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Inter-Regional Networks in Brussels
Analyzing the Information Exchanges among Regional Offices

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Abstract. What triggers the information exchange among the regional offices in Brussels? To answer this question, we develop a framework based on network theory and present the first large-N quantitative study on EU-level inter-regional networks. Our results show that information exchanges take place predominantly among regions from the same member state. Furthermore, the likelihood of regular information exchanges between two regional offices depends on the resources invested in regional representation, the joint involvement in inter-regional associations, and geographical proximity. In contrast to our expectations, our findings refute the hypotheses that more regional autonomy and more experience in Brussels increase the propensity towards cross-border inter-regional networking, a practice that might potentially contribute to the fragmentation of member state representation.

Keywords. regional interest representation, multi-level governance, social network analysis, exponential random graph models.

Introduction

Regional authorities increasingly mobilize at the EU-level and a large number of them have established their own representation in Brussels. This EU-level representation of regions involves regular and intense contacts with other regions through informal networks and inter-regional associations (Bartolini, 2005; Borrás, 1993; Hooghe, 1995; Tatham, 2008). However, much literature on European regions understands the role of these actors vertically, as through the central government, and the extent to which regions bypass or collaborate with central state agencies is a central concern. The horizontal interaction among regions, such as through inter-regional networks among Brussels-based representations, has received rather limited attention. This is remarkable as the importance of networking in order to gain clout in EU policymaking processes has been highlighted repeatedly (Bomberg and Peterson, 1998; Marks and Hooghe, 1996; Tatham, 2008).

Understanding how regions exchange information in Brussels and the form of these inter-regional networks also has broader relevance. It provides insight into a general puzzle regarding the nature of the European political order, namely the extent to which Europe can be characterized as a governmental arena in which member states still occupy a dominant position (Marks, et al., 1996a; Moravcsik, 1998). The study of regional authorities, and more specifically their involvement in EU-affairs, has played a pivotal role in this debate (Hooghe, 1995,1996; Hooghe and Marks, 1996). One contention in this literature is that the EU-level mobilization of regions can be understood as a multilevel power play between the central state, the sub-state and the European level. As such, regional mobilization could potentially diminish the pivotal position of the member states in the European political order. However, recent research concludes that the regionalization of European states has not hollowed out member state representation and that, instead of bypassing central state executives, sub-state authorities tend to collaborate intensively with central state authorities (Tatham, 2008,2010,2012; see also Beyers and Bursens, 2006; Moore, 2008; Morata, 2010).

Instead of focusing on the vertical interactions among sub-state jurisdictions, central state executives and EU-institutions, this article focuses on the horizontal dimension of territorial lobbying in Brussels, specifically on how representations of regional authorities, or regional offices, build exchange networks with other regional offices. By mapping and explaining network formation among Brussels-based regional representations, we analyze to what extent these inter-regional interactions are shaped by member state embeddedness, functional interdependencies, power-related factors or experiences with day-to-day

policymaking in Brussels.

In the next section, we elaborate our theoretical framework and construct a set of hypotheses concerning the likelihood of information exchanges among regional offices. We then present our research design and dataset from a telephone survey among 127 regional offices. After mapping inter-regional exchange networks, the factors that impact the likelihood of information exchanges are analyzed. Our results indicate substantial variation in the propensity to engage in inter-regional networking beyond national borders. Furthermore, the emergence of information exchanges between two regions is, next to joint member state embeddedness, influenced by resources, the sharing of membership ties in inter-regional associations, and geographical proximity. In contrast to our expectations, the extent of self-rule of a regional authority and experiences in Brussels have no significant impact on cross-border inter-regional networks.

Inter-regional exchange networks in Brussels

Traditionally, much of network theory is based on a presumption of homophily: that ties are more likely to emerge among actors who share some attribute (Coleman, 1958; McPherson et al., 2001). Yet, regional authorities may share various attributes and not all of these attributes are equally important for the creation of inter-regional information exchanges. One important question we seek to answer is which shared features adequately explain tie formation among Brussels-based regional representations. In addition, we submit that similarities between actors will not always have the same impact, particularly if these similarities concern resources or capabilities. To start, information exchanges can serve multiple, and not necessarily mutually exclusive, purposes. For instance, by exchanging information actors can reduce the uncertainty experienced in their environment, yet gaining information and expertise can also serve political objectives and result in political influence. Furthermore, although networks generate benefits, establishing and maintaining networks also requires resources, time and energy (Leifeld and Schneider, 2012). This resource-dependent nature of network formation implies that not all similarities will affect tie formation positively. Suppose, for instance, that two dyads each containing actors with an equal common resource base and which consequently show a high level of similarity. One dyad has two similar, but resource poor actors, while the other dyad has two highly resourceful actors. Then, one can expect that, because of the resource-dependent nature of network formation, more interactions will take place in the latter dyad. Therefore, a dyad where the actors have a high level of similarity, but are resource poor, will, despite their similarities, be constrained in tie formation.

We distinguish three sets of explanatory factors, namely functional interdependencies, political power considerations and contextual factors connected to experiences with day-to-day policymaking practices. First, one goal of regions in establishing an office in Brussels is arguably to enhance their ability to manage the interdependencies that link them with their national governments, other regions and the European institutions. Second, being represented in Brussels can be considered as part of a multilevel power play among different layers of government, whereby the activities of a regional office could also be meant to increase the political leverage of regional governments vis-à-vis their national governments and the European institutions. The regional office could then function as a quasi-embassy, which enables the regional executive to establish direct political relations with other regional authorities and/or with EU institutions. Third, instead of serving specific purposes (such as functional needs or political power), some contextual factors could provide an alternative explanation for inter-regional networking. One can plausibly presume that experiences in a particular context, in this case the Brussels environment, shapes the propensity to establish ties with others. Simply put, the longer and more intensive the exposure, the more expertise and experience one has and the more others are likely to seek that expertise.

Our expectation is that, controlling for other factors, the more the needs of two regions overlap, the higher the chance of regular exchanges. We point at four factors that may affect inter-regional networks: member state embeddedness, structural funding, geographical proximity and policy interests. We start with discussing the importance of being embedded in the same member state, which may necessitate intra-state coordination among regions.

One of the early quantitative analyses of inter-regional networks in Brussels identified national embeddedness as a key explanatory factor for inter-regional networks (Salk, Nielsen, *et al.* 2001). If central state executives still play a significant role in the vertical interactions between the domestic and the EU-level, one would expect that member state attachments still shape exchanges among regional offices. And case-studies indeed show that regional offices of the same member state tend to coordinate their activities (Rowe, 2011). For example, the German *länder* organize monthly meetings, the Dutch provinces are housed in the same building and have their own association, and even in the Spanish case, despite the centripetal nature of the Spanish state, there is evidence of Brussels-based coordination. Increasingly, member state Permanent Representations have specialized staff that aim to coordinate regional involvement in EU-affairs. Such intra-state coordination makes a lot of sense as regions located in the same member state face similar challenges with the implementation of EU regulation, depend on the same central government ministers for Council negotiations and often have similar policy interests. The crowded Brussels context probably also stimulates

intra-state coordination as this saves on transaction costs for European policymakers. For instance, the Commission may prefer listening to a single, coordinated regional position from a member state, rather than to a hundred distinct regional positions.

H1: Belonging to the same member state increases the chance that two regional offices exchange information.

Nonetheless, if only national embeddedness would drive the emergence of inter-regional networks, the interactions among regional offices would basically reproduce domestic inter-governmental relations. This would make establishing a Brussels-based office a somewhat futile enterprise as regional policymakers could equally well meet at the national level and save the costs of sending officials to Brussels where they will mostly meet with regional officials seconded by other regions belonging to the same member state. However, this reasoning misjudges the multiple roles and functions of regional offices such as surveying EU policymaking, monitoring the central government representation, obtaining information on European subsidies, and exchanging policy relevant information with regional authorities from other member states. Furthermore, European policymakers might appreciate the provision of regional input without central governments acting as middle men, or may prefer to interact with functionally based arrangements as this allows them to diminish their dependence on central state executives (Hooghe, 1996). The functional requirements that drive intra-state networks and reinforce the territorial nature of the EU can be contrasted with cross-border networks generated by other functional interdependencies, such as a dependency on EU structural funding, geographical proximity, and an interest in similar policy domains.

First, if two regions gain substantial EU-funds, they will have to interact with the same units in the Commission, are subject to similar evaluation criteria and share an interest in the smooth implementation of regional and structural policies. While some have hypothesized that EU structural and cohesion policies energize regional interest representation (Hooghe, 1996; Marks et al., 1996b), we doubt that a shared dependence on EU-funds will stimulate cross-border information exchanges. As EU-funds have re-distributive implications, regions benefiting from such funds might be less eager to establish cross-border ties, as this may imply the sharing of realized benefits with other regions. Instead of looking outward, regions that depend on substantial EU-funds are more likely to interact with regions from their own member state that are in a similar position and, most importantly, seek the support from the national government that is directly involved in Council decision-making on redistributive policies.

Second, geographical proximity may also foster tie formation. Our first hypothesis

states that regional offices from the same member state are more likely to exchange information because they face similar needs, have comparable policy interests and depend on the same central government. In addition, regional representatives from the same member state often speak the same language, which eases information exchanges. A similar argument can be made for geographically close regions from different member states (see also Bochsler, 2008). Such regions often face comparable cross-border problems, sometimes use the same or a related language, and may feel some cultural affinity. Moreover, the EU actively stimulates such inter-regional collaboration, for instance via its Interreg-program.

Third, irrespective of geographical location or resource dependency on the EU, regional offices may form networks because they share policy interests. One concrete example is agricultural policy, which unites regions that do not necessarily share borders but have a shared interest in agriculture, a large constituency of farmers or produce the same commodities. The joint application for a TEN-T project by two regions that have similar transport interests is another example of inter-regional collective action driven by shared functional needs. Policymakers representing such regions tend to face similar policy challenges and requests from the EU institutions and, therefore, we expect that regional exchanges are more likely to take place among such regions.

H2: The more two regions depend on EU-funding, the lower the chance that offices representing these regions exchange information.

H3: The more geographically proximate two regions, the higher the chance that their offices exchange information.

H4: The more two regions are interested in similar policy areas, the higher the probability that their offices exchange information.

Regions establish a representation in Brussels as they expect that this will increase their political leverage vis-à-vis other regions, the central state or the European institutions. Then, EU-level regional mobilization is seen as a multilevel power play and inter-regional networks are driven by shared institutional or power interests. Here, we distinguish three political factors that could alter the likelihood of tie formation: self-rule, government majorities and regionalism.

First, regions with substantial self-rule are similar in the sense that they have a large policy portfolio, which makes them more visibly represented in Brussels and stimulates them to establish inter-regional collaboration (Donas and Beyers, 2013). As these regions are potentially more affected by implementation problems with EU law, policy information from regions in a similar position is most useful to them. The joint monitoring of specific policy

areas may save considerable resources and help to increase the influence of such regions. Therefore, we expect that cross-border information exchanges are more likely among regions with substantial self-rule. In contrast, regions with lower levels of self-rule will probably spend relatively more resources on coordinating with regions from their own country, for instance, in order to influence the national position. In other words, we expect more cross-border exchanges among regional authorities with much self-rule, but less exchanges if two regions enjoy lower levels of self-rule.

Second, political alignment may influence the chance that close ties emerge between two regions. In political exchange networks actors agree to reveal private, valuable and possibly salient information to each other. We know from interest group research that organized interests establish most information exchanges with like-minded interests and that exchanges go more smoothly among non-competitive actors (Carpenter et al., 2003; Hojnacki 1997; Kollman 1997). Similarly, we expect that regions where similar political parties are in government are more likely to develop close ties because of these shared political beliefs. Besides, information supplied by regions with a like-minded government could be perceived as being more trustworthy and useful.

Third, two regions may be more likely to develop ties if they both have a considerable regionalist political movement with political parties that strive for more political autonomy. The presence of regionalist political parties heats up the autonomy debate within a region, and motivates regional executives to develop their own presence in Brussels (Bauer, 2006; Donas and Beyers, 2013). As regionalist parties have already established their own collaboration in the European Parliament (e.g. European Free Alliance), one can imagine that such cross-border inter-regional collaboration is reproduced in information exchanges among regional offices.

H5: The more two regions exercise self-rule, the higher the chance that offices representing these regions exchange information.

H6: The smaller the political distance between the political leadership in two regions, the more likely that their offices exchange information.

H7: If two regions harbor regionalist parties, the probability that their offices exchange information increases.

A final set of explanatory factors concerns the experience of being present in Brussels. Following Marks and his colleagues (2002), having a Brussels office lowers the transaction costs of informational exchanges and facilitates dense cooperative networks (see also Borrás, 1993). In particular two organizational features help to explain inter-regional tie formation,

more specifically the staff size and the experience on how to proceed in Brussels. The activities of officials at an office closely resemble those of lobbyists, namely to ally with other lobbyists and policy experts. Such activities involve establishing and maintaining networks, which in turn requires time, resources and professional expertise. Therefore, we expect that two regional offices that benefit from a large staff size are more likely to form a tie compared to offices with a smaller staff. Furthermore, as it takes time to learn how to operate in Brussels, we expect that the network formation between two offices is also shaped by the length of time that two offices have co-existed in Brussels.

Another Brussels-based factor that could influence tie-formation is joint membership of inter-regional associations. Over the past decades the growth in regional offices has coincided with the growth of the European interest group population, which means there is more competition for access to policymakers (Berkhout and Lowery, 2008, 2010). Regional authorities have adapted to this development by acting more collectively, for instance through establishing various inter-regional associations. These associations enable regions to coordinate their strategies and exchange information. At this moment, there are more than 60 EU-level inter-regional associations that play an important role in the Brussels lobby circuit (Donas and Beyers, 2013; Tatham, 2008) and whose activities are similar or equivalent to that of functional interest groups (Piattoni, 2010: 250-1). To strengthen their lobby efforts, regional authorities make strategic use of these associations. Furthermore, in many cases regional offices provide the structural logistics for these associations. Therefore, we expect that the more two regions have overlapping formal memberships in the same associations, the more they are inclined to work closely together.

H8: The larger the staff size of two regional offices, the more such offices exchange information.

H9: The longer two regional offices have co-existed in Brussels, the higher the chance that these offices exchange information.

H10: The greater the number of shared formal memberships of inter-regional associations, the more these offices exchange information.

Research design

To test these hypotheses we had to identify the Brussels-based community of regional representations. For this purpose, we pursued a data collection strategy commonly applied in recent large-scale studies on organized interests, namely the systematic mapping of all actors lobbying at a particular venue (Berkhout and Lowery, 2008; Halpin and Jordan, 2012). More concretely, we combined directories published by private organizations with registers created

by European and Brussels institutions (Donas and Beyers, 2013). From this list we selected offices representing regions with the following three features: (1) they were located at the first level below the central government; (2) they were not a de-concentrated administrative unit; and (3) they had an average population of at least 150,000 inhabitants (Hooghe et al., 2010b).ⁱ This led to a set of 180 offices, including 159 liaison offices that represent single regions and 21 partial national associations (n=180) that represent a small group of (mostly neighboring) regions from the same country.

Then, we collected data on the information exchanges among these regional offices through a telephone survey (conducted in the Fall of 2011 and Winter of 2012). We started out with contacting the 180 offices in Brussels; in total, we were able to interview key officials in 127 regional offices. Of the other 53 contacted representations, only 17 could not be interviewed because they refused or did not find a suitable time for an interview. Analysis of the non-response shows that mostly Southern European regions refused to participate, yet we still have a considerable number of responses for regions in these countries.ⁱⁱ For the other 36 regional representations we have indications, through contacts with officials from the same member state (either other regional offices or the national Permanent Representation), that these offices were recently closed down or have substantially decreased their activities, often due to the recent financial crisis which depressed the budgets available for a permanent Brussels-based presence.

One of the key questions in the interviews was an open question into information exchanges with other regional representations:

Now, I would like to ask you some questions about the policy networks you are involved in. Basically, it concerns the networks through which you share and exchange policy relevant information with other significant actors. Could you tell me which are, for your office, the most important Brussels-based regional representations with whom you had regular contact during the past six months?

All the contacts mentioned during the telephone interview were coded into a binary 127x127 adjacency matrix in which a '1' corresponds to regular information exchange between two regions, and '0' that no regular information exchange was identified. Of a total of 16,002 potential edges, 1,127 (or 7.04 percent) were connected and 35% of these ties were reciprocal, which we believe is a decent outcome for an open-ended interview question in a telephone survey. During the same interview, we also enquired into staff size, the year in which the office was established and the policy domains the office monitors. For the latter we created, based on the *Comparative Agenda's Project Codebook*, a list of 18 policy domains.ⁱⁱⁱ

On these 18 domains, closed dummy-questions were asked that resulted in a 127x18 binary affiliation matrix that we transformed into a 127x127 matrix containing counts of policy domains two regional offices claim to monitor closely.

We pursued a similar data collection method for the formal affiliations among inter-regional associations. For this, we coded the membership of 68 inter-regional associations in a 127X68 affiliation network that was then transformed into a 127x127 adjacency matrix that indicates the extensiveness of overlapping membership in trans-regional associations between all possible dyads. If Flanders and Scotland are jointly members of five associations, the cell in the adjacency matrix thus has a value of five. The reliance on EU funding was measured by dependence on support from cohesion and structural funds per capita (period 2007–2013; Eurostat; natural log). Finally, we measured the geographical distance between two regions as the number of regions lying between a dyad of two regions.^{iv}

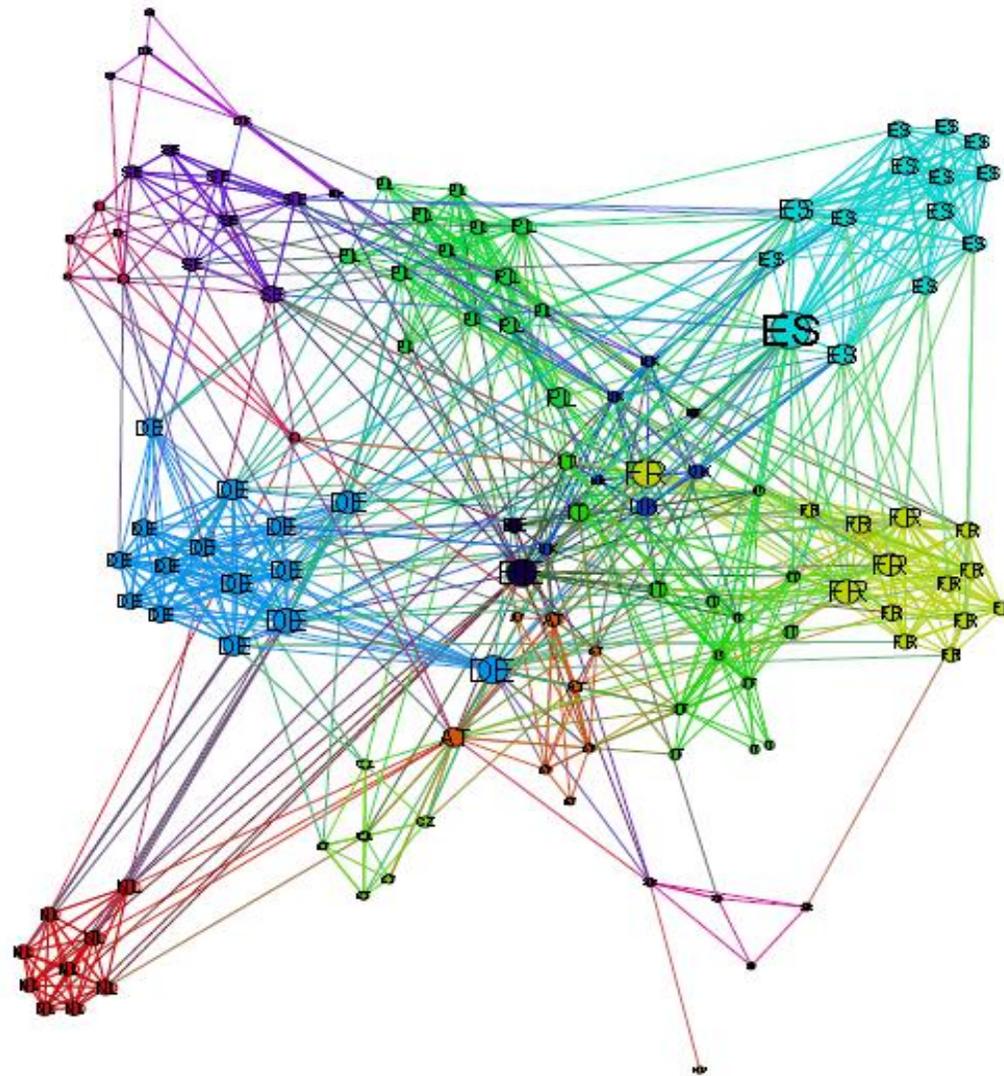
For testing the political hypotheses we collected evidence on the composition of regional executives, or more precisely the parties governing the regions during the period we conducted our fieldwork. For many regions we would have been able to construct, based on the Parties and Election Database^v and the left-right scale of the European Expert Survey (Hooghe et al., 2010a), an index measuring whether a regional executive tends more to the left or more to the right. However, some regions (for instance in Slovakia, Denmark and France) do not have an executive body as a separate institutional venue ('a government'); in these cases the regional parliament delegates executive tasks to a parliamentary committee chaired by a politician of the biggest party (and in some cases these committees consist of all parties). In order to have comparable measures, we therefore used the left-right index for the political party that chaired this executive committee or the regional government (prime minister), which in almost all cases was the largest political party in the region (Hooghe et al., 2010b). We opted for this executive-centered measure of the political center of gravity in a region because the external relations of regions – which includes the decision on whether and how to establish a regional office – are always executive competencies. Our hypothesis on the degree of self-rule – the extent of autonomous authority exercised by the regional executive – is tested with the Regional Authority Index (RAI) developed by Hooghe, et al., (2010b), which is a combination of four four-point items measuring institutional depth, policy scope, fiscal autonomy and representation. The presence of regionalist regional parties that strive for more regional autonomy was measured with a dichotomous variable that indicates whether a region harbors a party that is member or observer of the *European Free Alliance* (EFA), and/or is coded by Massetti (2009) and/or Jolly (2006) as being regionalist.^{vi}

Data analyses

Before testing our hypotheses, we give an explorative account of the network data. Figure 1 presents a visualization of the regular exchanges regional offices reported during the interviews.^{vii} Offices belonging to the same member state were given the same color and the size of the nodes corresponds with the node's centrality, or more precisely the indegree centrality which measures how often an office was named by another office.

This map clearly shows clustering on a country basis, which implies that most exchanges take place between offices representing regions from the same member state. Yet, there are also some other noteworthy observations. For instance, the Belgian (black) and UK regions (dark blue) are more dispersed across the network than other regions, meaning that regions from these countries are less internally focused. This suggests that, even though the focus of most regional offices is strongly on regions from the same member state, there is considerable relative variation in this. Moreover, it seems that the geographical position within a member state matters. For instance, some central and northern French offices (e.g. Ile-de-France, Alsace-Lorraine) are more closely positioned to the German and Belgian offices, while offices representing southern French regions (e.g. Midi-Pyrénées) are more adjacent to the Spanish offices. Similarly, Danish, Finish and Swedish representations are positioned nearby each other (upper left). All this substantiates the expectation that geographical proximity corresponds with a higher likelihood of information exchange. Finally, the size of the nodes shows that the inter-regional network exhibits some center-periphery structure with a set of strongly connected (mostly Spanish, German, Austrian, Belgian and Italian) regions and those with a more peripheral position. The latter consists of offices representing regions from recently admitted Eastern European states (Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), from unitary member states (the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland) and from Southern Europe.

Figure 1. Information Exchange Networks among Regional Offices in Brussels



Index: AU = Austria, BE = Belgium, CZ = Czeck Republic, FR = France, DE = Germany, EI = Ireland, UK = United Kingdom, DK = Denmark, FI = Finland, SE = Sweden, IT = Italy, NL = Netherlands, PL = Poland, SK = Slovakia, HU = Hungary, ES = Spain

This descriptive map demonstrates that there is substantial variation in the propensity with which regional offices seek exchanges with offices from other member states. One way to measure this predisposition is via Krackhardt and Stern's E-I-index (1988: 127–8). This index was developed for networks with multiple types of mutually exclusive groups and measures the extent to which ties external to a particular group dominate over internal ties. In this case, the mutually exclusive groups would be member states. For each regional office we calculated this index by subtracting the number of internal ties from the number of external ties, and dividing this difference by the total number of ties. A value of -1 indicates that all exchanges are with regional offices of the same member state, a value of 0 that there are an equal number of internal and external links and a value of +1 that all exchanges are with offices hailing from other member states.

In addition to the individual index, we can also calculate this index for the whole sample. For the overall exchange network the E-I-index is strongly negative, namely -.663, which confirms that, generally, regional offices prioritize tie-formation with offices from their own member state. Despite this strong internal identification, we also observe substantial variation (see figure 2). About 30% have an E-I-index higher than 0, meaning that they have more external than internal information exchanges. For 33% (n=42 offices), the E-I index lies between -.50 and 0. Although these actors concentrate most of their attention on intra-state exchanges, these offices also establish information exchanges with at least five other regional offices external to their member state. The set of regional offices (38% or 48 offices) with an E-I index lower than -.50 heavily concentrates on regional offices from their home country; in this set no one has more than five external contacts and 80% have just two or fewer external contacts.

Given the fact that establishing and maintaining ties is demanding in terms of resources and that most interactions take place among regions from the same member state, an important question is what leads offices to establish external exchanges on top of their intra-state networks. Regarding the political variables, we expect that, for the reasons outlined above, representations from regions with substantial self-rule or a politicized regionalist movement will be more likely to seek cross-border exchanges. Regarding functional variables, we expect that regions which monitor many policy domains are more actively seeking policy relevant information and therefore have a more outward looking attitude. In addition, we predict that, because of the re-distributive implications, a strong dependence on EU structural and cohesion funds leads to a lower E-I index. Finally, a large staff size, a long presence in Brussels and extensive formal ties through trans-regional associations are

expected to trigger exchanges between regional offices hailing from other countries.

Figure 2. Varying levels of EI-index and the average number of internal and external ties developed by 127 regional offices

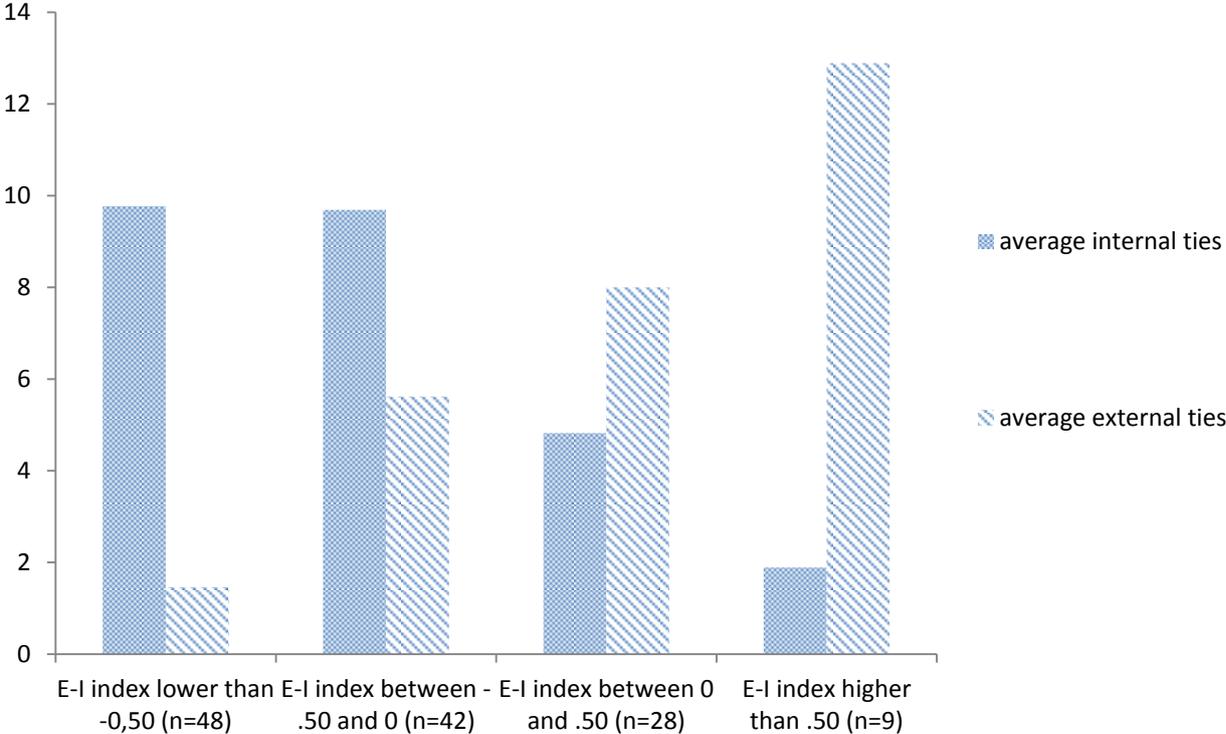


Table 1 presents the results of two OLS-regressions with the E-I index and the overall number of external ties as dependent variables.^{viii} Most of our hypotheses were confirmed, but some findings contradict our expectations. First of all, we need to reject the hypothesis on regionalist parties. Although regions that harbor such parties are more likely to establish an office (Donas and Beyers, 2013), such regions are not significantly more eager to form cross-border inter-regional ties. Second, having a considerable policy portfolio leads regions to focus slightly more on external ties, yet this parameter is not highly significant ($p=.0553$). The strongest predictors of cross-border inter-regional networks are membership in inter-regional associations and staff size. The more staff and the higher the involvement in inter-regional associations, the more externally oriented offices are. The results also give some confirmation of our expectation about the dependence on EU-funds; the higher the funds received, the lower the number of external ties relative to the internal ties.

Two findings contradict our expectations. First, instead of triggering cross-border inter-regional exchanges, the results show that regions with substantial self-rule are relatively more inclined to network with regions from their own country. Interestingly, self-rule has a

negative significant impact on the E-I-index, but a much weaker and statistically not significant impact on the number of external ties. This means that the *absolute* number of external ties does not differ that much for different levels of self-rule, but that the *relative* number of internal ties (compared to external ties) is considerably higher for regions with more self-rule. Second, greater experience in Brussels (measured in number of years operating there) results in a lower number of externally oriented ties and more internally oriented ties. Yet, we need to be careful with this result as some collinearity, or more precisely the strong correlation between staff size and age ($r=.55$, $p<.0001$), may affect the significance tests. There was no substantial and significant bivariate relation between age and the inclination to develop cross-border inter-regional exchanges.^{ix} A model (not reported here) without age resulted in significant parameter estimates for staff size, but a model without staff size leads to a non-significant and negligible effect for age. Therefore, on the basis of this we remain slightly cautious in drawing a firm conclusion on whether and how Brussels-based experiences (in years) affect the propensity to externally oriented tie-formation.

Table 1. Predicting the extensiveness of external networking (OLS regression, N=127)

| | E-I index | | Number of external ties | |
|--------------------------------|---|----------------|--|----------------|
| | β | Standardized b | β | Standardized b |
| Intercept | 0.31 (0.28) p=.2614 | | 6.45 (2.47) p=.0101 | |
| EU funding (logged) | -0.08 (0.04) p=.0037 | -.18 | -0.83 (0.33) p=.0141 | -.19 |
| Policy portfolio | 0.03 (0.01) p=.0553 | .17 | 0.41 (0.13) p=.0018 | .26 |
| Self-rule | -0.06 (0.02) p=.0225 | -.30 | -0.36 (0.20) p=.0806 | -.18 |
| Regionalist parties | 0.11 (0.10) p=.270 | .11 | -0.13 (0.91) p=.8907 | -.01 |
| Staff regional office (logged) | 0.17 (0.06) p=.0038 | .31 | 2.06 (0.52) p<.0001 | .38 |
| Time in Brussels | -0.02 (0.01) p=.0018 | -.31 | -0.21 (0.07) p=.0030 | -.27 |
| Trans-regional associations | .02 (0.01) p=.0080 | .30 | 0.32 (0.09) p<.0001 | .35 |
| Model fit | Adjusted R ² = .26 F = 9.41, p<.0001 (df=7) | | Adjusted R ² = .39 F = 12.45, p<.0001 (df=7) | |

Index: standard errors between brackets

In a next step we modeled the dyadic relations in the squared matrix with 127x127 nodes, from which we observed 1,127 connected edges. Traditionally, researchers used a logistic model to predict the binary outcome variable, but the problem with this approach is that, within social networks, conditional independence cannot be assumed. The assumed dependencies between ties in a network and the potential clustering of these dependencies in specific parts of a network mean that standard errors tend to be severely biased with traditional regression models. Therefore, we use a recently developed technique – exponential random graph modeling (ERGM) – which is a parametric approach that tests for the randomness and hypothesized regularities in observed network data (Robins et al., 2007; Wasserman and Robins, 2005; for applications in political science see Cranmer and Desmarais, 2011; Leifeld and Schneider 2012; Thurner and Binder, 2009).

The starting point of ERGM is that each observed network of a particular size can be understood as one realization of the set of all possible networks with this particular size (ranging from a completely disconnected to a fully connected network). Instead of assuming that observations are sampled from a univariate distribution (as in traditional regression models), ERGM presumes that network data are a realization of a multivariate distribution in which the value of one edge depends on the values of neighboring edges. The standard ERGM takes the following form:

$$\Pr(Y = y) = \left(\frac{1}{k}\right) \exp\{\sum_A \eta_A g_A(y)\}$$

where (1) k is a normalizing constant which ensures a proper probability distribution (constraining the probabilities to sum to 1), (2) \sum_A refers to a summation over all configurations, (3) η_A parameters refer to the coefficients of the network-effects or dependencies within the observed network, and (4) $g_A(y)$ represent covariate terms and their affiliated hypotheses. This equation describes a general probability exponential distribution of graphs, a distribution which presumes that edges are dependent upon each other. This means that estimates of η_A are statistically significant if two edges are conditionally dependent. In addition to tests for the structural or self-organizing features of a network, more in particular how actors are locally embedded (for instance, the propensity of triads to close), ERGM can estimate how covariates – such as the similarities among actors and/or specific actor attributes – affect network choices. In other words, the overall shape of a network is driven by the process that connects individual nodes, a process that may depend on some shared actor attribute, or $g_A(y)$ and the dynamics of the interaction process itself, or η_A . The resulting coefficients can be interpreted in a similar way as logistic regression coefficients, namely the

log-odds of establishing a tie are conditional on some actor attribute or a specific network statistic.

Table 2 presents the results of five models we tested with the *statnet* package for R with Markov Chain Monte Carlo Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MCMC MLE) (Handcock et al., 2003). All these models (except model I) control systematically for potential dependencies and structural tendencies in the network, because inferences about edge and nodal covariates are more robust if we systematically control for endogenous factors in the formation of networks (Lusher et al., 2013: 27). More concretely, we added three network variables. First, we controlled for the possibility that tie-formation is simply a result of some actors being very active in seeking to interact with other actors; to control for this we added the outdegree to our models. Second, one might expect that the initiation of an exchange by actor *a* with *b* tends to be reciprocated by *b* seeking exchanges with *a*; to control for this we added a statistic capturing the inclination of edges to be reciprocated. Third, ties between two actors are possibly established because these actors share several other partners with whom they exchange information. This propensity to close triads is based on the notion that some actors may put a higher trust in those with whom their exchange partners already collaborate. In order to test for this, we added a variable capturing the geometrically weighted edgewise shared partner distribution (GWESP with a $\theta=.10$) (Lusher et al., 2013: 69-76). Our results show that there are considerable endogenous network effects, as activity (outdegree), the confirmation of ties (reciprocity) and ‘the friend of my friend is my friend’-logic (transitivity) play a significant role in establishing exchange relations (model III, IV and V).

Table 2. Explaining dyadic exchange networks among regional offices (ERG-models; Null Model: LL=-4073.43, AIC=8155, BIC=8163)

| | Model I: Country Model | | Model II: Endogenous Effects | | Model III: Endogenous + Country Effects | | Model IV: Endogenous + Country + Nodal Covariates + Interaction Effect | | Model V: Endogenous + Country + Dyadic Covariates Effects | |
|--|--|---------|--|---------|---|---------|--|---------|---|---------|
| | β (se) | P value | B (se) | P value | β (se) | P value | β (se) | P value | β (se) | P value |
| Edge | -3.675 (.053) | <.001 | -5.432 (0.259) | <.001 | -6.125 (0.308) | <.001 | -6.378 (1.289) | <.001 | -4.746 (3.483) | 0.173 |
| Outdegree | | | 0.071 (0.007) | <.001 | 0.147 (0.014) | <.001 | 0.149 (0.020) | <.001 | 0.164 (.016) | <.001 |
| Reciprocity | | | 2.720 (0.106) | <.001 | 0.991 (0.150) | <.001 | 0.888 (0.421) | <.001 | 0.972 (0.287) | <.001 |
| GWESP ($\theta=.10$) | | | 1.352 (0.184) | <.001 | 0.821 (0.125) | <.001 | 0.770 (0.117) | <.001 | 0.699 (.163) | <.001 |
| Originate from the same member-state | 4.150 (0.079) | <.001 | | | 3.527 (0.132) | <.001 | 3.674 (0.302) | <.001 | 3.411 (0.186) | <.001 |
| <i>NODAL COVARIATES</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Regionalist party (dummy variable) | | | | | | | -0.542 (1.029) | .578 | | |
| Staff size regional offices (logged) | | | | | | | 0.641 (0.074) | <.001 | 1.052 (0.124) | <.001 |
| Experience in Brussels (n years) | | | | | | | -0.008 (0.008) | .295 | | |
| RAI (Hooghe, Marks, et al. 2010) | | | | | | | -0.072 (0.108) | .502 | | |
| <i>DYADIC COVARIATES</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Dependence on EU funding | | | | | | | | | -0.076 (.155) | .623 |
| Geographical distance | | | | | | | | | -0.020 (0.007) | .013 |
| Similar policy interests | | | | | | | | | 0.021 (0.016) | .007 |
| Level of self-rule | | | | | | | | | -0.060 (0.066) | .369 |
| Distance political leadership (left right) | | | | | | | | | -0.055 (0.022) | .014 |
| Regionalist parties | | | | | | | | | 0.1045 (0.284) | .713 |
| Joint staff size in dyad (logged) | | | | | | | | | -0.563 (0.150) | <.001 |
| Joint time in Brussels | | | | | | | | | -0.012 (0.009) | .171 |
| Overlap in membership of trans-regional associations | | | | | | | | | 0.093 (0.047) | .047 |
| Interaction regionalist party*self-rule | | | | | | | 0.055 (0.105) | .603 | | |
| | LL-ratio=-2533.885, df=2 AIC=5072, BIC=5087 | | LL-ratio=-3163.925, df=4 AIC=6336, BIC=6367 | | LL-ratio=-2176.71, df=5 AIC=4363, BIC=4401 | | LL-ratio=-2123.63, df=10 AIC=4267, BIC=4344 | | LL-ratio=-2067.06, df=15 AIC=4164, BIC=4279 | |

Before we test the effect of dyadic covariates, we controlled for whether tie-formation could be the result of nodal attributes. For instance, it might be that more experience, self-rule, resources, regionalist movements or an interaction among self-rule and regionalist parties makes some offices more attractive to interact with. Basically, this analysis (Model IV) shows that, of all the nodal covariates, only staff resources had a significant positive effect, meaning that the more staff employed, the more an office will be approached by other offices. Next, we included this nodal covariate in Model V with the dyadic covariates testing our key hypotheses.

Our first conclusion is that all hypotheses regarding the political variables need to be rejected, or qualified. The political color of the regional executive has a significant effect on inter-regional tie formation, but the observed signs point to a direction opposite of what was expected. Or, offices representing a regional government that is more to the right are more, and not less, likely to have exchanges with offices that represent regional executives of a different political leaning. Furthermore, the coefficient for self-rule also points in the opposite direction to what we expected, namely edges with more self-rule seem to be less well connected, although this effect is statistically not significant. Thus, one cannot conclude that offices representing a region with much self-rule are more likely to interact with other strongly autonomous regions. Finally, the effect for regionalist parties is statistically not significant, meaning that ties are not more (or less) likely to be initiated between two regions that exhibit strong regionalist tendencies.

Contrary to our findings with regard to political considerations, we find more support for the functional hypotheses. As we expected, we do not observe a significant impact of a dependence on EU-funding, meaning that two regions receiving substantial EU subsidies are not more likely to be aligned in day-to-day exchanges. What matters most in tie formation is geographical proximity. The larger the geographical distance, the lower the likelihood that regional offices will regularly exchange information. Holding other factors constant, each additional region lying geographically between a dyad of two regions decreases the odds of establishing a tie with 2%.

Model V also demonstrates that two regional offices that monitor similar policy areas are more likely to exchange information. Apparently, exchanges and contacts with close neighbors are considerably more important than political concerns; regions with much self-rule are often geographically close to cross-border regions that enjoy much less self-rule (for instance, Picardie-France, with low self-rule, is close to Wallonia-Belgium, with much self-rule). In addition, when an office seeks exchanges outside its own country, it is more likely to do so with a border-region with lower self-rule, but with which it possibly shares some specific policy interest.

Some Brussels-based factors are relevant to tie formation, especially staff resources

and membership in inter-regional associations, as both these factors remain significant in model V. To begin with, regional offices with a substantial staff size are much more contacted (see the positive effect of the nodal covariate in model IV), which shows that staff resources are important for tie formation. Yet, this does not mean that well-resourced offices coalesce primarily with other well-resourced offices. The negative dyadic covariate indicates the opposite, namely edges with two well-resourced offices are less well connected than edges with two weakly staffed offices. The combination of the positive effect for the nodal covariate and negative effect for the edge covariate illustrate some center-periphery pattern in tie formation. On average, weakly staffed offices are less invited for exchanges and most offices invest in exchanges with strongly staffed offices. However, this mechanism does not mean that strongly staffed offices, who get much attention from others, coalesce a lot. On the contrary, we observe that especially edges among weakly staffed offices show a considerable chance to be connected. Next, although Brussels-based factors such as staff resources matter, we have no evidence in support of experience. Offices with a long presence in Brussels are not more likely to seek exchanges among each other. In addition, the results show that shared membership in inter-regional associations increases the likelihood of policy exchanges among two regional offices, which demonstrates that an established formal associational infrastructure lowers transaction costs and fosters informal exchanges among regional offices.

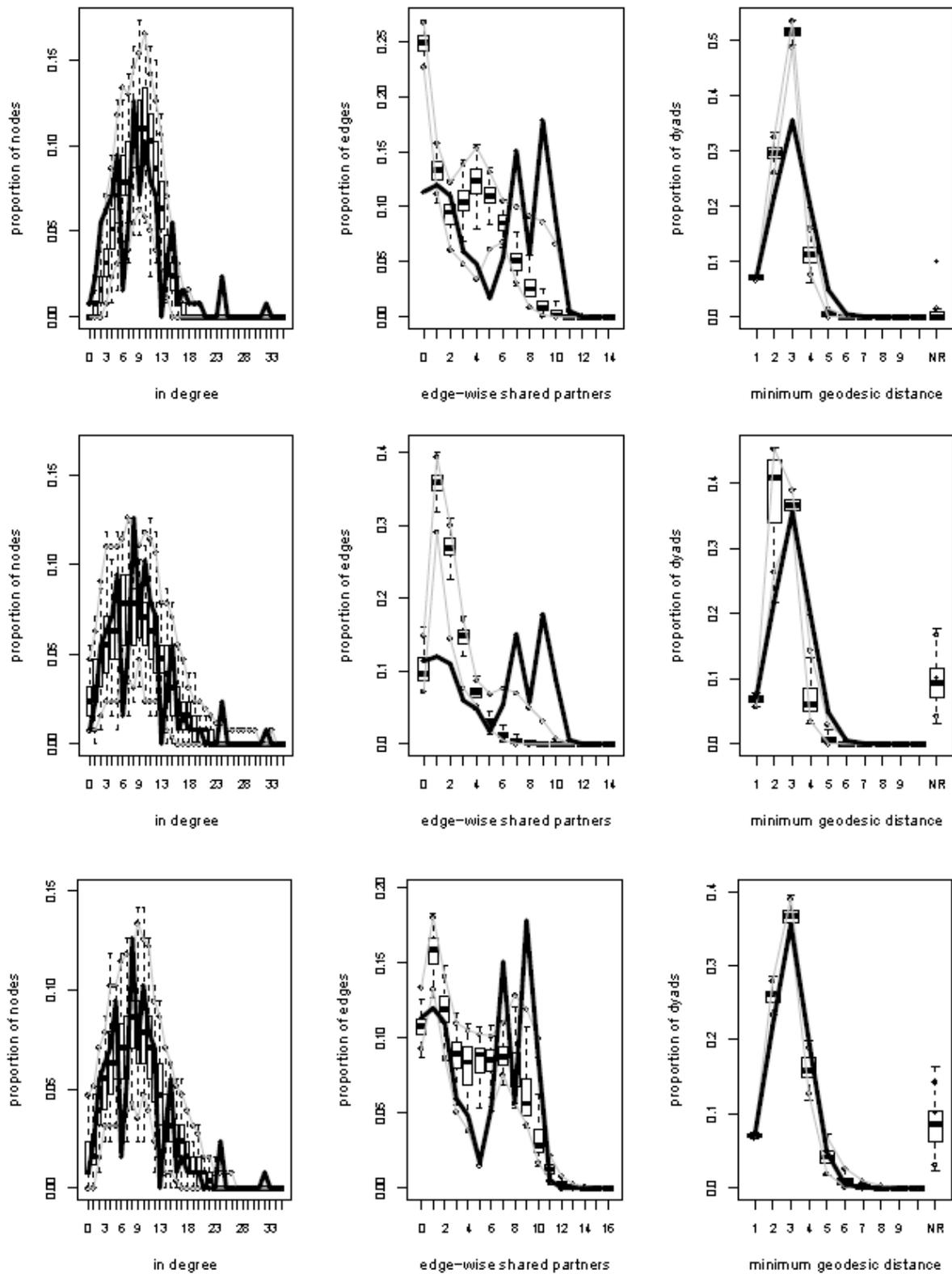
Finally, the strongest and most robust predictor for a connected dyad is whether or not two regions hail from the same member state. We observed strong and significant coefficients in all models. For instance, a comparison of the parsimonious model I with the intercept-only model demonstrates that just adding this single parameter leads to a tremendous increase of the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC). Adding the same variable to a network-model (moving from model II to model III) also resulted in a substantially improved fit. For instance, considering model I, the likelihood that two regions from the same member state regularly exchange information is 61%, compared to only 2% if the two regions are from different member states.¹⁰ No other variable has such a considerable impact on the overall fit of our models. In order to further corroborate the importance of this variable, we take a closer look at how evidence on national embeddedness affects the overall model fit.

First, one might argue that, as reciprocity and transitivity are considerably higher in intra-state exchanges (respectively 48 and 65%) compared to extra-state exchanges (respectively 13 and 4%), both these network-statistics and the member-state factor virtually measure the same underlying group effect. Therefore, the network-statistics might model the data adequately. However, when comparing model I (only member-state), II (only network-statistics) and III (both network and member-state covariate), we observe that the AIC and the BIC for models with the member-state variable (I and III) are considerably better compared to

a model with only network-statistics (II). Interestingly, a parsimonious model with only the member-state factor and no network-statistics (I) generates a much better fit than a model with only network-statistics (II). Yet, the fact that the GWESP statistic remains highly significant in all models shows that, in addition to a member-state effect, there is a significant chance that connected offices share a third partner, which shows that regional offices tend to put considerable confidence (for instance, in their cross-border interactions) in those with whom their exchange partners interact.

Second, in order to assess how well our models represent three network statistics, namely indegree, edge-wise shared partners and minimum geodesic distance, we simulated 100 networks with the estimated parameters. Figure 3 presents the Goodness-of-Fit Plots for Model I, II and V. The plots show that the distribution of the edge-wise shared partners – that is, the general propensity to act in small groups – has a bimodal distribution, implying that some areas of the network are highly cohesive while other areas are only loosely connected. Generally, we observe most discrepancy between simulated and observed network statistics for the edge-wise shared parameters, in particular at lower levels of partner sharing. Interestingly, it is this network feature that is difficult to model without information on country origin. Model II, with only network-statistics, shows a very large discrepancy between simulated and observed data, especially for edge-wise shared partners and geodesic distance. Although Model I, with only the member-state covariate, is not our best fitting model, its fit is, with just one covariate, considerably better than the more elaborate Model II, which is the worst fitting model. Finally, Model V – with both member-state, network statistics and dyadic covariates – gives the most adequate representation of the data. Basically, the main thrust is that one cannot understand Brussels-based exchanges among regional offices without considering member-state embeddedness.

Figure 3. Goodness-of-Fit Plots: Model I (Upper), Model II (Middle) and Model V (Lower)



Index: Black line represents the observed network statistics. The boxplots show the distribution across the 100 simulated networks and the soft-lines the 95% confidence intervals.

Conclusion

Our objective was to analyze which factors increase the likelihood of information exchanges among Brussels-based regional offices. Although regions are increasingly active in EU policymaking, our analysis demonstrates that this regional presence has not necessarily hollowed out or fragmented member state representation. Basically, this corroborates earlier research that found little evidence of bypassing behavior by highly autonomous regions, yet observed an overall propensity to develop cooperative and supportive interactions with other domestic actors (see Tatham, 2008, 2010). By presenting a detailed analysis of the horizontal dimension of territorial lobbying, we add some important insights to this literature. Basically, we conclude that the Brussels world of territorial lobbying consists of two spheres, one dominant sphere of intra-state interactions and a smaller, but significant, sphere of inter-regional exchanges.

Our most important finding is that member state embeddedness is by far the strongest predictor for inter-regional networking. We expected such a relationship, of course, but we did not expect such a strong and profound inward-looking propensity, especially among regions with a high level of self-rule. This propensity implies that increased regional mobilization does not necessarily contribute to a fragmentation of member state representation. Rather than jeopardizing member state representation, it appears as if regional mobilization can be highly complementary to the overall representation of a member state.

One might expect that the similarities among strongly autonomous regions – for instance, in terms of being affected by EU-law – foster EU-level mobilization and cross-border cooperation. To some degree this is indeed what happens. In previous work, we demonstrated that especially autonomous regions are eager to establish their own representation and that they are more likely to be members of inter-regional associations (Donas and Beyers, 2013). Therefore, we expected an outward-looking propensity among these regional offices with regards to their Brussels-based networks. However, our analyses contradict this. Regions with substantial self-rule mostly interact with offices that represent regions from their own country. Inter-regional exchanges are not driven by political alignments or similarities in terms of political autonomy. Instead, exchanges with geographically close neighbors and regions with a similar policy interest are much more important. Finally, when regional offices seek exchanges with regions from other member states, they do not take into account the self-rule of these regions, they exchange with regions where other political parties are in power, and they tend to interact much more strongly with regions that belong to the same inter-regional associations. The latter finding is important as it corroborates the relevance of an existing formal associational infrastructure that lowers transaction costs and eases the emergence of informal information exchanges among regional offices.

To conclude, it is doubtful whether cross-border inter-regional networks are inspired by a quest for more self-rule, the bypassing of national governments, or the preservation of political autonomy. While the dependence of highly autonomous regions on EU-legislative outcomes could be argued to stimulate independent lobbying practices, we submit the opposite. It is precisely their dependence on EU policies that explains an inward-looking propensity among regions with high levels of self-rule. The fact that EU legislation needs to be agreed upon in the Council makes such regions highly dependent on well-prepared national policy positions, for which they greatly depend on the national government and other regions from their member state.

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Notes

ⁱ For various reasons we use a threshold of an average population of at least 150,000 inhabitants for one subnational level within a country. First, without this threshold we would have to include the lowest level of

countries such as Cyprus, Slovenia or Luxembourg. As a result, small villages and communes would vastly outnumber larger regions, counties, provinces or cities in our sample. Second, the 150,000 threshold is the same as the one Hooghe et al., use (2010b); data on self-rule, shared-rule and economic indicators are only available for jurisdictions of this size. A detailed overview with all variables, datasets and syntax is available via the online appendix.

ⁱⁱ For instance, the Southern European countries count for 13 of the 17 missings (Spain n=1; France n=8; Italy n=4), but fortunately we have a considerable number of responses for these three countries (Spain n=14; France n=14; Italy n=13). Because of budget cuts two Greek, two Spanish, three Italian and six UK offices closed. Furthermore, five Czech, one Lithuanian, five Romanian, two Polish, five Slovakian, and five Hungarian offices were (temporarily) closed.

ⁱⁱⁱ For the codebook see <http://www.comparativeagendas.info/>. The list of domains included 1) agriculture, 2) art, entertainment, culture, 3) banking, assurance and financial Services, 4) community development and housing issue, 5) education, 6) energy, 7) environment, 8) fisheries, 9) foreign policies and development cooperation, 10) governance, public administration, 11) health, 12) labor market policies, 13) macro-economics, tax and fiscal politics, 14) manufacturing, 15) research and development, 16) social affairs, 17) structural and regional funds, 18) transport.

^{iv} For this, we used the European NUTS-map, which is available through the EU Publication Office (map number QG301042ENC, see www.bookshop.europa.eu).

^v See <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/>.

^{vi} In order to determine whether a region harbors a regionalist party we build upon three overlapping lists. We use the lists of Massetti (2009) and Jolly (2005) who conducted a comprehensive study of West-European regionalist parties. However, in order to get a sense of Eastern European regionalist parties we added the members and observers of the EFA. Obviously, not all regionalist parties are member of EFA. Yet, we are not coding parties, but whether or not a region harbors one or more regionalist parties. In many cases when there is one regionalist EFA-party, there is a regionalist party competitor that is not part of EFA. We simply code a region as having a regionalist party, irrespective of whether this party has MPs or MEPs elected or not (as the number of elected officials is strongly affected by the electoral system).

^{vii} Figure 1 was created with Gephi 0.8.2 using the force-based algorithm Atlas, with the main principle that linked nodes are plotted adjacent to each other and non-linked nodes are pushed apart. We developed similar visualizations with other software using Gower Metric Scaling and Multidimensional Scaling with largely similar results. Yet, because Gephi 0.8.2 resulted in a better visual result, we opted for this solution (Bastian et al., 2009; Noack, 2007; see also www.gephi.org).

^{viii} Note that the first dependent variable is bounded by -1 and 1, while the second is bounded by 0 and 126 (the maximum number of nodes one can supply information to). To ensure that predicted values are within these boundaries, one could apply a logit transformation of the first dependent variable or to run a count model for the second variable. We tested the same models with a count and fractional logit model, but as the results are virtually identical to the traditional OLS-models, we report the latter results.

^{ix} The bivariate correlation with the E-I index is -.10 ($p=.2802$) and with the number of external ties .06 ($p=.5329$).

^x The log-odds of an edge among two offices from the same member-state is $-3.675+4.15=4.75$, compared to -3.675 for the exchanges between member-state (Model I). The corresponding probabilities are $\exp(\beta)/(1+\exp(\beta))$, or, in percentages, 2% and 62%.