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Panel 11C
Policy, Authority, and Identity in the EU Regions

European Regions' relationship with the EU seen from below —Re-visiting the subnational mobilization thesis¹—

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ABSTRACT Concepts like subnational mobilization and multilevel governance put originally the subnational level and its interaction with the supranational institutions in the European Union (EU) centre stage. This article revisits fundamental claims of the debate about the relations between regions and the EU by analysing attitudinal data of top subnational officials from five European countries. Subnational administrative elites are generally EU-friendly and supportive of the process of European integration. With respect to issues of subnational governance, our respondents would like to see moderate strengthening of the institutional nexus between regions and the EU. However, subnational interest in closer cooperation with the EU in specific policy areas remains surprisingly weak.

Keywords: subnational mobilization, multilevel governance, regions in the European Union, subnational administrative elites

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1. Introduction

Subnational mobilization, i.e. the engagement of subnational actors in European policymaking, is a central feature of the conceptions of multilevel policymaking in the European Union (EU). To a large extent the theoretical claims behind multilevel governance have been developed empirically on the example of emerging political interactions in the context of the EU's regional economic policy, better known as the structural funds (Marks 1992, 1993; Hooghe/Marks 2001). Originally subnational mobilization was a kind of a “combat term” aimed against the perceived dominance of intergovernmental interpretations of the European integration process. Before this background it is no surprise that the whole debate about the European regions' relationships with the EU used to be coined by a vocabulary of transition and transformation (Jeffery 2000). In this article, we re-visit this debate which has peaked in the late 1990s, but goes on with somewhat lower intensity until today (Moore 2008).

By now, this debate about subnational mobilization has produced many and complex theoretical assertions and expectations, and also—but to lesser extent—empirical research testing them. We take issue with three central expectations that have been put forward by the subnational mobilization camp. First, that the subnational mobilization logic of by-passing the national level leads subnational actors to *desire strong supranational institutions*. The second claim which we re-visit is that the *subnational resource base determines the intensity of subnational-supranational political exchange*, i.e. that subnational actors automatically want to intensify subnational-supranational interaction if only their resource base is above a certain threshold. A final claim to reassess is that one should observe *subnational convergence*, i.e. that (at least institutionally “stronger”) subnational actors are to converge with respect to their engagement with the supranational level.

These (and other) claims have been intensely debated (Bache 1998, 1999; Jeffery 2000). The reason to revisit them now—almost two decades after the debate originated—is twofold. First, all three claims are “time sensitive”, thus change should be more pronounced and better observable as integration intensifies and time goes by. To what extent this time sensitivity is visible empirically has important implication for the assessment of dynamic elements of multilevel governance theory—in particular with view to perhaps overly optimistic conceptions of transnational learning processes on which it is based. Second, the original

debate has been mainly based methodologically on case studies and empirically the focus was EU structural policy. This paper uses attitudinal data from a survey of top-officials in regional administrations of five EU member state—thus bringing an up to now neglected empirical perspective into the debate.

The paper proceeds as follows. After this introduction, the major claims of the debate about subnational mobilization is summarised in more detail (section 2). In the next two chapters the strength and weaknesses of an analysis based on attitudinal data are discussed and the details about the survey from which the empirical data is taken are given (section 3 and 4). Subsequently, the three major claims are confronted with our survey results (sections 5). The article ends by summarising the findings and highlighting their implications for the emerging theory of multilevel governance (section 7). Among other things, our analysis shows that administrators from institutionally weaker regions and from regions that are economically poorer than the EU average favour consolidating subnational-supranational institutional interaction. By contrast, with respect to cooperation in particular policy areas, it is the bureaucrats from regions with a GDP above EU-average who are in favour of involving the EU in areas where they have or seek policy competences. Our results are not easily explainable from the classical subnational mobilization perspective.

2. The subnational mobilization theory

In her classical article on the topic, Liesbet Hooghe defines subnational mobilization “as an instrument to challenge state power, and to support supranational authority. Subnational units compete with member states for control over territorial interest aggregation. So the relationship is one of contested hierarchy, in which the supranational arena is expected to be on the side of the subnational level” (Hooghe 1995: 177).² The empirical reference of the subnational mobilization debate is however the 1988 reform of the EU structural funds. This reform was coined by rhetoric of vertical partnership between all governmental levels and the aim to build subnational capacities in order to pave the way for sustainable regional economic development. Marks (1992, 1993) analysed the reform of the structural funds and developed on its basis the first versions of the multilevel governance thesis—formulated as a critique to

² Hooghe and Marks, the most prominent researchers in this debate, have refined their theoretical claims in separate or joint publications over the years (Hooghe/Marks 1996; Marks/Hooghe/Blank 1996; Hooghe/Marks 2001). We would posit however that the crucial claims re-visited here have remained by and large “intact”, although the sophistication of the argument did certainly increase. As in our view these claims are in greater purity outlined in the original publications we refer in the following to those.

“state-centric” intergovernmentalist and (which is sometimes forgotten) also to “supranational institution-centric” neo-functionalist accounts of European integration alike.

A major point of the multilevel governance thesis is that institution building is not limited to the supranational level but may involve all politico-administrative layers (as well as societal interests) of the “system”. From such a vantage point, subnational-supranational interaction is not just a peripheral echo of “real” integration at the European level. Rather—especially if connected with the hypothesis that the nation state is losing control about “his” subnational level because it gets systematically by-passed—subnational-supranational political exchange becomes in this perspective a major empirical field to prove or disprove claims put forward either by intergovernmentalists or adherents of the multilevel governance thesis about the validity of their competing conceptualizations of what it actually is that drives the European integration dynamic. It is precisely in this context that the role of regions in the EU under the label of “subnational mobilization”, i.e. the increasing involvement of subnational bodies into the supranational policymaking, became theoretically meaningful for the ongoing debate (Hooghe 1995).

Hence, the interest in regional ties with the EU was fuelled by the expectation that member states might be “outflanked” by the transfer of authority to the EU and by “incentives for newly assertive and politically meaningful regional bodies” (Marks 1993: 402) which shifted beyond the control of national governments. Eventually “mobilization and empowerment of subnational governments” would lead to the emergence of a system of multilevel governance “characterized by co-decision-making across several nested tiers of government, ill-defined and shifting spheres of competences (creating a consequent potential for conflicts about competencies), and an ongoing search for principles of decisional distribution that might be applied to the emerging polity” (Marks 1992: 407).

While the “Europe of the Region” slogan was perhaps always wishful political thinking, also the “Europe *with* the Regions” concept behind the multilevel governance interpretation of EU integration was not born out by reality. Although regional and local actors mobilised and engaged in European policymaking, empirical evidences showed very different mobilisation patterns among (admittedly also very heterogeneous) European regions (Marks et al. 1996;

Nielsen/Salk 1998).³ Accordingly, the notion of a “Europe with *some* Regions” emerged (Marks et al. 1996) highlighting the sharp disparity of access to European policymaking between subnational authorities.

To recall this context of the broader debate is necessary to appreciate the refinement of the subnational mobilization thesis. Subnational entities have very differential participation possibilities due to their varying institutional capacities—the argument soon went (Marks 1996). Institutional well endowed regions have more and can make more out of their access possibilities to the European decision making process and they have also more to lose than institutionally weak regions if they do not to engage in subnational-supranational exchange. Thus, the subnational institutional situation and national actor constellations were put forward as explanation for differential subnational mobilization towards European policymaking. The more competences regional authorities have the more they are affected by European regulation and therefore, the higher should be their interest in participating in the policymaking process (Marks et al. 1996).

On the question why and under which conditions, subnational actors mobilize to join EU policy-making, the debate through the subsequent years did not change much. Sure, the role of the European Commission or the Committee of the Regions, the emergence of the partnership principle (as an EU policy instrument), or (with respect to the accession countries) conditionality added new features. Recently, researchers have focused more on the precise conditions under which subnational mobilization is actually supposed to make a difference for policymaking (however long-term and diffuse their real influence might be). However, the relationship between subnational mobilization and policy outputs remains little understood (Moore 2008: 531). Some authors do not find much evidence that subnational mobilization actually has an impact on policy decisions (John 2000: 890), while others see subnational lobbying as successful efforts to seek particular outcomes (John/McAteer 1998). The inconclusiveness of results of second and third generation research in this field may well have to do with the fact that basic arguments of the subnational mobilization thesis have not been sufficiently tested empirically and thus provide only suboptimal basis for further theoretical development and consolidation.

³ About the notion of regions, regionalism and regions in Europe see critically Keating (2008; Bauer/Börzel 2010)

The fruitful theoretical debate provides a broad range of assertions and potential empirical implications. We chose three—as we think—crucial claims for systematic assessment. First, subnational mobilization as a feature of the EU multilevel level game has usually portrayed subnational and supranational actors as “brothers in arms” in an effort to “by-pass” and eventually to disempower the nation state. The expectation behind this claim is the emergence of (intensifying) interest homogeneity between subnational and supranational actors to by-pass the national level. Such interest homogeneity is difficult to measure empirically. A central implication appears to be, however, that subnational actors develop a genuine interest in a strong and active supranational level; accordingly subnational actors should be seen, for example, to prefer rather a supranational, integrationist conception of EU governance than an intergovernmental one.

Second, the enormous empirical variation in the subnational bodies’ actual eagerness to engage (sometimes more but sometimes less) in political exchange with the EU has essentially been explained with varying regional capacities and institutional constellations. The assumption was that the various subnational entities if they were only able to—i.e. if they had the resources in terms of manpower, finances and domestic institutional access—they kind of automatically would engage in intensifying interaction with the supranational level. Thus the resource base appears to determine the intensity of subnational-supranational political exchange, i.e. that subnational actors somehow automatically want to intensify subnational-supranational interaction, if their resource base is above a certain threshold. Empirically an implication is that institutionally or financially strong subnational entities should be per se interested in intense interaction with the supranational level; only the lack of resources and institutional capacities should prevent them from intensifying their engagement with the supranational level.

Third, since the political environment of the ongoing unification process would little by little favour the intensification of subnational-supranational interaction by transnational learning, interregional competition or else, subnational entities (at least the “stronger” ones) were expected to converge in their engagement with the supranational level; especially since political abilities (according to the first and the second expectation) would increasingly materialise, so would rise subnational motivations to interact vertically with the supranational level. In other words, one should observe subnational convergence, i.e. that (at least

institutionally well endowed) subnational actors are to converge with respect to their preferences about an engagement with the supranational level.

It is thus these three central claims—first that subnational actors want a supranationalist EU, second that subnational actors are only prevented by lacking resource from wanting ever more intensive political interaction with the supranational level, and third that strong subnational entities are expected to converge in their engagement preferences with the supranational level—that we consider in the remainder of this article. In order to assess the validity of these claims we want to bring to bear new empirical observations taken from a recent survey of subnational administrative elites in five European countries (more below).

3. Elite attitudes in political research

Empirically our analysis is based on attitudinal data from subnational administrative elites in five European countries. The major strength of our data lies in that it allows cross sectional comparisons. But, as with all research strategies, there are downturns. In this section we thus briefly want to reflect upon the value of the kind of data we use for our analysis.

Dispositions, beliefs and values of administrative elites are a classical field of study in political science and comparative public administration research (Aberbach/Putnam/Rockman 1981; Derlien/Mayntz 1988; Page 1999; Derlien 2003; Aberbach/Rockman 2006; Goetz 2006; Schwanke/Ebinger 2006). Administrative elites prepare, design and implement policies and political decisions. The preferences of administrative elites are thus seen as important indicators of future political choices (Le Pape/Baptiste 1999; Jeffery 2000; Roller/Sloat 2002; Mols/Haslam 2008).⁴

The relevance of subnational administrative elites' preferences depends on how one conceives the role of elite preferences in policymaking. Obviously, "deterministic" arguments cannot be made about how an individual's particular attitude will lead to a precise political choice on the part of the institution this individual works for, or to an exact political outcome. The causal chain is usually too long and it is difficult to control for all the other potentially influential

⁴ It is also worth noting that the current debate about the transformation of government into governance – especially under the auspices of European integration – stresses technocratic expertise as a crucial resource in effective policymaking, which can be taken as an additional incentive to revisit the attitudes of administrative elites.

variables. Nevertheless, institutionalists argue that “members of an institution observe and are the guardians of its constitutive principles and standards” and that their behaviour is based on a “logic of appropriateness and a sense of obligations and rights derived from an identity, role, or membership in a political community and the ethos and practices of its institutions” (Olsen 2009: 9). Thus, we can assume that there is a link between members of a bureaucracy (especially the upper layers) and the political authority for whose use the bureaucracy has been created. The individual certainly has liberty in his actions, but he is also shaped by and thus embodies the way his or her organization interprets the outside reality (Egeberg 2004).

We see our analysis as part of a long tradition of research on elite attitudes and thus, once one agrees that subnational top officials occupy roles at the hub where subnational politics and expertise meet, there is good reason to elicit what the political preferences and opinions of such an influential group are (Le Pape/Baptiste 1999; Börzel 2005; Kooiman 2003). Subnational top officials have crucial practical powers both up (preparing decision-making, suggesting ideas) and down (implementation, supervision) the line. Given their key role in virtually all stages of the subnational policy process, it is our view that systematic knowledge about subnational top officials’ preferences in regard to crucial issues of European and subnational governance can provide important factors of explanation for particular policy outcomes and that it can also be used for estimating future political choices at the subnational political level. Knowledge about subnational top officials’ political preferences can thus serve as an indicator of how these individuals routinely act, and also as a potential predictor as to how they will likely use their discretion. This makes the political preferences of subnational elites a valuable object of empirical analysis.

4. Data

The selection of our interviewees—high-ranking officials in subnational administrations—was carried out in three stages. Our aim was to ensure that interviewees from states with different institutional structures at the subnational level, i.e. from decentralized as well as from federal states, would be represented in the sample. Furthermore, we wanted to interview subnational elites in countries that have varying durations of experience with the reality of European integration. We thus decided to interview members of the subnational administrative elites in Germany, Spain, France, Poland, and Hungary.

Second, the selection of the subnational units was guided by the consideration of including interviewees with distinct regional backgrounds. In order to increase the variance of regional backgrounds of our interviewees, three factors were of major importance: the socioeconomic status of their respective regions, and their cultural and party-political distinctiveness with regard to the centre (the nation state). Hence, we ensured that both socioeconomically poor and rich regions, regions with and without a special cultural or national self-understanding, and regions with the same and with different governing parties compared to the party-political constellation governing the centre were all represented (Marks et al. 1996; Keating 2008).

Third, the individual interviewees were selected on the basis of their position in the subnational administration. In order to be included in our sample, individuals had to hold management positions—usually as a head of unit. Moreover, our heads of unit had to have policy responsibilities as opposed to only horizontal administrative or juridical duties (cf. Bauer 2008). This means that only policymaking administrators were included in the sample. Due to the varying size and the diverging responsibilities of the regions represented in our sample, the numbers of interviewees per region ranges from 1 to 13. Altogether, our sample is comprised of 347 individuals in 60 regions (see Table 1). We developed a standardized questionnaire consisting of some 100 questions. The data were collected by means of telephone interviews conducted by native speakers in the second half of 2007.

Table 1: Sample structure

Country	Regions included in sample	Interviews per region	Interviews per country	Response rate
Germany	13 Länder (of 16)	4-9	78	47%
Poland	12 Voivodships (of 16)	2-9	70	45%
Hungary	19 Megyek (of 19)	2-7	84	41%
France	10 Régions (of 26)	1-13	66	45%
Spain	6 Autonomous Communities (of 17)	5-11	49	53%
<i>n = 347</i>				

Finally, what can we say about how our sample actually looks like? The subnational administrative elite in the countries under consideration is predominantly male and middle-aged. Nearly 40 percent of the interviewees are between 46 and 55 years old; about 30 percent are over 55 years old. As for many other top positions in the public and private sector, the share of women is significantly lower than that of men. In fact, only about one third of the people represented in the sample are women. Apart from two exceptions, all interviewees have a university degree. Their disciplinary background is, however, quite heterogeneous.

Within the German Länder administrations, we observed a predominance of people trained in law and public administration, although the share of lawyers and public administration specialists in the German Länder administrations is somewhat lower than in the German federal administration (Luhmann 1973; Schwanke/Ebinger 2006). Among the Spanish and French subnational administrative elite, we also found a relative predominance of public servants trained in law or public policy. However, officials with other educational backgrounds, e.g. economics, natural sciences, and social sciences and humanities, are almost equally represented. Among the Polish and Hungarian subnational top bureaucrats, economists constitute the largest group.⁵

5. Evidence

We now present evidence from our data in order to assess the empirical validity of the three claims put forward by the subnational mobilization thesis, i.e. that subnational actors rather want supranationalist EU, that subnational actors have a genuine interest in seeking political exchange with the supranational level (unless they lack the resources to do so) and that strong subnational entities are expected to converge in their engagement preferences with the supranational level. We re-visit each of these claims in turn.

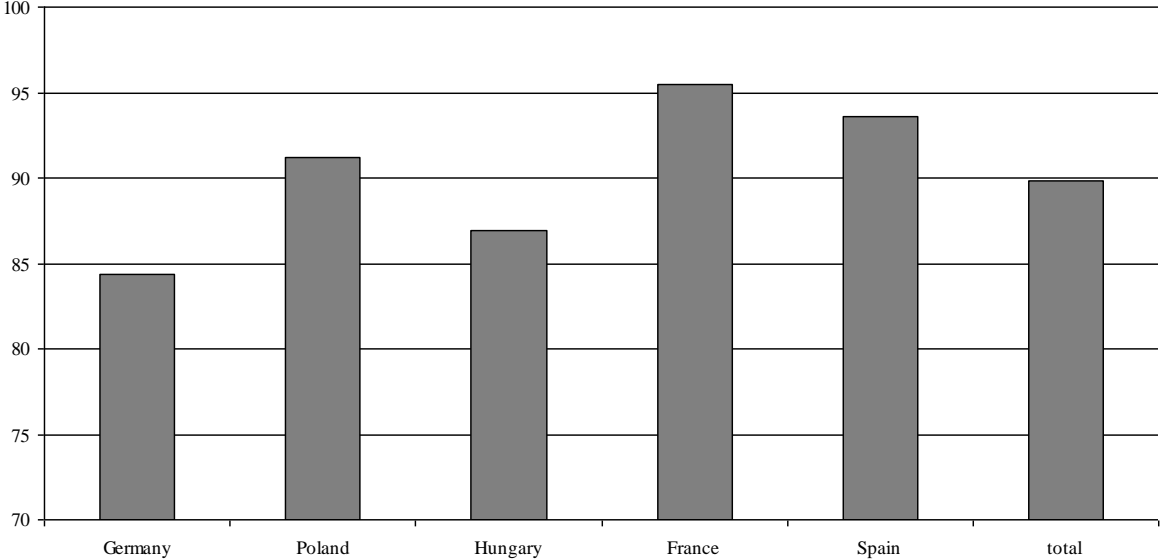
5.1. Do subnational actors have a genuine interest in a strong supranational level?

The logic of the first claim that we want to test is perhaps best summarised in the saying “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”. If we follow the arguments of the subnational mobilization thesis that the supranational institutions are on the side of the subnational authorities we should find that regional administrators are in favour of strong and active supranational institutions. A strong supranational orientation with respect to what is usually conceived of as the EU governance structure comprehends at least two aspects. First, the decision-making procedure should be rather dominated by supranational than by intergovernmental institutions. Second the supranational institutions should become stronger and more powerful vis-à-vis the nation states. Do we find in our data a clear subnational preference for a supranational conception of EU governance?

⁵ Our data reveal that as regards the questions addressed in this article, national preference trends are clearly and robustly identifiable. This encourages us to focus on the presentation and comparison of the results of the national subsamples. See for more details about the sample Bauer et al. (2010).

We measured an individual’s preference for supranationalism by asking how decisions in the Council of Ministers should be taken, by majority or unanimity. A supranationalist attitude should be reflected by support for majority voting. And, indeed, only 10 percent of all interviewees are in favour of unanimity as the general decision-making rule, while an overwhelming majority (90 percent) of our interviewees state that they prefer the majority principle over unanimity (see table 2 below). Although we find only low cross-country variation, above all the French subnational elites prefer the majority criteria as general decision rule in the Council of Ministers. Our data thus indicate that the vast majority of subnational civil servants favour a supranational over an intergovernmental architecture in the EU.

Table 2: Decision-making rule in the Council of Ministers



Note: The table reports the percentages of respondents by country favouring majority voting as the decision-making rule in the Council of Ministers.

Usually the European Commission is conceived of as the obvious supranational ally of subnational authorities. We thus asked several questions to tap the subnational administrators’ perception of Commission and other EU institutions (see table 3 below). First, we asked whether the Commission should become the government of the EU. Especially our Spanish interviewees and also the Hungarian administrators are in favour. Another question was aimed at a similar logic, i.e. to find out what our interviewees think about “restrictions” imposed on the Commission’s activity. Again, subnational administrators do want to have a Commission free of mandatory restrictions, i.e. they do not want the Commission to be turned into a kind of another intergovernmental body at EU level (“Coreper III”). It is only the Polish subsample

that indicates reservations about a strong European Commission. This particular Polish attitude is also reflected in the lower mean value for the next question about the role of the European Parliament. With regard to the statement that the European Parliament should have the same rights as the Council of Ministers during the legislative process Polish subnational elites are less supportive and prefer a more intergovernmental setting with a stronger Council of Ministers than the other administrators in general. Finally, we assessed the preferred role of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) within the European polity. In the history of European integration the ECJ played an important “integrationist” role (Weiler 1994). Our regional administrators strongly agree with the statement that the ECJ should have the final judgement concerning disputes between member states and the EU. The broad agreement reflects also the general acceptance of the European jurisdiction.

Table 3: Subnational Preferences for EU Governance: supranational versus intergovernmental

	Germany	Poland	Hungary	France	Spain	Total
The EU-Commission should be the government of the EU.	7.0	6.3	7.9	6.5	8.3	7.2
Carrying out its tasks the EU-Commission should strictly follow the instructions of the member states.	4.7	6.9	4.0	4.8	4.9	5.0
In the EU legislative process, the European Parliament should have the same rights as the Council of Ministers in which the nation-states are represented.	8.5	6.5	7.0	7.3	8.9	7.6
In case of a dispute between the EU and a member state the ECJ should render the final judgement/be the final arbiter.	7.7	8.9	9.5	8.0	9.1	8.6

Note: The table reports means by country. The scale of the possible answers ranges from 1 (strong disagreement) to 11 (strong agreement).

In general, the subnational administrative elites strongly support the supranational architecture of the EU. The Polish respondents, however, deviate from this picture in respect to the power sharing between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. At the same time we find strong cross-national approval for and trust in the European Court of Justice. Although the presented data reveals strong support for the supranational setting among the regional administrators we do not get a clear picture about the hypothesis “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”.

Literature on subnational mobilisation identified different channels for regions to represent their interests in the European policy-making process (Hooghe 1995; Hooghe/Marks 1996). Using data on the rating of the helpfulness of such channels we might see that subnational

administrators may not see their national governments as enemies but they may have a strong affinity towards EU level. Indeed, asking them how helpful the institutions are when it comes to influencing the decisions in their favour we can see (table 4) that the national institutions are rated as less efficient. The national parliaments are assessed as the least helpful institution whereas the European parliament seems to be a better partner when regions want to influence the European decisions in their favour. Comparing the mean values per country for the national government and the European Commission which reflect two powerful institutions in the European institutional setting we observe that the European Commission on average receives a better appraisal. Except the Spanish regional administrators see their national government as more helpful when it comes to influencing European level decisions. In consequence, there is an indication that the European level institutions are seen as a potential ally for regional authorities in the European multilevel governance system.

Table 4: Helpfulness of channels of interest representation

	Germany	Poland	Hungary	France	Spain	Total
National Parliament	5.1	6.1	5.8	5.2	6.2	5.6
National Government	8.3	7.9	6.1	7.9	7.7	7.5
European Commission	8.2	9.0	6.9	8.7	7.3	8.0
European Parliament	7.3	8.4	7.2	7.8	7.0	7.5

Note: The table reports the means by country. The scale of the possible answers ranges from 1 (strong rejection) to 11 (strong support).

5.2. Do subnational actors want to intensify subnational-supranational ties?

Now we turn to the question whether subnational units are per se interested in intense interaction with the supranational level. As discussed above, this expectation follows the proposition that subnational authorities and the European arena mutually benefit from closer vertical cooperation. According to the subnational mobilization argument, subnational regional entities have a general incentive to intensify subnational-supranational ties. In order to empirically analyse this claim we want to introduce the distinction between establishing institutional structures to potentially interact and policy interaction in specific areas, i.e. what we conceive of as “*polity* nexus” and “*policy* nexus” of subnational-supranational interaction. What are the patterns our data contains if this distinction is made?

Polity Nexus

We are interested in how subnational elites assess different elements of the emerging institutional set-up of the subnational-supranational exchange. Therefore we examined our interviewees' attitudes concerning the following issues: the participation of regional parliaments in the early warning system, the possibility to delegate regional ministers as national representatives in the Council of Ministers, the option of bringing before the ECJ suspected cases of breaches of the subsidiarity principle, and the usefulness of the Committee of the Regions as the formal representation of subnational interests in the political system of the EU.

Subnational top officials strongly support the idea that subnational parliaments signal to the European Commission their suspicion that a particular EU proposal violates the subsidiarity principle in the context of the "early warning system" (see table 5). Only German *bureaucrats* are less in favour than their counterparts elsewhere—perhaps unsurprisingly so if one considers that the German federalism has a strong bias in favour of vertical *executive* (and not parliamentary!) multilevel cooperation that traditionally disfavours regional parliaments.

The Maastricht Treaty already established the possibility of regional ministers participating in the Council of Ministers as representatives of their respective member states (Hooghe 1995). Use of this option is made in cases where the Council of Ministers is negotiating policies that nationally fall under regional responsibility.⁶ How do subnational elites assess this institutional linkage with the European arena? We receive somewhat lower mean values of support for this instrument than for the option to file subsidiarity complaints in the early warning procedure. The reason for such reservations might be that subnational representatives in the Council of Ministers negotiate on the basis of a "national" position. Such a national position usually already represents a compromise between central and subnational governments; therefore, regional delegates cannot unconditionally promote the position of their individual subnational authority. The pattern is similar with respect to direct complaints to the ECJ for a suspected breach of the subsidiarity principle. Spanish, French and Hungarian respondents are very much in favour to have such an option, the German subnational elite much less so.

⁶ In the subnational mobilization literature, this constitutes one of several channels of representation (Hooghe 1995; Hooghe/Marks 1996)

Table 5: Strengthening of the institutional nexus

	Germany	Poland	Hungary	France	Spain	Total
Involvement of regional parliaments in the national early warning system	7.9	8.7	9.0	8.8	8.6	8.6
Possibility to delegate a subnational representative to the Council of Ministers	6.9	8.2	8.1	8.3	8.4	7.9
Right to file an action at the ECJ if the principle of subsidiarity is endangered	5.3	7.4	8.1	8.5	8.9	7.5

Note: The table reports the means by country. The scale of the possible answers ranges from 1 (strong rejection) to 11 (strong support).

Finally, we asked about the desired future for the Committee of the Regions, which by many accounts constitutes the single most important structure of interest representation between the subnational and the European arenas (Hooghe 1995; Hooghe/Marks 1996). Therefore we might expect clear-cut preferences in favour of an institutionally strong body representing subnational authorities within the EU. We offered our interviewees four options to choose from (“abolish the CoR”, “keep it in its current form”, “strengthen the role of the institution in the policymaking process” and, finally, “make it a true third chamber”). The majority of our interviewees want indeed to give more rights to the CoR (see table 6); about one fifth of the interviewees even responded wants the CoR having equal competence to the Council of Ministers or the European Parliament (“third chamber”). However, German bureaucrats are in comparison again more critical, a significant majority wants to abolish it and one third simply wants to maintain the CoR’s status quo.

Table 6: Future role of the Committee of the Regions

	Germany	Poland	Hungary	France	Spain	Total
Abolishment	13.3	1.5	4.0	8.2	4.2	6.4
Maintain the status quo	34.7	16.4	14.7	13.1	6.3	18.1
More rights at the stage of law formulation	41.3	61.2	61.3	54.1	75.0	57.4
Equal third chamber alongside EP and Council of Ministers	10.7	20.9	20.0	24.6	14.6	18.1

Note: The table reports percentages of respondents by country.

In sum, our data suggests that subnational bureaucrats want to intensify modestly or significantly what we called the “polity nexus”, i.e. to introduce or optimise systemic structures that allow the subnational level potentially to engage in subnational-supranational political exchange.

Policy Nexus

What we call “policy nexus” is concerned with the subnational actors’ preferences to participate in multilevel policymaking across particular policy areas.⁷ From our point of view this aspect is very relevant as it reflects subnational attitudes towards the vertical dimension of the EU multilevel governance system. There are two important aspects to consider when regional authorities want to share policy responsibility in particular areas together with the supranational level. First, the question in which policy areas do subnational bureaucrats want to see their “regions” involved; second, the question when do they want to cooperate with the supranational level in these policy areas. It has been suggested that European regions may benefit politically from joined cooperation between subnational and supranational level in particular policy areas (Mazey 1994). Despite the debate about the policy allocation in the EU (Alesina/Angeloni/Schuknecht 2001; Breuss 2003), this aspect has not yet been studied systematically from a subnational vantage point.

First, we thus asked subnational top bureaucrats whether or not regional authorities should be involved in policymaking across a range of twelve specific policy areas (table 12 in the appendix). In general, the interviewees showed only a moderate desire for subnational policy participation: on average, they only want subnational competences in about four policy areas. However, national differences become evident when the national mean values are compared. Whereas Hungarian respondents are satisfied with few competences (1.6), the Spanish demand extensive competences in about eight out of twelve policy areas. The Polish (4.8), French (4.3) and German (3.4) subnational elites desire only modest codetermination rights across policy areas in the EU multilevel system.

Second, we asked subnational elites to tell us in which policy areas they want to cooperate with the supranational level. Overall, a constellation where policymaking is shared vertically across political levels and involves subnational and European actors is preferred in about one policy of twelve. In other words, the subnational preference for vertical cooperation in policymaking involving the supranational level turns out to be even lower than the subnational preference for policy competences as such. In short, on the basis of this data the subnational level should neither be seen as “by default” expansive in terms of desired policy

⁷ Aware of the fact that multilevel governance is a complex concept comprising aspects of policy competences and also of varying modes of coordination and interaction (Benz 2007; Benz/Zimmer 2008; Tömmel 2008), we focus on the former.

involvement nor overly sympathetic to supranational involvement where subnational policy competences are deemed appropriate. Both results are going down badly with present transformative conception of the dynamism of the emerging multilevel governance order in Europe.

There are also national patterns (cf. table 7). German and Polish subnational administrators favour a subnational-supranational cooperation in about one policy whereas Hungarian bureaucrats do not want to have any policy competences together with the EU level. With a mean value of about two policies French and Spanish subnational administrators are relatively open for vertical interaction in policymaking together with the EU.

Table 7: Subnational-supranational cooperation in twelve policies

Country	Mean	SD	N
Germany	1.1	1.8	76
Poland	0.9	1.3	65
Hungary	0	0.2	83
France	2.4	2.2	65
Spain	2.2	2	49
Total	1.3	1.8	338

Note: The table reports in how many of the twelve policies under study the respondents favour competences for the EU and the regional level; reported are national mean values, standard deviation (SD) and number of respondents (N) per country.

Scrutinising these preferences in more detail we identify three policies in which a stronger nexus between regions and the EU is supported. Research & technology, business development & structural policy and environmental protection (table 8). Moreover, in comparison to the general participation of subnational authorities in these policy areas (see table 13 in the appendix), the preferences for a supranational-subnational nexus are strong. Around half of respondents favouring subnational competences in these policy areas want the EU as a partner. These policies can be categorised as issues of “low politics”. In contrast, with regard to policies primarily falling under the sovereignty of the nation state, so called “high politics”, very few subnational administrators favour the involvement of regional authorities. Besides the policy-variation the results in table 8 also indicate that preferences for EU and regional cooperation in policy-making vary cross-nationally. Around one third of the German and Polish, and half of the French respondents, regards shared responsibilities as being most useful in business development & structural policy. Spanish respondents, however, prioritize subnational-supranational cooperation in research & technology, tourism and environmental protection.

Table 8: Preferences for Regions and the EU to hold responsibility for a range of policies

	Policy	Total	Germany	Poland	Hungary	France	Spain
Low politics	tourism	12.3	7.1	0	0	18.5	48.0
	culture & schools system	8.9	4.0	4.7	0	35.4	2.0
	business development & structural policy	22.8	29.7	28.8	0	50.8	6.0
	health & consumer protection	8.9	12.9	6.2	2.6	19.7	2.0
	environmental protection	23.3	19.7	18.5	1.2	46.2	42.0
	research & technology	25.3	20.0	17.7	0	36.9	69.4
	agriculture	14.5	12.3	12.3	0	19.7	38.8
	social policy	3.6	4.0	1.6	0	9.4	4.1
High politics	asylum & immigration	2.4	1.3	1.6	0	4.8	6.0
	foreign & defence policy	0.3	1.3	0	0	0	0
	monetary policy	4.1	1.3	0	0	0	26.5
	border police & border protection	0.6	1.3	0	0	0	2.0

Note: The table reports percentages of respondents being in favour of competence allocations in different policies in which regions and the EU hold responsibilities.

In sum, subnational top-bureaucrats favour the intensification of subnational-supranational political exchange—to some degree. Moreover, far from wanting to expand policy involvement in all areas, *they carefully select the policy areas in which they wish to see allocation of increased subnational competences*. The areas where the subnational elite favour competences are mainly policies that can be characterised as “low politics”. Clearly, the subnational top bureaucrats’ desires for a supranational-subnational policy nexus are very modest. Nevertheless, in some policy areas a relatively high proportion of respondents favouring regional participation prefer a constellation that fosters a stronger exchange between the supranational and subnational governmental levels.

5.3. Are there signs of convergence?

The third expectation of the subnational mobilisation theory concerns convergence among comparable groups or categories of subnational entities. Obviously our survey data does not allow assessing convergence as growing similarity over time. We can however look for evidence for similar preference patterns as a substitute. According to the subnational mobilisation hypothesis the effects of European integration on the regional entities will vary in dependence upon the differential resources (institutional, financial) individual regions have at their disposal (Hooghe 1995: 192). More resources mean greater probability of eagerness to engage in vertical political exchange. Furthermore the hypothesis that institutional well

embedded regions should have a higher incentive to engage with the European level implies that subnational administrators of these regions should converge in their attitudes. As our sample includes resourceful and very modest subnational entities as well as institutionally strong and weak regions we should expect respective variation in the attitudes of the administrative elites between these groups of regions. We scrutinise similarity and variation between rich and poor regions as well as institutionally strong and weaker entities in order to assess whether the groups converge in their preferences.

Taking the answer patterns about European governance, the subnational-supranational polity and policy nexus, one can argue that—despite different degrees of subnational autonomy—our sample of regions’ administrators show striking similarities in their preferences. Looking at the descriptive data, subnational administrators are in favour of strong supranational institutions and have a positive attitude towards subnational-supranational interaction in general. At that level of generality, agreement does however not come as a big surprise.

The picture changes if one engages in a more detailed analysis. Distinguishing between poorer and richer regions and regions with a gross domestic product lower or higher than the EU average with respect to the expressed attitudes about the polity nexus, we observe interesting results. *We find that the mean values of “poorer” regions are higher than the means of the socio-economic richer entities (table 9).* Furthermore, a Kruskal-Wallis test for group differences shows that these differences are significant for the early warning system and the right to file an action at the ECJ. *This indicates that on average subnational elites from socio-economic well developed regions are less in favour of a strong integration of regional authorities in the institutional setting of the EU than their poorer counterparts.*

Table 9: Differences between resource rich and poor regions

Subnational authorities with...		Integration of regional parliaments in national early warning system	Possibility to delegate a subnational representative to the Council of Ministers	Right to file an action at the ECJ if the principle of subsidiarity is endangered
GDP < EU-Average	mean	8.9	8.1	7.8
	sd	2.4	2.9	3.1
	n	233	232	232
GDP > EU-Average	mean	8.1	7.6	7
	sd	2.5	3.1	3.4
	n	103	98	102
Kruskal-Wallis test		significant	not significant	significant

Note: The table reports the average number of policies in which the respondents favour competences for regions and the EU differentiated between socio-economically strong and weak regions, that is between regions with a gross domestic product higher, respectively lower, than the European average. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis

tests show that the group differences are significant for the first and the last item. Reported are group mean values, standard deviation (sd) and number of respondents (n) for each group.

To find implications of the factor “institutional strength” we again divided our sample in two groups; the first characterized by a relative low degree (France, Hungary and Poland) and the second by a relative high degree of regional autonomy (Germany, Spain).⁸ *Again, it is the institutionally poor equipped regions that have higher mean values indicating preferences for a greater political exchange with the European level (see table 10).* Additionally, the result of the Kruskal-Wallis test points to significant group differences.

Table 10: Differences between institutionally strong and weak regions in regard to the institutional nexus

Subnational authorities with...		Integration of regional parliaments in national early warning system	Possibility to delegate a subnational representative to the Council of Ministers	Right to file an action at the ECJ if the principle of subsidiarity is endangered
low autonomy	mean	8.9	8.2	8.0
	sd	2.4	2.8	3.0
	n	210	209	209
high autonomy	mean	8.2	7.5	6.7
	sd	2.5	3.1	3.3
	n	126	121	125
Kruskal-Wallis test		significant	significant	significant

Note: The table reports the average number of policies in which the respondents favour competences for regions and the EU differentiated between institutionally strong and weak regions. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis tests show that the group differences are significant for all items. Reported are group mean values, standard deviation (sd) and number of respondents (n) for each group. Note that all group differences are significant.

With respect to what we called the policy nexus we do find significant group differences (table 11). However, in respect to the relative socio-economic situation the picture turns out to be quite different than above: *Administrators from socio-economic strong regions are more in favour for cooperation with the EU level across various policy areas.* Though the standard deviation within the group of socio-economic strong regions is higher, the elites prefer on average in about two policies a constellation bringing together the European and regional level. Comparing the groups of regions with low and high autonomy we observe a similar picture than above. Although on a relatively low level administrators from institutionally strong entities prefer again a more intense interaction with the supranational institutions based on policy competences compared to their weaker counterparts.

⁸ This classification is based on the regional scores of the regional authority index by Hooghe, Marks and Schakel (2010). Regions with a lower value than 10 are classified as regions with low authority.

Table 11: Group differences for subnational-supranational interaction in twelve policies

	Subnational authorities with...			
	GDP < EU-Average	GDP > EU-Average	low autonomy	high autonomy
mean	1.0	1.8	1.0	1.6
sd	1.5	2.2	1.7	2.0
n	233	105	213	125
	Kruskal-Wallis test is significant		Kruskal-Wallis test is significant	

Note: The table reports the average number of policies in which the respondents favour competences for regions and the EU differentiated between socio-economically strong and weak regions as well as institutionally strong and weak authorities. A Kruskal-Wallis test shows that the group differences are significant. Reported are group mean values, standard deviation (sd) and number of respondents (n) for each group.

In sum, our data suggests that it is administrators from institutionally weaker regions and from regions that are economically poorer than the EU average who are in favour of consolidating subnational-supranational institutional interaction (polity nexus). By contrast, with respect to cooperation in particular policy areas, it is the bureaucrats from regions with a GDP above EU-average who are in favour of involving the EU in areas where they have or seek policy competences (policy nexus). These results do not sit well with the subnational mobilization theory where in particular with view to institutional transformation along vertical dimension of multilevel governance, the institutionally “stronger” regions were expected to take the lead.

6. Conclusion

Taking subnational administrators’ attitudes as empirical basis this article reviewed crucial claims put forward by the subnational mobilization theory which is itself closely related to our current conceptualisation of multilevel governance in Europe. Revisiting subnational mobilisation claims almost two decades after this theory has been developed is appropriate because it is based on expectations of transition and transformation, i.e. patterns of interaction are supposed to increase as integration intensifies. Three central implications of subnational mobilization theory have been analysed on the basis of subnational elite survey data: that subnational actors want a supranationalist EU, that subnational actors want to intensify subnational-supranational exchange and that in particular institutionally strong subnational entities are expected to converge in their preferences about interaction with the supranational level.

In general, the regional administrative elites are indeed in favour of a supranational EU, i.e. of strong and independent supranational institutions. In order to have a powerful “brother in

arms” to emancipate from national tutelage, this is precisely what should be expected on the basis of subnational mobilisation theory. The picture gets however more diverse when preferences for subnational-supranational political exchange are analysed. We distinguished between polity- and policy-centred exchange and found that the support for structural vertical interconnections which open a potential to interact are much more broadly supported than are wishes to cooperate with the EU in particular and concrete policy areas. With the exception of Germany—where reservations are palpable—European subnational administrators are clearly in favour of strengthening the institutional channels for political exchange with the EU (access to the Court of Justice to defend subsidiarity, integration of regional parliaments in the early warning system, strengthening of the CoR, etc.). They are, however, much less keen on working jointly with the supranational level in policy-making.

The obvious question, then, is why would subnational elites show more enthusiasm for intensifying the institutional nexus, which simply constitutes channels for potentially joining in EU decision-making, and at the same time remain so reserved when it comes to indicating where they see substantial need for cooperation across governmental levels in specific policy areas? We tentatively conclude that subnational elite preferences in this respect indicate that there is little hope (or fear) of a transformative governance dynamic fuelled by the expansive agendas of subnational levels; subnational elites’ yardstick for competence allocation appears to be the status quo of their respective national systems and not a vision of an emerging European multilevel system in which their level could expand its authority.

This view is supported by the finding that instead of wishing to extend the policy nexus, subnational elites appear more eager to upgrade the institutional nexus. After all, the institutional nexus is basically a defensive tool, good for alerting to and, if possible, inhibiting threatening EU decisions. At the same time, it does not entail obligations in terms of positive subnational action. Intensifying the policy nexus and entering into the challenges of multilevel policy-making would require more proactive behaviour (and probably a broader resource base than most of the subnational authorities in our sample have at their disposal). Our data thus suggests that subnational elites think that there are limits to what their subnational authorities should do and where they should engage in intensifying the subnational-supranational nexus in multilevel policy-making. Such self-restriction is of great interest – not only to those expecting huge transformative repercussions from multilevel policy-making also at the subnational level.

Finally, analysing the preferences for intensifying the polity- and the policy-nexus from a convergence perspective, we observe that it is the financially and institutionally weak “camp” that is more eager to support polity-related interaction structures while the “camp” of institutional stronger and economically better off regions in the eyes of their administrators do have some hesitation. By contrast, with respect to subnational-supranational interaction in concrete policy areas it is the better off regions whose bureaucrats support relatively more cooperation with the EU. However, the word “relative” is important here, because generally speaking the eagerness to cooperate vertically with the EU in policymaking is—as we saw—much less developed than the support for institutional interaction.

What does this mean for the subnational mobilisation part of multilevel governance theorising? We would like to put the following statements to discussion.

1. European governance as supranational governance is supported regardless to what is the presumable benefit for subnational entities in terms of nurture a potential brother in arms to help with emancipation from national paternalism.
2. If we take regional bureaucrats attitudes as cues for regions as political entities, regions appear rather conservative, especially poor regions do not want neither for the EU nor for themselves great involvement in various policy areas. The transformative dynamic of sub-supranational exchange thus appears in this sense limited.
3. Socio-economic and institutional characteristics appear to determine cooperation desires. However institutionally and economically poorer regions rather focus polity issues, strong regions policy issues. Subnational mobilization theory seems not to be able to explain that.

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8. Appendix

Table 12: The twelve policies under study

tourism	environmental protection	asylum & immigration
culture & schools system	research & technology	foreign & defence policy
business development & structural policy	agriculture	monetary policy
health & consumer protection	social policy	border police & border protection

Table 13: Preferences for regional policy competences

Policy	Percentage of respondents preferring subnational participation
tourism	71.4
culture & schools system	67.4
business development & structural policy	49.3
health & consumer protection	42.7
environmental protection	42.6
research & technology	39.9
agriculture	29.1
social policy	22.1
asylum & immigration	18.9
foreign & defence policy	15.3
monetary policy	12.1
border police & border protection	2.1

Note: The table reports the percentages of respondents favouring participation the subnational levels in the respective policy areas.