic Council of Ministers show high presence in the leading activities, which allow for a good spread of information among policy makers. For creating a real territorial development with other MLG levels, HELCOM has a high number of “observers” from different categories, including NGOs (ibid.).

The study shows so far that the EUSBSR plays a highly relevant role for the ICORGs, and there are strong wishes expressed by the factors uncovered in this study that the macro-regional strategy should bring some change to the work of the ICORGs. In the next section, I will discuss the governance and implementation of the EUSBSR in more detail.

7.3.1 Needs for Better Coherence in the Governance and Implementation

The implementation of MLG still includes weaknesses as shown through the previous section regarding the EUSBSR. If MLG is seen as an alternative for intergovernmental cooperation, and MLG cannot be institutionalized, it could create false beliefs and expectations for actors and stakeholders about their actual and real powers of influence in the system (Peters and Pierre 2004, 87). MLG is now an established feature of regional development in Europe, but the development responsibilities and powers of regions vary enormously from country to country (Bachtler 2010, 7). It could also mean weak commitment by the states to the system. The ICORGs work on a voluntary basis as lobbying organizations in addition to the IGOs in the MLG system. Their member regions own very heterogeneous mandates in their own state systems. Without legal or institutional arrangements, the ICORGs – with their member regions – will remain on the

implementation side of the MLG system without having a relevant influence on the decision-making. The way to see MLG as supporting and complementary approach could be more functioning when the stakeholders of other levels could more easily recognize their responsibilities of the active networking cooperation beside the national level (Peters and Pierre 2004, 76).

Currently, the high-level coordination happens in the High-Level Group (HLG) of macro-regional strategies (cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016b). It consists of official representatives from all EU Member States and gives advice and proposes actions to the European Commission and the Member States on the EUSBSR and its implementation (European Commission 2015, 12). It provides opinions on the review, and proposes actions on the updates of the EUSBSR and its Action Plan (ibid.). The ICORGs wish that all levels of the MLG have to be included in the implementation of the EUSBSR (BSSSC et al. 2008, 2). The ICORGs' possibilities to have their say on the EUSBSR structure are in-built on the implementation level hence not on the decision-making level directly. There is no a macro-region specific High-Level Group that would include relevant stakeholders from all the MLG levels in the Baltic Sea macro-region. The multilevel cooperation is enhanced by each member state in a variable intensity, and through the policy areas and horizontal actions on the coordination and operational levels (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 130). In the current context, the High-Level Group of the macro-regional strategies does not include subnational stakeholders in its decision-making mechanisms. The structure of the EUSBSR shows that political coordination of the macro-regional strategies is in the hands of the European Commission and Member States. The European Commission, though, recommends that the existing regional institutions cooperate to avoid duplication or overlapping of activities, and play their role in implementation (European Commission 2014a, 9), whereby with regional institutions is meant IGOs on the national level.

Kristian (ICORG) stated the ICORGs should fight for their place in the decision-making of the EUSBSR:

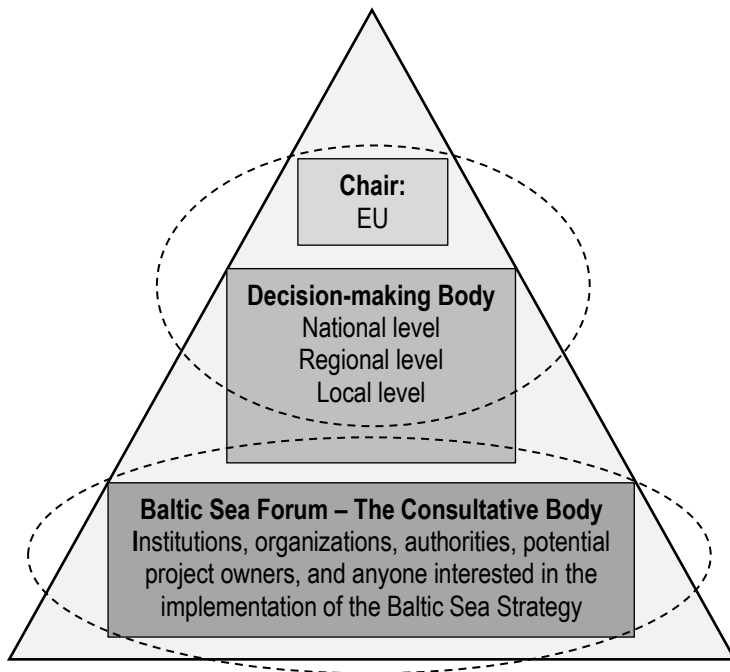
This would provide the ICORGs with decision-making powers while the ICORGs would contribute to improve the strategy and connect it to the regional political decision-making. This would also promote the principle of subsidiarity. According to it the decisions have to be made as close as possible to the citizens. Today the EUSBSR is managed too far from the regional even national politicians. This is the reason for the current situation in which the Baltic Sea regions do not have the critical mass and legal competencies to act in the Baltic Sea affairs. (Kristian, ICORG, original English)

Kristian (ICORG) suspects that there might be fear of the workload related to new responsibilities, and there are also cultural reasons for the regions not being ready to fight for their interests. In any case, he believes that this responsibility is worth taking because of the increased powers.

As formulated in Item 34, in 2008, the subnational cooperation organizations initiated in their joint statement a new method before the official launch of the EUSBSR to strengthen the implementation process of the drafted Baltic Sea Strategy. The model of governance would be more than a voluntary forum for exchange of suggestions and national action plans (BSSSC et al. 2008, 10–11). In this model of governance (see Figure 5), the chair was proposed for the EU Commission; the decision-making body would have consisted of national, regional, and local levels; and the Consultative Body (Baltic Sea Forum) would have consisted of institutions, organizations, authorities, potential project owners, and anyone else interested in the implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy, which would have included all relevant actors, and at the same time would have formed a clear and transparent decision-making structure (*ibid.*). They recognized even then the advantages and disadvantages of both the top-down and bottom-up processes. This strategic instrument would have supported the EUSBSR and created a catalyst for further development of the region.

If a role which does not exist yet in the system could be found for the ICORGs, and a High-Level Group for the Baltic Sea organizations would be established, it would be a rational idea, we would say, we do not want to lose the voice of the Baltic Sea organizations in the process, and they would participate in the implementation and decision-making process. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

Figure 5. Model of governance for the Baltic Sea macro-region



Note: Model of Governance was proposed by the ICORGs in their joint position paper on the EUSBSR. Compiled by the author based on BSSSC et al. 2008.

The revised Action Plan of the EUSBSR notes the vital need to communicate the achievements and results of the EUSBSR on all levels to all possible target groups (European Commission 2015, 34). The basic responsibility for communication lies with the implementing stakeholders in the governance of the EUSBSR. Even if there are successful initiatives and major improvements made possible by the implementation of the EUSBSR, the process will fail if those results are not widely communicated (ibid.).

Communication between different levels (MLG) is needed. The national rules cannot solve all the problems. The EUSBSR is definitely a good direction. The challenge would certainly be which organization would take the responsibility on certain policy area as another would feel to be neglected. There should be a steering group organizing the division of labour. One way is for ICORGs to take the responsibility on a project, people would have a common goal and their work would be more effective. (Ella, ICORG, original English)

The EUSBSR has created a governance architecture which already influences the existing organizations on the macro-regional level (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 125).

Coherence, coordination, and overlapping between the IGOs of the Baltic Sea macro-region has been studied widely (cf. Aalto et al. 2012, 2017; Etzold 2010; Etzold and Gänzle 2012; Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000). The fast growing “institutional thickness” which results from new institutional levels and policy instruments overlapping old ones necessitates coordination between the organizations at the implementation level (e.g., project networks, interlocking working groups) (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 13; cf. Etzold and Gänzle 2012, 1). Coherence, coordination, and overlapping are challenges both for the ICORGs and on the subnational level. In Section 7.1.3, it was already noted that there is geographical overlapping of the ICORGs with their member regions. The overlapping exists in several policy areas as well, and will be described in Table 31 regarding the policy areas of the EUSBSR and thematic priorities of the ICORGs in different policy sectors. For the organizations to remain relevant and preserve their members’ interests, the organizations have to specify their future purposes and contributions to overall cooperation efforts (Etzold 2010, 249). Parallel structures and institutional overlap could lead to a change and optimization of their working modes and structures (ibid.).

Item 20 (CII, reviewed in Section 6.5.2) dealt with stronger macro-regional cooperation, and stated that the ICORGs should seek division of labour among their members for acting in sectors where they were strongest. The Item includes two dimensions: coordination among the ICORGs and overlapping policy sectors. The MLG-enthusiastic Factors I and II favoured this approach, but Factors III and IV created groupings in the middle distribution area. In the individual sortings, there were no relevant groupings recognized based on the nationality or the ICORGs. The strong anchoring of respondents (22 out of 32) in the middle distribution area (-2 to +2) might be due to several reasons, but it certainly tells about the difficulties in taking on a position on the division of labour and coordination, as the ICORGs have their own histories and have worked separately now over two decades. It is to be noted that none of the factors resisted the better coordination and division of labour. Markus (Finnish region) noted that there are tasks which are done best on the national level, and tasks which should be implemented by regions. The participation of the regions depends on political will. Regions could implement the EUSBSR on strategic, political, and practical issues. Sabine (German Land) continued that ICORGs should be able to make division of labour and focus on certain things. Now, it seems that all ICORGs are doing everything. Rudolf (ICORG) stated that ICORGs could have different roles in the implementation of the EUSBSR, others could concentrate more on projects, and

still others could be more policy-focused, making common policies for the Baltic Sea macro-region.

As a whole, the interviews gave the impression that the reason for the passivity of the ICORGs and their member regions regarding the EUSBSR is not the contents of the EUSBSR. It is a paradox that ICORGs in their working groups and decision-making bodies deal with nearly all thematic areas of the EUSBSR policy areas, but only a few regions have activated them in their own decision-making and implementation process of the EUSBSR. Another paradox is that the stakeholders of the member regions of the ICORGs are actively participating in international projects, but the member regions hardly use the ICORGs as a project channel or platform to achieve any of the following goals: strengthening the position of subnational level of the MLG system, lobbying for the regional development needs, or defending other strategic targets. The integration of local and regional authorities into the implementation of the EUSBSR is still limited, even if they could adopt an essential role in implementing the macro-regional initiatives (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 134; Schymik 2011, 20). In the recent online survey, the participating policy area coordinators (PACs) and horizontal action coordinators (HACs) did not think that the coordination with local authorities was efficient and effective in the context of the EUSBSR (Gänzle and Kern 2016b, 134).

Table 31. ICORG activities in the policy areas and horizontal actions of the EUSBSR

Policy area (PA)	PA Coordination	ICORG working group activity	MLG or subnational cooperation mentioned explicitly in the EUSBSR Action Plan 2015
Bioeconomy	Finland, Lithuania (rural development), Sweden (fisheries) and Nordic Council of Ministers (bio-economy)	The working groups and/or policy sectors of ICORGs (CPMR BSC, BSSSC, UBC, B7) on energy deal bio-economy questions through e.g., forestry and biomass issues	Yes
Culture – Culture & creative sectors	Schleswig-Holstein	BSSSC, UBC and B7 through policy work and working groups	Yes, PA led by Schleswig-Holstein

(continued on next page)

Policy area (PA)	PA Coordination	ICORG working group activity	MLG or subnational cooperation mentioned explicitly in the EUSBSR Action Plan 2015
Education – Education, research and employability	Hamburg and Norden Association (Sweden)	UBC Commission “smart and prospering cities”	No, PA led by Hamburg
Energy – BEMIP Action Plan (for competitive, secure and sustainable energy)	BEMIP (overall) & Latvia and Denmark	The working groups and/or policy sectors of ICORGs (CPMR BSC, BSSSC, UBC - “sustainable cities,” B7) on energy	No
Hazards	Sweden	N/A	No
Health – Improving and promoting people’s health, including social aspects	Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being	UBC Commission “inclusive and healthy cities,” B7	No, local level mentioned in implementation
Innovation – Exploiting the full potential of the region in research, innovation and SME, utilising the Digital Single Market as a source for attracting talents and investments.	Poland and Sweden	UBC Commission “smart and prospering cities,” B7	No, Vanguard initiative mentioned
Nutri – Reducing nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels	Finland and Poland	N/A	No
Safe – To become a leading region in maritime safety and security	Denmark and Finland	The working groups and/or policy sectors of ICORGs: CPMR BSC, BSSSC, UBC Commission “safe cities,” B7	No

(continued on next page)

Policy area (PA)	PA Coordination	ICORG working group activity	MLG or subnational cooperation mentioned explicitly in the EUSBSR Action Plan 2015
Secure – Protection from land-based emergencies, accidents and cross-border crime	Sweden and the Council of Baltic Sea States Secretariat	UBC Commission “safe cities”	Yes, especially municipalities and bottom-up process mentioned.
Ship – Becoming a model region for clean shipping	Denmark	The working groups and/or policy sectors of ICORGs: CPMR BSC, BSSSC, B7	No
Tourism – Reinforcing cohesiveness of the macro-region through tourism	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	UBC Commission “smart and prospering cities,” B7	No, PA led by Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
Transport – Improving internal and external transport links	Lithuania and Sweden	The working groups and/or policy sectors of ICORGs: B7, CPMR BSC, BSSSC, UBC Commission “sustainable cities”	Yes, in the updated version of the Action Plan 20.3.2017 (European Commission 2017b)
Horizontal action (HA)	HA Coordination	ICORG working group activity	MLG or subnational cooperation mentioned explicitly in the EUSBSR Action Plan 2015
Capacity – Capacity building and involvement	The Baltic Sea NGO Network, the Union of the Baltic Cities and the Swedish Institute	UBC one of the coordinators, CPMR BSC multi-level governance working group	Yes, HA lead by the UBC
Climate	CBSS Secretariat	N/A	Yes, especially local level mentioned

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Horizontal action (HA)	HA coordination	ICORG working group activity	MLG or subnational cooperation mentioned explicitly in the EUSBSR Action Plan 2015
Neighbours – Creating added value to the Baltic Sea cooperation by working with neighbouring countries and regions	City of Turku (Finland) and the Council of Baltic Sea States Secretariat	N/A	Yes, HA lead by the City of Turku
Spatial Planning – Encouraging the use of maritime and land-based spatial planning in all Member States around the Baltic Sea and develop a common approach for cross-border cooperation	VASAB and HELCOM	The working groups and/or policy sectors of ICORGs: B7, CPMR BSC, BSSSC, UBC Commission “sustainable cities”	Yes

Note: Table compiled by the author 15 April 2017 from the information in the EUSBSR Action Plan 2015 (European Commission 2015), and information from the web sites of the ICORGs.

When going through the policy areas and horizontal actions of the current Action Plan of the EUSBSR listed in Table 31, the ICORGs show quite a bit of interest towards the thematic areas of the EUSBSR. The ICORGs are quite committed to thematic areas in their internal discussions, and many activities are done even if not through the EUSBSR. The ICORGs are active already in the thematic fields of most policy areas through their working groups or through their political work in different policy sectors. The working groups of the ICORGs usually do not run projects. It is curious why the ICORGs have not obtained a place for themselves in these thematic areas in structure of the EUSBSR. The positions of the ICORGs, not only as project developers but also as decision-makers beside the national stakeholders in the EUSBSR, would certainly strengthen MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region.

It is very important concerning the future of the EUSBSR that the horizontal stakeholders take a stronger role in implementing the EUSBSR based on the MLG approach. The EUSBSR seems not to be opened to the regional organizations. Horizontal actions or flagship projects could be instruments for the ICORGs to work with. The ICORGs should make their work more efficient and the EUSBSR

may function as an impetus here. I do not believe directly that there is much double work, it is more question about the efficiency. (Jani, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

Aalto et al. (2012, 9) remind us that coverage of a wide range of policy sectors is positive, as it is possible to address the multiple needs of the region, but “it can also lead to poor coordination, loss of direction, and to the duplication of activities by the organizations involved.”

But being in an organization, like the ICORG, you get the possibility to really drive the contents of a project and connect it with political issues. (Kristian, ICORG, original English)

Meanwhile it is relevant to evaluate how the ICORGs could contribute to the EUSBSR. The interviewees expressed different aspects on the division of labour through the EUSBSR.

Ulrich (German Land) stated that the EUSBSR could help the ICORGs make divisions of labour and recognize the individual ways and angles to work with specific priorities. The EUSBSR could also see that different organizations would not work parallel with the same priorities at the same time. The ICORGs could save their often-scarce resources by using division of labour.

Monika and Sabine (German Länder) stated that currently, several ICORGs work with several sectoral issues through their working groups and lobbying activities, but only a few of them are committed to the work through the EUSBSR. They said it is not always seen as a problem, as different ICORGs have different members. In this way, it is possible to gather several views behind the policies and actions; but, if the EUSBSR was successful, it could also increase the importance of the ICORGs and, in a natural way, show the need to streamline structures of the existing organizations.

The streamlining of the ICORGs is absolutely necessary which has also been the target in the beginning of the process of the EUSBSR. The EUSBSR is completely unsuccessful if it does not manage to create synergies and networking between the ICORGs and other stakeholders of the Baltic Sea area. (Gertrud, German Land, translated from German)

Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt (2000, 11) presented an option for coordination between actors at the implementation level, “if top-down division of labour for some reason is impossible or unsuitable, the actors engaged in implementing practical activities may agree to co-ordinate their efforts among themselves, to avoid double work, achieve synergies, share responsibilities, learn from each other,

and increase efficiency.” In this process-oriented approach, the central level for coordination would act as a facilitator (ibid.). An output monitoring system could be combined with this approach to discuss matters of cost-efficiency and provide information for enhancing cooperation (ibid.12). The EUSBSR offers an instrument for the coordination of tasks vertically between the levels of the MLG and horizontally between the stakeholders. The revised version of the EUSBSR explicitly states that the EUSBSR can enhance the coherence of cooperation in the region and contribute to a better division of labour among existing networks to avoid overlaps and strengthen synergies (European Commission 2015, 21; cf. Etzold and Gänzle 2012, 6). The EUSBSR should receive acceptance also besides the EU-financed projects; it could win acceptance as a common and joint strategy for the whole Baltic Sea region. Schymik (2011, 10) proposes that macro-regions could form informal alliances of political actors and influence the EU policies with “soft power,” identifying common interests and positions.

The policy areas and horizontal actions represent the main areas where the EUSBSR can contribute to improvements, either by tackling the main challenges or by seizing key opportunities of the macro-region (European Commission 2015, 9). Typically Member States coordinate policy areas or horizontal actions, and work on their implementation in close contact with the Commission and all stakeholders (i.e., other Member States, regional and local authorities, intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies). Other bodies may also be nominated to coordinate a policy area or horizontal action (ibid.).

When looking back the list of policy area coordinators of the revised EUSBSR (Table 31) and by acknowledging that fact that “MLG” or “regional level” is mentioned in the descriptions of the policy areas only a few times, one can conclude that the strategy has a strong state-centrist approach. This holds – except for PA culture – even in the policy areas led by German Länder.

All the policy area coordinators, all the flagship leaders, everyone is coming from national ministries, and people from national ministries does not either think, they don't think multi-level governance, they don't think in that way, and that's why they don't think about integrating, and that's why maybe also that the successful, practical cases for the Baltic Sea Strategy is coming financed from the INTERREG program, because there you have built something from bottom up with partners. The problem is the structure I think more than the willingness or the preparedness from regions and the cities to interact. (Astrid, ICORG, original English)

MLG is built in all the horizontal actions. The purpose of the EUSBSR is to coordinate strategies and funding to efficiently address the challenges for the Baltic

Sea macro-region identified in the EUSBSR (European Commission 2015, 150). The goal of the horizontal action "Capacity" is to strengthen MLG in the framework of the EUSBSR which means that stakeholders involved in the implementation of the EUSBSR, in its policy areas, need to understand the MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region, and the programming and funding structure of the 2014 to 2020 programming period (ibid.). The Partnership Agreements also coordinate national, regional, and local strategies and funding with the objectives in the Europe 2020 (ibid.; Dabrowski, Bachtler, and Bafoil 2014; European Commission 2010; Perron 2014). The role of partnership principle in the ICORGs' work will be discussed in Section 7.4.1.

The revised EUSBSR Action Plan (European Commission 2015, 150) states that the horizontal action (HA) Capacity is designed to meet "the needs for professional and partnership-based management of the EUSBSR, by focusing on building knowledge, competencies, and leadership skills for implementation of the EUSBSR in a complex MLG system." It aims to offer support for the implementing stakeholders by developing and operating a capacity building platform which involves and utilizes networks across sectors in the BSR. It supports involvement of all levels including local and regional authorities (ibid.).

The list of implementing stakeholders might also include a flavour from top-down approach where most of the implementing stakeholders are actors from national level. One must keep in mind that the implementation of the EUSBSR is very often done with the EU funding. The challenge is that the EU funding is very heterogeneously distributed in the macro-region strongly supporting the less developed regions. The decisions for the flagship project leaders are made mostly on the national level and possibly are foremost stakeholders from the national level. Furthermore, the MLG capacity building reaches mostly project stakeholders and is split in great number of separate projects. This may pose a risk that stakeholders and regions which do not receive EU funding or are not participants in projects with MLG approach are not goals of the MLG capacity building either. If the MLG capacity building in the Baltic Sea macro-region stays project based, one may seriously ask if the capacity building may have impact on the governance system of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

Sabine (German Land) said that the political will to invest more resources onto the implementation of the EUSBSR seems often to be missing. The fears to take the responsibilities and not to be able to fulfil them are also not unseen, she continued. This is certainly one of the reasons that weakens the mandate of the ICORGs and prevents them to become stronger in the EUSBSR implementation

process. The communication and political discussion on the goals and priorities of the ICORGs on the regional level is rather limited which certainly also sets limits for understanding MLG as one dimension of the EUSBSR.

It is not only a question of resources, every single region has some kind of set environmental goals, legislative goals, being part of national level and delivering services taking care of their municipalities. They have to leave up to certain standards, so they are participating the EUSBSR if they like or not...There is nothing wrong just be a partner with in the projects, but much of the EUSBSR will be carried through what the municipalities and regions actually do...I think it is attacking and looking at the EUSBSR in a way of looking for problems and barriers than looking ways of something we all have to do, it is very common sense strategy. (Peter, ICORG, original English)

In the post-sorting interviews, different ways of streamlining the activities were discussed: one way would be to allocate activities under the umbrella of the CBSS or the other way to look the priorities of the EUSBSR.

There was in the beginning some hope that the EUSBSR could bring some clarity to the field of the organizations but not much has happened. The first thing to do the division of labour would be the increased cooperation between the various organizations. The CBSS after its reform want to concentrate more on projects and cooperation with other organizations. The stronger role of the CBSS would also make the other organizations stronger. The CBSS presidency always affects how the work is annually done. If certain thematic is taken seriously on the national level, it also contributes and supports how things are done on the regional level. Nobody wants to be guided or dominated by the CBSS but it would be very important to have a good cooperation and division of labour between the CBSS and other organizations. If the CBSS would be so strong enough that it could play this role, then decisions from the local and regional levels would be communicated and also be heard on the national level in the Member States, this would be good but then the CBSS should be very much stronger as an organization. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

Monika (German Land) continued that the regions do not want to see the CBSS in a dominant role but if it could as an equal partner through a fair division of labour take a role as a facilitator in the MLG system that would be acceptable. Helmut (German Land) thought that the reform process implemented in the CBSS has been seen very positive by the regions.

Ursula (German Land) noted that the streamlining of the ICORGs would on the other hand possibly also increase the quality of organizations and make them more attractive to work with. Mathias (German Land) added that ICORGs should help to organize competencies and knowledge through projects gathering resources

and bringing people together who work in the same field. If they are able to focus on the specific strengths or topics, then they should also be able to involve these structures, projects, networks, and working groups in the implementation of the EUSBSR.

According to Ella (ICORG) the EUSBSR could help to recognize the most important topics for the regions and then to identify their role in dealing with the topics.

It is very important from the German point of view that slim but efficient structures are developed. The parallel processes of the Baltic Sea region have to be evaluated as well. Possibly the stakeholders in question are not themselves able to join together, so a certain amount of pressure from the EUSBSR from top would not be that bad... but simply there is not any more the financial resources to support parallel structures, maybe there could be more financial resources by putting structures together and to work more efficiently. (Ursula, German Land, translated from German)

The role of the EUSBSR to streamline the existing structures of the ICORGs also awakes opposite opinions in the current reality of the numerous cooperation structures of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

So, it's about people that they talk to each other, the point is, we have so many different structures, so many different approaches, legal approaches, policy approaches, and so on, so I think it's more the process and not so much the outcome. And the process, if there is a need to have different organizations then they might serve, well, it's perhaps not double work, it's but it facilitates to achieve results. (Mathias, German Land, translated from German)

Everybody has their own function in some way or another ... simply said that it is a grown structure. I do not see so much trouble with double work, it could be more coordinated, and maybe even with more connections through these annual forums which everybody really needs. All organizations are there, it is a good way of exchanging views. (Sabine, German Land, translated from German)

Erkki (Finnish region) stated that the ICORGs should be focused on selected thematic sectors. A large representative organization without focus does not work either. Etzold and Gänzle (2012, 13) remind that coherence of cooperation can be improved when one actor provides the platform and acts as a facilitator for the cooperation like the European Commission in the EUSBSR. It is though important that various platforms and facilitators communicate permanently to ensure the coherence (ibid.). Gänzle and Kern (2016b, 140) state that “the EUSBSR can develop a new transnational and flexible governance architecture that provides the capacities to solve common problems in a multilevel, multifactor and multisector

sector setting, and which facilitates learning and adaption to a dynamic environment.”

The MLG enthusiasts of the Factors I and II urge the ICORGs to activate themselves to the EUSBSR as well as taking more visible role in facilitating project work. This is very understandable from the point of view of regions which are above the EU28 average in GDP and only receiving limited amounts of cohesion and regional policy funding. For these regions outside of cohesion and regional policy funding or receiving that in very limited amounts, the ICORGs should create added value by analysing the importance of other funding sources to their member regions of course not forgetting that the regions in Baltic States and Poland which are potential members for the ICORGs are still under EU28 GDP average and eligible for the cohesion and regional policy funding.

The ICORGs representing their member regions on the regional level have remained nearly unused resource as a networking platform for generating projects and gathering knowledge in specific knowledge areas of regions. Numerous international projects are implemented by the stakeholders of the member regions but the ICORGs hardly play any role in this. Even more this is alarming as these organizations especially should represent the regional politicians and use this opportunity to combine political work and implementing the targets of the ICORGs as well as the targets of the European strategies through strategic project work.

Both things have to happen, an organization to my understanding has to show a clear profile and have a recognizable task and a mission, what we are for, which are our themes, for my eyes this has to be focused and not all kind of themes which could be of some interest for certain individual regions. One should restrict to relevant points, and at the same time run also projects, which show, that this is what we support as regions, and these are the themes, where we believe in that regional cooperation produces added value, these are the projects where we have the stakeholders we think are important. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

In this section, we have seen that the ICORGs would benefit in multiple ways from intensifying their collaboration on the EUSBSR. But how the ICORGs should adapt the macro-regional strategy to the lobbying of the new and future cohesion and regional policy? The ICORGs could use the EUSBSR also for their lobbying purposes to influence the drafting and implementation of the EU cohesion and regional policy; and to promote the development interests of their member regions like their smart specialization. I will discuss in more detail the

changing operational environment and the changing cohesion and regional policy in the next section.

7.4 FIII/FIV: Towards New Regional Policy in the Changing Operational Environment (Partnership Principle)

In this section, I will discuss the changes in the operational context of the Baltic Sea macro-region, and how the ICORGs could modify their goals of their work to respond to the current challenges. The context around the ICORGs regarding the EU cohesion and regional policy has changed drastically since the mid of the 1990s. As the ICORGs were established only Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Sweden of the Baltic Sea States were members of the EU. The ICORGs lobbied strongly for the membership of regions of Baltic States and Poland entering the EU which became reality in the year 2004 (cf. BSSSC 2000, 2002, 2003; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2003, 2004). The economies of the Baltic Sea States are also due to their historical backgrounds very heterogeneous. The EU cohesion and regional policy has played a decisive role to reduce economic and social disparities in the Baltic Sea macro-region but still a clear gap among the economies can be recognized. Even more the European strategies for cohesion and regional policy Europe 2020 and territorial cohesion TA 2020 try also to respond to the challenges caused by the globalization process. These changes in the operational environment challenge regional organizations to adapt and possibly adopt new roles and tasks (Etzold 2010, 4). Item 16 dealing with the global issues is discussed in the end of this section.

At different institutional levels of the MLG exist very different interpretations of how MLG works, at the local level it might be extremely appealing to negotiate directly with powerful and resourceful transnational institutions (Peters and Pierre 2004, 83). Amid increasing difficulties in mobilizing financial resources from the national level, regions attach great hopes to their exchange with the EU structural funds, similarly transnational institutions have the option to choose whether to approach national or subnational institutions (*ibid.*).

These organizations were established at some point for certain functions of the participating regions. As now these functions and regions change, it has to be evaluated, if it is possible to find other functional equivalences ... this has to be reflected in the statutes of the respective organizations. (Thomas, German Land, translated from German)

As reviewed in Chapter 3, the management of the EU regional development funding (ESIF funding during the EU 2014 to 2020 programming period) belong to the core tasks of the Finnish and German member regions of the ICORGs. Influencing the EU cohesion and regional policy; and channelling EU financing to the subnational level and interregional cooperation has been traditionally one of the main interests and lobbying tasks of the ICORGs during their 20 years' existence (cf. B7 2002, 2007, 2013; B7 et al. 2004, 2012; BSSSC 1994, 1996, 1998, 2005; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2004; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and North Sea Commission 2008). The EU regional policy and structural funds including the cohesion and regional policy lobbying have played a very important role also in the activities of the intergovernmental regional organizations since their establishment as well (Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000, 5). Still, two decades ago, the ICORGs' approach was to develop economies of the Baltic Sea region in equal terms (cf. BSSSC 1998).

The current 2014 to 2020 programming period has brought change to the cohesion and regional policy objectives as well, instead of focusing to the traditional goal of reducing interregional disparities through redistributive measures, the focus is increasingly in the promotion of economic growth and making regions more competitive through innovation, productivity, entrepreneurship, and skills (Bachtler 2010, 3; cf. BSSSC 2011b, 2013a; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2015). The Europe 2020 strategy replaced the predecessor strategy of Lisbon, and its main focus is on economic development and strengthening the development opportunities in the EU (Böhme et al. 2011, 12). A place-based development approach has emerged then in the regional development policies of the EU facilitated by the OECD (Bachtler 2010, 1). The macro-regional approach and MLG are strongly embedded as an element of the cohesion policy, especially after the introduction of the EUSBSR in 2009 (cf. European Commission 2013, 8). Sielker (2016a, 2009) points out that if the EU regional policy and European territorial cooperation goals are to be enhanced, regional differences need to be recognized more explicitly by the place-based approach applied.

Member regions of the ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-region have become more divided to the receivers and nonreceivers of the cohesion and regional policy funding. Regional policies of some countries though seek to maintain some aspect of traditional policy goals of promoting equity or convergence like in Germany with constitutional requirements to reduce disparities, or in Nordic countries with

higher budget allocations or special measures to certain regions which suffer of long-standing underperformance or under-development (Bachtler 2010, 4).

The EUSBSR has changed the operational environment for the ICORGs drastically since its introduction in 2009. The Council of the European Union stated on the EUSBSR that “the strategy is financially neutral and relies on coordinated approach, synergetic effects and on a more effective use of existing EU instruments and funds as well as other existing resources and financial instruments” (Ahner 2016). The key funding sources are the ESI funds but actions and projects under the EUSBSR can be funded by many other financial resources (other EU financing programmes) as well as national, regional, and private sources (European Commission 2015, 32).

As the cohesion and regional policy instruments (partnership principle and EUSBSR) and territorial cohesion with place-based approach play a relevant role in the ICORGs’ work, 13 out of 40 items of this study deal with the lobbying work of the ICORGs for defending the interests of their member regions in the cohesion and regional policy. MLG relies especially in the context of the EU cohesion and regional policy on the implementation of the partnership principle (European Parliament 2014, 10). It has opened the multilevel approach for all levels of governance involving regions on the subnational level in preparation of operational programmes, project selection and management, monitoring and evaluation (cf. European Parliament 2014). The Item 37 gathered a very strong unanimous consensus on all factors that the regional and local levels should be involved in the debates of the future regional policy as well as in the implementation and administration of structural funds. Abolishing weaknesses by cohesion and regional policy was widely accepted in the strategies of the ICORGs in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. To date, most of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions favoured policy and ICORGs’ work that is based on regional strengths instead of weaknesses.

The cluster of consensus-like items (CIII) dealing with financing instruments for the EU regional policy was reviewed in Section 6.5.3. Item 40 stated that also the decision-making and management of the territorial cooperation strands (interregional programmes) should also be mainly the responsibility of the subnational level. All factors except the Factor I defended this approach of empowerment of subnational level regarding the interregional programmes. One reason for this hesitance on Factor I is to secure the appropriate division of labour. Monika and Sabine (German Länder) noted that the German Länder would like to see the national level as a strong partner as otherwise there is the danger that the

financial burden of the interregional programmes would be transferred to the Länder and the national level would lose the interest to these programmes. The partnership brings elements of the MLG for regions in cohesion and regional policy programmes, in selected countries and regions also through a multi-fund approach combining the ESF, ERDF and EAFRD (European Agricultural Funds for Rural Development) (European Parliament 2014, 66). The partnership principle is not though applied in the cross-border, transnational, interregional, or other direct funding from the EU, which means that these financial instruments are kept apart from the regional ESIF financing instruments, and from the regional decision-making system.

Item 31 confirmed the interest of the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions to strengthen the approach of creating synergies between the structural funds and the rural development programmes. All four factors welcomed this approach. As the partnership principle offers the direct channel since 1989 for the subnational level to engage in the management cycle of the cohesion and regional policy through negotiations directly with national level and the European Commission, it is logical to make a conclusion that the ICORGs have not been very attractive as lobbying channels in the technical preparation of the operational programmes. In general cohesion and regional policy requirements have supported multilevel partnerships involving the participation of a broad array actors on subnational level in programme design and delivery, but it is also argued that national governments have continued to exert a strong grip on key decisions and that there has been resistance to EU pressures for subnational empowerment (European Parliament 2014, 33) The role of the ICORGs seem to be in lobbying on the other hand the general principles of the cohesion and regional policy or on the other hand lobbying the specific requests and territorial specificities of their member regions, and further regarding the cross-border, transnational, interregional, or other direct funding from the EU like the framework programmes.

Member regions of the ICORGs tend to contribute in the lobbying of financing instruments of the EU regional policy through ICORGs in specific issues which are important, not the whole range of the regional policy. For the North-German Länder, transport and clean shipping issues are important, sparsely populated areas and accessibility are important for Finnish regions.

Yes, we get our important points which we want to see on the EU level into the positions of the ICORG, very small points where you think that there is nobody who would support us, then once they come into the position paper of the ICORG, then with support of other organizations it is communicated to Brussels, there is

cooperation with European wide organization through the ICORG, and the European Commission takes a serious note on the position paper as such a European wide organization also stands behind it. Then you notice that you are really listened in Brussels when a letter from the board of the ICORG is sent to Brussels with such a position paper. (Monika, German Land, translated from German)

The ICORGs have influenced with their lobbying to maintain the cohesion funds if these funds are always at the stake to be cut when the budget negotiations are started for the new period. The ICORGs have also been successful in Brussels in awareness raising for the regions and that their views are listened. (Jenni, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

Through the extracted factors a clear difference can be recognized regarding the cohesion and regional policy lobbying of the ICORGs between Finnish and German regions. The angle looking the cohesion and regional policy is different. The most Finnish member regions of the ICORGs are above the EU28 average as well but the Finnish respondents seem to value much more than German respondents the territorial specificities, smart specialization, and promotion of regional development objectives in the work of the ICORGs as the Factors III and IV show.

One explanation to this difference in approaches might be as Thomas (German Land) explained that the cohesion and regional policy lobbying the German Länder fulfil many other channels of influencing where the ICORGs do not play a key role. Ursula (German Land) told that in Germany the federal level has to deliver the message about the regional policy objectives to Brussels which is formulated in cooperation with the federal government and the Bundesrat by the Länder: “The North German and East German regional offices make also more and more cooperation in Brussels which make them also effective. The national government expects the Länder to inform how the cohesion and regional policy should be formed on the German side. Basically, the national government would like to give this task direct to the Länder but the EU Commission does not want to negotiate with additional 16 partners. The Länder have large freedoms on this, the main thing is that the national budgetary lines are followed.” The Federal government leaves the formulation of development programmes to Länder governments, which have direct relations with the Commission (Benz 2000, 31). In Germany, there is the reverse situation compared to Finland that national level is strongly keen to give the full right for the Länder to act in the EU financing programmes.

For us this a two tracks strategy, once it is towards the Bund because our federal ministry is the national contact point towards the European Commission, when we take this kind of formal route we also include in this process our second chamber der Bundesrat when we try to promote our issues on the federal level, is very often diluted by the other 16 Länder, when we formulate our interests towards the Commission via ICORGs then it is more or less clear cut our German regional interests... we can be more clear when we go through the ICORGs ... working cooperation between North German Länder, at least we have generated processes which are on good communicative basis. (Helmut, German Land, original English)

Partnership principle as such has not played a visible role in the lobbying activities of the ICORGs or in their discussions about MLG. As stated earlier, the management of the regional ESIF funding still happens separated and parallel from the interregional, transnational, and cross-border programmes. The decision-making based on partnership principle concentrates on the project financing of the ESIF funding on the regional level but e.g., excludes the decision-making of interregional, transnational, and cross-border projects. The decisions for these programmes are made through the respective programme secretariats or evaluators, and programme specific in cooperation with the regional authorities. The steering committees in regions for partnership do not deal with international funding. Both decision-making mechanisms are based on MLG but separated. At least from the point of view of the ICORGs this creates hindrances for the work with MLG in the context of the EUSBSR. This makes the communication difficult and rather narrow between the stakeholders on different MLG levels, if though finally the same stakeholders of regional level are implementing projects of all programmes of regional ESIF and international funding on regional, national, Baltic Sea, and EU levels.

The challenge for building an efficiently working MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region is that the most relevant policy instruments like the EUSBSR and the partnership principle basically only coordinate and channel the EU funding through project actions. These policy instruments activate foremost those levels and stakeholders which are responsible for managing or implementing the EU funding, that is, the institutions of the EU, national authorities and limited the regional and local administrations. It should be stressed that the regional and local levels are also in very different positions as receivers of the EU funding.

According to the challenges in the functioning of the partnership principle as a policy instrument in the MLG system, Dabrowski, Bachtler, and Bafoil (2014, 361) propose investments in capacity-building to ensure more equitable participation in partnerships and to overcome the asymmetries of information; secondly

partnership principle needs to be tailored to the local realities and enhance its monitoring and thirdly the cross-level coordination should be enhanced. The horizontal action “Capacity” of the EUSBSR also aims to offer capacity building support for the implementing stakeholders and furthermore an important target is to increase the involvement of local and regional authorities to the implementation of the EUSBSR (European Commission 2015, 150–151). “Partnership principle is generally presented as a technical device, but it is a highly political instrument with values, which shape different purposes and effects in different contexts” (Bache 2010, 59). Partnership has promoted a general shift towards MLG through the establishment of regional structures throughout the EU and setting up partnerships, but these shifts vary greatly according to differences between and within domestic arenas (*ibid.* 67). Where domestic pressures have pushed for a change into the same direction, the EU regional policy instruments have had more impact (*ibid.*).

During the current financing period 2014–2020 of the EU the Cohesion Fund is aimed at Member States whose Gross National Income (GNI) per inhabitant is less than 90 % of the EU average (European Commission 2017a). It aims to reduce economic and social disparities and to promote sustainable development (*ibid.*). Regions of the Baltic Sea macro-region are still rather heterogeneous of their economic situation regarding the EU cohesion and regional policy. There are also wide range of challenges in the regions from Northern sparsely populated areas with challenging accessibility to the dense populated metropolitan areas with their interests and needs as motors of development.

EU funding plays a relevant role in most of the regions, especially in those which are less developed and peripheral which again reflects the membership in the ICORGs. (Mathias, German Land, translated from German)

Since the beginning of the EU regional policy period 2014–2020 the regions of the Baltic Sea macro-region receive the financial support of the EU cohesion and regional policy rather unevenly. More than before the member regions of the ICORGs are above the threshold of the average GDP (90) of the EU. Paasi (2009, 130) notes that “statistical NUTS regions are crucial in creating the vision of ‘the Europe of Regions’ and rather than being meaningless, the location of regional boundaries can prove of huge economic importance in regional policy.” Like in Finland the ERDF programmes are not built based on the NUTS 3 distribution but based on the larger NUTS 2 areas, which means in the Finnish case the four NUTS 2 regions of Southern, Western, Eastern, and Northern Finland. In

Germany only Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein are partly receiving cohesion and regional policy funding as Hamburg is above the GDP threshold. All ESIF funding and macro-regional strategies are based on the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission 2010). These targets apply to all regions of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

The sustainability of partnership principle can be questioned because of the declining cohesion and regional policy allocations in some Member States and regions as well as the associated rationalisation of partnership-based management arrangements (European Parliament 2014, 35). As to be recognized in the Table 32, two groups of regions in the Baltic Sea macro-region still exist, on the other hand the Nordic countries and Germany with high GDP and on the other side Baltic States and Poland GDP clearly less than 90% of the EU average despite the economic growth centres of the countries. Using as indicator the gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 2/3 regions (PPS_HAB - Purchasing Power Standard) we see that a clear gap still exists between these groups if though the Baltic countries and Poland have been successful to reduce the economic disparities. For the ICORGs the economically diversified member regions create challenges which should be dealt better in the strategy work of the ICORGs. The big metropolises of the Baltic Sea macro-region score high GDPs like Helsinki (149) and Hamburg (205) (Eurostat 2016b). In the other end we have the rural and peripheral regions with low GDPs like Lääne-Eesti (49) in Estonia, Kurzeme (48) in Latvia, or Elblaski (45) in Poland (ibid.).

The current system of the cohesion and regional policy financing does not recognize sufficiently the notable economic disparities inside of the NUTS 2 regions either. Typical examples for this are the regions (NUTS 3) surrounding larger cities or capitals. The differences measured by the GDP between a large city and the neighbouring region can be remarkable. Good examples of GDP differences are capital of Land Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Schwerin Kreisfreie Stadt (125) and Land Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (83), or capital region of Helsinki (149) and the neighbouring region of Pääjät-Häme (96). These kinds of new economic disparities may provide tasks for the ICORGs in their regional policy lobbying towards the EU.

Table 32. Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 2/3 regions (PPS_HAB)

Country/region	NUTS 2/3	GDP ¹	GDP ²	GDP ³
GERMANY				
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	2	61	76	83
Schwerin Kreisfreie Stadt	3	-	117	125
Vorpommern-Rügen	3	-	68	75
Schleswig-Holstein	2	103	100	103
Kiel Kreisfreie Stadt	3	-	147	146
Schleswig-Flensburg	3	-	74	82
Hamburg	2	192	205	205
FINLAND				
Helsinki-Uusimaa	2	130	153	149
Etelä-Suomi/Southern Finland	2	91	104	99
Kymenlaakso	3		108	100
Päijät-Häme	3		90	96
Varsinais-Suomi	3		115	106
Länsi-Suomi/Western Finland	2	83 (Väli-Suomi)	101	101
Pohjanmaa	3	-	105	118
ESTONIA				
Eesti	2	-	64	75
Pohja-Eesti (Tallinn/Harjumaa)	3	-	96	106
Lääne-Eesti	3	-	46	49
LATVIA				
Latvija	2	-	55	62
Rīga	3	-	97	98
Kurzeme	3	-	42	48
LITHUANIA				
Lietuva	2	-	56	73
Kauno apskritis	3	-	53	69
Klaipėdos apskritis	3	-	58	75
POLAND				
Gdanski	3	-	36	47
Elblaski	3	-	35	45

Note: GDP¹ = Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 2/3 regions (PPS_HAB) Purchasing Power Standard per inhabitant 1996 (100=EU average);

GDP² = Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 2/3 regions (PPS_HAB) Purchasing Power Standard per inhabitant 2006 (100=EU average);

GDP³ = Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 2/3 regions (PPS_HAB) Purchasing Power Standard per inhabitant 2012 (100=EU average).

Purchasing Power Standard per inhabitant 1996 (100=EU average). Examples of Finnish and German regions represented in this study and examples of regions of Baltic States and Poland compiled by the author 17 December 2016 (Eurostat 1999 and 2016b).

The representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions represent regions which mostly are now above the EU average. The views of the respondents on all factors reflect the demand on ICORGs to develop their approach how to work with the regional policy and various financing programmes. On the other side, the ICORGs are requested to activate themselves in the EUSBSR and on the other side to focus more on the diversified needs of the member regions especially regarding place-based approach and territorial governance. The cohesion and regional policy which was still in the 1990s one of the most important lobbying targets of the ICORGs serves in a large scale after two decades during the current EU 2014 to 2020 programming period only for the regions in Baltic States and Poland and selected regions in the Northern countries. If the cohesion and regional policy lobbying was earlier more a general approach “one size fits all” now the ICORGs should concentrate more how to use the diversified financing instruments of the EU regional policy more efficient to the advantage of all member regions especially for those who does not enjoy the cohesion and regional policy instruments any more or in a drastically reduced manner. The change of the context should make the ICORGs to adapt and realize the diverse needs of their member regions. The regional policy is now even more looking into the territorial specificities of the member regions and the challenges caused by the globalization.

That we should be strongly involved in the future regional policy that is today a fact and this is more a fact than it has been seven years ago...our impression that this is for the Commission far easier to have discussion with a cluster of regions than with an individual regions and so I think that they especially vis a vis European Commission these organizations make sense... must say it was one of the most rewarding processes of the work to see the ICORG was able to organize an own joint statement towards regional policy which was not fluffy and was put down in five or eight pages or so with major issues and this was very much to sharpen our interests and very useful for us a lobbying procedure towards Brussels. (Helmut, German Land, original English)

The challenge for the ICORGs regarding the financial instruments has become manifold. It is not any more a question of only defending the cohesion and regional policy targets for regions which are still below EU average but looking the whole ESIF funding from the point of view of diverse needs of the regional level. The cross-border, transnational, and interregional funding might play even more important role to respond through cross-border cooperation activities to the challenges of the globalization as previewed in Section 2.4 (cf. Böhme et al. 2011; Piattoni 2016). The ICORGs should be able to recognize the ways, how their member regions could take advantage of using the international funding.

The ICORGs and their member regions are confronted with the globalization process in an increasing manner since their establishment. As Rosenau (2004, 39) notes MLG does not make a comprehensive analysis of the complexity of the emergent political world: “The notion of multilevels suggests governmental hierarchies and posits the various levels as vertically structured in layers of authority. The spheres of authorities may be widely dispersed and not necessarily linked to each other through layered hierarchies.” From this point of view it would be relevant to take into consideration globalization and the larger processes happening outside of the Baltic Sea macro-regional and the EU context.

The ICORGs should promote harnessing the globalization for the advantage of their member regions. Research and innovation policies as well as smart specialization strategies of regions would need even more interregional dimension (European Commission 2017c). There is need for a vision to modernise economy by embracing e.g., digitalisation, technological and social innovation, decarbonisation, and the circular economy. Fundamental economic transformation happens at the local level, where industry and people interact (ibid. 17–19). The ICORGs play a key role in this development by recognizing the changing global context, and interpreting its opportunities to concrete actions for their member regions using the policy instruments introduced in this study and promoting interregional smart specialization strategies.

Regarding the increase of ICORGs’ cooperation outside of the BSR and even globally did not though convince the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions (16)⁷². All factors resisted the idea of increasing cooperation of the ICORGs outside of the BSR and even globally, if though it might be wise for the ICORGs to keep the role of the ICORGs in the globalization process under discussion (see Table 33). The Factors I and II resisted the thematic in a clear manner as the Factors III and IV were located closer to the zero distribution are, where 12 out of 32 respondents through their individual Q sorts were located. The regions of the Baltic Sea macro-region as well of Europe in general are influenced by the globalization process in many areas of society and business. ICORGs could enhance the understanding of changing context in their member regions, and analyse how to respond to the globalization process and how to take the advantage of it.

⁷² Item 16 was presented by a representative of a German member region of the ICORG during a pilot study Q sorting in 2011. The original wording of the representative was that “It is enough work in making standpoints in the European policies than start to travelling around” but Item was modified to its final form to appear a bit more stimulating for the interviewees.

Table 33. Factor I–IV Q-sort values on Item 16

(16) ICORGs should increase their cooperation outside of the BSR and even globally.											
Factors	FI			FII			FIII			FIV	
Factor Q-sort values for Item 16	-3			-5			-1			-2	
Q-sort values for Item by each participant (n=32) DE= German, FI = Finnish and OR = participant of the ICORG											
Score	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
DE	4		3		1		1		1		
FI	2	2	2	3	1	2					
OR	3		1	1	1	1		1	1		1

Peter (ICORG) means that it is a problem that most ICORGs are set up to work with problems created with the Cold War, so their basic charters and reasons for existing are often focused on the Baltic Sea region. He takes as an example selling natural resources. The real challenge for the ICORGs is if they could even work globally. As an example for the global networking are the Baltic Sea islands which target their work fully or partly on the global level outside of the Baltic Sea (e.g., through shipping interest). ICORGs should increase the cooperation but many of these do not have the funding and capacity.

The Europe 2020 strategy and the TA 2020 (previewed in Section 2.4) try to respond to the challenges caused by the globalization, and soften its negative impact to the European regions. In the next section I will look more in detail the importance of the territorial cohesion for the ICORGs and their member regions.

7.4.1 Cohesion and Regional Policy Meets Territorial Cohesion (ESPON TANGO Handbook)

Regional development and spatial planning are the core tasks of the Finnish Regional Councils and German Länder as previewed in Chapter 3. Europe 2020 Strategy and especially TA 2020 support strategic territorial development, and strengthen the territorial dimension across different policies in the MLG system (Böhme et al. 2011, 13).⁷³ The concept of territorial cohesion has played a decisive role in the work of the ICORGs. The concept contains all geographical and spatial

⁷³ “The TA 2020 aims at promoting polycentric and balanced territorial development; encouraging integrated development in cities, rural, and specific regions; territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions; ensuring global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies; improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities, and enterprises; and managing and connecting ecological landscape and cultural values of regions” (Böhme et al. 2011).

aspects of EU cohesion and regional policy; and therefore complements the concepts of economic and social cohesion (B7 2004; BSSSC 2005, 2008b, 2009; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2016b). It is essential that the needs of each region are defined locally to be successful in implementing a differentiated regional policy a bottom-up approach in focus (BSSSC 2008b, 3). Territorial cohesion contributes to new forms of partnership between civil society, private and public sectors, particularly all forms of territorial cooperation such as cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation enhance the creation of such networks in the Baltic Sea region (*ibid.*).

Diversity of territories is highly relevant in territorial cohesion and creates potential for development and distinctive identities of local and regional communities (Council of the European Union 2011, 4). Territories with common potentials or challenges may find joint solutions for cooperation and sharing experience, and complement each other by joining forces for creating additional development potential (*ibid.*). Multi-level governance is required to manage different functional territories and guarantee balanced and coordinated contribution of local, regional, national, and European actors (*ibid.* 8). This prerequisites vertical and horizontal coordination between decision-making bodies at different levels and among sector-related policies (*ibid.*).

In the changing context a limited collective reflexivity, excessive institutional complexity or instability, absence of feedback procedures, limited strategic thinking, or uncertain strategies may hinder territorial governance approaches that are adaptive to changing contexts (ESPON 2013a, 52–53). The case studies of the ESPON research on territorial governance showed that limited collective reflexivity may tell about delayed adaption and use of available instruments and funds. Institutional complexity may reflect complex structure, frequent organizational changes, and fluctuation of staff (*ibid.*). The ICORGs could contribute shaping a common understanding of the issues at stake. These same challenges also apply to the work of the ICORGs and again most of these challenges deal with the limited communication and restricted division of labour.

If the Factors I and II were clearly interlocked to the EUSBSR, the Factors III and IV (previewed in Sections 6.3 and 6.4) finds them closely in the context of the European territorial cohesion and regional policies (BSSSC 2008b, 2013a, 2015; Council of the European Union 2011; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2016b). These two latter factors also share supportive consensus on the cluster of consensus-like items regarding financing instruments of the cohesion and regional policy (31, 37, and 40 previewed in the previous section). Especially the Factor III

strong believes in the powers of the ICORGs to promote regional involvement in the European cooperation and make the position of regions stronger in Europe (2, 8). The Factor III shares though with the EUSBSR enthusiasts of the Factor I the belief into the ICORGs as promoting the regional development objectives and making the territorial specificities of the member regions visible among the European institutions (7, 14).

I think the whole aim, the whole usefulness of the ICORGs is just to pool strengths in the region, when you generate some kind of EU funded project it is never about that you are acting in the area where you are weak, normally you are acting in the area where you are strong and I think this is more the way to the success than other way around. (Helmut, German Land, original English)

If Factors III and IV share the common ground for the ICORGs to make the European institutions aware about the regional specificities, the Factor IV stress even the strengths of regions and look for more smart specialization (9, 21). The Council of the European Union has introduced in the Europe 2020 strategy the smart specialization as a key element for place-based innovation policies (European Commission 2010, 2012, 8). The new innovation policy concept “smart specialisation” as a part of the “Innovation Union” flagship initiative, is designed to promote the efficient and effective use of public investment in research (European Commission 2016a). The goal of the smart specialization is to boost regional innovation in order to create economic growth and prosperity, and to support regions to focus on their strengths. Spreading small investment too broadly across several frontier technology fields may limit the impact in any one field (*ibid.*). Several regions have created smart specialization strategies (RIS3) which could be used in international cooperation between and within the ICORGs. Professional advice to EU countries and regions for designing and implementing their research and innovation strategies is provided by the smart specialisation platform (European Commission 2016b).

The ESPON Handbook on territorial governance combines the operative field of the MLG (the coordination of actions, policy sector integration, and stakeholder participation) to the territorial and knowledge related elements (ESPON 2013c, 13). The added elements include the adaption to the changing contexts and realising place-based and territorial specificities and impacts (*ibid.*). The operative field of the MLG was reflected in Chapter 3. The ESPON Handbook on territorial governance functions as an instrument bringing the objectives of the Europe 2020 and TA 2020 closer together. It might also help to respond to the hopes presented by the Factors III and IV on regional development interests and smart

specialization. Böhme et al. (2011, 44) developed “Territorial keys” as an attempt to translate the TA 2020 into a set of task and policy issues which could safeguard the successful implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy (ibid. 44). Territorial keys deal with accessibility, service of general economic interest, territorial capacities, city networking, and functional regions (ibid. 46).⁷⁴ All these are issues which are at heart of regional development and spatial planning in the member regions of the ICORGs.

In the Finnish unitary system the regions search much more support for their regional interests through ICORGs than the German Länder do. According to Mathias (German Land) German Länder have their strong and regulated role in the European politics through the federal system. For the German Länder it is easier to promote their regional development objectives through the federal system as in the other Baltic Sea states including Finland. The ICORGs may and could play an important role for other regions in the Baltic Sea macro-region including Finnish regions.

According to the ESPON Handbook prejudices and limited strategic thinking may limit the realization of good governance. Kristian (ICORG) and Helmut (German Land) seem to be rather cautious towards the smart specialization at least in case of the German regions: “This is a very important goal but very difficult to achieve and with the condition that that regions have to have the choice to do what they want and that it should not be top-down driven.”

All these deficits may be recognized in the complex Baltic Sea macro-regional context where the ICORGs are working. Large and complicated processes like MLG, the EUSBSR, or smart specialization are rather abstract to the local and regional decision-makers to understand and adapt to. It is challenging for politicians on local and regional level to see the linkages of these large processes to the everyday practice.

⁷⁴ “For the territorial keys the relevant linking issues are for the accessibility (global accessibility; European and trans-border accessibility; national accessibility and daily accessibility between metropolises; accessibility of the main and secondary centres; modal split, public transport, and intermodal transport change; e-connectivity and access to energy networks); service of general economic interest (sparsely populated areas; access to services of general economic interest; investing in education); territorial capacities (territory-bound factors; local innovation system & networks; wise management of cultural and natural assets; renewable and local energy production; territorially-related characteristics for energy production; revitalization of cities); city networking (interactions between metropolises at the EU scale; interactions between the main national growth poles; territory-bound factors; accessibility of metropolises and between metropolises); and functional regions (enlargement of local labour markets; critical mass of means through territorial cooperation; accessibility of secondary growth poles and regional centres; public transport connections to regional centres; compact cities)” (Böhme et al. 2011, 46).

If you look at the Baltic Sea region we have different situations and the different member regions of the ICORGs, so it's easier to organize with regard to the specific fields of cohesion policy, not along the lines of the ICORGs. (Mathias, German Land, translated from German)

Ulrich and Ursula (German Länder) stated that there is very strong support for the ICORGs that they are able to promote regional development objectives if though the lobbying on regional development objectives mostly happens in an indirect way. The promoting of the regional development objectives is done also through practical work in the working groups of the ICORGs besides the political lobbying.

Helmut (German Land) stated that it is possible to include region specific objectives and receive added value through the positions and statements of the ICORGs. The positions receive importance in Brussels among the EU institutions especially when the position papers are supported by several ICORGs of the Baltic Sea macro-region. It is also advantageous for the European institutions in Brussels that regions actively present their views to them.

The atmosphere dealing the context can be defined with views from the ICORGs. Aaro and Peter (ICORGs) explained that there are certain policy issues which are avoided to be taken on the agenda if it is obvious that opposite views would be strong and not negotiable. Cohesion and regional policy means different things in developing Baltic Sea regions and developed Baltic Sea regions. In Baltic States and Poland it is still the question of abolishing weaknesses in living standards and in developed Nordic and German regions it is a question of supporting the strengths and smart specialization. In the case of the islands as member regions because of their island situation they have due to their location difficult accessibility as a weakness and it cannot be abolished. These weaknesses have to be acknowledged and one has to do the best and if possible turn it into strengths.

We had discussion but we tried to achieve consensus in this kind of matters, and if we knew that the topics were disputable we even did not open them for discussion. Due to this we tried to find issues where we have common nominators. ... It could be noted that regions feeling belonging to the periphery try to pool with each other and again regions with strong economies and institutional structures tend to try to find common ground together. (Aaro, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

ICORGs should be able to present joint statements and solutions in similar kind of interest areas as it is challenging for the Commission to listen all individual ICORGs separately. The Baltic Sea region should become stronger together. We are coming a bit the Mediterranean and others behind. (Jani, ICORG, translated from Finnish)

This study has shown that the differences in mandates of the regions influence to the way how regions see the role of the ICORGs. The strong German Länder have efficient channels of influence when decisions regarding the financing programmes on the regional level are made. The German regions see the role of the ICORGs to efficiently to support the member regions in implementing these programmes. In the Finnish unitary system, the mandate of the regional level is much weaker, and the regional level leans much more on the partnership principle when drafting the regional programmes.

Juhani (Finnish region) told that it is two track lobbying, on the other side the member regions and their politicians bring the issues to the discussion with their national ministries and the national level bring the message to the EU, on the other side the regions formulate their opinions in the ICORGs and ICORGs bring the message to the EU level. The ICORGs are too weak to discuss with all national ministries. It is the responsibility of the regional politicians that no opposite opinions are created between these two tracks of influence.

As joint discussions and statements between stakeholders on the national and regional levels have been made and forwarded further to the European Commission regarding the new funding period, I have not noted that the ICORGs would have been much used. (Petri, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

I think that one reason for this is our a too much old fashioned Tsar time like administrative system, in these programmes, projects, and implementation, that ministries of the state defend jealously their territories, and the possibilities of local and regional levels to steer the funding have diminished all the time when the financing programmes have been reformed. The regions know well best which are the spearheads and what there is needed. (Aino, Finnish region, translated from Finnish)

In this chapter, I discussed the four extracted factors, the clusters of consensus-like items, and how the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions view the different priorities regarding the core tasks of the ICORGs in the MLG system. The four extracted factors revealed that ICORGs should (i) use the EUSBSR more efficiently to promote MLG; (ii) be active in their project work; (iii) continue lobbying for regional development interests, and (iv) bring forward the smart specialization of their member regions. I analysed all findings in the light of different theoretical approaches pertaining to the MLG system: the state-centric intergovernmental approach, globalization, and macro-regionalization. Further, I looked at (i) communication, coordination, and the division of labour, which are vital to the functioning of the MLG system; (ii) how the features of MLG – and its recognized challenges – are reflected in the day-to-day administrative practices in

the Finnish and German ICORG-member regions; (iii) how and on which conditions the ICORGs could use the EUSBSR strategy process to apply the MLG system to the advantage of their member regions; and finally, (iv) the ongoing changes in the operational environment of the Baltic Sea macro-region, which has pushed the ICORGs into a largely new working context.

Next, I will present conclusions based on the results of the study. Finally these results are synthesised with seven recommendations that are based on the empirical findings, the Q methodological research, earlier research on IGOs, and the theoretical discussion in this study.

8 CONCLUSIONS: CAN THE ICORGS ACT AS INTERMEDIATORS IN THE MLG SYSTEM?

This study has contributed empirical results to the research on MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-regional context by examining the role and relevance of the ICORGs in the building of the new Baltic Sea macro-region. The study focused on the ICORGs representing regional governments and analysed two country-cases: elected bodies of Länder in the federal Germany, and nominated political bodies of Regional Councils in the unitary Finland. The study showed that subnational level and ICORGs play a central role in implementing a functioning MLG system even though they seem to have been largely neglected in the previous research (cf. Tatham 2015). Regions are the bodies that, in the end, implement policies, even in the case that they are not able to fully participate in drafting and making decisions on them, e.g., because of the centrally steered MLG system. The representatives of ICORGs and their member regions have also recognized several problems which currently seem inevitable to the application of the MLG concept.

While granting that making a contribution to mainstream MLG research or its underlying theory was not the primary goal of this thesis, mainstream MLG theories helped to interpret the empirical findings of the Q study and to define the role of the ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-regional MLG system in relation to the supranational (EU), national, “macro-regional,” and subnational (regional) levels. Following Stephenson’s classification (2013), this study used MLG theories mostly in the dual sense as originally suggested by Hooghe and Marks (2001, 2003, 2010); the functional conception of macro-region and implementation studies exploring the three EU policy instruments (partnership principle, EUSBSR and territorial governance); and coordination and learning studies with the link to the capacity building. This study also referred to global governance as the ICORGs and their member regions are targets of the globalization process as well. The main interest, however, was on the position of the ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-regional MLG system, representing the regional governments of their member regions. The brief introduction to the approaches of neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism/liberal intergovernmentalism helped situate the developments behind the theoretical dichotomy between intergovernmentalist and

MLG approaches on the one hand, and the apparently strong role of states and the national level in EU policymaking and the concurrent development of macro-regional strategies on the other. These above-mentioned theoretical approaches supported the interpretation of the results of the Q methodological research, with the main findings summarized in the next sections (8.2 and 8.3).

The research literature often takes intergovernmental cooperation on the national level for granted. An example of this is the use of the term “region.” In the literature the term “region” is used in a very mixed and inconsistent way. A clear distinction between interregional (subnational), intergovernmental (national) or macro-regional (geographically specific) cooperation is often missing and needs to be made. The theories of the MLG do clarify the use of the term. The ICORGs studied in this research have specific features: They work in the international arena, and their members are regionally elected or nominated governmental bodies on the subnational level – which is equivalent to the regional level of the MLG as defined, e.g., in the governance Type I by Hooghe and Marks (2003, 2010). “A regional government is the government of a coherent territorial entity situated between the local and national levels with a capacity for authoritative decision-making” (Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel, 2010). In the MLG context of this study, the term “international” did not refer only to the inter-state (i.e., national-level) relations but also more widely included the interregional (i.e., regional-level) relations below the national level (cf. Aalto, Harle, Long, and Moisisio 2011). In this study I combined these features using the term international cooperation organizations of regional governments (ICORGs). This ICORG definition is not connected with geography but rather is MLG-level specific. It differentiates ICORGs from other cooperation schemes and organizations, like non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the national-level IGOs. By using the term “ICORG” in this study, I apply coherent terminology on the regional cooperation organizations in the MLG system.

The application of Q methodology in this study not only supported the analysis of the primary text materials but also helped to examine the subjective meanings of the very persons who have participated in producing those primary text materials. In the Q methodological research, the three policy instruments of the EU formed a part of the empirical framework in the primary material: cohesion policy, including the partnership principle, the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and territorial cohesion (*ESPOON Handbook on Territorial Governance*). These policy instruments had a twofold role for this thesis. First, they formed an important part of the empirical context of interest to this thesis. More precisely, these policy instruments function as tools for the ICORGs and their member

regions in their day-to-day work and help them operate in the evolving MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. Second, these policy instruments became important source material for the methodological work of this thesis.

The factor interpretation produced four factors which revealed the subjective views of the representatives (i.e., participants) of the ICORGs and their member regions on the current role and problems of the ICORGs in the MLG system and outlined their potential future tasks. The first factor implied the strong need to open up a discussion on the role the ICORGs could have in governing and implementing the EUSBSR, the second factor urged ICORGs to facilitate strategic projects and to commit to their project work, the third factor stressed the traditional core tasks of the ICORGs – that is, lobbying regional development objectives and territorial specificities of their member regions – and the fourth factor discussed the dimensions of the current context of the EU regional policy for member regions of the ICORGs, stressing smart specialization and place-based approach.

Among the four factors extracted, several items clustered on related issues and received similar Q-sort values. These clusters of consensus-like items echo a shared understanding among respondents loading significantly on the factors on several key challenges and opportunities regarding the current state of development of the ICORGs, including visibility and commitment through communication and interaction; stronger macro-regional cooperation; stronger commitment to the EU regional policy through financing instruments; the decisive roles of geographical representativeness and political legitimacy; and the efficient use of resources. To define the role of the ICORGs in the MLG, it was relevant to study the linkages between the ICORGs and other stakeholders both horizontally and vertically within and between the different MLG levels. These clusters of consensus-like items are discussed in more in detail later in this concluding chapter in Section 8.1.

In the next sections of this concluding chapter I will answer my three research questions: Are the ICORGs able to act as intermediators in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region, how do the ICORGs deal with the different forms of the MLG, and are the member regions in favour of changing the way the ICORGs work? In this context, I will also assess whether (i) different constitutional contexts and forms of the MLG types influence the ICORGs' work, and (ii) ICORGs and IGOs share similar coordination problems in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region?

8.1 Current Challenges in the ICORGs' Work

One of my assumptions was that the ICORGs have coordination problems in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region that are similar to those found in earlier studies on IGOs: similar work being done several times, insufficient exchange of information, unclear responsibilities, and parallel work in several overlapping sectors (Aalto et al. 2012, 2017; Etzold 2010; Etzold and Gänzle 2012; Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000). The respondents in the Q methodological experiments recognized similar problems according to the clusters of consensus-like items that emerged during the factor analysis (reviewed in Section 6.5).

Good and balanced communication, interaction, and division of labour are vital elements of a functioning MLG system. These features have been widely discussed in previous research regarding IGOs (Aalto et al. 2012, 2017; Etzold 2010; Mariussen, Aalbu, and Brandt 2000). Communication and coherence seem also to be the greatest challenges for the ICORGs in the MLG system. The cluster of consensus-like items "Better Visibility and More Commitment with the Vertical and Horizontal Communication (CI)" implied severe deficits in the horizontal and vertical communication of the ICORGs. Weak linkages between the levels have led to the communication problems, insufficiently organized division of labour, and inefficiency with double work. The tradition of exchanging information and negotiation between regional and national levels seem to follow the constitutional tradition (cf. Benz 2000, 2010).

The ICORGs have traditionally concentrated on the communication and interaction between the regional and EU levels and, to some extent, on the communication at the Pan-Baltic macro-regional level. Yet ICORGs do exchange information and cooperate with each other horizontally to some extent. They occasionally organise joint meetings and prepare joint position papers on selected thematic issues. In the macro-regional context, the communication is too limited. The interviewees of the study were worried about the limited horizontal communication on issues related to the ICORGs within the regional level itself. This challenge was shared regardless of the state system in question (Finland, Germany). The respondents felt this was a major concern for the ICORGs as political commitment was necessary to create a firm basis for the organizations' legitimacy. This might also imply the danger that the larger processes, like the EUSBSR or MLG, remain rather distant to the regional politicians and their knowledge on them remains superficial. A parallel challenge of limited horizontal

communication can be recognized on the national level in the internal communication among the ministries for foreign affairs (Aalto et al. 2012).

Despite the multifaceted communication channels within the German federal system, the representatives of the German Länder expressed the concern that discussion among politicians about ICORG-related issues in the Länder is quite restricted. The issues on the ICORGs' agenda are not very actively discussed among politicians in the Länder. Furthermore, the ICORGs are not strong enough to attract the attention of politicians in Germany. One of the findings of this study is that one obstacle for active communication in the member regions is the limited space for participation in and communication regarding decision-making processes. The decision-making on ICORG-related issues is not widely communicated in the meetings of regional governments. The respondents suggested that if the ICORGs were stronger internally, they would also be attractive in the eyes of the politicians.

This study showed that the ICORGs have to be aware that their member regions work within different information exchange systems on the national level and hence need to be able to support the different communication requirements of their member regions. In Germany, the multichannel communication system allows the information flow regarding the ICORGs from the Länder to the federal ministries on the national level. In Finland, an equivalent interlocking system does not exist; the constitutional context does not support efficient information exchange between national and regional levels (previewed in Sections 7.1.1 and 7.2). This applies in the reverse for the IGOs with regard to information flow from the national to the regional level. Improved communication facilitates the coordination of a division of labour between different levels, especially as actors linked to MLG in the ICORGs and IGOs seem to work mostly through informal information exchange.

The representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions strongly suggested, as indicated by the cluster of the consensus-like items "Stronger Macro-regional Cooperation (CII)," that to overcome these problems, the ICORGs must commit to closer cooperation with each other and with selected IGOs. The EUSBSR offers a concrete framework where these organizations can cooperate and build mutual trust, which can result in a more efficient division of labour, improved coherence, and a reduced amount of overlapping work. According to the respondents, this does not need to mean streamlining of organizations, but it could mean more efficient cooperation in selected thematic fields between different MLG levels, more efficient use of scarce financial and human resources, and

shared commitment to a better working MLG system. With time, this could also make overlapping structures unnecessary.

These empirical findings implied that one explanation for the weak communication flowing from the ICORGs towards the national level might also be the limited human resources available. Another reason could be the absence of the ICORGs in those frameworks where the national level is active. Currently the German Länder closely follow the intergovernmental cooperation – the work of the CBSS – through the communication exchange with the German Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, where the Länder also have the ability to inform the federal level about the ICORG affairs. In Finland, a similar regular exchange between the ministry and Regional Councils does not exist. The role and work of the CBSS has remained quite abstract, even though it has a wide network of strategic partner organizations on the regional level to promote cooperation and information exchange (see Section 1.3.5). The respondents of the study suggested that the ICORGs could act as intermediators for their member regions, and a facilitator role could be built for the CBSS as a “common reference point” between the levels in MLG of the Baltic Sea macro-region (discussed in Sections 7.1.2 and 7.3). The results of the factor analysis indicated that it might be easier for organizations on the regional, local, and even national levels of the Baltic Sea macro-region to communicate with this “common reference point.”

Another matter influencing communication is how cohesion and regional policy has changed since the beginning of the 1990s when the ICORGs were established. The emergence of macro-regional strategies and the resulting major change of the EU regional policy instrument have shifted the traditional goal of reducing interregional disparities through redistributive measures towards the promotion of economic growth, thereby seeking to make regions more competitive. The EU funding of ERDF, ESF, and EARFD on NUTS 2 or NUTS 3 levels for several member regions has diminished essentially, and other financing programmes have assumed more importance. As indicated by the cluster of consensus-like items “Stronger Commitment to the EU Regional Policy through Financing Instruments (CIII),” the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions preferred the ICORGs to concentrate more on how to use the diversified financing instruments of the EU regional policy more efficiently to the advantage of all member regions – especially of those regions, if any, that are witnessing drastically reduced funding from the cohesion and regional policy instruments. In the current EU financing period (2014–2020), the cohesion and regional policy that was amongst the most important lobbying targets of the ICORGs in the 1990s retains

such a status only for the regions in the Baltic States and Poland and for selected regions in the Northern countries. This change within the wider context implies that the ICORGs need to adapt in order to respond to the diverse needs of their member regions. The regional policy is now geared more towards taking into account the territorial specificities of the member regions and the challenges caused by globalization.

The interviewees identified severe challenges for the ICORGs as indicated by the cluster of consensus-like items “Defenders of Geographical Representativeness and Political Legitimacy” (CIV). The various structural regional reforms in different Baltic Sea States have diminished the number of member regions with the regional level ceasing to exist or becoming annexed to larger regional entities. ICORGs are currently strongly represented by the regions from Germany and from three Nordic countries (i.e., Finland, Norway, and Sweden), and are underrepresented in the other six Baltic Sea States (i.e., Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), from which there are only a few members – if there are any at all. The participation of the member regions is often also overlapping, as some regional governments are active in two or more of these organizations at the same time. In practice, these organizations never had the full range of the subnational actors as members.

The respondents furthermore expressed their deep concerns about the diminishing representativeness of the ICORGs in the Baltic Sea macro-region. As the ICORGs have lost their footing on the regional level in many Baltic Sea countries, it is uncertain if they can represent and speak with one voice for the whole Baltic Sea macro-region. This has also become a question of legitimacy and credibility. The ICORGs are struggling to keep their membership geographically and politically as representative as possible so that they can represent the whole Baltic Sea region. Losses in this respect, however, not only make the geographical representativeness narrower but also lead to a lack of political legitimacy. Political positions on the boards of the ICORGs have been replaced by civil servants in cases where the political decision-making system has failed to nominate a politician to represent the member region. The narrowing political representativeness of the regional level in the ICORGs makes it challenging to defend, let alone strengthen, their role in the MLG system. This is an additional problem for the legitimacy of the ICORGs, which already struggle with poor geographic representation vis-à-vis the Baltic Sea macro-region.

In the view of the respondents, to preserve their political legitimacy, the ICORGs should maintain the political dimension as part of their decision-making

structures. The ICORGs have to work hard to link up different regions and stakeholders with different interests from the whole Baltic Sea macro-region and consequently to be able to speak up for them with a common voice. According to Blatter et al. (2008, 485) regions act as a counterbalance to the strong powers of “political executive elites” in the international collaboration and fight for the legitimacy of the EU integration. In the Baltic Sea macro-region, the ICORGs are the only international regional organizations representing the regional governments and their political decision-makers. The interviewees also thought that, as interest organizations of their member regions vis-à-vis the European institutions and national level, the ICORGs should maintain the financially independent status guaranteed by the funding from their member regions. In line with the idea of a dual logic of representation and cumulative advantage proposed by Tatham, a strong institutional endowment of a region correlates with a higher demographic weight and supranational embeddedness (Tatham 2015, 398; Tatham and Thau 2014). That said, the ICORGs have no other alternatives than to try to bring different types of regions together, pool resources, and hence seek to strengthen their geographical and political representativeness.

However, the work of the ICORGs is still relatively inefficient as the organizational structures and level of professionalism remain undeveloped. For larger projects or activities, additional investments and resources from member regions are needed. The representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions stressed – in the cluster of consensus-like items “More Efficient Use of Resources (CV)” – that through division of labour and abolishing the double work, financial and human resources in the MLG system could be used in a more focused fashion to benefit the cooperation areas where help was most needed. Here the respondents indicated that the ICORGs should strive to contribute to the coherence and division of labour in the MLG system both horizontally on the regional level and vertically between regional and national levels. Better visibility of the ICORGs would increase awareness about their activities. The ICORGs also should increase horizontal communication and division of labour on the macro-regional level between different organizations including other ICORGs and IGOs. Finally, strengthening the commitment of stakeholders horizontally on the MLG levels, and also providing a platform for non-EU stakeholders like Russian regions to participate in Baltic Sea cooperation agendas would benefit the MLG system but especially the practical cooperation between the ICORG members on the local and regional level.

The results of the factor interpretation discussion regarding the current state of affairs in the ICORGs (Chapter 6) and reflections vis-à-vis the earlier research on IGOs (Chapter 7) are condensed to the seven recommendations in Chapter 9, which include practical proposals on how to respond to the above-mentioned challenges and problems indicated by the clusters of consensus-like items of the Q study.

8.2 Working with Different Political and Constitutional Contexts

My interest was also to address the potential impact of the unitary and federal state system on the realization of the MLG concept (discussed in Sections 3.2; 3.3, and 7.2). I focused on the Finnish and German member regions representing these state systems. The German Länder represent the federal system with strong powers while the Finnish regions are mandated with fairly weak powers in a unitary system. In this respect, one aim of this study was to explore the functioning of MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region with regard to two different models of national governance – that is, the federal and unitary systems (reviewed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3). These two state systems represent potentially different contexts for subregional activity in MLG. Further research is naturally needed to comprehensively cover the full scope of variations of national level governance throughout the Baltic Sea States.

Based on the findings, however, the state system does not seem to restrict the work of the ICORGs themselves. Similarly, Tatham (2015, 387) found in his study on regional influence in Brussels that the decentralization level affects only indirectly regional actors' success in representing their interests. It has a conditioning role, but nevertheless more decentralized and populous regions wield more influence (*ibid.*). Moreover, Blatter et al. (2008) studied the foreign relations of European regions and their informal linkages with the EU institutions, focusing on the representations of the regions from federal or decentralized countries in Brussels. They ended up with a related finding, which can be recognized in relation to the ICORGs examined here: Regions, being part of the public sector, counterbalance strong lobbying organizations of the private sector. Furthermore, the territorial interests compensate for the shortcomings of the formal national decision-making processes (*ibid.* 485).

The results of this study nevertheless suggest that ICORGs have to be well aware of the respective state system under which their member regions operate to

be able to respond to their needs and to be able to use the different state systems to their best advantage. Finland is a unitary state organised on a decentralised basis with three levels of governance – central, regional, and local – while the Federal Republic of Germany has a strictly coupled federal system (cf. Benz 2010, 217).

Intergovernmental relations in Germany require negotiations between all individual governments due to the constitutional rules, while the policies of European, national, and subnational institutions are often coordinated in an informal manner rather than through compulsory multilateral negotiations (ibid.). Compared to the German type of joint decision-making, the EU can be defined as a loosely coupled multilevel system that allows members to escape the deadlocks in the decision-making process by taking advantage of the flexibilities of complex institutional settings and interinstitutional processes (ibid.; cf. Benz 2000). The German model of joint decision-making represents a simple form of the MLG with two levels of Federal and Länder governments compared to more complex governance in the regionalized EU (Benz 2000, 23). In MLG of the EU, simultaneous negotiations with large numbers of actors at the national and subnational levels would be impossible and are thus replaced with sequential processes of policymaking (Benz 2010, 216).

The reform of the regional and municipal governance system in Finland that is currently under way might offer a true chance to empower the Finnish regional level. It would receive an autonomous status with executive powers in the new three-tier system consisting of central government, autonomous regions, and local governments as reviewed in Section 3.2. Even after the reform, it is possible that new Finnish regions will remain rather weak compared to the strong regions in other European countries, including German Länder. The key reason is because the new Finnish regional governments will not gain, for instance, legislative, tax, or constitutional powers, which the German Länder have. The Finnish regions will remain quite small in size (measured against the number of inhabitants) compared to the German Länder, as the number of regions will remain the same. In any case, the reform would bring in elements of MLG, which might strengthen the role of the independent regional decision-making in the Finnish public administration. Regarding MLG and the current status of the Finnish regions, the ongoing administrative reform would not automatically guarantee the growth of importance in international affairs or in political decision-making.

The division of labour between the levels might become clearer in the Finnish administrative system if it could improve communication between national, regional, and local levels. For the first time, political decision-makers would be

directly elected to the new regional governments. The importance of the political mandates in these new regional governments would also grow remarkably compared to the current split system, with numerous parallel joint municipal authorities interacting through their own political decision-making systems. The new political mandates might be politically attractive, and the importance of regional political decision-making would grow. The new regional administrative agencies would be more powerful, knowledgeable, and efficient, with stronger human resources. It might offer more opportunities to use international funding resources and expert exchange between European regions. The international dimension including EU policies (social, economic, and territorial cohesion), EU financial instruments, interregional cooperation (e.g., EUSBSR and ICORGs), and a place-based approach with smart specialization should be given a high priority in the strategy work of the new regions.

Even though the Finnish regions are currently rather weak in their powers, they have had the mandate to act and represent their regions in the international arena. The law of regional development recognizes the task for international activities for Regional Councils (FINLEX 2014). In the draft law proposal of the current Finnish government on the regional government, international tasks have been removed from the list of the law-based primary tasks and are classified as voluntary tasks that the new regions “can additionally” take care of. This clearly poses a risk to the international dimension and to the future activities of the Finnish regions in the international field. The current Regional Councils are committed to international cooperation through regional development and EU tasks in manifold ways, and the biggest worry seems to be how to guarantee the financial resources for the future regional governments’ international activities in the annual budgets. Classifying the international affairs as voluntary tasks on the regional level seems to follow the top-down logic of a unitary state in the MLG system.

The draft law proposal on the regional government does not support strengthening the development of the MLG system. If the new law is accepted as it stands now, the civil servants and politicians should make an extra effort to defend the position of Finnish regions in the different forms of the MLG. The new regions will have 26 law-based task areas including social and health care services (FINLEX 2017). It is realistic to expect that especially the small Finnish regions will have scarce resources for volunteer tasks, as there are only three law-based task areas of social and health care services – including an environmental health dimension; and fire and rescue services consume 94 percent of all financial resources of the new regions (Alueuudistus 2017b). Thus, only 6 percent of the

budget remains for the other 23 law-based task areas and additional voluntary tasks, including international affairs (ibid.). It is possible, then, that the gap between the national and regional levels in Finland in communicating and coordinating international and EU affairs might even grow. The reform could also put the Finnish regions in unequal financial situations, creating an environment in which regions with bigger and stronger economies would have more resources for international activities. This could further deepen disparities in the international dimension of regional development between strong and weak regions. If the current unbalanced system in sharing the ERDF and ESF funding will not be corrected, the financially weak NUTS 3 regions inside the Southern and Western Finnish NUTS 2 regions would be in very unfavourable circumstances after the regional government reform, even if they border financially strong regions (discussed in Section 7.4).

The ICORGs are important cooperation forums for civil servants and politicians in the Baltic Sea macro-regional and EU contexts. If the reform of regional government will be accepted as it stands in the draft law, it might also further strengthen the central steering by the national level in the implementation of the EUSBSR and the partnership principle. The results of the conducted Q methodological research suggest that capacity building for civil servants and politicians could play a supportive role here. The change in the political tradition of interests and decision-making still would need targeted campaigns supporting regional politicians so that they could better adapt to the new organizational context. The cluster of consensus-like items on better visibility and more commitment to both vertical and horizontal communication (reviewed in Section 6.5.1) also revealed current communication difficulties in the Finnish system between the regional and national levels as, unlike in the German federal system, the current administrative system in Finland does not support active exchange of information.

The empirical findings of this study indicate how the constitutional context seems to influence member regions primarily in the vertical interaction between regional and national levels. The horizontal communication on the regional level seems to be based much more on voluntary and informal communication. In Finland the constitutional context does not support effective communication exchange of information between national and regional levels on EU affairs. In federal Germany, communication is guaranteed on both voluntary and legislative grounds. In Finland, the national level with its legal powers represents the country vis-à-vis the EU and is not obliged to consult the regions. As a result, the national

level has strong steering powers towards the regional level. However, a common problem faced by both Finnish regions and German Länder seems to be the horizontal communication within the member regions.

The empirical findings show that in Finland, the weak mandate of regions has extended to the status of the regional politicians as well. This sets challenges, as the ICORGs should be represented by politicians representative of their member regions. Few politicians identify themselves only as regional politicians representing their Councils. The domestic and regional affairs appear primary, and the international affairs remain secondary. The hierarchical, fairly inflexible political selection process does not often support the selection of persons with the best skills and merits to the political positions. International affairs have rarely received sufficiently high status in the regional political culture. The fieldwork conducted for this study suggests that it is regarded as a sector where civil servants are active, whilst typically the responsibilities lie with very few people.

In Germany, there are numerous formal and informal vertical communication schemes between Länder and both the national level (Bund) and the EU level, and horizontal communication mechanisms on the Länder level. German Länder have, through the multilevel system of German federalism, several efficient lobbying channels. In the German federal system, cooperation between the national level (Bund) and regional level (Länder) is multichannel; partly the communication is organised through law-based activities e.g., in the Bundesrat, partly in non-formal setting. The German Länder have noticed that the European decision-making processes include a multitude of informal ways of working. All the governments of the German Länder have established responsible units in their administration or even posts of the ministers for European affairs to have all necessary information and take care of contacts to the bodies of the EU. In the German federal system, there is regular information exchange between the national level of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and regional level of Länder. This information exchange is based on mutual interest, not only on legislative responsibility. The three North-German Länder studied also have long traditions of cooperation in practical issues together and with the national level. The ICORGs are also expected to promote cooperation and division of labour between and within the MLG levels with their member regions. The German cooperative federalism with its multifaceted communication system between Länder, Bund, and the EU offers good examples and good practices (e.g., using the channels of informal and formal communication for the ICORGs) to operate with a higher impact and to better contribute to the development of the MLG system. The German representatives in this study

revealed a desire for the ICORGs to take stronger roles in the EUSBSR and to use it as an instrument to develop the MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region; the Länder have used the EUSBSR to their advantage from the very beginning. German Länder understand the importance of the efficient communication system between the MLG levels. The new macro-regional strategies have altered the communication between levels in MLG, but country-specific analysis reveals rather different situations in Finland and Germany.

The tightly coupled, bi-level German MLG system might not serve as the most functional example for the development of the MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region given the heterogeneous administrative systems prevailing in the individual countries. German federalism, however, might serve as an example to follow owing to its horizontal and vertical communication system for the wider macro-regional development in the Baltic Sea region. The German Länder seem to suffer in the ICORGs from a kind of a “positive problem” as they are not fully able to use their capacities in the ICORGs because the regions of other Baltic Sea States do not possess equal powers and resources vis-à-vis their own state systems. The German Länder have an equal situation on the EU level in the CoR, but there they have established the RegLeg cooperation with regions with similar mandates.

8.3 Working with Different Forms of MLG

In the literature, MLG is often regarded as a blurry concept or theory missing a commonly agreed-upon definition (cf. Böhme et al. 2011). In the MLG research dealing with the EU and its institutions, MLG is sometimes even seen in its narrowest sense as two-level collaboration between the EU and the national level (see e.g., Egeberg and Trondal 2016; Jachtenfuchs 2010; Scharpf 2006, 2010), with the subnational level absent. The European institutions actively promote MLG as an approach. The European Commission announced in a White Paper five principles underpinning good governance: openness, participation, responsibility, effectiveness, and coherence, which are to be implemented, maintained, and enhanced through the MLG system (European Commission 2001). Further, the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 recognized the subsidiarity principle, which indicates the responsibilities of all MLG levels and guarantees that EU policies are conceived and applied at the most appropriate MLG level. The CoR for its part established a score board in 2011 to observe how EU institutions take the MLG principles on board and launched the Charter on the MLG in 2014. MLG promotes the

European and national goals on the local and regional levels, but also translates the strategic goals of the local and regional levels into the strategies of the EU (Böhme et al. 2011, 15). This study demonstrates that even though MLG is implemented through policy instruments like the partnership principle, the EUSBSR, or territorial governance, several deficits can be recognized in the practical implementation and steering processes of the MLG – particularly in what comes to the roles of the local and regional level.

There seems, though, to be a common understanding that a functioning MLG system needs different types of participation from actors on all levels. Here the ICORGs work on a voluntary basis as lobbying organizations, representing elected or nominated regional governments in addition to the IGOs in the MLG system. Yet the ICORGs' member regions also have very heterogeneous mandates in their own state systems. From the perspective of the ICORGs and their member regions, the lack of an agreed-upon definition, when coupled with unequal power relations within MLG, seems to lead to the unequal management and implementation of the system.

The references to MLG in this study are, broadly speaking, in line with the main conceptions of the MLG research recognized by Stephenson (2013, reviewed in Section 2.2). These mostly relate to the (i) original conception of the MLG concerned with the legal jurisdictions of authority and efficiency, as the ICORGs represent elected or nominated regional governments; (ii) the functional conceptions of the policy, country, (in this study) macro-region, and implementation studies that explore MLG through three different policy instruments (partnership principle, EUSBSR, and territorial cohesion); as well as to the co-ordination and learning (capacity building measures through the EUSBSR). This study also referred briefly to regionalization and the (iii) comparative approach to global governance taking into account that the ICORGs and their member regions in the Baltic Sea macro-region are targets of the globalization process as well (reviewed in Section 2.4).

The original and most well-known conception of the MLG is well exemplified in the typology created by Hooghe and Marks (2010). The principles of the MLG are well embedded in the structures of the EU and federal states like the Federal Republic of Germany in a stable and durable structure of the EU in Type I. It consists of general-purpose jurisdictions, non-intersecting memberships, and jurisdictions organized on a limited number of levels with a system-wide architecture consisting of decentralized national states as well as regional and local governments. Jurisdictional reforms of Type I are unusual. Changes normally

happen by reallocating policy functions across existing governance levels (ibid. 19). ICORGs represent regional governments (i.e., public bodies) of the subnational level in the MLG Type I. The policy instruments discussed in the study represent the most vulnerable field of the MLG: The governance systems for different EU policies represent the Type II governance with task-specific jurisdictions, intersecting memberships, flexible design, and with no limitation to the number of jurisdictional levels (cf. Hooghe and Marks 2010). The voluntary memberships of the MLG Type II also allow the members to exit the jurisdictions if they no longer fulfil their needs (Hooghe and Marks 2010, 27). In their pure forms, the Type II jurisdictions are instrumental arrangements. As Piattoni (2016, 90) puts it, MLG I and II present ideal types that never actually appear in their pure forms.

Piattoni (2016, 90) stressed that “the importance of the macro-regional strategies lies in their ability to mobilize institutional and non-institutional actors towards the EU policy goals and recombine the polity to manage and implement these policies in new and flexible ways” (Piattoni 2016, 90). EU macro-regions like the EUSBSR have features of both types of the MLG typology of Hooghe and Marks. These macro-regions mix these ideal institutional constellations in new ways: hierarchically nested general-purpose political institutions (Type I MLG) and overlapping single-purpose functional jurisdictions (Type II MLG). Their governance structures have MLG characteristics because they include territorial institutions at different jurisdictional levels and functional non-governmental organizations (Piattoni 2016, 89; cf. Hooghe and Marks 2010, 23). Additionally, the macro-regional strategies have a pronounced effect on the institutions at the macro-regional level: “New forms of interinstitutional comprehensive points of reference may be established” (Gänzle and Kern 2016a, 14).

In the functional MLG conceptions recognized by Stephenson (2013), the country- and macro-region-specific, and implementation studies are interconnected in the sense of exploring MLG through three different policy instruments (partnership principle, EUSBSR, and territorial cohesion). The degree of flexibility and openness MLG is applied, together with the use of the EU policy instruments, seem to be strongly dependent on the state system of the respective member state. The examples of the implementation of the partnership principle and the role of the ICORGs and their member regions in the EUSBSR in Finland and Germany show that the German federal system supports the empowerment of the regional level in the MLG system much more than that of the unitary Finland. The key challenges in the implementation of the MLG are bound to the jurisdiction of the Member States, not in the activities of the regional level. The German Länder have

adopted a “leave-us-alone strategy” (Laufer und Münch 2010, 224) aiming at strengthening the action space of the European regions. German Länder have successfully defended their rights and mandates in the German federal system in relation to the EU (reviewed in Section 3.3) as compared to the relatively weak Finnish regions, which never had this kind of opportunity of influence.

The macro-regional strategies of the EU make it evident that intergovernmental cooperation and the national level will possess a strong role in the future as well if a MLG system has appeared beside to it. The EUSBSR has dominated the MLG discussion in the Baltic Sea macro-region since its establishment in 2009. The ICORGs and their member regions have recognized the state-centric approach in the EUSBSR from the very beginning and have asked the national level for more space to act on the management and implementation of the EUSBSR. According to the respondents of the Q methodological experiments, the subnational level should clearly be included in the governance of the EUSBSR. One should be able to see MLG as a general approach between the different levels and not to restrict the debate just to the context of the EU-level strategies and EU funding. Without legal and institutional arrangements, the ICORGs and their member regions will remain on the implementation side of the MLG system without having a relevant influence on decision-making. In the long run, this might lead to even more diminishing interest of the local and regional levels to follow and fulfil the common strategic goals of the macro-regional strategies and the policies of the EU.

From the European Commission’s and Member States’ perspective, rather than pushing forward a well-functioning MLG system, the more tempting approach with the initiative of the EUSBSR has been towards more efficient use and simplified management of the EU funding in the Baltic Sea macro-region (cf. Ahner 2016). The earlier research and empirical findings of the study show that this serves as a relevant example of how a state-centric approach still aptly characterizes the formation of states’ interests vis-à-vis the current MLG debate in the EU. One piece of evidence on the state-centrism of the EUSBSR process is that those at the subnational level, including the ICORGs and their member regions, do not have a fixed role in the political steering of the process. The ICORGs’ possibilities to have their say on the EUSBSR structure are built into the implementation level – hence they are not directly on the decision-making level. At the moment there is no macro-region-specific High-Level Group that would include relevant stakeholders from all the MLG levels in the Baltic Sea macro-region. The role of regional and local authorities remains strongly seen in the implementation side in the revised EUSBSR Action Plan as well. The structure of

the EUSBSR shows political coordination of the macro-regional strategies to continue to reside in the hands of the European Commission and Member States. The representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions asserted that a place in the macro-regional decision-making body would provide the ICORGs with more influence, help them to contribute to improve strategy, and connect them to the regional political decision-making of their member regions. This would also support the principle of subsidiarity.

My conclusion is that the macro-regional strategies as such have increased collaboration in the MLG system, but in the Baltic Sea region the proponents of these strategies must work harder to justify their existence compared to other European macro-regions because the Baltic Sea region is already strongly networked through numerous cooperation schemes. My empirical findings showed that the ICORGs have not fully activated themselves regarding the EUSBSR. They have been active in its drafting process, and actively participate in the follow-up process. Yet several interviewees criticised the implementation process of the EUSBSR as problematic and complicated. According to them, the EUSBSR represents a top-down approach from the EU Commission, while there is a lack of understanding of the different administrative systems found in the Baltic Sea macro-region. For local or regional politicians, it is difficult to see the benefits of the EUSBSR and to prove especially what the Strategy could achieve in different policy areas to stimulate their member regions' economic progress. MLG can be applied as a framework for policymaking and policy implementation, but a prerequisite for this is that actors of all MLG levels manage to administer the policy (Milio 2010, 177). In short, the ICORGs and their member regions are in danger of becoming frustrated with the inadequate possibilities to participate in the steering process of the EUSBSR.

This study indicates that the EUSBSR plays a highly relevant role for the ICORGs, and that there are strong wishes expressed by the factors uncovered here showing that the macro-regional strategy should bring changes to the work of the ICORGs. The respondents proposed that ICORGs could have different roles in the implementation of the EUSBSR. Some of them could concentrate more on projects and others could be more policy-focused, making common policies for the Baltic Sea macro-region. At present the situation is incoherent since the ICORGs in their working groups and decision-making bodies deal with nearly all thematic areas of the EUSBSR policy areas but few regions have activated themselves in the decision-making and implementation process of the EUSBSR. It is ambiguous as well that the stakeholders of the member regions of the ICORGs are actively

participating in international and interregional projects but hardly use the ICORGs as a project channel or platform to any of the following goals: strengthening the position of the subnational level of the MLG system, lobbying for regional development needs, or defending other strategic targets. The integration of local and regional authorities to the implementation of the EUSBSR is still limited if they could adopt an essential role in implementing the macro-regional initiatives (cf. Gänzle and Kern 2016b; Schymik 2011).

Given that the partnership principle offers a direct channel since 1989 for actors on the subnational level to participate in the management cycle of the cohesion and regional policies through direct negotiations with actors on the national level and the European Commission, it is logical to find that the ICORGs have not been very attractive as lobbying channels in the technical preparation of the operational programmes. The partnership principle as such has not played a visible role in the lobbying activities of the ICORGs or in their discussions about MLG. As stated earlier, the management of the regional ESIF funding still takes place separate from but parallel to the interregional, transnational, and cross-border programmes. The decision-making based on the partnership principle concentrates on project financing from the ESIF funding on the regional level but, e.g., excludes the decision-making of interregional, transnational, and cross-border projects. As an example regarding the implementation of the EUSBSR, the main source of the financing for the EUSBSR comes from the transnational INTERREG programme, and its financing decisions are not discussed in the light of the partnership principle on the regional implementing level. This also creates a weak linkage in the MLG system between decision-making and implementation.

The common challenge for building an efficiently working MLG system in the Baltic Sea macro-region is that the most relevant policy instruments, like the EUSBSR and the partnership principle, basically only coordinate and channel the EU funding through project actions. These policy instruments activate foremost those levels and stakeholders which are responsible for managing or implementing the EU funding – that is, the institutions of the EU, national authorities, and limited regional and local administrations. Constitutional systems influence the management of the cohesion and regional policy – in other words, the implementation of the partnership principle. Countries with more centralized government structures with stronger powers on the national level seem to have more centralized steering and managing of cohesion policy than federal countries.

The empirical findings of this study indicate that the regional and local levels are also in very different positions as receivers of EU funding, which might lead to

rather uneven participation of regional actors to the MLG system. MLG is regularly used in the “project world” in different thematic cases – for example, in EU-financed projects or studies dealing with climate change or to fulfil the eligibility criteria of the financing programme when MLG stakeholders of all levels are gathered together. Inequalities can be recognized in the access of the local and regional authorities to the EU funding. The challenge is that the EU funding is very heterogeneously distributed along the macro-region and strongly favours the less developed regions. Regarding transnational funding and the EUSBSR, most policy area coordinators are from the national level; they decide about the flagship project leaders, which mostly come from the national level as well.

As this study shows, the EUSBSR and the partnership principle – policy instruments initiated by the EU – seem still to be rather top-down driven. The EU promotes these policy instruments, but the Member States remain reluctant to assign a broader mandate to the regional level. The ICORGs and their member regions find the Member States continuing to enjoy a strong steering role in relation to regional and local governments, economic and social actors, as well as social partners. This shows the dichotomy between intergovernmentalist and MLG approaches in the EU policymaking e.g. in management of the EUSBSR to prevail. For the sustainable development of the macro-regional strategies, it has to be guaranteed that partner countries, subnational authorities and civil societies have their say and possibilities of influence (Gänzle 2017, 18; cf. Sielker 2016a, 2016b for EU Danube Region Strategy).

The *ESPON Handbook on Territorial Governance* combines the operative field of the MLG (the coordination of actors, policy-sector integration, and stakeholder participation) to the territorial and knowledge-related elements (ESPON 2013c, 13). The added elements include adaptation to the changing contexts and realising place-based and territorial specificities and impacts (ibid.; discussed in Chapter 4). *The ESPON Handbook* functions as an instrument, bringing the objectives of the Europe 2020 and TA 2020 closer together. *The ESPON TANGO Handbook* tries to diminish the gap between the cohesion and regional policy and territorial governance. It adds to the operational MLG the explicitly territorial and knowledge-related elements. As reviewed in Section 4.3, current policy analyses tend often to focus on MLG governance with vertical and horizontal linkages and integration of relevant stakeholders, paying less attention to the territorial dimension. The checklist of *the ESPON TANGO Handbook* (see Table 4) appears also applicable to assess the work of the ICORGs. The messages from extracted factors and clusters of consensus-like items respond rather directly to the five

dimensions of territorial governance regarding coordination, policy sectors, and stakeholder participation. Based on the findings in the factor interpretation, the Factor FIII and FIV stressed the smart specialization and territorial specificities important in the ICORGs' work and reveal linkages to the territorial and knowledge-related elements of the MLG. All these issues are at the heart of regional development and spatial planning in the member regions of the ICORGs.

The cohesion and regional policy case shows that the two policy instruments discussed in this study also show the parallel and overlapping work that has been done by the European Commission and the Member States regarding MLG. In the subregional practice, the partnership principle and the EUSBSR work in parallel, both having their own administrative practices implementing MLG, the partnership principle tightly connected with its administrative rules to the ESIF funding and its delivery, and the latter EUSBSR with its own administrative logic working closely with the cross-border and transnational funding, policy areas, and horizontal actions. Cohesion and regional policy lobbying has played a very important role in the activities of the ICORGs since their establishment. If the cohesion and regional policy lobbying was earlier a more general "one size fits all" approach, the respondents of this study think the ICORGs should now concentrate more on how to use the diversified financing instruments of the EU regional policy more efficiently to the advantage of all member regions, especially on behalf of those who do not receive or receive only limited support from the EU structural funds.

The sustainability of the partnership principle can be called into question because of the declining cohesion and regional policy allocations in some Member States and regions as well as the associated rationalisation of partnership-based management arrangements (European Parliament 2014, 35). For the ICORGs, the economically diversified member regions create challenges which would be better dealt with in the strategy work of the ICORGs. The views of the study participants on all factors reflect the demand on ICORGs to develop their approach to working with regional policy and various financing programmes. Simultaneously, the ICORGs are requested to activate themselves in the EUSBSR and to focus more on the diversified needs of the member regions, especially regarding a place-based approach and territorial governance.

According to Stephenson (2013), a focal point of the functional conception of the MLG is "coordination and learning." The passivity of the regional stakeholders and the ICORGs in the implementation of the EUSBSR might have further led to the situation where the stakeholders, especially on the regional level, were not

properly familiar with the EUSBSR. The horizontal action “Capacity,” using the MLG as an overall guiding principle, offers capacity-building support for the implementing stakeholders. It is definitely needed, as the awareness of the EUSBSR and MLG is rather limited on the local and regional levels. Awareness is restricted mostly to stakeholders working with EU project management or implementation. According to the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions interviewed for this study, for now, the ICORGs might appear somewhat abstract in terms of how they present their views whilst also remaining invisible among the citizens on the local and regional level. Regions should more actively communicate to the public the ways in which they participate in international activities so that they might gain visibility for their work in the field of international organizations. But for now, weak horizontal and vertical linkages of the MLG levels lead to communication problems, insufficiently organised division of labour, and inefficiency, with double work persisting.

Study respondents on the factors I and II stressed that the EUSBSR could offer an instrument for the coordination of tasks vertically between the various levels of the MLG and horizontally between regional stakeholders. The ICORGs could save their often-scarce resources by enhancing the division of labour. The revised version of the EUSBSR explicitly states that it can enhance the coherence of cooperation in the region and contribute to a better division of labour among existing networks to avoid overlaps and strengthen synergies (European Commission 2015, 20; cf. Etzold and Gänzle 2012).

The goal of the horizontal action “Capacity” is to strengthen MLG in the framework of the EUSBSR, which means that the people and organizations involved in the implementation of the EUSBSR, in its policy areas, need to understand not only the MLG system of the region but also how the programming and funding structure works in the 2014 to 2020 programming period (European Commission 2015, 150). According to Milio (2010, 177), proactive cooperation between administrative and political bodies is essential to enhance the implementation of policy goals on the regional level. That the MLG capacity building reaches mostly project stakeholders and is split among a great number of separate projects may pose a risk: that stakeholders and regions not receiving EU funding or not participating in projects with a MLG approach will not be considered in for MLG capacity-building measures, either. If MLG capacity building in the Baltic Sea macro-region stays project-based, one may seriously question whether the capacity building truly will have an impact on the governance system of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

In terms of the MLG conceptions recognized by Stephenson (2013), this study also elaborated the regionalization and global governance approaches as the ICORGs and their member regions are parts of globalization processes. The globalization approach stresses that the states are not the only key participants in the complex political world even though they arguably remain among the main players (Rosenau 2003 and 2004). This was recognized by the MLG theories, regionalism, and macro-regionalization alike (Benz 2000; Böhme et al. 2011; Gänzle and Kern 2016a; Hooghe and Marks 2001, 2010; Laufer and Münch 2010; Peters and Pierre 2004; Piattoni 2009, 2016; Schymik 2011; Scott 2002). The ICORGs serve the subnational level of the whole Baltic Sea macro-region, and for them it is also relevant to work with stakeholders outside the EU governance (e.g., Norwegian and Russian regions) while remaining part of the MLG system.

In globalization processes, national frontiers lose some of their significance, prompting people to act beyond political borders and cultural barriers. This means that cross-border cooperation becomes one of the dimensions to manage (Piattoni 2016, 79). Through the processes of globalization and European integration, new forms of functional areas emerge at different territorial levels, thus increasing the mutual dependency of various regions (Böhme et al. 2011, 26). The respondents noted that the change of context should force the ICORGs to adapt and recognize the diverse needs of their member regions. Regional policy is now looking even more deeply into the territorial specificities of the member regions and the challenges caused by globalization. The cross-border, transnational, and interregional funding might play an even more important role – to respond, through cross-border cooperation activities, to the challenges of globalization as reviewed in Section 2.4. From this point of view, it would be relevant to take into consideration globalization and the larger processes happening outside of the Baltic Sea macro-regional and EU contexts.

Based on the empirical findings of the study, the ICORGs could harness globalization to the advantage of their member regions. Research and innovation policies as well as smart specialization strategies would need even more of an interregional dimension (European Commission 2017c). Moreover, there is need for a vision to modernise the economy by embracing, for example, digitalisation, technological and social innovation, decarbonisation, and the circular economy. Fundamental economic transformation is under way at the local level, where the industry and people interact (*ibid.* 17–19). The ICORGs play a key role in this development to the extent that they recognize the changing global context and can interpret the opportunities therein for concrete actions to the benefit of their

member regions using the policy instruments introduced in this study and promoting interregional smart specialization strategies. According to Sielker (2016a, 2009) the regional differences need to be recognized more explicitly by the place-based approach applied if the EU regional policy and European territorial cooperation goals are to be enhanced.

8.4 Adapting to New Priorities of the Work in the MLG Context

Based on the earlier research and the results of this study, it is possible to recognize two phases in the ICORGs' history since the beginning of the 1990s. ICORGs were established in a new political situation of the Baltic Sea macro-region, as the Soviet Union had collapsed, the Baltic States had become independent, Germany was reunited, and the EU enlarged into northern Europe as Finland and Sweden assumed membership. This new context created immense opportunities for intense regional cooperation. Subnational bodies like regional governments enjoyed the simultaneous, albeit incremental, empowerment of supranational and subnational institutions following the logic of Type I in the typology of Hooghe and Marks (cf. Hooghe and Marks 2010, 20–21). The change in the structure of Type I happened by reallocating policy functions across existing governance levels (ibid. 19). The ICORGs did benefit from the empowerment of regional governments, and their membership and agenda grew consistently. The Baltic States and Poland became members in the EU, and living standards rose drastically in these new democracies.

The second phase followed with the inception of the macro-regional strategy in 2009 initiated by the European Commission. As the earlier research revealed, the working context for the ICORGs changed rapidly after their first two decades of existence, and these cooperation organizations began to face a wide variety of challenges in their operational working context as revealed in the clusters of consensus-like items (summarized in Section 8.1). The economic crisis of 2008 had especially serious consequences as regional reforms followed in several Baltic Sea States, and cohesion policy support was diminished for many regions around the Baltic Sea as a result of the negotiations for the current 2014 to 2020 programming period of Structural Funds (reviewed in Section 7.4). New perspectives were opened through macro-regional cooperation on the subnational level and for the ICORGs, but the strong coordinating role of the European Commission and Member States within the macro-regional strategies did not allow space for the ICORGs in the decision-making mechanisms. From the theoretical point of view,

the EUSBSR also started to mix the Type I and Type II of the MLG typology. For the ICORGs acting only in the framework of MLG Type I was not self-evident anymore.

Regarding the new macro-regional context, one of my assumptions was that the member regions are in favour of change in the work of the ICORGs. As Etzold (2010, 249) notes, if the organizations are to remain relevant and to preserve their members' interest, they have to specify their future purposes and contributions to overall cooperation efforts. The four extracted factors reveal the priorities set by the respondents for the ICORGs' tasks in the MLG system (reviewed in Chapter 6), and these priorities do not fully reflect the current way of working in the ICORGs. Based on the results of this study, it seems that the ICORGs have neither been fully able to follow the new processes initiated by the European Commission, nor have they been able to adapt their working methods and structures to the new operational context.

This study demonstrates that the ICORGs are working in a challenging and divided context when it comes to MLG. The expectations by the respondents between the factors seem to represent different approaches, which might imply that "one size fits all" does not apply for the ICORGs' member regions. The first two factors are represented by the MLG enthusiasts, including mostly more pragmatic, policy- and practice-orientated representatives of the ICORGs and their German member regions. The two latter factors, represented by representatives of ICORGs and their Finnish member regions, reveal more traditional tasks of the ICORGs related mostly to the policy lobbying aspects of regional development, which lend them their unique character and differentiate them from the other organizations and cooperation structures in the Baltic Sea macro-region.

In the light of the results obtained here, Factors I and II respond clearly to the needs caused for the member regions through the implementation of the macro-regional strategy of the EUSBSR, whereas Factors III and IV move the discussion regarding territorial cohesion back to the agenda (reviewed in Section 7.4). The two latter factors deal with the core substance issues of the Finnish Regional Councils and the German Länder (reviewed in Chapter 3). Regional development and spatial planning are the core tasks of the regional governments, and therefore the concept of territorial cohesion has played a decisive role in the work of the ICORGs (B7 2004; BSSSC 2005, 2008b, 2009; CPMR Baltic Sea Commission 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2016b). The concept of territorial cohesion contains all geographical and spatial aspects of EU cohesion and regional policy and therefore complements the concepts of economic and social cohesion (Council of the European Union

2011). MLG is required to manage different functional territories and to guarantee the balanced and coordinated contributions of local, regional, national, and European actors (ibid.).

The territorial cohesion has created a further policy challenge for the ICORGs. The results of this study show that in the Finnish unitary system, the regions more openly seek support for their regional interests through ICORGs. German Länder have instead their strong and regulated role in European politics through the federal system. For the German Länder it is easier to promote their regional development objectives through the federal system than in the other Baltic Sea States, including Finland. A question is then raised how to better combine the spatial and regional development concerns with the cohesion and regional policy of the EU currently – and in particular in regard to the future regional policy after 2020. The theory of regionalism has made its efforts to discuss and combine the needs of the regional level in spatial planning and regional development as well as in responding to the challenges caused by the globalization (cf. Böhme et al. 2011; Piattoni 2016; Scott 2002). It seems, however, that the macro-regional strategies have so far not been able to fade away the division between the social and economic, and territorial cohesion. This seems particularly evident in the implementation of the MLG in various parallel forms (see Section 8.1). The dichotomy between intergovernmental interests of Member States and the MLG approach of EU institutions also persists.

The extracted factors showed that one of the strengths of the ICORGs could be their ability to recognize the changing global context and to interpret the opportunities to concrete actions for their member regions by using the different policy instruments and by promoting the place-based approach for local and regional economic change and interregional smart specialization strategies. Macro-regional strategies effectively support policymaking and spatial development with a strong stakeholder-based nature dependant on actor-networks (Sielker 2016a, 2009). This enables the creation of transnational place-based strategies for cooperation areas (ibid.). In this respect the ICORGs could more efficiently promote bridging between the economic and social, and the territorial cohesion. *The ESPON TANGO Handbook* (reviewed in Section 4.3 and discussed in Section 7.4) offers a concrete tool for the ICORGs in bringing in the territorial and knowledge-related elements to MLG. It is also stressed by Factors III and IV which, as mentioned above, play a decisive role in harnessing globalization.

The interviewees of the study urge the ICORGs to activate themselves to use the EUSBSR as an instrument for promoting MLG in the Baltic Sea macro-region.

They see that in the long run this would also lead to streamlined structures and strengthen the impact of the ICORGs' work. None of the ICORGs representing the subnational level has so far taken on the responsibility of coordinating a policy area or horizontal action of the EUSBSR. As indicated in the previous sections, the state system also has played a decisive role in how actively the subnational level has participated in the EUSBSR process, but the empirical findings of this study also show that the state systems do not seem to restrict as such ICORGs' and their member regions' work in the MLG system. The North-German Länder have taken an active role in the implementation of the EUSBSR. Similarly, the South-German Länder are active in the Danube macro-region (Sielker 2016a, 2016b), but for the Finnish regions the obstacle seems to be weak mandates vis-à-vis the EUSBSR to which they have remained relatively passive. The ICORGs could use the EUSBSR also for their lobbying purposes to influence the drafting and implementation of EU cohesion and regional policy and to promote the development interests of their member regions.

In the interviews, expectations regarding practical results could be recognized. The member regions of the ICORGs make notable investments of financial and human resources into these cooperation organizations. This means that the ICORGs could be more influential by conducting projects that benefit the regional level with concrete results, involve private actors, and facilitate economic growth; in this way, ICORGs could enhance the local awareness of their beneficial actions. Consequently, this could draw in politicians more effectively to further discuss these issues and, in the process, eventually become more supportive of the ICORGs' work. The empirical results of the study further showed that the ICORGs have remained a nearly untapped resource as a networking platform for generating projects and gathering knowledge on specific topics at the regional level. Numerous international projects are implemented by the stakeholders of the member regions, but the ICORGs play hardly any role in this.

The representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions on Factors I and II identified many possibilities of improvement with the project work and recommended that ICORGs could function as platforms for regions to meet and initiate projects supporting their strategic goals. Respondents saw different ways to add value with the project work: (i) ICORGs could actively start to run projects jointly or individually in the selected policy areas or horizontal actions of the EUSBSR; (ii) project work could be done through the lead of the selected member regions, but ICORGs should still have the guiding role in the projects; (iii) the project work could enhance the targets of the other three uncovered factors:

implementation of the EUSBSR, lobbying for regional development objectives and smart specialization of regions; and (iv) ICORGs should become well known for their high-quality expertise in project work, combining their knowledge on the current EU policy developments with their member regions' strengths and qualities.

Based on the empirical findings of the study, MLG, the EUSBSR, or smart specialization might still appear rather abstract to the local and regional decision-makers to understand and adapt to. It seems to be challenging for politicians on the local and regional levels to discern the linkages of these large-scale processes to everyday practice. Egan (2009, 1248) notes that growing transnational networks, dense cooperation, and interaction can foster policy learning: exchanges of ideas, technical expertise and information as well as the promotion of norms and values. The Q methodological study showed that it is essential to guarantee the support of regional politicians by motivating them to understand the value of the work done in the ICORGs. Because of this, the earlier research and the study respondents suggested that the ICORGs should contribute more in the member regions to individual and institutional capacity building, the method used by the EUSBSR horizontal action "Capacity" (cf. European Commission 2015). This would help their member regions and stakeholders to adapt better to the changing operational context, increase their awareness about the EU policy processes, and become better integrated into the MLG system.

An important question remains: Can the ICORGs then, despite their current problems and the challenging MLG context, effectively act as intermediators in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region? By intermediating is meant here building linkages, acting as a bridge, and increasing coherence, communication, and cooperation between and on the different MLG levels. The macro-regional strategies activate actors on different MLG levels towards the EU policy targets and recombine institutional structures to achieve these policy targets in new and flexible ways (Piattoni 2016, 90). Macro-regions also offer a platform for national governments, subnational regional bodies within the EU, regions and states beyond the EU outer borders, and cross-border regional organizations that contain EU and third countries (Schymik 2011, 9). The earlier research demonstrated and the results of this study confirmed that Member States still have a strong steering role in the EUSBSR in relation to regional and local governments, meaning that the dichotomy between intergovernmental and MLG approaches in EU policymaking prevails. The German Länder may take advantage of their strong mandate in the German federal system, but they may also function as drivers for activating other

member regions in the ICORGs. This Q methodological study with the representatives of the ICORGs and their member regions in Finland and Germany showed that there is a strong desire for ICORGs to contribute to the building of a better functioning macro-regional MLG system for the advantage of their member regions. The strong role of the Member States in the Baltic Sea macro-regional MLG system so far has not allowed wider participation that would have included the regional level in the decision-making process regarding, for example, the EUSBSR. The respondents insisted, however, that the ICORGs should strive for a proper steering group in decision-making representing all MLG levels in the EUSBSR.

The empirical results of this study also showed that for the ICORGs' member regions, insufficient awareness, unclear goal-setting and limited financial and human resources create obstacles for active participation. The ICORGs can only be as strong as their member regions. As stronger regions tend to receive more visibility compared to the weaker ones, with the same logic, the ICORGs could gain more visibility and influence in the Baltic Sea region by pooling resources (cf. Tatham 2015; Tatham and Thau 2014). The populous and financially strong regions create a firm basis for the ICORGs, and at the same time this basis could offer a framework where the weaker member regions may also have influence, and work for achieving their goals. Based on the results of the interviews, the current relationship between the ICORGs and their member regions seems to remain rather incoherent. On the one hand the member regions have high expectations for the services to be received from the ICORGs, but on the other hand the resources to be given to the ICORGs require hard negotiations in the member regions. According to the respondents, the ICORGs need to develop more efficient processes through macro-regional and platform-type cooperation as well as through the support of their member regions if they are to be able to effectively respond to their expectations. This seems to be a prerequisite for the ICORGs to strive for if they are to strengthen their role as intermediators for their member regions, building bridges for better coherence, cooperation, and coordination in the macro-regional MLG system.

In the last chapter, to mitigate the ICORGs' current problems analysed in this study and to respond to their current challenges, seven recommendations with specific tasks are proposed aimed at helping the ICORGs operationalize the results of this study and convert them into common action. These recommendations – based on the empirical findings and results of the Q methodological research with

the experienced respondents from the ICORGs and their member regions, as well as earlier research, might give fresh impetus on the future development of the ICORGs' work and possibly help them to reconsider their priorities and cooperation schemes in the MLG structure. Some of the recommendations are already in implementation in some ICORGs. Certainly, yet further activities could be proposed to connect the ICORGs to the larger policy processes in and around the Baltic Sea macro-region and to improve the coordination, cooperation, and coherence on and between MLG levels as well as between ICORGs and IGOs in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region.

9 SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING THE ICORGS' WORK

Based on the analysis of the Q methodological research, empirical findings and theoretical discussion of this study as well as earlier research about the IGOs and the further discussion above, seven recommendations are proposed how the ICORGs could successfully ameliorate some of their current problems and continue developing their work in the MLG system of the Baltic Sea macro-region. The first five recommendations are results of the discussion reflecting Factors I and II as well as the items which gathered consensus among the factors and created clusters of consensus-like items (previewed in Section 6.5). Especially the three dimensions presented in *the ESPON TANGO Handbook* (previewed in Section 4.3); the coordination of actions, stakeholder mobilization, and integration of policy sectors, which deal with the operative field of the MLG, cross-cut in many of the recommendations. The two additional territorial and knowledge-related elements from the *ESPON TANGO Handbook*; adapting to changing contexts and realising place-based territorial specificities; characterize the two last recommendations based on Factors III and IV.

9.1 Be Political and Interregional!

The ICORGs are the unique international organizations representing the political decision-making of the subnational regional level. The independent role of the ICORGs matters. The ICORGs have to be able to stay independent representing their member regions. The ICORGs have to be able to gather and connect different kind of regions and stakeholders with different kind of interests. They should also be able to represent regions and stakeholders of the EU Member States who are not typical EU funding receivers but also regions and stakeholders from non-EU Member States.

Task 1: Activate your politicians to the work of the ICORGs! The political dimension in the decision-making structures of the ICORGs is the first priority. The ICORGs should integrate the capacity building as a standard

task in their work. The individual and institutional learning could encourage officials and politicians in the regions to learn and discuss the goals and the work of the ICORGs. Without necessary actions, the ICORGs are not able to defend their political mandate in their member regions and possible new candidate regions. The political legitimacy and representativeness create the establishment for the political influence in the decision-making mechanism of the MLG and in the policy instrument like the EUSBSR.

Task 2: Represent voices from the entire Baltic Sea macro-region! As the study shows, the ICORGs are struggling with the weakening of the geographical representativeness which is directly linked to the amount of political legitimacy. The ICORGs have not been able to create a sufficient awareness on the national level and in their member regions on regional level neither, on the possibilities to promote MLG and apply different policy instruments. The ICORGs have to continue to recruit active stakeholders. The cooperation between the ICORGs in selected thematic areas may also increase the needed geographical representativeness. It is important to represent the whole macro-region through memberships and activities to guarantee ICORGs' geographical and political legitimacy.

9.2 Cooperate Macro-regionally!

The macro-regional cooperation between the ICORGs should be improved. It could lead to better coordination and division of labour (e.g., in the framework of the EUSBSR) (cf. recommendation "Be part of the EUSBSR"). The ICORGs should also improve their cooperation with the IGOs on the macro-regional level. The intergovernmental cooperation organizations share similar coordination challenges as do the ICORGs. It is certainly easier for the ICORGs to start strengthening the linkage of the MLG between regional and national level in the macro-regional context with the IGOs compared to the work that would be done in each member state where the ICORGs have member regions. The increased cooperation could lead to the joint initiatives, better coordination, and division of labour on the macro-regional level.

Task 1: Strengthen cooperation with intergovernmental organizations!

The CBSS as an IGO could possibly aim at becoming a facilitator in the Baltic Sea cooperation. The CBSS could serve as an umbrella for the stakeholders of various levels of the MLG. A coordinating stakeholder on intergovernmental level with firm judicial powers could function as a coordinator between the stakeholders on the different MLG levels. If an

IGO on the macro-regional level would take the role for facilitating the cooperation, it would require that the ICORGs have made the needed decisions on division of labour and their role in the decision-making between each other.

Task 2: Strengthen cooperation with non-EU countries! As platform organizations independent from the EU governance structures the ICORGs may also more easily include Russian regions or business actors into their activities. The CBSS could play an important role in creating cooperation with Russian regions as the common Baltic Sea macro-regional reference point. On the other side, several regions and municipalities already have functioning working bilateral cooperation, for example the Turku process and the EUSBSR horizontal action “Neighbours.” The ICORGs should jointly with other Pan-Baltic organizations take the initiative to strengthen the cooperation with the non-EU countries with the support of the existing mechanisms.

9.3 Communicate Horizontally and Vertically!

Communication appeared as one of the challenges the ICORGs have in their work especially towards the national level and horizontally inside the member regions. The ICORGs communicate conventionally with their member regions and the level of the EU, and partly with their strategic partners in the Baltic Sea macro-region. As the informal communication plays a relevant role, the ICORGs should not set hindrances to their communication if the formal channels are not available or are at the developing stage.

Task 1: Improve your communication with the national level! Member regions should strengthen their communication with the national level with the support of the ICORGs regarding the affairs discussed in the ICORGs. ICORGs are able to formulate joint positions in the interest of their member regions, which can be used in communication towards national ministries. ICORGs could directly provide the national governments with political statements or brochures with project results in multiple languages. The other route for improving visibility and communication is the macro-regional cooperation which is noted in the recommendation “Cooperate Macro-regionally!”

Task 2: Use capacity building to improve communication in the member regions! There is a severe deficit in communication horizontally in the ICORGs’ member regions, especially between the regional politicians and the regional stakeholders. One efficient means to improve the

communication is the capacity building. The process has been successfully started in the framework of the EUSBSR through the horizontal action “Capacity,” and it is recommended by the ESPON Handbook as well. The ICORGs should adopt the instrument of capacity building in their regular working methods and in cooperation with the responsible civil servants, politicians, and other stakeholders in member regions to increase awareness about the ICORGs, and promote commitment to the EUSBSR. This would also be of great help for the Finnish member regions during and after the regional reform to recognize the importance of international lobbying channels for the regional level and the importance to be a part of the MLG system. The capacity building should not only restrict to the administrative bodies of the member regions, which are the formal members in the ICORGs, but also activate respective stakeholders (e.g., business, academia, and third sector) to the activities of the ICORGs.

Task 3: Increase your visibility! The ICORGs have to increase their visibility on the regional and national levels of the MLG about their achievements through media, meetings, conferences etc. Active participation in the project activities increases the visibility as well. There the supportive role of the member regions is essential.

Task 4: Recognize different cultures of communication! It is important to recognize and consider the country-specific characteristics: which powers the member regions have and how communication between different levels works. The German multichannel communication system may serve as an example. The ICORGs should be aware of the different channels of influence in Baltic Sea States. The awareness of these various lobbying channels could contribute to clarifying the role of the ICORGs and where they could find most suitable cooperation partners for lobbying.

9.4 Be Part of the EUSBSR!

The ICORGs should integrate themselves into governance and implementation of the EUSBSR. It is also a question of managing the EU funding in the Baltic Sea macro-region, in other words channelling the EU funds to the member regions.

Task 1: Continue promoting the establishment of the High-Level Group of the EUSBSR. The High-Level Group should include in its decision-making body all the MLG levels. The ICORGs could represent the regions of the subnational level in the High-Level Group rotation system.

The ICORGs could act as intermediary organizations between the regional and national levels towards the level of the EU in the EUSBSR framework.

Task 2: Analyse the task and policy areas of the EUSBSR, and make joint decisions among the ICORGs on the division of labour. At the moment, there are overlapping activities among several policy areas. The EUSBSR offers an ideal framework where different thematic tasks could be combined vertically and horizontally between different levels. Each ICORG should have specific priorities to concentrate on, or to take care of jointly. The coherent participation in the activities of the policy areas and the horizontal actions would also pave a path to the decision-making in the EUSBSR. The ICORGs with tasks and responsibilities in the EUSBSR would bring added value to their member regions and activate them to the projects. The division of labour would also enhance the coherence and cooperation with the IGOs.

Task 3: Learn from positive examples! The German Länder, the Union of the Baltic Cities, and the CBSS Secretariat have taken an active role in implementing the EUSBSR. They could act as examples and serve best practices for the ICORGs in designing their activities in the EUSBSR.

9.5 Show Concrete Results with Project Platforms!

ICORGs could use the project path for developing their organizational work, improving their level of professionalism, and acquiring financial resources for working for the strategic targets of the member regions. The ICORGs could make use of the EU funding more efficiently in their member regions and contribute in strengthening the MLG system. Thematic platform work might also be efficient for attracting new member regions to the ICORGs.

Task 1: Create platform(s) for project work! ICORGs could be further developed separately or jointly as platform organizations where projects ideas could be developed and circulated among the member regions which would lead to concrete strategic projects. The ICORGs could influence the decision-making procedures and structure of the EUSBSR, and strengthen the implementation of the strategy making them more powerful macro-regional stakeholders and deliver the missing added value to their member regions.

Task 2: Mobilize regional stakeholders! The ICORGs should see the project activities as learning process to solve joint problems. Member regions

should recognize stakeholders, interest groups etc. which would have interest and capacities to participate policy or thematic activities, and how these stakeholder groups could be encouraged to participate. Often the Councils or governments in question do not have the human or financial resources to be represented in all issues and tasks relevant to the member regions. The participation could be mandated more to the other stakeholders in the respective regions for having the best expertise to be used in the ICORGs. This would also offer to the ICORGs more resources and the possibilities to act as platforms fulfilling the needs of the member regions.

Task 3: Use platforms connecting different interests! ICORGs may act as platforms for discussing, developing, and influencing different funding mechanisms for joint interests of the member regions. The project platforms would also have the opportunity to link different EU funding mechanisms better together. The ICORGs may activate regions' participation in the implementing of the EUSBSR. These activities would compensate the limited resources of the member regions. The ICORGs should offer a multilateral cooperation network for their member regions. The project platforms could also work for transferring good practices and models from advanced to less advanced member regions and offer business opportunities as well.

9.6 Strengthen the Specificities of your Member Regions!

The ICORGs could act as facilitators in building the bridge between the EU cohesion and regional policy and the territorial cohesion. The spatial planning and regional development are core tasks of the ICORG member regions, and the ICORGs could contribute to strengthen the territorial cohesion by best practices and strategic projects.

The ESPON Handbook for better territorial governance is an instrument including concrete tools which the ICORGs could use to combine the operative field of the MLG, and to adapt to the changing contexts in the Baltic Sea macro-region, and to realize the place-based specificities in their member regions. The joint specificities would establish ground for focused and smart cooperation and give impetus for joint lobbying actions of the ICORGs.

Task 1: Recognize the place-based/territorial specificities of your member regions! Promote the work in the member regions for the creation of regional and interregional smart specialization strategies. The place-based approach is closely connected to the territorial cohesion.

ICORGs though should be able to highlight the importance of the territorial specificities in their activities and make more regions committed to the work in the ICORGs. The ICORGs should use more actively the existing smart specialization strategies in updating the goals for their work. Recognizing the territorial specificities of their member regions, the ICORGs could actively promote the participation of the respective stakeholders in their member regions to the project and lobbying activities.

Task 2: Lobby for the more efficient combined use of the financing instruments! The MLG instruments of the EUSBSR and partnership principle still work in parallel on the regional level. The ICORGs should promote the combined use of the cross-border, interregional, and transnational as well as other direct funding of the EU cooperation programmes with regional ESIF funding. The ICORGs should lobby for a better combined use of these funding sources, especially as the regional ESIF funding is declining in the member regions. The economic disparities based on the GDP might be significant even between neighbouring regions which should be noticed in the lobbying work of the ICORGs.

9.7 Act Interregionally - Recognize Global Challenges!

The Europe 2020 and TA 2020 strategies aim to tackle the challenges caused by the globalization. Globalization and the processes outside the European context have not found ground in the ICORGs, and it seems that the ICORGs have not been very successful in making the globalization issues and their effects visible on their agenda on the regional level.

Task 1: Recognize the changing global context! The ICORGs should support member regions in recognizing the impacts of the globalization process on the regional level. The ICORGs could focus on searching practical solutions (e.g., in the form of projects) to combine the goals of the EU regional policy and the territorial cohesion in their member regions. The ICORGs should further promote project activities in the framework of the cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation to find solutions, and make better understanding to respond to the challenges of globalization.

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11 APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Condition of instruction for the pilot study.

Interviews are recorded for further analysis. All information will be kept highly confidential and only for research purposes. Individual answers cannot be traced back to the persons interviewed. All participants are assigned with codes in this research which are only known by the researcher.

Participants receive 40 items in the beginning of the test. Participants are asked their subjective views regarding the sample of items. The meaning is to learn about the formulation of items and about the subjectivity in their political interaction. In the test situation participants sort the collected items to the matrix with the meaning of modeling their subjective thinking towards the collected items. Participants are asked to express their opinions about the items and while sorting the items. In the end questions are asked regarding the research theme.

In the test situation participants are asked to do as following:

1. Please read through the items and arrange them onto three piles initially signifying agreement, disagreement and a neutral position. Abbreviations: IRPO = international regional political organization; BSR = Baltic Sea Region; EUSBSR = European Union Strategy for Baltic Sea Region; MLG = multi-level governance
2. Please arrange the items first as a representative of your organization along the scale from -5 (signifying disagreement) to +5 (signifying agreement). 0 implies a neutral position.
3. Please tell your opinions about the items and regarding your decisions while sorting the items. The researcher may also ask clarifying questions from participant while sorting the items.
4. Please arrange the items now along your personal view along the scale from -5 (signifying disagreement) to +5 (signifying agreement). 0 implies a neutral position.
5. Please tell your opinions about the items and regarding your decisions while sorting the items. The researcher may also ask clarifying questions from participant while sorting the items.
6. The researcher makes in the end of the test general questions to you about your work, your experiences and your opinions with and about the international regional political organizations of the Baltic Sea Area.

Questions of the post-sorting interview:

1. Are there in items certain policy areas or tasks which are missing or IRPOs should be more active? How you would locate these missing items on the Q-sort grid?
2. Which are/have been your tasks in your organization with international regional political organizations of the Baltic Sea Area?
3. How successfully your organization (region) has achieved/achieves the goals set for the work with the IRPOs of the Baltic Sea Area?
4. How successfully the IRPOs have achieved their goals and supported the work of your organization/region (like in the cohesion policy lobbying or other policy areas)?
5. How does your organization see the conditions for international work in the BSR related to regional and national circumstances (Gemeinden, Land und Bund in German Mehrebenensystem)?
6. How does your organization see the future work in these BSR IRPOs? How does your organization see that the work of the IRPOs could be developed?
7. What are your personal opinions and experiences to the work of the BSR IRPOs?

Appendix 2. Selected items for the test interviews in the pilot study

1. (1) Differences in living standards in the Baltic Sea Area are still unacceptable and much remains to be done in order to achieve true cohesion within the area.
2. (10) BSR s should strive to achieve a polycentric Europe.
3. (12) I want that BSR IRPOs initiate and promote practical and useful projects.
4. (16) Through strong local and regional involvement much wider public participation and support will be gained for European co-operation.
5. (18) IRPOs of the Baltic Sea Area makes for the regional popularly-elected bodies possible to promote their common interests with EU institutions, national governments and other Baltic Sea organizations.
6. (19) IRPOs of the Baltic Sea Area need support from as many regions as possible.
7. (27) I want that BSR IRPOs are actively involved in the debates of the future regional policy.
8. (29) I strongly urge that EU Commission closely coordinate and cooperate with BSR IRPOs and its members in the implementation of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy.

9. (32) IRPOs should point out the importance of the role of the regions as partners in national and EU energy policies.
10. (44) I strongly prefer that Russia is a part of the Baltic Sea region and an important partner in the Baltic Sea cooperation.
11. (46) Private actors of the BSR must play an important role in the implementation process of EU-strategies.
12. (48) Task is now through Baltic Sea strategy to encourage organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline existing structures in order to strengthen their impact and to avoid double work.
13. (57) The task is now to create political and administrative structures to secure the influence of the citizens and their local and regional bodies on the future development of the BSR.
14. (58) Structural and cohesion funds must be eligible for all regions.
15. (62) I want that strong regions play a key role in the further integration and development of the BSR.
16. (63) The task is now that the EU and national states continue to support and develop an environment for business and sustainable economic growth throughout the Baltic Sea region to secure regional development and a good quality of life for the citizens.
17. (66) I think as regional structures are undergoing changes in several countries around the BSR, IRPOs should review a possible solution for alternative membership in countries where the regional level is disappearing.
18. (67) It is evident that BSR IRPOs create awareness among EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities when drawing up European policies and legislation.
19. (68) I strongly prefer that BSR IRPOs contribute towards creating partnerships, setting up projects and networking territories on a global level.
20. (70) I truly think that BSR IRPOs have significantly changed the position of regions as regards the building of wider Europe and contributed to the creation of transnational and intra-European cooperation.
21. (73) I want that BSR IRPOs contribute to the opening of the Union's foreign policies to include regional involvement
22. (77) The task is now as Europe is becoming more congested, more crowded and more centralized around urban areas, it is crucial to stress the importance of peripheral values and ensure a balance between periphery and centre.
23. (78) The territorial excellence policy as a part of the future cohesion policy should apply in all European regions in order to optimize each region's own potentials.

24. (81) I strongly prefer that Baltic Sea region has a well-balanced intergovernmental structure for political dialogue and practical co-operation.
25. (82) I really think that the coordinating role of the Council of the Baltic Sea States should be enhanced and make this role more clear and visible by opening up for full integration into the CBSS of any intergovernmental, multilateral network or organization in the region, while preserving the CBSS as an overall political forum.
26. (84) The task of the IRPOs is to support a joint strategy on infrastructure and transport covering the entire Baltic Sea Region.
27. (85) IRPOs should develop the BSR into Europe's maritime best practice region by 2015.
28. (86) There has to be the regional commitment and encouragement to implement measures agreed in the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) in order to reach and maintain good ecological status of the Baltic Sea.
29. (87) It is the task of the IRPOs to raise public awareness of energy and climate change issues in the BSR.
30. (88) Involvement of local and regional actors is important to reach at least a 20% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

Appendix 3. Condition of instruction in English for the main study

Condition of instruction for test persons

This research tries to clarify what kind of role the international regional organizations (IRO) of the Baltic Sea Area (BSR) own in the multi-level governance system in relation to regional, national and the level of the European Union. Two main contexts, cohesion policy and the multi-level governance are chosen, where statements for further analysis regarding the research problem will be studied. Due to the heterogeneous systems of the regional administration in the Baltic Sea Area this research is limited to study the regions and their memberships in the international regional organizations of the Baltic Sea Area in a unitary state of Finland and in a federative state of Germany. This research is restricted to the organizations which represent regions with elected political bodies (like in German Länder and Finnish Regional Councils).

Condition of instruction

Interviews are recorded for further analyzing and receiving information about the research theme and for further development of statements. All information will be

kept as highly confidential and only for research purposes. No connections to interviewed persons can be recognized in the results. All test persons appear through codes in this research which are known only to the researcher.

Test persons are asked their subjective opinions regarding the sample of statements collected by the researcher. The meaning is to learn something about the formulation of statements and about the subjectivity in their political interaction. In the test situation the test persons do divide the collected statements to the matrix with the meaning of modeling their subjective thinking towards the collected statements. Test persons are asked to tell their opinions about the statements, and opinions during dividing the statements. In the end test persons are asked questions regarding the research theme. Test persons receive the statements in the beginning of the test.

In the test situation test persons are asked to do as following:

1. Please read through the statements and arrange them onto three piles initially signifying agreement, disagreement and a neutral position. Abbreviations: IRO = international regional organization; BSR = Baltic Sea Region
2. Please arrange the statements first as a representative of your organization along the scale from -4 (signifying disagreement) to +4 (signifying agreement). 0 implies a neutral position.
3. Please tell your opinions about the statements and regarding your decisions during dividing the statements. The researcher may also ask clarifying questions about your decisions dividing the statements.
4. Please arrange the statements now along your personal view along the scale from -4 (signifying disagreement) to +4 (signifying agreement). 0 implies a neutral position.
5. Please tell your opinions about the statements and regarding your decisions during dividing the statements. The researcher may also ask clarifying questions about your decisions dividing the statements.
6. The researcher makes in the end of the test general questions to you about your work, your experiences and your opinions with and about the international regional organizations of the Baltic Sea Area.

As this is a pilot part of the research interviews, I do kindly ask the test persons' availability for a retest in the later stage of the research. This research is in progress in the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the University of Tampere in Finland. The advisor for the PhD student Mr Marko Mälly is Jean Monnet Professor, Mr Pami Aalto. Kindly thanking already in advance for your valuable support. Contact by e-mail: marko.mally@pajjat-hame.fi

Appendix 4. Condition of instruction in Finnish for the main study

Haastatteluohjeistus

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, millainen rooli Itämeren alueen kansainvälisillä alueellisilla poliittisilla organisaatioilla (KAPO) on monitasoisessa hallintajärjestelmässä suhteessa alueelliseen, kansalliseen ja Euroopan unionin tasoon. Koheesiopolitiikka ja monitasoinen hallintajärjestelmä on valittu konteksteiksi, joissa tutkimusongelmaan liittyviä väittämiä tutkitaan jatkoanalyysia varten. Alueelliset hallintojärjestelmät Itämeren alueella ovat heterogeenisiä. Sen vuoksi tutkimus on rajattu alueisiin ja niiden jäsenyyksiin Itämeren alueen kansainvälisissä alueellisissa poliittisissa organisaatioissa Suomen unitaristisessa ja Saksan federalistisessa valtiojärjestelmässä. Tämä tutkimus on edelleen rajattu organisaatioihin, jotka edustavat alueita, ja joilla on poliittinen toimielin (Saksan osavaltiot ja Suomen maakunnan liitot).

Ohjeistus

Haastattelut nauhoitetaan jatkoanalyysia varten. Kaikkea haastatteluissa kerättävää tietoa käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja vain tutkimustarkoitusta varten. Haastateltuja henkilöitä ei voi tunnistaa yksittäisistä vastauksista. Kaikki haastateltavat henkilöt esiintyvät tutkimuksessa koodeina, joiden henkilöyhteys on vain tutkijan tiedossa.

Haastateltaville annetaan 40 väittämäkorttia haastattelun alussa. Haastateltavilta kysytään heidän subjektiivisia mielipiteitään väittämätöksestä. Tarkoitus on tutkia väittämien muotoilua sekä subjektiivisuutta poliittisessa vuorovaikutuksessa. Haastattelussa haastateltavat jakavat väittämät pakotetulle matriisille, minkä tarkoituksena on tutkia heidän subjektiivisuuttaan väittämätöksestä. Haastateltavia pyydetään kertomaan mielipiteensä väittämistä sekä jakaessaan väittämiä. Haastattelun lopuksi haastateltavilta kysytään tutkimusaiheeseen liittyviä kysymyksiä.

Haastattelutilanteessa haastateltavia pyydetään ystävällisesti toimimaan seuraavasti:

1. Lue väittämät huolellisesti ja jaa ne sen jälkeen kolmeen pinoon sen mukaan, oletko väittämistä samaa mieltä, eri mieltä tai mielipiteesi on neutraali. Väittämässä käytettävä lyhenne KAPO tarkoittaa Itämeren alueen kansainvälisiä alueellisia poliittisia organisaatioita

2. Jaa väittämät alueesi edustajana matriisille asteikolla -5 (täysin eri mieltä) +5 (täysin samaa mieltä). 0 ilmaisee neutraalia mielipidettä.
3. Kerro mielipiteesi väittämistä sekä päätöksistäsi jakaessasi väittämiä. Tutkija voi kysyä myös tarkentavia kysymyksiä haastateltavan jakaessaan väittämiä.
4. Jaa väittämät nyt henkilökohtaisen näkemyksesi pohjalta matriisille asteikolla -5 (täysin eri mieltä) +5 (täysin samaa mieltä). 0 ilmaisee neutraalia mielipidettä.
5. Kerro mielipiteesi väittämistä sekä päätöksistäsi jakaessasi väittämiä. Tutkija voi kysyä myös tarkentavia kysymyksiä haastateltavan jakaessaan väittämiä.
6. Tutkija tekee haastattelun lopuksi yleisiä kysymyksiä liittyen työhösi, kokemuksiisi ja näkemyksiisi liittyen Itämeren alueen kansainvälisiin alueellisiin poliittisiin organisaatioihin.

Tämä tutkimus on käynnissä Tampereen yliopiston johtamiskorkeakoulussa kansainvälisen politiikan oppiaineessa. Filosofian ja yhteiskuntatieteiden maisteri Marko Mällyn väitöskirjaohjaaja on Jean Monnet professori Pami Aalto. Lämpimästi kiittäen jo etukäteen arvokkaasta avustasi ja osallistumisestasi tutkimukseen. Sähköpostiosoite: mally.marko@gmail.com

Appendix 5. Information about the main study in German.

INTERVIEWS IM RAHMEN DER DOKTORARBEIT VON HERRN MÄLLY - Internationale regionale politische Organisationen (IRPO) in Beziehung auf die regionalen, nationalen und europäischen Ebenen in dem Mehrebenensystem der Ostseeregion

Der Status der internationalen regionalen politischen Organisationen (IRPO) in Beziehung auf die regionalen, nationalen und europäischen Ebenen in dem Mehrebenensystem der Ostseeregion ist die zentrale Forschungsfrage in meiner Doktorarbeit. Zwei Kontexte - Kohesionspolitik und Mehrebenensystem - sind gewählt in denen Statements für weiteres Analysieren in Rahmen der Forschungsfrage studiert werden.

Regionale Verwaltungssysteme der Ostseeregion sind sehr heterogen. Deswegen ist diese Forschungsarbeit auf die Regionen in Finnland und Deutschland und ihre Mitgliedschaften in den internationalen regionalen politischen Organisationen begrenzt. Weiter wird die Studie nur auf die internationalen regionalen Organisationen begrenzt, die Regionen mit gewählten politischen Organen repräsentieren (in Finnland Regionalverbände und in Deutschland Bundesländer).

Diese Studie wird in dem Institut für Staatswissenschaft und Internationale Beziehungen an der Universität Tampere in Finnland durchgeführt. Herr Marko Mälly vorbereitet seine Doktorarbeit in der Leitung von Herrn Dr Professor Pami Aalto.

In den Forschungsinterviews sortieren die Testpersonen 40 im Voraus selektierte Statements aus dem Primärmaterial auf einen Matrix. Testpersonen wird ihre subjektive Meinungen über die Statements während den Interviews gefragt und dadurch wird die Bedeutungen der Statements und ihre politische Interaktion studiert und weiteranalysiert. Nach dem Sortieren der Statements wird noch ein kurzes Interview mit Fragen über das Forschungsthema durchgeführt.

Es wird insgesamt 30 Forschungsinterviews gemacht, 10 in den finnischen Regionen, 10 in den norddeutschen Regionen und 10 in den internationalen regionalen politischen Organisationen. Mehrere Interviews sind schon durchgeführt worden, und für ein Interview wird ungefähr drei Stunden benötigt. Das Interview wird mit einer kurzen Pause durchgeführt.

Alle in den Interviews erhaltenen Informationen werden hoch vertraulich verhandelt und die Resultate können nicht auf einzelne Testpersonen zurückgeführt werden.

Ich bedanke mich herzlich bei Ihnen schon im Voraus für Ihre freundliche Unterstützung bei der Vorbereitung meiner Doktorarbeit.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Marko Mälly

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Appendix 6. Selected items in English in the main study

1. (12) I want that IRPOs initiate and promote practical and useful projects.
2. (16) Strong local and regional involvement in the IRPOs gains much wider public participation and support for European co-operation.
3. (19) IRPOs of the Baltic Sea Area need support from as many regions as possible.
4. (46) Private actors in the BSR must play an important role in the implementation process of EU strategies.
5. (48) Task is now through EUSBSR to encourage organizations and networks of the BSR to streamline existing structures in order to strengthen their impact and to avoid double work.

6. (66) I think that IRPOs should review a possible solution for alternative membership in countries where regional structures are undergoing changes and the regional level is disappearing.
7. (67) It is evident that IRPOs create awareness among EU institutions to take better account of territorial specificities when drawing up European policies and legislation.
8. (70) I truly think that IRPOs have significantly changed the position of regions as regards the building of wider Europe and contributed to the creation of transnational and intra-European cooperation.
9. (78) The territorial excellence policy (smart specialization) as a part of the future cohesion policy should apply in all European regions in order to optimize each region's own potentials.
10. (84) The task of the IRPOs is to support a joint strategy on infrastructure and transport covering the entire Baltic Sea Region.
11. (86) There has to be the regional commitment and encouragement to implement measures agreed in the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) in order to reach and maintain good ecological status of the Baltic Sea.
12. (87) It is the task of the IRPOs to raise public awareness of energy and climate change issues in the BSR.
13. (90) I think that it is very difficult task for the IRPOs to find common nominators in the EU cohesion policy.
14. (92) IRPOs are not able to promote regional development objectives of their member regions within EU institutions, national governments and other Baltic Sea organizations
15. (95) Better division of labour in different policy fields should be introduced between national and regional levels.
16. (97) IRPOs should increase their co-operation outside of the BSR and even globally
17. (98) IRPOs should take a role in implementing the EUSBSR
18. (100) In cohesion policy lobbying IRPOs are stronger than regional offices in Brussels.
19. (101) BSR IRPOs tend to have missed an ambitious goal for their work.
20. (102) IRPOs should seek division of labour among their members for acting in sectors where strongest.
21. (103) IRPOs should contribute in abolishing weaknesses of regions and not supporting strengthnesses.
22. (104) National level (e.g. ministries) of the BSR is not interested in the views presented by the IRPOs.
23. (105) Economically strong regions have too much power in the IRPOs.
24. (106) Member regions are unable to find suitable and capable persons to work in IRPOs.
25. (110) My regional politicians discuss regularly in their meetings about the work in the IRPOs

26. (113) My region would be prepared to invest more resources into IRPOs to make their work more efficient.
27. (114) Regions do not have resources to participate in implementing the EUSBSR.
28. (115) It is not possible to include Russian regions into IRPOs as equivalent partners because Russia is not an EU member state.
29. (116) The decision-making in the IRPOs is very much based on few individuals instead of joint thinking of member regions.
30. (118) It is unrealistic to create a MLG system in the BSR.
31. (124) It is crucial to create the best possible relationship and synergy between rural development efforts locally, regionally, nationally and in relation to the EU funded effort (Structural funds programmes and the rural development programmes).
32. (125) The EU Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration has been and must remain a major source of funding for research and innovation in the regions and municipalities of the BSR.
33. (126) The Northern Dimension (ND) offers a special platform for cooperation with the non-EU members of the BSR. The ND activities should complement EUSBSR in order to provide a common approach of all Baltic Sea actors to mutual objectives and challenges.
34. (127) To strengthen the implementation process of the EUSBSR the IRPOs suggest creation of a new model of governance which combines the top-down and bottom-up processes of the MLG. This strategic instrument supports the EUSBSR and creates a catalyst for further development of the region.
35. (131) Cities shall play a crucial role in the process of creation and implementation of the EUSBSR. Their particular strength is the closeness to the inhabitants.
36. (132) From our consultations with other actors during past years – be they intergovernmental, governmental, non-governmental, academic or in the private sector – it has become clear that the CBSS is regarded as one of the leading organizations facilitating cooperation in the BSR. It is important for the CBSS to retain this role and develop it further.
37. (138) Regional and local levels should be strongly involved in the debates of the future regional policy as well as in implementation and administration of the structural funds.
38. (147) Development of tourism is an important field of the CBSS cooperation that promotes the economic development based on the common cultural heritage of the populations.
39. (148) CBSS stated the importance of the development of favorable framework conditions for entrepreneurship and innovation in order to strengthen potential regional business clusters.

40. (149) Particularly concerning territorial cooperation strands, decisions on programmes and projects should be mainly a responsibility of the sub-national levels.

Appendix 7. Selected items in Finnish in the main study

1. (12) Haluan, että KAPOt ideoivat sekä edistävät käytännöllisiä ja hyödyllisiä projekteja.
2. (16) Vahva paikallinen ja alueellinen sitoutuminen KAPOjen toimintaan lisää paljon laajempaa julkista osallistumista ja tukea eurooppalaiselle yhteistyölle.
3. (19) Itämeren alueen KAPOt tarvitsevat mahdollisimman monen alueen tukea.
4. (46) Itämeren alueen yksityisillä toimijoilla täytyy olla tärkeä rooli EU-strategioiden täytäntöönpanoprosessissa.
5. (48) Tehtävänä on nyt EU:n Itämeri-strategian avulla rohkaista Itämeren alueen organisaatioita ja verkostoja virtaviivaistamaan niiden olemassa olevia rakenteita tarkoituksena vahvistaa niiden vaikutusmahdollisuuksia sekä välttää päällekkäistä työtä.
6. (66) Mielestäni KAPOjen tulee tarkastella mahdollisia ratkaisuja vaihtoehtoisista jäsenyyksistä maissa, joissa alueelliset rakenteet muuttuvat ja alueellinen taso on katoamassa.
7. (67) On selvää, että KAPOt luovat tietoisuutta EU:n toimielimissä, jotta niissä voidaan ottaa paremmin huomioon alueelliset erityispiirteet luotaessa eurooppalaista politiikkaa ja lainsäädäntöä.
8. (70) Olen todellakin sitä mieltä, että KAPOt ovat muuttaneet merkittävästi alueiden asemaa, mitä tulee laajentuneen Euroopan rakentamiseen, ja myötävaikuttaneet kansainvälisen ja alueiden välisen yhteistyön luomiseen Euroopassa.
9. (78) Alueellinen huippuosaamisen politiikka (älykäs erikoistuminen) osana tulevaisuuden koheesio politiikkaa tulisi koskea kaikkia eurooppalaisia alueita, jotta voitaisiin optimoida jokaisen alueen oma potentiaali.
10. (84) KAPOjen tehtävänä on tukea koko Itämeren alueen laajuista yhteistä infrastruktuuri- ja liikennestrategiaa.
11. (86) Itämeren toimintaohjelmassa (HELCOM) sovittujen toimenpiteiden toteuttamisessa tulee olla alueellista sitoutumista ja rohkaisua saavuttaaksemme ja ylläpitääksemme Itämeren hyvän ekologisen statuksen.
12. (87) KAPOjen tehtävänä on lisätä julkista tietoisuutta energia- ja ilmastonmuutoskysymyksistä Itämeren alueella.
13. (90) Mielestäni KAPOilla on hyvin vaikea tehtävä löytää yhteisiä nimittäjiä EU:n koheesio politiikassa.
14. (92) KAPOt eivät pysty edistämään jäsenalueidensa aluekehittämisen päämääriä EU:n toimielimissä, kansallisissa hallituksissa ja muissa Itämeren alueen organisaatioissa.

15. (95) Kansallisen ja alueellisen tason välillä tulisi tehdä parempaa työnjakoa eri politiikan lohkoilla.
16. (97) KAPOjen tulisi lisätä yhteistyötä Itämeren alueen ulkopuolella ja jopa maailmanlaajuisesti.
17. (98) KAPOjen tulisi ottaa rooli EU:n Itämeri-strategian täytäntöönpanossa
18. (100) Koheesipolitiikan lobbauksessa KAPOt ovat vahvempia kuin alueiden toimistot Brysselissä.
19. (101) Itämeren alueen KAPOt näyttävät kadottaneen toiminnastaan kunniahimoisen päämäärän.
20. (102) KAPOjen tulisi pyrkiä työnjakoon jäsenalueidensa keskuudessa, jotta ne voisivat toimia osa-alueilla, joissa ne ovat vahvimpia.
21. (103) KAPOjen tulisi myötävaikuttaa heikkouksien poistamiseen alueilta eikä tukea niiden vahvuuksia.
22. (104) Itämeren alueen kansallinen taso (esim. ministeriöt) ei ole kiinnostunut KAPOjen esittämistä näkemyksistä.
23. (105) Taloudellisesti vahvoilla alueilla on liikaa valtaa KAPOissa.
24. (106) Jäsenalueet eivät löydä sopivia ja osaavia henkilöitä toimimaan KAPOissa.
25. (110) Alueeni poliitikot keskustelevat kokouksissaan säännöllisesti KAPOjen työskentelystä.
26. (113) Alueeni olisi valmis investoimaan lisää resursseja KAPOihin niiden toiminnan tehostamiseksi.
27. (114) Alueilla ei ole resursseja osallistua EU:n Itämeri-strategian täytäntöönpanoon.
28. (115) Venäläisiä alueita ei ole mahdollista sisällyttää KAPOihin tasavertaisina kumppaneina, koska Venäjä ei ole EU:n jäsenvaltio.
29. (116) KAPOjen päätöksenteko on pitkälti muutamien yksilöiden käsissä eikä perustu jäsenalueiden yhteisiin näkemyksiin.
30. (118) Ei ole realistista luoda Itämeren alueelle monitasoista hallintajärjestelmää.
31. (124) On todella tärkeää luoda paras mahdollinen yhteys ja synergia maaseudun kehittämistoimien välillä paikallisesti, alueellisesti, kansallisesti ja suhteessa EU-rahoitteisiin toimiin (rakennerahasto-ohjelmat ja maaseudun kehittämisohjelmat).
32. (125) EU:n tieteen ja tutkimuksen puiteohjelma on ollut ja sen täytyy säilyä tutkimuksen ja innovaatioiden rahoituksen päälähteenä Itämeren piirin alueilla ja kunnissa.
33. (126) Pohjoinen ulottuvuus tarjoaa erityisen yhteistyön viitekehyksen Itämeren alueen EU:hun kuulumattomien maiden kanssa. PU-toimenpiteiden tulisi täydentää EU:n Itämeri-strategiaa tarjotakseen kaikkien Itämeren alueen toimijoille yhteisen lähestymistavan keskinäisiin päämääriin ja haasteisiin.

34. (127) EU:n Itämeri-strategian täytäntöönpanoprosessin vahvistamiseksi KAPOt ehdottavat uuden hallintamallin luomista, joka yhdistää monitasoisen hallintajärjestelmän ylhäältä-alas ja alhaalta-ylös -prosessit. Tämä strateginen väline tukee EU:n Itämeristrategiaa ja toimii katalysaattorina alueen kehittymiselle jatkossakin.
35. (131) Kaupungeilla tulee olla keskeinen rooli EU:n Itämeristrategian luomisessa ja täytäntöönpanoprosessissa. Kaupunkien erityinen vahvuus on niiden läheisyys asukkaisiinsa.
36. (132) Konsultaatioidemme perusteella muiden toimijoiden kanssa viime vuosina – olivatpa ne hallitusten välisiä, hallituksia, ei-hallitusten välisiä, akateemisia tai yksityisellä sektorilla – on käynyt selväksi, että Itämeren maiden neuvostoa pidetään yhtenä johtavista organisaatioista Itämeren alueen yhteistyön edistämiseksi. Itämeren maiden neuvostolle on tärkeää säilyttää tämä rooli ja kehittää sitä edelleen.
37. (138) Alue- ja paikallistasojen tulisi olla voimakkaasti sitoutuneena keskusteluihin tulevaisuuden aluepolitiikasta sekä rakennerahastojen hallintoihin ja toimeenpanoon.
38. (147) Matkailun kehittäminen on tärkeä osa Itämeren maiden neuvoston yhteistyötä, mikä edistää talouskehitystä ja perustuu kansojen yhteiseen kulttuuriperintöön.
39. (148) Itämeren maiden neuvosto painottaa suotuisten olosuhteiden kehittämistä yrittäjyydelle ja innovaatioille, jotta potentiaalisia alueellisia liiketoimintaklustereita voidaan vahvistaa.
40. (149) Erityisesti mitä tulee kansainvälisiin alueiden välisiin yhteistyöohjelmiin, päätökset ohjelmista ja projekteista tulisi olla pääosin alue- ja paikallistason vastuulla.

Appendix 8. Selected items in German in the main study

1. (12) Ich will, dass die IRPOs die praktischen und nützlichen Projekte initiieren und befördern.
2. (16) Starke lokale und regionale Verbindung mit der IRPOs vermehrt wesentlich die öffentliche Teilnahme und Unterstützung für die europäische Zusammenarbeit.
3. (19) Die IRPOs brauchen Unterstützung von den möglichst vielen Regionen im Ostseeraum.
4. (46) Die privaten Akteure der Ostseeregion müssen eine wichtige Rolle in dem Implementierungsprozess der EU-Strategien spielen.
5. (48) Die Aufgabe ist jetzt durch die EU-Ostseestrategie die Organisationen und Netzwerke des Ostseeraumes zu ermutigen, ihre gegenwärtigen Strukturen zu vereinfachen. Das Ziel ist ihre Einflussmöglichkeiten zu verstärken und die doppelte Arbeit zu vermeiden.

6. (66) Meiner Meinung nach sollten die IRPOs die möglichen alternativen Mitgliedschaften in den Ostseeländern überlegen, in welchen regionale Strukturen sich verändern und die regionale Ebene abgebaut wird.
7. (67) Es ist klar, dass die IRPOs in den EU Institutionen mehr Bewusstsein bilden. Es ermöglicht, dass in der Gestaltung der europäischen Politik und Gesetzgebung die regionalspezifischen Besonderheiten besser in Hinsicht nehmen können.
8. (70) Ich betone, dass die IRPOs in einer bedeutender Weise den Status der Regionen verändert haben, wenn es um den Aufbau des erweiterten Europas handelt. Die IRPOs haben auch Einfluss auf den Aufbau der transnationalen und interregionalen Zusammenarbeit in Europa ausgeübt.
9. (78) Territorial Excellence Policy (Smart Specialization) als der Teil der zukünftigen Kohesionspolitik sollte in allen europäischen Regionen anwendbar sein, dass die eigenen Potenziale jeder Region optimiert werden könnten.
10. (84) Die Aufgabe der IRPOs ist eine gemeinsame Infrastruktur- und Verkehrsstrategie im Ostseeraum zu unterstützen.
11. (86) In der Implementierung der vereinbarten Massnahmen der Ostseeaktionsplan (HELCOM) muss die Regionalebene besser verbunden werden, dass wir einen guten ökologischen Status der Ostsee erreichen und aufrechterhalten können.
12. (87) Die Aufgabe der IRPOs ist das allgemeine Bewusstsein über die Energie- und Klimaveränderungsfragen in dem Ostseeraum zu verstärken.
13. (90) Meiner Meinung nach ist es für die IRPOs sehr schwierig über die gemeinsamen Nenner im Rahmen der EU-Kohesionspolitik sich zu einigen.
14. (92) Die IRPOs können nicht die regionalen Entwicklungsziele ihrer Mitgliedsregionen in den EU Institutionen, nationalen Ministerien und in anderen Organisationen des Ostseeraumes befördern.
15. (95) In den verschiedenen Politiksektoren zwischen den nationalen und regionalen Ebenen sollte man bessere Arbeitsaufteilung einführen.
16. (97) Die IRPOs sollten Zusammenarbeit ausserhalb des Ostseeraumes und sogar weltweit vermehren.
17. (98) Die IRPOs sollten an der Implementierung der EU-Ostseestrategie teilnehmen.
18. (100) In den Lobbyingtätigkeiten für Kohesionspolitik sind die IRPOs stärker als die regionalen Vertretungen in Brüssel.
19. (101) Es wirkt so, dass die IRPOs im Ostseeraum die ehrgeizige Zielsetzung in ihrer Tätigkeit verloren haben.
20. (102) Die IRPOs sollten die Arbeitsverteilung unter ihren Mitgliedsregionen verbessern, dass die IRPOs in den Sektoren tätig sein könnten, wo die am stärksten sind.
21. (103) Die IRPOs sollten zur Abschaffung der regionalen Schwächen herbeizuführen und nicht deren Stärken zu unterstützen.

22. (104) Die nationale Ebene des Ostseeraumes (z.B. die Ministerien) ist nicht für die Ansichten der IRPOs interessiert.
23. (105) Die ökonomisch starken Regionen haben zu viel Macht in den IRPOs.
24. (106) Die Mitgliedsregionen finden keine passende und sachverständige Personen für die Aufgaben in den IRPOs.
25. (110) Die Politiker meiner Region diskutieren regelmässig in ihren Sitzungen über die Tätigkeiten in der IRPOs
26. (113) Meine Region wäre bereit mehr Ressourcen in die IRPOs zu investieren, um ihre Tätigkeiten effektiver zu machen.
27. (114) Die Regionen haben keine Ressourcen an dem Implementierungsprozess der Ostseestrategie teilzunehmen.
28. (115) Es ist nicht möglich russische Regionen als gleichwertige Partner in den IRPOs zu haben, weil Russland kein EU-Mitgliedstaat ist.
29. (116) Die Entscheidungen in den IRPOs sind oftmals in den Händen einiger einzelnen Politiker und begründen sich nicht auf die kollegiale Meinungsbildung der Mitgliedsregionen.
30. (118) Es ist nicht realistisch einen Mehrebenenverwaltungssystem im Ostseeraum zu verwirklichen.
31. (124) Es ist sehr wichtig ein bestmögliches Verhältnis und Synergie zwischen den Entwicklungsmassnahmen des ländlichen Raums lokal, regional, national und im Verhältnis zur EUfinanzierten Massnahmen zu entwickeln (Strukturfonds und Programme für die Entwicklung des ländlichen Raums)
32. (125) Das EU Rahmenprogramm für Forschung, technologische Entwicklung und Demonstration ist und muss auch in der Zukunft als Hauptquelle für Finanzierung der Forschung und Innovationen in den Gemeinden und Regionen des Ostseeraumes gehalten bleiben.
33. (126) Die Nordische Dimension bietet einen besonderen Zusammenarbeitsrahmen mit den Ostseeländern, die keine EU-Mitglieder sind. Die Massnahmen der ND sollten die EU-Ostseestrategie in der Art und Weise vervollständigen, welches eine allgemeine Annäherungsweise für alle Ostseeakteuren in den gemeinsamen Zielen und Herausforderungen anbieten kann.
34. (127) Zur Stärkung des Implementierungsprozesses der EU-Ostseestrategie schlagen die IRPOs ein neues Verwaltungsmodell vor, welches die top-down und bottom-up Prozesse des Mehrebenenverwaltungssystemes zusammenverbindet. Dieses strategische Modell unterstützt die EU-Ostseestrategie und befördert die Entwicklung des Ostseeraumes auch in der Zukunft.
35. (131) Die Städte müssen eine zentrale Rolle in der Formulierung und Implementierung der EU-Ostseestrategie haben. Die besondere Stärke der Städte ist, dass sie bürgernah sind.

36. (132) Durch unsere Konsultationen mit den anderen Akteuren in den letzten Jahren – in den Organisationen zwischen den Regierungen, Regierungen, NGOs, akademischen oder privaten Organisationen –ist es klar geworden, dass der Ostseerat als eine der führenden Organisationen in der Förderung der Ostseezusammenarbeit gilt. Es ist wichtig für den Ostseerat diese Rolle zu erhalten und weiterentwickeln.
37. (138) Die regionalen und lokalen Ebenen sollten stark an den Diskussionen über die zukünftige Regionalpolitik sowohl als auch der Verwaltung und Implementierung der Strukturfonds teilnehmen.
38. (147) Die Entwicklung des Fremdenverkehrs ist ein wichtiger Sektor der Kooperationstätigkeit des Ostseerates. Es befördert Wirtschaftsentwicklung und begründet sich auf die gemeinsame Kulturerbe der Ostseeländer.
39. (148) Der Ostseerat betont die Wichtigkeit der Entwicklung der vorteilhaften Rahmenverhältnisse für Entrepreneurship und Innovationen, dass die potentiellen regionalen Geschäftskluster verstärkt werden können.
40. (149) Besonders wenn es um die interregionalen Kooperationsprogramme handelt, sollten die regionalen und lokalen Ebenen in erster Linie für die Entscheidungen über die Programme und Projekte verantwortlich sein.

Appendix 9. Questions of the post-sorting interview of the main study

1. Are there in statements certain policy areas or tasks which are missing or IRPOs should be more active? How you would locate these missing items on the Q-sort grid?
2. Which are/have been your tasks in your organization with international regional political organizations of the Baltic Sea Area?
3. How successfully your organization (region) has achieved/achieves the goals set for the work with the IRPOs of the Baltic Sea Area?
4. How successfully the IRPOs have achieved their goals and supported the work of your organization/region (like in the cohesion policy lobbying or other policy areas)?
5. How does your organization see the conditions for international work in the BSR related to regional and national circumstances (Gemeinden, Land und Bund in German Mehrebenensystem)?
6. How does your organization see the future work in these BSR IRPOs? How does your organization see that the work of the IRPOs could be developed?
7. What are your personal opinions and experiences to the work of the BSR IRPOs?