4. On the importance of administrative culture in cross-border cooperation

4.1 The concept of administrative culture

The concept of administrative culture ultimately goes back to political science cultural research, as established by the early works of Almond/Verba from the 1960s on civic culture[158]. Since the 1980s it has become increasingly important, especially in political science research on administration, a specific differentiation of the sub-disciplines of "comparative government" and „policy research". The starting point was, on the one hand, the observation that the political-administrative systems of different countries are characterised by specific functional mechanisms, which in turn can be explained by the influence of different national cultures. These basic findings were confirmed by comparative implementation research of European programmes and legislation as well as by corresponding cross-sectional analyses of sectoral policy fields in different member states. One of the first comprehensive empirical studies in this context was presented by Werner Jann[159]. He has identified three dimensions of administrative culture: He defines administrative culture I as the sum of social values that exist in a particular country with regard to its own administration. This is supplemented by an understanding of administrative culture that refers to the values existing within an administration itself (administrative culture II). The combination of both dimensions can then be used to analyse and explain country-specific patterns of administrative action/style in policy-implementation (= administrative culture III). According to this, administrative culture can be understood as the sum of values, attitudes and behaviours that exist in and towards an administration. The dichotomy of systemic hardware (= structural level) and administrative culture "software" (= interaction/value level) of public administration is sometimes used for conceptual purposes. In this tradition, Thedieck defines administrative culture as follows: "In contrast to the (legal and organisational)

---

158 Almond / Verba 1993
159 Jann 1983

82

structure, administrative culture captures the values, norms, orientations and patterns of action of public administration"[160].

Another, more systemic approach to the phenomenon of administrative culture can be found through organisational studies. Following the early work of Parsons/Linton, Rudolf Fisch[161] has presented a broader definition of organisational culture, which is particularly suitable for the purposes of cross-border cooperation, and which can be understood as a cooperative subsystem of national institutions[162]. According to this definition, one can always speak of an appropriate organisational *culture* or, in a figurative sense, a cooperation *culture,* if the members of an organisation/cooperation system have identical motives for action and self-understandings, refer to common and recognised symbol systems, share identical norms and congruent value systems and if they have developed specific patterns of action and reaction for standard situations.

The administrative historian Stefan Fisch from Speyer, in turn, has coined the very memorable and beautiful image of administrative culture as "coagulated history"[163], while Dieter Schimanke, following recent work by Werner Jann[164], has recently elaborated the following four dimensions and thus laid a foundation for administrative culture research, with special regard to aninterdisciplinary and comparative approach[165] :

a) Opinions, attitudes, values concerning public administration (administrative culture in the narrow sense and part of the political culture),

b) Typical models of roles and orientations of the members of public administration,

c) Specific typical behaviour in public administration (e.g. in a national public administration with a difference to other national public administrations), and

d) Administrative culture in the broadest sense would cover patterns of behaviour, organisational forms and principles stable over time in a defined unit (e.g. a nation); this definition is close to the classical understanding of the anthropological definition of culture

What these definitions have in common is, on the one hand, an understanding of the object that can be located between the macro-level of a

---

160 Thedieck 2007: 9
161 Fisch 2002
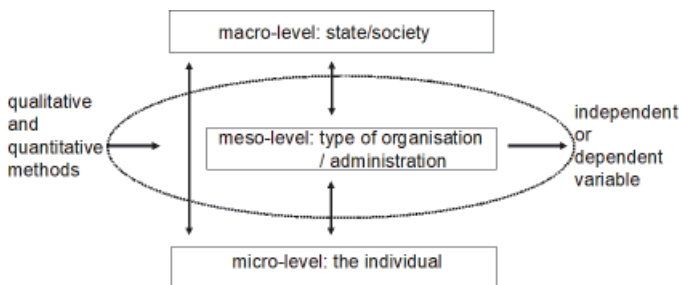162 Beck 2007
163 Fisch,2000
164 Jann 2002
165 Schimanke 2008: 14

state and the micro-level of the individual as a country-specific "culture bearer" and that can thus be interpreted as an (administrative) organisational meso-level. On the other hand, it takes into account the fact that administrative culture is always both an independent variable that can be used to explain different political-administrative patterns, outputs and outcomes of public policies, but on the other hand is itself a contingent phenomenon that – in the sense of a dependent variable – can be influenced and is indeed influenced by external factors, albeit in a corresponding temporal dimension[166]. Administrative culture cannot be viewed in isolation from the basic cultural characteristics of individual countries or global cultural circles[167] – but conversely, it is not the all-explanatory factor either – as could be observed in the recent past, for example, with the uniform New Public Management model of administrative modernization, when normative protagonists of the new "movement" complained that the implementation of the modern approach had failed due to the inertia of an "outdated" bureaucratic administrative culture. Rather, in most cases, an understanding of administrative culture as an intervening variable can realistically be justified, which does not diminish the importance of the concept, but seeks to further differentiate it in the sense of a contingency model.[168].

The following diagram schematically represents the previous considerations on the concept and analytical dimensions of administrative culture[169] :

Figure 7: Administrative culture as meso-level of analysis

_____

166 Beck 2007
167 See König 2008 who distinguishes between Anglo-Saxon civic-culture and continental European legalistic administrative culture.
168 Beck 2008
169 Beck 2007: 34

84

In (comparative) cultural research, a number of analytical criteria can be identified that are used for the analysis of both the macro and micro level. In the sense of locating administrative culture as an institutional meso level, the application of these criteria is of great importance with regard to the identification and description of country-specific basic cultural characteristics: they can also form the contextual starting point for the comparative analysis of different "national" administrative cultures. In summary, the analysis of relevant publications reveals the following seven criteria of (inter-) cultural differentiation[170] :

– <u>Communication style</u>: Cultural differences between countries can be determined by which general social communication styles dominate. The empirical findings in this regard range from cultural groups that cultivate a rather implicit communication style to countries in which an explicit communication style dominates.

– <u>Perception of time</u>: The perception and interpretation of the role that the factor of time plays in social relationships is another cultural differentiation feature. In so-called polychronic cultures, an understanding of time prevails according to which man dominates time, while in so-called monochronic cultures, time tends to dominate man, which in turn has direct consequences for the respective self-image, the handling of time and its relative importance in social interaction.

– <u>Action orientation</u>: International comparative analyses have also identified countries in which the primary social action orientation relates to people as concrete counterparts. In contrast to this, there are country cultures that attach greater importance to the task in question. From this, the cultural differentiation criterion of object orientation versus person orientation can be derived.

– <u>Degree of differentiation</u>: Uniformity versus difference, both socially and organisationally, forms another important differentiation criterion by which different basic cultural patterns of different countries can be analysed.

– <u>Discourse orientation</u>: The way in which social discourses are structured also represents an intercultural differentiation criterion. The two contrasts that can be worked out in empirical studies in this regard are, on the one hand, countries or cultural circles in which dissent is

---

170 The following classification is based on an interpretative cross-sectional analysis of the work of Hofstede 1980; Hofstede 1994; Hall 1984; Jann 2002; Jann 2006; Eder 2000; Todd:1999; Demorgon 2004; Davoine 2005: Thedieck 1992; Thedieck 2007

an important characteristic: Dissent is not seen as negative per se but as productive. On the other hand, there are countries that are characterised by a pronounced culture of consensus. An interesting indicator in this context is, for example, the strike rate (= number and duration of strikes per social conflict event) of a country.

– <u>Power distance</u>: The spatial and/or personal distance between different levels of power and decision-making can also vary considerably between different countries/cultures. Elitist cultures usually have a much higher social and then also organisational power distance than so-called egalitarian cultures.

– <u>Problem-solving style</u>: Finally – not least as the sum of the criteria mentioned so far – the prevailing individual and collective problem-solving patterns of different cultural groups also differ, sometimes considerably. In certain countries, according to the empirical findings, problem solving takes place predominantly in the form of a linear, very strongly analytical style in which the individual problem components are usually prioritised and then worked through sequentially. Other national cultures, on the other hand, are characterised by the fact that problems are approached in a circular manner, whereby non-linear problem solving can sometimes involve creative combinations of the initial problem dimensions, which usually leads to the parallel processing of different, more holistically shaped problem solutions.

This view reveals that comparative cultural research is characterised by a real dilemma: on the one hand, criteria are needed to be able to identify and explain cultural differences and similarities at all. On the other hand, such a comparison must always remain sweeping and latently carries the danger of reproducing cultural stereotypes. For the analysis of the administrative-cultural dimension of cross-border cooperation, such a comparative view is nevertheless worthwhile in several respects. On the one hand, it makes clear that there can be "national" cultural profiles in a cross-border area, which obviously differ in important criteria, sometimes quite considerably. At the same time, it shows that these cultural profiles cannot be regarded as alternative or contradictory per se and that a sweeping contrast is of little use. It is precisely this high degree of difference in detail that makes practical dealings between different national cultures so presuppositional and (in both a positive and negative sense) sometimes so fraught with tension. The following diagram attempts to illustrate this using the

example of the basic cultural profiles of the three neighbouring states on the Upper Rhine:[171]

Figure 8: Cultural patterns oft he Upper-Rhine region

		F			CH	D	
Style of communication	implicitly	F			CH	D	explicitly
Role of time	polychrone	F		CH		D	monochrone
Orientation of action	person	F		CH		D	mission
Differenciation	uniformity	F			D	CH	variety
Style of discourse	disagreement		F		D	CH	consent
Power distance	high	F		D		CH	low
Problem-solving	circular	F		CH		D	linear

Such a criterion-based comparison suggests that the differences in administrative culture between different countries are likely to go much further than simple dichotomies such as the one between the "central state" of France on the one hand and the "federal state" of Germany and Switzerland on the other. At the same time, it can be asked to what extent there are differences in the details of the prevailing basic patterns of administrative culture beyond the common affiliation to a continental European administrative family, which are of interest for variances in the performance[172] and/or the style of public administrative action.

---

171 In a first step, the author based the location of the country profiles on participative observation during meetings and professional work-experience within a cross-border context. As a second step the „hypothesis" of the graph was validated by several self-assessments by numerous actors from the three countries during exercises and workshops on „intercultural management" guided by the author..Actors were asked to first locate their own cultural profile and then locate the culural pattern of the neigbours as they perceive it. In a third step, the findings were analysied and taken into account by the author, wich lead to the final graph.

172 See e.g. Kuhlmann 2011

Cross-border cooperation and the transnationality of interaction between actors from different administrative cultural contexts that characterises it thus offers an interesting subject for administrative culture research in Europe. Here, the focus is not on the comparative analysis of different administrative-cultural patterns of the partners involved (although these naturally have a very strong impact on the cooperation context as independent variables), but rather on the question of which *specific* patterns characterise cross-border cooperation in the sense of a dependent variable, and whether the emergence of a specific administrative-cultural pattern can be concluded from this. A conceptual understanding of cross-border cooperation culture as a *transnational administrative culture*[173], which refers to the specific patterns of action of cross-border cooperation *between* administrations from different countries and which can be distinguished from comparable patterns in the context of the respective "home administration", would guide the investigation.

4.2 Administrative cultural patterns of cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine: results of a survey

In the following, an attempt will be made to approach the administrative cultural factor in cross-border cooperation at the level of cooperation culture in the trinational Upper Rhine region. This chapter is based on the results of a survey amongst more than 500 actors in cross-border cooperation in the area of the Upper Rhine region[174], in the course of which the German, French and Swiss participants evaluated, among other things, specific working hypotheses for recording and describing selected characteristics of the cross-border cooperation culture. The research design followed the variables of the GLOBE-Study[175] and implemeted them to the specific context of cross-border cooperation, which enabled the first empirically proven recording of those specific interaction patterns that take place within the sub-system of cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine.

---

173 Cf. Beck/Dussap/Larat 2012
174 The survey was conducted by the Büro für angewandte Psychologie BAP on behalf of a PEAP-funded project in November 2011. A detailed study report was published in 2015 as Speyerer Arbeitsheft Nr. 221: Beck/ Becker-Beck/ Beck, J. (2015)
175 Chhokar/Brodbeck/House 2007

88

One basic question referred on how actors perceive the cross-border cooperation context in comparison to their domestic cooperation-context. The results show a specific and distinct pattern of cross-border cooperation culture which is illustrated in the following graph[176]:

Figure 9: The cultural pattern of cross-border cooperation in the Upper-Rhine
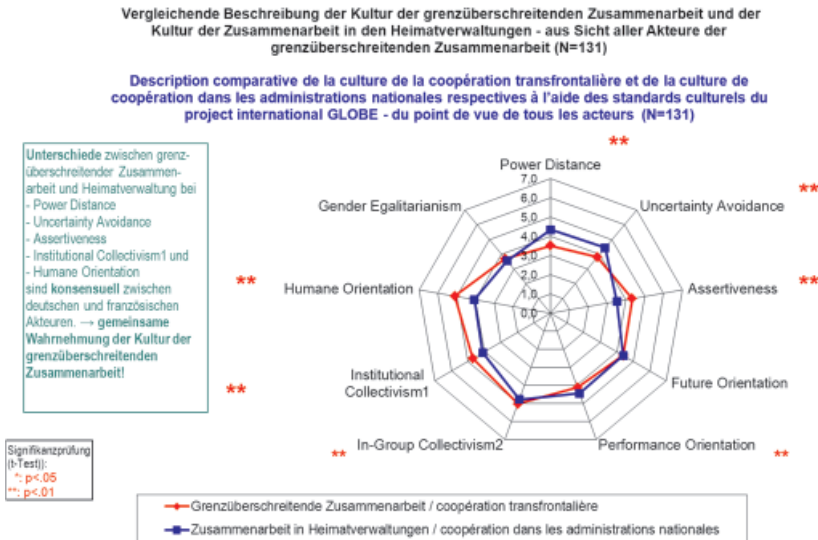
Source: Beck/Becker-Beck/Beck/Dussap 2015

The different basic administrative cultural patterns of the three neighbouring states on the Upper Rhine[177] have a formative effect on the design of cross-border cooperation and thus on the functionality of the cross-border cooperation system as a structural framework condition. Firstly, with regard to *problem perception and analysis*, the survey shows that there are obviously different time horizons and levels of problem analysis between the partners involved, which usually also lead to diverging assessment criteria and goals. The difficulties of reconciling these different approaches lead to the result that cross-border cooperation is generally characterised by a low degree of original problem analysis, a low degree of strategy orientation

---

176 The red line shows the pattern of cross-corder cooperation which is distinct from that of cooperation, taking place at domestic level (blue line), with rergard to seven out of nine items

177 See Beck 2008: pp. 196 for more details.

and often a one-sidedness of the initiative function of individual actors for new projects[178].

With regard to cross-border *agenda-setting*, one can observe a replication or synchronisation of national topic contours. In addition, local interests often dominate over cross-border needs. Differences also relate to the roles of administration and politics as providers of topics and ideas, which generally leads to a low selectivity or an addition of diverse thematic approaches in cross-border cooperation.

The *process organisation* of cross-border cooperation is characterised by the challenge of synchronising very different responsibilities and competences for action, which results in very small-scale work processes with diverse informal feedback loops. The large number of committees and meetings that can be observed thus stands for a high procedural and a relatively low result orientation of cross-border cooperation[179].

The different basic patterns of administrative culture are also reflected in the high complexity of cross-border *decision-making*. Different roles, competences and self-perceptions of the actors regularly lead to an increased complexity – compared to the national context – in the preparation and structuring of working meetings, resulting in lengthy processes[180]. In this context, administrative cultures that define themselves more strongly through project ideas that are kept open and ready for discourse contrast with those cultures that present elaborated project proposals with plans, draft contracts and business plans at a very early stage. A lack of knowledge about the partners' functional conditions also means that cross-border patterns of decision preparation are characterised by delays at the working level as well as the need to synchronise different administrative cultural self-understandings, with the result that decision preparation takes an unusually long time.

With regard to cross-border *decision-making* itself, the transnational negotiation system can be characterised by the fact that there are very strong blockades due to veto positions at the working level. This is not only caused by the unanimity principle[181], but also by the fact that in the

---

178 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 3.9

179 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 4.2 and 4.1 respectively

180 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 4.2

181 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 3.8 and 3.6 respectively

different administrative cultures there are different self-understandings of what a decision is and who has to make it. The informal preliminary decision-making function is therefore performed by a close interpersonal and inter-institutional network of representatives of the official cooperation partners[182]. The fact that – beyond the institutionally very low competence profile for original cross-border decisions – there is not infrequently a large discrepancy between the chief level and technician level between the administrative cultures involved can also be seen as a cause for the generally observable tendency to postpone and/or avoid decisions. Different interpretations of the contents of decisions as well as the institutionally low binding effect in implementation also lead to the fact, that the material dimensioning of cross-border decisions is very often limited to basic statements, announcements and superordinate external support aspects of cooperation in the "external relationship"[183]. Obviously, there is much less coupling or bartering in cross-border decision-making processes, as there is little "bargaining power" or original competence to act on the part of the actors acting across borders.[184] The cross-border decision-making processes are also complicated by the fact that the decisions made by the subsystem of cooperation must always be followed up and democratically validated at the level of the decision-making bodies of the institutional partners involved in the respective national context, with the risk that, in case of doubt, "external" interests very often dominate.[185] It is therefore not surprising that the material scope for action is not experienced as very wide by the actors involved.[186]

Finally, with regard to *policy implementation*, a (systemic) restriction can be observed to those thematic areas that are located in the intersection of professional, spatial and political responsibility between the actors involved. Since this is not evident per se, delays in implementation can very often be observed due to different sub-spatial, political-administrative im-

---

182 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 4.2
183 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 3.7
184 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 3.6
185 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 4.0
186 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was only confirmed by all respondents with 2.8

plementation cultures[187]. In addition, the implementation of cross-border decisions is dominated by the great dependencies of the cross-border cooperation system on technical and financial contributions from "external" actors. Here, the cross-border cooperation system can only rarely break up the different programme and administrative cultures of the "external" ministries in Paris, Berlin, Stuttgart, Mainz, Basel and partly in Bern: In the implementation of cross-border projects and initiatives, the actors of cross-border cooperation are highly dependent on the support of these "external" partners, who themselves are often not directly involved in the preparation of decisions[188]. The complex implementation conditions of cross-border cooperation often lead to projects and plans being delayed again in the implementation phase due to different administrative-cultural patterns: inter-administrative-cultural problems, misunderstandings and sometimes also conflicts very often come to light here, without these being able to be solved by suitable institutional structures and procedures within the framework of the sub-system's own genuine problem-solving competences.[189]

Thus, the de facto binding effect of decisions, once taken in the implementation, in the cross-border cooperation must generally be classified as rather low.

The tendency of cross-border cooperation to be less effective, efficient and sustainable than national regional policy can be very much explained by the high divergence of the administrative cultures involved. However, the search for the "administrative culture" factor in cross-border cooperation has another dimension. Over the years, the subsystem of cross-border cooperation has itself developed its own administrative cultural pattern, which can be interpreted in terms of systemic organisational culture on a supra-individual basis and as an institution in the broader sense. This administrative culture of cross-border cooperation is highly functional and makes it possible to mitigate the direct "spillover" of national administrative cultures.

If we look at the *motives for action and the self-image of the actors involved*, the history of cross-border cooperation on the Upper Rhine, for instance,

---

187　On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 3.8

188　On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 3.6

189　On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), the hypothesis of own problem-solving skills was only confirmed by all respondents with 2.9

shows that it is characterised by phase-specific, jointly supported leitmotifs that have shaped the actions and mutual interaction of the actors over time[190] : In the 1950s, for example, the motive of reconciliation between former wartime enemies was in the foreground and had a formative effect on cooperation. This was supported by individual personalities who saw themselves as pioneers and, for example, developed direct contacts through town twinning arrangements close to the border. The 1960s, on the other hand, were characterised by the discovery of the necessity of overcoming administrative and national borders due to increasing socio-economic interdependencies that did not stop at national borders. It is no coincidence that the Regio Basiliensis, for example, was founded in this phase. The 1970s, in turn, were marked by the belief in the necessity and usefulness of joint institution-building, which found expression in the founding of the D-F-CH Intergovernmental Commission (with its two regional committees, the later Upper Rhine Conference) as well as other commissions and committees. In the 1980s and then 1990s, a common leitmotif was the conviction, that it was not enough to just plan together, but that also joint projects should be realised. The use of EU funds for joint projects was and is a strong common motive for action, which can also stand for the self-image of cooperation as a whole in this phase. Today, on the other hand, the interest of all actors in a joint utilisation of the potentials of the three sub-regions for the positioning as an integrated European metropolitan region, as well as a uniform external appearance are in the foreground. This is combined with the desire for optimisation and better networking of the existing institutions and the sectors of politics/administration, business, science and civil society in the sense of synergetic, high-performance cross-border governance.

Interesting patterns of cross-border administrative culture can also be identified at the level of *common symbol systems.* The creation of common facilities and institutions, the development of their own legal forms (Karlsruhe Agreement), the importance of common logos, the use of symbolic places for meetings and events, the role of flags, etc. symbolise a common cross-border self-image today[191], which in its specific manifestation can be considered just as characteristic of cross-border cooperation as the (still unsuccessful) search for a universally valid logo and a branding for the

---

190 Wassenberg 2007
191 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 3.7

trinational cooperation region on the Upper Rhine that can be communicated to the outside world.

With regard to the *normative systems* (written and unwritten rules), patterns can also be identified that can be considered characteristic of cross-border cooperation. At the formal level, this is usually structured by cooperation contracts and agreements between the partners involved, in which formal decision-making procedures and rules are laid down. In addition, the partnership and co-financing principle is generally valid, which ultimately means that no project can be realised without all competent partners and thus not against the will of one of the partners involved. There are also structured patterns of decision-making via project and working groups, as well as established patterns of informal trinational coordination via personal networks. Bilingual documents and the differentiation between "official" and "other" forms of cooperation are further elements of the cross-border norm system. This also includes the informal rule that projects only come into being if all partners can find themselves in them. In contrast, informal tying, which is usually the case for negotiation systems, does not exist in the cross-border context due to the lack of sufficient negotiating mass. The informal rule is rather, that everyone can speak his or her mother tongue, but it is good manners to speak the language of the neighbour, if a meeting takes place on its territory[192] -only then does one have a chance of actual acceptance there within the framework of informal networks. The fact that observing the unwritten rules in particular is crucial for the functionality of the cross-border cooperation system was considered very important by all respondents.[193]

With regard to the question of shared *value systems*, cooperation in the Upper Rhine region has always been characterised by the demand for particularly good, high-quality and intensive cooperation[194]. Efforts are always made to present a positive image and consequently (also as a result of intensive coordinated press work) there are hardly any critical press articles in the regional media, but rather success stories about cross-border cooperation. The actors involved at all levels also see themselves as "doers of conviction" who constantly adhere to the necessity of cross-border co-

---

192 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 4.2

193 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 4.1

194 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 4.0

operation, even if immediate results and communicable benefits are not always immediately apparent. They also see themselves as a laboratory of European integration and define themselves vis-à-vis the nation state through the claim of a so-called "small foreign policy". The Upper Rhine is therefore always presented as a European model region with the firm intention of seeing cross-border cooperation as its own policy field and further upgrading it[195]. In addition, respect for cultural differences, efforts to create a partnership of equals, and cooperation based on trust and conflict avoidance are further elements of this common value system[196].

Finally, the cross-border cooperation culture is also characterised by the fact that common *patterns of action have* developed *in and for standard situations.* Its most visible expression is that today all institutional partners in cross-border cooperation have created special organisational units for cooperation. These form a supra-individual network of cross-border responsibilities and are characterised by a high degree of professionalisation in cross-border affairs[197]. Furthermore, the creation of joint working processes for policy development and implementation can be observed, which represent a very specific Upper Rhine pattern[198] : Relevant topics are prepared by so-called three-country congresses, the results of which are then taken up and implemented by the Upper Rhine Conference and implemented with the help of the available INTERREG funds. New topics are first prepared in the Upper Rhine through trinational basic studies. The work is structured by setting up bi- and trinational project groups at the working level, which in turn work for the decision-making level (steering committee). An important role is played by those working full-time on cross-border cooperation who, as sherpas, form a dense, informal network of 30 people[199]. In addition, a high degree of routinisation of decision-making content and processes can be observed through a standardised meeting procedure (cross-border meetings usually follow the same procedure – regardless of whether they are held on the German, French or

---

195 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 3.8
196 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), these hypotheses were confirmed by all respondents with 3.8 and 3.9 respectively
197 Botthegi 2014
198 Beck/Pradier 2011
199 On a rating scale from true (5) to false (0), this hypothesis was confirmed by all respondents with 4.2

Swiss side)[200]. Particularly at the executive level, importance is attached to a smooth course of meetings[201] : conflicts must be resolved in advance at the working level, because the "zoning up" of and thus direct involvement of the political level with conflict-prone issues is to be avoided. This would collide with another standard constellation: that of creating a particularly pleasant environment for the meetings, which may well include the culinary dimension.

As a result, the Upper Rhine multi-level system[202] certainly has its own culture of cooperation, which can be interpreted as a transnational administrative culture not least because this cooperation takes place almost exclusively between public actors[203]. It is characteristic of the system that this Upper Rhine cooperation culture is founded less on an integration of the existing national administrative cultures than on the functional requirements (solving common problems, developing common potentials), the jointly held values or benefit expectations (reconciliation, programme management, regional positioning in Europe) as well as the specifics of cross-border cooperation as a "small foreign policy" (symbolism, diplomatic gesture) or "decentralised European domestic policy" (laboratory of European integration). In this respect, it should not differ significantly from other border regions.

4.3 On the contingency of administrative culture in cross-border cooperation

The analysis of cooperation on the Upper Rhine, however, reveals another facet of the administrative-cultural phenomenon in cross-border cooperation, namely its relativity or contingency in relation to other factors relevant to cross-border policy-making[204]. In this respect, the analysis of cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine confirms the experience-based hypothesis according to which the administrative-cultural factor is always either overrated or undervalued[205]. It is certainly undervalued in a view that sees cross-border cooperation merely as a transnational regime, making analogies with international negotiation systems, for example at the

---

200 On a scale from true (5) to false (0), the relevant hypotheses were confirmed by all respondents with 3.7, 3.6, 4.1 and 4.2.
201 Similarly Hartmann 1997
202 Nagelschmidt 2005
203 Beck/Pradier 2011
204 Cf. Benz/Scharpf/Zintl 1992
205 Eisenberg 2007

96

EU level or in the field of international relations[206]. In fact, this facet has so far only been partially explored in the literature and thus represents a very innovative new field of research. Such an interpretation suggests that the cultural factor as an institution in the broader sense is overlaid by the power- and interest-driven interaction between rational actors. Following the corresponding modelling of the rational choice school and then also the basic assumptions of game theory[207], the interaction in cross-border networks of institutional (headmasters) and individual (agents) actors is likely to be determined by the material and strategic objects of negotiation in question, the institutional context, but above all by the respective constellations of interests, rather than by administrative cultural differences[208].

Conversely, the danger of overemphasis exists in academic approaches to comparative cultural research and then specifically in the field of intercultural communication[209]. Here the reader of relevant studies sometimes has the impression that every interaction in international networks or every institutional and individual relationship between actors in transnational space is exclusively culturally determined. Practitioners of cross-border cooperation will then tend to raise critical objections regarding the viability and performance of models of acculturation or oscillation[210] and point to the relativity of interpersonal learning potentials compared to the inter-institutional challenge of cooperation[211].

A pragmatic approach can be developed with the concept of cultural contingency in cross-border cooperation[212]. This is based on the observation that in cross-border affairs, both of the perspectives outlined above are often linked to each other. Rational, interest-driven interaction and (administrative) cultural contingency are mutually dependent and are coupled with each other in many different ways. Criteria that can be used to illustrate this contingency are, in addition to the character of a policy field at issue in cross-border cooperation, the nature of the respective task, the degree of institutionalisation within which the cooperation takes place, the nature of the actors' relationships to each other, and the typology of the actors who encounter each other in the respective cooperation relationship.

---

206 Hasenclever/Mayer/Rittberger 1997; Müller 1993; Kohler-Koch 1989; Efinger/Rittberger/Wolf/Zürn 1990
207 Scharpf 1993; 2006
208 See already Beck 1997
209 Demorgon 2005; Eder 2000
210 Euro Institute 2007
211 Lang 2010; Lambertz 2010
212 Beck 2011b

Such a consideration can lead to a corresponding contingency model, which I have formulated elsewhere as a proposal[213] :

Figure 10: Contingency-model of administrative culture in cross-border cooperation

		Type of policy problem	Type of mission	Degree of institutionalisation	Type of relation	Type of actors involved
Impact of administrative culture	rather high	- redistributive - geostrategic - innovative - regulatory - cross-sectoral	- cooperation - implementation - planning	- secondary organisation (projects)	- impersonal - formal - unregular - mutual mistrust	- new comers - technical staff - low autonomy of action
	rather low	- distributive - routine - sectoral - self-regulatory	- coordination - information - representation	- primary organisation (institutions)	- personal - informal - regular - mutual trust - „win-win"	- exp. seniors - politicians - professionals of cooperation - high autonomy of action

Accordingly, the relevance of the (administrative) cultural factor varies depending on the characteristics of other variables relevant to cooperation: it correlates with these and cannot be seen independently. In other words: If cross-border policy is characterised by aspects of strategic redistribution and presupposes cooperation in the sense of material reconciliation of interests, takes place irregularly in projects with a zero-sum character and between technocratically acting newcomers with little autonomy of action, then the inter- (administrative-) cultural conflicts will be much more pronounced than in such constellations that can rather be located in the lower half of the matrix. This can be explained by the fact that in cases that correspond to the first pattern, the respective differing institutional factors are much more important than in the latter, in which, as a rule, little is at stake materially.

It is no coincidence that large parts of cross-border cooperation have tended to move in the lower range of the contingency matrix in recent years and were thus only relatively little problematic from an inter-(administrative)cultural point of view. In contrast, newer approaches to integrated cross-border governance[214] appear to be much more demanding. They re-

---

213 Beck 2008; 2015b
214 Hooghe 1996; Hooghe/Marks 2001; Piattoni 2010; Grande 2000

quire effective network management[215], which optimises both the internal and the external dimension of cross-border cooperation as a subsystem[216]. Functional institutionalisation can cushion the direct impact of different national administrative cultures and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of cross-border cooperation[217]. Moreover, it is often the prerequisite for transnational administrative culture to come into being at all and to unfold its functionality for the cross-border cooperation context[218]. Regional governance[219] is (normatively) also the right answer to future challenges in the cross-border context. Therefore, there is currently great euphoria and expectation among many actors in cross-border cooperation, and the concept is being actively taken up by consensus. In the medium term, however, considerable intercultural tensions are likely to arise over the concrete design of its basic components. In order for these to lead to productive intercultural learning and innovation processes[220] and thus ultimately serve to deepen the transnational administrative culture, the functional autonomy of the cross-border sub-system vis-à-vis the institutional context of its home institutions would have to be increased[221]. Keywords that are currently being discussed in this context, especially with regard to creating the conditions for the further development of the cross-border administrative or cooperation culture, are: Cross-border opening clauses in sectoral legal ordinances (e.g. on the basis of cross-border *de minimis* regulations), political will to transfer material tasks and competences to cross-border institutions (so-called horizontal subsidiarity: see chapter 5.3), flexible EU programmes with compatible funding criteria as well as networking and functional change of existing structures[222]. There is thus the prospect that the administrative-cultural patterns of cross-border cooperation will also be more strongly oriented towards the future requirements of cross-border areas in Europe. Conversely, only then will it really be possible to speak of the emergence of a distinct *transnational* administrative culture in cross-border affairs.

---

215 Cf. Benz/Lütz/Schimank/Simonis 2007; Jansen/Schubert 1995; Marin/Mayntz 1990; Mayntz 1992
216 Cf. Kilper 2010
217 Beck/Pradier 2011
218 Critically, Debray 2010
219 Prince 2011
220 Casteigts 2008
221 Similarly, Schlie 2008; Blatter 2000
222 Janssen 2007; Beck 2012

4.4 The relativity of cross-border cooperation culture

On the basis of this finding, however, the question then arises in a second step as to the extent to which this cross-border culture of cooperation, which in practice is predominantly constituted by a cooperation of public administrations, can actually be interpreted as a transnational *administrative culture in* the sense defined above, beyond its relatively plausible organisational systemic dimension.

Here the assessment will be rather cautious. On the one hand, the system of cross-border cooperation presents itself more as a cross-border *negotiation system* than a transnational *administrative system:* Both the quantity of the cross-border policy profile per se and the cross-border degree of organisation are – compared to the respective functional and institutional context of the partner regions involved – rather low. A few simple figures from the trinational region of the Upper Rhine may illustrate this: 90,000 cross-border commuters in the Upper Rhine may seem a lot in absolute terms, but they represent just 3 % of the total working population, i.e. 97 % of the working population in the Upper Rhine may commute between their place of work and their place of residence – but they do not do so on a cross-border basis. Even if the more than 30,000 motor vehicles that pass the Europabrücke between Kehl and Strasbourg every day appear to be significant, this is very relative when one realises that many times that number of people commute into Strasbourg from the surrounding Alsace region and out to the rest of Alsace every day. More people also commute between Freiburg and Karlsruhe and Mulhouse and Strasbourg than between Offenburg and Strasbourg, Freiburg and Mulhouse or Lörrach and Basel.

The following chart illustrates how strongly commuter flows on the Upper Rhine, with the exception of the Basel-Mulhouse axis, are still oriented towards the national sub-areas:

100

Figure 11: Commuting flows in the Upper Rhine
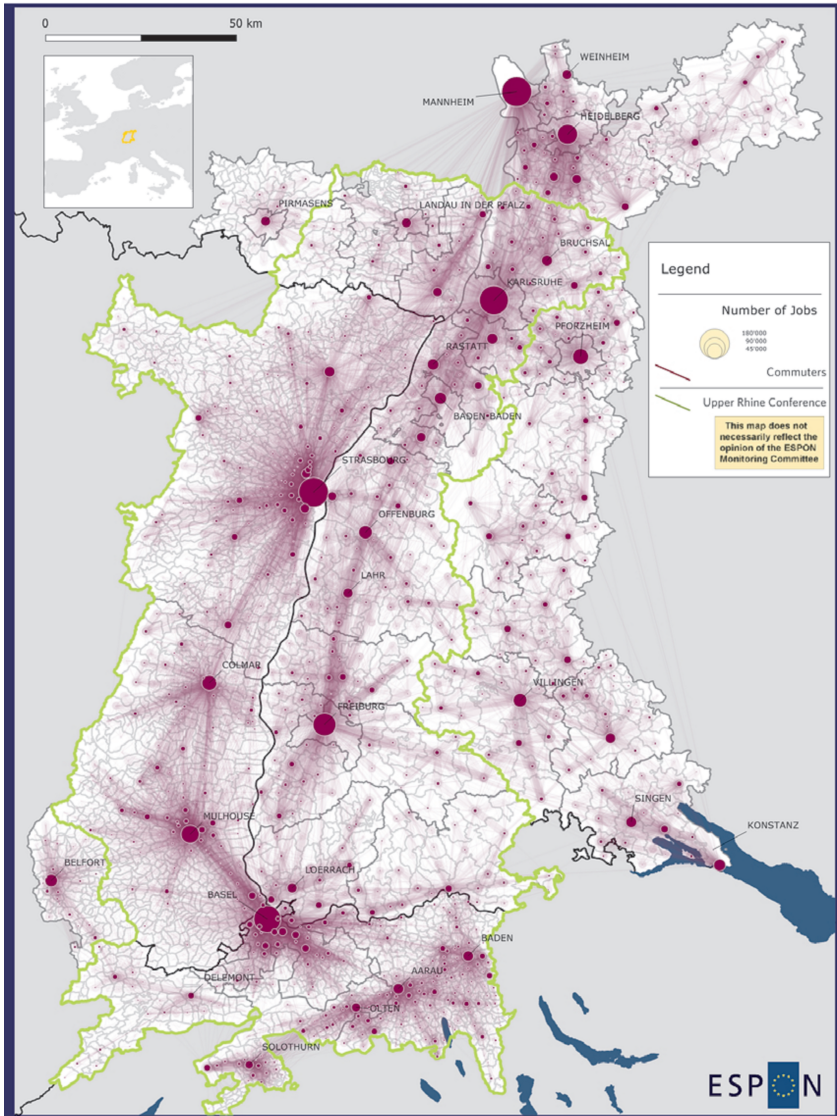
Source: ESPON Metroborder 2012: 42

Although there are over 300 SME networks in the Upper Rhine, only 12 are active across borders. It is estimated that of the 200,000 companies in the Upper Rhine, no more than 5 % are involved in direct cross-border cooperation relationships. Of the approximately 175,000 students enrolled in the Upper Rhine, a maximum of 1,500 are likely to be mobile across borders between different universities and higher education institutions within the framework of EUCOR. There are 38 cross-border study programmes in the Upper Rhine – but there are also many more study and other training programmes that are not designed to be cross-border and/or are at least explicitly open to cross-border students.

Although these few figures show the enormous potential for cross-border cooperation, they also illustrate that the factuality of cross-border cooperation is still very low in many areas and, above all, in comparison to national contexts, still the exception rather than the rule. An even clearer picture emerges when one attempts to quantify the cross-border organisational profile. On the basis of the available statistics and using the average shares of the public service in total employment in France (23 %), Germany (11 %) and Switzerland (22 %), it can be assumed that in the trinational region of the Upper Rhine, for an area of 22,000 sq. m. and with 6 million inhabitants, around 470,000 public servants are employed at the various institutional levels of the deconcentrated state and territorial self-government. Of these, a maximum of 1,000, i.e. 0.2 %, are estimated to be involved in cross-border cooperation.[223] Of this already very small group, in turn, hardly more than 100 FTE (= 0.02 %) are likely to be employed as full-time actors in cross-border institutions and projects or in the corresponding staff units and specialist departments of public administrations. Although the Euro-Institut trains almost 4,000 public servants in cross-border cooperation every year, it reaches only 0.8 % of its potential target group.

Secondly, it should be noted that a public legal framework for cross-border cooperation does not exist in substantive terms. Although codified cross-border administrative tasks can be derived in individual areas of law (e.g. domestic law on spatial management planning may provide for consulting the neighbour in the case of relevant impacts, or the relevant

---

223 The number was calculated from the 700 actors working in the various working groups and expert committees of the ORK, 170 actors working on cross-border issues in cross-border institutions and with the institutional partners of the cooperation, and 130 other actors at the municipal level and in cross-border projects/project groups.

EU-wide regulations also provide for corresponding procedures in the environmental field), there is no transnational general or specific (administrative) law, i.e. an essential prerequisite of public administration is missing: the legal programme of tasks. In addition, the intergovernmental and supranational agreements that have codified instruments and forms of cross-border cooperation do not constitute transnational law either, since the details of the functioning of e.g. a cross-border local special-purpose association according to the Karlsruhe Agreement , an EGTC[224] or also the instrument of Euroregional Cooperation Groupings (ECG) newly created by the Council of Europe within the framework of the 3rd Supplementary Agreement to the Madrid Convention, are materially determined by the legal systems of the respective host country. The German Länder, for instance, have not yet really made use of the possibility of transferring sovereign rights to neighbouring institutions in areas where the Länder are responsible for the execution of state tasks, which was codified in Article 24 (1a) of the Basic Law as part of the reform of federalism in 2006 – although cross-border cooperation in the area of security, for example, would be an obvious option for this.

   Thus, from the overall spectrum of the classic administrative functions of regulatory administration, economic administration, organisational administration, political administration and service administration[225], only service administration and coordinating administration can actually be practised in a cross-border perspective. If, however, any cross-border subordination structure is to be excluded from the outset, then large parts of classic administrative activity are excluded from the cross-border perspective too – also the planning and thus ultimately also prospectively shaping administration, if it wants to produce more than symbolic planning documents without implementation competence. A planning requirement, such as that established in the cross-border context of the Verband Region Stuttgart in the German context or the creation of Metropolitain region in France at the supra-local level, would de facto be just as inconceivable cross-border as the supra-municipal (and, from the point of view of the affected districts, cross-border) "upzoning" of task competence in the area of social policy, as it happened with the creation of the Hannover Region in Germany: On the one hand, the corresponding legal foundations are lacking in *all* national partners, and on the other hand, no political will on the part of the acting actors to tackle such a transnational structural

---

224   EGTC REGULATION.
225   Hesse/Ellwein, 2012: pp. 465

formation can be discerned to date. Also, a new administration[226] based on the criteria of effectiveness and efficiency of public task fulfilment, i.e. the adaptation of administrative scales to new socio-economic or functional challenges in a cross-border perspective (so-called 360° perspective) is hardly possible at present, although there have been and still are repeated (more or less successful) attempts to redesign cross-border relations administratively, e.g. in the urban-rural relationship, on the basis of national and international examples[227].

The various cross-border institutions themselves, on the other hand, can at best be regarded as symbolic rather than constitutive elements of a cross-border *system of government:* Neither the Upper Rhine Council nor the Eurodistrict councils or even the project councils can be understood as transnational elected parliaments, a cross-border judiciary is completely missing, and the Upper Rhine Conference, Eurodistrict offices, INFOBEST, city-networks as well as the various cross-border working groups cannot be interpreted as executives in this sense. In contrast, what appears to be a characteristic structural feature of analytical interest from an administrative science perspective is the de facto dominance of project organisation as a cross-border organisational pattern. However, this opens up an understanding of cross-border administration that must be regarded as secondary from an organisational science point of view: if the secondary organisational patterns have a formative effect on the cross-border administrative context, this is likely to be a further indicator that cross-border administration in the classical self-understanding of a primary organisation – and thus ultimately also the prerequisite for the emergence of a transnational administrative culture – does not exist in the proper sense. Using the criteria and definitions presented above , the subject of study would simply be missing from the administrative analysis, and the question would have to be asked to what extent the search for the corresponding "software" makes sense at all without the existence of a proper "hardware".

On the other hand, the analytical perspective, if it wants to do justice to the cross-border realities from the perspective of political and administrative science, should not be narrowed by the search for the normative figure

---

226 Wagener 1974
227 In the past, these were, for example, in the Strasbourg-Ortenau area, the attempt in the 1970s to form a district based on the Washington D.C. model, in 2004 the initiative to create a Strasbourg/Ortenau Eurodistrict and, most recently, the procurement of Eurometropolis status for Strasbourg with a strong cross-border orientation.

of thought of a cross-border administrative culture. In the cross-border context, intercultural and inter-institutional project structures certainly stand for a specific form of cross-border administrative and cooperation culture, and they differ in their functionality from project structures and "cultures" of the national context. If project organisation is still the exception rather than the rule in the national home administrations, the opposite pattern can apply in the cross-border context. And if, moreover, the dominance of management careers in the public administration can be used to draw conclusions about specific administrative-cultural patterns of the national public administration[228], this applies in the opposite direction to the cross-border context: the facticity of the project organisation can be interpreted as an indicator of an administrative-cultural pattern in the cross-border organisational structure and the corresponding cross-border project careers as a corresponding pattern of their administrative-cultural personnel structure. This pattern is complemented in the view of the organisational structure of cross-border cooperation by a dominance of the staff unit structure: Due to the cross-sectional character on the one hand and the specific inter-institutional coordination needs on the other, the cross-border responsibilities at the level of the partner administrations involved are usually not located in the line organisation, but close to the management level. In addition, within the staff units, these are again only one subtask among others, alongside European or international and/or territorial or functional prospectus tasks. Accordingly, the mediation functions between staffs and the technical lines are very preconditional: The functional anchoring of cross-border issues in the day-to-day business of the departments must be carried out again and again in a political "top-down procedure" and then from within the staffs themselves. The classic field of tension between staff and line[229] is particularly pronounced in cross-border affairs – and thus of particular relevance from the perspective of transnational administrative culture – because in addition to the usual conflicts of responsibility, which in case of doubt can still be controlled by committed political leadership, there are further "veto potentials" at the motivational and competence level of the departments: Without proof that a cross-border engagement can also generate real added value from the point of view of the professional fulfilment of tasks as well as the individual career perspective, the professional level will usually limit itself to soft forms of encounter with the "colleagues on the other side of the

---

228 Cf. Hopp/Göbel 2008: 392
229 Cf. König 2008: pp342; Hopp/Göbel 2008: 188

border", and in the process, in case of doubt, will use the existing systemic differences (lack of comparability, different distribution of responsibilities, different work cultures, etc.) as an obstacle to a cross-border engagement – an option that does not exist in this form within in the domestic national context. Admittedly, there are also cases in which cross-border cooperation is initiated and consolidated precisely from the professional line, as the example of the working and expert groups of cooperation structures designed for the long term, such as the Upper Rhine or Lake Constance Conferences, shows. In contrast to the "vertical professional brotherhoods" (Frido Wagener) of the national context, the enabling function and thus the functionality of such cross-border "horizontal professional brotherhoods", which would then be understood as enabling transnational sectoral administrative working-cultures, must, however, be regarded as comparatively much smaller in view of the existing system differences: a closer look shows, that it is usually the selective cooperation of professional „lone fighters" – who see themselves as "cross-border pioneers" and who, in part, are motivated by personal affinities.T The following diagram summarises the essential differences between the national administrative context and the functional characteristics of the cross-border cooperation system:

Figure 12: Major differences between national administrative context and cross-border cooperation system

	National administrative context	**Cross-border cooperation system**
Task justification	Substantive legal framework, permanent tasks	voluntary, selective
Administrative functions	Regulatory administration, economic administration, organisational administration, political administration, service administration	Coordinating (service) management
Organisational structure	Line organisation with sectoral specialisation and complementary project organisation	Project organisation with complementary staff units

106

	National administrative context	**Cross-border cooperation system**
Staff structure	Specialist teamwork rather rare	GeneralistsTeamwork dominates
Career path	Management and specialist career	Project career
Process pattern	formalised, division of labour	informal, integrated
Control pattern	output/impact oriented	input / legitimacy oriented
Funding	Usually permanent: Voted policy-budgets	Usually limited in time: Project budget
Institutional differentiation	Legislative, executive, judiciary	Executive only

In this respect, there does not seem to be just one transnational cooperation culture, but different path dependencies in the development and design of cross-border cooperation. Thus, in perspective, the search for the relevance of the administrative culture factor on the transnational "meso level"[230] would also have to differentiate, depending on the sectoral administrations involved.

Such a cross-border system of action, differentiated according to the principles of horizontal and vertical subsidiarity, as described in more detail in the following chapter, appears to be a necessary prerequisite for better developing the existing territorial, intercultural and identificatory innovation potentials of cross-border territories and thus their specific function for European integration in the future. The question of the emergence of a transnational administrative culture is directly linked to this.

---

230 Cf. Beck 2007: 34