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Resistance or Acceptance? The Voice of Local Cross-Border Organizations in Times of Re-Bordering

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ABSTRACT

National borders in Europe are increasingly subject to re-bordering processes, including the external and internal borders of the European Union. This article asks if and how local cross-border organizations (Euroregions) have reacted to the recent hardening of these borders. The Austrian-German border is one where border controls have been re-introduced in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, and which also has significant local cross-border institutional activity. Based on an analysis of 350 written items, published by six Euroregions during the five-year period 2015–2019, the article finds that the Euroregions have generally not voiced resistance to this development and have not been active in relation to the policy field of refugee or migrant inclusion. When they reacted, the resistance has mainly been embedded in an argumentation linked to instrumental concerns, such as the traffic situation, even though the research also demonstrated the existence of normative arguments related to human rights discourses and rights of migrants.



KEYWORDS

Border control; cross-border cooperation; refugee crisis; Euroregions; multi-level governance

1. Introduction

The first two decades of the twenty-first century have witnessed important changes in the way borders are managed in Europe. While the late 1980s and 1990s were marked by borders across the continent becoming easier to cross, the early years of the 2000s were characterized by a double process of softening and hardening borders (i.e. simultaneous *de-bordering* and *re-bordering* processes, or even co-bordering, see Albert and Brock 1996; Albert 1999; Longo 2018).

On the one hand, thirteen new member states have joined the European Union (EU) in the early 2000s. Most of them have also joined the Schengen Agreement through which participating countries allow border control free travel between each other. This development has not just significantly changed the EU's territorial shape and external borders, but also meant a massive internal *de-bordering*. On the other hand, global and regional geo-

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political events have encouraged processes of re-bordering. The 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States stood at the beginning of a period of securitization with enhanced border controls, especially in air travel. Moreover, the Arab Spring has started a domino-process of instability in the European neighborhood. Civil wars in Libya and Syria have contributed to unprecedented levels of unregulated migration into and within the EU, resulting in the collapse of the Dublin III asylum-system.

The people who were most dramatically, and tragically, affected by this were the thousands of people who lost their lives in shipwrecks in the Mediterranean while trying to pass the maritime borders to Europe and reaching its shores (Ribas-Mateos 2015; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). At the same time, it was clear the European leaders and voters sought to decrease the number of arrivals by increasingly tougher border management procedures, something that became accentuated during and after the spiking number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe in 2015.

What especially changed after 2015 was the situation at Europe's internal borders. In the five-year period between January 2015 and December 2019, EU member states and other parties to the Schengen agreement (through which participating European countries allow border control free travel between each other) notified the Commission 86 times about "temporary reintroductions of border control at internal borders" (European Commission 2019), something which the Schengen agreement had sought to make a phenomenon of the past. This represented a dramatic increase, since only 17 notifications had been made in the five preceding years.

These decisions have been made at national levels. So far, there has been little research on the reaction of local actors, even though almost all regions and local governments located at national borders in Europe are involved in some sort of formal cross-border cooperation, often referred to as Euroregions (Perkmann 2002; Medve-Bálint and Svensson 2013, 104). Existing research is in general occupied with the general implications of Europe's hardening external borders, such as discussions on "Fortress Europe" (Scott and Wastl-Walter 2016). To the extent that the effects of hardening borders on local cross-border cooperation organizations have been analyzed, this has mainly been with relation to the external borders to the east (e.g. Prokkola 2013; Prokkola 2019) or south (Celata, Coletti, and Stocchiero 2017).

Attention to internal borders has so far been more sparse, with some notable exceptions. For example, Zaiotti's (2013) earlier discussion of the row between Italy and France over migrant mobility touched upon some key issues of the forthcoming events. There is also research on the nexus between security, border management and the Schengen treaty in which "critical perceptions of the Schengen cooperation prevail as many scholars compare Schengen to an ideal project ensuring freedom of movement, flawless protection of human rights and perfect external border controls" (Votoupalová 2018, 4).

The aim of this article is therefore to add to the literature on local governance in borderlands that are subject to re-bordering processes. Specifically, it asks how public cross-border cooperation organizations (Euroregions) have reacted to re-bordering. Euroregions are organizations that could be expected to be vocal critics of hardening borders in the form of walls, fences or tighter border controls. After all, Euroregions – or their equivalents on other continents – denote institutionalized cooperation between local governments and regions at different sides of national borders which aim to facilitate cross-border mobility of goods, services and people. This, in turn, is expected to lead to "peace and prosperity" (i.e. social cohesion and economic growth). At the same time,

local actors may take other considerations or values into account that may influence whether and how they respond. To find out whether local cross-border organizations voiced resistance to hardening borders, or aligned with and accepted this new practice, a two-level case study was carried out, in which the Austrian-German border represents a typical case (Yin 2009) of an affected internal Schengen border.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 elaborates on how the concept of borders and related notions are used in the article. It also discusses the role of formalized border cooperation in European borderlands in the light of the frequently used metaphor “laboratory of European integration.” Lastly, the section introduces the theoretical framework of the article, which draws on multi-level governance and new institutionalism. Section 3 outlines the research design and Section 4 provides an overview of the Austrian-German border and six Euroregions operating at this borderland (Bayerischer Wald-Bohmerwald, Inn-Salzach, Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein, Via Salina, Zugspitze-Wetterstein-Karwendel 1998 and Inntal-Chiemsee-Kaisergebirge-Mangfalltal). The analysis in Section 5 leads to the finding that the Euroregions have generally not voiced resistance to this development and have not been active in relation to the policy field of refugee or migrant inclusion. The conclusion suggests that overall Euroregions appear to have accepted the re-bordering dynamic because their focus was on project execution which was largely unaffected by the re-bordering process and its humanitarian implications.

2. Border Regions as Laboratories of European (Dis)Integration: The Role of Euroregions

Scholars that study borders generally agree that “borders are not just hard territorial lines” (Brunet-Jailly 2011, 3). Rather, they are seen as complex socially constructed institutions with agency of their own that goes beyond the adjacent territories. However, for the purpose of this article I do not problematize borders per se, but primarily treat them as territorial demarcations between national political systems, albeit with far-reaching effects on social and political relations. The term borderlands is used to denote territorial areas adjacent to national borders. I acknowledge that it is not always easy to determine what the scope of these should be. The European definition of the corresponding *border regions* as all NUTS3-level regions located next to a border, e.g. European Commission 2017, certainly makes these territories more inclusive than most people are comfortable with. Hence, for the purpose of this article, I will use the term borderlands as a shorthand for territories in which cross-border cooperation organizations are active.

There are many ways to denote formalized cooperation between public and other actors in borderlands. In Europe, the usual scholarly inclination for new concepts has been accompanied by the even more prolific term-inventors of various international institutions promoting cross-border cooperation. For instance, the European Union’s usage of the term “macro-region” is at odds with its use by international relations scholars. Moreover, while the EU’s 2006 directive on European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) introduced a new legal tool for cross-border cooperation, funding remains open to any actors doing cooperation across borders, regardless of whether they are constituted as EGTCs or other types of organizations. Such organizations have variously called themselves Euroregions, EUregios, border collaboration or border committee.¹ The proliferation of terms has led to fuzzy conceptual borders; for the sake

of consistency, in this article I refer to these as Euroregions, defined as formalized cooperation organizations between subnational authorities, often including private and non-profit actors, located close to a border in two or more countries (Perkmann 2002; Svensson 2013).

The number of Euroregions has increased significantly since the early 1990s (Svensson 2013) and many of them have benefited from EU technical and financial support. This support was provided under the presumption that these organizations will promote local cross-border flows of goods, services, and people, making them laboratories of European integration at a sub-national scale. The metaphor of “laboratory,” which has often been used in research on borderlands (Knippenberg 2004; Kramsch and Dimitrova 2008; Stokłosa 2015), has regained analytical purchase since 2015 when countries that are parties to the Schengen agreement increasingly started to reinstate internal border controls.

When a social scientist uses the metaphor of laboratory, it can be seen as a legitimizing device. It has clear connotations to the natural sciences, experiments and “hard science.” That said, the idea is that the micro-cosmos of a borderland constitutes a more easily observed version of the larger European Union. The conceptual confusion outlined above can also be linked to the laboratory metaphor in the sense that experimentation leads to many new forms of cross-border regions. In borderlands, you can find different ways in which local flows of “goods, services, capital and people” (the foundational four freedoms of the European Union) are being promoted through different institutional structures and policies at the local level. Thereby the researcher can expect to see different consequences and find out what works and what does not. While these metaphorical borderland laboratories are often seen from the outside as a room that can be observed through one-way windows, they could be seen as stand-alone houses built from glass, that is, greenhouses that showcase the plentiful, the beautiful and the useful yields of the European project.

If the metaphor of greenhouses is used, Euroregions at internal Schengen borders are showcases for the project of European integration. While scholars have long recognized that Euroregions have difficulties achieving as much as originally promised, and that they are sometimes paper tigers with little concrete results to demonstrate (Perkmann 2007), it was often expected that there would be a development towards more integration and better joint governance. This implied certain normative overtones to at least some research: if failing, how could they do better? Taking the metaphor of greenhouses further, the reintroduced border controls can be seen as weeds or bugs entering and threatening to destroy the work of the gardeners.

As mentioned earlier, Euroregions could be expected to be vocal critics of hardening borders in the form of walls, fences or tighter border controls. At the same time, these organizations are embedded in complex multi-level governance networks, and they are often dependent on the goodwill of multiple actors at the national levels of involved countries to reach their goals in various policy areas. Constituting assemblies of the organizations may also include elected politicians belonging to parties that have committed themselves to stronger borders. That would lead to the opposite reaction of acceptance, or even alignment.

It is therefore at this stage mainly an empirical question to tease out the result of this friction between, on the one hand, the sub-national implementation of national level

policy priorities and, on the other hand, the European spirit of cross-border cooperation. However, while the question on what approach was taken by Euroregions is an empirical one, the result will be important for larger theoretical constructions on how European integration will develop, if the laboratory metaphor is taken seriously. For this article, a tentative broad theoretical approach is taken, which combines new institutionalist and multi-level governance literatures. This means that I approach the material with the assumption that people and collective entities may behave, or at least frame their arguments, in rationalist (instrumental) or normative ways (March and Olsen 1989; North 1990). Furthermore, I assume that Euroregions are embedded in complex networks encompassing overlapping jurisdictions (referred to as Type 2 by Hooghe and Marks 2003), where they have to strategically and skillfully target decision-makers at different points of vertical and horizontal scales to advance their agendas.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The study of how cross-border organizations react to borders is done through a two-level case study, in which the Austrian-German border represents a typical case (Yin 2009) of an affected internal Schengen border, and six cross-border organizations along its borders represent cases of institution-building. Since the numerical absolute number of migrants in 2015 aiming for Germany was the highest, the German-Austrian border was under high stress compared to other borders. At the same time, it is a border with settled and functional cross-border cooperation organizations. Six Euroregions were founded in the 1990s and have developed into multi-purpose policy organizations that also have a role in the making and distribution of EU funding for territorial cooperation (Deppisch 2012; Fohim, Scherer, and Zumbusch 2018). This opens up to the question what a hardening border regime in this context means for the activities and attitudes of organizations, more specifically, those who could be expected to be in favor of open borders, did they react to this?

The analyzed empirical material consists of written documentation available from the respective websites of these six organizations. Two additional cooperation initiatives exist but were not included in the analysis, due to being less formalized in one case and too new in another. Where available, news items, newsletters and annual reports for a five-year-period starting between January 2015 and December 2019 (see Table 1 for details) were copied or downloaded and saved into the qualitative coding software AtlasTi, to enable further processing. The final corpus included more than 350 text items ranging from one-paragraph news items to lengthy reports. Table 1 in Section 5 details main characteristics of the organizations and the scope of the analyzed material, along with key findings. The content was coded thematically; most important for the purpose of this article was that any content related to asylum, migration, refugees or border controls was marked, but the material was also coded for covering a set of other topics such as the internal organization of the Euroregion, funding mechanisms, and specific policy areas. The key purpose in this stage was to find out the amount of coverage of these topics, as related to other ones more aligned with Euroregional daily affairs. The next step involved a qualitative content analysis of the material of relevance to the purpose of the article. In accordance with the broad multi-level governance framework combined with a new institutionalist approach that serve as theoretical departure for the paper, special attention

Table 1. Euroregions at the Austrian-German Border with Key Characteristics and Analyzed Material.

| Euroregion | Founded | Members | Scope of analyzed material | Dominant/typical material, in order of frequency | Material relevant to “hardening” borders and/or migration |
|--|-----------|---|---|--|---|
| Euregio Bayerischer Wald – Böhmerwald – Mühlvierte | 1993 | 350 regions and local governments and other organizations (e.g. civil society organizations) (trilateral: Austria, Germany, Czech Republic) | 71 news items (2014–2019) 10 newsletters (2015–2019), 4 annual reports* | EU Cohesion Policy current and future developments; information on project funding from EU Interreg program; cooperation on projects in the area of education; commemorative and other events; European values/value of EU | Marginal. General refugee situation and border controls; integration of refugees; border controls |
| Euregio Inntal-Chiemsee-Kaisergebirge-Mangfalltal | 1998 | 80 local governments, regions and other organizations (e.g. higher education institution) | 90 news items (2015–2019), 4 Annual Reports (2015–2018), 1 Resolution | Interreg; organization-related; events, European values; infrastructure and transport; education; business development; environment | Present. Referrals to border controls and refugee situation in annual report introductions and speeches. Infrastructure resolution partly on border controls. Cooperation on integration of refugees mentioned in several news items. |
| Euregio Salzburg-BLG-Traunstein | 1995 | 110 local governments, regions and other organizations (e.g. Economic Chamber, Chamber of Labour) | 23 newsletters (2015–2019), 4 Annual reports (2015–2018) | Events; education; business development; tourism; environment; information on project funding from EU Interreg program; organization-related; youth | Present. Referrals to border controls and the migration situation at the end of 2015 and early 2016. Discussion and cooperation about refugee integration. |
| Inn-Salzach-Euregio | 1994 | 137 local governments from 4 districts (Braunau, Grieskirchen, Ried and Scharding) | 147 news items (2017–2019) | Information on project funding from EU Interreg program; policy area; environment and sustainability; innovation and business development; organization-related, events | None. |
| Euregio Via Salina | 1997 | 125 local govts + Bavaria, Tyrol and Vorarlberg | 16 news items (2015–2019) | Information on project funding from EU Interreg program | None |
| Euregio Zugspitze-Wetterstein-Karwendel | 1998/2015 | 20 local governments, agencies and associations from 3 regions | 9 news items (2017–2019) | Project outcomes from the EU Interreg program in areas of education; environment; gender and cultural heritage | None |

Source: Websites of the listed institutions. Data retrieved November 2019–January 2020 if not otherwise indicated.

*From the Bavarian carrying organization of Euregio Bayerischer Wald – Böhmerwald – Unterer Inn e.V.

was paid to the scale of problem situation and argumentation and whether any argumentation was broadly rational (instrumental or normative). Beyond that, an inductive approach to the material was taken, with for instance policy areas and other themes coded as they appeared in the material.

All material was in German, but coding and analysis was carried out in English. While this may have led to some loss of meaning, this is likely to be minor due to the similarity between the languages and the author's high-familiarity but non-native approach to both. Another caveat is that document analysis based on this type of source has its limitations. As noted in other research published in this journal, "the Internet does not completely reflect the daily evolution of [cross-border regional activity]. In some cases, websites are not updated as often as necessary. In other cases, [cross-border region] websites may exaggerate their productivity" (Harguindeguy and Sánchez Sánchez 2017, 252). For the purpose of this article, the information was assessed as valid in relation to two aspects: (a) an indication of the scope and intensity of activity (b) the image the organization seeks to portray to the outer world on a sensitive topic, where absences might also be meaningful. In this sense, I contend with Harguindeguy and Sanchez Sanchez that data that is "available on the internet" can, and in this case is, a justifiable source of information. Further research that incorporates interviews or ethnographic techniques (such as participant observation or action research) would be a valuable follow-up.

Finally, it should be noted that within the field of multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary borderland studies, political scientists, especially, have taken an interest in these organizations. As noted by Popescu, "scholarship influenced by political science seeks to examine the emergence of cross-border institutions and to document and a certain measure of autonomy of cross-border governance networks from the state administrations" (Popescu 2012, 129). Hence, the approach in this article follows a political science perspective. Furthermore, the research focus on Europe mirrors the intensity of institution-building on this continent. A cursory look at titles and abstracts of articles published in the five-year period from 2015 to 2019 in the *Journal of Borderlands* showed a dozen articles focusing on formal institutions and organizations in Europe, more than the number of similar articles for all other continents combined (including comparative work).²

4. Cross-Border Cooperation Organizations at the Austrian-German Border

The Austrian-German border area has favorable conditions for cooperation due to shared language and similar cultures (Svensson 2013). The rulers of the area changed frequently over history, but the current border has been set since the peace treaties of the Napoleonic wars³ at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Moosleitner 2004; Dopsch 2004; Dirninger 2004). There are also political-administrative similarities facilitating cooperation, since both sides of the border are incorporated in a federal state, but nonetheless Austrian and German stakeholders have different possibilities and capacities to act. Bavaria is a much bigger federal state (12 million inhabitants) than either Salzburg or Tyrol in Austria (530,000 and 714,000 inhabitants, respectively). This means that Bavaria takes on a quasi-national role (instead of Berlin). A further political-administrative difference is that regional districts in Austria do not have political representation, but are merely administrative, whereas the German districts do have political councils. Nevertheless,

the politico-administrative setting of the border is less heterogenic than in many other European border spaces. On both sides of the border, there is a multitude of relatively small local governments (*Gemeinde*) along with a smaller number of midsized towns and one big city (Salzburg).

Cross-border cooperation along the entire German-Austrian border developed from the 1970s onwards, starting with discussions and decisions concerning the alpine area, joint water resources and spatial planning. Most of the Euroregions along the border were founded around the time of the Austrian accession to the EU: Bayerischer Wald-Bohmerwald 1993/94, Inn-Salzach 1994, Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein 1995, Via Salina 1997, Zugspitze-Wetterstein-Karwendel 1998 and Inntal-Chiemsee-Kaisergebirge-Mangfalltal 1998.⁴ These six are all official partners of the European Territorial Cooperation's Interreg Program for Austria/Bavaria 2014–2020. They have been tasked with the authority to distribute funds for projects up to a total value of 25,000 euro, through so-called “small project funds.” This is a practice at some, but far from all, European borders, but where it happens it gives the Euroregions extra status and power, and justifies their existence to a certain degree. The Euroregions are also involved in the processes surrounding strategic planning and larger projects within the Interreg program, even though their geographical coverage and resources are often unsuitable for thinking strategically about the whole border program area (Fohim, Scherer, and Zumbusch 2018). The Euroregions are more than partners or implementers of European Union funding disbursement though. They are multi-purpose organizations, usually with broad mission statements comprising cooperation between members in all areas that can advance regional development and cohesion. For this, they are contingent on decision-makers at all levels of governments, and may need to act as policy entrepreneurs (Medve-Bálint and Svensson 2013) or de facto lobbyists (Svensson 2013) in order to achieve this.

The Euroregions has somewhat different legal set-ups, but most have chosen some version of having one association for each side of the border that are joined up through joint agreements and structures. For instance, when Euroregion Salzburg was founded, it was agreed that German law on private associations would be used for joint activities (Müller 2009, 12), but the organizations were established on each side of the border to ensure legal presence in both countries. In German, they are called “carrying organizations” (*Trägervereine*), and they can be seen as separate pillars that legally support the Euroregion. While Euroregion Salzburg is in a process of converting into becoming a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), so far the Euroregion has been presented as one organization, while not being a legal person that can make binding decisions on its local government members. As noted by Ritter, “the activity field of the Euroregion is therefore strictly dependent on [local governments] to give resources of different kinds and support and implement the activities of the Euroregion” (2008, 11, author's translation). The size of the budget can give an indication of organizational size. Euroregion Salzburg, generally seen as one of most active and successful out of the six (Fohim, Scherer, and Zumbusch 2018), spent 338,000 EUR in 2018, the major item being staff costs (210,000 EUR). Member regions and local governments contributed 155,000 EUR, and 180,000 EUR came out of the European Territorial Cooperation Interreg support (EuRegio Salzburg 2019).

After this overview of the basic set-up of cross-border cooperation institutions in the form of Euroregions organizations at the Austrian-German border, we now move on to how the geopolitical events of 2015 affected border management, and in turn, how Euroregions reacted to that.

5. The 2015 Refugee Situation and the Reactions of Euroregions at the Austrian-Bavarian Border

The European Commission cannot block a member state wishing to introduce border controls, but it needs to be notified and a justification should be given. The reintroduction of border controls is possible for the 26 states who are members of the Schengen zone and may last for up to 6 months at a time. Border controls at internal Schengen increased five-fold in the five-year period 2015–2019, compared to the preceding 5 years. The comparison of the two periods – one before and one after the spike in refugee entry and mobility that occurred in 2015 – also reveals a stark change in the nature of justifications (European Commission 2019). Temporarily reinstated border controls before 2015 were mostly justified on the grounds of planned events: for instance, in 2010 Latvia reinstated border controls between May 24 and June 1 due to a NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Riga, in 2012 Spain justified its controls with a meeting of the Governing Council of the European Central Bank in Barcelona on May 2–5, and in 2014 Belgium referred to a G7 summit as the reason to have border controls between June 1 and 6, 2014.

By contrast, after the summer of 2015, the justifications changed to general and ongoing conditions, and generally utilized the maximum 6-month time frame: France has repeatedly referred to “persistent terrorist threats,” Austria cited “security situation in Europe and continuous significant secondary movements for its latest border control extension” (May 12 to November 11, 2019), and Sweden expressed “serious threat to public policy and internal security” three times in a row before the latest justification of simply stating “terrorist threats, shortcomings at the external borders” (November 12, 2019 to May 12, 2020).

While migration has been on the political agenda for years, 2015 was a year that has come to represent a cluster of issues related to refugee and migrant influx to the continent, at least from a European perspective. At the end of 2015, more than one million people had crossed the Mediterranean Sea, escaping both the civil war-torn Syria and unrest further east (e.g. Afghanistan) as well as economic poverty in Africa, and continued north, primarily through the Balkan route towards the core of continental Europe. The issues this raised included the inability of administrative systems to effectively deal with high numbers of migrants, reluctance and unwillingness on significant parts of populations and political representatives to increase the number of refugees hosted (almost regardless of the level they started from), and need for European cooperation but frustrations at almost every turn to do so.

There is much published and ongoing research on how the situation unfolded in 2015, with the label “refugee crisis” simultaneously used and contested (Gilbert 2015; Cantat 2016; Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak 2018; Sigona 2018; Rajaram 2015; García Agustín and Jørgensen 2019). In a way, the “struggle over meaning, legitimization, and power in representations of the refugee crisis” (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, 12) has been ongoing since then. It has also been intertwined with different opinions of how the

European Union should develop. Research has demonstrated that leaders displayed different, and inconsistent, visions of European integration during and after 2015 (Wolf and Ossewaarde 2018). In part, this may have been a reaction to the dramatic narration of events in traditional and social media, where border crossings and border areas become sites of theatrical staging by different actors, creating what some call a “border spectacle” (Cantat 2020). This “border spectacle” also in some cases extended to geographic places far from the border. One example was when refugees who did not want to seek asylum in Hungary, but were denied further traveling to Austria, were stuck at a railway station in Hungary’s capital Budapest for several days in late August and early September 2015. Another is when refugees on some occasions marched in groups on highways, leading to video footage that to citizens of affected countries may have appeared surreal, as ruptures in reality.

September 2015 was also the month when both Austria and Germany for the first time notified the European Commission that they would reintroduce border controls due to “big influx of persons seeking international protection” (European Commission 2019, 7). Both countries made a claim for it to be for all borders, but both also stated that they would focus on their southern/south-east borders. In the case of Austria, this meant the borders to Italy, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia, whereas it for Germany solely meant the border with Austria. The temporary controls were first given for shorter periods, (e.g. September 16–25 in Austria’s first notification, and September 13–22 in Germany’s). From November 2015 the countries utilized the maximum six-month periods, with the current “temporary reintroductions of borders” set to expire in May 2020.

However, measures to tighten controls at the Austrian-German border did not end with this. Various actors in Bavaria was dissatisfied with the federally employed border police. Therefore, as of 2018, Bavaria reinstated a border police of its own, in order to monitor its borders. This has been criticized by for instance politicians from the Green party as against the German constitution according to which border protection is a federal task, but in January 2020 it was announced that the Bavarian border policy would receive more resources (BR24, 2020).

It is reasonable to assume that the collective visual memory of 2015 in Austria and in Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, is one of drama and disruption. Europeans would remember what they saw via media from the “theatre stages” of the “border spectacles” (Cantat 2020). At the same time, most Europeans do not have any individual memories of any of the above, since the events did rarely affect citizens in their daily lives. Borderlands may be different though, since the people living there are likely to have seen these events first-hand and experienced subsequent border controls. If the reintroduction of internal border controls can be seen as part of the “theatrical stage” (Amante 2019), citizens and local political actors in the borderlands would be among the few that actually had tickets. The lack of scholarly attention to these local actors, and the relationship between external and internal re-bordering processes means that we know little of this. In order to answer how cross-border cooperation organizations at internal borders reacted to hardening borders, it is therefore imperative to establish what imagery they themselves displayed. What memories come to fore when seeing the visual and text documentation of the activities of the six Euroregions at the Austrian-German border?

5.1. Absent or Marginal Coverage of Migration, Refugees and Border Controls

The analysis showed that a large part of the written material on the websites of the six Euroregions at the Austrian-German border relates to various parts of the process surrounding the allocation and implementation of European Union funds for cross-border cooperation (Interreg). Funding opportunities derived from European cohesion policy programs are occasionally mentioned. The less active Euroregions typically limit their elaboration of this into single news items, while the more advanced ones weave them into stories around particular policy areas, such as environment, education or business development. The attention to policy fields vary. For example, Euroregion Salzburg has many projects on education while Euroregion Inn-Salzach focuses more on the environment, including climate change. Typically, a news item chronicles a certain event, such as young girls in the borderland attending a day on opportunities in technical education, or the launch of a guide for bikers in a particular cross-border Alpine region. Events related to the organization itself are also memorialized through photos and summaries, such as general assemblies or working group meetings. Introductions to annual reports or speeches that are reproduced on the websites take broader outlooks but usually also focus on achievements directly linked to the Euroregion.

The analysis of the material also confirms earlier research that has characterized the German-Austrian cross-border cooperation as particularly driven by normative concerns and values related to European integration (Svensson 2013). This usually means that borderland activities are directly linked to the creation and expansion of the European Union as a peace project of the European continent of the second half of the twentieth century, as opposed to the wars that dominated the first half. References to borderlands as laboratories of integration, discussed earlier in this article, feature frequently, such as in the following quote:

The Austrian member of regional parliament <name of speaker> emphasized in her opening speech that Europe today only can function if it also functions in its borderlands. (News item, Euroregion Bayerischer Wald, 2019, author's translation)

One explanation for Euroregional attachment to the European integration project is that they, as mentioned earlier, were founded in connection to Austrian accession in the 1990s, and this is also something that is sometimes highlighted by Euroregions themselves.

It is almost 25 years since a majority of Austrians voted for accession to the EU, and in connection to that the Euroregion was also founded. We all benefit daily from EU's achievements, like securing peace, generosity, guardian of democratic basic values and welfare. The Euroregion, representing more than 100 local governments, assures and is responsible for joint action across the borders. (Newsletter from 2018, Euroregion Salzburg, author's translation)

Explaining the normative attachment to Europe through the timing of the foundation does not provide the full picture, though, since the overall number of Euroregions in Europe expanded rapidly at this time, without similar normative formations elsewhere (Svensson 2013). Finally, European values are also referred to in the context of current events, such as Brexit (UK's process of leaving the European Union).

Brexit shook the European Union at its fundamentals, but despite of that, the countries of the European Union shortly thereafter continued to work on their joint idea, sometimes with

more, sometimes with less success. For us in the Euroregion Inntal, such changes at the European level means that we have to work even harder to create trusting and open cooperation across borders. (Annual Report 2017, p 5 Euroregion Inntal, author's translation)

In a quote such as this one, a reference could just as well have been made to the responsibility for openness in times of the refugee crisis. Instead, references to the actual border crossings are largely absent from the material. This indicates that the image that the organizations have or want to display is rather one of a Europe that is still “borderless” internally, i.e. going back to the definition of borders given in section 2, they have been removed as hard territorial lines (physical demarcations) and what remains to be worked with are “border obstacles” in the form of people's ideas and visions being constrained by memories of these borders or regulatory frameworks differences that prevent deeper integration. [Table 1](#) gives an overview per Euroregion of the analyzed materials and the findings as outlined above.

References to border controls, general migration or refugee integration in the borderland could only be found in the analyzed material of three Euroregions out of the six. The general migration situation was referred to by two Euroregions, for instance in speeches or annual reports introductions. A newsletter from late 2015 hinted at the theme that had dominated the media in the fall:

In his keynote <title and name of speaker> painted with a broad brush and included more than 1000 years of joint history until the current refugee situation, and pointed to central fields for the development of joint place branding such as health, life science or biotechnology. (Euroregion Salzburg, Newsletter 2015, author's translation)

Such general references have later occurred again, since the topic of migration and asylum, and border controls have not gone away:

After approval of the economic report for 2018 <speaker title and name> gave an overview of the current situation in Europe. He referred to topics such as Brexit, Catalonia, migration, counter-terrorism, EU enlargement and strengthening the regions. (Newsletter, 2017, Euroregion Salzburg, author's translation)

Less than a dozen instances in the text material contained direct references to the border controls taking place at the Austrian-German border or elsewhere in Europe. This was often in passing. For instance, an account from a meeting in Brussels between the Commission and a delegation from Bavaria, including representatives of Euroregion Bayerische Wald, states that “external border protection” was one of the topics that were discussed. Another example is how a news item records the speeches at a Euroregional gathering and how the local border controls featured there:

Further [the speaker] was critical against the reintroduction of border controls, since especially the three-country-region has benefitted from the erasure of borders. (Euroregion Bayerische Wald, 2016, author's translation)

Asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrants generally do not appear as inhabitants of the Euroregions, as targets of interventions or discussions. Only a few news items display it as an area of cooperation, for instance when an information day about asylum-seekers and the labor market was arranged for stakeholders in the cross-border region:

Many refugees have come to Tyrol and Bavaria in the past months. The integration of people who have fled to our region is both a chance and a challenge for the labor market. Through information and networking we seek to respond to this challenge and to find solutions through cross-border exchange. (News item, Inntal, 2016, author's translation)

Overall therefore, the coverage of the refugee situation and subsequent border controls is marginal or entirely absent from the websites of the Euroregions. However, there are two exceptions from this, which indicates that at times, there have been serious discussions taking place about the consequences and meanings of the reinstated (temporary) border controls. An account of the assembly meeting of Euroregion Salzburg taking place on November 4, 2015, published in the annual report for that year, mentions that a position paper on the asylum- and refugee was discussed, which would be directed towards the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann. This position paper does not appear in later news items or annual reports, though, and does not seem to have left any traces in public discussions. More material is available on a similar action on part of Euroregion Inntal, of which a detailed analysis is given in the next section, since it demonstrates local resistance to the border controls and policy action on the part of Euroregion to advocate for change.

5.2. Policy Action: A Euroregion Resists

On August 1, 2018, Euroregion Inntal issued a joint resolution, addressed to decision-makers and policy-makers in the respective countries. The “Resolution for a joint, cohesive and sustainable traffic policy for the North/South Axis between Munich and Verona” is as the name indicates a document ostensibly about traffic infrastructure, and consists of ten demands to the relevant territorial levels of the two states (Austria and Germany) as well as the European Union. The demands include for instance increased railway capacity, increased highway fees to reduce/discourage transit traffic and finalization and realization of the plans for a new tunnel under the Brenner mountain pass at the Austrian-Italian border. The eighth point refers to the core interest of this article and is quoted in its entirety below:

While border controls at the national borders can be a solution for specific short-term problems, long-lasting stationary border controls, on the other hand, are against the spirit of the common European Region and leads to massive constraints for the inhabitants. These (controls) are only tolerable as a transitional measure until there is an effective protection at Europe's external borders. On the primary road system (i.e. motorway) there are almost daily congestions/queues, which some days lead to people taking avoidance routes to the secondary road system (i.e. federal and national roads), leading to a complete break-down of public life and unbearable conditions for the inhabitants. [author's translation]

The text in the resolution protests against the perception that the so-called temporary border controls have come to appear as permanent to the borderland inhabitants. The argumentation is based on both, a rational (instrumental) and a normative logic. Interestingly, the normative logic is mentioned first: the roads are against the “spirit of the common European Region,” the word “region” here probably referring to the borderland region and not the European Union. Secondly, the border controls have non-negligible negative consequences for the inhabitants. These consist of an increased presence of

cars on the roads, which is unpleasant for the inhabitants. In addition, those locals who cross the border have to wait unreasonable amounts of times in queues. The resolution does not refer to migrants/refugees or how other external parties are impacted by the controls, but it is clear that unlike internal border controls, external border controls are both morally accepted and wanted as the only reasonable solution.

There is also a linkage to environmental causes, which is implicit in the title's inclusion of the word "sustainable." This argument was reinforced in oral adjacent communication to the resolution, documented in a speech held by the President that was reproduced in one of the Euroregion's newsletters and a summary of the resolution in the Annual Report. The President underlined that the border controls, and the other deficient in traffic infrastructure problematized in the resolution, lead to "unbearable queues and waiting times" that harm "people and nature in our common border region" (speech July 6). The annual report makes a similar argument of the congestion being harmful to "the health of the population and the environment" (Annual Report 2018, page 6). Environmental sustainability is thereby used as an argument for intervention. Moreover, border controls are said to be "costly for business and damaging for the health of truck drivers" (Euroregion Inntal, without date).

Another tool deployed in the adjacent material is to accentuate the vulnerable, peripheral, position of borderland citizens. Notably, the position of the borderland is much more peripheral in relation to the power centers of one country (Germany) than the other (Austria). "Maybe the government in far-way Berlin does not care, but our population has no understanding for the repeated European Union prolongations [of the border controls]" (Annual Report 2018, page 6, author's translation). The same text, therefore, ends with a repetition of the demand to keep controls for external borders only.

While parties external to the region are not present in the resolution, another speech given by the President of the Euroregion, given to members of the Euroregion, embeds the issue of border controls not only in the local context but takes a broader global approach. The argument consists of four statements. Firstly, the situation is not so severe. Secondly, we should help them because they are in need.

In comparison with 2015, substantially fewer people land looking for help at Europe's southern coasts. [...] For me border controls do not constitute a sustainable solution for migration pressure. Who leaves his home and loved ones, if he is not hungry and fears persecution and death? Do we want to drown people in the Mediterranean, when ships with people seeking help are not allowed to anchor in harbors, or rescue boats, like those run by Doctors without Borders, are prevented from leaving harbors?

The third part of the argument then states that if we don't want them to come, decision-makers (presumably at both national and EU level) should use instruments in different policy sectors (agricultural policy, trade policy, aid policy) to alleviate root causes for migration. And, finally, he invokes normative moral support by referring to Robert Schuman, a key figure in the early phase of European integration.

Wise politicians and policy look further: the pressure from migrants will only cease when there is peace in war areas, and when Europe stops exporting agrarian surpluses, old clothes and electronic waste to for instance Africa. Instead we should invest in education and infrastructure (in Africa). Already in 1950, Robert Schuman drew attention to this, by saying that the building of a common Europe must include development of Africa.

Table 2. Argumentation Against Border Controls in One Case of Policy Action.

| Normative | Instrumental | Factual (premises) | Policy recommendations |
|--|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Against the spirit of European borderland integration • Against the spirit of the European Integration/ EU project (reference to Schuman) • Refugees are in need and worthy of support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borderland inhabitants spend time in queues. • Borderland inhabitants endure the unpleasant conditions created by congestions. • Queuing costs money for business. • Congestion is harmful to health of inhabitants. • Congestion is bad for the environment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are not so many migrants coming anymore (hence borders not needed) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External border control (official policy recommendation) • Better aid policies (money to education in Africa) • Agricultural policy (not have surpluses) • Trade policies – not export electronic waste or too cheap agricultural produce |

To sum up, even though the policy action against border control is partly “hidden” in a broader frame of reducing traffic, a closer look at interconnecting communications reveal a set of arguments that can be sorted into four broad categories, displayed in [Table 2](#).

The categories differentiate between the normative and instrumental bases for behavior, as follows from the new institutionalist framework, but also add supporting factual statements and the conclusions drawn in terms of policy recommendations directed at actors at different governance levels. The textual material is too scant to make inferences on the general distribution between these. More research, including similar policy initiatives, and based on other types of empirical material and at other borders, would be needed. However, it can be noted that the effectiveness of this argumentation can be questioned, since, at the time of writing, Germany had border controls with Austria for the period from November 12, 2019 until May 12, 2020 (European Commission [2019](#)).

5. Conclusion

There may be a Europe without borders, but at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, there is certainly not a Europe without border *controls*. The reintroduction of border controls at internal Schengen borders due to an unexpected high influx of refugees in 2015 put Euroregions into a delicate situation of tension between different actors. On the one hand, important funding from their activities come from the EU and is connected to the idea on the open borders. On the other hand, they are linked administratively and politically to the national levels, which chose to prioritize security over mobility at the borders. Moreover, local populations and local politicians (who are represented in decision-making forums in Euroregions) may have different claims based on convenience, ideological views on immigration and other. One could therefore reasonably argue that they should show resistance to harder borders, but one could just as reasonably argue that they would accept, or even align with national policies.

Consequently, the starting point of this article was that the reaction of Euroregions to hardening border is, at this stage, a subject for empirical research, which can subsequently feed into theory building on causal mechanisms. It also argued that enhanced understanding of causal mechanisms of reactions, and what it says about the relative powers of

different layers of actors in Europe would to some extent be applicable to other European processes, due to the role of border regions as laboratories or greenhouses for European integration.

This article focused on the Austrian–German border as a typical case of an affected *internal* Schengen border, subject to re-introductions of border controls since 2015. It analyzed whether and how the Euroregions reacted to this by analyzing written and visual documentation on their websites, mainly news items, newsletters, and annual reports. The analysis showed that both the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015 and the changed conditions at the borders are largely absent from the narrative. A future historian who had only these documents and no other information of Europe in 2015–2019 could easily draw the conclusion that this was a period consisting of choir competitions and business networking events. Euroregions appear to have focused on day-to-day tasks, primarily related to planning and executing projects.

The key finding is therefore that neither resistance nor overt alignment with national discourses on the need to protect borders was the dominant choice of action. Instead the absent or very marginal coverage of the “refugee crisis” shows avoidance, and thereby possibly tacit acceptance, to be the main reaction. However, in answering the question how local cross-border organizations responded, it is important to highlight that the material still shows traces of influence of these events. This gives a basis for drawing some further conclusions on the basis for attitudes and reactions towards harder borders. Three out of the six Euroregions had texts that in various contexts referred to asylum-seekers, refugees, migrants or border controls. Two of the Euroregions had also initiated or carried out policy action directed towards the national and European levels, that in some way thought to draw the attention to the effects of the reintroduced border controls. An analysis of such a joint resolution demonstrated that the argumentation was largely instrumental and linked in with local interests, even though advocacy for the resolution also included normative arguments as to the link between open borders and actually assisting refugees rather than the local population.

Overall, these findings point to the need for scholarship and policy to further explore and take into account the causal relationships between external and internal re-bordering processes in the European Union. This could be explored through inclusion of alternative sources of data, such as interviews with different kinds of actors that took part, and to see how well the results travel, research into organizations at other borders would be needed. At stake is not only the possibilities and limitations with regards to governance in borderlands, but also larger issues connected to the European integration project at such.

Notes

1. The latter term seems to be the preferred one by the Nordic Council whereas the Council of Europe complemented its 1980 landmark convention on “transfrontier co-operation” with a protocol on Euroregional Co-operational groupings (Council of Europe 2018).
2. See for instance Pérez-Nieto 2016; Harguindéguy and Sánchez Sánchez 2017; Celata, Coletti, and Stocchiero 2017; Kaisto 2017; Jańczak 2017; Jańczak 2018; Langenohl 2017; Taillon 2018; Lange 2018; Colomb 2018; and Podadera Rivera and Calderón Vázquez 2018.
3. Treaty of Ried 1813, Treaty of Munich 1816, and minor border corrections made in additional treaties 1818 and 1851 (Roth 2004, 64). In the 20th century, the border was de facto removed as a state border during 1938–1945, when Austria was a part of Nazi

Germany. This period does not receive much space in official documentation surrounding the Euroregions. Economic historian Christian Dirninger writes: “The forced integration [following after the Austrian Anschluss] of the two parts in the Nazi time could presumably in no aspect be seen as a favorable constellation” (Dirninger 2004, 99, author’s translation).

4. Several of the Euroregions have relatively long names, due to the absence of natural names that would cover both sides of the border or insistence of participating partners to see their name mentioned. In daily speech, Euroregions are usually referred to by their first denominator, e.g. Euroregion Salzburg or Euroregion Inntal, a practice applied also in this article for the sake of readability. It should also be noted that in addition to these six organizations, which are included in this study, there exists a less formalized cooperation called the Tegernsee-Isar-Achensee-Forum (TIA-Forum) and an additional Euroregion, Donau Moldau, was founded in 2012.

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