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## ARTICLES

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# REGIONAL ACTOR CONSTELLATIONS IN EU COHESION POLICY: DIFFERENTIATION ALONG THE POLICY CYCLE<sup>1</sup>

**Hubert Heinelt**

Technische Universität Darmstadt,  
Institute of Political Science

**Achim Lang**

University of Konstanz, Department of  
Politics and Public Administration

**Abstract:** *The aim of this article is to offer an empirical description and comparison of governance arrangements across different phases of EU cohesion policy and to offer explanations for national and regional variations in the prevalence of governance arrangements in non-Cohesion (Germany and Italy), old Cohesion (Greece and Spain), and CEE countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland), covering two regions for each country. Drivers of actor participation on the regional level are often linked to legal and normative requirements regarding the partnership principle. However, we conclude that Europeanization is far from being a straightforward process. The transformation of established vertical power relations within the political system as well as state-society relations at the national and sub-national level in accordance with the partnership principle are mediated by domestic and regional factors – including given responsibilities and administrative capabilities of regional government.*

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**Keywords:** *EU cohesion policy, partnership principle, multi-level governance, policy networks, implementation*

**HUBERT HEINELT** – Public Administration and Public Policy, Institute of Political Science, Technische Universität Darmstadt. Residenzschloss, 64283 Darmstadt, Germany • [heinelt@pg.tu-darmstadt.de](mailto:heinelt@pg.tu-darmstadt.de)

**ACHIM LANG** – Material Theory of the State, Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Konstanz. Universitätsstrasse 10, 78457 Konstanz, Germany • [achim.lang@uni-konstanz.de](mailto:achim.lang@uni-konstanz.de)

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## INTRODUCTION: CHANGING PATTERNS OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

This article analyzes variations in the participation of societal actors across regions and policy stages in European Union (EU) cohesion policy. The central focus is on the extent to which societal actors participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of operational programmes of cohesion policy. The aim is to identify the conditions that shape the involvement of societal actors in the policy process.

Variations in actor involvement in EU cohesion policy have been a major topic in the scholarly as well as in the political debate since the beginning of a genuine regional policy at the EU level in 1975. It is argued that after the reform of the structural funds in 1988 competences shifted to the EU and sub-national actors. This led to a multi-level polity characterised by a distribution of tasks and competences over various nested territorial levels as well as network-like actor constellations in which public and societal actors are involved (Marks 1993; Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996; Hooghe 1996; Heinelt and Smith 1996). However, it also has been observed and emphasised that, subsequently, 'member states took every opportunity to claw back what they conceded in 1988' (Allen 2005, 226) leading to a (re-) strengthening of the national government level in cohesion policy (Kukawka and Smith 1996). The extent to which such processes have taken place is still being debated, thereby focussing on the role of the European Commission in promoting a decentralised approach to cohesion policy (Bauer 2001; Bachtler and Mendez 2007) and on the oppor-

tunities of regional public authorities and societal actors to gain or to sustain their influence (Gualini, 2003). But these reflections do not distinguish (except Marks 1993; Heinelt et al. 2005, 153 ff.) between growing or shrinking relevance of national government, sub-national government and societal actors at different stages of the policy process across member states and regions. This is surprising given the almost unmanageable numbers of analyses that have focussed on policy making in EU cohesion policy and that have enriched our understanding of country patterns and regional differences in policy-making and governance structures (Hooghe 1996; Heinelt and Smith 1996, Bachtler, Downes, and Gorzelak 2000; Baun 2002; Bauer 2001; Gualini 2003; Leonardi 2004; Heinelt et al. 2005; Bache 2008).

Additionally, most studies on EU cohesion policy refer to the more general governance debate or to the multi-level governance approach in order to point out the particularities of EU policy making,<sup>2</sup> thus neglecting differences in governance arrangements across policy phases and regions within a country.

The aim of this article is to shed light on the participation of public and, in particular, societal actors in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of operational programmes across a number of regions. We will concentrate on selected non-Cohesion (Germany and Italy), old Cohesion (Greece and Spain), and Central and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland), covering two regions for each country.<sup>3</sup> We are aware of the possible impacts of such a selection regarding the findings of our study. However, we are sure that we have (maybe with the exception of the UK and the Scandinavian countries) captured by this selection major governance traditions expressed by generalised state-society relations or policy styles (Knodt 1998) to be found among EU member states. Furthermore, we have concentrated on 'regional operational programmes' or 'integrated regional operational programmes' as we focus on regional actor constellation in EU cohesion policy. A broader actor involvement at this level is taken as an indicator of Europeanization and measured by the implementation of the partnership principle laid down as a formal rule in EU regulations but also resulting from shared beliefs about ways of doing things relevant for this policy field. In 'sectoral' or 'thematic' operational

programmes (like infrastructure programmes) the partnership principle has also been applied. However, in these programmes – usually implemented by central government or central government agencies – a broad involvement of actors can generally not be observed (Heinelt 1996b).

We start from the assumption that hierarchical and network-based interactions between public and societal actors are unequally distributed over the particular phases of formulation, implementation and evaluation of operational programmes. Based on results of research on policy implementation (Pressman and Wildawsky 1973; Mayntz 1987), it is reasonable to involve those actors in particular phases of the policy process which are decisive for achieving particular policy objectives or for ensuring the effectiveness of cohesion policy. More precisely: In order to ensure effectiveness, the involvement of beneficiaries or policy addressees (organised in collective societal actors) as well as public actors from lower tiers of government in a horizontally structured network can be crucial, since their motives can be taken into account, their willingness to comply can be secured and the resources they possess can be mobilized (Mayntz 1987, 96–97). This applies especially for the policy formulation phase in which policy problems and the appropriate ways to solve them are defined. However, the involvement of a broader spectrum of actors can also be seen as essential in the decisions on programmes and in their implementation for achieving intended policy objectives. The resources to be mobilised through the participation of actors (for instance in implementation) refer not only to financial resources but also to knowledge relevant to achieving expected outcomes and solving problems. The partnership principle – laid down in the regulations for the structural funds as amended since the reform of 1988 (European Commission 2007) – echoes these arguments for a participation of sub-national and societal actors in policy making. The application and strengthening of the partnership principle would indicate a process of *Europeanization*.<sup>4</sup> The basic as-

2 It is important to emphasise that the multi-level governance approach has gone beyond the traditional international relations theories of (neo-)functionalism and intergovernmentalism based on empirical reflections on the specificities of EU Structural Funds (Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996; Hooghe and Marks 2001; Bache and Flinders 2004; Bache 2008).

3 In Germany, Lower Saxony and Saxony have been included in the analyses as well as Murcia and Galicia from Spain, Basilicata and Campania from Italy, Eastern and Western Macedonia from Greece, Malopolska and Lower Silesia from Poland, Northern Great Plain and South Transdanubia from Hungary, and Northwest and Southwest from the Czech Republic.

4 Initially, the debate on Europeanization concentrated on the formal application of EU regulations and differences in domestic institutional settings. But more and more the debate focussed not only on the formal application of EU regulations but on 'processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ways of doing things, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies' (Radaelli 2003: 30). In this respect, more emphasis was given to the questions of if and how beliefs and norms underlying EU policies are selectively incorporated in domestic policies in accordance with specific spatially embedded political debates about appropriate political structures and objectives of policy-making (see Falkner 2004).

sumption underlying the partnership principle<sup>5</sup> is that the effectiveness of policy interventions can be ensured through the involvement of sub-national governments as well as societal actors (Heinelt 1996a, 12).<sup>6</sup>

To explain differences in the involvement of public and societal actors across member states, we will examine the impact of *country-specific* patterns of authority between the national and sub-national tiers of government. We start from the hypothesis that in cases where regional governments exercise a high level of authority in domestic policy making (see Hooghe et al. 2008, Marks et al. 2008) and participate decisively in cohesion policy, few access points to policy making are offered to societal actors. In a similar vein, we will test the hypothesis that in federal systems (Germany) or quasi-federal systems (Spain) the centrality of sub-national government in programming and implementation as well as in negotiations with the European Commission limits the involvement and strengthening of local and societal actors. Both hypotheses are derived from Heinelt (1996b) and Heinelt et al. (2005) who argued (with respect to the German *Länder* and the Spanish Autonomous Communities) that in areas where a decentralised approach to policy making is seen as appropriate, sub-national governments try to assure their competences not only against central government but also against societal actors. Still, we analyse if existing administrative structures at the NUTS 2 level ease the involvement of local governments and societal actors since administrative structures at this level indicate the development of administrative capacities needed to perform essential tasks in cohesion policy as well as to provide additional access points for local governments and societal actors.

The incorporation of the partnership principle may take some time. Therefore – based on the empirical basis of our study, which covers the planning for both funding periods 2000/4–2006 and 2007–2013 – more decentralized and participatory planning for the funding period 2007–2013 can be expected in comparison to programming for the previous funding period (2000/4–2006).

The article proceeds as follows: In the next section, the data and methods are described. In section three, the participation of different actor categories is compared across policy phases and regions in order to identify particular patterns of actor constellations. In section four, these patterns of actor involvement across policy phases are related to the institutional structures of the member states in order to test the aforementioned hypotheses.

5 See Bauer 2002 for a summary of the discussion about the implementation of the partnership principle.

6 However, Bauer points out that 'theoretical expectations regarding its transforming potential, in terms of pitting supranational and sub-national actors against central state authority and thereby circumventing the latter, have not materialized' (Bauer 2002: 769).

## DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The cross-sectional analysis is based on field work carried out by country teams from seven EU member states. The field work consisted of semi-structured interviews with actors from relevant organisations in regional development policy. A main part of the analysis was the qualitative assessment of actor participation in EU cohesion policy by each country team. To facilitate comparison and assessment, actors were grouped within broader actor categories that were distinguished according to their status as public or societal organisation. *Public or governmental actors* include all forms of public organisations such as national and regional government and subordinated administrative units. The group of *societal actors* contains the whole spectrum of non-governmental organisations such as environmental groups, organisations of the voluntary sector, chambers, trade unions and business associations.<sup>7</sup>

An assessment of actor participation has been done for *different steps* of the planning of structural funds interventions, the implementation of operational programmes, and their evaluation/monitoring. Regarding the time frame, we considered

- the programming phase of the last and the current funding periods.<sup>8</sup> Programming is subdivided into (i) debates about particular structural problems and the formulation of a (regional) development strategy, (ii) the drafting of operational programmes, (iii) the decisions on official proposals for programmes and (iv) the negotiations of these proposals with the Commission and their final approval which lead to Community Support Frameworks (CSF) or Single Programming Documents (SPD),
- the application of the programmes during the last funding period, i.e. 2000–2006 for the old member states and 2004–2006 for the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Regarding the implementation of the operational programmes, (i) the development of individual project proposals, (ii) their appraisal and (iii) the final approval of projects are considered separately,
- the evaluation and monitoring of the last funding period. Evaluation and monitoring are subdivided into (i) the evaluation of programmes and (ii) the monitoring of financial transactions.

7 We did not use the term civil society (or civil society organisations) because this term is used quite differently in the scholarly debate and in the EU jargon (see Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2009).

8 As mentioned in the introductory section, this time frame especially allows identifying changes in the programming phases for the last and the current funding periods.

Actor participation was assessed using a three-level scale, ranging from no involvement at a particular step of the policy process [0], to involvement without crucial/decisive influence [1], to major influence [2] on decisions taken or deliberations taking place at the individual steps. The assessment is based on the formal and informal rules and practices of actor participation. The country teams assessed the actor participation on the basis of face-to-face semi-structured interviews and official documents.

An example of the coding scheme will make the operationalization and measurement of actor participation clear. The first stage of our policy cycle model contains debates about regional strengths and weaknesses. The question then is if an actor merely participates in the debates or if an actor (e.g. a regional government) dominates the debate by defining the problems to be solved, the objectives to be achieved and the measures to be taken – without actually considering alternatives articulated by other actors. The country teams asked representatives of different actor categories to assess their influence as well as that of other actors in these debates in terms of how their input and that of others had affected the final analysis of regional strengths and weaknesses. Finally, each country team compared the summarized statements of the interviewed actors with the result of analysed documents and made its own assessment of the influence of different actor categories. In the following stage, assessment is easier. The drafting of operational programmes involves the definition of particular objectives and measures in various policy subsystems that are designated to be put into action. Here we asked if actors participated in the definition of objectives and measures and if their opinions were really taken into account. These examples should make it clear that our assessment strategy followed strict guidelines.<sup>9</sup>

Our analytic strategy comprises two parts. First, we classify actor constellations according to their profile similarity. As a result, the response variable is composed of five different dominant actor constellations denoting different governance arrangements. Second, we cross-tabulate the actor constellations with the (multi)nominal independent variables that were set out in the introduction.<sup>10</sup>

9 To ensure that the assessments made by the individual country teams are comparable, the assessments were explained and discussed in common workshops. Nevertheless, actor participation cannot be assessed without some discretion. This is precisely why we do not pretend to have measured actor participation down to two digits after the dot.

10 Due to the multi-categorical and nominal nature of the dependent variable, a Chi<sup>2</sup>-test was appropriate for analyzing the effects of the independent variables. As will be seen in the remainder of the article, more advanced regression techniques, such as multinomial logistic regression, are not appropriate due to possible autocorrelation and very high within-country similarities.

## PATTERNS OF ACTOR PARTICIPATION IN OLD AND NEW MEMBER STATES

The cross-regional assessment of actor participation in the planning of structural funds interventions, the implementation of operational programmes, and their evaluation/monitoring shows a great variety that can be reduced to five dominant actor constellations or types of policy networks (Table 1).

**Table 1** Types of dominant actor constellations

		National government			
		not decisive/deciding		decisive/deciding	
		Regional government		Regional government	
		not decisive/ not deciding	decisive/ deciding	not decisive/ not deciding	decisive/ deciding
<b>Societal actors</b>	not decisive/ not deciding	—	Regional government networks	National government networks	National and regional government networks
	decisive/ deciding	Societal actor networks	Participatory governance		

The first constellation can be labelled *societal actor networks*. In this configuration, only societal actors play an important role. The second one can be denoted *participatory governance*, due to a configuration in which not only all/most actor categories are involved but especially societal ones. Furthermore, no actor category dominates over others in these policy networks. In such policy networks, forms of governance which are not characterized by hierarchical coordination of activities but by horizontal interactions between public and societal organisations can be expected.

Apart from these settings, three other configurations can be distinguished insofar as they are clearly dominated by governmental bodies and societal actors do not participate or are not decisive in taking policy choices. This indicates that bargaining and arguing may take place (especially between the involved governmental bodies) but that a hierarchical mode of governance prevails:

- In *regional government networks*, ministries or agencies of the regional tier of government are the main and decisive actors.

- Regarding constellations in which central and regional government (again represented by ministries or agencies) share responsibilities and jointly take policy choices, we talk about *national and regional government networks*.
- Finally, we can distinguish networks in which central government ministries are the main and decisive actors. Therefore, these constellations are denoted as *national government networks*.

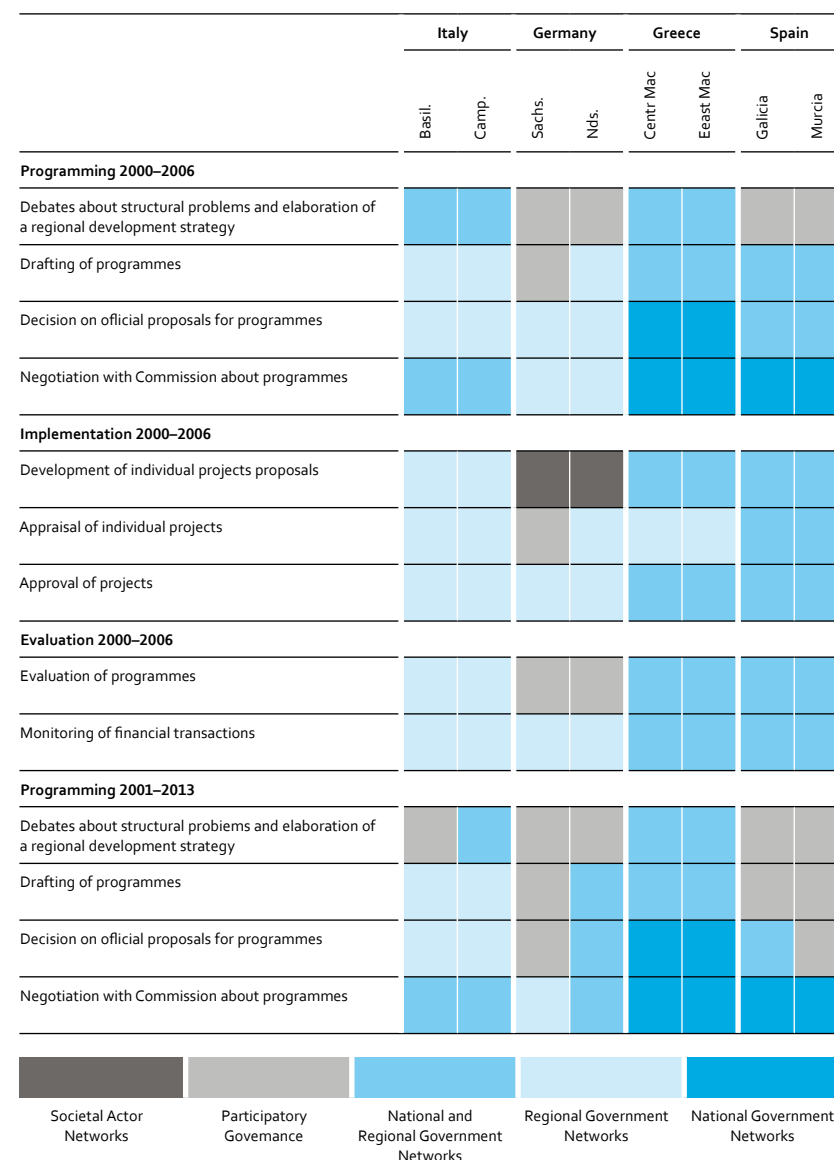
Figure 1 illustrates the network types in non-cohesion countries (Italy and Germany) and old cohesion countries (Greece and Spain).

During debates about a regional development strategy, a participatory mode of governance prevails in the German and Spanish regions. In both countries, many actors, especially societal ones, are involved and no actor category clearly dominates in these phases. It is remarkable that societal actor networks are only dominant in Germany in one particular phase – namely in the development of individual project proposals. This can be explained by the fact that societal actors are the main beneficiaries of the funding in Germany, in contrast to Spain, Italy or Greece. Furthermore, participatory governance can be detected in the evaluation of programs in Germany only, where private consultancies carry out this task.

At first sight, the intra-country similarity of policy networks is striking as well. In particular, the Greek as well as the Spanish regions greatly resemble each other in terms of dominant actor constellations, which indicate not only highly similar institutional settings but also highly determining effects of institutional structures insofar as it is seemingly impossible to have a differing involvement of societal actors in both regions of these countries. However, in the case of Murcia, the influence of societal actors is higher at the third stage of the programming phase for the funding period 2007–2013 than in the second Spanish region (Galicia) – namely in the decision on the official proposal for programmes for the current funding period. In Murcia, societal actors – particularly business associations and trade unions – have been able to participate in this phase more strongly than in Galicia. This is basically due to the absence of regionalist parties in Murcia. In Galicia, the regionalist party has centralized Cohesion Policy making and abstains from any corporatist arrangements (Jordana et al. 2009). Furthermore, both Spanish regions demonstrate that the involvement of societal actors has improved in the phases of the drafting and the decision on the official proposals for programmes over time from the programming for the previous to the current funding period.

Taking a closer look, differences between the regions analysed in Italy and Germany indicate varying institutional opportunities or abilities of societal ac-

**Figure 1** Patterns of policy networks at different stages of policy making in non-Cohesion and old Cohesion countries



tors to participate. Especially in the German case, the federal state of Lower Saxony (Nds.) shows a more *participatory governance* approach in programming than Saxony (Sachs.) where a regional government network is prevailing at the stages of drafting and deciding on programmes. These remarkable differences in actor involvement during the formulation and elaboration of a regional development strategy and the operational programmes can be attributed to differences in policy styles between both German federal states that result in differing actor constellations. Lower Saxony employs a corporatist governance approach which highlights the inclusion of societal organisations (business interests and trade unions) in the decision making process. In contrast, Saxony relies on etatist policy structures. However, it was only in the phase of individual project appraisal during the implementation between 2000 and 2006 that actor constellations in Saxony differed from Lower Saxony.

In Italy, the difference between the two regions analysed concerns only the evolvement of a *participatory governance* approach in Basilicata over time (between the last and the current funding period) in the first phase of programming, that means, in debating structural problems and elaborating a regional development strategy.

Central government plays a minor role in the non-cohesion countries and old cohesion countries analysed, except for Greece. In Greece, decisions on official proposals for programmes and the subsequent negotiations with the European Commission fall under the competences of the central government. In the other countries regional governments have an exclusive say (Italian and German regions) or decide together with the national government (Spanish regions) on official proposals for programmes. In the German regions, the negotiations with the European Commission about programmes fall under the competences of regional government (the *Länder*). In the Italian regions, negotiations are undertaken jointly by regional and national government. As a consequence, programming in Greece shows more etatist tendencies linked to *national government networks* than in the implementation phases of the operational programmes characterised either by decentralized *national and regional* or *regional government networks*.

Regarding societal actors, it is safe to say that they play an important role in Germany and Spain, a minor one in Italy and none in Greece. However, the intensity with which private and societal organisations can bring in their stake in the programming and the implementation of operational programmes and evaluation of regional policy varies considerably between countries. Whereas their influence is comparatively high in the federal states of Germany and, to a lesser extent, in the Autonomous Regions of Spain, the regions in Italy and Greece show that societal actors on average (if at all) serve as information

providers to central or regional government but are unable to actively bring in their interest due to public bodies' reluctance to provide adequate access points.

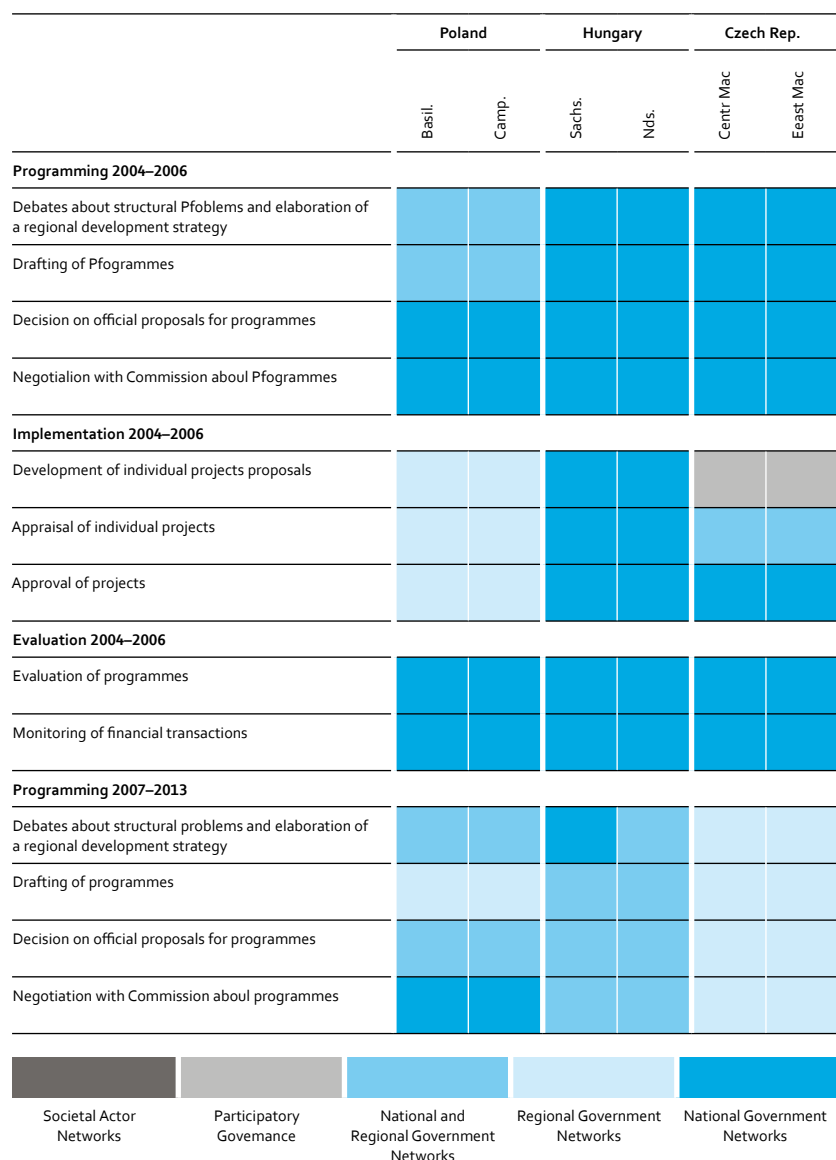
Figure 2 illustrates policy networks at the different stages of policy making in the new member states, namely Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary. In contrast to the old member states, *national government networks* have been important in most policy phases, particularly in the decisions on official proposals for programmes and the subsequent negotiations with the European Commission as well as in the evaluation of the 2004–2006 funding period. However, the dominance of these networks has given way to a more dualist competence sharing between central and regional government, i.e. to *national and regional government networks* or *regional government networks* in the programming of the 2007–2013 funding period.

In Poland, the programming for the 2004–06 funding phase was dominated by the central government. Regional government participated in the debate and drafting of so-called 'integrated regional operational programmes' through national and regional government networks, but final decisions on proposals for programmes and negotiations with the European Commission remained at the responsibility of the national government. In the new funding period 2007–2013, the 'integrated regional operational programmes' were replaced by 16 'regional operational programmes'. Regional government became responsible for preparing the strategy as well as for drafting the programmes. Central government provides framework regulations on procedures and policy instruments and negotiates with the Commission. The role of the governor (the regional government administration) has been significantly weakened while non-public actors still have not gained importance (Swianiewicz and Lackowska 2008).

In Hungary, programming for the first regional operational programme was delegated to regional development agencies, public bodies under the control of central government. The situation changed when programming for the current funding period started. National and regional government networks became prevailing, indicating a stronger influence of the sub-national government level. That there are differences between regions is shown by the different actor constellations in the phase of debating structural problems and elaborating a regional development strategy. While in the Northern Great Plain region, a national government network is still dominant in this phase, it has been replaced by a national and regional government network in the South Transdanubia region.

In the Czech Republic, the programming phase for the period 2004–2006 was almost entirely under the control of the central government. In contrast,

**Figure 2** Patterns of policy networks at different stages of policy making in new Cohesion countries



the programming for the funding period 2007–2013 was prepared under the responsibility of regions and dominated by regional government networks. This can be explained by the introduction of regional operational programmes as well as by the establishment of regional councils at the NUTS 2 level, which perform the role of managing authority for the regional operational programme. These regional councils comprise of representatives from the elected assemblies of the (sub)regions covered by these newly established ‘cohesion regions’ at NUTS 2 level (Stachová et al. 2008).

That *national government networks* were dominating in these countries before the programming of the ongoing funding period is hardly surprising since the regions were somewhat artificial compared to the well-established regional level in Germany, Italy and Spain. The changes of administrative structures at the sub-national level can be illustrated by the cases of the Czech Republic and of Hungary.

Entirely new administrative units had to be created in the Czech Republic in order to cope with EU requirements regarding the size of NUTS 2 regions (Cerveny and Andrlé 2000; Baun 2002, 269–270). Until the year 1997, two administrative levels existed below central government: about 6000 self-governing municipalities and 77 districts. In 1997, an administrative reform created 14 regions, which subsequently became the most important regional units with a high legitimacy due to their elected governments. The districts lost most of their administrative functions but have not been dissolved. Still the new regions were too small in size to serve as NUTS 2 ‘cohesion regions’ in EU regional policy. Thus in 2000 a new law created eight ‘cohesion regions’ that were just a new layer of central government administration and have no political representation. Therefore it is not surprising that the artificial character of the Cohesion Regions led to central government dominance in Czech cohesion policy.

The same argument applies to Hungary, which has seven NUTS 2 regions (Horvath 2000). With the exception of the capital city of Budapest, all other regions are combinations of three neighbouring NUTS 3 counties. In Hungary, central government ministries responsible for national and European resources opposed decentralisation. Furthermore, the NUTS 3 counties had long traditions and strong identities. As they were the principal sites for party politics, political support for the process of region building was somewhat ambivalent.

In contrast to the Czech Republic and Hungary, administrative units in Poland were already established at the NUTS 2 level. However, regional-level responsibilities in Poland were divided and contested between the governor, who is a central government representative in the region, and the marshal, who is

the elected head of the regional administration. Due to this conflict in Polish regions, power-sharing, if not central government dominance, prevailed in most phases of cohesion policy making in Poland.

Another factor – similarly applying to all Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries – that thwarted the involvement of regional administrative and societal actors lies in the nature of the first operational programmes. Operational programmes were integrated into joint operational programmes that covered the whole country and left little room for regional actors' manoeuvres. As a result, central government had to initiate the processes of regionalization and regional institution building during the first funding period 2004–06. In the subsequent funding period, central governments somewhat loosened their grip on cohesion policy and enabled (especially in the Czech Republic) the development of *regional government networks*. Societal actors are merely relevant through forms of *participatory governance* in the development of individual projects in the Czech Republic.

An additional explanation why societal actors participate less in the CEE countries is offered by studies that focus on 'civil society'<sup>11</sup> and state-society relations in post-communist countries. We cannot go into details here, but we would like to sketch findings explaining the weak involvement of societal actors in these countries. Literature on the evolution of civil society in post-communist Eastern European countries describes their organisation and capacities as rather weak and concludes that central government has preserved its central and strong position vis-à-vis organised societal actors (Ost 1993, Howard 2002). The lack of societal actor participation in Cohesion Policy making in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland might, therefore, be linked to the low endowment of post-communist countries with social capital (Mishler and Rose 1997), with organised civil society (Ost 1993) and with institutionalised state-society relations (Cowley 2004, Meardi 2007). One reason for the perceived absence of societal actors in the policy process is, on the one hand, ascribed to the weak capacity and unwillingness of organized business and trade unions to adopt the European social model as propagated in the social dialogue (Crowley 2004). This weakness of societal organisations has an impact on the governance of economic activities (Vahuyse 2007) and thus on cohesion policy. As Crowley (2004) demonstrates, labour organisations have remained weak in comparison to their Western European counterparts. Crowley explains this weakness by stating that the dominant trade unions in post-communist countries have been created by the Communist

Party which creates suspicion and lack of legitimacy on the part of the labour movement. Similarly, Howard identifies mistrust in communist organisations as a major driving force for the low membership rates in voluntary organisations (Howard 2002). Mishler and Rose also have identified mistrust as a major cause for the weak position of societal actors in relation to the state (Mishler and Rose 1997).

## ACTOR CONSTELLATION IN EU COHESION POLICY: A COMPARISON

In the previous section, we presented a closer look at the prevalence of governance arrangements across regions and policy phases. We concluded that some countries and regions have undergone major changes in terms of actor involvement. Particularly some new member states have adjusted their governance structures for the programming of the 2007–13 funding period, compared with the previous programming phase, and adopted a more participatory style of governance.

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of actor constellations across policy phases. It can be seen that *participatory governance* still plays a minor role in most policy phases. *Participatory governance* prevails particularly in the programming of the ongoing funding period. Similarly, *national and regional government networks* and *regional government networks* have gained importance in the programming of the new funding period. This shift happened at the expense of national government dominance. As mentioned above, this finding reflects the further development of regional administrative capacities for coping with regional development issues as well as the transition from integrated country-wide to separate regional operational programmes in the CEE countries. Both aspects enabled regional governments to take an active part in the programming of cohesion policy.

### Europeanization and the partnership principle

In the introduction we started with the assumption that the Europeanization of actor settings in cohesion policy can be measured by the implementation of the partnership principle, which is laid down as a formal rule in EU regulations but also results from shared beliefs about ways of doing things relevant for this policy field. This should lead to a dominance of *participatory governance* across regions and policy phases. As Table 2 demonstrates, statist actor constellations have higher actual frequencies than one would expect when con-

11 As emphasised in footnote 7, we did not use the term civil society because it is used quite differently in the scholarly debate and in the EU jargon.

sidering row and column shares, and are thus predominant in all phases of cohesion policy. Particularly during the programming for the funding period 2000/4–2006, there was a tendency towards *national government networks* not only during the official decisions on programmes and their negotiation with the European Commission but also in the drafting of operational programmes and even in the discussion of regional strengths and weaknesses. Table 2 depicts 26 national government networks during the programming for the funding period 2000/4–2006, while one would only expect 17 such networks. The same applies for evaluation during this funding period.

The application of the partnership principle, however, does not necessarily imply that the involvement of regional government and societal actors is distributed equally over all phases of the policy process. Instead, it is concentrated on particular phases such as programming and implementation of operational programmes. The results indicate the dominance of national or regional government during the implementation and evaluation of EU structural funds interventions. In the programming phases, however, we encountered the opposite effect: arrangements of *participatory governance* – in which a more-or-less broad spectrum of public and private actors are involved – are more prevalent than in other policy phases. Governments offer societal actors (as well as local government) opportunities to articulate their demands and concerns in programming Structural Funds interventions in order to make the interventions more effective. This is in line with the basic idea of the partnership principle (as outlined in the introduction of this article).

### Administrative structure

In the introduction, we hypothesized that the level of regional authority exercised by regional government explains not only regional government involvement in cohesion policy but also the participation of societal actors in the policy process. In Figure 3, we plotted the Regional Authority Index developed by Hooghe, Marks and Schakel (Hooghe et al. 2008, Marks et al. 2008) against the sum of actor participation scores over all phases.<sup>12</sup> As it can be seen, regional authority exercised by regional government positively correlates with regional government participation and is negatively associated with central government scores. In contrast to our earlier predictions, societal actor involvement in cohesion policy making is positively correlated with the empowerment of regional government. In a similar vein, in federal systems such as

**Table 2** Frequencies of actor constellations (expected frequencies in parentheses)

		Regional Government	National Government	National and Regional Government	Participatory Governance	Chi <sup>2</sup> (p-value)
Programming 2000/04	No N=124	41 (34.4)	29 (37.9)	39 (37.9)	15 (13.8)	11.16 (0.011)
	Yes N=56	9 (15.6)	26 (17.1)	16 (17.1)	5 (6.2)	
Implementation	No N=140	33 (38.9)	47 (42.8)	43 (42.8)	17 (15.6)	6.49 (0.090)
	Yes N=40	17 (11.1)	8 (12.2)	12 (12.2)	3 (4.4)	
Evaluation	No N=152	44 (42.2)	43 (46.4)	47 (46.4)	18 (16.9)	2.63 (0.451)
	Yes N=28	6 (7.8)	12 (8.6)	8 (8.6)	2 (3.1)	
Programming 2006	No N=124	32 (34.4)	46 (37.9)	36 (37.9)	10 (13.8)	9.77 (0.021)
	Yes N=56	18 (15.6)	9 (17.1)	19 (17.1)	10 (6.2)	
NUTS 2	No N=78	10 (21.7)	41 (23.8)	25 (23.8)	2 (8.7)	42.05 (0.000)
	Yes N=102	40 (28.3)	14 (31.2)	30 (31.2)	18 (11.3)	
Federal	No N=130	36 (36.1)	51 (39.7)	40 (39.7)	3 (14.4)	79.55 (0.000)
	Yes N=50	14 (13.9)	4 (15.3)	15 (15.3)	17 (5.6)	
Total		50	55	55	20	

Note: societal actor networks have been omitted due to their small number (N=2).

12 For example, Murcia has a central government score of 24. This means that, for Murcia, all central government scores over all phases of cohesion policy added up to 24.

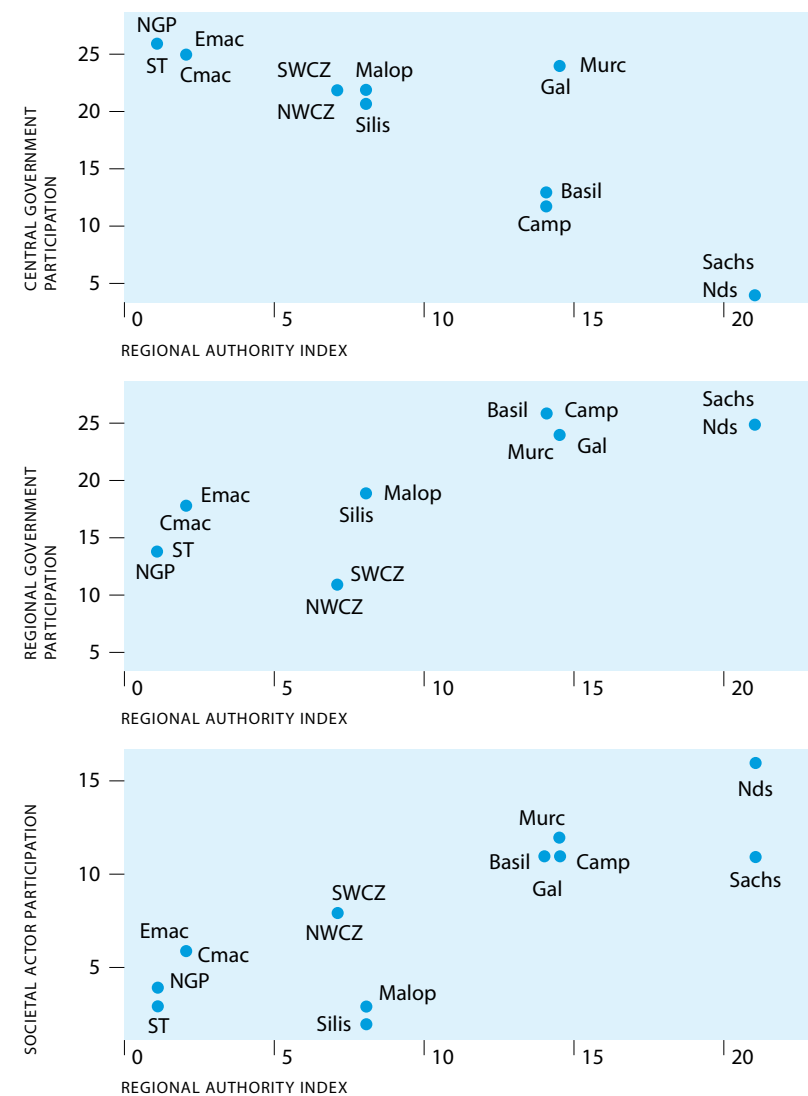
Germany and quasi-federal systems like Spain, societal actors are more empowered than in unitary states. Therefore, we find a statistically significant impact of federalism on the prevalence of *participatory governance* (Table 2). These findings disconfirm earlier studies that explained the limited role of societal actors by the centrality of sub-national government (Heinelt 1996b, Heinelt et al. 2005).

In the introduction, we assumed that existing administrative structures at the NUTS 2 level ease the involvement of sub-national governmental as well as societal actors. Under such institutional settings, we assume that actor constellations of *participatory governance* have been developed. As Table 2 depicts, differences between countries in this respect have a significant impact on the level of decentralization and participation and lead to particular paths of adaptation. Indeed, the existence of an administrative structure at the NUTS 2 level eases the participation of regional and societal actors. Regions without established administrative units at the NUTS 2 level have a higher prevalence of *national government networks* or *national and regional government networks* in which either national or regional governmental actors or both are dominant and hardly leave room for the development of *participatory governance*. The rationale behind this argument is that administrative capacities ease the incorporation of societal actors by providing access points for societal groups to the policy making process at the regional level.

### Adaptation over funding periods

In the introduction, we formulated a hypothesis concerning the pace of adaptation. We hypothesized that programming for the 2007–2013 funding period is more decentralized and participatory in CEE countries than programming for the 2000/4–2006 funding period. This hypothesis has been confirmed. The new member states increased power sharing arrangements, compared to the central government dominance in the prior funding period. Further development of regional administrative capacities not only helps to cope with regional development issues but also eases the participation of societal actors in subsequent funding periods. As mentioned above, the transition from integrated country-wide to separate regional operational programmes supported such a development in the CEE countries because regional governments as well as societal actors were enabled to take an active part in the programming of cohesion policy. The accumulation of administrative capacities, as it has been shown, is a remarkably slow process. In case of the new member states, the first period (2004–6) enabled national governments to build capacities for EU cohesion policy. The ongoing funding period serves regional administra-

**Figure 3** Regional Authority Index related to actor participation scores (sum over all phases)



Note: The Regional Authority Index is based on Hooghe et al. 2008 and Marks et al. 2008. The actor participation score (on the y-axis) is an additive index that sums up all participation scores over all phases of the policy cycle.

tive units to refine their repertoire, and one might expect an increase in the participation of societal actors in future funding periods. This accumulation suggests that learning takes place within and between concerned organisations.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to offer an empirical description and comparison of regional actor constellations across different phases of EU cohesion policy by looking at 'regional operational programmes' or 'integrated regional operational programmes'. In addition, it was the aim of this article to offer explanations for national and regional variations in the prevalence of particular governance arrangements in selected non-Cohesion (Germany and Italy), old Cohesion (Greece and Spain), and CEE countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland). The selection of these countries captured the major – but not all – state-society relations and policy styles to be found among the EU member states.

In the introduction, we hypothesised a likely adaptation of regional governance due to processes of Europeanization, in particular with respect to the legal and normative requirements linked to the partnership principle. In our analysis of drivers of actor participation on the regional level, we concluded that Europeanization is far from being a straightforward process. Without doubt, there is pressure for decentralisation within the political system as well as for strengthening societal actors in accordance with the partnership principle. However, this process is thwarted by a number of factors:

- There is no such thing as a consistent pattern of actor constellation over the different stages of the policy process in any region under consideration. In general, government networks are prominent in all phases of the policy cycle. However, there is a decreasing prevalence of national government involvement in the implementation of operational programmes. This indicates that national governments (successfully) try to keep control over *what* should be done while answering *how* this is to be done and achieved is left to more-or-less decentralised and participatory governance arrangements.
- Adaptation proceeds slowly, despite changes in some new member states. Particularly the development of capacities on the part of societal actors and their inclusion in policy making is a protracted process. However, we can witness a shift towards more power sharing between central and regional governments in the new EU member states. This finding reflects the further development of regional administrative capacities for coping with regional

development issues as well as the transition from country-wide to regional operational programs in the CEE countries. Both aspects enabled regional governments to take an active part in the programming of cohesion policy.

- Existing administrative structures at the NUTS 2 level ease the inclusion of regional governmental as well as societal actors in the policy process. Similarly, in countries with high regional authority exercised by regional governments – as in federal and quasi-federal political systems – sub-national governments have (successfully) benefited from advantages of the multi-level system of the EU cohesion policy.
- Finally, there are differences between governance arrangements of regions within the same country. This indicates, on the one hand, that beliefs and norms (like the partnership principle) underlying the EU structural funds are selectively incorporated in regional policy in accordance with specific spatially embedded political debates about appropriate political structures and objectives of cohesion policy. On the other hand, this finding underlines that the given institutional settings are shaped by regional actors and their empowerment.

To sum up, the degree to which societal actors are involved is not sufficiently explainable by formal rules alone. Instead, their participation depends particularly on the following three factors. First, they are rarely involved when regional government and administration is weak or absent. We have seen mutual empowerment of the two actor categories that gives both a stake in regional matters. Second, the participation of societal actors rests on the willingness and responsiveness of predominantly regional governments and administrations. This involves the willingness to share responsibilities with environmental groups, business associations, trade unions et cetera, and also the underlying norms that shape the responsiveness of (regional) governments towards these societal groups and organisations. Norms that facilitate such responsiveness are derived mainly from state-society relations such as corporatism, subsidiarity (Knodt 1998) or social capital. However, studies that link state-society relations and social capital to empowerment in regional policy making are rare, particularly for the new EU member states. This remains a desideratum for further research.

Third, participation of societal actors depends on their resources and capacities for taking part in cohesion policy. This is particularly problematic in CEE countries, where interest groups and 'civil society' as well as social capital in general are still underdeveloped (see Getimis et al. 2006, 265–266, with reference to Hungary and Poland). However, we do not share Bauer's pessimistic account, in which he questions 'the sustainability of the partnership ar-

rangements in EU administrative practice' (Bauer 2002, 784). We furthermore suggest applying a more long-term perspective for CEE countries since the establishment of suitable institutional settings and actor relations is a matter of years if not decades.

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