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RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Seamless imaginaries, territorialized realities: the regional politics of corridor governance in Southern Africa

Tim Zajontz  <sup>a,b</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Corridors are central to contemporary processes of spatial reordering. On the African continent, they feature prominently in development planning at national, regional and continental scales. This article sheds light on the regional politics and supranational governance of cross-border corridors, aspects that have remained underrepresented in the burgeoning literature on corridors. Combining theoretical insights from the New Regionalism Approach and critical political geography and focusing on the 'corridor agenda' pursued by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the article deconstructs dominant conceptions of corridors as archetypal spaces of flow and advances the argument that the spatial production and governance of cross-border corridors are contingent upon the compatibility of scalar and territorial articulations of state space. In the case of the Walvis Bay–Ndola–Lubumbashi Development Corridor, the incompatibility of Namibia's decidedly regional 'gateway strategy' and Zambia's (sub)national 'pothole politics' has yielded a connectivity patchwork. Efforts to institutionalize supranational corridor governance have been obstructed by state territoriality aimed at retaining political control over corridor space at the national scale. While commonly represented as spatial panaceas for attaining neoliberal meta-goals of global connectivity and seamless territorial integration, (trans)regional corridors are politically contested spaces that engender dialectical processes of de- and reterritorialization at various scales.

## KEYWORDS

regional corridor governance; corridor space; state spatial strategies; Southern African Development Community (SADC); Namibia; Zambia

**HISTORY** Received 6 May 2021; in revised form 9 June 2022

## 1. INTRODUCTION

World orders are always spatial orders, which are marked by historically specific combinations of spatial formats (Marung & Middell, 2019). In the context of intensifying world market integration under neoliberal globalization, corridors have become essential spatial formats to facilitate the movement of people, goods and information and to foster regional and global connectivities. Corridor projects feature prominently in many national and regional development plans as well as in

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transregional connectivity initiatives, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative and the European Union's Global Gateway. Cross-border and (trans)regional corridors are integral to the global 'regime of infrastructure-led development' which is aimed at 'getting the territory right' by producing 'functional transnational territories that can be "plugged in" to global networks of production and trade' (Schindler & Miguel Kanai, 2021, p. 40). Consequently, Mayer and Zhang (2021, p. 988) assert that '[t]oday, the rise of corridors is at the heart of a process of spatial restructuring and geographical reimagining', a trend the authors term 'corridorization'.

Corridorization is certainly at the heart of contemporary spatial reordering in Africa (Nugent & Lamarque, 2022). While corridors have in previous epochs shaped Africa's (often externally enforced) spatial orders, transport, development and growth corridors have become important components of neoliberal space-making on the continent from the 1990s onwards (Müller-Mahn, 2020; Söderbaum & Taylor, 2003). Linking the continent's 16 landlocked states as well as inland sites of extraction, production and consumption with seaports and overseas markets is now deemed essential for the continent's industrialization (Lesutis, 2020). The return of large-scale infrastructure onto the development agenda has spawned new corridor megaprojects that are expected to 'bring development' to historically marginalized territories as well as to facilitate regional integration (Aalders et al., 2021; Mosley & Watson, 2016; Nugent, 2018). In line with the more recent 'agricultural turn' in development planning, a new generation of agricultural growth corridors are now also promoted by governments, development agencies and the private sector as 'territorial tools for agro-industry development' (Gálvez Nogales & Webber, 2017) destined to integrate African fertile lands into global value chains (Chome et al., 2020; Tups & Dannenberg, 2021).

Worldwide, the political 'buy-in' into corridor-based development has been remarkable, as '[s]eemingly countless national and provincial governments hope that corridors that link peripheral, resource-abundant territories to global markets will trigger regional development' (Scholvin, 2021, p. 442). Such 'hopes' usually manifest in 'politics of aspiration' in which infrastructural megaprojects, like corridors, serve as spatial imaginaries that project prosperous futures in public debates and political negotiations (Müller-Mahn et al., 2021, p. 1071; Tups & Dannenberg, 2021). Müller-Mahn (2020, p. 156) argues that African development corridors signify the ultimate "dreamscapes of modernity" and showcases of "future-making". However, future-oriented imaginaries of corridors as hyper-modern and seamless spaces of flow that herald inclusive development clash with present-day realities along Africa's corridors.

A growing body of literature problematizes social, economic and environmental repercussions of large-scale corridor projects, often implemented in a top-down manner, for communities and habitats along Africa's corridors. Such repercussions include displacement effects, environmental degradation, land-grabbing, discriminatory or exclusionary mobilities and limited forward and backward linkages into local (and informal) economies (Enns, 2018; Scholvin, 2021). Corridor-based development has been criticized for fostering capitalist expansionism and corresponding extractivist and financialized modes of accumulation by opening-up 'frontier economies' to foreign interests (Hartmann et al., 2021; Lesutis, 2020; Mosley & Watson, 2016; Tups & Dannenberg, 2021) as well as for reinstating colonial patterns of uneven development and spatial inequalities (Aalders, 2021; Enns & Bersaglio, 2020; Kimari & Ernstson, 2020; Zajontz, 2022a). Others have drawn attention to ecologically damaging effects of corridors that cut across protected areas (Sloan et al., 2017). Contrary to apolitical conceptions that prevail in much of the grey literature and represent corridors as ideal-typical spaces of flow that herald inclusive growth, corridors are spaces of contestation. Corridor-based development brings forth winners and losers and engenders social, political, ethnic and ecological tensions (Aalders et al., 2021; Chome et al., 2020).

This article shares the view that corridorization is a highly political and contested process. Yet, it sheds light on aspects of Africa's corridor agenda that have received little scholarly attention in the recent research wave on corridors, namely the regional politics and supranational governance of cross-border corridors. The bulk of research has focused on the national scale and

offered valuable insights as to how central governments, usually in alliance with (foreign) capital, have engaged in corridor projects to reorganize state territory with the declared goal of spurring national development and growth, thereby causing contradictions and contestation. How such national space-making interrelates with 'corridor politics' at the supranational scale has, however, remained markedly under-researched (for exceptions, see Lamarque, 2022; Nugent, 2022). Yet, Chome et al. (2020, p. 302; emphasis added) are right in arguing that '[m]ost corridors envisage trans-national connections, and so planning and implementation processes become embroiled in *regional* politics, sometimes upsetting the visions of economic integration and regional development'.

Analysing current corridorization through regionalist lenses can add significant value, as previous, pioneering research on corridors and (micro)regionalisms emanating from the New Regionalism(s) Approach (NRA) has demonstrated (Söderbaum & Taylor, 2003, 2010). This research tradition has challenged 'methodological nationalism' and shed light on formal and informal processes that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state (Söderbaum, 2016, p. 5). Importantly, the NRA has problematized discrepancies between highly ambitious official regional integration agendas and regional 'realities' on the ground (Söderbaum, 2004; Taylor, 2011). The development and governance of cross-border corridors is a concrete case in point, as regional corridor-based development has faced a wide implementation gap. As Müller-Mahn (2020, p. 158) attests, although '[a]t first sight, the mushrooming of development corridors in Africa and other continents looks like an impressive success story of regional planning and integration', the adopted 'model for corridor-based regional development initiatives all over Africa does not necessarily prove that it has really been successful'.

This assessment certainly applies to Southern Africa, a region whose 'corridor agenda' is subjected to scrutiny in this article. In the light of rapid economic liberalization of the 1990s, the improvement of cross-border transport routes was considered pivotal both for regional integration within the newly established Southern African Development Community (SADC) and for coupling the region with the global economy. Taking inspiration from South Africa's spatial development initiatives (SDIs), which included the cross-border Maputo Development Corridor, SADC identified regional SDIs, including more than a dozen corridors (Müller-Mahn, 2020; Söderbaum & Taylor, 2003). The SADC Secretariat, with support from institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the European Union and other Western donors, developed an ambitious corridor agenda which became a key component of the neoliberal, outward-oriented model of open regionalism that SADC has embraced since the 1990s (Zajontz & Leysens, 2015). The goal was to attract foreign investment and to 'unlock inherent economic potential in specific spatial locations in southern Africa' (Taylor, 2003, p. 317).

SADC's Protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology of 1996 called for 'the integration of infrastructure development along identified regional development corridors' (SADC, 1996, Art. 3.3, para. 3(g)) and the 2012 Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan (RIDMP) reiterated 'a need to develop appropriate, integrated, safe, secure and efficient infrastructure capacity along strategic transport and development corridors with regards to road and railway networks' (SADC, 2012, p. 4). As Söderbaum and Taylor (2010, p. 45) attest, 'development corridors have emerged as the most distinct form of policy-driven micro-regionalism in eastern and southern Africa'. While SADC governments have enthusiastically joined in hegemonic narratives of connectivity and hyper-modern futures associated with corridor-based development, their readiness to use resources towards *regional* infrastructure projects and to relinquish authority to supranational corridor management institutions (CMIs) has remained limited, which has severely compromised SADC's corridor agenda.

This article merges insights from the NRA with concepts from critical political geography to unearth competing territorial and scalar logics that are involved in the development and governance of cross-border corridors in Southern Africa. Drawing on Brenner et al.'s (2003, p. 6)

‘integral’ conception of ‘state space’, which posits that state institutions are strategically mobilized in myriad territorial, place-related, scalar and networked ways with the aim of regulating or reorganizing social and economic life, it is argued that the production of regional ‘corridor space’ ultimately depends on the complementarity of state spatial strategies. Where state territoriality obstructs infrastructural connectivity along corridors and stands in the way of supranational corridor management, corridors remain ‘a form of regionalism that hangs on the vagaries of national politics’ (Nugent & Lamarque, 2022, p. 25). Cross-border and regional corridors thus prove to be relevant spaces of governance to concretize research on the ‘interesting question about how the logics of territorialization and flows are combined in specific cases of regionalization and how, if at all, these sometimes complementary, sometimes antagonistic logics can be governed’ (Jessop, 2019, p. 71).

The article proceeds in three steps. First, the ideal-typical conception of corridors as spaces of flow is challenged by the idea that corridors engender potentially contradictory processes of de- and reterritorialization at various scales. The first section advances the argument that the production and governance of cross-border corridor space depends on compatible territorial and scalar articulations of state spatial strategies. Two major challenges to SADC’s corridor agenda are identified: the tendency among member states to prioritize national over regional infrastructure development and inadequate supranational corridor governance. These two phenomena are subsequently analysed in a case study of the Walvis Bay–Ndola–Lubumbashi Development Corridor (WBNLDC) which draws on primary textual data, such as official documents and reports, as well as on interviews with practitioners and officials. Second, the paper outlines Namibia’s ‘gateway strategy’ with its decidedly regional scalar orientation and focus on cross-border corridors. Namibia’s efforts to modernize corridor infrastructure along the Namibian stretch of the WBNLDC are documented. Yet, it is shown that ‘seamlessness’ along the WBNLDC has been curtailed by Zambian state spatial (non-)interventions and ‘pothole politics’. Third, the paper reveals different levels of commitment on the part of the Namibian and Zambian governments to institutionalize the governance of the WBNLDC at the supranational scale.

## 2. CORRIDOR SPACE, STATE SPATIAL STRATEGIES, AND THE POLITICS OF TERRITORY AND SCALE

Spatial planners and policymakers commonly represent corridors as ideal spaces of flow which transcend territorial boundaries and/or terrestrial obstacles to the free movement of goods, information and people, and catalyse economic development in regions they traverse. Enns (2018, p. 106) underlines that Africa’s ‘corridor agenda has been constructed on the imaginary of a seamless Africa, as new corridors are promised to enable flows of capital, commodities and people to circulate with ease across space and between scales’. The predominant model of corridor-based development furthermore presumes a linear progression from transport corridor via logistics, trade and economic corridors into integrated growth corridors. To facilitate this staged progression, corridor development is accompanied by outward-oriented economic policies aimed at establishing investment-friendly regulatory and macro-economic environments to attract foreign direct investment along corridors. A briefing published by the African Development Bank (AfDB) exemplifies the hegemonic conception of corridors:

The economic corridor approach looks at regional transport routes not only as a means of transporting goods and services or as a gateway for land-locked countries, but also as a tool for stimulating social and economic development in the areas surrounding the route. ... Political boundaries thus cease to be economic boundaries and spatial-economic *regional* planning takes the lead.

(Mulenga, 2013, p. 2; emphasis added)



Such economistic representations of corridors reveal a reductionist spatial ontology that is biased towards the deterritorializing logic of flows and fails to account for the complex spatiality of corridors. Indeed, the term ‘corridor’ stems from Latin *currere* which translates into ‘to run’ or ‘to move quickly’. Holding spatial properties that link distant locales, corridors are associated with connectivity and the mobility of people, services and goods. Their connectivity function springs from terrestrial conditions, human-made connective infrastructure or, commonly, a combination of the two. Notwithstanding these connective spatial properties of corridors, the production of ‘corridor space’ does not do away with, but is instead co-determined by, territoriality, that is, ‘the use of territory for political, social and economic ends’ (Agnew, 2005, p. 441).

This article contends that the ‘territorial rescaling’ (Mayer & Zhang, 2021, p. 981), which is engendered by corridorization, has little to do with the eventual transcendence of state territoriality that economistic conceptions of corridors seem to presume. Instead, the spatial production of regional corridors is characterized by dialectical processes of de- and reterritorialization at various scales. Engel et al. (2017) rightly underline that:

[r]egional actors respond to processes of deterritorialization (‘flows’) of national and regional regimes of territorialization by reterritorializing these spatialities. ... Actors – such as states – are making contingent, case-specific choices with regard to the scale or spatiality that they utilize to achieve certain purposes. (p. 5)

The role of state actors as important ‘wardens of political territoriality’ is therefore key in the production of regional ‘corridor space’. The growing influx of foreign capital in large-scale infrastructure and connectivity projects has boosted African states’ ‘infrastructural power’, the ‘power of the state to penetrate and centrally co-ordinate the activities of civil society’ (Mann, 1984, p. 188). Despite elaborate regional and continental infrastructure planning and programming, infrastructural power has remained concentrated in the hands of central governments which employ it to consolidate their political authority, particularly in those national political arenas where ruling classes lack hegemony (in the Gramscian sense) (Taylor, 2011). As Chome et al. (2020, p. 300) underline, ‘[c]orridors are spaces of social and political control, rooted in complex ethnic and political histories’. Corridor projects have thus resulted in reterritorialization at the national and subnational scales by extending the reach and control of the state and reinforcing state territoriality, a key source of state power (Lesutis, 2020, p. 603; see also Lefebvre, 2009, p. 224).

At the same time, political elites strategically engage at the supranational scale to bolster their domestic political power in what Söderbaum (2004) calls ‘sovereignty-boosting regional governance’. The latter entails the media-effective participation in regional summitry and official pledges to ambitious regional integration agendas. Meanwhile, the implementation of protocols and supranational regulatory harmonization often fail to materialize, because the very same political elites jealously guard against actual transfers of political authority to the regional or continental scales. Nugent and Lamarque (2022) observe this paradox in the infrastructure sector where African governments, while subscribing to numerous regional and continental infrastructure and corridor development initiatives:

advance their own preferences whilst often paying lip-service to continental and regional plans. National governments organize their bureaucratic functions according to a very particular sense of scale. The presidency and core ministries in the capital city decide on what the national priorities are, which opens up a field of potential contestation. (p. 15)

Hence, corridor infrastructure with a regional spatial reach competes with infrastructure priorities at the national and subnational scales. Lisinge (2020, p. 430) underlines that ‘politicians tend to prefer national [over] ... regional projects, and short term rather than long-term projects so as to take credit for the success of projects’. As the below case study of the WBNLDC reveals, infrastructure development along particular cross-border corridors might be a national priority for some, though not for other corridor states.

Using their infrastructural power, state actors can either facilitate or obstruct the development and supranational governance of regional corridors, depending on the territorial and scalar articulations of particular ‘state spatial strategies’, that is, initiatives that mobilize state institutions to influence the geographies of social and economic relations and to regulate the circuit of capital (Brenner, 2004, p. 93; see also Jessop, 1990, pp. 260–261). For a particular cross-border corridor to progress from a transport corridor to a fully integrated economic space, state spatial strategies of corridor states must align, infrastructure projects must complement each other and regulatory regimes must be harmonized. The governance of ‘corridor space’ that extends across several sovereign state territories therefore calls for the ‘rescaling [of] territorial administrative practices’ (Mayer & Zhang, 2021, p. 981) and the transfer of certain bureaucratic authority to the supranational scale. As Kanai (2016, p. 161) explains, for the planning and management of cross-border infrastructure ‘retooling of the territorial state apparatus and its scalar arrangements is essential, along with the production of new scales of socio-economic regulation’. Yet, state actors are not always ready to ‘rescale’ corridor governance. A report commissioned by the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) identified, *inter alia*, the following challenges in establishing cross-border corridors: ‘negotiations, adoption and ratification of corridor agreements; funding the construction/rehabilitation of existing gaps in infrastructure; and establishment of the Corridor Management Institutions’ (UN-OHRLLS, 2020, p. 7).

As early as 1996, SADC’s Transport Protocol called for the ‘establishment of cross-border multi-modal Corridor Planning Committees comprising of public and private sector stakeholders in the Member States or States whose territory or territories are traversed by such corridors’ (SADC, 1996, Art. 3.5, para. 3). The 2003 Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan set the goal of having functional corridor planning committees for all 18 officially recognized corridors by 2005 (SADC, 2003, p. 128). In late 2020, there were however only four formal CMI: the Dar es Salaam Corridor Committee, the Trans Kalahari Corridor Committee, the Maputo Corridor Logistics Initiative and the WBNLDC, as will be discussed below (Harmon, 2019, p. 41). A memorandum of understanding (MoU) among member states of the North–South Corridor awaited ratification by South Africa at the time of writing. Legal instruments are also in place in the case of the Beira, Mtwara, Nacala and Lobito corridors, but CMIs have not been set up (Harmon, 2019, p. 41; interview with a senior SADC official, 7 November 2020). Supranational corridor governance in the SADC has remained arduous work in progress, to which this article will return in the last section. It now turns towards the incompatibility of Namibian and Zambian state spatial strategies in developing infrastructure along the WBNLDC.

### 3. ‘GETTING THE CORRIDOR RIGHT?’ SELECTIVE CONNECTIVITY ALONG THE WALVIS BAY–NDOLA–LUBUMBASHI CORRIDOR

The state of corridor infrastructure is a good indicator for the extent to which spatial strategies, priorities and practices of state actors align to produce trans-territorial connectivity. Limited commitment to regional infrastructure projects on the part of member states has severely curtailed SADC’s corridor agenda. Woolfrey and Verhaeghe (2017, p. 12) find that ‘SADC member states interests in corridors are not so clearly defined in practice’. One interviewee argued that



infrastructure deficits along the region's corridors result from a lack of coordination and political will among national governments and emphasized the need for 'a stronger institution with involvement of all the beneficiary member states that are participating in the design and construction of such infrastructure' (interview with a senior SADC official, 7 November 2020). An assessment of the first phase of SADC's RIDMP underlines the misalignment of regional and national priorities in the infrastructure sector, stating that 'national governments have a tendency to look inwards at their national priorities resulting in corridor projects being treated as national projects' (Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), 2019, p. 59). Consequently, the study identifies a 'shift in priority by Member States in terms of infrastructure projects that they are implementing' – from regional to national projects, with the former usually not being factored into national budgets (SARDC, 2019, p. vii).

The WBNLDC offers a critical case to investigate the interplay between state spatial strategies and SADC's regional corridor agenda, the reason being that the two countries with the longest corridor segments, Namibia and Zambia, have pursued divergent politico-spatial objectives in general and with regard to the WBNLDC in particular. This section first outlines Namibia's 'gateway strategy' and its decidedly regional scalar articulation, before discussing infrastructure developments along the Namibian stretch of the WBNLDC. Lastly, it is shown how Zambian state spatial (non-)interventions have curtailed the production of seamless corridor space.

### 3.1. Namibia's 'gateway strategy'

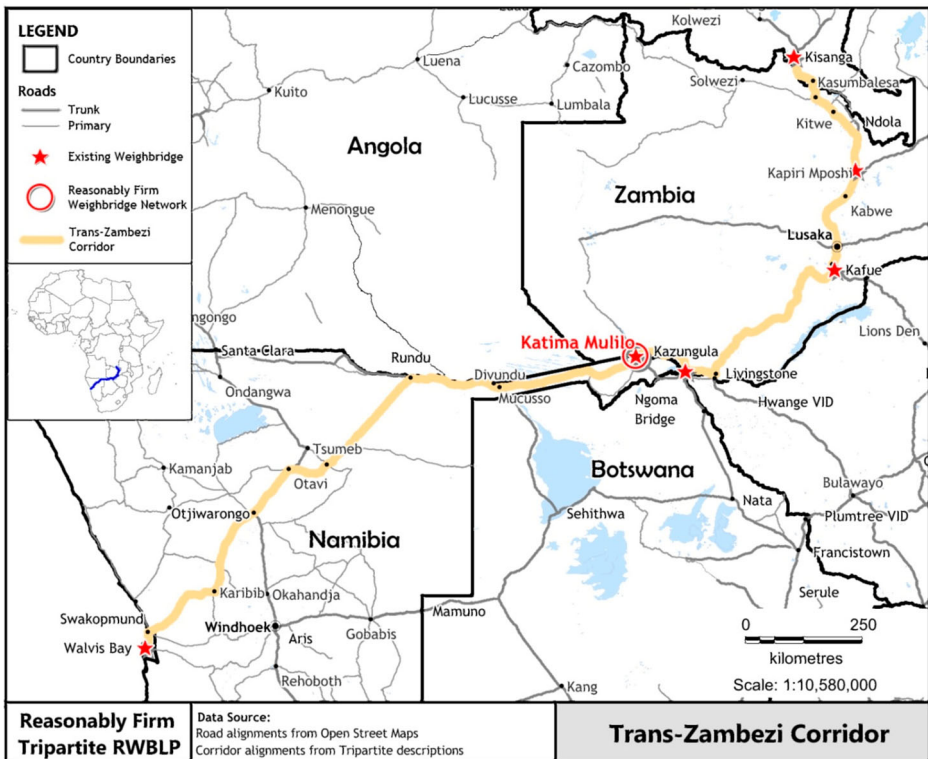
Development and spatial planning in Namibia has been crucially informed by the imaginary of a 'logistics nation' (GRN NPC, 2012, p. 87) and the state spatial objective of transforming the country into an 'international logistics hub for SADC countries' (GRN NPC, 2015). Since the late 1990s, successive governments have aligned Namibian state space with infrastructure-led development planning, whereby the transport and logistics sectors are considered 'essential for trade, industrialization, socio-economic development and regional integration and thus ... a key developmental priority' (GRN NPC, 2017, p. 38). An interviewee argued that in Namibia '[t]here has been a political will in the logistics and transport fraternity. There has been a huge buy-in in terms of logistics. In the concept of being industrialized, logistics is one of the vehicles' (interview with a project manager at the Namibian–German Institute for Logistics, 6 November 2020). Policies to strengthen Namibia's logistics sector and to improve physical infrastructure with the aim of attracting cross-border cargo form part of a state spatial strategy that has been decidedly regional in its scalar articulation, as it relies on the facilitation of transport links with neighbouring countries (Schoeman, 2016). The country's fourth national development plan emphasized the country's comparative geographical advantage, stating that 'Namibia is strategically positioned within the SADC region, meaning we offer a gateway for trade to and from the region' (GRN NPC, 2012, p. 84).

Infrastructure improvements and trade facilitation along cross-border corridors that link the country's main seaports in Walvis Bay and Lüderitz with neighbouring markets have become state spatial priorities. Namibia's President Geingob pledged that 'Namibia will transform itself into a SADC Logistical Hub by investing in [the] Trans-Kalahari, Trans-Kunene, and Trans-Zambezi [WBNLDC] Transport Corridors' (GRN NPC, 2017, p. x). The country's Logistics Hub Master Plan follows the hegemonic conception of progressive corridor development: A first transport corridor phase (2015–20) focusing on removing infrastructural bottlenecks is followed by an economic corridor phase (2020–25) during which Namibia is to evolve into 'one of the regional distribution centres' (NPC/JICA, 2015, p. ES-3). As the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Walvis Bay Corridor Group (WBCG) explained: 'We want to transform the corridors into hubs where value addition takes place and where other services, such as manufacturing, are offered along the corridors' (Tjivikua, quoted in Urban Café Radio, 2020). Namibia's gateway

strategy has spurred investments into corridor infrastructure, not least along the WBNLDC, by far the country’s busiest cross-border corridor in terms of freight volumes (Namport, 2020).

### 3.2. Namibian efforts to ‘get the corridor right’

The WBNLDC gained ‘infrastructural traction’ and became a viable cross-border road corridor after the upgrade of the Trans-Caprivi Highway (B8), finalized in 1999, and the opening of a new bridge across the Zambezi in May 2004 which links the border towns of Katima Mulilo (Namibia) and Sesheke (Zambia). By means of a 2524 km-long asphalt route, the corridor connects Namibia’s largest port in Walvis Bay with Zambia and extends to Lubumbashi in the resource-rich Haut-Katanga province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Figure 1). Thus far, rail infrastructure is limited to the Namibian line between Walvis Bay and Grootfontein and Zambia’s network that links Livingstone with Zambia’s Copperbelt Province and interlinks with the Congolese railway in Sakania. Currently, this leaves a rail gap of almost 1000 km along the WBNLDC (Dannenberg et al., 2018, p. 144; Zeller, 2010, p. 13). In Namibia, discussions about extending the line from Grootfontein to Katima Mulilo are at an advanced stage (interview with a project manager at the Namibian–German Institute for Logistics, 6 November 2020). Equally, the Zambian government has conducted feasibility studies to extend the existing railway network to the Namibian border (interview with a senior official of the Zambian Ministry of Transport, 14 June 2017), although a timely implementation of such plans seems unlikely for fiscal reasons.



**Figure 1.** Map of the Walvis Bay–Ndola–Lubumbashi Corridor. Source: Tripartite Transport & Transit Facilitation Programme, <https://tttfp.org/corridors/trans-zambezi-corridor-2/>.

In recent years, the WBNLDC has recorded growing volumes of freight, which stood at 826 m tonne-km in 2016, 1150 in 2017 and 1094 in 2018 (Ojala, 2018, p. 18). Namibia's relatively well-maintained road network is a major reason why the WBNLDC has become a viable alternative to southern routes to South African ports (Cross Border Road Transport Agency (CBRTA), 2020, p. 17). Another advantage over the often-congested North–South Corridor, which nonetheless still accounts for 60% of regional traffic, springs from the fact that the WBNLDC saves cargo in transit one border crossing compared with southern routes (Kawasaki et al., 2021, p. 306). Border crossings in Kazungula (on the Zambian–Botswanan border) and Beitbridge (on the Zimbabwean–South African border) have notoriously delayed cargo travelling along the southern routes. Moreover, comparatively high levels of security for cargo and corridor users are also frequently cited as a comparative advantage of the WBNLDC (Tjivikua, 2020).

Seaport competitiveness is another crucial determinant for the performance of transport corridors. Thus, the expansion of Walvis Bay port has been central to Namibia's gateway strategy. As Simon and Ekobo (2008, p. 53) argue, the 'external/transnational focus of the Namibian government's development plans centred on Walvis Bay as a "gateway port"'. The fourth national development plan emphasized the need for further investments both in port infrastructure in Walvis Bay and in connective road and rail infrastructure, as:

volumes [were] expected to be boosted by demand both domestically and by neighbouring landlocked countries with high growth potential, such as Botswana and Zambia. ... Without sufficient investment ... , Namibia will lose the opportunity to become a key port of choice in southern Africa.

(GRN NPC, 2012, p. 23)

In the meantime, the Namibian government has invested in a major expansion of Walvis Bay port. A new container terminal, commissioned in August 2019, with a throughput capacity of 750,000 twenty-foot-equivalent units (TEUs) increased the port's previous annual handling capacity of 355,000 TEUs and reduced container dwell time from 14.5 to 9.5 days (AfDB, 2020). To smoothen the flow of traffic from and to the port, the Namibian government, in 2020, finished the new bypass around Swakopmund.

Geographically, Walvis Bay enjoys competitive advantage over East African ports for seaborne trade with Europe and the Americas, not only because it offers shorter distances to most destinations there but also because it spares the passage through the Suez Canal. Moreover, in contrast to South African ports, Walvis Bay's turn-around times on cargo handling are not weather-dependent (CBRTA, 2020, p. 31). However, Walvis Bay is at an obvious disadvantage for trade with Asia, for which navigation times to ports in East and South Africa are shorter. This is significant considering that the bulk of copper and cobalt exports from the Copper Belt is destined for China (Kawasaki et al., 2021, p. 306). Hence, the WBNLDC needs to offset higher costs related to longer sea routes to/from Asia (compared with Dar es Salaam, Beira and Durban) by time and cost savings along the corridor and in the port. In the Global Competitiveness Report 2019, published by the World Economic Forum, Namibia ranks in 35th place (out of 141) regarding the 'efficiency of seaport services', outperforming its neighbours South Africa (50th) and Angola (118th) (Schwab, 2019, pp. 55, 411, 519). Commending the port's efficiency, a Ndola-based haulier explained that:

at Walvis Bay, I have loaded within 24 h. The vessel came in, the next day the container was shifted to the agent when the container had just landed and they started loading my trucks. So, that's how efficient they are.

(interview with a Zambian haulier, 30 June 2017)

Zambia accounts for the majority share of cross-border seaborne trade handled at Walvis Bay port (Figure 2). In 2017, 51.8% of all inbound transit cargo at Walvis Bay port was

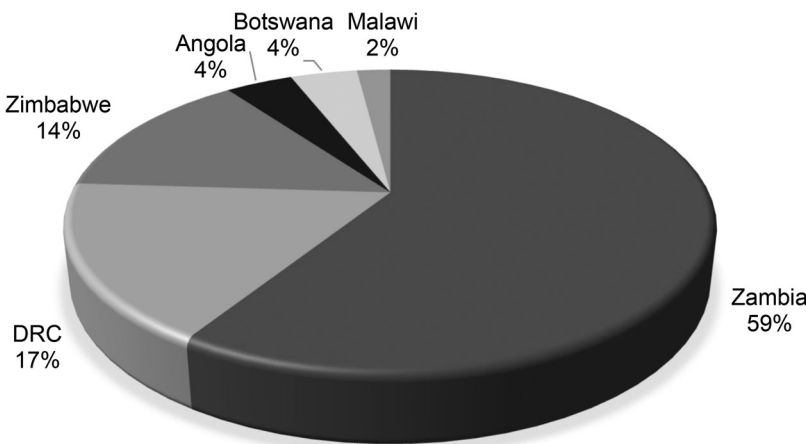
destined for Zambia, whilst 85.7% of outbound transit cargo originated from there (Ojala, 2018, p. 13). Exports from Zambia and southern DRC are mostly copper (in the form of anodes, cathodes or blister copper), most of which is destined for China (Namport, 2019, p. 23). Although Namibia could double the volume of cross-border cargo from 442,848 metric tonnes (financial year 2010/11) to 1 m metric tonnes (2019/20), transit cargo still only made up about 20% of total cargo handled at Namibian seaports in 2021 (Pesat, 2021). Hence, growth in cross-border cargo is paramount for the Walvis Bay port expansion to reach projected rates of return. As an AfDB project completion report underlines, ‘throughput has not met the ... traffic projected at appraisal’, remaining 75.3% below target (AfDB, 2020, p. 5). Whilst this is partly due to the COVID-19-induced economic contraction, there is a risk that some of the port’s increased capacity continues to lie idle. The Namibian state, not least through Namport, has a heightened interest in increasing the share of regional trade that travels along the WBNLDC (and other cross-border corridors) for its gateway strategy to succeed. However, this is highly dependent on complementary state spatial interventions in neighbouring Zambia.

### 3.3. Zambian ‘pothole politics’

Spatial (non-)interventions by the Zambian state have compromised the performance of the WBNLDC. Poor road infrastructure along segments of the WBNLDC, especially on Zambian territory, has sustained a patchwork of connectivity. For the WBCG CEO:

[t]he infrastructural development and the maintenance of the infrastructure are some of the challenges. ... If you move into the next part of the corridor in another country, you see there are some infrastructural challenges – like in terms of the road infrastructure that are perhaps aging or dilapidating. (Tjivikua, 2020)

An interviewee confirmed that while ‘Namibia has benchmarked its road development and maintenance programme, Zambia has lagged behind in developing infrastructure’ along the corridor (interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020). At first sight, Zambia’s increased road development efforts since the early 2010s, framed by the spatial imaginary of a ‘landlinked Zambia’ (Zajontz, 2022b), appear compatible with the goal to improve corridor infrastructure.



**Figure 2.** Origin of cross-border seaborne trade at Walvis Bay, financial year 2018–19. Source: Author’s compilation based on Namport (2019, p. 30).

However, Woolfrey and Verhaeghe (2017, p. 12) find that whilst ‘on a rhetorical level, Zambia commits to rehabilitating road links “under various regional corridors, such as the North–South and Nacala Corridors”, in practice, the country seems to prioritize its domestic road network, somewhat “neglecting” the regional dimension’.

The allocation of funds in the context of Zambia’s ambitious, largely debt-financed *Link Zambia 8000* road development programme, launched in 2012, has been largely determined by politicized territoriality at the national and subnational scales. The geographical prioritization of (corridor) infrastructure within Zambia has been strongly affected by Zambia’s patronage-based political system (Hinfelaar & Achberger, 2017). The allegedly politically motivated neglect of certain road infrastructure in the country has fostered what I call ‘pothole politics’. The latter implies the targeted geographical distribution (or withholding) of public funds for road infrastructure according to political affiliation and is marked by strongly polarized (along party, regional and ethnic lines) political debate between the central government and communities that feel disadvantaged in the context of public infrastructure programmes. One interviewee argued that the prioritization of road projects has not followed economic but rather political considerations, with some urban and rural roads having been prioritized over key corridor roads:

When you look at the Link Zambia 8000 project, you find that the township roads where some of these people have been voting heavily [for the then ruling party Patriotic Front] are the ones that are being developed, whereas economic roads are being neglected.

(interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020).

A key segment of the WBNLDC, the M10 between Sesheke at the Namibian–Zambian border and Kazungula, has been a highly contentious case in point. A former Livingstone district commissioner explained that the road segment ‘is a highly viable trading route for many Zambians and it needs attention if the cost of doing business in SADC could be made cheaper. As at now the delays in trade are being passed on to customers’ (Sensele, quoted in Lubanga, 2017). One interviewee argued that the overdue rehabilitation of the road is a result of the politicization of (road) infrastructure development in Zambia, whereby:

priorities are misplaced or maybe everything seems to be politicised. Especially in the Zambian set-up, there is a lot of politics ... If you look at the story behind the Sesheke–Kazungula road, you find that there are politics involved. Of course, the Sesheke area there and the prominent part where that road is badly deteriorated, it is an opposition stronghold in terms of political affiliation. ... You find that the Zambian government [then led by the Patriotic Front] has neglected this road, because the people of that area, they do vote for opposition members of parliament. So, in that sense the development of that road has been politicised and that’s not what we expect to see.

(interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020)

This case is instructive not so much because infrastructure development is politicized (which it always is, though to varying degrees), but because the state spatial non-intervention of the Zambian government in the concrete case demonstrates that regional corridors are crucially affected by territoriality employed at national and subnational scales.

The neglect of this vital corridor segment has adversely affected travel times and thus curtailed seamless corridor connectivity. Some hauliers have put up with a detour of 230 km to circumvent said road. Other trucking companies still use the road at extremely low speeds to avoid damage to vehicles and load, which costs them up to eight hours for a distance of less than 200 km (Brandt, 2020). Other corridor stakeholders are affected, too. The Sesheke district council has criticized that the bypassing of the road segment has cost the council precious revenues from road fees (Mulenga, 2017). Hence, the collection of road fees by the local state – itself a



territorialized practice that is usually not reflected in dominant conceptions of corridors – has been compromised by the central government’s state spatial priorities that have privileged road development in other parts of the country at the expense of regional connectivity along the WBNLDC (Figure 3).

The WBNLDC Interim Secretariat has long lobbied Zambian authorities, including State House, to rehabilitate the road. Officially, ‘the biggest song is that the government does not have money to rehabilitate this road’ (interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020). However, another interviewee suggested that Zambia’s fiscal constraints are a result of systematic misappropriation of funds, arguing that the Zambian government ‘lack[s] that consistency in implementing their policies to collect revenue that is going to assist them in developing infrastructure’ (anonymised interview, 2020). Indeed, the massive inflow of foreign capital into Zambia’s road sector by means of loan finance has created opportunities for rent-seeking along clientelist networks surrounding the country’s political elites (Zajontz, 2020, ch.5). At the same time, some overpriced road projects were implemented that were not prioritized at the working level of the relevant state agencies which turned ‘conventional policy planning on its head’ (Zajontz, 2022b, p. 20). Irrespective of the degree of (in)formality, the mobilization and attribution of resources for infrastructure development in Zambia have been determined by national and subnational territorial logics. The territoriality exerted through described ‘pothole politics’ have proven incompatible with the production of frictionless, transnational corridor space and the neglected road segment is exemplary for Schindler and Miguel Kanai’s (2021, p. 47) finding that the ‘conceptualization of seamlessly integrated regions is often not realized in practice, and instead there is a patchwork of selective connectivity’.

This is not to say that cross-border corridors and the regional scale have been altogether neglected in Zambia’s state spatial strategy. Ultimately, landlocked Zambia and its copper-dependent economy heavily rely on access to seaports. Enclosed by seven neighbouring countries,



**Figure 3.** The Sesheke–Kazungula road, April 2017.

Source: Author.



Zambian territory is interlinked with several corridors (ending at Angolan, Mozambican, South African and Tanzanian ports) which compete for cargo flows. The competition of corridors that arises from this 'geography of choice' engenders further territorial logics, as corridors necessarily organize 'economies, politics and social life around particular directional priorities' (Newhouse & Simone, 2017, p. 4). Such directional priorities are, for instance, set through political decisions for or against infrastructure funding for a particular corridor. As Lamarque (2022, p. 232) aptly underlines, '[c]orridors compete not only to be used, but also to be funded and built'. As part of the North–South Corridor, one of the continent's priority corridors identified under the African Union's Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), both the rehabilitation of the trunk road between Kapiri Mposhi in central Zambia and the Tanzanian border as well as the Zambezi bridge in Kazungula, a key link along the southern corridor through Botswana, have received funding from the AfDB. The rehabilitation of the trunk road between Lusaka and Chirundu at Zambia's border with Zimbabwe, along the Beira corridor, was co-funded by the World Bank (Zajontz, 2022b).

Simulations suggest that the WBNLDC could – at the detriment of Namibia's gateway strategy – lose out because of infrastructural modernization along competing corridors. Currently, 10.8% of Zambian imports travel along the corridor and enter Zambia at Katima Mulilo. Kawasaki et al. (2021) estimate that the opening of the Kazungula Bridge, which was commissioned in October 2020, could cut this share by 1.9%, whilst the planned rehabilitation of the Tanzania–Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA), which links Zambia with Dar es Salaam port, could equally cut Katima Mulilo's current share of imports by 1.9%. An interviewee confirmed that the new bridge in Kazungula 'is going to take away some of the volumes from our corridor [WBNLDC]' (interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020).

As noted above, Walvis Bay port competes with other seaports in the region. Kawasaki et al. (2021, p. 303) assert that in the case of Zambia, which accounts for the biggest share of cross-border cargo at Walvis Bay, '[g]ateway seaport choice of Zambian cargo is particularly complex because the number of port options is higher than that for other landlocked countries in the region'. The competition among Southern African seaports for market shares, and by extension the competition of corridors, reveals competing territorial logics and priorities with detrimental effects for SADC's corridor agenda. SADC acknowledges this explicitly in the RIDMP which states that '[f]rom the individual perspective, ports compete for traffic leading to limited scope for cooperation and integration' (SADC, 2012, p. 57). A SADC-commissioned study on corridor management suggests that, while competition among corridors might boost corridor performance, 'it may be time for SADC countries to begin to think of working together as a region to compete with other global regions rather than concentrating on internal competition between corridors and countries' (Harmon, 2019, p. 19; see also Simon & Ekobo, 2008, p. 63). The study suggests that this can be attained by deepening corridor governance. Yet, attributing resources and relinquishing authority to the supranational scale has remained a contentious issue.

#### 4. 'UPSCALING' CORRIDOR GOVERNANCE: COSTLY OR CONTESTED?

Besides infrastructural challenges, SADC's corridor agenda and its inherent objective of frictionless transnational connectivity have been hampered by a persistent implementation gap pertaining to protocols and policies on cross-border trade and transport facilitation and harmonization. An evaluation report of SADC's RIDMP finds that 'disharmony of the legal and regulatory regimes among Member States, particularly for inter-territorial projects[,] is affecting the implementation of such regional projects, since this has a bearing on the management and control of such projects' (SARDC, 2019, p. ix). There has been limited progress regarding the supranational institutionalization of corridor governance, although cross-border CMI are 'deemed to

be critical to support the development of regional corridors that will facilitate the unimpeded travel between the territories of the SADC member countries (regional trade perspective), and access to the regional seaports (international trade perspective)' (Harmon, 2019, p. 8). A SADC official confirmed that:

For us [SADC], such structures [CMIs] are important because a corridor is the implementation space, is the theatre of operations or application of those laws, regulations and standards that we have developed. ... Where you have got a corridor coordination arrangement, it becomes easier for the beneficiary member states to coordinate their actions, to apply peer pressure on each other to conform and comply to regional agreements.

(interview, 7 November 2020)

CMIs shift certain aspects of corridor governance from the national to the supranational scale so as to streamline political, administrative and legal–bureaucratic cooperation among corridor states. However, actual establishment of CMIs has faltered: 'Whilst on paper we have 18 regional transport corridors defined and approved by SADC ministers, only six of those ... have some form of legal or institutional structure' (interview with a senior SADC official, 7 November 2020).

This last section is concerned with the degree to which the governance of the WBNLDC has been institutionalized at the supranational scale. In line with its regional gateway strategy, Namibia's fifth development plan emphasized the goal 'to seek opportunities to pool resources and provide a framework for the regional management of infrastructure, such as transportation corridors' (GRN NPC, 2017, p. 44). The Zambian government for its part has remained much less invested in supranational corridor governance.

#### 4.1. Namibia's 'corridor champion': the Walvis Bay Corridor Group

The WBCG was established in 2000 as a public–private partnership and mandated to facilitate economic activity along the Trans-Kalahari Corridor, the Trans-Cunene Corridor, the Trans-Oranje Corridor and the WBNLDC. The WBCG is an association not for gain, based on Section 21 of Namibia's Companies Act, and comprises relevant Namibian state agencies and business associations whose members operate along the corridors. As Wiggill (2016, p. 22) describes it, the WBGC 'started by looking at landlocked countries to see how it [Namibia] could better serve them as an alternative. ... [I]t became, in a sense, a marketing arm of the Namibian government'. The WBCG maintains offices in Lusaka (since 2005), Johannesburg (since 2008), Lubumbashi (since 2012) and Sao Paulo (since 2012) which underlines its (trans)-regional scalar horizons (WBCG, n.d., p. 6). According to its CEO, the WBCG 'want[s] to set up [further] offices in Asia (China), Europe and the USA. To attain our goal of growing the volumes on the corridors, those markets need to be more aggressively engaged and pursued' (Tjiviku, quoted in Urban Café Radio, 2020). A Namibian logistics expert called the WBCG 'our marketing agency in logistics' (interview with a project manager of the Namibian–German Institute for Logistics, 6 November 2020).

The WBCG is primarily funded by the Namibian government and donor agencies, with a minor proportion of funding coming from its members. The WBCG plays a key strategic role in advancing Namibia's state spatial strategy. Namibia's fifth national development plan foresaw that the WBCG should be 'transformed from an entity that focuses on the various Walvis Bay Corridors to one that will consolidate the coordinated public and private sector efforts to make Namibia a regional logistics hub' (GRN NPC, 2012, p. 88). The WBCG shows that the Namibian government has actively pursued what Brenner (2004, pp. 91–92) calls a 'state spatial project' by reorganizing the state's institutional set-up, the state's scalar division of administration and the modes of (public–private) governance with the objectives of fostering its gateway strategy. A long-time expert in Southern Africa's logistics and transport sectors

emphasized the extent to which the Namibian government has steered corridor governance: 'What I find very interesting and very important around the Walvis Bay corridor [referring to the WBNLDC] is: It's driven by government, there is government buy-in' (Richardson, 2020).

The institutional set-up of the WBCG has been considered by some as exemplary for a successful national CMI. An AfDB briefing asserts that:

a semi-autonomous public-private partnership, in this case the WBCG, is generally well-suited for this role as this ideally would ... improve efficiency, accountability for the provision and delivery of quality outputs, capitalise on synergies between public authorities and private sector companies and encourage innovation and diversity.

(Mulenga, 2013, pp. 5–6)

Indeed, the WBCG has proven effective in governing certain functional problems along the corridor. For instance, the establishment of an HIV/AIDS help desk and (mobile) clinics since the early 2000s has helped to improve the health of transport and sex workers along the Walvis Bay corridors (interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020; Harmon, 2019, p. 12). Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WBCG has swiftly collaborated with government agencies and the private sector to put in place testing centres along the corridor in order to keep disruptions to the flow of goods and people to a minimum (WBCG, 2020). The WBCG's CEO stressed that 'the optimisation [of the COVID-19 response] requires coordination of multiple stakeholders' (Tjivikua, 2020).

Namibia remains the only SADC member state with a dedicated national CMI, even though the 1996 SADC Transport Protocol explicitly stipulates that '[t]he functions of the Corridor Planning Committees may be facilitated by national committees comprising national, public and private sector stakeholders on such corridor[s]' (SADC, 1996, Art. 3.5(9)). Twenty years in existence, the WBCG has become an efficient, 'problem-solving' spatial entrepreneur with significant technical expertise and close ties with Namibian government agencies. The organization has been an active facilitator of network governance amongst organizations and businesses that trade and transport along the WBNLDC. For the Namibian government, the WBCG serves as the main public-private interlocutor to manage the country's cross-border corridors. Nugent (2018, p. 30) argues that the fact that non-Namibian actors are relegated to an associated membership status 'is indicative of the measure of control that the Namibian state prefers to retain'. Indeed, the WBCG is first and foremost a *Namibian* 'corridor champion' (UN-OHRLLS, 2020, p. 47), tasked with advancing Namibia's state spatial strategy (and related economic interests) of becoming a 'logistics nation' and a 'gateway' to SADC. However, as an exclusively Namibian institution its impact on policies, regulations and politico-administrative space-making has definite territorial limitations. Therefore, the WBCG has been a vocal advocate for a transnational corridor secretariat for the WBNLDC (Harmon, 2019, p. 13). Yet, the Zambian government has remained much less invested in institutionalizing corridor governance at the supranational scale.

#### 4.2. Retaining national control over 'corridor space'

First transnational attempts at institutionalizing governance of the WBNLDC were made between Namibia and Zambia in 2005 as part of a capacity-building programme funded by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (WBCG, n.d.; interview with a senior SADC official, 7 November 2020). The programme convened private and public actors involved in the corridor in three clusters: a Namibian, a Zambian and a cross-border cluster (CBRTA, 2020, p. 37; Harmon, 2019, p. 13; WBCG, n.d.). However, project funding ceased after three years. An inter-governmental agreement to formally

establish the WBNLDC was eventually signed by the DRC, Namibia and Zambia in March 2010. The agreement foresees a trilateral corridor secretariat and intergovernmental sectoral committees for specific policy areas, such as transport, customs and health. However, these institutions have not been established, because, by late 2020, the agreement had only been formally ratified by the DRC (interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020). Particularly, funding for a permanent corridor secretariat has remained an unresolved issue (Harmon, 2019, p. 13; interviews with a senior SADC official, 7 November 2020; and a key informant, 16 December 2020).

The corridor is still managed by an interim secretariat which is hosted by the Lusaka office of the WBCG. The latter, through funds from the Namibian government, also employs the hitherto only staffer of the interim secretariat. As one key informant explained:

Ironically, you find that the interim secretariat has been housed, has been coordinated by the Walvis Bay Corridor Group – of course through the government of the Republic of Namibia. ... the Namibian government is the one that has single-handedly spearheaded, has funded activities of the corridor.

(interview, 16 December 2020)

This again underlines the central role the WBNLDC plays within Namibia's state spatial strategy. Another interviewee argued: 'For its own strategic reasons – because they are smart – WBCG has deployed an officer. He *is* the interim secretariat and he is quite effective in promoting that corridor' (interview with a senior SADC official, 7 November 2020).

Nonetheless, the interim secretariat has not been able to fulfil its intended mandate. Whilst it is in regular exchange with relevant state agencies in the three corridor states, the secretariat is lacking both sufficient human resources and the authority 'to legally deal with all these challenges and bottlenecks along the corridor and, of course, spearhead a corridor programme itself' (interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020). Consequently, it has remained 'not easy to get agreement on difficult issues' (Harmon, 2019, p. 13). With almost half of the WBNLDC's road corridor stretching along Zambian territory and Zambia being the only country with two border crossings along the corridor (Sesheke and Kasumbalesa), Zambian involvement in managing the corridor is paramount. Yet, a report on CMI in SADC concludes that 'Zambian participation was more reactive than proactive' (Harmon, 2019, p. 19).

The Zambian government has hesitated to allocate resources to and vest the necessary politico-administrative authority in the secretariat for it to effectively coordinate regulatory, legal and bureaucratic affairs amongst the corridor countries. Officially, Zambia has invoked limited financial and human resources as reasons for its lukewarm commitment to institutionalizing the WBNLDC (interviews with a senior SADC official, 7 November 2020; and a key informant, 16 December 2020). An interviewee explained that the Zambian government decided 'that they are not going to fund any of these corridors' and instead demands that maritime port authorities in coastal states should finance CMIs. Consequently, Zambia started to withhold its membership contributions towards the Dar es Salaam Corridor Committee in 2020. By doing so, the interviewee argued:

they are also telling the Namibia ports authority to fund its corridors, because they are direct beneficiaries of all these programmes along the corridor. So, it is competition in the sense of competing needs, competing resources, for example from a landlocked country like Zambia. It is also this multiplicity of having multiple membership for all these regional economic institutions.

(interview with a key informant, 16 December 2020)

A region-wide study found that limited financial resources have indeed hampered setting up appropriate CMIs, since particularly SADC member states that belong to multiple corridors,

such as Zambia, struggled to spare resources for CMIIs (Harmon, 2019, p. 13). This problem is evident throughout the continent, as '[c]orridor management authorities are typically skeleton bodies with staff seconded from national ministries that have a greater or lesser input from the private sector' (Nugent & Lamarque, 2022, p. 16).

The decision whether to attribute scarce resources towards supranational corridor governance reflects certain state spatial priorities regarding preferred scales of politico-economic coordination, administration and control. A senior SADC official argued that:

Zambia uses the excuse – I call it an excuse – of saying we belong to several corridors. To say it is expensive to belong to several corridor management institutions, I think it's myopic and an uninformed opinion, because the costs of not having a corridor management institution to coordinate is far higher. So, I think it is simply policy inconsistencies.

(interview, 7 November 2020)

The SADC Secretariat has advised the Zambian government to establish a small but permanent unit within the transport ministry to coordinate Zambia's interests within several CMIIs (interview with a senior SADC official, 7 November 2020). However, interviewees suggested that the reasons for Zambia's hesitancy were political rather than financial.

Institutionalizing corridor governance at the supranational scale implies relinquishing a certain degree of political authority, which might be detrimental to particular political and/or economic interests. An interviewee reasoned that vested interests stood in the way of 'upscaling' corridor governance in the Zambian case, as 'corruption leads – or the intent to create corrupt opportunities – leads our policy-makers and our political leaders to deliberately ignore any institutional solutions that will stand in their way of practicing corrupt activities' (anonymised interview, 2020). Following this interpretation would suggest that retaining politico-administrative control over corridors at the national scale shields certain political and/or economic interests from the bureaucratic-legal scrutiny of a trilateral corridor secretariat. Taylor (2011) has previously observed such tendencies within SADC more generically:

Although co-ordination measures are on the agenda of SADC, such processes are commonly managed at an intergovernmental level, with few if any plans to surrender state authority to the supranational regional body and almost no buy-in to anything that smacks of improved governance if and when that might threaten the patrimonial structures upon which most regional elites base their power.

(p. 1249)

As access to state institutions provides access to economic resources, clientelism and patronage have pervaded the Zambian state and 'political competition takes place largely on the basis of distribution of patronage/targeted resources to allies and supporters' (Hinfelaar & Achberger, 2017, p. 24). State territoriality thereby manifests predominantly at national and subnational scales in the form of state spatial interventions that consolidate the political power of elites to influence the (territorial) distribution of socio-economic means (Brenner, 2004).

To remedy member states' poor track record in establishing corridor-specific CMIIs, SADC has meanwhile proposed a region-wide CMI which, divided in four subclusters, should manage the 18 recognized regional corridors (electronic communication with a senior SADC official, 19 January 2021; Harmon, 2019). Whilst this constitutes another attempt at supranational corridor (meta)governance, the efficacy of a region-wide CMI will equally depend on member states' readiness to realign their state spatial strategies to allow for a certain transfer of political authority to the supranational scale.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This article shed light on the regional politics and supranational governance of cross-border corridors – aspects that have received little scholarly attention in the recent research wave on corridors. Combining analytical insights from the New Regionalism Approach and concepts from critical political geography, the article has shown that the spatial production and governance of cross-border corridors is highly contingent upon complementary state spatial strategies among corridor countries. While commonly represented as the spatial panaceas for establishing global connectivity and seamless territorial integration, regional corridors are politically contested spaces that engender dialectical processes of de- and reterritorialization. Where scalar and territorial articulations of state space do not align, regional corridor infrastructure is marked by patchworks of connectivity, while the degree of institutionalization of corridor governance at the supranational scale remains low, obstructing the imagined seamlessness of corridors.

The case study of the WBNLDC revealed that cross-border corridors have been integral to Namibia's state spatial strategy. The Namibian government has mobilized significant resources to improve transport infrastructure along the WBNLDC and has set up a public–private spatial entrepreneur, the WBCG, to advance its regional gateway strategy within and beyond Namibian territory. However, incompatible Zambian state spatial (non-)interventions have undermined corridor connectivity and curtailed the establishment of a supranational corridor secretariat. In the case of the WBNLDC, the scalar and territorial articulations of Zambian state space have proven incompatible with Namibia's gateway strategy and have hampered both the production of seamless corridor space and the institutionalization of corridor governance at the supranational scale.

Generally, there has been a wide implementation gap between SADC's corridor agenda and member states' readiness to endow corridor projects with the necessary financial resources and administrative–bureaucratic authority. Despite governments' pledges to develop the region's corridors into frictionless and hyper-modern spaces of flow, infrastructural power and spatial governance have remained largely concentrated at the national scale. This speaks to Middell's (2019, p. 21) observation that, historically, emerging spatial formats 'replace, complement, or compete with already existing spatial formats'. While regional corridors are unlikely to replace the nation state, they partly complement, partly compete with it. The nation-state and its territoriality seem thereby particularly resilient in post-colonial world regions. These findings appear relevant beyond Southern Africa, as (trans)regional corridors have (re)emerged across the globe and constitute pivotal spatial components of connectivity initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative and its Western competitors Build Back Better World and Global Gateway. The imaginary of seamless global space, interconnected by (trans)regional corridors, which crucially informs the current wave of neoliberal space-making will continue to encounter territorialized realities in Africa and elsewhere.

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