Faculty of Social Sciences
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EU CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: STAKEHOLDERS' MOBILISATION AND FUNDING ACQUISITION

Thesis submitted for the degree of doctor of Social Sciences: Political Science at the University of Antwerp to be defended by Marsida BANDILLI

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Preface

Dear reader,

I invite you to learn about my research, "EU Cross-Border Cooperation: Stakeholders' Mobilisation and Funding Acquisition". This book was written to meet the requirements of the doctoral program at the University of Antwerp. I conducted the research and wrote the thesis (full-time and remotely) between 2013 and 2024.

This project began with European funding, specifically through the JoinEU-SEE IV scholarship, as part of the Erasmus Mundus program. My research journey was difficult and took longer than expected, but it was also magnificent. All credit goes to Prof. Dr. Peter Bursens, my supervisor, who trusted me and pushed me to go further in my research. Special thanks to Prof. Petra Meier and Prof. Dr. Kristof Steyvers, who brought new perspectives and improved the quality of this research.

I would like to thank the Interreg Vlaanderen-Nederland office, whose collaboration provided the empirical focus for this project. I am also grateful to the interview respondents in my surveys and to Jan-Hendrik Van Sligtenhorst for his contribution to data collection.

A big thank you to my colleagues from the Politics & Public Governance (PPG) department, formerly ACIM (Antwerp Centre for Institutions and Multilevel Politics), for our exchanges, new ideas, and continued cooperation. Thanks to all those around me who encouraged, complimented, and applauded me throughout this journey: Aydin, Iskander, Frederik, Inger, Sarah, Kirsten, and many others—thank you for the wonderful moments we shared.

This adventure would never have been possible without the support of what is most precious in my life: my family. To my father, Koli, to whom I dedicate all my achievements—I am so proud to be your daughter. To my mother, Zoica, who continues to give me strength and hope. To my brother, Arben, and my sister, Klaudia, who have been with me through joy and sorrow. And to my little niece, Emi, and my nephew, Arbor, who fill me with laughter and joy.

Thanks to my life mentor, Prof. Assoc. Dr. Ervin Demo, for the wonderful lessons he taught me.

Cher lecteur, chère lectrice,

Je vous invite à prendre connaissance de ma recherche « EU Cross-Border Cooperation: Stakeholders' Mobilisation and Funding Acquisition ». Ce livre a été écrit pour répondre aux exigences du programme de doctorat de l'Université d'Anvers. J'ai effectué la recherche et la rédaction de la thèse (à temps plein et à distance) pendant 2013 – 2024.

Ce projet a été débuté dans le cadre d'un financement européen, plus précisément grâce à la bourse d'études JoinEU-SEE IV, dans le cadre d'Erasmus Mundus. Mon parcours de la recherche était difficile et a duré plus longtemps que prévu, mais ce parcours a été aussi magnifique. Tous les mérites vont à Prof. Dr. Peter Bursens, mon superviseur, qui m'a fait confiance et qui m'a poussée d'aller toujours plus loin dans la recherche. Remerciements particuliers à Prof. Petra Meier et Prof. Dr. Kristof Steyvers qui ont apporté de nouvelles perspectives, et qui ont amélioré la qualité de cette recherche.

Je tiens à remercier le bureau de Interreg Vlaanderen-Nederland dont la collaboration a donné l'accent empirique à ce projet. Je suis également reconnaissante envers le répondant des entretiens de mes enquêtes et à Jan-Hendrik Van Sligtenhorst pour la contribution à la collecte de données.

Un grand merci à mes collègues du département Politics & Public Governance (PPG), ancient ACIM (Antwerp Centre for Institutions and Multilevel Politics) pour nos échanges, pour les nouvelles idées et la coopération continue. Merci à tous ceux alentour de moi qui m'ont encouragée, complimentée et applaudi dans ce voyage : Aydin, Iskander, Frederik, Inger, Sarah, Kirsten, et bien d'autres : merci pour ces beaux moments partagés.

Cette aventure ne serait jamais possible sans le soutien de ce qui est le plus précieux dans ma vie : ma famille. A mon père Koli, à qui je dédie tous mes accomplissements. Je suis si fière d'être ta fille. À ma mère Zoica, qui continue à me donner de la force et de l'espoir. À mon frère Arben et à ma sœur Klaudia qui m'ont accompagnée dans la joie et dans la tristesse, et à ma petite nièce Emi et à mon neveu Arbor qui me remplissent de rire et de la joie.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Setting the Scene

In a bustling EU environment humming constantly with stakeholders trying to make their positions heard at the EU institutional corridors, there existed an initiative called EU Funding. This initiative was not just about funding; it was also about ground-breaking projects that revolutionise cross-border regions. Traditional EU funding was contributing to significantly making a difference at supporting businesses and companies at the EU Member State level, while cross-border funding delved into regional solutions – drawing from the cross-border cooperation nature to create sustainable solutions.

Recognising that some issues could only be addressed through joint efforts, stakeholders envisioned a cross-border cooperation that could tackle an issue, like sustainability but also foster the collaboration between two communities. As the dialogues unfold, one stakeholder takes the initiative for a project idea, shares the idea with another stakeholder and asks the EU Funding authorities for assistance with the project application. Slowly but steadily, trust began to replace scepticism, and a shared vision emerged – to engage companies in border regions to incorporate corporate social responsibility in their activities. The cross-border cooperation project “Sustainability Just Do It” was born.

Fuelled by the belief that accessing European Union (EU) funding requires the understanding of the complex landscape of the EU funding, this thesis endeavours to address crucial inquiries confronting stakeholders in pursuit of EU funding. Specifically, it seeks to answer a fundamental question: Am I selected to receive funding through the EU cross-border cooperation action?

Provided with a list of stakeholders/ project proposals for the EU cross-border cooperation action, I expand the knowledge to how, in addition to aligning your project proposal with the EU funding scheme priorities and objectives, it becomes also important to have the right financial boost, to form partnerships with other stakeholders, to communicate with the decision-makers throughout the process and moreover to open the doors to potential future collaborations.

The Flanders-Netherlands case of cross-border cooperation offers a rich and complex ground for critical and theoretical reflection. At first glance, this collaboration might seem like a relatively straightforward example of cross-border governance, given the absence of language barriers, shared historical and cultural ties, and geographic proximity. These factors create a context where cooperation appears almost inevitable. However, a deeper theoretical reflection reveals that this case is not representative of most cross-border

interactions within the European Union, where language, cultural, economic, and political differences often pose significant barriers.

Theoretically, this case could be viewed through the lens of "most-likely" case selection, where the preconditions for cooperation are particularly favorable, suggesting that if collaboration can succeed here, it should succeed elsewhere with similar or fewer impediments. However, this introduces a significant limitation: the case does not fully account for the challenges of cross-border cooperation in regions where these favorable conditions are absent. As a result, the Flanders-Netherlands case may not provide generalisable insights into the broader landscape of EU cross-border cooperation, where tensions and disparities are more pronounced.

Moreover, from a governance and institutional perspective, the case highlights how EU frameworks like Interreg might serve as facilitators of cooperation but are not always the primary driving force. The Flanders-Netherlands region, particularly through the Benelux framework, has historically engaged in cooperation even in the absence of formal EU initiatives. This raises critical questions about the role and added value of EU instruments in contexts where pre-existing conditions already support cross-border governance. The case challenges the notion that EU integration uniformly enhances cross-border collaboration, suggesting that in highly developed, integrated regions, the EU's role may be more symbolic or supplementary than essential.

Additionally, the Flanders-Netherlands region is characterised by a high level of economic development, in contrast to many other border regions in Europe, where disparities in infrastructure, governance capacity, and economic conditions complicate cooperation. This underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of cross-border cooperation, one that takes into account the varying socio-economic and political contexts across Europe. The lessons drawn from this case must therefore be applied with caution when attempting to derive broader conclusions about the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation initiatives under the EU framework.

In sum, while the Flanders-Netherlands case offers valuable insights into the dynamics of cross-border cooperation, it also highlights the importance of contextualising these findings within the broader European landscape. Theoretical reflections on this case must consider both the favorable conditions that make cooperation likely and the limitations these conditions impose on the generalisability of the case to other, more complex border regions.

In the end, every successful funding story of cross-border cooperation becomes a beacon of inspiration for other aspiring stakeholders aiming to tap into the EU financial schemes. The cross-border cooperation project stories are also stories about how to catalyse a positive change in the local community, solidifying the main ideas from this manuscript in a burgeoning EU funding landscape.

1.2 The European Union Scene

Stakeholders are essential contributors to policy-making processes, particularly within the EU. A diverse array of stakeholders, such as civil society organisations, trade unions, academic institutions, businesses, media outlets, and citizens participate in EU affairs. Their involvement significantly influences the formulation of policies, legislation and decision-making procedures through lobbying and advocacy efforts (Heersink, 2023; Mahoney and Baumgartner, 2008). These stakeholders engage throughout all stages of the policy-making processes, seeking to shape its dynamics and outcomes (Mahoney & Baumgartner, 2008).

A broad spectrum of stakeholders actively engages and exert influence across various levels and subjects within the decision-making processes of the EU. The European Commission's White Paper underscores the significance of the Commission's relationship with interest groups, encompassing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others. It is evident that stakeholders have consistently held a pivotal role in EU decision-making processes. Moreover, EU institutions, including the Commission rely on stakeholders for technical information and expertise. To facilitate this exchange, the Commission maintains close relationships, and conducts structured dialogues with stakeholders, especially when diverse perspectives are essential. This approach is tailored to fostering interaction with stakeholders such as business leaders, trade unions, interest groups and non-governmental organisations. Additionally, the regional representation offices established in Brussels scene play a crucial role as liaison points between the EU's central institutions and the regional/ local governments in each member state (Christiansen & Piattoni, 2004).

The involvement of stakeholders with the EU is pivotal for its governance, aiming to foster a more inclusive and democratic decision-making process. This symbiotic relationship has proven mutually beneficial for both the European Commission and stakeholders, aligning with the needs and priorities of each party. On the one hand, the European Commission leverages this engagement in order to access technical expertise, thereby enhancing its capacity to craft robust and competitive policies. Conversely, stakeholders capitalise on their interactions with the European Commission to exert influence on policies and address pertinent issues, thereby creating a platform for active participation (Stevens & De Bruycker, 2020; Christiansen & Piattoni, 2004).

Collaborations between public sector entities, such as government agencies and authorities, and private sector companies have emerged as significant ventures (Van Ham & Koppenjan 2001). Within the realm of EU decision-making, scholars have extensively examined various facets, including its institutions, actors and procedures. A prominent theme in EU decision-making literature revolves around the role and influence of actors in decision-making processes (Binderkrantz et al., 2015). Research in this field investigates the impact and participation of diverse actors in shaping policy outcomes (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2015). These studies delve into how actors endeavour to mold policy outcomes, with a particular focus on lobbying within the EU context. Furthermore, they

scrutinise the allocation of resources among stakeholders and analyse the factors driving this distribution (Orach et al., 2017; Dür & Mateo, 2013).

As the EU undergoes continual evolution due to new policies and developments, the literature on decision-making likewise evolves, reflecting changes in the Union's structure and its interactions with stakeholders. This dissertation centres on understanding and elucidating EU decision-making dynamics through the lens of stakeholders. By examining stakeholders' direct involvement with EU funding schemes, I aim to uncover mobilisation patterns, identify factors enabling access to such funding and anticipate potential challenges that may impede stakeholder engagement with these schemes. My research focuses on territorial cooperation targeting border regions, with the goal of promoting integration and reducing disparities between adjacent areas. Additionally, I delve into the formal institutional framework of Interreg Flanders-Netherlands, which facilitates stakeholder involvement in this cross-border cooperation *initiative*.

Cross-border cooperation is a significant phenomenon in Europe, where numerous actors spanning EU borders collaborate on diverse issues through cross-border programs and initiatives. The Interreg program stands out as a pivotal funding instrument of the EU's Cohesion Policy, which aims to foster cohesion and balanced development across all EU regions. While Interreg primarily targets reducing disparities between regions and enhancing territorial cohesion, this research focuses specifically on the involvement of stakeholders in project proposal calls. By focusing on the mobilisation of stakeholders who apply for project proposals, the collaborations among stakeholders for joint project proposal applications, as well as the attainment of EU funding access, this dissertation's impact is crucial for comprehending stakeholders' involvement to EU funding initiatives.

In this dissertation, my primary objective is to investigate the dynamics surrounding stakeholders' application for project proposals and to elucidate factors contributing to their access to funding. The main research question for the research could be formulated as: "*How do stakeholders collaborate to secure funding for cross-border projects that target economic development, social promotion, and environmental protection and what factors influence their success in obtaining EU funding?*". The selection of the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands program as a case study is highly appropriate for addressing the main research question. This particular program serves as an exemplary model of EU-funded cross-border cooperation, with a long-standing history and a diverse range of projects that encompass various sectors and stakeholder types. The Flanders-Netherlands region is characterized by significant economic, cultural, and administrative interactions, providing a rich context for examining the dynamics of stakeholder involvement and collaboration. Additionally, the availability of comprehensive data on past and ongoing projects within this program facilitates a detailed analysis of factors contributing to funding success. The well-documented processes and outcomes of the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands initiatives offer valuable insights into the mechanisms of stakeholder mobilisation, network formation, and strategic behavior, making it an ideal case to explore the determinants of successful funding acquisition in EU cross-border cooperation programs.

To achieve this, I formulated three research questions, which are briefly outlined here.

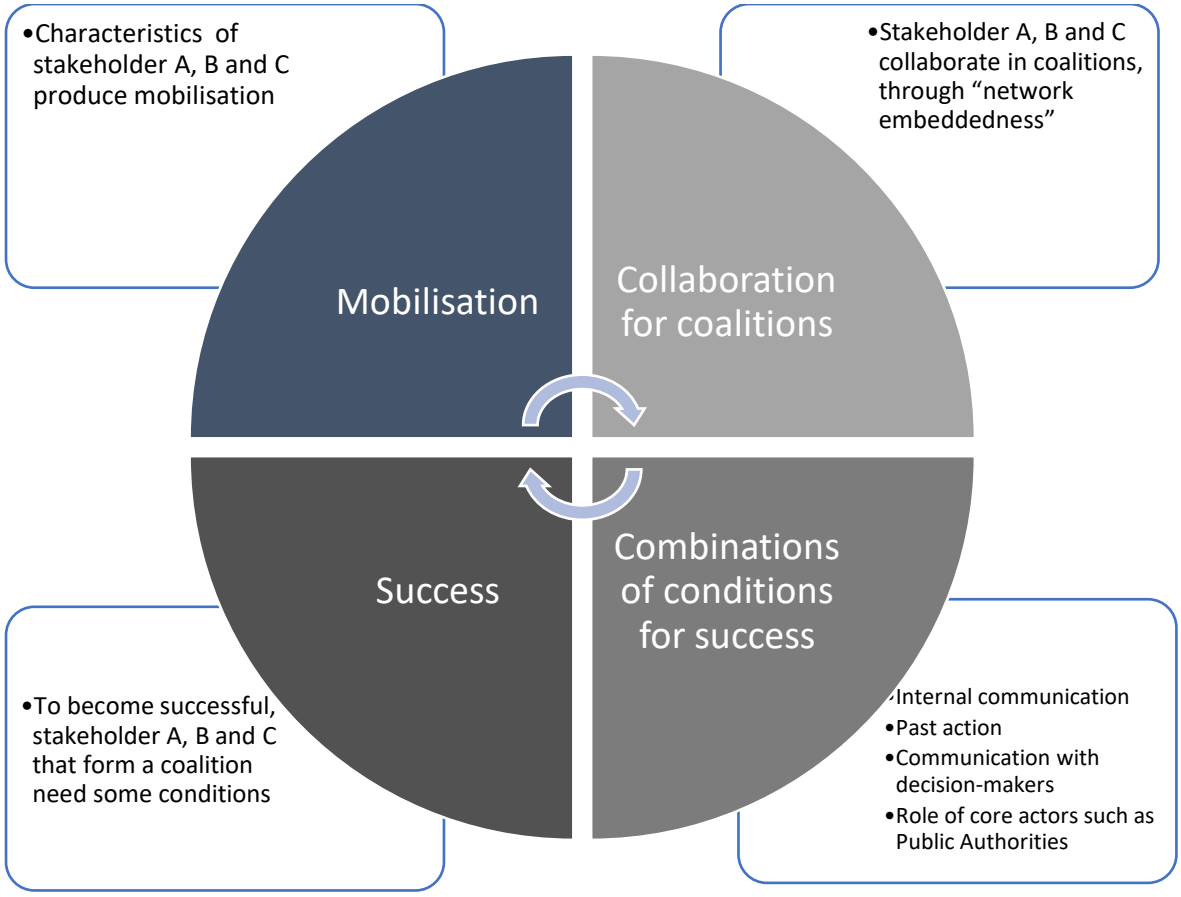
Despite extensive research on the outcomes and impacts of EU cross-border cooperation projects, there is a notable gap regarding the specific strategies and processes that stakeholders use to successfully secure funding. Existing studies often focus on the broader effects of funded projects, but there is limited understanding of the best practices and challenges faced by stakeholders during the proposal development, submission phases and access to EU funding. This thesis aims to fill this gap by examining the intricate dynamics of stakeholder engagement and collaboration in the context of EU cross-border cooperation project proposals.

The first research question, addressed in chapter 4, delves into the mobilisation characteristics of stakeholders involved in Interreg Flanders-Netherlands. The second research question, addressed in chapter 5, explores the collaborative relationships among stakeholders who jointly apply for project proposals through coalitions. Lastly, the third research question, addressed in chapter 6, seeks to identify the primarily factors facilitating stakeholders' access to EU funding.

The data utilised for this research is drawn from project applications submitted to Interreg Flanders-Netherlands between 2007 and 2013. Further details regarding the data are provided in chapter 3.

The main concepts employed in this dissertation are depicted in Graph 1, offering a visual overview of the key elements under investigation.

Graph 1. The main concepts used in this dissertation.



This section delves into the exploration of the key concepts that are fundamental to this thesis.

1.3 The core underlying concepts

Stakeholders

The conventional definition of stakeholders, as articulated by Freeman (1984), characterizes them as *"any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of some major strategic goals"*. Stakeholders are perceived as dynamic groups and organisations that operate based on their vested interests. This conceptualisation underscores the outcomes resulting from stakeholders' actions. Expanding on this notion, Freeman, Wicks & Parmar (2004) and Freeman & Mcvea (2001) emphasise that stakeholders play a vital role in the survival and success of these goals.

Cross-border Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation denotes collaborative endeavours between different regions or countries that share a common border or are in proximity to one another (Lepik & Krigul, 2009). A defining feature of cross-border cooperation is its reliance on financial resources to

support initiatives spanning borders. These funds may originate from national governments, regional authorities, and the EU, particularly in the case of EU borders. European Regional Development Funds, one of the primary European regional development funds, finance cross-border cooperation projects under the Interreg framework.

EU funds

EU funds are constructed as an interstate transfer mechanism aimed at disbursing payments to regions while fostering market integration (Bartolini, 2005). This definition emphasises EU funding as a mechanism primarily geared towards promoting economic and social cohesion by mitigating disparities among regions within the EU (Bartolini, 2005). In this thesis, the concept of EU funding is employed within the framework of the support that the EU extends to enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion across European regions.

Mobilisation

Mobilisation for resources entails the systematic gathering and deployment of financial or other assets to accomplish specific objectives, such as funding a project or advocating for a cause. This process often involves soliciting funds from various sources, including EU funds. Mobilisation typically progresses through several stages, including planning and identifying the resources and assets necessary for successful project implementation or initiative support. Developing a resource mobilisation strategy is integral to comprehending this process. Key financial resources considered vital by stakeholders include grants, loans or other funding sources, along with the identification of human resources possessing the requisite skills and expertise (della Porta & Diani, 2006). Acquiring new resources necessitates stakeholders' engagement with governments, foundations, universities and other financial institutions that provide resources (Zald, 2017).

Coalition

Coalitions denote collaborative partnerships or alliances formed by various stakeholders, including governments, organisations, businesses, or communities, to collectively pursue funding opportunities from the EU. These coalitions unite to leverage a combined pool of expertise, resources, and influence, thereby enhancing their prospects of securing EU funding (Cairney, 2013). In the context of cross-border cooperation, coalitions refer to collaborations between public authorities and private companies aimed at addressing societal challenges or developing innovative solutions aligned with EU funding programs. When establishing a coalition, it is imperative for stakeholders to seek EU funding opportunities alongside other resourceful partners. Collaborations between businesses and public authorities are essential to garnering consideration for funding.

Success

In this dissertation, the concept of stakeholders' success is closely intertwined with their access to EU funds. Accessing EU funding is gauged by the receipt of financial support from the EU for a project proposal that aligns with the EU's priorities. It is crucial to acknowledge that EU funding opportunities can be highly competitive, and not all proposals ultimately secure funding (Orach et al., 2017). Therefore, thoroughly assessing stakeholders' success hinges on the actions and strategies they employ concerning the particular EU funding program or EU policy under consideration. Success is contingent upon stakeholders' adeptness in navigating the intricacies of the funding process and effectively aligning their proposals with EU objectives.

1.4 Structure and approach of this thesis

Understanding that the EU offers a plethora of funding programs spanning diverse sectors like research, innovation, regional development, education, and environment, necessitated a strategic selection process. Identifying the EU funding program with a cross-border cooperation dimension entailed prioritising initiatives fostering collaboration between neighbouring countries, particularly Belgium and the Netherlands.

This thesis delves into the crucial facets of stakeholders' engagement with EU funds dedicated to cross-border cooperation, elucidating how collaboration during the proposal phase can facilitate access to EU funding. Given that cross-border projects target areas such as economic development, social promotion, and environmental protection, this research explores how stakeholders collaborate to address mutual challenges through project proposal applications. While the thesis acknowledges the broader EU Cohesion Policy's objectives of promoting economic and social cohesion among member states and regions, its primary focus is on stakeholders' alignment with specific EU financing mechanisms for cross-border cooperation. A significant emphasis is placed on Interreg cross-border cooperation between Flanders and the Netherlands, encompassing project proposal calls spanning from 2007 to 2013.

Below is a general outline of the chapters featured in this thesis:

Chapter 2 serves as the literature review, presenting a synthesis of existing scholarly works, research studies and pertinent theories relevant to the research topic. Several key theoretical frameworks have informed this study:

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT): This theory guides the understanding of the dynamics of competition for funding resources. It elucidates how organisations strategically manoeuvre to secure resources crucial for their operations and survival.

Multilevel Governance Theory (MGT): This framework acknowledges the intricate interactions and collaborations among different levels of governmental authorities and

private actors, such as local, regional, national, and European institutions, in their pursuit of EU funds. It sheds light on the complexities of governance structures within the EU context.

Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF): The ACF offers insights into the dynamics and interactions among actors within coalitions. By examining how various stakeholders form alliances and pursue common goals, this framework provides a nuanced understanding of coalition dynamics (Weible & Sabatier, 2018; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014).

The importance of *core* actors in shaping coalitions, and their potential influence on the outcomes of EU funding project applications is duly acknowledged. Furthermore, various aspects of EU lobbying literature are extensively utilised within the institutional and decision-making context of the EU. Common themes and topics addressed in EU lobbying literature, including direct lobbying (such as contacts and meetings with policymakers), and indirect lobbying (such as media campaigns), are instrumental in shaping this thesis.

In addition to providing an overview to these theories and the current state of knowledge, this research also identifies gaps that it aims to address. In the review of the RDT, the focus lies on assessing how stakeholders strategically navigate an environment where resources are becoming increasingly scarce. This thesis demonstrates that establishing coalitions through meaningful collaborations enables less resourceful stakeholders to align with larger actors capable for providing higher levels of resources.

Expanding on this, through the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Weible & Sabatier, 2018; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014), the study delves into how actors share beliefs and coordinate their actions when collaborating on projects.

Furthermore, the cross-border cooperation programs offer countries and regions the opportunity to enhance knowledge exchange and strengthen people-to-people ties in border regions. This suggests that multiple actors operating at various levels and regions are driven not only by their aims to influence EU policy-making but also to gain access to EU funding. While the literature has long recognised the influence of organised interests on European politics (Allern et al., 2021; Klüver, 2013), the thesis argues that one of the most crucial activities for stakeholders is their mobilisation for EU funding schemes.

This chapter delves into the characteristics of the mobilised actors operating at local, regional, national, and European levels. It also explores other characteristic features linked to their sector of activity and their public and private functions.

Chapter 3 introduces the research strategy and methodology employed to address the three research questions posed in this dissertation. Given the nature of this research project, a mixed-methods approach incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data and methods was utilised.

The mixed-methods approach allowed for the collection, analysis and integration of quantitative data to elucidate the characteristics of stakeholders' mobilisation. The main mobilisation hypothesis was tested using data obtained from the coding of stakeholders' websites. Additionally, qualitative data collected through interviews provided a comprehensive understanding of collaboration dynamics and factors contributing to EU funding access.

The questionnaire utilised in the interviews was constructed based on related-issue variables, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. To select interview participants, a sampling based on convenience sampling was employed from the overall project proposal population dataset.

By employing a mixed-methods research design, this study was able to achieve both breadth and depth in understanding the phenomena under study, including mobilisation, coalitions, and success. This approach facilitated a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

Chapter 4 delves into an in-depth exploration of stakeholder mobilisation, particularly within the context of cross-border cooperation programs. This chapter delves into the dynamics of MLG and RDT in shaping stakeholders' mobilisation strategies.

With the advent of EU-funded programs aimed at fostering cross-border cooperation, the landscape of stakeholder participation in these programs has evolved. Consequently, one would anticipate a more heterogeneous form of mobilisation, characterised by diversity in stakeholders' size, level of activity, and other dimensions.

The empirical analysis in this chapter draws from a dataset comprising project proposal applications seeking access to EU funding. The empirical findings reveal that stakeholders' mobilisation patterns are more diverse than previously assumed. Beyond a substantial presence of business interests, there exists considerable diversity among local, national and sub-national stakeholders. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates the involvement of a diverse groups of actors across economic and social sectors in cross-border cooperation programs.

In essence, chapter 4 expands our understanding of stakeholder mobilisation within cross-border cooperation programs, shedding light on the varied composition and dynamics of mobilised stakeholders operating in these initiatives.

Chapter 5 is an essential contribution to our understanding of how stakeholders build coalitions. It offers a comprehensive examination of how actors collaborate and create unique patterns of collaboration that tackle shared issues of interest. By exploring frequent collaborations among stakeholders addressing common interests, this chapter paints a vivid picture of collaboration ties while highlighting core collaborations.

The Social Network Analysis (SNA) method is applied to visually present a node-and-edge graph that clearly indicates the close shared ties among actors for project applications. This has produced a compelling network of stakeholders that collaborate for project proposal applications, while focusing on the core collaborations between them. The chapter provides a profound insight into the individual position and the role of the public authorities in these collaborations.

The results speak to the recognition of a shared identity among members of a coalition, leading to a sense of unity and solidarity. The visual representation of the collaboration ties between stakeholders sheds light on the importance of frequent collaboration and the resulting benefits. The findings further underscore the importance of a shared identity among coalition members, fostering unity and solidarity among stakeholders.

In essence, chapter 5 provides valuable insights into the dynamics of stakeholders' collaboration, shedding light on core collaborations and shared ties among actors within the network of cross-border cooperation initiatives.

Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors that determine how stakeholders can gain access to EU funding. The objective of this chapter was to test and expand the application of the EU lobbying literature to explaining EU funding access. While previous investigations have explored the main tactics and strategies employed by stakeholders to gain access to the EU policies and legislative processes, this chapter offers new insights into the tactics and strategies facilitating access to EU funding.

The research methodology for this chapter involved qualitative interviews with a selection of stakeholders from the main database. The findings from these interviews were analysed using the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method to identify the configurations of conditions that lead to success in acquiring EU funding. The results of the empirical analysis demonstrate that effective communication, collaboration with core actors in coalitions, and internal communication with actors are the most significant factors in the acquisition of financial support from EU funding programs.

This research has far-reaching implications for stakeholders seeking access to EU funding. By applying the QCA method, I have identified the tactics and strategies that are most likely to lead to success in accessing EU funding. My findings emphasise the importance of effective communication and collaboration with key actors in coalitions to increase the likelihood of obtaining financial support from EU funding programs. This research provides an important contribution to the EU lobbying literature and can guide stakeholders in navigating the complex EU funding landscape.

Chapter 7 serves as a pivotal section of this thesis, consolidating the key findings, insights, and implications of the research conducted throughout the study. In this chapter, I provide a summary of the main research questions addressed, the methodology employed to answer

these questions, and the primary outcomes of the study. Additionally, I offer recommendations for future research and policy, considering the practical applications of the research and the choices made based on identified limitations.

The chapter underscores the significance of the insights derived from data analysis, highlighting their academic and practical implications for both scholars and practitioners in the field. It represents the culmination of the study, synthesising the research journey and its contributions to advancing understanding in the domain of stakeholders' involvement in EU funding programs and cross-border cooperation initiatives.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 The importance of the study

This chapter underscores the significance of the research topic within the content of the specific research questions addressed in the thesis. Mobilisation for EU funding is a multifaceted process involving various organisations and governmental bodies actively seeking financial resources from EU funding programmes. Upon identifying a viable opportunity, stakeholders collaborate do develop a project idea, culminating in the preparation of a detailed project proposal outlining objectives, activities, budget and added value.

An illustrative example of this process is the project titled '*Sustainability just do it*'. Spearheaded by POM West-Vlaanderen and developed with the support from the Province of Zeeland and POM Oost Vlaanderen, this project aimed to promote sustainable Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) events through the creation of a cross-border Environ-meter. This project exemplifies successful cross-border cooperation, effectively integrating CSR into the business strategies of SMEs and companies in the border region.

The mobilisation for EU funding typically occurs when stakeholders collaborate to apply for a project proposal under specific calls for proposals. This collaborative approach enables stakeholders to devise more effective and comprehensive solutions to complex challenges, a phenomenon well-documented in the literature (Faludi, 2009). Moreover, within the EU, various tools and initiatives have been established to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion (Dühr et al., 2010). This concerted effort fosters closer cooperation and enhances connections to achieve territorial cohesion within the EU.

In this distinctive institutional framework of the EU, stakeholders have the opportunity to actively share their concerns and perspectives. EU institutions routinely engage stakeholders by seeking their input on matters relevant to their interests. Through an intricate system of public consultation, the EU provides stakeholders with a platform to contribute to the policymaking process. This robust system has facilitated the active participation of numerous business and trade associations in the Brussels lobbying arena over the years. enabling them to make valuable and impactful contributions to EU policies and regulations (Aspinwall & Greenwood, 2013).

Policies aimed at regional development have been instrumental in addressing disparities between regions, a longstanding focus of EU regional policy (Vanthillo & Verhetsel, 2012). The European Commission's White Paper on European Governance (2001) has underscored the importance of greater involvement of sub-national government actors and citizens in this endeavour. This shift towards a *'new paradigm'* of stakeholder participation has

catalysed novel forms of mobilisation, enabling a broader range of stakeholders, including institutions, central governments, regions, cities, and civil society to participate in EU initiatives[1].

Throughout the six decades of EU integration, the Union has established various mechanisms, including funding provisions, to support interregional and cross-border cooperation. Stakeholder participation is considered crucial for the success of such cooperation initiatives. Much of this participation is characterised as an exchange relationship, wherein EU funding is allocated to groups that promote the European identity (Mahoney & Beckstrand, 2011).

The importance of information dissemination and citizen support in lobbying efforts has been widely recognised (Klüver, 2013). Bouwen (2002) argued that organised interests seeking access to EU institutions must provide goods demanded by these institutions in order to gain access. These arguments align with the notion that successful lobbying efforts entail meeting the needs and expectations of EU institutions.

The success within the complex framework of EU institutions is often evaluated based on the exchange relationship established between decision-makers and stakeholders. EU cross-border cooperation programmes aimed at reducing disparities between border regions have been implemented to address regional inequalities. This dissertation primarily focuses on the trajectory of stakeholders within this context, specifically examining their mobilisation, collaboration patterns and factors contributing to their access to funding, using data from stakeholders who submitted projects for the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands (2007 – 2013) project application call. The overarching research question guiding this thesis is: *How do stakeholders collaborate to secure funding for cross-border projects that target economic development, social promotion, and environmental protection and what factors influence their success in obtaining EU funding?*

This question aims to uncover the processes, strategies, and challenges involved in stakeholder collaboration during the development and submission of project proposals within the framework of EU cross-border cooperation initiatives. By addressing this question, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of effective collaboration and the factors that contribute to successful funding applications.

The thesis addresses three key research questions that are essential to understanding stakeholders' involvement in EU cross-border cooperation initiatives under the Flanders-Netherlands Interreg programme. The first research question is: *What are the features of stakeholders that mobilise for EU cross-border cooperation programmes?* This question

[1] See White Paper of the European Commission: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Al10109

examines the characteristics of stakeholders mobilising for EU cross-border cooperation programmes. Drawing on RDT, and the work of Pfeffer and Salanick (2011), it explores how organisations manage environmental interdependence and uncertainty. Using a dataset of stakeholders involved in the Flanders-Netherlands cross-border cooperation programme, the thesis illustrates how stakeholders strategically allocate and utilise their resources to maximise their effectiveness.

The second research question is: *Are stakeholders who share the same organisational identity more likely to collaborate with each other for project proposals within the cross-border cooperation programme?* The second research question examines whether stakeholders with the same organisational identity are more likely to collaborate for project proposals within the cross-border cooperation programme. Drawing on ACF theory (Weible & Sabatier, 2018), the thesis analyses the belief systems of coalitions within policy subsystems. By integrating the SNA findings of core stakeholders with their *core beliefs*, the contribution offers empirical evidence of the closeness between stakeholders. This dissertation emphasises the importance of organisational identity in determining collaboration patterns among stakeholders.

The third research question is: *What explains project funding success, and more in particular what is the role and impact of specific stakeholders in this success process?* The third research question investigates the factors influencing project funding success, with a particular focus on the role and impact of specific stakeholders in the process. This question draws from both interest groups literature and cross-border cooperation literature. To address this, the thesis examines the tactics and strategies used by interest groups when engaging with decision-makers. Factors such as frequent internal communication among coalition members, communication with decision-making bodies, participation of public authorities in coalitions, and past collaborations with the same actors are considered crucial in understanding project funding success.

The subsequent section explores a detailed definition of the stakeholders' concept and their primary involvement in public policy-making processes.

2.2 Identifying stakeholders' involvement in public policy-making: the stakeholder's contribution

The main question that prevails in the literature is: who are stakeholders? The concept of stakeholders has evolved over time, leading to various definitions and academic debates. Initially introduced in the early 1980s, stakeholders are generally understood as individuals, organisations, or activists directly affected by an entity's decisions, policies, or operations (Freeman, 2004). These stakeholders typically have a vested interest in an initiative, project or policy, and their actions can influence or be influenced by the organisation's objectives.

In another definition, stakeholders encompass "*any group of people, organised or unorganised who share a common interest or stake issues or systems; organised at any level or position in society, from global, national and regional*" (Grimble & Wellard, 1997). Freeman (2004) clarifies "…*stakeholder's actions can affect or are affected by the achievements of the organisation's objectives*". Stakeholders "*make their actual stakes known… or might be influenced by, or are potentially influencers of some organisation whether this influence is perceived or known*" (Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003). Savage et al., (1991) elaborate that: "*stakeholders have an interest in the actions of an organisation, as they can influence its decision-making processes*". Bache and Flinders (2004) add that stakeholders "*have the interest to participate in various governance processes. For instance: private business, voluntary associations, organised interests, or single-issue pressure groups*". In a nutshell, the concept of stakeholders still remains fluid but focuses on the intrinsic added value that stakeholders bring to policy-making processes.

Despite the growing recognition of stakeholders' importance in policymaking, there remains a lack of consensus on the precise definition of the stakeholder concept (Freeman et al., 2004). However, stakeholders play critical roles, with some being considered key stakeholders, whose support is indispensable for a project or idea to materialise. They employ various practices to make their interests heard, particularly during periods of significant change that directly impact their survival and existence.

Differences exist among individual stakeholders and their relationships, and their actions across different domains illustrate how policymakers respond to their claims and expectations (Laplume, Sonpar & Litz, 2008). Notably, at the EU level, the European Commission has increasingly emphasised stakeholders' involvement in various policy areas in recent years.

The critical question surrounding stakeholders' identification and classification (Laplume, Sonpar & Litz, 2008) has driven the focus of this dissertation towards new research avenues, contributing to the theoretical advancement of stakeholders' involvement in policymaking within the context of cross-border cooperation. The dataset of project proposal applications revealed a diversified set of stakeholders mobilised by the financial support of the EU through its cross-border cooperation mechanism.

Through asking: *What are the main features of stakeholders that mobilise for EU cross-border cooperation programmes?* this research aims to provide a detailed description of stakeholders' characteristics. This includes examining their level engagement, core business activities, and their regional affiliations. Understanding these features offers insights into the dynamic environment in which stakeholders operate. While the EU encourages the participation of all stakeholders in its financed initiatives, not everyone manages to mobilise effectively. The complexity of the application process often leaves many actors excluded, highlighting the challenge of stakeholders mobilising to their full potential (Olson, 2009).

Now that the institutional framework for defining stakeholders is established, the dissertation introduces the main institutional framework of the EU and how this environment fosters stakeholder participation and collaboration within cross-border cooperation initiatives.

2.3 EU's institutional environment: implications for stakeholders' mobilisation

The effective articulation of diverse interests by stakeholders at the EU level is a crucial aspect of the European integration project (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). A central question in political and intellectual circles pertains to whether there exists adequate representation within the EU (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Recognising the pivotal role stakeholders play in EU policies and decision-making processes, the EU has instituted various mechanisms to facilitate their participation. Initiatives such as the European Commission's White paper have broadened opportunities for societal and economic actors to align, influence and shape the content of European policies (Mazey & Richardson, 2015).

From the inception of what we now know as the EU, the founding fathers acknowledged the importance of involving interest groups in European public policy-making processes (Mazey & Richardson, 2015). The EU has established channels for stakeholders to participate in policy processes and has actively sought their input through various public consultations (European Commission, 2001). Many of these stakeholders are well-organised and advocate on multiple issues of interest. A key aspect of these processes is the presence of various linkages or relationships with groups, which are essential for effective functioning (Bomberg & McEwen, 2012; Christiansen et al., 2004). Given that formalising stakeholders relations is considered fundamental to the integration process, it's no surprise that stakeholders occupy a central role in these practices.

The EU is widely believed to have positively impacted the ability of stakeholders to mobilise for EU funding. The EU budget has facilitated stakeholders' collaboration and their influence over policy formulation and implementation (Bomberg & McEwen 2012; Christiansen et al., 2004). Early lobbying efforts, bargaining strategies, and initiatives to garner public support were aimed at shaping policy content by securing broader public backing and attracting media attention (Moravcsik, 2013; Bomberg & McEwen, 2012; Hooghe et al., 2002).

Due to the multi-institutional and MLG structure of the EU, stakeholders have become more aware and have expanded their involvement in EU policies. Stakeholders commonly engage in venue shopping practices to maximise their impact on EU policies and regulations (Klüver, 2013; Della Porta & Caiani, 2009). The extent to which stakeholders engage in the complex EU environment depends on their unique trajectories, as well as the prevailing institutional norms and patterns that facilitate mobilisation (Bomberg & McEwen, 2012). As the EU continues to evolve, the dynamics of how actors mobilise and for which EU policies they

advocate depend on both their initiatives and the opportunities for forming new alliances with other stakeholders.

Drawing on the mobilisation literature within the EU, I examine the patterns of stakeholder mobilisation within the multi-level context of the EU. In this environment where power is dispersed and authority is debated, the active participation of stakeholders remains essential (Bomberg & McEwen, 2012). Mobilisation for accessing EU financial support for cross-border cooperation projects often stems from various motives. Stakeholders may mobilise to express their identity, as well as to protect their interests and financial gains (Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003). Translating interests into action necessitates group efforts through effective communication (Stekelenburg et al., 2013), and weighing the perceived costs and benefits of mobilisation (Keating, Hooghe & Tatham, 2015; Olson, 2009). The dynamics of stakeholder mobilisation have been examined through various approaches, utilising diverse research strategies. For example, Mische (2003) evaluates stakeholders based on the synchronised relationships and networks they establish.

Building on this discourse, I aim to identify the stakeholders involved in mobilising for EU funding. The focus is on a significant subset of stakeholders who are actively seeking resources provided by the EU through its various financing instruments (Bache et al., 2020). This endeavour aims to comprehend the diverse attributes of stakeholders who actively submit project proposals for EU-funded cross-border cooperation programmes. The mobilisation of stakeholders is examined across multiple levels, including subnational, national, local and European levels. Drawing inspiration from the MLG system of the EU (Marks et al., 1995), I delineate the distinctive characteristics of mobilised stakeholders, aiming to provide a clearer perspective on their roles. Moreover, I posit that stakeholders engaged in mobilising for EU funding within specific cross-border cooperation programmes possess unique features and traits that warrant recognition and comprehension. Understanding the profile and the features of stakeholders involved in mobilising for EU funds may prompt further inquiry into their interactions and collaborations, a topic explored in greater detail in chapter 5.

The empirical inquiry posed here is: *"What are the main features of stakeholders that mobilise for EU cross-border cooperation programmes?"* This query delves into the attributes of stakeholders in terms of their operational scope, such as local, provincial, or regional, and their business type, including non-profit organisations, businesses, institutions, business associations, public authorities, and research institutes. Chapter 3 conducts a comprehensive examination of stakeholder mobilisation for the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands cross-border cooperation programme, elucidating the key features and characteristics of stakeholders engaged through their project submissions. Additionally, this chapter delves into essential aspects of stakeholders' mobilisation, particularly focusing on the geographical distribution of their activities, a critical element in understanding their engagement.

Chapter 3 also distinguishes between various types of mobilising actors, their level of engagement, and their social sectors, drawing from an extensive array of social sector indicators utilised by the United Nations. Recognising that stakeholders rely on external resources, the analysis differentiates between direct and indirect dependencies, contextualising them within the primary economic activities of the provinces or regions they represent. The exploration of stakeholder mobilisation forms a fundamental element of this thesis, facilitating a deeper exploration of pertinent research questions.

Having established the foundational framework for stakeholder mobilisation within the EU, the subsequent section shifts focus to the perspective of MLG and its empirical basis in stakeholders' mobilisation for EU funding.

2.4 Mobilisation of stakeholders in the EU: the role of MLG

The evolution of the EU into a multilevel policy-making arena has ushered in new patterns and dynamics of mobilisation (Piattoni, 2009). This process of European integration has not only reinforced but also expedited the direct engagement of stakeholders in EU policy formulation (Piattoni, 2009). The EU has introduced novel political structures that provide avenues for mobilisation, expanding opportunities beyond national or local borders. Stakeholder mobilisation has taken place across various policy contexts, both within and beyond member states. For instance, the allocation of resources to European regions aimed at addressing disparities has prompted involvement from regional authorities and other stakeholders. Since the mid-1980s, the Commission has actively sought to elevate the role of stakeholders, particularly through policies such as the EU Cohesion Policy (Piattoni, 2009).

Over the past three decades, significant policy implications have emerged, leading to opportunities for economic strengthening in various regions and the development of successful projects by stakeholders. This has transformed the political landscape from a two-level "game" (national and supranational) as initially theorised by Putnam (2010), into a multilevel venue where stakeholders from different levels hold equal significance. While stakeholder involvement in EU policies has become commonplace, the notion of stakeholders working with EU funds has also gained prominence. However, existing stakeholder literature primarily focuses on a broad range of issues, from EU policies to lobbying and influencing these policies (Labanino & Dobbins, 2022; Binderkrantz, 2015; Dür & Mateo, 2013; Eising, 2007). Ironically, despite the increased role of stakeholders in EU policy and funding, there is a lack of analysis regarding stakeholder identification for these policies and EU-funded programmes. Therefore, it would be prudent to initiate the identification and mapping of stakeholders mobilising for EU funding in a more inclusive manner.

Mobilisation does not take place in a "*vacuum devoid*" of institutional frameworks. Instead, it unfolds within an environment characterised by formalised political structures, and institution-building (Christiansen & Follesdal & Piattoni, 2004). Scholars have observed a deliberate increase in regional representation in Brussels in the years that followed. Studies have also noted the proliferation of offices representing regions in the Brussels landscape (Donas & Beyers, 2012; Marks, 1993). These developments have created interdependencies, facilitating the exchange of information and providing access to key EU institutions such as the Council of the EU, the European Commission, and the European Parliament (Bache & Flinders, 2004).

In other words, we are now in an era characterised by MLG, where constant negotiations take place among governments and actors operating at various territorial levels: supranational, national, regional, and local (Marks, 1993). As previously mentioned, the institutional framework that aligns closely with the MLG concept is the Cohesion Policy, which primarily supports cities and regions. This dual process unfolds within EU funding policies as stakeholders mobilise for funding while the EU encourages their involvement in such policies. Many of these stakeholders serve as advocates for the interests of cities and regions. Consequently, the ultimate aim is to incorporate stakeholders who benefit from MLG structures and arrangements directly into EU policy processes. The establishment of regional representation offices in Brussels underscores the ongoing exchanges between stakeholders' representatives and the European Commission.

This section focuses on stakeholders engaged in EU policy processes, particularly those participating in EU funding initiatives. Marks (1993) proposed that among the diverse array of stakeholders, only a select few actively participate in shaping and directing policies. Other studies suggest that effective collective action necessitates organisation, strategic planning, coalition-building, and adaptability throughout the policy-making and implementation stages.

While the stakeholder analysis sheds light on the strategies employed by various interests, there is a notable aspect to consider. Put differently, it becomes essential to differentiate between the "*actual*" and "*potential*" mobilisation of stakeholders engaged in public policy or funding endeavours. In an MLG system, stakeholders are expected to discern their identity and determine their level of participation that satisfies their objectives (Olson, 2009). Ideally, research would focus on identifying stakeholders genuinely committed to creating public value and furthering the common good, distinguishing them from those who remain inactive in this regard. However, mapping stakeholders interested in participating and applying for cross-border cooperation projects falls beyond the scope of this study. As highlighted in the literature, certain stakeholders may never fully mobilise, or realise their mobilisation potential (Olson, 2009). This often results in a landscape dominated by the same actors (Bursens, Donas & Beyers, 2012), albeit engaged in varied activities, and policy discussions.

Analysing stakeholder mobilisation serves the purpose of gaining insight into the stakeholders involved in EU funding. This chapter also offers guidance on selecting which stakeholders to include in the analysis and how to approach it. While stakeholder analyses are typically conducted in the context of EU policy, the focus here is to gain a deeper understanding of the involved actors and their roles. There is often a question of whether there is an optimal level of participation. In the framework of this research, it becomes challenging to determine which stakeholders might be interested in EU funding, and it would have been impractical to identify every stakeholder "*potentially*" capable of mobilising for EU funding. Therefore, the decision was made to focus on stakeholders who actually mobilise for funding, which has facilitated the stakeholder identification and analysis process.

The issue of mobilisation is central to numerous research debates and inquiries. It is widely recognised in stakeholder literature that mobilisation for financial resources and their effective utilisation is crucial. Research confirms that mobilisation often revolves around critical resources, which significantly influences stakeholder behaviour (Hanegraaff & Beyers & De Bruycker 2016; Eising 2007). Stakeholders are not self-contained; they rely on various resources, both internal and external, to achieve their objectives. This understanding promotes the involvement of all parties with their environment. Examples of critical resources include knowledge, selective benefits, legitimacy, facilities, labour, authority, funds, organisation, consensus, and value (Piattoni, 2009).

In the next section, I introduce the RDT, which provides a framework for understanding the processes, channels, and tools that create dependencies on resources.

2.5 Mobilisation of stakeholders: the RDT perspective

Pfeffer and Salanick's RDT has been influential for over four decades since its inception. This theory, supported by empirical evidence, delves into the fundamental organisational processes and structures influenced by critical internal and external resources. While widely embraced in academic discourse, numerous empirical studies have scrutinised its explanatory power. A key tenet of RDT is the understanding that an organisation's behaviour is intricately linked to its environmental context, or ecology (Pfeffer & Salanick, 2011). Consequently, discussions on organisational behaviour emphasize the significance of critical resources. Without these resources, an organisation's ability to function effectively is compromised (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2011).

A significant aspect of Pfeffer and Salanick's research focuses on how organisations address their resource needs and establish relationships with their external environment. In this chapter, I explore whether stakeholders exhibit dependency on resources and the extent of this dependency. I begin by providing an overview of the inception and development of the RDT. Subsequently, I present empirical findings and discuss their implications for the theory.

Tarrow (1996) posited that the increasing opportunities for mobilisation create interconnections and dependencies on resources controlled by critical stakeholders. Many collaborations among stakeholders begin with alliances formed through various forms of contributions, whether in-kind or otherwise. These alliances typically involve formal or informal agreements between two or more organisations aimed at advancing a specific cause, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined (Scott & Davis, 2006). Pursuing common goals often necessitates collaboration with other stakeholders and organisations possessing specialised knowledge, expertise, and additional resources. This includes technical expertise that may not be readily available elsewhere. The ongoing influence of the RDT in the literature is attributed to significant empirical advancements. In the context of EU funding programmes, the dependency on resources, remains underexplored despite its relevance.

This chapter now delves into how the RDT influences the mobilisation of stakeholders for EU funding. Drawing on empirical evidence within the context of EU's multilevel policy system, existing research provides a strong foundation. Yet, it appears that there are still numerous avenues for stakeholders to engage in mobilisation efforts for EU funding.

The first criterion I employ examines the distinct social and economic characteristics of stakeholders. The second criterion considers both sets of features in conjunction. Early studies on social movements and stakeholder mobilisation emphasised the repertoire of action and strategies, which are pivotal for mobilisation (Snow & Soule, 2009). However, I align with the fundamental propositions of the RDT, which suggest that stakeholders are inclined to mobilise for EU funding. Additionally, stakeholders' characteristics shed light on their identities and the similarities or differences they may share (see Jenkins, 2008). These similarities or differences among stakeholders are detailed in the subsequent section.

2.6 Collaboration of stakeholders: A perspective of similarity and dissimilarity

The EU funding policy extensively encourages stakeholders to pursue funds addressing various social, economic and health-related issues. Understanding mobilisation processes raises significant questions. Establishing and sustaining commitment, which includes mobilising and coordinating with a range of other stakeholders to secure funding, remains crucial for many organisations. This raises vital inquiries regarding organisational identity, primarily concerning how an organisation presents and maintains itself. Additionally, internal expression of this identity holds significance (Pratt and Kraatz, 2009).

The second research question I pose is: *Are stakeholders who share the same organisational identity more likely to collaborate with each other for project proposals within the cross-border cooperation programme?* It is evident that collaboration across professional, organisational, and cultural boundaries holds inherent appeal. Successful collaboration enhances problem-solving, fosters new partnerships, and yields positive outcomes. In this

context, collaboration may manifest as dense networks, with certain stakeholders occupying central positions within these networks, referred to as the "*network core*", while others may gravitate towards the network's periphery (Järvenpää & Majchrzak, 2016).

Actors tend to collaborate with others who share similar identities, but they may also work with those who differ from them. Collaboration is essentially an assembly process (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). Stakeholder collaboration facilitates dialogue, negotiation, and the development of mutually acceptable proposals for addressing common problems. Collaborations can be focused on achieving shared goals over the long term or for specific, short-term purposes, with some dissolving immediately after achieving their main objectives.

Collaboration primarily revolves around the relationships that stakeholders build when interacting with each other. Each stakeholder possesses expertise and resources such as knowledge, but individually, they may lack all the necessary resources to achieve their objectives. Hence, stakeholders often collaborate to pool their resources and expertise, recognising that some goals are better achieved collectively rather than individually (Weible & Sabatier, 2018).

In this chapter, I propose that stakeholders' characteristics and identities significantly influence their collaborations. This leads to interactions primarily with stakeholders who share similar characteristics. As stakeholders collaborate with different actors for various project ideas, they establish varying numbers of relationships or *ties*. The nature of collaboration among stakeholders can vary across multiple dimensions, and for the purpose of this thesis, it is crucial to clarify these forms and dimensions of collaboration. I closely examine the extent to which stakeholders with similar or dissimilar characteristics collaborate more frequently during the project application phase.

Following the presentation of the main theoretical framework on stakeholders' collaborations, I provide an overview of the tactics and strategies employed by stakeholders in EU policy-making venues.

2.7 Overview of stakeholders' tactics and strategies for achieving success in EU public policies

Stakeholders have long played a significant role in EU policy-making processes. Mobilisation efforts for specific EU policies are often driven by the incentives provided by the EU itself. Empirical studies frequently demonstrate stakeholders' strong preference for engaging with the EU as a means of influencing public policy decisions. Moreover, stakeholders involved in lobbying understand that their efforts extend beyond simply influencing policies; they also aim to secure benefits such as EU funding. Consequently, staying informed about policy developments is crucial particularly as policies become increasingly technical and require specialised expertise that stakeholders can offer.

The third research question I ask is: *What explains project funding success, and more in particular what is the role and impact of specific stakeholders in this success?* This question raises further complexities, such as determining which strategies are most effective for securing EU funding. The answer is closely linked to the empirical analysis presented in this study, which aligns with the broader strategies stakeholders employ when seeking EU funding. Below, I provide an overview of the lobbying strategies employed by various stakeholders across different EU policy processes.

The EU represents a unique and intricate policy-making system, characterised by its unpredictable and multilevel nature. This complexity often spurs increased lobbying activities across various levels of European institutions. The involvement of stakeholders in the policy process is expected to enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes. In this context, I examine the communication strategies adopted by stakeholders during the EU funding application process. Specifically, I focus on *stakeholders* as key actors in this process, delving into the lobbying and communication strategies from academic perspectives.

In the following section, I provide an overview of lobbying strategies within EU policy-making, with particular emphasis on the strategies employed by stakeholders to achieve success. These theoretical frameworks will be empirically examined in chapter 6.

2.7.1 An overview of the lobbying strategies in the EU policy-making

The EU continues to function as a complex system, bringing together a diverse array of stakeholders. Since its inception in 1975, the European Regional Development Funds have provided significant opportunities for regions to engage with the EU, bridging the gap between demand and supply sides (Snow, 2007). However, not all stakeholders have embraced these practices equally, with NGOs, business actors, and others exhibiting varying levels of participation. As a result, the EU's policies have effectively divided stakeholders into two categories: insiders, or beneficiaries, and outsiders, or non-beneficiaries.

The success of stakeholders within this system is not purely coincidental; rather it is influenced by a range of tactics and strategies employed within the policy context. The table below provides a detailed overview of some of the key contributions made by academics and scholars in the field of EU lobbying literature.

Table 1. Reviewing of the literature of lobbying the EU

Lobbying the EU	**Reference**
Bringing demand and supply together	Snow, 2007

Stakeholder's formal engagement	European Commission, White paper 2001
Venue-shopping, influencing decision-makers	Richardson & Mazey, 2015; Klüver, 2013; Berkhout & Lowery, 2010; Baumgartner & Mahoney 2008
Direct contact with the EU and its institutions	Dür & Matteo 2013; Klüver, 2013; Bouwen & Mccown, 2007; Donas & Beyers, 2012; Schneider & Baltz, 2003; Bouwen, 2002; Marks, 1993
Lobbying for legislative processes	Godwin, 2013; Bell, 2003
Business groups use more insider strategies	Dür & Mateo, 2013
NGOs lobby more for survival	Klüver, 2013; 2011; Dür & Mateo, 2013
Lobbying is more effective in a phase of policy-making	Mahoney & Goertz, 2004
Lobbying tactics and strategies are important	Dür et al., 2013; Klüver, 2013; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Mahoney, 2008

The White Paper of the European Commission (2001) emerged as a prominent agenda item within the EU, offering a strategic framework for stakeholders amidst global challenges. Lobbying within the EU often entails direct engagement with EU institutions or establishing relationships with entities managing EU funding (Dür & Mateo 2013; Klüver, 2013; Klüver, 2011; Bouwen & Mccown, 2007; Beyers, 2004; Bouwen, 2002). The lobbying process varies depending on the targeted institution, such as the European Commission, working party representatives, national representation offices in Brussels, the European Council, and the European Parliament. Stakeholders may employ various strategies, including venue-shopping, direct influence, and coordinated action to shape decision-making processes (Klüver, 2013; Berkhout & Lowery 2010).

Direct lobbying enables stakeholders to directly participate in decision-making by providing their expertise at the European level. Indirect lobbying arenas have also expanded, following initial stakeholder coordination. Research indicates a significant increase in lobbying efforts to 100 percent from 1994 to 2005, underscoring the growing importance of active tactics

and strategies in enhancing stakeholder's participation and influencing policy outcomes (Donas & Beyers, 2012).

Lobbying is an essential tool for stakeholders to advance their interests in EU institutions, and it comes in both direct and direct forms (Richardson & Mazey, 2015). In the Brussels scene, lobbying for legislative processes is omnipresent, but it differs from stakeholder to stakeholder (Klüver, 2012). It is interesting to note that business groups tend to use insider strategies more than others (Dür & Mateo, 2013), while NGOs tend to lobby for their survival (Klüver, 2013). However, the effectiveness of EU lobbying varies depending on the policy-making phase (Mahoney, 2008).

Despite some criticisms, most scholars and policy-makers acknowledge the legitimacy of lobbying in the policy-making process (Klüver, 2013). As knowledge becomes increasingly important in lobbying and EU affairs, and the EU policies and institutional structures become more complex and interdependent, the demand for lobbying increases (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

However, scholars worry that lobbying is mainly about listening, finding indications of the institutions' views, and providing good information. The amount and time of lobbying required remains subject of debate among scholars. As a result, new direct lobbying strategies have emerged. "*While high-level lobbying is necessary and can be highly successful under certain circumstances, it is an optimal strategy for gaining sustained access to the policy-making processes in the EU*" (Coen & Richardson, 2009).

In conclusion, continuous and unparalleled access to the multilevel structure and lobbying at the EU level with a multitude of political voices produces an environment where stakeholders can advance their issues of interest. As we transition from the interest groups literature to the realm of EU funding, it is essential to explore the strategies outlined in existing literature.

2.7.2 Strategies and tactics that enable stakeholders' success

Stakeholders play a crucial role in influencing EU policy changes, including gaining access to EU funding. The EU policy processes make it easier for stakeholders to access EU institutions at every stage of policymaking, from initiation to implementation. Hence, stakeholders now view EU funds as an essential source of financial support (Mihaylova et al., 2022). The financial aid is meant for regional development and reducing disparities between European regions. As a result, stakeholders have become sophisticated interlocutors, equipped with the necessary expertise to navigate EU funding programmes. Lobbying activities are concentrated in Brussels and regional offices that manage EU funding.

Measuring success in EU policy-making is challenging (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). However, studies suggest that success can be measured by the extent to which stakeholders can influence policy processes, which gradually contributes to the choice of tactics and

strategies (Dür et al., 2013; Klüver, 2013). Lobbying activity in the EU institutions has been on the rise since the late 1980s. The European Commission and the European Parliament (Com 93/C1666/04), have opened up, making it easier for stakeholders to influence policy changes. This openness has eased the functional supply and institutional demand for stakeholders, leading to an explosion of lobbying activity in the 1990s.

The second body of studies concentrates on lobbying success strategies, which are not the same as policy success (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008). Several studies have been conducted on this topic, including one by Klüver and Mahoney in 2015, which reviewed the activity of around 4 000 interest groups that lobbied on 44 policy debates in the EU. They used computer-assisted content analysis to examine the argumentation and increased activity in Brussels. The study found a positive correlation between the resources associated with individual lobbyists and their ability to achieve their goals in Washington (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015). Another study by Mahoney and Baumgartner in 2008 demonstrated that inside vs. outside lobbying strategies are critical factors that contribute to certain policy outcomes. It is important to note that lobbying does not happen with a single strategy but rather with a combination of strategies.

Various tactics such as venue shopping, intergovernmental lobbying, and other dynamics have been used towards EU institutions (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). Stakeholders gain access during standard decision-making procedures because they provide useful information to those who develop and deliver EU policies (Eising, 2007). It is estimated that firms, EU associations, and national associations have more access and are more active in EU policy processes (Eising, 2007). However, NGOs' strategies are rising because of how they transmit their ongoing societal interests (Greenwood, 2013; Coen, 2013). The knowledge about the organisations receiving EU funding is derived from the data published in the European Commission public registry, yet this information only provides a partial view of the overall picture (Mahoney & Beckstrand, 2011).

It is clear that lobbying happens not with a single strategy, but rather with a combination of strategies. Therefore, it is essential to understand the various strategies and tactics used in lobbying to achieve the desired outcomes.

A significant number of stakeholders in Brussels use lobbying strategies to influence EU institutions. They require expertise, information, and knowledge to achieve their goals. It is also important to understand how these stakeholders use lobbying strategies to secure funding from the EU.

Given the crowded and competitive lobbying environment, stakeholders have developed new lobbying strategies to secure EU funding. To achieve success, stakeholders submit several project proposals under EU-funded programmes that align with the specific policies promoted by the European Commission. I assess how the choice of strategies influences the chances of success for EU funding.

The success for EU funding is influenced by both inside and outside strategies. Despite the reduction in information about lobbying and understanding of EU institutions due to the establishment of lobbying scholarship, I illustrate that lobbying strategies can facilitate the take-up of EU funds.

Chapter 3 Research Strategy and Methodology

3.1 Research context

Before delving into the research context and strategy, it remains crucial to understand the framework of EU funding programs, particularly focusing on cross-border cooperation programs. The EU initiated several policies promoting territorial distribution in the mid-1970s, with embedded significance in today's context. Initially, these funds served as a mechanism for interstate transfers, allocating payments to regions to promote market integration, with policies and programs aimed at reducing economic and social disparities among its member states (Bartolini, 2005). Cross-border cooperation programs are a key part of this framework, and the EU has been providing financial support to regions that promote market integration and economic development or earlier and as a result have an embedded value nowadays. Financial support was channelled directly to regions through a range of legal and financial instruments designed to foster economic development (Bartolini, 2005).

A significant portion of Cohesion Policy funding targets less developed European countries and regions, aiming to alleviate economic and social disparities within the EU (Ezcurra & Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Mohl & Hagen, 2008). While Cohesion Policy plays a central role, other contributions and private investments also contribute to reducing regional disparities (Kyriacou et al., 2014). Research by Rodriguez-Pose and Fratesi (2004) suggests that EU funding has a significant impact on education and human capital investment, although its influence on infrastructure and business development may be less pronounced.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), introduced in 1975, plays a pivotal role in addressing regional imbalances in Europe by supporting the development and structural adjustment of lagging regions (Bache et al., 2020; Bache & Flinders, 2004). Between 2007 and 2013, EU spending on regional development averaged around € 50 billion per year, representing a substantial portion of European public expenditure dedicated to managing regional disparities and promoting territorial cohesion within the EU. Hence, approximately one third (35.7%) of European public spending was allocated to addressing regional imbalances and fostering territorial cohesion in the EU.[2]

[2] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2007/publications/guide2007_en.pdf

Cross-border cooperation and governance are pivotal for achieving social cohesion within the EU (Anderson & Wever, 2003). The ERDF has played a significant role in bolstering economic, social, and territorial cohesion, while also fostering cross-border connections that hold potential for positive economic impacts in the region. This has led to enhanced competitive advantages for regions and has contributed to overall economic growth in border areas. Facilitating the exchange of knowledge, resources, and expertise has been a key aspect of this policy, reinforcing cross-border cooperation and driving regional development and prosperity. As a result, substantial disparities between regions have been reduced and eliminated, particularly in border regions (Anderson & Wever, 2003). The EU has made great strides in promoting cross-border cooperation between different regions of its member states. By breaking down administrative and physical barriers, the EU has facilitated collaboration in various border regions, including the German-Polish and German-Czech boarders, as well as in several Euroregions. A study by Schelberg in 2001 confirms the effectiveness of these efforts. These accomplishments illustrate the EU's dedication to nurturing collaboration and solidarity among its member states, setting a noteworthy precedent for other regions worldwide to emulate.

Cross-border collaboration is vital for the development of European regions and for the European integration project as a whole (Siedentop, 2001). The advancement of cross-border cooperation has facilitated the vision of a Europe with '*open borders*' where '*collaborative action*' at the regional levels are essential. This cooperative approach is promoted both within and outside the framework of the European territorial cooperation objective outlined in the general Cohesion Policy discourse (Anderson & Wever, 2003).

Activities in border areas are funded by various programmes, with Interreg being just one of them. Projects presented jointly by partners across different regions in Europe are covered under the interregional programme Interreg, which has been instrumental in developing economically lagging regions (EC, 2000). Initially starting as an informal initiative for collaboration and exchange, cross-border cooperation became more formalised with the introduction of the ERDF. Substantial progress has been made towards realising the ambitions set in cross-border cooperation programmes. Collaboration and exchange among governments, civil society organisations, and stakeholders at national, regional, and local levels have accelerated growth and reduced economic disparities (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

However, dedicated research on the specific concerns of stakeholders' mobilisation, their collaboration patterns, and the factors enabling stakeholders' access to EU funding for cross-border cooperation remains limited.

This thesis explores the dynamics of cross-border cooperation in Europe, focusing specifically on stakeholders' involvement in the Interreg programme, their efforts to securing funding, their collaborative endeavours, and their stories of success. The following section outlines the key research questions addressed in this study and discusses the data collection methods that form the foundation of this research. While some studies portray regions as "*laboratories of European integration*" (Cole & Pasquier, 2012) emphasising

cultural exchange and social capital mobilisation, collaboration, and the factors contributing to project success.

To achieve these goals, this thesis utilises a dataset comprising project applications submitted under Interreg Flanders-Netherlands programme between 2007 and 2013. Analysing the complete set of mobilised stakeholders provides insights into the scale of mobilisation efforts for cross-border cooperation. This information offers a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand and facilitates comparisons with data from other studies in the future. The chosen dataset is crucial for this research, as it enables novel approaches to exploring pertinent research questions drawn from the literature reviewed earlier.

The rationale for researching the Belgian-Dutch cross-border cooperation case lies in its unique geopolitical and socio-economic context. Belgium and the Netherlands share a complex historical relationship, characterised by both collaboration and conflict, making their current cooperative efforts particularly intriguing. This research aims to explore how these two nations navigate shared challenges and opportunities in areas such as trade, transportation, environmental management, and regional development. Additionally, examining this cooperation can yield valuable insights into the broader dynamics of European integration and cross-border governance, providing lessons applicable to other regions with similar transnational interactions. Understanding the mechanisms and outcomes of their collaboration can inform policy development, enhance regional cohesion, and foster sustainable development in border areas.

The Interreg Flanders-Netherlands Programme is a collaborative effort spanning the Belgian and Dutch border, holding significant importance for the North-West part of Europe both geographically and economically. Positioned near key economic hubs like Randstad and Ruhr, this cross-border region includes vital cities such as Antwerp and Brussels, exerting a direct influence on the overall economic development of the area.

Throughout the period from 2007 to 2013, a diverse array of stakeholders submitted project proposals for the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands Programme. Chapter 4 delves deeper into this case, outlining the various project proposals and their alignment with the programme's specific priorities, which include economic development, environmental objectives, and societal transformation.

Collaborating stakeholders from both sides of the border jointly developed project proposals, which were then submitted to the Managing Authorities. The Managing Authorities consist of both the Interreg Secretariat and the Steering Committee. The project application process is overseen by the Interreg Secretariat. After submission, the Steering Committee, acting as the official authority, assesses whether to allocate EU funding to the project. A key requirement for these proposals was that stakeholders could request a of maximum 50% of the project budget, with the remaining 50% to be financed by the stakeholders themselves (in Bache, 2004).

The Managing Authorities and other related structures played crucial roles in the promotion of the programme and providing relevant information to interested stakeholders regarding EU funds. The initiation of a project proposal typically stemmed from stakeholders' initiatives, involving actors operating at various levels including national, regional, local, and European. These actors encompassed governmental bodies, agencies, non-governmental establishments, and business entities operating within the cross-border area (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Bache & Flinders, 2004).

The primary responsibility of the Managing Authorities, Secretariat office and Steering Committee was to oversee the management of EU funding in alignment with broader European objectives. The Steering Committee, comprising representatives from both Belgium and the Netherlands, included eight deputies representing different provinces or acting as representatives of socio-economic partners and civil society[3].

Located in the city of Antwerp, the Secretariat office served as administrative hubs for the programme. The Committee Members were tasked with determining the success or failure of project applications. However, solely relying on the decisions of the Committee Members to determine project success would overlook the stakeholders' perspective in accessing EU funding. Chapter 6 delves deeper into the project proposal application process, outlining the journey stakeholders undertake from developing a project idea to its submission, and the strategies employed to enhance their chances of success.

While stakeholders indeed engaged in exchanges with decision-makers to gain insights into project applications for EU funding, they also utilised a diverse array of tactics and strategies to enhance their chances of success. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the tactics and strategies employed by stakeholders.

These tactics and strategies, well-documented in the literature, encompass a range of approaches. From traditional lobbying tactics to direct contact and communication with decision-makers, stakeholders employed informal meetings and utilised external tactics such as protest and media attention (Mahoney, 2008; Beyers, 2004). These methods collectively increased the likelihood of gaining access to EU funding opportunities.

3.2 Research strategy: a mixed method approach. Why triangulation is better?

The methodology adopted for this thesis is mixed methods, which offers several advantages and was chosen deliberately for this research endeavour. Mixed methods research, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods, has become increasingly common

[3] For more on authorities and structure check Interreg Flanders-Netherlands website: http://www.grensregio.eu/en

across various research fields (Timans et al., 2019; Halcomb & Hickman, 2015; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2015). Introduced in the 20th century, mixed method research quickly gained popularity as a valuable tool in the social sciences. Its broadest applications emerged in the early 1990s. The mixed method approach aligns well with the broader research objective, as it helps mitigate potential biases that may arise from solely relying on one method of research and data collection.

Utilising the dataset of stakeholders who submitted project applications, stakeholders were identified and further examined through their respective websites to extract information regarding their primary areas of work and social sectors. Qualitative interviews, employing open-ended questions, were conducted with respondents using a convenient sampling technique, following a careful case selection procedure.

By combining the dataset of stakeholders who were either granted or denied EU funding with interviews conducted with both successful and unsuccessful project applicants, a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study was achieved.

By employing a quantitative method with SPSS software, empirical support was provided for the hypotheses testing. The SNA was deemed more appropriate for addressing the second research question, which involved identifying core stakeholders in a network and assessing identity similarity. The QCA method offered the advantage of analysing a medium number of cases while examining complex combinations of explanatory factors associated with the dependent variable '*success*' (Rihoux, 2013). This allowed for the identification of possible combinations of causality linking relevant conditions to outcomes. The QCA technique deployed in this thesis served to bridge and transcend the qualitative-quantitative divide in the dissertation.

The main research questions addressed in this thesis and the methods used to answer them are introduced here. The first question I ask in this thesis is: *What are the features of stakeholders that mobilise for EU cross-border cooperation programmes?* This question aims to uncover the key characteristics of stakeholders, including their level of work (local, provincial, regional), and their type (NGO, firm, institution, business association, public authority, research institute etc). To capture the mobilisation dynamics of stakeholders who applied for project proposals, the SPSS software package was utilised. This allowed for the calculation of correlation coefficients to measure the strength and associations between variables measured on an ordinal scale (using Kendal tau b correlation). Considering the nature of this question necessitated hypotheses testing, it was deemed imperative to employ statistical analysis. This approach allows for the rigorous examination of data to determine the significance of relationships or differences between variables, ensuring that conclusions drawn are based on robust evidence rather than mere speculation. By utilising statistical methods, I was able to objectively assess the validity of hypotheses and make informed interpretations of the results, thereby enhancing the reliability and credibility of

the study findings. The empirical results regarding stakeholder mobilisation are summarised in chapter 4.

The second research question posed in this thesis is: *Are stakeholders who share the same organisational identity more likely to collaborate with each other for project proposals within the cross-border cooperation programme?* This question is addressed using the SNA method. This methodological approach allows for the identification, measurement, and analysis of relationships among stakeholders within a network. It involves identifying actors that collaborate more frequently with one another for project proposal applications within the same EU funding call for proposals.

To answer this question, a criterion is set where actors who have submitted at least 5 project proposals with others were considered as 'high collaborators'. This facilitates the identification of *core actors* in the network and provides insights into the shared identity values and preferences among actors. The use of the SNA is well-suited for this research question as it does not entail hypothesis testing. Instead, it focuses on understanding collaboration patterns and shared identity dynamics. In this dissertation, chapter 5 utilises expectations rather than hypotheses, distinguishing it from the other empirical chapters. Expectations are broader, less formal anticipations of possible outcomes, allowing for a more exploratory approach to the research questions. This flexibility is particularly advantageous when employing methodologies like SNA. SNA benefits from expectations as it explores complex relational patterns and interactions among stakeholders without being constrained by predefined hypotheses. Thus, chapter 5 is able to delve deeper into the nuances of stakeholder interactions and outcomes, complementing the more rigid hypothesis-driven analyses in the other empirical chapters.

Network diagrams produced using social network software such as Pajek are presented in chapter 5, providing visual representations of collaboration ties among stakeholders. These diagrams help to illustrate the core actors in the network and highlight their collaborative relationships. By analysing the network structure, it becomes possible to identify key actors that dominate social network and gain insights into the dynamics of collaboration within the cross-border programme. The software Pajek facilitated the extraction of a subset of core actors from the extensive network of stakeholders (nodes), highlighting their connections (ties) through shared projects. This process enabled the identification of key stakeholders that play a central role in the social network, thus *core actors*, indicating their prominence and influence within the collaborative framework of the cross-border programme.

The third research question I pose is: *What explains project funding success, and more in particular what is the role and impact of specific stakeholders in this success?* To address this question, a small-N case selection approach was employed, comprising 8 successful and 8 unsuccessful projects, totalling 16 cases. Using the QCA method (fsQCA software 3.0), this allowed for a detailed exploration of the conditions and combinations thereof that influence stakeholders' access to EU funding. The use of the QCA method aligns well with the

complexity of this research question, offering a comprehensive analysis of various factors contributing to project success.

The mixed methods approach employed in this study integrates qualitative and quantitative methods, providing several advantages across different research phases. In the design phase, it allows for a holistic approach to framing the research questions and objectives. During data collection, combining both methods enables a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder mobilisation, collaboration dynamics, and identity, as well as the contextual factors influencing project success. Finally, in the data analysis phase, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides stronger evidence and nuanced insights, enhancing the overall robustness of the findings. This approach ensures that the research captures a rich and multifaceted understanding of the phenomena under investigation, offering valuable insights for theory and practice. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a holistic understanding of the research questions, contributing to a richer and more comprehensive analysis of the phenomena under investigation.

3.3 Research Methodology (phase 1: mapping of stakeholders and phase 2: interviews)

Before delving into the empirical work, it's essential to establish the research design, starting with defining the population under study. In this research, the focus is on stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation programmes, particularly those who have applied for project proposals within the programme being examined.

When considering mobilisation, there are two perspectives: '*potential mobilisation*' encompassing all groups with a potential interest in EU funding and the capacity to mobilise, and '*actual mobilisation'*, referring to actors who explicitly express their interest by submitting project proposals for EU funding. For this study, the emphasis is on "actual mobilisation", focusing on stakeholders who have taken concrete steps to seek EU funding through project proposals. This approach was chosen for its clarity, systematic approach, and tangibility of data.

Mapping stakeholders who have actually mobilised for EU funding provides a manageable and focused dataset of analysis. Conversely, attempting to capture all stakeholders with potential interest in cross-border cooperation but who haven't mobilised for the programme would be labour-intensive and challenging to execute effectively. Thus, the study prioritises stakeholders who have demonstrated concrete interest through their participation in the EU funding scheme.

Empirically, the research focuses on the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands Programme spanning from 2007 to 2013, a well-established cross-border cooperation initiative in Europe. To ensure the viability of the data, certain choices were made. Leveraging a dataset provided by the Secretariat office in Antwerp was one such decision. This office plays a pivotal role in

the day-to-day implementation of the cross-border cooperation programme, making the dataset a reliable source of information.

The dataset obtained from the Secretariat office contained systematic details such as project titles, brief project descriptions, and lists of collaborating actors involved in proposal submissions. While this information was foundational, it wasn't comprehensive enough to address all research inquiries. Therefore, additional data collection efforts were undertaken to gather information about stakeholders' characteristics, which was primarily sourced from stakeholders' websites. This supplemental data enriched the dataset, offering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research context.

The data collection process unfolded in two distinct phases. In the initial phase, a comprehensive mapping of stakeholders was conducted using application techniques that emphasised their key attributes (Aligică, 2006). Leveraging stakeholders' websites, data pertaining to their primary features and characteristics were systematically collected. Detailed information regarding the theoretical framework, methodology, and data collection procedures could be elaborated upon in subsequent sections on this thesis. The forthcoming section will outline the specific procedures employed for the overarching mapping of stakeholders participating in the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands programme.

3.3.1 Phase 1: Mapping of Stakeholders that have mobilised

To address the first research question, I gathered data concerning stakeholders who engaged in the selected cross-border cooperation programme, focusing on their actor type, operating sector, and level of mobilisation. As previously mentioned, the dataset provided by the Secretariat office of the Interreg programme lacked relevant information regarding stakeholders' main features. Therefore, additional data collection was imperative, primarily from individual stakeholders' web pages. This necessitated the application of coding and re-coding techniques to ensure the construction of valid and reliable data.

The Managing Authorities of the cross-border cooperation programme played a pivotal role in this endeavour. The Secretariat office officially initiated the call for proposal for the cross-border cooperation programme, subsequently publishing pertinent information on their website to apprise stakeholders of the open call for applications. In addition to disseminating information about the call for proposals, the Secretariat office assumed responsibility for the day-to-day management of the programme. They provided assistance to stakeholders throughout the project application phase and maintained records of successful projects financed by the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands programme.

A coding scheme was employed based on a rigorous procedure that was established in previous research by colleagues from the University of Antwerp, as outlined by Hanegraaff et al. (2016). This scheme facilitated the extraction of information regarding stakeholders' characteristics and their involvement. Specifically, I coded for geographical location (country, region, and province), stakeholder type, and social sector (based on the United

Nations List of Social Sectors)[4]. Given the periodic updates to stakeholders' websites, a re-coding procedure was conducted over time. Data collection occurred between September 2014 and June 2015.

The investigation spanned in a 7-years period (2007–2013). In total, 788 stakeholders were identified as having mobilised for the cross-border cooperation programme. These actors submitted project proposals alone or in collaboration with others, aligned with one of the programme's three main priorities: Economy, Environment or Societal Issues. Table 2 provides an overview of the distribution of stakeholders according to their country. The table illustrates a nearly equal distribution of actors between Belgium (54.4%) and the Netherlands (44.4%), with only 1.1% have either a European or international affiliation.

Table 2. Number of participating Stakeholders according to the Country

Country	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Belgium	429	54.4
The Netherlands	350	44.4
Other	9	1.1
Total	788	100.0

In the subsequent section, I provide a brief overview of the second phase of data collection, which involves conducting interviews with stakeholders.

3.3.2 Phase 2: Interviewing Stakeholders

For the second phase of data collection, I conducted a small-N selection of project proposals for in-depth interviews, with a total of 16 projects selected (N=16). Specifically, I interviewed 32 respondents (N=32). The sampling of respondents was based on variation in coalition size, which refers to the number of stakeholders per coalition or project proposal, the level of mobilisation of stakeholders per coalition or project proposal, and the type of stakeholder. Project leaders were the first ones to be identified and interviewed, as they provide valuable insights. Since most project proposals involved collaboration with other

[4] For more information, see the UN Website: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesm/seriesm_4rev4e.pdf

actors, additional interviews were conducted to ensure data reliability. The interviews took place between May and June 2016.

Telephone interviews, Skype and face-to-face meetings were the primary interviewing techniques used during the second phase of data collection. Skype interviews, championed by social science scholars such as Paul Hanna (2012), provide convenience and mitigate concerns associated with spatial and physical interactions. Telephone interviews provide convenience for both researchers and participants, allowing for efficient data collection without the need for travel or scheduling conflicts. Moreover, telephone interviews often lead to more candid responses due to the perceived anonymity of the medium. On the other hand, face-to-face meetings facilitate richer communication through non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions, fostering deeper understanding between the researcher and participant. Qualitative interviews formed the backbone of the data collection process. Interacting with project managers and officers provided additional in-depth knowledge and relevant details necessary to assess the conditions contributing to the success of stakeholders in their project applications. The initial analysis of the *'raw'* data revealed that stakeholders collaborated on project proposals, with at least two actors coming together to develop a project application.

For each selected case, two interviews were conducted: one with the leading institution of the project proposal and another with one of the partner institutions. By asking the same questions to both the leading actor and the partner actor, I could cross-verify the information provided during the interviews. The sampling techniques employed were based on convenience sampling, utilising the author's database of stakeholders.

The questionnaire for the interviews was constructed based on a theoretical framework that investigated the conditions for stakeholders' success in achieving funding. The aim was to capture both the internal and external dynamics of stakeholders that were initially mapped. As summarised in Table 3, a total of 287 project proposals were submitted alone or in collaboration with others for the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands programme during the period from 2007 to 2013. Out of these 287 project proposals submitted, only 70 were successful and granted funding.

Table 3. Overview of project applications, detailing the number of successful and unsuccessful projects

No of Projects	**No of Successful Projects**	**No of Unsuccessful Projects**
287	70	217

A total of 16 cases (project proposals) were selected, divided into 8 successful and 8 unsuccessful cases. Table 4 and 5 provide an overview of the successful and unsuccessful cases selected for interviews.

In order to attain a more precise comprehension of success, I chose cases that exhibited variability in factors like coalition size (small, medium, big), the level of mobilisation of stakeholders for each coalition (local, provincial, regional, national, European, and international) and the type of actor (NGOs, firm, institution, peak business association, professional association, public authority, research institute or university, sectoral business association).

Table 4. Overview of successful project proposals and actors interviewed

No cases	Project Title	Project description	Actors interviewed	Coalition Size	Level of Work
1.	Aquavlan	Developed within the Euroregion Scheldemond, the project aimed to establish and facilitate a viable aquaculture industry in the Euroregion Scheldemond.	Inagro; HZ University of Applied Sciences	Medium (11 – 20)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)
2.	Sustainability Just Do It	This project aimed to develop sustainable corporate social responsibility for companies through the development of a cross-border Envirometer.	POM West Vlaanderen	Small (3 – 10)	Provincial
3.	Euregional Pact 2	Based on the results of Euroregion Pact, aimed to bridge the gap between the academic and regional business community by developing one new drug to fight cancer.	University of Maastricht, Carim	Small (3 – 10)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)
4.	Growth Opportunity	This project aimed to professionalise the multifunctional enterprise in a countryside, by adding innovation in entrepreneurship and marketing of their products.	Centrale van de Landelijke Gilden vzw; ZLTO	Big (21 – 30)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)
5.	Bodembreed	The project focused on the preservation of the agricultural land by strengthening the knowledge and insights of the soil.	Provincie Vlaams-Brabant, PIBO Campus	Medium (11 – 20)	Provincial and Regional

6.	Land zonder grenzen	Tackling the Euroregion of Scheldemond, the objective of this project was to deal with future challenges such as aging and shrinking population, shortage occupations, cross-border work etc.	Vlaamse Landmaatschappij, Flemish Dienst (Nl)	Small (3 – 10)	Local
7.	Redevelopment stations environment	This project attempted to boost the speed of the redevelopment of interesting areas through investments in public infrastructure.	Stad Turnhout	Medium (11 – 20)	Provincial
8.	Cross-border mountain bike	This project aimed to develop a cross-biking route between East Flanders, West Flanders and Zeeland.	Provincie West-Vlaanderen – Dienst Sport	Small (3 – 10)	Provincial

Table 5. Overview of unsuccessful project proposals and actors interviewed

No cases	**Project Title**	**Project description**	**Actors interviewed**	**Coalition Size**	**Level of Work**
1.	Keg Vitaal	This project aimed to encompass ICT technology exchanges through creating a facility business centre from the one side, and providing continuous development through coaching and training to the other side to potential customers and SMEs.	Stichting Milo; Koninklijke Kentalis	Medium (11 – 20)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)
2.	Blauwe Raam	This project aimed to strengthen the route network of waterways so that coherence is promoted between the use of the water and the functions of the shore.	TPA, Tourism Flemish Brabant	Medium (11 – 20)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)

3.	Natuurlijk Sturen	The project aimed to give impetus to a new way of thinking and designing the Public Space.	Vlaamse Landmaatschappij, IMOB	Medium (11 – 20)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)
4.	Innovatie in decubitus preventie materialen	This project aimed to contribute to cross-border medical awareness and prevention through the development of new sustainable materials, and it targeted mostly the elderly.	Allanta vzw, University of Maastricht	Medium (11 – 20)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)
5.	Integrating Nanotechnology high-systems	The aim of this project was to make the SMEs in the Meuse-Rhine region become more familiar with nanotechnology and the usage of this technology in their processes, and range of products.	Nanohouse, Sirris	Small (3 – 10)	Provincial
6.	Sporting life	This project aimed to develop a standardising method for people with disabilities or chronic illnesses so that they could be rehabilitated towards an active lifestyle by participating in physical activities. Developing medical research with the purpose of creating a sports medicine was also encompassed as a project objective.	MS & Revalidatiecentrum	Small (3 – 10)	Provincial
7.	Thematic Cluster Project on Renewable Energies	The project aimed to establish a structural network and partnership between companies and universities to guarantee the knowledge transfer and project development in the field of energy sustainable development.	Brabantse Ontwikkelings Maatschappij (BOM)	Big (21 – 30)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)

8.	Location	This project aimed to develop for the youngsters between 12 to 18 years old a technology or a cross-border region game that could consist in: tracing the cross-border administrative boundaries or the reconstruction of a historical event etc.	PHL, Limburg Catholic University College	Medium (11 – 20)	Mixed (Provincial, Regional, Local)

The questionnaire served as the primary instrument for the interview (see Annex 1). Specifically, all questions were presented to respondents in the same order and manner. I maintained consistency in this approach while crafting open-ended questions during the interview preparation phase. By following this method, the open-ended questionnaire facilitated the collection of all necessary data for the research. Prior to the interviews, the questionnaire was developed and shared with respondents, ensuring that comprehensive and accurate answers were obtained during the interview questions.

Once I had identified the major dynamics of stakeholders' success from the literature, I developed two main strands of questions. The first set of questions aimed to capture the internal dynamics of stakeholders within each coalition, while the second set focused on understanding the external dynamics of each coalition, specifically the relationships stakeholders formed with other institutions during the project proposal application process.

Finding suitable interview candidates proved to be challenging in some cases. However, I received guidance and assistance from representatives of institutions I had already interviewed. For instance, if a project manager or officer from the leading institution in a project proposal was interviewed, they would provide recommendations on who else to interview.

Prior to scheduling an interview via phone, or Skype, or face-to-face meetings, I sent an email to the interviewee requesting their participation. All respondents were asked for permission to conduct the interview, and their consent was sought to use the interview responses for the purpose of this research.

The interviews primarily targeted officials responsible for developing and implementing project proposals. However, reaching these respondents for face-to-face meetings in their respective locations presented challenges, as the organisations were based in various provinces/ regions in Belgium and the Netherlands. Therefore, utilising convenient interviewing methods such as phone or Skype conversations proved to be effective.

During the interviews, I took notes to facilitate the process, following the method outlined by Schatzman & Strauss (1973). Prior to conducting the interviews, respondents confirmed their consent via email.

The project managers, who were directly involved in the development and implementation of project proposals, were the first to be interviewed. These individuals played a crucial role in facilitating contacts and providing valuable insights into the project application process. As they were intimately familiar with the projects, project managers proved to be reliable and rich sources of information (Beringer et al., 2013).

The Secretariat office of the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands played a significant role in facilitating the overall interviewing process. It provided valuable assistance in introducing me to the relevant individuals responsible for projects within their respective organisations.

It's worth noting that none of the respondents contacted via email refused to participate in the interview. The interviews were promptly transcribed after completion, allowing for the coverage of 16 cases through a total of with 32 open-ended questions, in a semi-structured questionnaire.

The preparation of open-ended interview questions was guided by theoretical frameworks from interest groups' lobbying literature, as well as theoretical approaches related to the internal and external communication of stakeholders. Interviews played a crucial role in gaining a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' roles in project proposals and their experiences.

Stakeholders were selected as the unit of sampling, with project managers or officers serving as respondents. Interviewed actors included NGOs, public authorities, research institutes, universities, and firms. The sample comprised 16 cases, equally divided between 8 successful and 8 unsuccessful cases.

Two main data sources were used for data collection: coding of stakeholders' websites for the purpose to gain knowledge of their characteristics, and qualitative interviews with project managers and officers involved in project proposals. Rigorous steps were followed throughout the data collection process.

The next section elaborates on the coding and distribution of independent variables related to the first research question of the study.

3.4 Coding and distribution of independent variables

This section outlines the main coding strategy employed in this dissertation. While coding stakeholders' websites provided valuable information, it required additional recoding due to the regular updates of these websites between 2014 and 2015.

Revisiting stakeholders' websites was deemed necessary to confirm the coded information. Some variables required complex measurement and operationalisation techniques, necessitating their transformation into indicators suitable for statistical analysis. For example, the social sector variable was operationalised based on the United Nations (UN) list of social sectors, which primarily focuses on economic and social sectors.[5]

Following the coding procedures, the data was transferred to coding data sheets and manually entered into the computer. This facilitated the subsequent data analysis processes.

[5] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesm/seriesm_4rev4e.pdf

The nature of the first research question in this dissertation necessitated statistical analysis. To achieve this, hypotheses were translated into statistical language, allowing for linear correlations across the dataset (Field, 2017). This approach enabled the assessment of prediction capabilities and the strength of relationships between pairs of variables, thus associating stakeholders' features with their mobilisation.

For the second research question, data collected on mobilisation proved invaluable. Two-node network tools were employed to extract significant information about stakeholders and their coalitions. Specialised techniques were utilised to identify central stakeholders in the network, measuring the extent to which a network revolves around a highly central actor. Incorporating this technique allowed for addressing the second research question: *Are stakeholders who share the same organisational identity more likely to collaborate with each other for project proposals within the cross-border cooperation programme?* By distinguishing between central stakeholders and peripheral stakeholders in the network, insights into shared identities were gained.

The third research question of this dissertation aimed to identify the conditions under which project proposals become successful for EU funding. This broad objective called for the use of another methodological technique: crisp set QCA, conducted with the fsQCA software for Mac. To ensure a robust research design, conditions for success were defined empirically and theoretically. QCA offers advantages for evaluating the casual effects central to stakeholders' mobilisation for cross-border cooperation programmes and the evaluation of success.

The QCA method allowed for examining various paths to stakeholders' success based on a small sample of 16 cases. While these cases are specific and may not be robust to sensitivity tests, the focus on in-depth cases provided valuable insights. Four conditions were considered, either alone or in combination, that may enable stakeholders' access to EU funding.

Next, the data operationalisation involved measuring indicators to align with the research project's scope and purpose. Data categorisation included dichotomous observations (1, 0), which were derived from open-ended questions in the questionnaire and later transformed into dichotomous observations for analysis.

3.5 Operationalisation of Stakeholder's attributes variables

Table 6 presents the cluster of independent variables used to address the first research question, which aimed at mapping stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation programmes.

Table 6. Stakeholder's attributes independent variables

Stakeholder's Attributes	**Variation**

Region	Flemish Region – Brussels Capital Region – Walloon Region – Netherlands Region – Other
Social Sector	Social vs. Economic[6]
Level of Mobilisation	Local – Provincial – Regional – National – European – International – Mixed
Type of actor	Non-profit Organisation – Firm – Institution – Peak Business Association – Professional Association – Public Authority – Research Institute/ University – Sectoral Business Association

Each variable was selected to contribute to the overarching goal of understanding the characteristics and features of stakeholders participating in these programmes. Below are the choices made for each variable and a brief discussion of their distribution.

3.5.1 Region

Enhancing the economic prosperity of regions and addressing regional disparities are central goals of the EU's Cohesion Policy. Regions play a vital role in this policy framework (Molle, 2017). However, understanding stakeholders' regional connections requires careful consideration of administrative boundaries in Belgium and the Netherlands. In contrast to Belgium, where distinct and well-defined regions with clear administrative boundaries are prevalent, the administrative structure of the Netherlands primarily centres around provinces without such delineations. Consequently, while both countries may exhibit similarities in certain respects, their organisational frameworks for administrative units differ significantly.

Belgium operates as a federal state where regions possess well-defined administrative boundaries and function as fully developed sub-state entities with inherent competencies that cannot be overridden by the federal level. This setup entails no hierarchical relationship between regions and the federal government, granting regions the autonomy to establish cooperative arrangements within their competencies with other state actors. However, despite this unique feature, the units under comparison can still be meaningfully compared.

The concept of region remains somewhat elusive, particularly when considering the classification used in EU law since 1988, known as the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for

[6] A full list of social sectors used for coding social sectors, as referring to the UN List of Social Sectors, is presented in the Annex of this book.

Statistics (NUTS). NUTS serve as a hierarchical classification system for administrative areas within the EU, facilitating the collection, development, and harmonisation of regional statistics (Iammarino et al., 2018; Basile, Castellani & Zanfei, 2008). Over time, the development of regions has emphasised the importance of territorial boundaries, with consistent NUTS classifications applied. In Belgium, the administrative landscape is characterised by three main regions: the Flemish Region, Brussels Capital Region, and Walloon Region. In contrast, the Netherlands lacks a systematic approach to administrative and territorial organisation, resulting in regions that are less clearly defined.

Considering these significant differences between the two countries, I opted to code the Netherlands as a single region. In other words, all stakeholders operating within the Netherlands were categorised under the Netherlands region. This coding decision did not pose any obstacles during data analysis. On the contrary, it facilitated the measurement of stakeholders' regional affiliations in a systematic manner. The dummy variables used to represent regional affiliation were as follows: Flemish Region, Brussels Region, Walloon Region, and Netherlands Region.

3.5.2 Social Sector

Another vital aspect of stakeholders pertains to their social sector involvement. To operationalise this dimension, I used the United Nations (UN) List of Social Sectors. This involved revisiting the data collected from stakeholders and determining how their activities aligned with these sectors. Additionally, I needed to decide on the quantification of the main variables, establishing scales and values. These decisions were informed by adapting the UN List of Social Sectors to facilitate practical coding, a topic I revisit later in this chapter. The social sector variable is analysed alongside the level of the mobilisation. Through bivariate correlations, I investigated whether there existed a linear relationship between these two variables.

Another significant variable, elaborated further in the subsequent section, is the level of mobilisation.

3.5.3 Level of Mobilisation

MLG encompasses various developments within the EU, including the increased involvement of subnational and national actors in Brussels (Bache & Flinders, 2004; see Marks et al., 1995). This trend indicates a growing prominence of actors from different levels in the decision-making and implementation processes of EU policies.

Considering this backdrop, I examine the MLG context in relation to the diffusion of stakeholders for project proposals seeking EU funding. Among the numerous elements shaping EU funding programmes, stakeholders play a crucial role. The mobilisation for specific EU policies is a result of EU policy processes (Hanegraaff et al., 2016). However, the level of mobilisation has often been overlooked. Scholars have noted examples, such as the

implementation of cohesion funds, where stakeholders mobilise from various levels (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Bache & Flinders, 2004). To code the level of mobilisation, I used categories including Local, Provincial, Regional, National, European, International, and Mixed. This coding system facilitated the statistical analysis procedures. However, it remains ambiguous whether the basis for measuring mobilisation should be the location or the geographical scope of work. In this thesis, I employ the geographical scope of work as the primary measure for analysis.

From an analytical perspective, a crucial question was how stakeholders should be distributed across different territorial layers and what kind of comparison would be most appropriate. I opted for the approach that emphasises the geographical expansion of a stakeholder's work. For instance, consider the case of Sirris, a non-profit organisation in the technology sector headquartered in Brussels. Due to its involvement in various fields and levels of work, including national and European levels, Sirris was categorised as operating at the European level.

The descriptive analysis of the level of mobilisation revealed that over 63.5% of mobilised actors operated at sub-national levels, including local, provincial, and regional levels. Additionally, approximately 1.5% of mobilised stakeholders operated at the European level, and 1.8% operated at the international level. It is evident that the majority of mobilised stakeholders for the cross-border cooperation programme operated at subnational levels, although international actors were involved to a certain extent.

3.5.4 Type of Actor

Cross-border cooperation programmes, formulated by the Commission, aim to: *"address the specific needs of regions, particularly those experiencing disparities"* (Bache & Flinders, 2004). An open question arises regarding the significance of the territorial aspect and the role actors play in the envisioned project. While the "type of actor" variable is already encompassed in the mainstream definition of stakeholders and has been empirically tested in previous research (Hanegraaf et al., 2016), it still holds relevance. In my interpretation, the "*type of actor*" encompasses categories such as non-profit organisations, firms, institutions, peak business associations, professional associations, public authorities, research institutes and universities, and sectoral business associations. This variable serves as a dependent variable, conceived according to the coding book developed by Hanegraaf et al. (2016).

Thus far, I have addressed a set of variables pertaining to stakeholders' attributes. Another set of inquiries pertains to the stakeholders' dependency variables, which include their reliance on resources and the economic activity of provinces and regions. These dependencies are measured using the Gross Domestic Product per Capita (known otherwise as GDP per capita). The variation and measurement of both variables are discussed in the following section.

3.6 Operationalisation of stakeholders' dependency variables (dependency on resources, economic activity of the province)

Table 7. Stakeholder's attributes and variation

Stakeholder's Attributes	Variation
Dependency on Resources	Direct - Indirect
Wealth of a Province	GDP per Capita (for 2007)

3.6.1 Dependency on Resources

The concept of dependency encompasses various forms of reliance resulting from interactions among different stakeholders. Actors may exhibit interdependence with one another or varying degrees of dependence on external factors, such as resources and funding. A crucial question arises regarding the types of dependencies fostered by stakeholders. While some stakeholders rely heavily on external sources for resources, others may exhibit interdependence with each other. Notably, having access to alternative sources of supply can position stakeholders advantageously, enabling them to engage in multiple exchange relationships with resource providers (Pfeffer & Salanick, 2011).

The RDT is a central theoretical framework referenced in this dissertation (Malatesta & Smith, 2014; Pfeffer & Salanick 2011). Recognising that stakeholders are neither self-contained nor self-sufficient allows for a deeper understanding of resource dependency. Although organisations employ diverse strategies for resource acquisition, their dependency on resources is influenced by various factors, which will be explored further in chapter 4.

3.6.2 Economic Activity of a Province

Stakeholders actively seek to obtain and maintain resources from their external environments (Davis & Cobb, 2010; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2011). There is a widely recognised notion in the literature that organisations engaged at various levels are involved in seeking EU funding (Ansell & Gash, 2007). The economic activities of these organisations are increasingly concentrated at local, provincial, regional, and European levels.

In this context, my aim was to establish a connection between organisations' reliance on resources from other organisations and their economic activities in provinces, along with low GDP growth, as indicated by GDP per capita. Data regarding the distribution of stakeholders' economic activities were sourced from the author's database, while data on

GDP per capita at the NUTS 2 level were obtained from the Eurostat website[7]. Although data for the period 2007 – 2013 were available, they were selected for the year closest to the specified timeframe corresponding to the project submission and mobilisation for the cross-border cooperation programme. Current GDP per capita was not considered due to the considerable variation in stakeholders' mobilisation across different calls for proposals.

I conducted a correlation analysis between the GDP per capita of provinces and the representation of stakeholders from these regions. My hypothesis posited that stakeholders from provinces with lower GDP per capita would require more funds, leading to higher mobilisation rates. To operationalise this, I utilised the provincial-level data (NUTS 2) to quantify stakeholders' representation. Subsequently, I established an ordered rank correlation with the GDP per capita of these provinces in 2007, aligning with the inception of the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands Program[8]. This analysis aimed to identify any trends or patterns indicating a correlation between higher GDP per capita and lower stakeholder mobilisation. By scoring the economic activity of each province based on GDP per capita at the NUTS 2 level, I could rank the provinces accordingly and assess their impact on stakeholder mobilisation.

Table 8. The ranking of stakeholders' representation in relation to the provinces where they work; and the ranking of the GDP per capita for those provinces (using the NUTS 2 level from the Eurostat data, 2007)

Provinces	**Distribution**	**Provinces Distribution Ranked**	**GDPperCapita (2007)**	**Provinces GDP Ranked**
Antwerpen	12,90%	1	37.000	1
North Brabant (NL)	10,80%	2	34.600	2
Flemish Brabant	5,50%	8	33.400	3
West Flanders (BE)	5,50%	7	30.200	6
East Flanders	7,90%	4	28.500	7

[7] Information was deducted from Eurostat Website: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database
[8] Information was deducted from Eurostat Website: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database

Limburg (NL)	6,70%	6	31.200	5
Zeeland (NL)	7,10%	5	31.900	4
Limburg (BE)	9,40%	3	26.300	8

Source: author's own database and the Eurostat Database – Gross Domestic Products Indicators (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database)

Table 8 revealed no significant disparities in GDP per capita between Belgium and the Netherlands at the NUTS 2 level, indicating overall satisfactory economic performance and development in both countries. As high-income countries according to the World Bank's classification, Belgium and the Netherlands demonstrated robust economic growth rates in 2007 (World Bank, Economic Growth Rates, 2007 in Bank, 2006). However, my focus was not on comparing economic growth patterns between these countries or assessing disparities in GDP per capita among EU member states. Instead, my objective was to correlate stakeholders' representation with provincial economic activity.

It's important to acknowledge the limitations of this analysis, particularly in measuring the relative mobilisation of stakeholders' provinces with differing economic statuses. Nonetheless, the observed rates of GDP per capita in relation to stakeholder distribution suggest that GDP per capita serves more as an environmental characteristic than a direct determinant of stakeholder mobilisation.

The findings are consistent with the RDT, which underscores organisations' reliance on the external environment for resources (Pfeffer, 2018; Beyers & Kerremans, 2007). However, the analysis did not directly assess the correlation between stakeholder mobilisation from specific provinces and the GDP per capita of those provinces during the 2007 – 2013 mobilisation period.

To recap, the examination focused on differences in GDP per capita at the NUTS 2 level in Belgium and the Netherlands. Considering the premise that organisations may depend on their environment for resources, it's crucial to investigate the distribution of stakeholder mobilisation in relation to GDP per capita. However, the interpretation of the results does not definitely establish a dependency relationship between low GDP per capita in a region/ province and a higher level of stakeholder mobilisation from those areas.

Given the significance of stakeholder mobilisation in securing EU funding, the subsequent chapter delves into the intricacies of mobilisation and addresses the specific dynamics surrounding it.

Chapter 4 Mapping Stakeholder's Mobilisation for the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands (2007 – 2013)

This chapter delineates the stakeholders involved in the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands programme, a significant EU cross-border cooperation initiative. It initiates with an overview of the contextual landscape in which stakeholders formalise projects or collaborations within the realm of EU funding. Providing insights into the MLG context, it elucidates how stakeholders from diverse levels mobilise for EU funding.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the stakeholders involved in mobilising for EU funding, focusing on their characteristics, dependencies, and engagement patterns. By systematically examining the roles of various stakeholder groups, including NGOs, local governments, and private firms, this chapter seeks to delineate the dynamics of resource mobilisation within the context of the EU's Cohesion Policy. It aims to highlight how different stakeholders navigate the complexities of cross-border policy arrangements, revealing the interplay between local contexts and broader EU objectives. Ultimately, this descriptive approach will contribute to a deeper understanding of the stakeholder landscape, offering insights into how diverse actors participate in and influence the mobilisation for EU financial resources.

The chapter also theoretically grounds its exploration in the RDT, which underscores stakeholders' reliance on external resources. Within this timeframe, a distinction is drawn between "*actual*" and "*potential*" mobilisation, with a special focus on which stakeholders actually mobilise for EU funding.

Beginning with the primary theoretical framework anchored in MLG and RDT, the subsequent sections differentiate between "*actual*" and "*potential*" mobilisation. It proceeds with the specification of hypotheses. Finally, section 4.7 concludes the chapter, summarising the key findings and insights derived from the analysis.

4.1 Mobilisation of resources: the RDT

In this section, the focus is on the RDT, which primarily concerns the environment and its influence on organisational survival.

RDT posits that organisations' survival hinges significantly on external resources, encompassing financial resources and information (Pfeffer, 2018; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2011). Consequently, this theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationships that stakeholders cultivate with their external environment, rather than focusing solely on internal dynamics within an organisation. Indeed, the RDT proves instrumental in elucidating stakeholders' behaviours, which are largely driven by dependency. Stakeholders, therefore, are externally influenced to fulfil the demands of their environment and produce resources essential for their sustenance (Pfeffer, 2018). Given stakeholders' dependency on resources, they continually seek resources primarily within their environment (Nienhueser, 2008).

To ascertain resource dependencies, it is pertinent to inquire: *What are the key resources in an environment? Who exercises control over these resources?* Resources manifest in various forms, hold distinct values based on the significance and availability, and vary in terms of the individuals or entities wielding discretion and control over them.

Undoubtedly, EU funding retains significant importance as a scarce resource, holding considerable value for stakeholders. Control over resources is often manifested through decision-making bodies tasked with allocating these resources, such as the Steering Committee and the Managing Authorities. These bodies have sole authority in determining which actors gain access to EU funding. The EU, as the primary interlocutor, wields control over resources deemed strategic for stakeholders (Beyers & De Bruycker, 2017; Coen, 2013).

Within the framework of RDT, it is underscored that in environments where resources are scarce, particularly financial resources, they assume heightened importance (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2011). Viewed through this lens, resources emerge as a crucial environmental factor shaping the behaviour of involved organisations. By rendering actors more dependent on the external environment, they are compelled to engage in network coalitions to access additional resources, such as EU funding. The central tenet of this theory posits that those who control critical resources wield power, and this power exerts influence on behaviour, thereby fostering situations of dependence and uncertainty (Hillman et al., 2009).

While the original theory by Pfeffer and Salancik (2011) highlights the potential for organisations to develop interdependencies with their environment, this thesis primarily focuses on the interdependencies formed by stakeholders within their respective environments. Interdependence, as defined in this context, refers to "*an existing relation, whenever one actor does not entirely control all the conditions necessary for the achievement of an action or for obtaining the outcome desired from the action*" (Pfeffer, 2018). This implies that interdependencies are not static but can evolve over time.

This chapter proceeds as follows: First, it delineates the distinction between the "*potential*" and "*actual*" mobilisation. Next, it outlines the main hypotheses and discusses the empirical results. Finally, the chapter offers an assessment of how well the theory helps identify the stakeholders expected to mobilise for EU funding. Rather than explaining why certain

groups mobilise more or less, the focus is on determining which types of stakeholders are likely to seek out these resources. While RDT addresses a wide range of organisational behaviours, this chapter does not aim to evaluate all aspects of the theory empirically. Instead, it focuses on providing a clear depiction of the various stakeholders involved in mobilising for EU funding, without delving into the reasons behind their varying levels of engagement.

I begin with the premise that stakeholders rely on financial resources, with EU funding being one of the most crucial resources enabling them to execute cross-border cooperation projects. While RDT suggests that an organisation's dependency on critical resources fosters interdependencies with other organisations, I diverge from this approach in this chapter. Instead, my focus is solely on gaining a deeper comprehension of the mobilisation efforts undertaken to secure EU funding and how this engenders varying degrees of resource dependency among actors. The subsequent section delves into the primary distinctions between potential and actual mobilisers, elucidating the trajectory pursued in this dissertation.

4.2 Operationalisation: the difference between "potential" and "actual" mobilisation

Hooghe et al. (2002) observed the evolution of governments into multilevel entities, where decision-making extends beyond traditional institutions and authority is dispersed across various levels from states to supranational and subnational entities. This transformation has created numerous opportunities for stakeholders to mobilise, particularly in terms of influencing policies and accessing funds (Piattoni, 2009). However, while some stakeholders actively engage in EU funding schemes by submitting project proposals, others remain less involved. This explores the types of stakeholders expected to mobilise for EU funding, presenting a series of empirical hypotheses to be tested, which will be outlined later in the chapter.

This section represents an initial step in the broader endeavour of understanding stakeholders' mobilisation for EU funding. The primary focus here is on actual mobilisation, which will be empirically investigated. This involves refining the key attributes of stakeholders and analysing the interdependence they develop with resources, particularly EU funding. Despite the extensive examination of stakeholder dispersal from the MLG perspective, there remains a scarcity of efforts to systematically gather and analyse fundamental data in this area.

Much of the empirical work in this chapter revolves around understanding the characteristics of stakeholders that mobilise and their dependency on resources, particularly EU funds. *But what exactly does this mobilisation entail?* It is crucial to recognise that assessing mobilisation goes beyond simply counting the number of stakeholders involved; it

also involves understanding the unique features of those stakeholders who are actively mobilising.

To gain a comprehensively understanding of mobilisation, this dissertation focuses on evaluating the attributes of stakeholders engaged in EU funding and their reliance on such funding. There are different approaches to quantifying mobilisation. A basic measure could involve identifying stakeholders actively seeking resources, such as EU funding, rather than assuming their interest. A more nuanced approach would consider whether stakeholders are actively considering applying for EU funds, which is more challenging to measure but holds significant importance.

Moreover, narrowing the focus to stakeholders who actually mobilise provides a more accurate depiction of mobilisation for EU funding. While all stakeholders engage in various forms of interaction, those who collaborate closely with each other for the purpose of accessing EU funding are of particular interest. Exploring the dynamics of these relationships and collaborations forms a significant aspect of the study, as elaborated in chapter 5.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, the objective is to develop a comprehensive understanding of mobilisation by examining the phenomenon of "*actual mobilisation*". This involves analysing all stakeholders who submitted project proposals under the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands cross-border cooperation project application phase from 2007 to 2013. This approach provides insights into the mobilisation process, stakeholder types, their level of mobilisation, and how these factors relate to the dependencies on the environment. The empirical findings presented here serve as the foundation for analysing stakeholder collaboration in the subsequent chapter.

MLG describes the complex decision-making processes characteristic of EU policy-making, where actors across various levels of government share competencies and play pivotal roles in decision-making (Richardson, 2015). This concept is particularly evident in the realm of EU cohesion policy. Stakeholders engage in mobilisation efforts within a multilevel environment encompassing national, regional, local, and European layers (Piattoni, 2009). The notion of MLG emerged in the literature in 1992, highlighting the involvement of diverse stakeholders, governmental bodies, agencies, and partnerships across different governance levels that were previously limited in scope.

The theoretical framework of MLG has been applied in various contexts, with scholars like Bache (2008) examining both horizontal and vertical dynamics within the MLG framework, spanning European, national, and subnational layers (Piattoni, 2009). A well-functioning MLG system typically involves stakeholders operating at different levels, underscoring the importance of understanding the scale of mobilisation both academically and empirically. As articulated by Bache (2008), the emergence of MLG has opened up possibilities for a differentiated multilevel polity characterised by varying processes and outcomes at the subnational level.

In summary, this section has explored the nuances of mobilisation highlighted in the literature, emphasising the significance of both potential and actual mobilisation as conceptual benchmarks for empirical analysis. While each term has its distinct characteristics, the empirical analysis of this chapter remains on actual mobilisation. Another crucial aspect addressed is the impact of Resource Dependency on mobilisation, which is examined in the subsequent section. The thesis aims to delve into three core elements: describing mobilisation, understanding stakeholder collaboration, and identifying conditions for stakeholder project proposal success.

4.3 Hypotheses specification – Mobilisation on stakeholders' attributes

The conceptual frameworks of MLG and RDT identified in the preceding section offer distinct but complementary perspectives on stakeholder mobilisation. Building upon these frameworks, this section aims to delineate hypotheses that derive from both theoretical lenses, emphasising the unique characteristics of stakeholders and their relative dependencies. The heightened cooperation across national borders is increasingly recognised as a crucial element in the development of regional, national, and European economies (Piattoni, 2009). This growing recognition underscores the importance of involving all stakeholders in cross-border initiatives and collaborations.

The first theoretical hypothesis tested in this chapter stems from the overarching MLG framework. According to this framework, multiple stakeholders are motivated to engage not only in shaping policies but also in accessing funds (Lowery, 2007; Richardson, 2006). This hypothesis guided the examination of stakeholders' mobilisation within their respective social sector. Building on existing literature, it is understood that local or regional actors advocate for their interests differently, leading to the expectation that some stakeholders are more likely to seek financial resources (Olson, 2009). For instance, *does an environmental NGO mobilise for access to EU funding schemes in the same way as a firm? Are there discernible differences in the mobilisation process and objectives that result in significant mobilisation outcomes: overrepresentation or underrepresentation of the groups?* These questions are central to undertaking the nuances of stakeholder mobilisation across different sectors.

Laurell and Sandström (2017) posits that profit-driven actors in business are primarily interested in advancing their economic interests, while stakeholders with a social emphasis pursue broader objectives related to cultural exchange, health and social services, social welfare, and education (Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2023). As a result, I expect that the social sector will significantly influence mobilisation efforts. This sector encompasses various dimensions outlined by the United Nations List of Social Sectors, reflecting the diverse fields in which stakeholders operate independently. These sectors include agriculture, mining, manufacturing, electricity, water supply, construction, retail trade, transportation, accommodation, information and communication, financial and insurance activities, real

estate activities, scientific and technical activities, administrative and support service activities, public administration and defence, education, human health and social work activities, arts, entertainment and recreation, as well as other services.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the social sector is significant as it is aligns with one of the programme objectives for which stakeholders seek funding. During the 2007 – 2013 programme, actors could independently or collaboratively submit project proposals with one of the three main program priorities: Economy, Environment, or Societal Issues.

The UN List of Social Sectors[9] informs the content of the hypothesis and operationalises the social sector variable.

Hypothesis 1: Stakeholders will mobilise significantly for EU funding opportunities related to sectors that are driven by their mission-focused agendas. Thus, an NGO engaged in environmental advocacy will mobilise significantly for EU funding opportunities related to sustainability and climate action, while a firm will mobilise significantly for EU funding opportunities that align closely with their business objectives.

The question I explore is the level of engagement of these stakeholders. Over the past two decades, there has been a notable decentralisation of authority from the EU and central government levels to regions and localities. This decentralisation has involved the reallocation of certain competences and distribution of funds (Piattoni, 2009). The European Regional Development Fund, in particular, has emerged as a crucial financial tool championed by the European Commission to empower regions.

A significant achievement of the European Commission in regional financing has been the mobilisation of stakeholders to foster territorial and cross-border cooperation, particularly in border regions. As I delve into further detail in chapter 5, the structure is relatively straightforward: many stakeholders mobilise by submitting project proposals to access EU funding, but only a selected few of them succeed in securing this funding.

Marks et al. (1995) observe that broader cooperation among regional stakeholders is one of the most notable outcomes of mobilisation efforts. This results in a network of actors stemming from various regions, areas, and levels of engagement. While there isn't a dominant type of actor that mobilises for EU funds, it's plausible that stakeholders operating at subnational levels will be more inclined to mobilise for EU funding opportunities. Cross-border cooperation programmes are designed to be adaptable rather

[9] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesm/seriesm_4rev4e.pdf

than permanent, allowing them to address evolving functional needs at both EU and national levels.

It is anticipated that actors who have previously mobilised for cross-border cooperation programmes will find it relatively easier to mobilise again. Past instances of cooperation demonstrate that the complex tasks associated with project applications are managed effectively (Klüver, 2011; Mahoney, 2008). Although there is no precise count for the levels of engagement among stakeholders, such as firms, NGOs, and public authorities, it is evident that their numbers have increased over the past two decades. The data source for all mobilised organised interests in the cross-border cooperation programme indicates that 788 stakeholders have expressed interest in the field through mobilisation. The question now is which specific stakeholders mobilise based on their level of activity. The hypothesis is introduced below.

Cooperation among a diverse range of stakeholders from local, regional, and provincial levels, spanning both the public and private sectors, is fostered between Flanders and the Netherlands region. These stakeholders establish horizontal links across borders and vertical connections with various actors (Blatter, 2004). While the Interreg programme primarily aims to engage local and regional actors in this collaboration (Rosanò, 2021), actors from European and international levels may also participate. Given that cross-border cooperation entails collaboration between public and private entities to promote shared interests and enhance the well-being of border area residents (Council of Europe, 2006), I would expect stakeholders operating at the local level to be overrepresented in the overall stakeholders' mobilisation for EU funding. This rationale leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Stakeholders from subnational levels, including regional, local, and provincial will mobilise significantly for EU funding opportunities. Thus, local actors who are more attuned to cross-border issues are expected to demonstrate a higher propensity to apply for EU funding opportunities, compared to European or international actors.

4.4 Hypotheses specification – Mobilisation on stakeholders' dependency

RDT focuses on how organisations navigate their external environment and manage dependencies. It suggests that organisations inevitably become reliant to some extent on external factors (Pfeffer, 2018; Pfeffer & Salanick, 2011). As organisations seek out new resources, they aim to exert control over those deemed critical to their operations. RDT acknowledges that organisations will adjust their dependencies to better fit the demands of their environment, often restructuring and adapting accordingly (Hillman et al., 2009).

The EU allocates significant financial assistance annually to support the development of European regions, including through cross-border cooperation (Cascario & Piskorski, 2005; Pfeffer & Salanick, 2011). While the RDT literature has primarily focused on understanding

the development of dependencies, recent studies have begun to explore how different types of stakeholders mobilise resources. Notably, observations suggest that NGOs tend to develop more direct dependencies on external resources compared to business firms. This difference can be attributed to NGOs' non-profit orientation, which often requires them to seek external funding to support their activities.

Business-oriented stakeholders typically prioritise profit-driven goals (Eising, 2007; Frooman, 1999). This focus enables them to generate profits from their activities and adapt to their external resource environment effectively. As a result, these stakeholders often possess the ability to mobilise resources independently to sustain their operations (Pfeffer & Salanick, 2011). Conversely, NGOs rely more heavily on external funding because their activities are driven by non-profit motives and do not generate income. This dependency on funds is a key characteristic of NGOs given their mission-oriented approach.

If this is the case, then I anticipate that NGOs and business stakeholders will mobilise in distinct ways. This variation is underscored by the fact that stakeholders utilise different tactics and strategies when engaging with decision-makers, a topic I will explore in greater depth in chapter 6. My aim is to test the premise that the type of actor creates specific dependencies, leading to the expectation that actors with a direct dependency on resources will be more active in seeking EU funding. Conversely, it can be argued that actors transitioning into profit-driven entities will show reduced activity in this regard. As an initial observation, I anticipate that fewer firms and profit-oriented entities will submit project proposals for EU funding. This leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Stakeholders that have a direct dependency on resources will mobilise significantly for EU funding opportunities. Thus, stakeholders that have a direct dependency on such resources will demonstrate a higher propensity to apply for EU funding opportunities, compared to actors with an indirect dependency.

Dependencies on resources suggest varying levels of engagement, leading to greater disparities between states and regions (Beyers & Kerremans, 2011). Since their inception, reforms on structural funds have consistently favoured lagging or declining regions.[10] In principle, Cohesion Policy aims to benefit all Member States; however, some receive only a minimal share of the funds. As a result, certain regions require more funding than others. This leads to the formulation of the following final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Stakeholders from periphery provinces will mobilise significantly for EU funding opportunities. Thus, stakeholders that come from periphery provinces will demonstrate a

[10] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border/

higher propensity to apply for EU funding opportunities, compared to stakeholders from core provinces.

4.5 Empirical analysis: the mapping of stakeholders' actual mobilisation

I expect that stakeholders oriented towards societal issues will exhibit greater mobilisation for social issues, while economic actors will be more inclined to mobilise for economic issues. To examine this hypothesis, I analyse the priorities chosen by stakeholders when submitting project proposals under the programme call. The main priorities include Economy, Environment, and People to People (referred to as Societal Matters in this thesis)[11]. The correlation between the social sector of stakeholders and their chosen priority is assessed. Table 9 shows illustrates a strong correlation between these variables (Spearman's correlation coefficient Rs is 1.161, significant at the 0.01 level). This indicates that stakeholders focused on social issues primarily submit project proposals related to environmental and societal themes, while those involved in economic activities tend to prioritise proposals under economic themes. Thus, stakeholders demonstrate distinct patterns of engagement.

Table 9. The Spearman Correlation coefficient for the social sector of stakeholders (utilising the UN List of Social Sectors) and the main themes of the Programme (where stakeholders submit their applications)

The Spearman's Rho Correlation Results			
		The Social Sector of the Stakeholder	The Programme Priority
The Social Sector of the Stakeholder	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (1-tailed) N	1,000 . 788	,161** ,000 788
The Programme Priority	Correlation Coefficient	,161** ,000	1,000 .

[11] The Interreg Flanders-Netherlands Programme website, provides with more details: http://www.grensregio.eu/english/

	Sig. (1-tailed) N	788	788

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

The distribution of stakeholders based on their type and level of mobilisation is presented in Table 10. Institutions (N=217), public authorities (N=216) and non-profit organisations (N=175) represent the stakeholder types that have engaged most actively. The table also illustrates that the majority of stakeholders operate at sub-national levels, including local, provincial, and regional tiers, while fewer are active at European, international, or mixed levels. This finding strongly supports the second hypothesis, which posited that the operational level of an organisation is a significant variable. Furthermore, the multilevel environment encourages the formation of local alliances among stakeholders, as discussed in the previous section.

Table 10. Stakeholder's distribution according to their type and level of mobilisation

Type of Actors											
Level	Non-profit	Firm	Institution	Peak Business Association	Professional Association	Public Authority	Research Institute/ University	Sectoral Business Association	Other	Total	Total %
Local	36	14	38	0	2	115	3	2	0	210	27%
Provincial	83	24	103	0	3	51	4	13	0	281	36%
Regional	32	11	39	1	4	22	19	7	0	135	17%
National	17	34	28	1	5	26	0	11	0	122	15%
European	5	3	7	0	1	2	0	0	2	20	3%

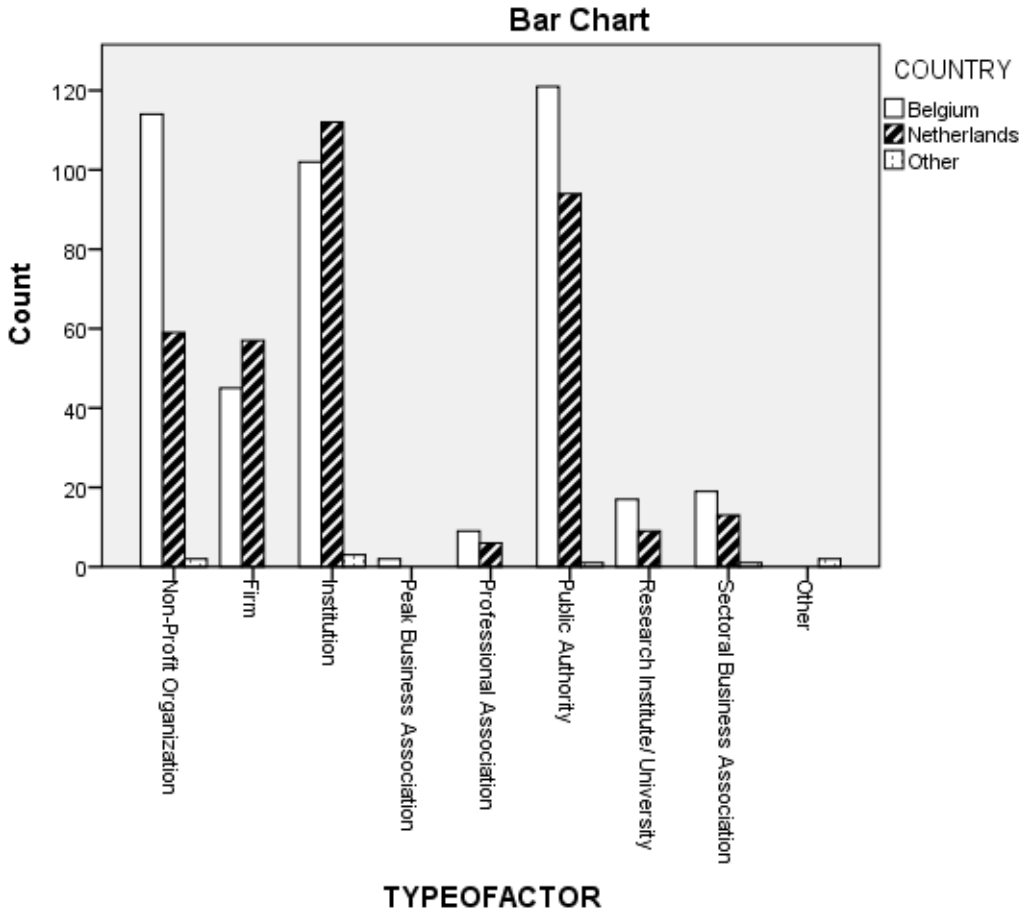
International	1	16	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	2%
Mixed	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0%
Total	175	102	217	2	15	216	26	33	2	788	
Total %	12%	13%	28%	0%	2%	28%	3%	4%	0%	100%	100%

Source: Author

I also find strong support for the third hypothesis. The majority of mobilised stakeholders demonstrate a direct dependency on EU funding. As illustrated in Table 10, the three most prominent types of mobilised stakeholders are non-profit organisations (22%), public authorities (28%), and institutions (278%)[12]. These stakeholders predominantly operate on a non-profit basis, highlighting their reliance on funding, particularly from the EU sources. In contrast, profit-driven actors are represented to only 12.9%. Thus 12.9% of mobilised stakeholders are firms, with peak business associations comprising a mere 0.3% and sectoral business associations represent 4.2%. These entities tend to have lower dependency on EU funding due to their profit-oriented nature, which allows them to generate resources through alternative means. Additionally, this number of representation in terms of mobilisation of business-oriented stakeholders could be attributed to their eligibility for participation in the Interreg Flanders Netherlands programme for the first time during the 2007 – 2013 period.

[12] We coded as Institutions: foundations, university colleges, and other stakeholders that have a non-profit stake.

Table 11. Stakeholder's distribution according to their sector and country, direct vs indirect dependency towards the EU funding



Finally, I examined the resource dependency variables of stakeholders, hypothesising that actors from less prosperous areas would exhibit greater propensity to apply for EU funding for cross-border cooperation compared to those from relatively more affluent areas. Table 12 presents the detailed results of the correlation analysis. To compute these results, I initially ranked provinces based on the number of mobilised stakeholders, assigning higher weight to provinces with greater mobilisation. Subsequently, I ranked the provinces according to their GDP per capita, utilising Eurostat Data[13] for the NUTS 2 level. GDP per capita data was available for the years 2007 to 2011, with 2007 selected due to the absence of significant fluctuations over subsequent years. For clarity in the analysis, I excluded the "Other" and "Mixed"[14] Provinces categories when ranking provinces based on the number

[13] Information was deducted from Eurostat Website: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database

[14] Other means that the actor is working in other provinces, than the ones eligible for the programme. Mixed means the actor is working in more than one province, thus multiple provinces.

of mobilised stakeholders, as these categories do not align with their primary value. Table 12 illustrates the outcomes of this comparative analysis.

Table 12. The ranking of provinces in relation to the number of stakeholders mobilised; and the ranking of the GDP per capita for those provinces (using the NUTS 2 level from the Eurostat data, 2007)

Provinces	Distribution	Provinces Distribution Ranked	GDPperCapita (2007)	Provinces GDP Ranked
Antwerpen	12,90%	1	37.000	1
North Brabant (NL)	10,80%	2	34.600	2
Flemish Brabant	5,50%	8	33.400	3
West Flanders (BE)	5,50%	7	30.200	6
East Flanders	7,90%	4	28.500	7
Limburg (NL)	6,70%	6	31.200	5
Zeeland (NL)	7,10%	5	31.900	4
Limburg (BE)	9,40%	3	26.300	8

Source: author's own database and the Eurostat Database – Gross Domestic Products Indicators (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database)

My hypothesis proposed that stakeholders operating in provinces with lower GDP per capita would demonstrate a greater direct dependency on EU funding and, as a result, were expected to mobilise for EU funding. Conversely, I would expect stakeholders operating in wealthier provinces, characterised by higher GDP per capita, to be less likely to seek financial resources through EU funding, due to a lower dependency on resources. To assess these relationships, Kendall's tau b correlation was employed, measuring the strength and direction of association between two variables measured on at least an ordinal scale: GDP per capita and provinces. The results, as depicted in table 13, reveal no significant correlation. There is no clear pattern suggesting that higher mobilisation rates are associated with provinces having lower GDP per capita, and vice versa. While stakeholders

in less prosperous provinces may exhibit higher resource dependency, their rates of mobilisation do not necessarily reflect this expectation. Possible explanations for this phenomenon could include stakeholders pursuing other EU funding schemes or facing limitations such as inadequate capacities (e.g., time, financial resources, expertise) that hinder successful mobilisation.

Table 13. The results of Kendall's Tau B – a Ranked Order Correlation for Provinces (accordingly with stakeholder's representation from these provinces) and their richness (accordingly with the GDP per capita based on the NUTS 2 level)

The Kendall's Tau B Ranked Correlation Results			
		The Provinces Distribution Ranked	The Provinces GDP Ranked
The Provinces Distribution Ranked	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	1,000 . 8	,143 ,621 8
The Provinces GDP Ranked	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	,143 ,621 8	1,000 . 8

4.6 Conclusions

This chapter delved into the mobilisation of stakeholders for EU funding, adopting a multilevel perspective and exploring their dependency on resources, particularly in the form of funds. The empirical focus remained on cross-border cooperation, specifically examining the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands Programme during the period from 2007 to 2013.

In summary, I identified several stakeholders variables – including their level of engagement, the policy domains they address, and their reliance on funds – in relation to the provinces they operate in, which influence their mobilisation levels. Through the empirical analysis, I demonstrated that the multilevel context within which stakeholders operate significantly influences their mobilisation efforts. Notably, the majority of mobilised stakeholders primarily operate at sub-national and national levels, underscoring the importance of understanding the varied levels of engagement within the broader landscape of cross-border cooperation (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

My findings indicate that NGOs and societal actors, particularly those operating within the non-profit sphere, are the primary stakeholders mobilising for EU funding. These groups are expected to be actively engaged in European-funded programs. Conversely, market-oriented economic actors, such as private firms, are likely to show lower levels of mobilisation for their resources.

Interestingly, the empirical analysis revealed that stakeholders in provinces with lower GDP per capita did not mobilise more than those in more prosperous regions. Contrary to the expectation that the European Commission programmes aimed at reducing regional disparities would lead to higher mobilisation in less affluent areas, it was found that stakeholders from wealthier regions submitted more applications for funds. This suggests that while resource dependency informs individual actors' mobilisation capabilities, it does not directly correlate with their geographical location.

This empirical analysis offers valuable insights into the characteristics of stakeholders engaged in mobilising for EU funds, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. By uncovering patterns in stakeholder features and dependencies, this chapter illuminates the intricate dynamics of cross-border policy arrangements. It emphasizes not only the formal involvement of stakeholders but also the multilevel nature of the EU's Cohesion Policy and the relationships formed during the mobilisation process.

The framework of MLG and RDT played pivotal roles in elucidating the anticipated dynamics of political mobilisation among stakeholders. By delving into the multilevel environment promoted by the EU and considering the dependencies on resources that drive stakeholders to mobilise, this analysis aimed to enhance our understanding of these intricate interactions.

However, the mobilisation of stakeholders for EU funding could be approached differently through regression analysis by examining not only the frequency of mobilisation but also the underlying factors that influence this engagement. By utilising multiple regression techniques, future research could analyse how various independent variables such as organisational size, prior experience with funding proposals, and the availability of resources could impact the likelihood of different stakeholder groups mobilising for EU funds. This method allows for the identification of significant predictors of mobilisation while controlling for potential confounding variables. Additionally, employing interaction terms could reveal how the relationship between these predictors varies across different types of stakeholders, such as NGOs versus private firms. By adopting this multifaceted approach, researchers could provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of stakeholder mobilisation, informing strategies to enhance participation in funding initiatives.

Chapter 5 Collaboration of Stakeholders and their Identity

5.1 The role of stakeholders in 'policy networks' in addressing complex issues of policy-making

Following the previous chapter's examination of mobilised stakeholders in the chosen cross-border cooperation programme, this chapter shifts its attention to stakeholder collaboration and the resulting network. Drawing from the ACF, I delve into shared identity within a subset of actors. Through empirical analysis, I explore how stakeholders engage in multiple coalitions simultaneously. By scrutinising actors involved in at least five project proposals (collaboration ties), I uncover the prevailing identity among "*dominating*" actors in the field. This chapter investigates the interactions among actors, particularly in terms of their organisational identity. I propose refining the data by exclusively considering stakeholders involved in collaborative project proposals. By starting with this subset, I assess the *similarity* in organisational identity among stakeholders. This approach allows for a clearer visualisation of collaboration patterns within the subset and facilitates an understanding of the shared identity among core stakeholders.

This chapter unfolds in the following sequence. First, I underscore the significance of examining stakeholder collaborations in light of their fundamental values and beliefs. Subsequently, I delve into the ACF framework, which serves as the primary theoretical foundation for this chapter. I introduce the key expectations stemming from this theoretical perspective. Following this, I elucidate the primary research methodology employed for data collection. Later in the chapter, I delineate the empirical model and present the results derived from SNA. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the significant implications that *organisational identity* holds for stakeholders' collaborations.

5.2 Why studying collaboration of stakeholders?

Coalitions are structures characterised by policy actors sharing common beliefs and coordinating their actions to influence policy processes (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). Existing literature on the ACF often examines the formation of coalitions for *ad-hoc* advocacy purposes, particularly within the environmental, energy, economic, and financial policy domains (Weible & Sabatier, 2018; Pierce et al., 2017). While coalitions may seek alternative decision-making venues, their types and interactions with stakeholders can vary (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). In this thesis, I focus solely on the size of coalitions (small, medium, and large) based on the number of participating actors, considering them as *ad hoc* entities navigating prevailing cross-border cooperation structures.

In this chapter, I investigate whether stakeholders with similar organisational identities are more inclined to collaborate for cross-border cooperation programmes. The central question addressed in this chapter is: *Are stakeholders who share the same organisational identity more likely to collaborate with each other for project proposals within the cross-border cooperation programme?* Besides examining actors who submit project proposals individually, I also focus on the *organisational identity* of stakeholders engaged in collaborative efforts. Organisational identity refers to the shared visions and contributions to society that actors embrace (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). Building on the ACF assumption that coalitions operate within policy subsystems by reflecting their own beliefs (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014), I analyse the similarity of stakeholders in terms of their shared features and beliefs.

The ACF framework posits that coalitions are formed to address common problems and achieve policy goals (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). While non-profit organisations actively seek memberships in coalitions (Fyall & McGuire, 2014), profit-making organisations also play a significant role in coalitions, as demonstrated in the data from the previous chapter. This chapter delves deeper into the relationships established between stakeholders for the purpose of project proposals, resulting in a permeable network with interconnected ties (Heaney & Israel, 2016). Additionally, it is important to consider that collaborations among stakeholders for coalition formation may evolve over time.

The subsequent section of this chapter delves into the data sources utilised for the empirical analysis. I elaborate in greater details on how the data gathered for mapping the mobilised stakeholders in the cross-border cooperation programme serves as a solid foundation for analysing the deep ties among actors for projects. The SNA method is employed, presenting a node-and-edge graph to quantitatively depict which stakeholders have established the most network ties.

5.3 Data and Methods

To study the relationship between actors for collaboration purposes, it is crucial to define the population of stakeholders that engage in collaborative efforts. However, it is also important to acknowledge that not all actors participate in collaboration equally. Some may work on project proposals independently, submitting them for the cross-border cooperation programme without establishing ties with other stakeholders. This aspect significantly impacts the data used for this chapter.

The comprehensive mapping of stakeholders mobilising for EU funds provided valuable insights into their participation, whether in coalition settings, or independently. This approach unveiled diverse stakeholders engaging in various issues, spanning from social affairs to sustainable economic development, across different levels of activity ranging from local to national and European levels. It sheds light on the dynamic coalitions and collaborations formed to access EU funds.

The utilisation of the SNA method enhances the understanding of the network composition by identifying its core actors. However, it is important to note a methodological caution. My analysis specifically focuses on the composition of coalitions, referring exclusively to stakeholders participating in at least one coalition. While I concentrate on this group of stakeholders involved in coalitions, they form a social network of actors sharing ties, i.e. relationships with one another.

Unlike the other chapters, this one employs expectations instead of hypotheses. Expectations are broader, less formal anticipations of possible outcomes. They offer a more flexible framework for exploring research questions and allow for a wider range of potential findings. While hypotheses are essential for empirical testing due to their specific, testable nature, expectations can guide the research process without being constrained by the need for precise predictions. This flexibility can be particularly useful in exploratory phases of research or when dealing with complex, multifaceted issues such as collaborations between stakeholders for project purposes, where rigid hypotheses might limit the scope of inquiry. By using expectations, this chapter aims to capture a broader spectrum of insights and foster a more open-ended investigation.

To test the expectations outlined later in this chapter, I evaluate the network position of each actor based on their collaboration ties. These measures are tabulated by organising actors and coalition memberships (*collaborations*) in a two-mode network using SNA. I employ a set of variables to gauge *organisational identity*, such as actor type and level of work.

Once the comprehensive mapping of stakeholders is completed, I isolate from the overall network those stakeholders collaborating more frequently with one another. This is achieved by applying a frequency threshold, typically set at 5 based on empirical observations. This process creates a subsystem of core actors sharing more frequent ties among themselves. It's worth noting that coalition sizes vary, ranging from a few actors to dozens of them.

Specialised software such as Pajek facilitates the placement of actors *in conjunction* to their connections (*i.e. project proposals*) within the social network. Pajek supports large network visualisations and captures core-periphery structures. By using this software, it becomes evident that actors are better positioned and more connected within the network, resulting in a higher intensity of collaboration between stakeholders. This technique highlights the strong connections among core nodes and illustrates that core nodes may also have significant connections to peripheral nodes.

5.4 Does identity help to build collaboration? The ACF

Sabatier's ACF theoretical framework originated in the 1980s, initially focusing on environmental fields to understand policy processes (Pierce et al., 2017). Over time, it has

evolved into a broader framework for analysing policy processes across various domains. The ACF framework has been applied in different fields, providing insights into coalition formation in areas such as energy, environment (Weible & Sabatier, 2018; Weible et al., 2009), economic and financial policy (Pierce et al., 2017), pharmaceutical policy (Chung & Brooks, 2019), among others.

The theory underscores the translation of deep core beliefs into policy core beliefs, which pertain to beliefs about a specific policy domain (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). According to the ACF, policy change occurs when a significant external perturbation is translated into action by a coalition.

In my analysis, I apply the ACF framework within the context of cross-border cooperation. The study highlights the various ways in which actors form coalitions based on their policy core beliefs, emphasising the dynamic nature of coalition-building. The focus is on the collaboration among a diverse set of actors to create coalitions for cross-border cooperation projects. Collaboration within the cross-border cooperation structure requires formalisation, with coalition members coming together around project proposals with societal impacts. These members may include both for-profit and non-profit organisations, united by shared beliefs.

I employ the ACF to examine the shared beliefs among actors and their collaboration patterns. This chapter specifically presents the *core-periphery* sub-network of stakeholders, reflecting the *status* of actors within a network. While SNA offers insights into the importance of actors, I anticipate a stronger *connection* among actors sharing a similar *organisational identity*. Through my analysis of the case study, the development of collaboration ties sheds light on actors' positions in alignment with their policy core beliefs. This illustrates how actors actively align with similar counterparts to pursue common policy objectives (Weible & Sabatier, 2018).

Before delving into the section that examines the expectations derived from the ACF theoretical framework, I first address the significant distinctions in stakeholders' roles as leaders or partners in project proposals. This section elucidates the interaction patterns of stakeholders through their participation in project proposal coalitions, highlighting their roles as leaders or partners. The subsequent section carries implications for applying ACF in collaborative settings.

Following this, I introduce how ACF can be more effectively employed to elucidate shared beliefs in collaborative contexts. This involves discussing how the framework can offer insights into the alignment of actors' beliefs and behaviours within coalitions formed for collaborative endeavours.

5.5 The role of Stakeholders as Leaders and Partners

5.5.1 Stakeholders as Leaders

Within the 287 project applications submitted by stakeholders for EU funding for cross-border cooperation projects, 70 were granted EU funding access, while 217 did not receive EU financial support. Based on interviews conducted with Managing Authorities at the outset of this research project, it is evident that each actor plays a vital role within a coalition. In every coalition, there exists a leading institution primarily responsible for carrying out the project application work and facilitating the involvement of other actors (Geuijen et al., 2022).

Regarding the coalition's structure, and to the best of my knowledge, for each project proposal submitted under a coalition, a leader-partner structure was established. Leadership positions are thus expected to exert a stronger influence on partners in closer proximity to the leading institution. The concept of leader-partner '*bundling*' for the provision of public goods (Joha & Janssen, 2010) is well-documented in the literature. The public value of partnerships (Reynaers & De Graaf, 2014), along with discussions on combining contributions from public and private parties (Casady et al, 2019), advances the argument that partnerships foster deeper cooperation and enhanced performance (Roberts & Siemiatycki, 2015).

In line with the typical coalition structures established for cross-border cooperation settings, a formal framework with clearly defined leader-partner roles is indispensable. This chapter delves deeper into the roles assigned to leaders and partners within each stakeholder participating in a coalition for a project proposal, aligning with the requirements of the project application process. Questions surrounding the initiation of collaboration, the purposes behind it and the evolution of preferences among the actors involved in a project proposal extend beyond the scope of this thesis.

In addressing these inquiries, I posit that leaders assume responsibility for navigating complex issues and must allocate resources for the coalition's success. Therefore, it becomes crucial for leaders to collaborate with actors capable of providing the resources they lack in their pursuit of financial support from EU funding. Although the coalition-building processes aimed at selecting participants are not the central focus of this thesis, such decisions can significantly impact the coalition as a whole. The presence and influence of leaders within a coalition can also translate into more effective tactics employed in dealing with decision-makers (Butterfoss, 2007).

To enhance the chances of success and provide the necessary resources for a coalition to thrive, a project leader translates the group's main objectives into a concrete action plan. This often entails making strategic choices. Sometimes, these choices involve collaborating with actors who do not share the same values, ideas, and beliefs, while at other times, it means working with those who do. The selection of project leaders occurs in various

circumstances, conditioning the choice of actors in a coalition. My analysis underscores the significance of the leader institutions within coalitions, as leadership roles are frequently associated with the consolidation of group resources and information.

Clearly, leader positions play a pivotal role in attracting other actors to the coalition. While leader and partner stakeholders may or may not share common values and beliefs, a mutual understanding is essential for coalition formation. Building and maintaining relationships, as well as the leader's role in sustaining these connections, are crucial aspects. Unlike other forms of collaboration, forging relationships for project proposals necessitate coordinating diverse workflows. However, the intricacies of how partnerships are designed and developed extend beyond the scope of this chapter. Drawing from the interview data gathered in chapter 6, the next chapter will further illustrate how specific stakeholders assuming leadership positions within a coalition remain vital to its success.

The subsequent section delves deeper into the contributions of partners within a coalition and their role in collaborative projects.

5.5.2 Stakeholders as partners

A coalition operates on the principle of actors mutually agreeing to allocate resources towards the pursuit of a common objective. This mutual agreement involves working collaboratively to achieve shared goals (Castanho, 2019). A robust project proposal typically results from the collaboration between two key parties: leaders and partners. In the realm of cross-border cooperation, the involvement of public authorities and other governmental bodies serves to deepen cooperation (Zach & Hill, 2017). Despite varying institutional contexts, similar leader-partner arrangements are employed.

As mentioned earlier, cross-border cooperation coalitions necessitate a formal structure with designated leading and partnering institutions. Chapter 6 provides a dedicated section elucidating the application process for project proposals and access to EU funding.

Leaders assume a pivotal role in identifying suitable project proposals for submission under the cross-border cooperation initiative, and in strategising the necessary steps to secure EU funding for these projects. They are responsible for identifying potential coalition members and devising tactics and strategies for engaging decision-makers. Additionally, leaders play a crucial role in attracting new members to the coalition and ensuring effective promotion of the project idea to the Managing Authorities overseeing cross-border cooperation. This often entails allocating a significant portion, typically 50% of the project budget to the proposed project, in accordance with the requirements of the cross-border cooperation programme.

A partnership is typically formed when partners agree on their objectives and allocate resources rationally. Although partnerships within coalitions may vary in formality, ranging from informal agreements to formal contracts, both leaders and partners are fundamentally

aligned with the success of the project. This draws from established leader-partner structures in the literature, as well as insights from meetings with the Secretariat office of Interreg Flanders-Netherlands in Antwerp.

Scholarly literature often examines the extensive use of public-private partnerships in EU policies (Coen et al., 2021), the degree of formality of these partnerships, and the role of public-private interdependencies in project success (Bogdanowicz et al., 2020). However, my focus lies specifically on the coalitions established for the purpose of submitting project proposals for cross-border cooperation.

For successful partnership within a project, partners must be informed and willing to contribute to the collaboration (Bogdanowicz et al., 2020). This necessitates planning, time, expertise, and a clear delineation of responsibilities and vision (Roberts & Siemiatycki, 2015). However, the intricacies of how stakeholders collaborate with one another are beyond the scope of this chapter. Nor it is the focus of this thesis to understand which partners actors choose to involve in the project and why.

The data for this chapter is derived from an original dataset of project proposals submitted by stakeholders for the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands cross-border cooperation action. SNA identifies the key actors with a strong position in the network. Sociograms help depict these actors at the centre of the network, compared to those on the periphery. This analysis yields a set of nodes and vertices representing the level of connectivity among actors. The core-periphery structure of the network is elaborated upon in the section dedicated to operationalising the core actors in the network.

5.6 Expectations deriving from the ACF

As briefly explained earlier in this chapter, the coalition framework theory demonstrates how advocacy coalitions are formulated based on shared beliefs (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). Close collaboration, which could potentially enable actors to achieve their aims, has already been assessed in the literature. Literature points that coalitions and their members play a crucial role in attaining political success (Junk, 2019; Mahoney & Beckstrand, 2011), determining their size and role of particular members (Nelson and Yackee, 2012), or working with similar actors that support the same belief system.

I primarily focus on the aspect concerning the belief system from the ACF. This section is dedicated to introducing the main expectations derived from the ACF theoretical background. A core aspect of this approach is the broader spectrum of policy actors, including those from non-profit and private sectors, and other government agencies. Applying the ACF to this chapter emphasises that coalitions emerge because actors vary in their belief system, referring to normative values regarding a particular policy topic, and seek to form collaborations that translate their beliefs into actual policies (Weible & Sabatier, 2006).

The ACF is a framework that emphasises the role of advocacy coalitions in policy-making and change (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). Within policy systems, a diverse set of actors can be aggregated into coalitions, with core beliefs serving as a crucial expression of stakeholders' '*underlying philosophy*' and coordination patterns (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). Directly measuring core beliefs is challenging, so proxy measures such as an actor's field of activity or social sector involvement are often used to gauge their *organisational identity* within a policy subsystem.

Collaboration for project proposals brings together actors from various borders, resulting in complex interactions and outcomes. While the specific interactions can vary, it's likely that multiple collaborations for coalitions emerge in this subsystem, necessitating cooperation between public authorities and for-profit entities (Andonova & Mitchell, 2010). Central actors within the policy subsystem play a significant role, as explored further in chapter 6.

In analysing stakeholders' mobilisation, it's notable that public authorities represent 28% of the mobilised actors, followed by institutions at 28%, non-profit organisations at 22%, and for-profit businesses at 13%. Beyond the distribution of stakeholders, my focus is on understanding how actors collaborate based on their public versus private status. This inquiry delves into the network structure of stakeholders' positioning, particularly examining the node-periphery dynamics within the network (Elliott et al., 2020).

I argue that sharing a similar organisational identity creates a conducive environment for establishing close collaboration ties. One crucial factor influencing the likelihood of collaboration is the presence of a shared *organisational identity*. This leads to the first expectation, primarily concerning the distribution of stakeholders within the closed-tie subsystem of actors.

Expectation 1: Distribution of stakeholders: Most of the public stakeholders (public authorities, NGOs etc) are predominantly situated at the core of the network while fewer public stakeholders are situated at the periphery.

The rationale behind this expectation lies in the concept outlined by the ACF, which suggests that coalitions consist of members with similar policy core beliefs and coordination patterns (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). Therefore, coalition partners are expected to demonstrate a high level of policy compatibility. Public and governmental agencies, including public authorities, play central roles in project proposal applications. As discussed in chapter 3, although stakeholder *types* may be challenging to define precisely, they are generally recognisable. At the subsystem level, public authority bodies are involved with the aim of enhancing public safety and well-being. Public authorities typically operate at various levels from local to national, and are responsible for policy recommendations and public communication. Consequently, it is anticipated that public authorities will have closer connections with other public authorities. This expectation is articulated as follows:

Expectation 2: Type of stakeholder: Public stakeholders are better connected with one another (exhibit strong ties), than public stakeholders are connected with private/ professional stakeholders.

Moving beyond stakeholder *types*, I delve into another attribute: the social sector of stakeholders. To categorise stakeholders based on their social sector, I employ two categories: *social sector* and *economic sector.* The social sector variable reflects stakeholders' choices regarding their project proposals. Many social-oriented stakeholders lack the resources to address issues independently and rely on economic stakeholders for support. Existing literature underscores the critical role of social stakeholders in addressing social issues (Walker et al., 2012). Stakeholders are classified into two groups: economic stakeholders, which pursue economic benefits (Barney, 2018) and social stakeholders, primarily non-profit organisations, which champion social values (Jegers, 2018).

Non-profit organisations have demonstrated a commitment to addressing critical concerns and implementing solutions to the public interest (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Consequently, I anticipate them to hold a more central position in the network. Therefore, in terms of stakeholders' collaboration based on their social sector, I expect:

Expectation 3: Sectors of stakeholders: Social-oriented stakeholders are more centrally positioned within the network, compared to economic-oriented stakeholders.

Another crucial aspect of stakeholders' collaboration revolves around the roles they assume as *leaders* and *partners* in a project. Within a coalition, the concentration of policy-making authority typically resides in leadership roles, with leaders often making the largest financial contributions to the partnership. Securing EU funds is a primary goal for actors applying for EU funding, as it presents an attractive opportunity for regional development (Commission, 2017). This is corroborated by evidence indicating that projects under the 2007 – 2013 Interreg Flanders-Netherlands programme were required to secure 50% of the total project budget as co-financing. Based on the findings from the stakeholder mapping in chapter 4, I expect stakeholders capable of providing the necessary co-financing for EU projects to occupy a more central position in the stakeholder subnetwork. This leads to the following expectation:

Expectation 4: Leader stakeholders: Leader stakeholders are positioned more centrally within the network compared, to partner stakeholders.

5.7 Operationalisation: the core stakeholders in a network

A plethora of relationships emerge among stakeholders as they collaborate to submit project proposals within a specific EU funding scheme. This results in complex network of interconnected actors involved in various project. This terminology is preferred as it highlights the division between *core* and *periphery* based on the extent of stakeholders'

participation in projects. This method assesses the relationships and interactions between organisations, stakeholders, and other connected entities. Utilising SNA, the structure and collaboration patterns of stakeholders are examined based on their nodes (representing actors) and ties (representing connections between them) (Galety et al., 2022).

The analysis proceeds as follows: from the broader network of stakeholders engaged in forming coalitions for EU funding, a subset of stakeholders that collaborate more frequently is identified. The SNA method is applied for data analysis, generating a network of nodes representing stakeholders and ties (or edges) representing project proposals or collaborations. Consequently, the study explores how actors with stronger ties collaborate more often on projects. Data for this analysis is derived from the network analysis output, which presents a *two-mode structure*: stakeholders on the one side and project proposals on the other. Using specialised software like Pajek, capable of handling large datasets, a subset of actors with more frequent collaborations is extracted.

The analysis conducted using the social network method can be conceptualised as consisting of two layers: a '*core*' comprising those who participate more frequently in the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands funding scheme through project applications, and the periphery consisting of those who are less interconnected. The focus lies on understanding the interconnections among stakeholders and how they contribute to building effective collaborations, particularly examining the nodes that share structural equivalence with one another. To achieve a detailed analysis of the network structure, the ties among the subset of stakeholders are visualised and explored.

Stakeholders from both sides of the border collaborate on project proposals aimed at addressing common issues of interest. Given the nature of the data, it is expected to observe a network with a *two-mode* structure, with stakeholders on one side and project proposals on the other. The data utilised here is actor-by-actor data, where stakeholders engaged with EU funding are identified as *"actors"*. For instance, Inagro, a non-governmental organisation working in agriculture, is classified as an actor, while IMEC, a business firm active in the technology and innovation field, is also identified as an actor. In the network structure, actors are represented by nodes that also reflect their attributes, the *type* (e.g., business associations, research institutes, non-governmental organisation, etc).

Next, stakeholders are categorised based on their *social sector* attribute. Social actors operate within social domains and address societal problems, while economic actors engage in activities primarily for economic gain, utilising resources to generate benefits. The density of ties, indicating the number of connections an actor shares with others, is a crucial factor to consider. Actors with a high-density score have numerous connections with other actors.

The subsequent section outlines the main steps undertaken for the empirical analysis. The term two-mode network, also known as a bipartite network, is frequently utilised throughout this chapter. Specifically, a two-mode network comprises *"…at least two sets of*

vertices, with connections formed solely between vertices from different sets. These connections link actors (stakeholders) and events (project proposals)" (De Nooy et al., 2018).

5.8 Empirical Analysis

The SNA provides a platform to visualise the dynamic relationships within a network. Utilising concrete sociograms offered by SNA, I am able to assess ties that may not be evident otherwise. The empirical findings align with outcomes obtained from *Pajek* software. By examining the core-periphery structure of the network, I can effectively present the results using sophisticated graphs generated by the program. Transposing the data from a two-mode network to a one-mode network enables the linkage of vertices from one set with vertices from the other set.

The network analysis offers several advantages that I leverage in this chapter. While statistical methods are more suitable for comparing the relationships of actors with their attributes, SNA excels in examining the structure of interactions between actors. Statistical methods are well-suited for testing theoretical propositions by assessing the fit to proposed theories. They provide a statistical significance score to each prediction, thereby either confirming or refuting them.

My empirical analysis delves into the relationships established by stakeholders when collaborating of coalition building. Despite variations in coalition size and focus, the crucial aspect lies in the connections forged among actors. By concentrating on the structural ties within the subset of actors collaborating more frequently, I can visualise the core actors. A social network is typically conceptualised as a graph comprising vertices (nodes, units, or points) representing important actors or objects. These vertices are interconnected by lines symbolising social relations among them. In the following section, I present the key findings of this chapter.

5.9 Findings

Being a pivotal figure in the network involves active engagement, characterised by maintaining numerous connections and participating in multiple pathways between other nodes. Centralisation reflects the variance in centrality scores across vertices, delineating a core comprising highly central nodes and a periphery comprising those with notably lower centrality scores. Degree centrality, as elucidated by Galety et al. (2022), quantifies the number of direct connections emanating from a particular node. Nodes exhibiting higher degree centrality, akin to stakeholders in general, tend to align with the most interconnected actors in the network.

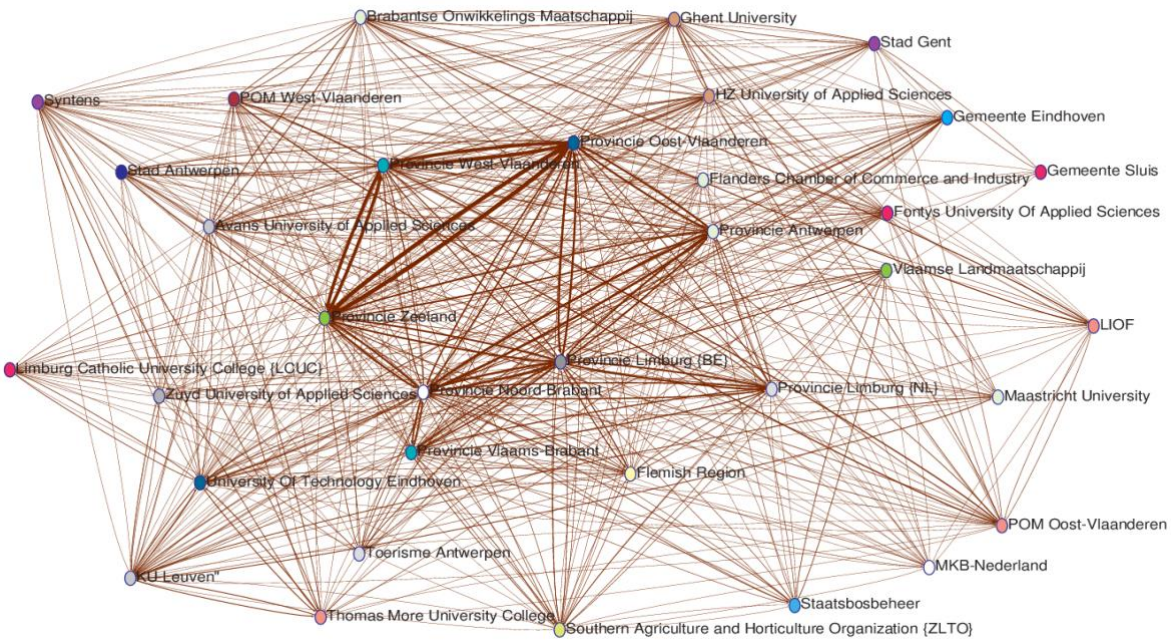
Measures of centrality structure primarily assess the average number of connections between a vertex and all other accessible vertices in the network. The findings of this study affirm that each actor (vertices) shares a minimum of three connections with other actors.

However, to discern robust or intensive ties, a threshold of N=5 was imposed to identify subgroups that collaborates more frequently. Employing this measurement necessitated computing the degree partition of the network, set at N=5. For clarity, a sociogram depicting a smaller subset of actors is preferable, thus proposing a cut-off of N=35 to showcase the 35 most interconnected actors and their relationships. As previously mentioned, actors depicted in the sociogram maintain at least 5 ties, denoted by lines. This information underscores the prominence of actors depicted in the sociogram, as they exhibit greater affluence and connectivity relative to their counterparts.

The sociogram visually represents the interconnectedness among actors, indicating a multitude of relationships. Specifically, it highlights the Province of Zeeland, Province of West Vlaanderen, province of Limburg (BE), province of Antwerp and Province of Oost (East) Vlaanderen. Each vertex is colour-coded to denote its corresponding stakeholder, while the thickness of the ties signifies the strength of the relationships between actors.

In terms of centrality, actors positioned at the core of the network exhibit a high degree centrality, fostering connections with both other core actors and those on the periphery.

Graph 2. Stakeholders with the highest degree centrality, hence at the core of the network. The periphery stakeholders – are those who collaborate often with the core. Here I calculate both the indegree (number of arcs a vertex receives) and outdegree (number of arcs a vertex sends).

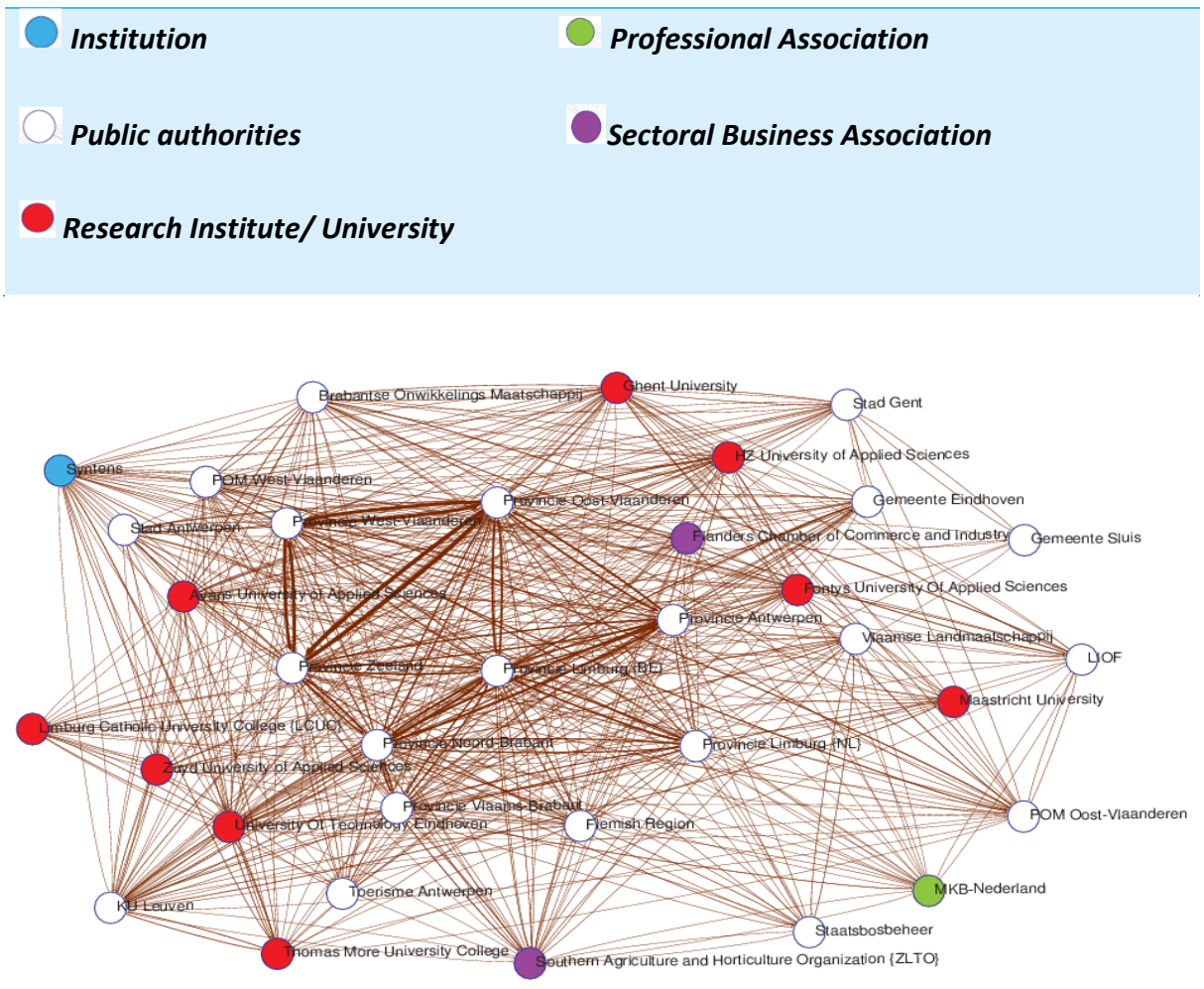


While numerous social relationships exist within the network, I focus on the core network and address the concept of similarity among actors who share dense connections. This entails an examination of tie structures among actors based on their *actor type* and *social sector* affiliation. Such analysis aids gauging stakeholders' belief systems and assessing whether they share values.

Network analysis provides the tools to elucidate network structure by revealing similarities among stakeholders, particularly with respect to the *actor type.* As anticipated, the findings demonstrate that actors tend to form ties and cultivate collaborations with those of the same *type.* Certain actors maintain embedded ties within the myriad of relationships; for instance, public authorities often collaborate extensively with one another, fostering tightly connections and thereby exhibiting greater similarity in behaviour and attitudes.

The accompanying sociogram illustrates the collaborative patterns among stakeholders of similar *actor types*, offering insight into the nature of their interactions within the network.

Graph 3. Stakeholders with the highest degree centrality (the core) and others.



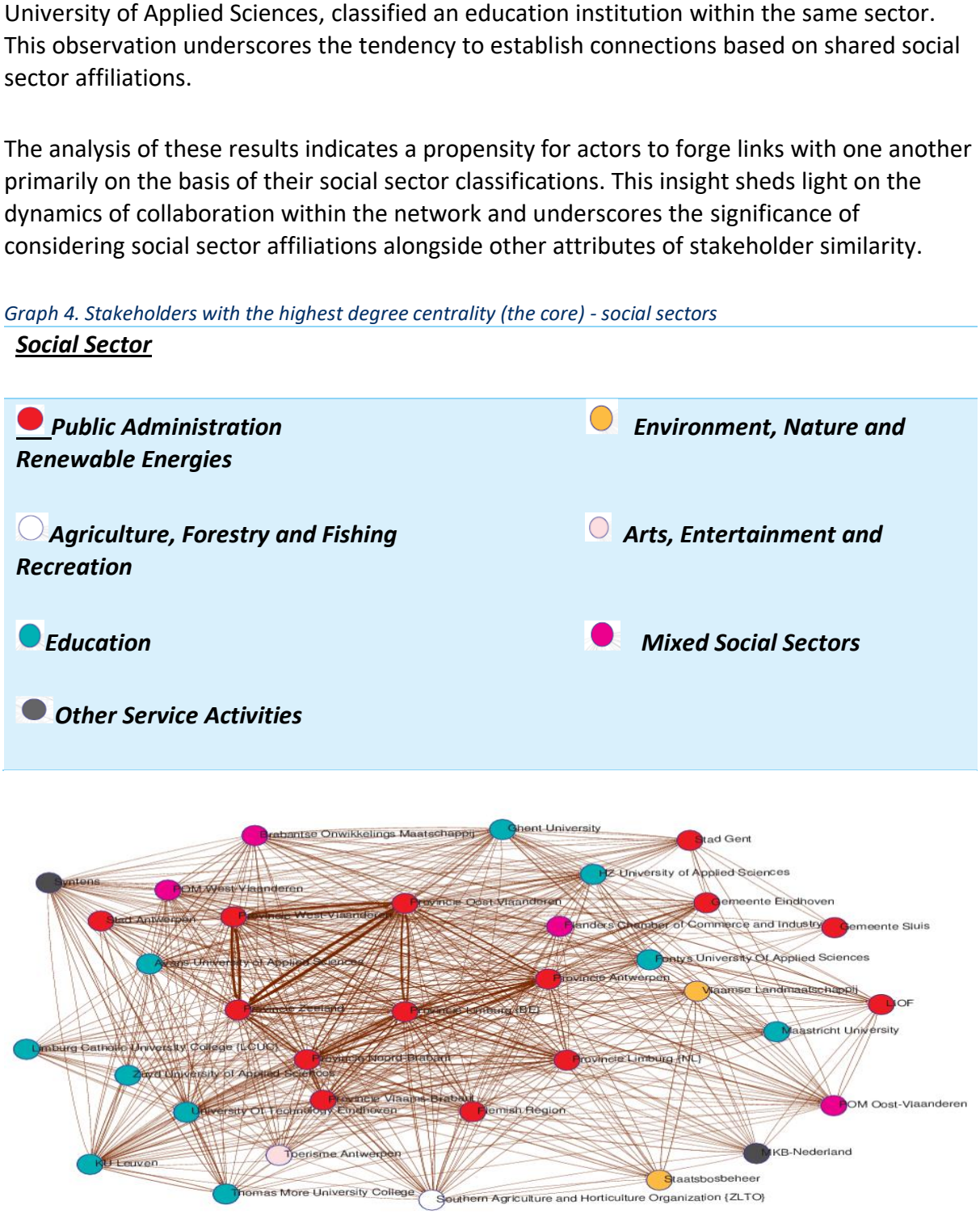
By incorporating measured attributes of stakeholder similarity into the research, it becomes feasible to calculate the homogeneity of actors within the network based on their respective *social sector.* While qualitative attributes of actors are intriguing, it is essential to consider variables such as *social* sector affiliation alongside their similarity. Existing research on stakeholder identity, as referenced in studies by Balmer (2017), Strandberg and Styvén

(2021), and McPherson et al. (2021), underscores the importance of including factors like social sector in assessing similarity.

Following this approach, I can depict the *social sector* of stakeholders, particularly focusing on those with the highest degree centrality. Notably, the analysis reveals that the Province of Zeeland, categorised as a public administration entity, collaborates frequently with Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, classified an education institution within the same sector. This observation underscores the tendency to establish connections based on shared social sector affiliations.

The analysis of these results indicates a propensity for actors to forge links with one another primarily on the basis of their social sector classifications. This insight sheds light on the dynamics of collaboration within the network and underscores the significance of considering social sector affiliations alongside other attributes of stakeholder similarity.

Graph 4. Stakeholders with the highest degree centrality (the core) - social sectors

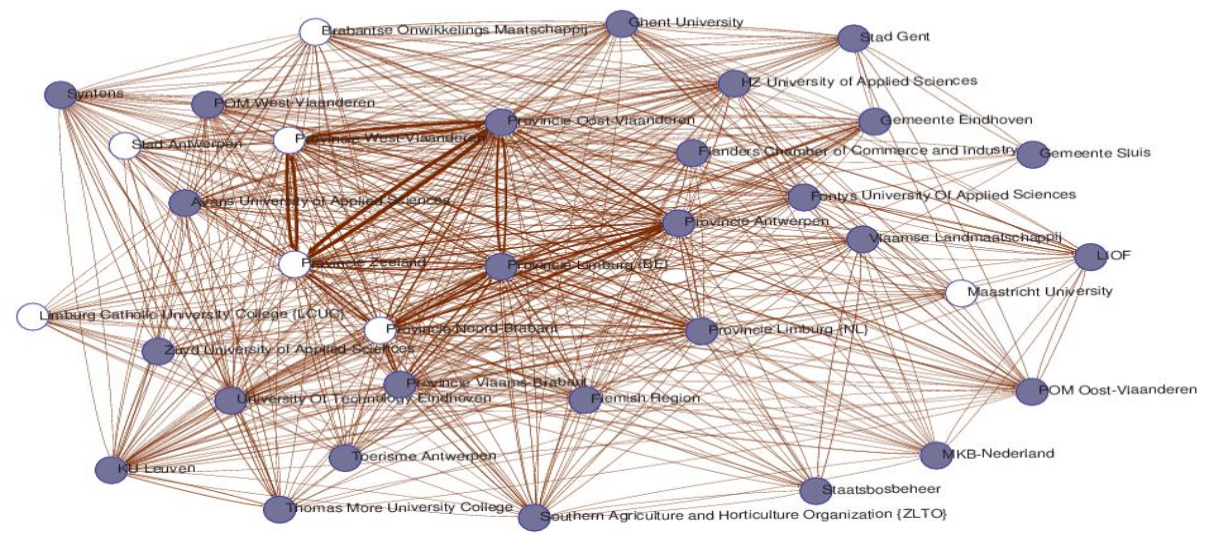


The third approach to centrality revolves around understanding the similarities between actors holding leader or partner positions within collaborations. This involves assessing the proximity of stakeholders occupying either leader or partner roles within the network. The underlying concept suggests that such distinctions may be shaped by asymmetric ties, as actors seek connections with those possessing appeal structural properties or attributes, leading to similarities in values and beliefs.

Alternatively, being selected as a project leader may also signify importance and prestige. From this perspective, I aim to determine whether central actors are predominantly connected to powerful actors (i.e., leaders) or less central actors (identified as partners) using graph theoretical measures.

The graph depicts connections between leaders and/ or partners, supplemented by data on social attributes, thus confirming the tendency for leaders to collaborate more frequently with other leaders. It's worth noting the significance of leader-partner relations in the context of key stakeholders within a coalition, a topic I more comprehensively explore in chapter 6.

Graph 5. Stakeholders with the highest degree centrality (the core) – leaders and partners



5.10 Conclusions

This chapter delved into the question of whether actors collaborating frequently for project proposals share the same organisational identity. The findings strongly correlate with the *type of actor*, their *social sector affiliation,* and the *leader-partner* roles they assume within project proposals.

In summary, the analysis revealed that stakeholder type *(public vs. private)*, social sector affiliation *(social vs. economic),* and stakeholder roles *(leader vs. partner)* significantly influence collaboration patterns. Empirical evidence demonstrated that public stakeholders not only occupy central positions within the network but also maintain stronger connections with other public entities. Additionally, social-oriented stakeholders emerged as key influencers within the network, positioning themselves at its centre. This positioning affords them to a slightly advantageous position, as they are more extensively involved in numerous projects.

Furthermore, the empirical analysis indicated that stakeholders in leadership positions are more inclined to collaborate with other leaders. This trend can be attributed to the pivotal role played by leading-position stakeholders within stakeholder coalitions, as they often possess greater experience and resources for participation, including financial, temporal, and material capacities.

In contrast, business-oriented stakeholders, despite their lesser mobilisation in cross-border cooperation during Interreg Flanders-Netherlands 2007 – 2013 period, engage primarily in collaborations with social-oriented actors. Consequently, social-oriented actors and leaders situated at the network's core play a pivotal role, facilitating collaboration ties with economic-oriented and partner stakeholders.

Analysing collaboration patterns underscores the importance of creating and enforcing partnerships with like-minded stakeholders to foster coalition development. Essentially, selecting the most compatible collaborators entails working with actors who share the same *organisational identity.* This alignment ensures that stakeholders benefit from shared visions, objectives, and values. While cross-border collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders are essential, it's imperative to acknowledge that key variables such as social sector affiliation, leader-partner dynamics, and actor type will continue to significantly influence stakeholder selection.

Therefore, this chapter not only sheds light on whether stakeholders submit project proposals independently or as part of a coalition but also delves deeper into the nature of collaboration ties formed within these coalitions. The ACF plays a pivotal role in assessing the shared organisational identity, more explicitly referring to the characteristics among stakeholders who collaborate frequently.

It is in this interaction that collaboration among actors may produce an understanding of the problem or challenge at hand, produce some sort of consensus due to existing interdependencies, and succeed to achieve innovative collaboration (Sørensen & Torfing, 2016).

Overall, this analysis enhances our understanding of collaboration dynamics by emphasising the importance of aligning organisational identities and objectives when forming partnerships. Such alignment not only fosters effective collaboration but also strengthens coalition development efforts.

Chapter 6 Understanding the conditions for the success of project proposals

While the previous chapter explored the factors that contribute to the collaboration of stakeholders with relation to securing access to the cross-border cooperation EU funding, this chapter examines the conditions that enable access to such funds.

This chapter deals with project funding success, and in particular it analyses the specific role and impact of stakeholders in this process. Although collaboration to secure EU funding has traditionally been an important element discussed by the literature (Podadera-Rivera and Vázquez, 2023; Castanho et al., 2017), I discuss the combinations of factors that enable stakeholders' access to such funds. The empirical focus of this chapter continues to be the success of stakeholders in obtaining EU funding for cross-border cooperation.

This chapter proceeds as follows. I first present the importance of studying collaborations in cross-border areas and how actors can access the financial mechanisms that promulgate cross-border cooperation. Then I summarise the main points of the literature review that derive from the essence of cross-border cooperation and scholarly work that focuses on the study of interest groups. The main dependent and the independent variables are then introduced. In the following section I explain the QCA methodology used in this chapter. The next section describes the main empirical results and findings. The chapter concludes with the meaningful insights that are extracted from the data analysis and elaborates on *conditions and combinations of conditions* that enable stakeholders' access to cross-border cooperation funding mechanisms.

6.1 Introduction part

More than a third of the EU population lives in border areas, which are directly affected by the EU policies that are specifically geared towards and implemented in cross-border areas (Medeiros, 2018). Cross-border cooperation remains one of the most important policy instruments of the EU (Noferini et al., 2019; Medeiros, 2018a; Castanho et al.; 2017). The financial stimuli that the EU gives for developing cross-border cooperation projects have helped to leverage the European regions economically. Both economic and social convergence have been further promoted by cross-border cooperation projects (Castanho et al., 2018). EU funding has additionally fostered knowledge exchange between organisations, research institutions and countries that participate in projects (Böhm, 2020). This in turn has created a space for developing high quality projects that can benefit the regions in the long run. Cross-border cooperation is an undeniable reality within the EU. Different modes of cooperation between cross-border regions create multiple possibilities for economic and social development, while strengthening the cohesion among these

regions. The cross-border cooperation literature also recognises that one of the main features of the cross-border discourse is the opportunity to obtain EU funds (Méndez & Bachtler, 2022). Coalitions appear to be crucial vehicles for exchanging information and experience, raising awareness or engaging in projects (Castanho, 2023). Obtaining EU funds for promulgating cross-border cooperation exposes European and Eurosceptic feelings in the border regions (Albanese et al., 2022; Borin et al., 2018).

As the data used for this thesis shows, from 287 project proposals that were submitted under the Flanders-Netherlands cross-border cooperation programme (2007 – 2013), 70 projects were successful, while 217 of them were unsuccessful. In such an environment, it is societally and scientifically relevant to ask the question why some project proposals receive support from EU funding, while others do not. Hence, the research question I ask in this chapter is: *What explains project funding success, and more in particular what is the role and impact of specific stakeholders in this success?.*

The findings from the previous chapter on the collaboration of stakeholders serve as a guide to laying down the foundations of this chapter. Chapter 5 showed that some collaborations are more prominent than others due to the core positioning of stakeholders in the network. These stakeholders have a central role to play as regards to the collaboration for projects. Public stakeholders and those assuming leadership positions in coalitions more specifically proved to be playing a crucial role to the project proposal application. Yet, the role of stakeholders in successfully acquiring cross-border cooperation projects remains to be explored. I address this question by focusing on the context of the cross-border policy issue at stake and by exploring how the tactics of stakeholders are used to win EU funding access.

This chapter continues as follows. First, I capture the dynamics of the cross-border cooperation programme at hand. Then I present the literature on stakeholders' success (Klüver & Mahoney, 2015; Dür et al., 2013; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007) and more specifically the growing, yet still underexplored field of research linking the EU funds with the success for cross-border cooperation projects (Wiedenfeld, 2013). In the following section I further develop the hypotheses and the main factors determining stakeholders' success in cross-border cooperation funds. The subsequent section provides information on the QCA methodology used for the study. Section 6 reports the empirical results; section 7 and section 8 discuss and interpret the findings; section 9 concludes.

6.2 Cross-border cooperation: from the project idea to getting access to EU funding

EU funding materialises via the distribution of funds in cross-border territories where investment through cross-border cooperation takes place. Application for EU funding for cross-border cooperation requires at least two stakeholders from a cross-border region to work together for developing a project proposal. Although stakeholders decide themselves

with whom they would like to work for the development of a project, it can be the case they ask for help from the Interreg office to find a good project partner.

After the project leaders decide which actors to involve in the development of a project, they work together for the development of the project idea. This includes frequent communication with the project partners in various forms, among others through e-mail exchange, telephone, meetings, etc. For those stakeholders that are not familiar with the application process it is very likely that they will ask for help from the Interreg Secretariat with the project application. Once a project is submitted, a decision is taken by the Steering Committee, which is the official authority that decides to grant the EU funding.

The cross-border selection is made based on various pre-established criteria and additional requirements that the projects must fulfill, all of which are discussed in detail here. The success of cross-border-cooperation projects hinges on a set of pre-established criteria meticulously designed to ensure effective collaboration and impactful outcomes. These criteria encompass a range of factors, including but not limited to, the alignment of project objectives with overarching regional goals, the degree of inclusivity in stakeholder engagement, the clarity and feasibility of project plans and timelines, the availability and allocation of financial resources, and the capacity for sustainable implementation and long-term impact. Additionally, criteria may consider the establishment of clear communication channels, the ability to navigate legal and administrative complexities across borders, and the promotion of mutual trust and understanding among participating entities.

By adhering to these rigorous criteria, cross-border cooperation projects strive to maximise their potential for success, fostering meaningful partnerships, and addressing shared challenges for the benefit of all involved stakeholders. The cross-border cooperation projects have to demonstrate a deep cooperation between stakeholders across the border, oftentimes by involving public authorities. They also have to prove how they relate to the overall cross-border cooperation project objectives in terms of the cultural, environmental and economic development, and involve a variety of stakeholders, especially those that have previously worked on cross-border cooperation issues: the definition of common objectives, commitment towards the cross-border project, and the promotion of connectivity between cities (see Castanho et al., 2018).

Table 14 describes the various project application phases for the cross-border cooperation programme Flanders-Netherlands (2007 – 2013).

Table 14. From project idea to application and access

i. Project idea Stakeholders decide to work jointly in a project proposal which they submit under Interreg programme.

ii. Partners and application

The selection of project partners starts as soon as the project proposal idea develops. However, the configuration of the project partners may change occasionally during the project implementation. The project is submitted to the Secretariat office of Interreg. The secretariat assists actors with information and may facilitate the search for partners.

iii. Evaluation

The Steering Committee, composed of representatives from Member States, Belgium and the Netherlands in this case, and eight deputies from partner provinces and representatives of socio-economic partners and civil society decide on successful/ unsuccessful projects. In some cases, the Steering Committee does not accept or refuse a project immediately, but rather says to stakeholders to improve or revise the application in a few specific points.

Several criteria make a project proposal successful[15]:

- Meeting the formal criteria of the project application in terms of its requirement and submitting before the deadline
- The importance of implementing a project within the borders that are touched by Interreg Flanders-Netherlands program area
- Co-financing from actors in the both sides of the borders, and at least one partner is involved in the implementation of the project. The co-financing consists in at least 50% of the financial contribution from the applying institutions. This signifies that project partners should be able to comply to the co-financing requirements or the government possibly contributes to maintain the financing plan.[16]

6.3 Review of tactics and strategies on lobbying success, the cross-border cooperation case

This section summarises the existing literature on cross-border cooperation with a focus on the potential impact of tactics and strategies on lobbying success. Why stakeholders

[15] https://www.grensregio.eu/mijn-project/project-indienen
[16] https://www.grensregio.eu/mijn-project/project-uitvoeren

become successful in attaining what they want to attain is a question that has inspired scholars for many years. The role and impact of organised interests in influencing policy making has been long recognised (Berkhout et al., 2015). Stakeholders' success has traditionally been attributed to a wide set of factors such as tactics and strategies, trust and value sharing (Dür et al., 2013; Klüver, 2013; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Mahoney, 2008). Most of the literature on stakeholders' success has been linked with the EU legislative process (Klüver, 2013; Dür et al., 2013). Key variables that explain *how* lobbying success is attained are the number of words contained in interest groups submissions to online consultations conducted by the European Commission (Klüver, 2013), the interest group type (Hanegraaff et al., 2015; Chalmers, 2011), the choice of inside and outside lobbying strategies, the institutional characteristics and the nature of the issue (Mahoney, 2008), alongside with the ability to provide useful and/ or technical information to policy-makers (Dür et al., 2013), and the exchange of relevant knowledge in the early stages of policy-making (Berkhout et al., 2015).

Other studies have pointed out that the EU's institutional structure allows stakeholders to advance interests through numerous points of access and influence. While all stakeholders try to shape policy by means of various tactics and strategies, the institutional context under which stakeholders engage in policy-making has also been found significant (Klüver, 2013; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Mahoney, 2008). On the supply side, a stakeholder's capacity to effectively generate and transmit information is an important factor. Scholars examining these patterns have found out the capacity to provide better information to EU decision-makers is linked to the group type (i.e. companies, professional associations, NGOs, trade unions, public authorities, and consultancies), see (Chalmers, 2011). In addition, having greater success is attributed to the information provision in the demand-side and the supply-side in the context of the EU legislative processes in the European Parliament (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2018). The ability to provide technical knowledge has further been assumed to narrow the gap between policy positions of the lobbyist and the policy-maker (Berkhout et al., 2015).

The lobbying success literature in policy-making in the EU has yielded important insights about how organised interests pursue their goals. The EU's multiple levels of government provide numerous possibilities for organised interests to reach their targets. In the context of the policies designed at the European level, this has triggered an ever-wider participation of organised interests. A considerable number of observers suggests that group type is ubiquitously a key variable in explaining success (Dür, 2015; Chalmers, 2011), while others suggest that the provision of expertise and information is detriment to success (Berkhout et al., 2015; Baroni et al., 2014). Moreover, the context of the EU policies contributes to further establish a European framework for stakeholder participation and success (Klüver, 2013). The argument raised in this chapter is similar to these lines of reasoning, yet adds a significant contribution as it applies existing knowledge on policy-making to the area of cross-border funding (Makkonen & Williams, 2024; Berkhout et al., 2015; Baroni et al., 2014; Klüver, 2013).

By doing so, this chapter contributes to the growing literature on the role of EU cross-border cooperation projects and their impact with regards to the cross-border area. The cross-border literature has focused on some of the crucial elements that make a project successful for the cross-border cooperation funds, including providing trust (Paldam & Svendsen, 2000), and sharing the same values with stakeholders (Anheier & Kendall, 2002). In general, by asking *what* explains project funding success, and *how* stakeholders become successful for cross-border cooperation projects, the broader literature on cross-border cooperation projects have identified the culture, the habits, the norms and the capacity to foster cross-border knowledge transfer and innovation as main critical factors for success (Weidenfeld, 2013).

Two aspects are important to note before developing my argument further. First, cross-border cooperation has been linked to reducing Euroscepticism by demonstrating the benefits of EU membership and promoting mutual understanding among different regions and cultures (Albanese et al., 2022; Borin et al., 2018). Second, the success of EU funding depends on various factors, such as the quality of the project proposal, the alignment with EU priorities and objectives, the effectiveness of project management and implementation, and the ability to demonstrate tangible results and impact. Some scholars link the EU funding success with the satisfactory fulfillment of the project application criteria (Castanho, 2019; Castanho et al., 2018). Other researchers consider the EU funding success depends on a combination of factors, including the quality of the project implementation processes (Sánchez-Pantoja et al., 2021). To increase the chances of obtaining EU funding is important to have the ability to position yourself strategically in a coalition and to promote effective interactions with decision-makers (Heaney, 2016).

In the context of policies designed to establish cross-border regional cooperation, this means balancing the differences in the demands' side. Systematic differences in terms of the legislation, culture, habits, norms and technological capabilities could hamper cross-border knowledge transfer and innovation (Weidenffeld, 2013). Literature recognises that language remains a barrier to the effective cross-border cooperation success for many regions (Makkonen & Williams, 2024). In the case of Flanders-Netherlands cross-border cooperation, regular interactions are maintained between specific stakeholders and are further promoted by the same language (Dutch). For some cross-border regions, being able to use the same language across the borders therefore constitutes an important factor that must be taken into account when analysing the cross-border cooperation dimension.

Overall, effective interactions among stakeholders are essential for achieving EU funding success. The nature of stakeholders' relationships can vary depending on a range of factors such as the type of the initiative and the level of stakeholder involvement. The question that I raise in this chapter is: *What explains project funding success, and more in particular what is the role and impact of specific stakeholders in this success?* Overall, the relationships of stakeholders are crucial for the success and sustainability of projects. Effective stakeholder relationships can help to build trust, foster cooperation and ensure that the interests and concerns of all stakeholders are taken into account. There are many different strategies that

can be employed when contacting decision-makers. Some examples of strategies that enable stakeholders' success are: communication with decision-makers (Beyers, 2004; Bouwen, 2002), internal communication with coalition members, the role of core actors and having worked with the same actors in the past.

6.4 Dependent and independent variables

Following a qualitative approach of coding the dependent variable success, I consider successful stakeholders to be those who have obtained EU funding. Therefore, the dependent variable of success has a dichotomous distribution, with number of values 0 and 1 where 0 means no access to the EU funding and 1 means access to the EU funding.

In this section I present the main factors that contribute to stakeholders' success for EU funding. As my analysis focuses on the success of stakeholders for EU cross-border cooperation, the decision-makers are uniquely placed to provide information that plays a prominent role during the project proposal application process. Lobbying literature recognises that the crucial role of stakeholders is primarily important for exchanging information with policy-makers in order to maximise their policy success (Klüver, 2013; Bouwen, 2011). This information and expertise that stakeholders have, provides benefits in the formulation stage of policies that successfully pass the legislative process (Klüver, 2013; Bouwen, 2011). The insider/ outsider tactics and strategies stakeholders use when contacting decision-makers are of particular importance. Binderkantz et al. (2014), Beyers (2004), and others recognise the use of direct and indirect strategies to achieve their aim. From navigating between direct interaction with decision-makers (committees, agencies, advisory bodies, parliamentary committees) (Binderkantz et al., 2014; Beyers, 2004) to indirect methods like media campaigns, and citizens' mobilisation – both strategies remain detrimental to achieve political objectives.

Overall, the internal dynamics of stakeholders, i.e. how they get and stay mobilised have been explored by many scholars (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2018; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Berckhout & Lowery, 2010b). To a certain degree the capacity of stakeholders to provide information to policy makers has been attributed to their internal ability to monitor and process this information (Chalmers, 2011). I argue that a closer investigation of the internal dynamics of stakeholders' mobilisation and how this relates to the choice of political tactics and strategies is also important for understanding the success of stakeholders for EU funding.

The factors I consider in this chapter are based on two main criteria: first I consider factors suggested by the interest group literature as drivers of stakeholders' success; second, I consider factors that can be derived by the cross-border literature, which are further reinforced by the results of the analysis of stakeholders' collaborations, that I presented earlier in chapter 5.

In other words, in order to understand the success of stakeholders for EU cross-border cooperation funding, I first look at stakeholders' communication with the decision-makers and their communication with coalition members throughout the project application phase. To date, these issues remain the core of the interests groups' literature (Berkhout et al., 2015; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). I also look at the specific role of stakeholders in the overall project application process. By looking at the results of the previous chapter, it becomes apparent that actors such as public authorities have a crucial role to play in project proposal applications. Whether through additional funding support, or through sharing of resources, the support by public authorities for a coalition remains critical. Finally, I examine the way the participation of public authorities increases the chances of the coalitions to access the EU funding.

These factors are analysed in depth and measured in the following paragraphs. Combinations of conditions are then analysed as being sufficient and/ or necessary to determine the success of stakeholders for cross-border cooperation for EU funding. More concretely, the underlying factors examined in this chapter are: 1) frequency of communication with the decision-makers; 2) frequency of communication of stakeholders with the members of their coalition; 3) role of core actors; 4) past action – having worked with the same actors in the past.

Communication

For a long time, most of the empirical studies depict a pattern where pressure is put on decision-makers through direct contacts and mobilisation (Binderkrantz et al., 2014). Communicative exchanges in order to gain a particular benefit (a subsidy, a favorable regulation or help with policy positions) are at the heart of interest group literature (Beyers & Kerremans, 2011; Bouwen, 2011). While some studies were more concerned with the beneficial exchanges between the supply and demand initiatives over critical resources, and access to policy-relevant information (Bouwen, 2011), other studies have tried to fill this gap by offering a "*multi-dimensional*" perspective of the usage of outside strategies or media campaigns (Berkhout et al., 2015).

As a matter of fact, the choice of the prevailing political strategies at the EU level varies immensely from the type of the political activities that take place. The institutional context of the policy issue is of particular importance. Thus, in the *milieu* of the European institutions, the European Commission and the European Parliament reach out to private actors to gain expertise and to "*test*" proposals (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2018; Bouwen, 2011). While it is true that according to the current and well-established interest group literature, one actor needs to supply what another actor requires, it is equally true that actors sometimes adopt a strategy aimed at intentionally achieving their own objectives.

Through outside communication strategies such as broader institutional outreach and media campaigns (Berkhout et al., 2015; Donas & Beyers, 2012) to communicating directly with the public and the EU institutions, actors strive to realise their political objectives. Yet,

insider tactics tend to be a better choice when it comes to influencing the decision-making process (Mahoney, 2008). *Insider tactics* generally refer to the usage of strategies that are aimed to gaining access. This typically refers to actors targeting government and the EU institutions directly (Dür & Mateo, 2013). While organisations rely typically in one or the other strategy, Dür and Mateo (2013) find that the insider approaches used by interest groups or advocacy organisations to influence decision-makers increase their chances of success as their resources increase.

Overall, the literature on inside tactics suggests that interest groups and advocacy organizations can play an important role in shaping policy outcomes through the strategic use of inside tactics. Here I employ some examples of inside tactics that have been discussed in the literature. Direct communication with decision-makers or their staff to influence decisions, such as through personal meetings, phone calls or e-mails are assessed. This involves providing expert knowledge or evidence to policy-makers (Junk, 2020). This further emphasises on the significance of frequent communication with decision-makers that help actors identify opportunities that could influence them to advance their agenda (Junk, 2019b).

Overall, effective communication with decision-makers requires careful planning, strategic communication, and a willingness to adapt and adjust approaches as needed. Although, frequent communication may not always be possible, particularly if decision-makers have limited availability or are reluctant to engage with stakeholders, frequent communication can help shape decisions and insure that stakeholders' issues remain a priority (Phinney, 2017; Heaney & Israel, 2016; Heaney & Lorenz, 2013). More specifically, stakeholders communicating directly with decision-makers contribute to increase the likelihood that their views will be taken into consideration. I assess here the role of stakeholders' frequent communication in relation to the main decision-maker bodies such as the Secretariat and the Managing Authorities and hypothesise the following.

Hypothesis 1: The more frequent stakeholders communicate with the decision makers (Secretariat, Managing Authorities) the higher their chances of success to obtain EU funding.

Academic literature offers a number of ways to identify and measure the appropriate strategies stakeholders use to achieve a desired policy goal. Invariably, this requires bringing together stakeholders in coalitions by working to achieve common goals (Casady et al, 2019). By choosing a collaborative strategy, actors decide to combine their individual and coalition actions. Overall, one of the benefits of the coalition building is that the sharing of resources and expertise enables stakeholders to address more effectively complex or multifaceted issues, in addition to as well leveraging their collective power to achieve change. By working together, stakeholders can amplify their voices and increase their visibility, thus making it more likely that their concerns will be addressed by decision-makers. Thus, coalitions remain an inherent focus of cross-border cooperation programmes, as mentioned in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

Building and maintaining a coalition requires public and private actors to work together to achieve shared objectives, although stakeholders may have divergent or conflicting goals which can make it difficult to build consensus (Van De Kerkhof, 2006). Coalitions may form around a range of issues, including public health, environmental protection, social justice, and economic development. For example, ad-hoc coalitions are temporary alliances or partnerships that are formed for a specific purpose or goal. Examples of ad-hoc coalitions include cross-border cooperation partnerships for project proposal applications. The advantage of ad-hoc coalitions is that they allow the rapid mobilisation of resources and expertise from different parties in order to address urgent issues. These coalitions are usually created with stakeholders that work in similar sectors, like for “profit”, and “non-profit”.

The primary goal of internal communication in coalitions is to facilitate communication and collaboration among stakeholders (Butterfoss, 2007). Internal frequent communication with decision-makers can promote the sharing of best practices and ideas, keep the coalition members informed, as to ensure that everyone involved is working towards the same goal and is aware of their role in achieving it (Kegler & Swan, 2011). This communication can take many forms, such as team meetings, email updates, progress reports, etc. (Sorurbakhsh, 2016). Here, I assess how internal communication with coalition members measured by the frequency of communication contributes to the EU funding access.

Hypothesis 2: The more stakeholders communicate with the members of their coalition the higher chances of success for EU funding.

Core actors

Existing studies have addressed the question of coalition diversity in terms of its participating members as well as regarding the importance of specific coalition members such as with respect to their members’ organisational types, geographic origins, resources and preferred tactics (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018; Phinney, 2017; Heaney & Rojas, 2014). While the role of a coalition and the characteristics of its members remain an important factor for attaining success (Junk, 2019; Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008), the results of the empirical analysis carried out in the previous chapter have showed public authorities play a crucial role.

According to most scholars, success is determined by the members of a coalition that help to achieve the policy goals that it seeks (Mahoney & Baumgartner, 2008). The concept of core actors highlights the importance of identifying and understanding the key players and influencers in a particular situation, and how their actions and decisions can shape the outcome. Those actors representing *non-economic interests*, namely public interest (Junk, 2019) will presumably entail a broader role that can help to attain policy outcomes. Likewise, core actors refer to stakeholders that are driving the project proposal idea or the collection of resources (Junk, 2019; Mahoney, 2008).

Arguably, combining resources from multiple sources to achieve a common goal or objective, otherwise known as "*resource pooling*", can help to maximise the efforts of stakeholders to fund a specific project or initiative. In the context of developing cross-border cooperation projects this can help to increase the chances to achieve success, i.e. obtain EU funding (Heaney & Lorenz, 2013). In this sense, the role of public authorities is critical within cross-border coalitions. Because public authorities would typically have the capacity to co-finance the cross-border cooperation projects' budgets, I expect they play a crucial role in the coalition.

Hypothesis 3: Participation of public authorities in a coalition increases chances of success for EU funding.

Internal dynamics

Research elucidates that the choice of coalition members and how to work together inside coalitions are critical components that may enhance the likelihood of success (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018). With the acceptance of the expectation that stakeholders will have higher chances to achieve their aims when they participate in coalitions, I focus on one important aspect of the internal politics of coalitions, namely its *network embeddedness.* Network embeddedness refers to the extent to which members are connected to other members (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018). Actors that are highly embedded within a network may benefit access to information, resources, and opportunities, as well as stronger relationships with key partners. Stakeholders can benefit from network embeddedness, as being well-connected within a network that can provide opportunities for them to achieve their strategic objectives. This can further promote trust among coalition members, improve their information exchange and can help to leverage the network connections to shape the outcome (Leifeld & Schneider 2012). Heaney and Leifeld (2018) basically measure *network embeddedness* with the coalition ties which measure how closely the members of a coalition are tied to one another.

Overall, the strength of coalition ties can have significant impact on the success of a coalition and its ability to achieve its objectives. By fostering stronger ties with the coalition members, coalitions can achieve their shared goals and objectives. When these factors come into play, and when stakeholders have worked together in the past, they have a history of shared experiences that can impact their future interactions and relationships (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018). I assess in this chapter how the history of past collaborations can be an important factor to consider when assessing their collaboration for obtaining EU funding success.

Hypothesis 4: Stakeholders that have worked with the same actors in the past, have higher chances of success for EU funding.

6.5 Methodology: Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

This chapter uses QCA (Emmenegger, Schraff & Walter, 2014; Schneider and Wagemann, 2012), a method intended for cross-case comparisons. The crisp set QCA (csQCA) which I use here helps to examine the relationships between conditions and a certain outcome. To integrate the analysis, a first configuration of the crisp set memberships is carried out, with each of the cases being assigned in one of the two possible membership scores: 1 (membership in the set) and 0 (non-membership in the set) (Thiem & Duşa, 2013). The crisp set is similar to dichotomous categorical variables in regression, for which it is important to assign a value of 1 for the presence of a contextual factor (e.g. presence of inside lobbying or outside lobbying, frequent communication, or non-frequent communication).

The QCA method has the advantage of viewing success as a pure example of complex causality. The configurational processes of comparative analysis allow to deal with a restricted size of complex cases, as well as going back to the cases and checking constantly with the data (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). My data is treated in a dichotomous set (1, 0) therefore the open-ended questions are carefully transformed in a dichotomous way that will fit Boolean calculation, thus a crisp set analysis (Rohlfing, 2019 Rihoux & Grimm, 2006). The crisp set data calibration facilitates the analysis and generates results that are easy to interpret, with the help of the fsQCA 3.0 software.

QCA helps to understand the conditions for stakeholders' success after a careful selection of successful and unsuccessful cases has been made. Conditions that exhibit a relationship with the outcome have also been identified. The use of *fsQCA 3.0* software helps to conduct the truth table analysis. There are two main set-theoretic relationships used to understand the conditions, the *necessary and sufficient conditions to produce an outcome.* A condition is necessary if always when the outcome is present, the condition is also present (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). In other words, there is no outcome if the condition is not present. If there are other sets of cases sharing other casually relevant conditions, and if these cases also agree in displaying the outcome in question, these other combinations of conditions also may be interpreted as sufficient for the outcome (Glaesser, 2015; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). Again, in other words, conditions are sufficient when their presence goes hand in hand with the outcome.

I used an open-ended questionnaire to collect the data. The data collection procedures that were followed required to validate whether the condition was present or not, for each of the cases. This required the calibration of the data as a set of dichotomous variables, indicating whether the condition is present or not. Also, the data analysis with a crisp set provides results that are easier interpretable, by using the Boolean algebra (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). Otherwise, using a '*fuzzy set QCA*' analysis requires to "differentiate between different levels of belonging anchored by two extreme membership scores at 1 and 0". Fuzzy set QCA incorporates data with continuous values, which has some degree of membership in the set "condition A" and in the set "non-condition A". Given the nature of my data is qualitative, it was challenging to calibrate them as continuous or interval (0, 0.1,

0.2…) or to define anchor points (e.g., 0 is fully out of the set; 0.33 is more out than in the set… 1 is fully in the set, etc.). The identity cut-off points or anchors I use are 0 and 1, in the crisp set, as drawn from previous studies in the literature (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Rihoux & Grimm, 2006).

6.6 Analysis

In this chapter, I follow the QCA steps. The first step is the identification of the outcome. Next, I present the selection of the conditions and cases. Then, I present the truth table which determines the frequency and consistency threshold. Finally, I run the QCA analysis with fcQCA 3.0 software (for Mac) and I interpret the results.

VI.I Identification of the outcome

The outcome used in this study is the concept of "*success*". This follows the conceptualisation described in section 3 where success is determined as access to EU funding. Successful actors are able to obtain the results they prefer. Success is a dichotomous variable, where the outcome on success coded with a 1 stands for access to EU funding, and an outcome coded with 0 stands for no access to EU funding.

VI.II Condition selection

This section specifies the conditions that are hypothesised to be part of the configurations of conditions that can lead to success (or failure) in acquiring funding (Rihoux & Grimm, 2006). Based on the literature review, I look for factors that prove to be the best predictors of the outcome – success. I selected a set of conditions that are argued to be more relevant in answering the research question. From the literature, four conditions emerged that will be used for the analysis. These conditions are summarised in table 15.

Relying on a dataset provided by the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands office in Antwerp, where out of 287 submitted project applications, 70 projects resulted successful and gained access to the EU funding, we analyse the conditions that enable one's success for EU funding. The first condition that has emerged is the communication (COM), which assumes that stakeholders communicating more frequently with decision-makers have higher chances of success **(H1)**. This condition remains highly important as it has been shown that communicative exchanges with decision-makers for the purpose of gaining access and desired political outcomes (Beyers, 2004; Bouwen, 2002) remain a crucial factor to one's success. To see whether or not a stakeholder belonging to a coalition has communicated with the decision-makers for the Interreg cross-border cooperation funding, I looked at the communication tools used to exchange with decision makers. Therefore, the exchanges and the contacts with the Interreg office during the application process are taken into consideration as crucial exchanges occurring during these interactions. The threshold value is 0 meaning that stakeholders have not had any contacts with the managing authorities of

the Interreg office, and 1 means that stakeholders have contacted the managing authorities of the Interreg Office (Orach et al., 2017). The Interreg Office refers to the main authorities that manage the funds such as the Secretariat, the Steering Committee or managers. Contact with the Interreg office is measured through direct contact – hence face to face meeting; and / or indirect contact – through e-mail or talking on the phone.

The internal frequency of communication (INTFREQCOM) is the second condition. The literature has shown that stakeholders that interact more actively with one another have greater chances in achieving their aims (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018). I check if stakeholders within a coalition have communicated frequently (5 – 10 times) during project application proposals, or less frequently (1 – 4 times) **(H2)**. Determining a threshold value for the frequency of internal communication is complex, however communication is defined as the frequency of communication among members and between members is measured following Kegler & Swan (2011). To dichotomise this condition, I further use an empirical, case-based knowledge. Based on the distribution of cases for the INTFREQCOM variable, I used the median 5: 0 if below 5, 1 if above (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). For this condition, 0 means low frequency of internal communication and 1 means high frequency of internal communication.

The third condition is the participation of public authorities in a coalition, (PUBAUTH). In particular, public authorities as demonstrated in Chapter 5 have proven to be crucial actors regarding the contributions that they bring to the coalition. Moreover, public authorities bring to the coalition the resources that most private actors lack (Binderkrantz et al., 2014) as well as the technical expertise and political commitment. Thus, the participation of public authorities in a coalition is a potential predictor to a coalition's success **(H3),** whereby those coalitions with public authorities' participation have a higher chance of success. This condition is relevant, because, as shown in section 2, members of a coalition/ project co-finance 50% of the project's budget. In this respect, the threshold value is based on the participation or not of public authorities in a coalition. This condition is interpreted as follows: 1 represents the participation of public authorities in a coalition, and 0 represents the absence of public authorities in a coalition.

Working with the same actors in the past (PASTACT) can be predicted by the trust and value similarity that stakeholders share (Leifeld & Schneider 2012; Lin, 2001) **(H4)**. Therefore, it can be argued that actors who have worked with the same actors in the past have higher chances of success for EU funding, than those who have no history of past collaborations. This study takes a threshold value of 50, meaning that if stakeholders have worked with more than 50% of other actors in the past, then the past action value is 1, and if stakeholders have worked with less than 50% of the actors in the past, the past action value is 0. However, the threshold value is not derived from the literature, instead the empirical evidence in this thesis suggests that both actors that have frequently shared experiences and cooperation activities in the past, are already better connected than other actors. A closer form of cooperation of stakeholders in the past, is backed up by the empirical evidence that gauges the prevalence of stakeholders' history of past collaborations. To

dichotomise this condition, I use empirical knowledge. Following the logic of Rihoux and Ragin (2009) I use a mechanical cutoff point, in this case the median which derives from the distribution of the cases.

Table 15. Operationalisation of conditions

Condition	Abbreviation	Threshold value	Description	Source
Communication	COM	0	0 – no contacts with the managing authorities of Interreg 1 – contacts with the managing authorities of Interreg	(Orach et al., 2017; Dür & Mateo, 2013;)
Internal Communication	INTFREQCOM	4	0 – low internal frequency of communication 1 – high internal frequency of communication	Author's database, Sorurbakhsh, 2016; Kegler & Swan (2011)
Participation of public authorities	PUBAUTH	0	0 – non-participation of public authorities in a coalition 1 – participation of public authorities in a coalition	(Junk, 2019; Heaney & Leifeld, 2018; Phinney, 2017; Heaney & Rojas, 2014; Mahoney, 2007)
Working with the same actors in the past	PASTACT	50	0 – not having worked with	Author's database; (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018;

			the same actors in the past 1 – having worked with the same actors in the past	Leifeld & Schneider 2012)

I. Case selection

In order to conduct the analysis, a selection of 16 cases (i.e. project proposals) was made, whereby 8 of the cases/ project proposals were successful and 8 were unsuccessful. The case selection sampling techniques followed convenience sampling upon the data available.

Variation in terms of the coalition size (small, medium, big); the level of mobilisation of stakeholders per coalition (local, provincial, regional, national, European and international); and the type of actor (NGOs, firm, institution, peak business association, professional association, public authority, research institute or university, sectoral business association) were taken into consideration.

For each project, the numerical data for each condition is compiled into a binary raw data matrix (table 16) based on the pre-determined threshold values. The meaning of the binary values 0 and 1 can be found in the previous section.

Table 16. Raw data matrix

CaseID	**COM**	**INTFREQCOM**	**PUBAUTH**	**PASTACT**	**SUCC**
Inagro	1	0	0	1	1
Bodembreed	1	1	1	1	1
Cross-border mountain bike trail	1	1	1	1	1
Euregional pact 2	1	1	0	0	1
Growth Opportunity	1	0	0	0	1

Land zonder grenzen	1	0	1	1	1
Redevelopment stations environments	1	1	1	0	1
Sustainability Just Do It	1	1	0	1	1
Blauwe Raam	0	1	0	0	0
Innovatie in decubitus preventie materialen	0	0	0	0	0
Integrating Nanotechnology high-systems	1	0	0	1	0
Keg vitaal	0	0	0	0	0
Natuurlijk Sturen	0	0	1	0	0
Sustainability desk	1	1	0	0	0
Thematic Cluster Project on Renewable Energies	1	1	0	0	0
Location	1	0	1	1	0

6.7 QCA Analysis: outcome success

Step 1: Necessity analysis for outcome success

The first step of QCA is the necessity of outcome and of the negated outcome (~). QCA recognises that some of the causes are more important than others. Although some causes might not be sufficient to trigger the outcome on their own, they are important enough to be a necessary part of the causal mix: the mix will always contain those necessary conditions for different outcomes to occur. The main ambition of the QCA method is to allow systematic cross-case comparisons. Simply said, oftentimes the produced given outcome of interest comes from a combinatorial way – with a few to some conditions (Rihoux & Ragin,

2009). As shall be explained at length in the next paragraphs, these conditions are recognised by the literature as the *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions.

Specifically, the consistency score captures how consistently empirically observed configurations are linked to the outcome. The consistency score as such tells us how closely a perfect subset relation between a configuration and an outcome is approximated (Ragin, 2008). In the crisp set analysis that I undertake, the consistency score represents the proportion of cases exhibiting the configuration that exhibit the outcome. The coverage is the measure of the empirical relevance or importance (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009) which refers to the proportion of cases exhibiting the outcome captured by this configuration. This coverage score provides a numeric expression for the empirical importance of a given condition (or a combination of conditions) producing an outcome (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).

Skocpol (1979) describes it very well writing that without a state break down (X) a social revolution could not be produced (Y); therefore, a state break down is a necessary (although not sufficient) cause for a social revolution. Therefore:

- A condition is necessary for an outcome if it is always present when the outcome occurs. In other words, the outcome cannot occur in the absence of the condition.

- A condition is sufficient for an outcome if the outcome always occurs when the condition is present. However, the outcome could also result from other conditions.

- A condition is necessary but not sufficient if it can produce the outcome in combination with other outcomes and occurs in all those combinations.

- A condition can be both sufficient and necessary if it is the only cause that produces the outcome.

Although it is a good practice to establish a consistency threshold, literature recommends a necessary consistency benchmark of at least >0.90, indicates that the potential necessary condition is empirically relevant (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Table 17 shows that only one condition reaches the threshold of 0.90 and that is communication. In this case, communication is a condition that may be necessary to the outcome of success.

Table 17. Analysis of Necessary conditions success

Conditions	**Consistency**	**Coverage**
COM	1.000000	0.666667

~COM	0.000000	0.000000
INTFREQCOM	0.625000	0.625000
~INTFREQCOM	0.375000	0.375000
PUBAUTH	0.500000	0.666667
~PUBAUTH	0.500000	0.400000
PASTACT	0.625000	0.714286
~PASTACT	0.375000	0.333333

Step 2: Truth Table

The starting point of the QCA are the combinations of casually relevant conditions. For this purpose, the second step of the QCA is to construct a truth table based on the raw data matrix (Table 16). The truth table lists the logically possible combinations of casual conditions and sorts cases according to the combinations they display (Rihoux & Grimm, 2006).

More specifically, with four casual conditions, there are 16 logically possible combinations of conditions, the same as the number of rows in the table. More generally, the number of conditions is 2k (k = the number of casual conditions).

After the truth table has been established, a frequency and consistency threshold must be decided. Since the N for the QCA analysis in this study is 16, for small-N QCA studies the threshold is typically one case (Greckhamer et al., 2018). As a result, all rows that do not meet the threshold are removed. While the necessary consistency threshold is set at >0.90, for the sufficient analysis the consistency benchmark set at ≥0.80 for raw consistency is enough (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). If the sufficient consistency threshold is above 0.80 '1' is noted in the variable 'SUCC' and if the sufficient consistency threshold is below 0.80 '0' is noted in the variable 'SUCC'.

Table 18. Truth table success

COM	INTFREQCOM	PUBAUTH	PASTACT	number	SUCC	cases	Raw consist.

1	1	0	0	3	0	Euregionalpact 2; Sustainability desk; Thematic cluster	0.333333
0	0	0	0	2	0	Inovatie in de; Keg vitaal	0
1	0	0	1	2	0	Inagro; integrating nano technology	0.5
1	0	1	1	2	0	Landzonder grenzen; location	0.5
1	1	1	1	2	1	Bodembreed; cross-border mountain bike trail	1
1	0	0	0	1	1	Growth opportunity	1
0	1	0	0	1	0	Blauwe raam	0
0	0	1	0	1	0	Natuurlijk sturen	0
1	1	1	0	1	1	Redevelopmen t station	1
1	1	0	1	1	1	Sustainability just do it	1

Step 3: Analysis

Now that the truth table is constructed, I analyse the presence of several causes for the outcome to occur. QCA assumes several configurations can simultaneously (or in combination with one another) produce the outcome (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). The standard QCA analysis produces three types of solutions: conservative/ complex, intermediate and parsimonious/ simple (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). The intermediate solution, which stands in the middle between the conservative and the parsimonious solution, uses prime implicants' matrices from both solutions to combine and filter those cases that are responsible for the intermediate solution (Ragin & Sonnett, 2005). This study mainly reports on the intermediate solution. Before running the analysis, I specify the conditions that I believe contribute to the outcome, i.e. success. As a reminder, the conditions derived from the literature are as follows: frequent communication with the decision-makers **(H1)**, frequent internal communication **(H2)**, presence of public authorities in the project **(H3)**, and having worked with the same actors in the past **(H4)**.

Intermediate solution

The intermediate solution provides an important tool for the analysis of the data with the QCA method. As mentioned in the previous section, this solution includes conditions selected by the researcher known as "prime implicants" (Ragin, 2017 – QCA user manual; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). This will be requested when the researcher cannot fully reduce the truth table. Each prime implicant is a set of conditions joined by the Boolean "AND" operator (Mendel, 2013). Prime implicants are based on the theoretical and substantive knowledge that guide (imply) several primitive expressions (rows) in the truth table. In the prime implicants table, each column represents a different row of the truth table (presented in the previous section) that is covered by one or more implicants (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). Table 19 below shows the prime implicants chart for the analysis.

The prime implicant chosen is INTFREQCOM*PUBAUTH: a high frequency of internal communication with stakeholders in a project and the participation of public authorities. From the literature, it is clear that internal communication leads to more success (Moise et al., 2012). The presence of public authorities is also an important condition, as shown in chapter 5.

The prime implicant INTFREQCOM*PUBAUTH is consistent with the 2nd and the 3rd hypotheses of this study.

Table 19. Prime implicant chart showing coverage of prime implicants

	COM*INTFREQCOM*PUBAUTH*~PASTACT
INTFREQCOM*PUBAUTH	**X**
COM PUBAUTH*~PASTACT	

From here, the intermediate solution is run by the fsQCA software, shown in table 20. The standard analysis generates three different paths. This means that success can be achieved in three ways. The consistency of the solution is 1, which means that the reliability of the solution is 100%. Put in other words, the solution path obtained is a sufficient condition for the success of stakeholders with 100% reliability. The total solution coverage is 1, meaning that these three paths can explain 100% of the cases of success with the EU funding for cross-border cooperation of our choice. Each measure of coverage provides a different insight into the plausible intermediate solutions. The path solutions provided by the software show that they pertain a high explanatory power and high coverage.

Table 20. Intermediate solution success

	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency	Cases
INTFREQCOM*PASTACT	0.5	0.25	1	Bodembreed; Cross-border mountain bike trail; Sustainability just do it
COM*~INTFREQCOM*~PASTACT	0.25	0.25	1	Growth opportunity
INTFREQCOM*PUBAUTH	0.5	0.25	1	Bodembreed; Cross-border mountain bike trail; Redevelopment stations environments
Solution coverage: 1				
Solution consistency: 1				

From the intermediate solution, some observations appear. The most important combinations of conditions for the intermediate solution are the first and the third path, as they have the highest coverage. Therefore, stakeholders with a high frequency of internal communication and that have worked together in the past, have high chances for accessing the EU funds. This is consistent with what is argued in the literature, namely that stakeholders that communicate more frequently with one another have higher chances of achieving what they aim to achieve (Sorurbakhsh, 2016; Kegler & Swan, 2011), according to H2.

Finally, I also note that this combination of the frequent internal communication with the presence of public authorities contributes to higher success for the EU funding.

Now, I am going to look at the different paths more in depth:

a) Path 1: INTFREQCOM*PASTACT

The first path is read as: frequent internal communication*past action

The literature has shown that stakeholders that communicate more often with one another become more successful in their endeavors (Sorurbakhsh, 2016; Kegler & Swan, 2011). While working and interacting well with stakeholders means to trust one another – an anchoring mechanism that has found a confirmation by academic scholars (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018; Leifeld and Schneider, 2012). There is a benefit to pursuing common aims together with stakeholders with whom you have worked in the past (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018). More specifically, the combination between these two conditions can bring the desired outcome, i.e. access to the EU funding. Examples of projects where stakeholders have communicated frequently with one another and have a history of past collaborations include: Bodembreed; Cross-border mountain bike trail; and Sustainability just do it project proposals. In the case of the Bodembreed, all variables are present: communication with decision-makers, internal frequent communication with the decision-makers, the presence of a public authority in the coalition, and having worked with the same actors in the past. The same variables are present in the Cross-border mountain bike trail project. Sustainability just do it is a bit different. This is a project where there is communication with decision-makers, frequent communication among the coalition members and past cooperation with the same actors. Nevertheless, no public authorities have participated in the project, and the project was nonetheless successful in obtaining EU funding. This shows that success is either a combination of some or even all factors/ variables combined.

The raw coverage which represents the proportion of outcome cases that are uniquely covered by a given term is 0.5. This means this combination of conditions can explain 50% of the success for the EU funding. The unique coverage is 0.25, meaning that 25% of success for the EU funding can be uniquely attributed to only that combination (frequent internal communication and past action) and no other. The minimum consistency score is 0.8 and in

this case the consistency score is 1, which makes that this combination can be considered sufficient to explain the success for the EU funding. This path makes a reference to the two variables that are found in **H2** (frequent communication of the coalition members) and **H4** (having worked with the same actors in the past). Hence, the two hypotheses, H2 and H4 are not confirmed individually, but the path builds as a combination of the two variables that are found in both hypotheses.

b) Path 2: COM*~INTFREQCOM*~PASTACT

The second path is read as: communication with the decision-makers*no frequent internal communication*no past action.

Stakeholders that communicate regularly with the decision-makers, who do not have frequent internal communication and have not worked together in the past have higher chances for getting access to the EU funding. This path only confirms **H1**. Examples include Growth opportunity project proposal. Given these results, I think that it is reasonable to view the insider strategies a coalition pursues (Weiler & Reißmann, 2019), i.e. frequent communication with the decision-makers (Secretariat and Managing Authorities of cross-border cooperation funds) as strategies that would greatly increase the coalitions' likely success.

The raw coverage is 0.25 which means that this combination of conditions can explain only 25% of the success achieved for the EU funding. The raw coverage is 0.25, meaning that this combination of conditions can explain 25% of the success for the EU funding for cross-border cooperation. The unique coverage is 0.25, meaning that 25% of success for the EU funding can be uniquely attributed to only that combination (communication with decision-makers, and no frequent internal communication and not having worked with the same stakeholders in the past) and no other. The minimum consistency score is 0.8, and the consistency score in this case is 1, which makes that this combination can be considered sufficient to explain the success for the EU funding. Here, **H1** is mostly confirmed (frequent combination of stakeholders with the decision makers, such as the Secretariat, the Managing Authorities).

c) Path 3: INTFREQCOM*PUBAUTH

The third path is read as: frequent internal communication*presence of public authorities.

The literature argues that the principal features of actors which participate in coalitions elicit greater contributions from its members and thus increases the prospects for success by the coalition (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018; Phinney, 2017; Heaney & Rojas, 2014). Because public authorities have the capacities to allocate more efforts to the coalitions it has joined – financial, staff, resources – the success of coalitions in accessing EU funds depends in part

on the participation of public authorities within these coalitions (Lorenz, 2020; Junk, 2019; Mahoney, 2008).

This path indicates that when internal frequent communication of project members is combined with the participation of public authorities in the development of these projects, success for EU funding is achieved. According to the hypotheses, **H2** (frequent communication of the coalition members) and **H3** (participation of public authorities in the coalition) are mainly confirmed. The path is a combination of two variables that are found in three projects: Bodembreed; Cross-border mountain bike trail; Redevelopment stations environments project proposals. In addition to the frequent communication with coalition members and the participation of public authorities in the coalition, having worked with the same actors in the past and communication with decision makers are other variables that make Bodembreed and Cross-border mountain bike trail project successful. The redevelopment stations project represents a combination of frequent communication of the coalition members with participation of public authorities and communication with decision makers. In light of the evidence, the combination of these factors makes the project successful for EU funding.

The raw coverage contains 0.5, which means that this combination of conditions can explain 50% of stakeholders' successes in the EU. The unique coverage is 0.25, meaning that 25% of success for the EU funding can be uniquely attributed to that combination (high internal frequency of communication and presence of public authorities) and no other. The minimum consistency score is 0.8, and the consistency score in this case is 1, which makes that this combination can be considered sufficient to explain the success for the EU funding.

6.8 QCA Analysis: outcome ~ success

Step 1: necessity analysis for ~ success

As explained in the previous section, a necessity analysis must be carried out for ~ success, i.e. the outcome of not having obtained EU funding. For the outcome success the same consistency threshold is used as for the necessity analysis. Table 21 shows that for outcome ~ success no condition reaches the threshold of 0.9, thus it can be said there are no singular necessary conditions. However, there are some conditions which are relatively close to that threshold: ~INTFREQCOM, ~PUBAUTH and ~PASTACT with a consistency value of 0.666667. More specifically, the lack of frequent internal communication, the lack of public authorities' participation and the lack of past action with coalition members are important conditions for the analysis.

Table 21. Analysis of necessary conditions ~ success

Conditions	Consistency	Coverage

COM	0.500000	0.428571
~COM	0.500000	1.000000
INTFREQCOM	0.333333	0.400000
~INTFREQCOM	0.666667	0.800000
PUBAUTH	0.333333	0.500000
~PUBAUTH	0.666667	0.666667
PASTACT	0.333333	0.500000
~PACTACT	0.666667	0.666667

Step 2: Truth table

In the second step, a truth table is constructed based on the raw data matrix presented in step 1 of the ~ success analysis. The truth table presents the minimal configurations of conditions sufficient for the outcome ~ success. This truth table (table 22) uses the same frequency and consistency threshold as the truth table for outcome confidence: a frequency threshold of 1 and a consistency threshold of 0.8.

Table 22. Truth table ~ success

COM	INTFREQCOM	PUBAUTH	PASTACT	number	~SUCCESS	cases	Raw Consistency
0	0	0	0	2	0	Innovatie in decubitus preventie materialen; Keg vitaal	1
1	0	0	0	1	0	Growth Opportunity	0

0	1	0	0	1	0	Blauwe Raam	1
1	1	0	0	2	0	Sustainability desk; Thematic Cluster Project on Renewable Energies	1
0	0	1	0	1	0	Natuurlijk Sturen	1
1	1	1	0	1	0	Redevelopment stations environments	0
1	0	0	1	1	0	Inagro	1
1	1	0	1	1	0	Sustainability Just Do It	0
1	0	1	1	2	0	Location; Land zonder grenzen	1
1	1	1	1	1	0	Bodembreed; Cross-border mountain bike trail	0

Step 3: Analysis

Once the truth table is constructed, I then move to the analysis of the combination of conditions that are sufficient to achieve the outcome success. There are three types of solutions (simple, complex and intermediate) and each can be appropriate in different circumstances. As for the outcome ~ success, only the intermediate solution is reported. Before running the analysis, the conditions that according to the researcher contribute to the negative outcome, i.e. not success for the EU funding, should be clarified. The assumptions derived from the literature are as follows: low communication with the

decision-makers **(H1)** with low frequent communication with the coalition members **(H2)**, no participation of the public authorities in the coalition **(H3)** and not having worked with the same actors in the past **(H4)**.

Intermediate solution

The prime implicant chosen here is COM*~INTFREQCOM*PASTACT.

The analysis in the previous section tells us that frequent communication with the decision-makers can be important for ensuring that decision-makers are aware of their perspectives, concerns, and priorities, and they have the necessary information to make informed decisions (Orach et al., 2017; Dür & Mateo, 2013). The history of past collaborations can also have an impact to achieve EU funding success (Heaney & Leifeld, 2018; Leifeld & Schneider 2012).

This section tells us that frequent communication with the decision makers, in combination with low internal communication and a history of past collaborations leads to ~ success, therefore failure.

Table 23. Prime implicant chart ~ success

COM*~INTFREQCOM*PASTACT	x
INTFREQCOM*~PUBAUTH*~PASTACT	

After selecting the prime implicant, the intermediate solution is run by the software, shown in table 24. The intermediate solution generates three paths. This means that ~ success for EU funding can be achieved in three ways. The consistency of the overall solutions is 1 which means that the reliability of the solution is 100%. Put in other words, the obtained transmission path is a sufficient condition for success for EU funding, with 100% of reliability. The total coverage solution is 1. Specifically, the three paths can explain about 100% of the cases with ~ success for the EU funding, with high explanatory power and coverage.

Table 24. Intermediate solution ~success

	Raw Coverge	Unique Coverage	Consistency	Cases

~COM*~INTFREQCOM*~PASTACT	0.333333	0.333333	1	Innovatie in decubitus preventie materialen; Keg vitaal; Natuurlijk Sturen
INTFREQCOM*~PUBAUTH*~PASTACT	0.333333	0.333333	1	Euregional pact 2; Blauwe Raam; Sustainability desk; Thematic Cluster Project on Renewable Energies
COM*~INTFREQCOM*PASTACT	0.333333	0.333333	1	Inagro; Land zonder grenzen; Integrating Nanotechnology high-systems; Location
Solution coverage 1				
Solution consistency 1				

Some notable findings emerge from the intermediary solution. First, it confirms that communication (both internal communication and external communication with the decision-makers) remain two important variables. In the intermediary solution presented here, past action (the presence or negation) appears in every path in the intermediary solution.

Then, according to the intermediary solution presented here, stakeholders with frequent communication with the decision-makers (**H1**), not a frequent internal communication with coalition members (**negation of H2**), and having worked with the same actors in the past (**H4**) have less chances to succeed in accessing EU funding.

Then, I explain more in details the three solutions proposed by the software:

a) Path 1: ~COM*~INTFREQCOM*~PASTACT

The first path is read as: low communication with decision-makers*low internal communication*not working with the same actors in the past.

This path confirms that with low communication with decision makers, low internal communication with coalition members and low history of past collaborations, success is achieved to a lesser degree than expected. This path acknowledges the assumptions made in hypotheses **H1** (frequent communication with decision makers), **H2** (internal communication with coalition members) and **H4** (history of past collaborations). Examples include Innovatie in decubitus preventie materialen; Keg vitaal; Natuurlijk Sturen project proposals. The two first project proposals, Innovatie in decubitus preventive materialen and Keg vital, I notice the four selected factors are absent (communication with decision makers; internal communication with coalition members; presence of public authorities and history of past collaborations). In the Natuurlijk sturen project proposal, besides the participation of public authorities in the coalition, the other variables are absent. This confirms that the Participation of the public authorities alone in the project, without any other variables being present is not enough to guarantee the success for EU funding. The raw coverage contains 33%, meaning that this combination of conditions can explain 33% of the low success for EU funding. The unique coverage is 33%, meaning that 33% of cases of low success for EU funding can be uniquely attributed to this combination. The consistency threshold is 0.8, which makes this combination of conditions not sufficient to explain the lack of success for EU funding.

b) Path 2: INTFREQCOM*~PUBAUTH*~PASTACT

The second path reads as: frequent internal communication*lack of public authorities' participation*not working with the same actors in the past.

The variable found in the second hypothesis **(H2)** is confirmed: stakeholders that use a frequent internal communication with their coalition members have higher chances of attaining success for EU funding. It is noteworthy, however, that there is lack of presence from public authorities in coalitions, and no past action has been noted in this path. This contradicts hypotheses **H3** (participation of public authorities in coalitions) and **H4** (having worked with the same actors in the past). Examples include Euregional pact 2; Blauwe Raam; Sustainability desk; Thematic Cluster Project on Renewable Energies project proposals. In Euregional pact 2, Sustainability desk, Renewable Energies and Thematic Cluster project proposals, communication with decision makers is present, the internal frequent communication is present but the other factors are missing. This confirms that a combination of communication with decision makers, and frequent internal communication is not enough to achieve success for EU funding. Blauwe raam is a project proposal, where only the frequent internal communication with coalition members variable is present. This proves the variable alone is not enough to guarantee the success for EU funding. The raw coverage contains 33%, meaning that this combination of conditions can explain 33% of the

low success for EU funding. The unique coverage is 33%, meaning that 33% of cases of low success for EU funding can be uniquely attributed to this combination. The consistency threshold is 0.8, which makes this combination of conditions not sufficient to explain the lack of success for EU funding.

c) Path 3: COM*~INTFREQCOM*PASTACT

The third path reads as: frequent communication with decision-makers*lack of internal frequent communication*working with the same actors in the past.

This path is in line with the two of the preconceived hypotheses and literature: frequent communication with decision-makers **(H1)** and working with the same actors in the past **(H4)**. Examples include Inagro; Land zonder grenzen; Integrating Nanotechnology high-systems; Location project proposals. Inagro and Integrating Nanotechnology high-systems are two project proposals where communication with decision makers and working with the same actors in the past are present, but the other variables are there. This proves that to achieve success, a combination of two factors: communication with decision makers and having worked with the same actors in the past is enough. In Landen zonder grenzen and Location project proposals we notice the presence of communication with decision makers variable, Public Authority participation and having worked with the same actors in the past. The raw coverage contains 33%, meaning that this combination of conditions can explain 33% of the low success for EU funding. The unique coverage is 33%, meaning that 33% of cases of low success for EU funding can be uniquely attributed to this combination. The consistency threshold is 0.8, which makes this combination of conditions not sufficient to explain the lack of success for EU funding.

6.9 Conclusions

This chapter equips us with an enlarged understanding of stakeholders' access to EU funding through merging the existing literature on lobbying success and the cross-border cooperation literature. The main dynamics that have been analysed in this chapter concern the following: *a) stakeholders' interactions with one another*; *b) their interaction with decision-makers*; *c) the role of single actors, such as public authorities.*

The crisp-set analysis used in this chapter, helped to understand the necessary/ sufficient conditions that could explain EU funding success. This allowed to analyse further the individual and combinations of conditions that enable stakeholders to gain EU funding access. Frequent communication with decision-makers is the first factor that is tied to stakeholders' EU funding success. Having a frequent communication with decision-makers, even when frequent internal communication with coalition members is missing, and/ or have not worked with one another in the past (*network embeddedness*), can in all cases lead to access to EU funding. Even in the absence of other conditions, frequent communication with decision-makers always leads to success for EU funding. A possible reason for that is that *insider tactics* remain stakeholders' preferred tactics that make groups' resources increase on a regular basis (Dür & Mateo, 2013).

Frequent internal communication with members of a coalition is another factor that is being analysed in relation to EU funding success. The empirical analysis confirms that frequent internal communication in combination with past action or/ the presence of public authorities contributes to the success of coalitions. The role of public authorities is another factor that contribute to their EU funding success. The data analysis confirms the presence of public authorities in coalitions in combination with frequent internal communication contributes to EU funding success.

Finally, but equally important, having worked with the same actors in the past leads to higher chances of success for EU funding. This is a finding that is consistent with the hypotheses of this study. Furthermore, having worked with the same actors in the past in combination with internal frequent communication contributes to one's success for EU funding.

The empirical analysis confirms that combinations of stakeholders explain their success for EU funding. These combinations of conditions are most fruitful when seeking to understand synergies of stakeholders' access to EU funding, because they tap into the multiple reasons of working together with others, for instance by actively and frequently communicating with coalition members *and* having worked with the same actors in the past *(network embeddedness)*. Another empirical set of casual conditions that reiterates stakeholders' success is frequent communication with decision-makers, *and* low frequency of internal stakeholders' communication *and* low action in the past. Another set of casual combinations

of conditions is high internal frequent communication with project members *and* public authorities' participation in projects.

The analysis of the lack of success variable confirmed that lack of communication with decision makers *and* low internal frequent communication *and* having worked with the same actors in the past produces a lesser degree than expected of success. The analysis of the negation of the outcome reinforces the results of the success outcome analysis. By reflecting on what makes stakeholders successful in attaining success for EU funding, the analysis further confirms that a combination of communication with decision makers *and* having worked together in the past are enough to achieve success for EU funding. However, this also confirms that when communication with decision makers *and* having worked together in the past is combined with low frequent communication, success for EU funding is not attained.

In conclusion, it can be said that, firstly, one's success for EU funding support for the development of cross-border cooperation projects cannot be explained by the occurrence of a single factor. There are different paths leading to success and/ or no success for EU funding support. Secondly, trusting your coalition members and working with the same people you have worked in the past demonstrates these factors matter, and frequent communication with decision-makers for the purpose of exchanging information and gaining information also matters. Thirdly, the presence of recognised leadership such as public authorities only enhances endogenous growth of a coalition's network formation. Last, but not least, the success of coalitions in attaining their aims depends in part on their ability to self-manage their coalition, as frequent internal communication essentially leads the way to access to EU funding.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

In this final chapter of the dissertation, I will present the most significant research findings, discuss their implications, and suggest promising research directions. The chapter commences with a delineation of the foundational theories that underpin this research endeavour, elucidating my contribution to the theoretical framework. Subsequently, it delves into the principal empirical findings before culminating in a discussion on the primary limitations and the opening of discourse regarding prospective research avenues.

Prior to delving into the subsequent section that elaborates on the theoretical contributions advanced within this thesis, I succinctly outline the core research inquiries that guided this research study:

1) *What are the predominant characteristics of stakeholders who mobilise in support of EU funds for cross-border cooperation programs?*
2) *To what extend does a shared identity elucidate stakeholders' collaborative efforts in cross-border programs?*
3) *What factors account for stakeholders' success in securing EU funding?*

7.1 Theoretical foundations and contribution to the theory

This dissertation explored the dynamics of cross-border cooperation among stakeholders within the framework of EU funding. Drawing on analogy to lobbying EU institutions, it aimed to investigate the design and utilisation of various tools by stakeholders to secure EU funding. Existing literature on EU lobbying suggests that stakeholders engage in activities to access and exert influence (Baroni et al., 2014; Klüver, 2013; Berkhout & Lowery, 2010). The premise of this study is grounded in the idea that cross-border cooperation programs serve as a mobilisation tool, fostering collaboration among stakeholders while also offering a pathway to access EU funds.

The central focus of this dissertation was the interaction among stakeholders, specifically geared towards accessing EU funding rather than advocating for policy change or institutional access. This funding serves as a means for stakeholders to implement projects that could significantly impact their communities. In particular, the dissertation analysed the cross-border cooperation between Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands spanning from 2007 to 2013. The projects funded through EU support for cross-border cooperation aimed at addressing economic and social development in the cross-border regions.

Throughout the dissertation, several key elements where highlighted to enhance the understanding of stakeholders' mobilisation, their patterns of collaboration, and the tactics employed to secure EU funding.

Chapter 2 of the dissertation provides a literature review of MLG, a framework that establishes mechanisms for power and resource distribution among different levels of government as well as non-governmental actors. These actors encompass regional and local governments, civil society organisations, and private sector entities. While the dissertation does not delve into the decision-making process of selecting stakeholders to engage with, it operates under the assumption that the exchange among stakeholders is both reciprocal and enduring.

Chapter 4, aiming to identify the types of stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation programs, examines the main characteristics of stakeholders engaged in the specific cross-border cooperation initiative under scrutiny.

The dissertation adopts a perspective on cross-border cooperation funded by the EU, where mobilisation extends beyond vertical dispersion among governance levels to encompass horizontal engagement across diverse sectors and spheres of interest. This form of mobilisation involves stakeholders, non-governmental actors, and civil society as articulated by Bache and Flinders (2004). Such mobilisation entails actors from local, regional, national and international levels interacting with one another to develop project proposals.

This dissertation sheds new light on theoretical frameworks through its assessment of MLG theory. Originating from studies on European integration, MLG theory has been applied within the realm of cross-border cooperation, specifically focusing on the participation of multiple actors across different levels, not necessarily at political levels, but rather in pursuit of EU funding schemes.

Literature related to MLG debates often emphasizes the importance of establishing a physical presence in Brussels (Aspinwall & Greenwood, 2013). In this dissertation, I reconcile the role of MLG within regional financial schemes for cross-border cooperation, viewing cross-border cooperation as a natural occurrence that aligns stakeholders along local, regional, and European axes. While MLG itself may not directly explain causality in this context, it serves as a conceptual framework enabling an understanding of the multilevel nature of stakeholders' mobilisation for EU funding.

Although MLG is typically conceptualised to empower subnational actors by involving them in decision-making arenas (Bache, 2008), the application of MLG in this dissertation elucidates the diverse nature of actors engaged in cross-border cooperation finance schemes. However, it's important to note that the conceptualisation of MLG employed here does not fully elucidate the intricate relations between cross-border cooperation funding programs and EU institutional and decision-making structures.

This dissertation broadens the understanding of MLG by examining the intricates of cross-border cooperation and the dynamics of stakeholder interactions with diverse governance frameworks. Through detailed Flanders-Netherlands case study, it sheds light on how

different levels of government and various actors collaborate, negotiate, and implement projects across borders. By exploring the challenges and successes of these interactions, the research provides nuanced insights into the mechanisms and conditions that facilitate effective MLG. Additionally, it highlights the role of non-state actors, the impact of regional diversity, and the importance of institutional contexts in shaping governance outcomes. This comprehensive approach not only enriches theoretical perspectives on MLG but also offers practical recommendations for enhancing cooperative governance in complex environments.

This dissertation argues that actors within cross-border cooperation rely on external funding sources while actively pursuing their strategic interests. Recognising their dependence on the external environment, stakeholders will undertake actions to minimise this dependency, as suggested by Pfeffer (2018). Drawing from RDT, which posits that resources create both direct and indirect dependencies, I evaluate stakeholders' capacity to assess preferential access to resources based on their criticality.

Further elaboration on the specific resources and motivations of stakeholders to capitalise on available resources is provided later in the chapter. In essence, the greater the need for external resources, such as funds, from the environment, the more likely stakeholders are to mobilise.

The RDT has been utilised to elucidate how stakeholders within the cross-border cooperation domain respond to environmental changes and strategically navigate their involvement with EU funding for cross-border cooperation schemes. This study extends the application of RDT within the context of EU funding schemes, exploring how stakeholders' actions are influenced by external dependencies.

As RDT would predict, stakeholders' behaviours are shaped by their external dependencies. By integrating insights from EU funding, this study enhances our understanding of dependencies within the cross-border cooperation field. By combining recent recognitions within RDT regarding the multifaceted nature of dependencies with stakeholders' perspectives, valuable insights may be gleaned for managing dependencies and devising effective strategies.

Examining the role of dependencies from stakeholders' perspectives in the context of EU funding and beyond presents a promising avenue for future research with RDT. Applying the RDT perspective can facilitate a deeper examination of how stakeholders manage uncertainties and employ strategies to mitigate them, by incorporating complementary theoretical perspectives. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder dynamics and strategic decision-making processes in the context of EU funding and cross-border cooperation initiatives.

Chapter 5 of this dissertation delves into the significance of stakeholder collaboration in project proposals. Specifically, it explores the common values and beliefs that drive collaboration among stakeholders involved in project proposals. Through the findings, we gain insights into the collaboration dynamics among stakeholders in such endeavours. It becomes evident that actors operating within similar sectors are more prone to collaborate. Both similarity and complementarity are essential for fostering robust and effective collaborations. Similarity ensures alignment and coherence in joint efforts, while complementarity enhances the potential for managing successful collaborative initiatives by bringing together diverse strengths and resources. This chapter elaborates on the concept of *organisational identity* as posited by the ACF, which emphasizes formation of coalitions and the mobilisation of actors within a landscape where public, societal and leadership positions influence coalition dynamics. The considerable number of stakeholders applying for project proposals under EU funding underscores their active engagement with EU financial programs. These stakeholders represent diverse interests and focal points. Organisational identity typically encompasses the distinct characteristics defining an organisation, with its type being one aspect. According to the ACF, actors act in alignment with their enduring beliefs, guiding their choices and actions towards achieving desired outcomes. While the ACF demonstrates that coalition members share common beliefs when engaging in collective action (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014), it is important to note that shared beliefs and actual coordination are distinct concepts. Shared beliefs may aid actors in deciding *in whom to trust* (Ingold et al, 2016), or may serve as a basis for establishing trust within relationships.

Chapter 6 delves into the tactics and strategies utilised by stakeholders to gain access to EU funding for cross-border cooperation projects. It examines four key variables derived from lobbying literature concerning access to EU funding: 1) direct communication with decision-makers responsible for allocating EU funding; 2) internal communication among stakeholders to develop project proposal ideas; 3) engagement of public authorities in projects, serving as a significant source of financial supply and influence; 4) previous collaborations with the same actors for similar initiatives.

The literature on interest groups expands our understanding of stakeholders' behaviour regarding access to EU funding, offering practical insights for policymaking and cross-border decision-making processes. By integrating interest group lobbying literature with cross-border cooperation literature, this chapter contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of achieving success in EU funding. The thesis advances theoretical understanding within interest groups literature by elucidating the conditions under which strategies can effectively secure access to EU funding.

Positioned between tactics and strategies of interest group behaviour and existing literature on EU funding for cross-border cooperation, this research underscores the importance of stakeholders' ongoing efforts to secure resources. Organised stakeholder engagement serves as a crucial means to access EU funding opportunities. The study concludes that employing lobbying tactics and strategies can effectively amplify stakeholders' voices and

enhance their success rates. Moreover, it suggests that effective stakeholder strategies often entail a combination of tactics tailored to the specific context of cross-border cooperation initiatives.

7.2 Research approach and empirical contributions

Chapter 3 of this dissertation elucidates the research methodology and approach, which embraced a mixed-method research design, following both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Triangulation was utilised in order to leverage qualitative data for stakeholder mobilisation, thereby enhancing the quantitative testing of hypotheses concerning stakeholders' mobilisation.

SNA facilitated a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' collaborations, drawing upon data derived from stakeholders' interviews. Meanwhile, QCA enabled the identification of conditions enabling stakeholder access to cross-border cooperation funding.

This amalgamation of methods and datasets has facilitated a deeper understanding of stakeholders' mobilisation patterns, collaboration styles and the strategies enabling their access to EU funding. The primary research methodologies employed in this thesis encompassed the utilisation of diverse datasets, methodologies, theories and assumptions to address the research inquiries.

The findings underscore the significance of mobilisation based on actor type and the level of mobilisation. Through the investigation, I discerned specific categories of stakeholders mobilised for the chosen cross-border cooperation program. A meticulous examination of stakeholder mobilisation for EU cross-border cooperation revealed that Institutions (N=217), public authorities (N=216) and Non-Profit Organisations (N=175) were the most actively participating stakeholder types in the program. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that a substantial portion of stakeholders operates at sub-national levels (local, provincial and regional), with only a limited number engaged at the European and international levels. This distribution is typical because local and regional stakeholders are often more directly involved in addressing community-specific issues and needs, which naturally positions them at sub-national levels of operation. These stakeholders usually focus on local government, economic development, where their impact can be more immediate and visible.

On the other hand, engagement from actors at the European and international levels generally requires more resources, broader strategic interest, and a focus on issues that transcend national boundaries. Consequently, fewer stakeholders operate at these higher levels, often because it involves greater complexity, higher costs, and a need for extensive networks and expertise. Therefore, the observed distribution is unsurprising and reflects the practical realities of stakeholder engagement, where the majority focus on more localised,

manageable scopes of work, while a select few with the necessary resources and broader strategic goals extend their influence to European and international arenas.

Unsurprisingly, the empirical data from the SNA lends credence to the collaboration among stakeholders of similar types. Notably, an examination of collaborative instances reveals that the Province of Zeeland (the Netherlands) frequently partners with Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands), providing an opportunity to delve deeper into the efficacy of collaboration based on stakeholder types. This empirical contribution holds significance as it furnishes evidence regarding the effectiveness of specific lobbying tactics and strategies.

Furthermore, the empirical findings highlight that success in securing EU funding hinges on a multitude of factors, briefly outlined here. This dissertation reveals that stakeholders opt for collaboration over solo project proposals. This inclination towards collaboration is understandable, as pooling resources enhances the likelihood of accessing funds. The intrinsic value of collaboration lies in fostering shared knowledge and understanding, enabling stakeholders to achieve more collectively than they could individually. Additionally, collaboration is likely extrinsically valued by funding agencies, which often prioritise and support cooperative efforts. These agencies recognise the potential for such collaborations to address complex, transnational issues more effectively and efficiently, and therefore, they frequently allocate funding to initiatives that demonstrate strong, cross-border partnerships and collaborative frameworks.

The empirical findings of the dissertation reveal that success can be attributed to combinations of various conditions. For instance, regular communication with coalition members *and* past collaboration with the same actors *(network embeddedness)* were found to enhance access to EU funding. Another significant combination of factors includes frequent communication with decision-makers, *coupled* with low internal stakeholder communication frequency *and* minimal past action. Additionally, a set of casual combinations involves high internal communication frequency with project members *and* the involvement of public authorities in projects.

It is common for stakeholders to engage with key decision-making bodies responsible for EU cross-border cooperation funds. These bodies typically include Managing Authorities tasked with day-to-day fund management and the Steering Committee responsible for project selection. While the approach to contacting these authorities may vary case by case, variables such as internal contacts within the authorities and frequent communication with them deemed important for success.

This study contributes to and enhances the discourse surrounding access to EU funding, which presents unique financial opportunities for stakeholders. While the multi-level EU policy processes have facilitated lobbying access, academic literature underscores that actors often utilize EU lobbying platforms to influence policies within the Brussels scene (Richardson & Mazey, 2015). Through this research, I unequivocally showcase that the

efficacy of lobbying and accessing EU funding at the regional level, is a particularly crucial aspect considering the significance of regional policy within the EU framework.

Moreover, this study not only aligns with but also enriches the requirements for securing EU funding. It emphasizes the necessity of a well-prepared proposal that aligns with the EU's funding priorities, underscores the strength of coalition-building, and elucidates the importance of employing effective tactics and strategies to achieve desired outcomes.

7.3 Limitations of this study and venues for further research

While this study has significantly enhanced our comprehension of stakeholders' participation and involvement in EU-financed cross-border cooperation programs, both theoretically and empirically, it is important to acknowledge the limitations imposed by certain choices made during the research process. Practical decisions were guided by the context and timeframe of this study, which inevitably influenced the scope of the dissertation.

In the following paragraphs, I elaborate on these decisions and propose potential avenues for future research.

The primary limitation concerns the temporal scope of the data utilised in this study, spanning from 2007 to 2013. Due to practical constraints and the chosen approach to data collection, reliance was placed on past data, thereby precluding the incorporation of potentially new evidence. While the data collection encompasses the full spectrum of mobilisers within Interreg Flanders-Netherlands from 2013 to 2017, the inability to supplement the dataset with more recent data is acknowledged.

The data analysis commenced with a database comprising successful and unsuccessful cross-border cooperation projects between 2007 and 2013, sourced from the Secretariat office in Antwerp. Initially, the database contained information on over 700 mobilised stakeholders, (788 more precisely), distributed across 287 projects, with 70 deemed successful and 217 unsuccessful. The uniqueness of this data lies in its comprehensive scope, encompassing information on over 700 mobilised stakeholders across 287 projects, making it an invaluable resource for understanding the dynamics of cross-border collaborations. However, the primary concern may not be the validity of the data, as it accurately captures the intended measures within the dataset obtained. Instead, the reliability of the data could be more problematic, given that patterns and dynamics of stakeholder mobilisation and project success may have evolved over the past decade. Changes in eligibility criteria or funding priorities could alter the characteristics of applicants and the configurations of factors leading to success. Thus, while the data is uniquely detailed and relevant, its ability to reflect current trends and conditions may be limited, necessitating caution when generalising findings to present-day scenarios.

However, despite the potential limitations associated with using "*old*" data, the strength of this research lies in its original empirical approach and robust methodological focus. The incorporation of various methodological techniques, ranging from SPSS statistical analysis to SNA and the QCA, enriches the dissertation's contribution significantly. Furthermore, it's essential to acknowledge that the literature review conducted for this dissertation was continuously updated throughout the research process to ensure that no important literature contributions were overlooked.

The second limitation pertains to the focus on a singular case, thereby restricting the generalisability of the study's findings. However, delving into a single case study, such as the cross-border cooperation between Flanders and the Netherlands from 2007 to 2013, has afforded the opportunity for an in-depth examination. This approach has enabled thorough exploration of phenomena beyond surface-level observations.

Despite the singular focus, the study's design ensures the ability to draw confident conclusions about the obtained results. Specifically, the investigation revolves around the access of stakeholders to project proposals for EU funding within the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands framework.

Furthermore, this concentrated approach has laid a solid foundation for generating transferrable knowledge applicable to other areas of EU funding. It has facilitated an explanation of the studied phenomena in a manner that renders the findings potentially applicable to analogous cross-border cooperation settings.

In conclusion, the Flanders-Netherlands case of cross-border cooperation provides valuable insights, but it also presents certain limitations that must be acknowledged. While the absence of language barriers, shared historical ties, and a high level of economic development make this a "most-likely" case for successful collaboration, these factors also limit the generalisability of the findings to other EU border regions where such favorable conditions do not exist. Theoretically, this case challenges broader assumptions about the role of EU frameworks, such as Interreg, suggesting that in regions like Flanders and the Netherlands, cooperation may be driven more by historical and regional dynamics (e.g., Benelux) than by EU instruments alone.

Moreover, this case underscores the need for a more context-sensitive understanding of cross-border governance. The high level of development in the Flanders-Netherlands region contrasts with many other EU border regions, where socio-economic and political disparities create more significant barriers to cooperation. Therefore, while the case provides a useful example of how cross-border collaboration can function in optimal conditions, its applicability to less developed or more fragmented border regions is limited. As such, the findings of this thesis should be interpreted with these contextual nuances in mind, ensuring that broader conclusions about EU cross-border cooperation account for the diversity of challenges and opportunities that exist across the European Union.

The research methodology, cantered on mapping stakeholders' mobilisation for project proposals within the Flanders-Netherlands cross-border cooperation program, lends itself to broader application. The utilisation of random sampling technique for successful and unsuccessful cases does not undermine the results' applicability, as the findings hold relevance beyond the specific conditions characterising the 2007 – 2013 Flanders-Netherlands cross-border cooperation period.

Indeed, it is important to clarify that the intention of this dissertation is not to generalise its results across time and space. Instead, the focus is on providing a detailed analysis of the specific dataset to gain insights into the patterns and dynamics of cross-border collaborations. While empirical generalisations may be limited due to potential changes over time or variations in different contexts, theoretical generalisation is still possible. The findings can contribute to broader theoretical understandings and frameworks that apply to similar scenarios, offering valuable insights and implications for future research and practice in the field of cross-border cooperation. This approach ensures that the conclusions drawn are contextually relevant while still contributing to the advancement of theoretical knowledge. While claims are made regarding the general trajectory of selected cases towards mobilisation, collaboration and access to EU funding, it is acknowledged that the depiction presented in this dissertation is constrained by the specific context in which EU funding access occurs. The breakdown of interest representation between 2007 and 2013 initiates a discussion on collective action within this timeframe. However, it's important to recognise that the landscape of cross-border cooperation may evolve, potentially influenced by increased involvement of business interests or shifts in program objectives, thereby potentially altering the dynamics of stakeholder mobilisation.

Chapter 4 delves into the historical engagement of stakeholders in the cross-border cooperation policy realm, noticing a distinction between *"actual"* and *"potential"* mobilisation. It is evident that despite the presence of a plethora of stakeholders operating in the EU public policy processes, many are unable to mobilise, even to a fraction of their potential (Olson, 1965). Consequently, this dissertation is delimited by the chosen mobilisation perspective. While mapping all stakeholders with potential interest in cross-border cooperation funds could be a time consuming endeavour, the focus remains on examining the actual mobilisation that transpired during the 2007 – 2013 timeframe.

Indeed, mobilisation patterns could vary significantly if different interests were mobilised for EU projects, potentially leading to disparate results. Additionally, the requirement for stakeholders to commit to bringing 50% of the overall project budget for the 2007 – 2013 project proposal call is a crucial factor to consider. Any alterations to this condition could potentially result in different mobilisation pattern outcomes.

However, it's essential to clarify that the aim of this dissertation was not to uncover an "*absolute and independent truth*", but rather to foster a deeper understanding of the interactions between stakeholders and decision-making bodies facilitating access to these funds.

This research elucidates how stakeholders employed specific tactics and strategies to access EU funding for cross-border cooperation programs, opening avenues for further investigation. Future research endeavours could explore comparative analyses across different cross-border cooperation programs, offering insights into diverse mobilisation patterns. By incorporating new dimensions of mobilisation patterns, a more comprehensive understanding could be developed regarding the comparison of strategies and tactics employed to secure access to EU funding.

Considering the perspective of decision-makers could indeed prove valuable insights into why they choose to grant access to a project proposal. This holistic approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of both stakeholders' and decision-makers' perspectives regarding access to EU funding. Introducing additional variables into the analysis of stakeholders' access to EU funding could further enrich the research and provide a more nuanced depiction of the dynamics at play.

Furthermore, it's important to acknowledge the timing constraints associated with completing this dissertation. The research for this PhD project commenced in 2013, supported by funding from JoinEU-SEE Erasmus Mundus program. Initially conducted while working full-time at the University of Antwerp, the research involved establishing a robust dataset and conducting stakeholder interviews. Despite the conclusion of financial support, the research project persisted, with significant portions of the dissertation being developed independently from the University of Antwerp. This challenging element of timing underscores the dedication and perseverance required to see this research endeavour through to completion.

7.4 Practical foundations and future implications

Undoubtedly, one of the pivotal questions inherent in social science is the *"so what"* question, which underscores the significance and implications of the undertaken research. As outlined in the introduction, the primary aim of this research project was to enhance our understanding of cross-border cooperation practices facilitated by EU financial support. By adopting a case study format focusing on cross-border cooperation between Flanders and the Netherlands, both theoretical and empirical choices in this dissertation were shaped. This section explores more in details the three research questions that were asked in the beginning and further aims to mitigate any perception of overlap, as the content extends beyond providing a mere conclusion to the research question. The research questions were inspired by the following inquiries:

1) How to understand better the stakeholder involvement with cross-border cooperation EU financed programmes?

2) Who gains and who doesn't gain access and by which means?

3) What are the next actions that should be taken?

Question 1) How to understand better the stakeholder involvement with cross-border cooperation EU financed programmes?

The dissertation's title underscores its focus on EU financial funding for cross-border cooperation from the stakeholders' perspective. It delves into both theoretical and practical aspects of cross-border cooperation in Europe, examining through various lenses including political institutions, ideology, discourses, and communities, as referenced in the works by Albanese et al. (2022) Borin et al. (2018). The phenomenon of stakeholders' involvement in initiatives across borders is widely recognised, as noted by Méndez and Bachtler (2022).

Furthermore, the dissertation highlights the involvement of local authorities in Europe in promoting cross-border cooperation, which has significant implications for fostering collaboration between cities and regions. The availability of funds from the EU Interreg program serves as a key driver in promoting and reinforcing interest representations from both sides of the border, as discussed by Batista et al. (2013).

On one hand, extensive evidence exists regarding the lobbying of EU institutions and the influence on policy change across various issues of interest, as documented by Klüver (2013), Dür et al. (2013), Dür & De Bièvre (2007). However, empirical evidence regarding the dynamics encountered in EU-financed cross-border cooperation remains scarce, as noted by Weidenfeld (2013), Anheier & Kendall (2002), Paldam & Svendsen, (2000). The present study aims to address this gap by carefully analysing the stakeholders' demand for access to EU-funded cross-border cooperation programs.

The comprehensive analysis conducted in this study reveals that a total of 788 stakeholders from Belgium and the Netherlands mobilised for cross-border cooperation programs through by submitting project proposals, either independently or in collaboration with others. The findings highlight that EU-funded cross-border cooperation predominantly maintains a regional and local focus. The majority of stakeholders involved in submitting project proposals operate at local, national and sub-national levels within the cross-border cooperation area. Consequently, while stakeholders operating solely at European or international levels may express interest in the cross-border cooperation field, they are encouraged to participate in collaboration with local and regional actors.

Furthermore, the cross-border cooperation programme between Flanders and the Netherlands has undergone changes and adaptations to its priority axes since its inception. The objectives analysed in this dissertation primarily focused on cross-border cooperation projects aimed at fostering development in regions spanning provinces such as Antwerp, East-Flanders, Flemish-Brabant, Limburg and West-Flanders from the Belgian side, and Limburg, North-Brabant and Zeeland from the Dutch side. The substantial allocation of cross-border funds to these regions plays a pivotal role in their economic development.

This underscores the potentially significant role that large business firms could play in the development of these cross-border regions and projects. However, as observed in the empirical section, NGOs and societal actors tend to exhibit more active mobilisation for cross-border cooperation programmes compared to business firms and companies, regardless of size. Recognising the potential contribution of business-oriented actors in developing projects for the cross-border region highlights the importance of creating a more flexible system that reduces administrative burdens and streamlines the process of applying for cross-border cooperation funds. The efficacy of such measures remains to be seen and evaluated in the subsequent phase of cross-border cooperation for the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands 2014-2020 programme, falling within the EU Cohesion Policy objectives.

From the perspective of stakeholders, collaborative efforts aimed at enhancing the economy and infrastructure across borders remains vital for promoting economic growth and social cohesion. The EU Cohesion Policy will continue to provide funding for numerous projects and initiatives geared towards fostering cross-border cooperation between Flanders and the Netherlands. For stakeholders, this funding serves as a crucial means leverage ties and advance economic and social cohesion.

A key piece of advice for stakeholders is to collaborate more with public governmental bodies, such as public authorities, to secure the necessary co-financing required for EU funding eligibility. Additionally, stakeholders must demonstrate their capacity to effectively execute the project, showcasing their expertise and available resources.

In accessing EU funding, beyond simply submitting project proposals, direct communication and engagement with decision-makers can be pivotal. Effective communication with decision-makers is instrumental in developing strong project proposals that align with official criteria, while also potentially streamlining bureaucratic processes and minimising administrative burdens associated with accessing EU funding.

Navigating bureaucratic processes and adhering to the rigid rules and regulations governing cross-border cooperation funding are indeed crucial aspects for promoting stakeholders' involvement with these funds. This is especially vital for new stakeholders who are navigating EU cross-border cooperation funding schemes for the first time. Simplified administrative procedures can play a pivotal role in ensuring that stakeholders' application efforts are successful and aligned with their goals and objectives.

Question 2) Who gains and who loses access and by which means?

The response to this question hinges on the chosen perspective. In this dissertation, we concentrate on stakeholders' viewpoints regarding EU funding for their cross-border cooperation projects. We delve into how stakeholders mobilise, their collaboration patterns, including the actors they choose to work with, and the internal tactics deployed within coalitions and during the application process. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that

another facet of the narrative, that of the decision-makers, has been omitted from the analysis simply because it falls outside the scope of this thesis.

The decision-making process regarding who ultimately receives EU funding warrants further exploration. This thesis operates under the assumption that formal evaluation criteria are applied when assessing eligible project proposals submitted for EU funding, as discussed by Paldam & Svendsen (2000). Nonetheless, this does not diminish the validity of this research. Instead, it offers a comprehensive depiction of the stakeholders involved, their collaborations, and their efforts to influence positive outcomes for their project proposals.

The experiences with collaboration among stakeholders for EU funding for cross-border cooperation reveal the diverse forms such collaborations can take. Actors sharing the same *organisational identity* are more inclined to collaborate, as evidenced by societal actors being more likely to collaborate with educational actors than with business firms. While questions about the power dynamics within coalitions were not explicitly asked, it's common to observe another form of collaboration where a few small actors team up with a larger actor, resulting in a win-win scenario. In such cases, small actors contribute their knowledge and expertise, while the larger actor fosters an inclusive environment where the opinions and voices of all actors are valued and heard.

Frequent communication with decision-makers during the project proposal development process, along with prior collaboration with the same actors, are factors that enhance the likelihood of success for project proposals. Moreover, positive outcomes may also be attributed to the pivotal role played by a single actor within the coalition, such as the presence of public authorities. However, this aspect warrants further exploration in greater detail to fully understand its implications.

The successes achieved by stakeholders do not imply that a singular formula is universally applicable. Rather, this dissertation sheds light on the conditions that can contribute to accessing EU funding for cross-border cooperation. However, it remains to be determined which objectives and criteria decision-makers utilise to assess project proposals.

Empirical evidence presented in chapter 6 indicates that success can be explained by combinations of conditions. For instance, frequent communication with coalition members *and* prior collaboration with the same actors *(network embeddedness)* contribute to success. Additionally, success can be attributed to factors such as frequent communication with decision-makers, *and* low frequency of internal stakeholders' communication *and* low past action. Furthermore, success may stem from a combination of high internal frequency with project members *and* the involvement of public authorities in projects. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of success in accessing EU funding for cross-border cooperation, highlighting the importance of various factors working together rather than a singular determinant.

Question 3) What are the next actions that should be done?

Interreg remains a cornerstone of the EU Cohesion Policy, representing one of its main program priorities. While the programme's focus may shift across different time spans, there are valuable suggestions to consider both from a researcher's and practitioner's standpoint.

From a researcher's perspective, gaining a comprehensive understanding of cross-border cooperation and stakeholder's engagement with EU financial tools necessitates a diverse array of analytical perspectives. While in-depth evaluations of the programme within specific time spans contribute significantly to understanding interest representation, mobilisation patterns and collaboration across actors and disciplines, there is potential for even greater insights through historical comparative research. Such research could illuminate alternative patterns of mobilisation, collaboration and success, providing valuable context for current and future initiatives. Additionally, investigating whether access to funding creates a feedback loop that further leverages the mobilisation and collaboration of these stakeholders could offer critical insights into the dynamics of stakeholder engagement and program effectiveness.

Furthermore, other perspectives merit closer examination. This includes delving into the political actions of the structures responsible for managing cross-border funds at the local level, such as the Steering Committee and Managing Authorities. Additionally, assessing the primary selection criteria used by decision-makers for project proposals is essential. By comprehensively exploring these perspectives, researchers can enhance our understanding of the dynamics shaping cross-border cooperation initiatives and inform future policy and practice.

From a practitioner's perspective, there are numerous areas for potential improvement in the process of accessing EU funding for cross-border cooperation projects. Interviews with stakeholders have revealed that the journey from project proposal application to securing EU funding has been fraught with challenges. Simplifying procedures and providing greater assistance to stakeholders with information and support throughout the application process could make a significant difference.

Building trust and fostering continuous support are essential elements on the path towards cooperation (Paldam & Svendsen, 2000). Organisations are more likely to share their ambitions and goals in an environment where trust is established, leading to elevated collaboration and appreciation.

Furthermore, there could be a shift in focus from merely sharing information and providing technical support during the project application phase to actively helping stakeholders refine their project proposal ideas. This could involve facilitating connections between

stakeholders, sharing knowledge, best practices, and information about past successful collaborations and networks that stakeholders can leverage for their project applications.

However, it's crucial to recognise that trust and collaboration are reciprocal, and efforts should be made to ensure that projects have a meaningful impact on the overall community and across the cross-border region of Flanders and the Netherlands. By prioritising support, collaboration and trust-building initiatives, practitioners can enhance the effectiveness and success of cross-border cooperation projects.

If I were a stakeholder in a project proposal, seeking EU funding for cross-border cooperation, my role and interest would be influenced by the specific nature of the project and the EU funding program. However, there are key elements that would guide my approach to fulfilling the stakeholder role:

- Clarifying interests and objectives: it's essential to clearly define my interests and objectives in relation to the EU funding area, particularly in cross-border cooperation. This involves understanding the potential benefits and challenges, as well as any specific information relevant to the proposed cross-border cooperation action.

- Collaborating with stakeholders: Collaboration with stakeholders is crucial to align interests and find common ground. By working together, we can enhance the overall success and sustainability of the project or proposal process.

- Engaging with institutional structures: Seeking opportunities to engage with institutional structures responsible for managing EU funds, particularly those related to cross-border cooperation, is important. Participating in meetings, providing input, and being involved in relevant discussions can help to establish visibility and credibility.

- Considering long-term implications: it's imperative to consider the long-term implications of decisions and actions. This includes ensuring the involvement of public authorities to meet the financial requirements of the project proposal and considering the sustainability of the project beyond the initial funding period.

- Advocating for interests and concerns: Advocating for my interests and concerns throughout the project proposal process is essential. This may involve making changes to the proposal based on feedback, maintaining dynamic collaborations with past partners, and actively engaging with decision-makers to ensure stakeholder perspectives are considered.

Overall, clear communication, collaboration and a proactive approach are essential elements for effectively fulfilling the role of a stakeholder in EU funding process. However,

the level of influence and engagement may vary depending on the context and relationships with other stakeholders, as well as the evaluation criteria such as relevance, quality, feasibility and impact.

While the EU funding landscape is diverse and procedures may differ across programs, it's vital to ensure compliance with the requirements outlined in the guidelines. Requesting support from the institutions responsible for managing EU funds for updates or relevant information can also significantly impact the expected outcomes of the project proposal.

By adhering to these principles and actively engaging in the process, stakeholders can maximise their contributions to cross-border cooperation projects and increase the likelihood of securing EU funding for initiatives that promote collaboration and address shared challenges effectively.

Indeed, this thesis does not provide a universal solution applicable to all scenarios. Instead, it offers a nuanced exploration and understanding of how stakeholders select their collaborators and employ strategies they use to "potentially" influence the outcomes of project proposal applications. The empirical examination of EU funding for cross-border cooperation between Flanders and the Netherlands from 2007 to 2013 serves as a foundation upon which theoretical concepts are empirically tested.

The primary contribution of this dissertation lies in its comprehensive investigation of stakeholders' perspectives within a closed universe, where many potential variables are kept under control. Analysing the mobilisation patterns of stakeholders' sheds light on the strong ties and closed channels of communication among them. Similarly, examining collaboration patterns reveals the diverse collaborative ties that positively impact how stakeholders connect and work together. Moreover, exploring the tactics and strategies employed by stakeholders demonstrates that success in accessing cross-border cooperation EU funding is influenced by a combination of factors. This controlled setting allows for a clearer delineation of the effects of the variables studied.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the empirical findings of this research stimulate further debate and inspire future research endeavours. In conclusion, this study enhances our understanding of stakeholders' engagement with cross-border cooperation projects within the context of EU funding opportunities. It also sets the stage for future exploration and advancements in the field of EU funding, offering valuable insights and paving the way for continued inquiry and innovation. Let the insights gained from understanding stakeholders' perspectives serve as a catalyst for ongoing inquiry, innovation, and transformative impact in the pursuit of knowledge.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Questionnaire used for interviews, phase 2 of data collection

University of Antwerp

QUESTIONNAIRE FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW (stakeholders)

Dear Sir/ Madam,

First of all thank you accepting to do this interview. I will start with a short introduction of my dissertation thesis. I investigating the involvement of actors with the Interreg Flanders-Netherlands Program. This interview would help me to understand why some projects are successful whereas others fail to get the EU funding for the cross-border cooperation programmes. Therefore, the interview will be built on two 'blocks' of questions: 1- the internal dynamics of coalition formation; 2- the external relations of coalitions with others. I have to highlight that the answers to those questions will be highly confidential and they will be used for research purposes only.

Thank you for your time and collaboration.

- INSERT Name of Actor/ Institution
- INSERT Project Title
- First of all, could you tell me what is your official title and function?

The first set of questions addresses the coalition of actors you were working for your project proposal. From the Interreg Office I received the information, for this project you were working with a set of actors. Is that correct?

So, it results that your coalition has a:

1) SMALL SIZE (3 – 10)
2) MEDIUM SIZE (11 – 20)

3) BIG SIZE (21 – 30)

Then I have found more information about the profile of each actor through coding their individual websites. There are a few things I would like to check with you. From my coding it results that actors are working at: Subnational levels (Local, Provincial, Regional) National/ European/ International levels. Is that Correct?

Then I also coded the social sectors upon consultation of the UN List of Social Sectors. So, I have coded your institution as: …….. Is that Correct?

Then there is a number of issues I would like to ask you.

PART A – Internal Organisation

1. Are the actors in your coalition working on similar/ different areas than yours?

2. Have you been working with these actors in the past?

2. Then I would like to ask you some questions in relation to the internal procedures of your coalition. Was your coalition organised more in a vertical (hierarchical) or network (horizontal) structure?

3. How formal was the organisation of your coalition? (Do you keep minutes, notes, printed materials, do you have rules of procedures etc)?

4. Would you specify any actor that played a crucial role for your coalition? Why?

5. What was the most used strategy for internal communication in your coalition members? (mention sending emails, face-to-face meetings, making phone calls, etc)

6. How often did you communicate with other actors in your coalition? Was the communication: frequent (5-10 times), or less frequent (1-4 times)?

Then there are some other questions that I would like to ask. This section focuses more on your external activities and also the external strategies you used for communication.

PART B – External Activities

1. During your application process did you have any contacts with anyone from the Interreg Office? For example: Secretariat, Managing Authorities and/ or Decision-Makers (Steering Committee), Managers?

2. How was the contact organised: through talking on the phone; or sending an email or meeting in person?

3. What was the purpose of this contact? Were you interested into gaining an insight about the Interreg Program? Or were you discussing your project application and how it could fit to the programme's objectives?

4. Did you contact any other institutions during your application process? (example European Commission; civil servants of the European Commission, national organisations etc)

Then I have some general questions.

5. What do you think it is an important factor in order to be successful for EU funds?

6. Who else do you think would be useful to contact (inside/ outside your project)?

7. Do you have any materials (position papers, minutes of meetings or other institutionalized materials) that you used during your application process?

8. Is there anything else you would like to add that was not mentioned?

Thank you for your time.

Annex 2. Detailed list of economic and social sectors as defined by the UN classification, used for coding procedures

ECONOMIC SECTOR

Detailed structure and explanatory notes

ISIC Rev.4

(International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Rev.4)

Click on any code to see more detail. Click here for top level only.

- A - Agriculture, forestry and fishing

    - 01 - Crop and animal production, hunting and related service activities
    - 02 - Forestry and logging
    - 03 - Fishing and aquaculture
- B - Mining and quarrying
    - 05 - Mining of coal and lignite
    - 06 - Extraction of crude petroleum and natural gas
    - 07 - Mining of metal ores
    - 08 - Other mining and quarrying
    - 09 - Mining support service activities
- C - Manufacturing
    - 10 - Manufacture of food products
    - 11 - Manufacture of beverages
    - 12 - Manufacture of tobacco products
    - 13 - Manufacture of textiles
    - 14 - Manufacture of wearing apparel
    - 15 - Manufacture of leather and related products
    - 16 - Manufacture of wood and of products of wood and cork, except furniture; manufacture of articles of straw and plaiting materials
    - 17 - Manufacture of paper and paper products
    - 18 - Printing and reproduction of recorded media
    - 19 - Manufacture of coke and refined petroleum products

    - 20 - Manufacture of chemicals and chemical products
    - 21 - Manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations
    - 22 - Manufacture of rubber and plastics products
    - 23 - Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products
    - 24 - Manufacture of basic metals
    - 25 - Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment
    - 26 - Manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products
    - 27 - Manufacture of electrical equipment
    - 28 - Manufacture of machinery and equipment n.e.c.
    - 29 - Manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers
    - 30 - Manufacture of other transport equipment
    - 31 - Manufacture of furniture
    - 32 - Other manufacturing
    - 33 - Repair and installation of machinery and equipment
- D - Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply
    - 35 - Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply
- E - Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities
    - 36 - Water collection, treatment and supply
    - 37 - Sewerage
    - 38 - Waste collection, treatment and disposal activities; materials recovery

    - 39 - Remediation activities and other waste management services
- F - Construction
    - 41 - Construction of buildings
    - 42 - Civil engineering
    - 43 - Specialized construction activities
- G - Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles
    - 45 - Wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles
    - 46 - Wholesale trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles
    - 47 - Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles
- H - Transportation and storage
    - 49 - Land transport and transport via pipelines
    - 50 - Water transport
    - 51 - Air transport
    - 52 - Warehousing and support activities for transportation
    - 53 - Postal and courier activities
- I - Accommodation and food service activities
    - 55 - Accommodation
    - 56 - Food and beverage service activities
- J - Information and communication
    - 58 - Publishing activities

    - 59 - Motion picture, video and television programme production, sound recording and music publishing activities
    - 60 - Programming and broadcasting activities
    - 61 - Telecommunications
    - 62 - Computer programming, consultancy and related activities
    - 63 - Information service activities
- K - Financial and insurance activities
    - 64 - Financial service activities, except insurance and pension funding
    - 65 - Insurance, reinsurance and pension funding, except compulsory social security
    - 66 - Activities auxiliary to financial service and insurance activities
- L - Real estate activities
    - 68 - Real estate activities
- M - Professional, scientific and technical activities
    - 69 - Legal and accounting activities
    - 70 - Activities of head offices; management consultancy activities
    - 71 - Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis
    - 72 - Scientific research and development
    - 73 - Advertising and market research
    - 74 - Other professional, scientific and technical activities
    - 75 - Veterinary activities
- N - Administrative and support service activities

    - 77 - Rental and leasing activities
    - 78 - Employment activities
    - 79 - Travel agency, tour operator, reservation service and related activities
    - 80 - Security and investigation activities
    - 81 - Services to buildings and landscape activities
    - 82 - Office administrative, office support and other business support activities
- O - Public administration and defence; compulsory social security
    - 84 - Public administration and defence; compulsory social security
- P - Education
    - 85 - Education
- Q - Human health and social work activities
    - 86 - Human health activities
    - 87 - Residential care activities
    - 88 - Social work activities without accommodation
- R - Arts, entertainment and recreation
    - 90 - Creative, arts and entertainment activities
    - 91 - Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities
    - 92 - Gambling and betting activities
    - 93 - Sports activities and amusement and recreation activities
- S - Other service activities
    - 94 - Activities of membership organizations

    - 95 - Repair of computers and personal and household goods
    - 96 - Other personal service activities
- T - Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use
    - 97 - Activities of households as employers of domestic personnel
    - 98 - Undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of private households for own use
- U - Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies
    - 99 - Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies