Well-working operational interfaces

A key to more collaborative modes of governance

Wiebke Wellbrock

Propositions

1   Public support programmes are so difficult to access that their access requires cleverly devised support structures.
(This thesis)

2   A big problem in science is the urge to categorize everything.
(This thesis)

3   Semi-subsistent farming should be recognised and supported as an independent form of rural livelihood in the European Union. Otherwise not only the welfare of a large number of rural residents will be compromised, but also the welfare of farmed animals cannot be fully ensured (based on my Master thesis 'Pig Welfare in Croatia: A Critical Reflection on the EU Welfare Directives' 2008 and scientific publications derived from it).

4   The choice of consumers for organic animal products is often not based on factual knowledge but on wishful thinking (based on my Master thesis 'Livestock Farming in the Eye of the Consumer: The Difference between Organic and Conventional Livestock Husbandry', 2008). The organic animal product industry will serve itself well by conserving these forms of wishful thinking.

5   Capitalism is like a spoiled child that walks all over its caring parents and can no longer be tamed.

6   Once men realize that money cannot be eaten, peasants will become one of the richest people in the world.

Propositions belonging to the doctoral thesis "Well-working operational interfaces: A key to more collaborative modes of governance".

Wiebke Wellbrock
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Dieses Buch ist meinen Eltern gewidmet.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I aim to contribute to effectuating more collaborative modes of governance in rural areas. For this, I pursue two intertwined research objectives: The *first objective* is to develop and refine a conceptual lens that can be used to frame arrangements supporting the collaboration of public officers, facilitators of joint learning and innovation and rural development initiators. The *second objective* is to apply this conceptual lens as a research tool to analyse supportive arrangements, particularly focussing on features that operate well to enhance joint learning and innovation and effectuate more collaborative modes of governance. This thesis builds on empirical research I carried out as part of a multi-disciplinary research team in the European FP7-funded research project *Developing Europe's Rural Regions in an Era of Globalisation* (DERREG) between 2009 and 2011. The project involved nine universities and research institutes across Europe, led by Professor Michael Woods of Aberystwyth University in Wales. As illustrated by figure 1.1 below, empirical investigations were carried out within ten rural case study areas, located in eight different countries of the European Union.

Figure 1.1 DERREG cases study areas

The aim of DERREG was to understand "*how globalization processes are impacting on rural economies and societies in practice, and why impacts and responses vary between different regions*" (Woods, 2011, p.1). To obtain a comprehensive picture of the manifold regional responses towards global dynamics, DERREG was organised along four work packages (WPs): Global engagement and local embeddedness of rural businesses (WP1); International migration and rural regions (WP2); Environmental capital and sustainable rural development (WP3); and Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems (WP4) (Woods, 2011). Within each work package, specific emphasis was placed on understanding "*how regional development policies and initiatives can effectively respond to globalisation and wider rural restructuring, shaping outcomes in specific regions*" (Woods, 2011, p.1). The research was undertaken with the objective to produce an interpretative model "*that will enable regional development actors to better anticipate and respond to the key challenges for rural regions arising from globalisation*" (Woods, 2011, p.12).

I was mainly involved in research for WP4 'Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems', although I also participated in WP1 'Global engagement and local embeddedness of rural businesses'. In WP4, I worked together with Marie Mahon and Maura Farrell from the National University of Ireland, Galway; Birte Nienaber and Wioletta Frys from Saarland University in Germany; Joachim Burdach, Michael Kriszan and Robert Nadler from the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig, Germany; Emilija Kairyte from NeVork Institute in Slovenia, Dolores Domínguez García from Vigo University in Spain, and Dirk Roep from Wageningen University in the Netherlands who coordinated our work package. Our task was to find out how support could best be arranged to support joint learning and innovation between the people operating within the different domains (rural area, knowledge infrastructure and public administration), in order to empower people to respond effectively to the needs of rural areas in times of increased global activities (Woods, 2011). Our study involved empirical research within six of the ten DERREG case study areas, namely Alytus County in Lithuania, Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia and Saarland in Germany, the Westerkwartier in the Netherlands, County Roscommon in Ireland and

the Comarca de Verín in Spain. I will give a more detailed description of the case study areas later in the introduction. In addition to my involvement in WP4, I also went to Colombia where I undertook empirical research in a rural area of the department Santander between November 2011 and February 2012. This additional research was motivated by my personal interest in getting to know the country and my interest to learn about differences in rural development between the European Union and a so-called 'developing' country. Although not part of the main body of this thesis, this additional research was nevertheless important for my understanding of the research topic. A brief account of my research experience in Colombia can therefore be found in Appendix 1.

I approached this study as a fairly blank sheet and our research endeavour has agonised me many times and challenged my understanding of the topic more than once. Not only have I had to learn about concepts and theories concerning regional and rural development from various disciplines such as rural sociology, human geography, economic geography, public administration and policy, but as part of the DERREG team, I also needed to apply these concepts empirically. Consequently, the research should be regarded as explorative in every sense of the word. In this thesis, I hope to present a coherent and convincing story that contributes sound scientific and practical understanding of how various development actors can be encouraged to learn to work together. In the remainder of this introduction, I will explain the conceptual lens of DERREG, focussing particularly on the relational approach, learning region concept, collaborative governance, joint reflexivity and building of collective agency, and operational interfaces. These aspects were crucial to our work in WP4, and are therefore crucial to understanding this thesis. Thereafter, I will position the aim of my thesis, introduce the research questions, case study areas, research methodology and method of data collection and analysis, and provide an outlook on the remaining chapters. I hope my story will not only convince but also inspire you.

1.1 Conceptual lens

Conceptually, DERREG drew on the 'relational approach' to globalisation as advocated by human geographers such as Doreen Massey and Ash Amin (Woods, 2011). Furthermore, DERREG drew on the concept of endogenous rural development such as the 'rural web of development' by Ploeg and Marsden (2008). DERREG extended these concepts by drawing on the wider literature in relational economic geography, including the concept of 'learning regions' (Woods, 2011). The 'relational approach' and 'learning region' concept are particularly important in understanding WP4 and hence this thesis. In addition, WP4 drew on the 'triple helix thesis' (Etzkowitz, 2003) and the extensive body of literature on 'rural governance' (e.g. Derkzen, 2008; Healey et al., 2003; Ray, 2006; Shortall, 2008; Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001) and related literature on 'collective or community capacity-building' (e.g. Amin, 2004; Amin, 2005; Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Gibney, 2011; Lee et al., 2005; Wals, 2007). In relation to the latter, WP4 also drew on the concept of 'joint reflexivity' and 'collective agency', and introduced the concept of 'operational interfaces'. In the following section, I will briefly introduce these concepts.

1.1.1 The relational approach to development

Doreen Massey (1991) invites us to look at development as a vibrant web of social and material relations and related activities spanning the globe. Following her relational approach, towns, villages and other localities are nodes within a fluent web of relations and referred to as places. Places have no fixed boundaries but co-evolve with interactions and activities that go beyond geographical locations, administrative boundaries and borders (Massey, 1991). The distinctive character of a place is formed by the political, social, economic and cultural processes and activities through which one place becomes connected to other places (Massey, 1991). Differences between places are then the result of differences in relations, networks and activities carried out by different social groups (Amin, 2004). Whether a place benefits or loses out from these relations depends on the interests and abilities of different groups to access and

use the assets of a place (e.g. natural resources, infrastructure and capacities) (Massey, 1991).

Arguably, Massey's (1991) relational approach provides a particularly interesting perspective for the study of rural development. Often, marginalised and declining rural places are regarded as being subjected to global forces in the form of capitalism, and material and cultural uniformity, that are seen as coming from an abstract space surrounding a particular place (Escobar, 2001). Massey's (1991) relational approach shows, however, how boundaries of a place can be seen as a social construct, resulting from the relations and activities of various social groups. She further emphasises the agency and responsibility of people mediating these social constructs, making relations and hence shaping places (Massey, 2004). People are thus not helpless victims of a global 'superpower'. Instead, development in one place needs to be regarded in relation to the development in other places. When one place gains from its relations other places lose (Massey, 2004). As a result, some places are referred to as 'hot' spots of development, whereas others are referred to as 'cold' spots of development (Wiskerke, 2007). Whether a place is a 'hot' or 'cold' spot also depends on the place-specific contexts such as the social, environmental and political structures and the geographical location, accessibility, physical environment, and policies in which people act and interact (Woods, 2009).

1.1.2 The learning region concept and the triple helix thesis

The learning region concept and the triple helix thesis are examples of functional, economic development approaches. Both highlight the importance of supporting the interconnectivity between different domains contributing to the development of a core economic area. Interestingly, each concept draws on a different body of literature without reference to each other.

The learning region concept is a normative concept first brought forward by economic and regional development scholars such as Björn Johnson and Bengt-Åke Lundvall (1992), Michael Storper (1993), Richard Florida (1995) and Kevin Morgan (1997).

They were intrigued by the incomparable performance of industrial agglomerations such as Silicon Valley, North-East Central Italy and the Southwest of Germany, and aimed to understand the underlying processes leading to their successful economic development strategies. Florida (1995) made two important observations: First, he noticed that successful economic development strategies treat regions like knowledge-intensive firms. Within these regions, lines between factories as sites of production and laboratories as sites of knowledge creation blur. Instead, workers and scientists work together to analyse, refine and improve products and production processes, whereby "*teams of R&D scientists, engineers and factory workers become collective agents of innovation*" (p. 529). Secondly, he noticed that governance structures are directed towards supporting the development of collective agency, co-dependent relations, network organisations, decentralised decision making, flexibility and a focus on customer needs and requirements (Florida, 1995). It was concluded that a key to successful economic regions lies in the ability of knowledge facilities, workers and government to jointly learn and innovate (Florida, 1995; Johnson and Lundvall, 1992; Morgan, 1997; Storper, 1993). Working together and building collective agency is, however, easier said than done. It needs to be learned, developed and institutionalised, requiring institutional learning over a long period of time, with repetitive interactions and trust (Gertler and Wolfe, 2002; Johnson and Lundvall, 1992; Morgan, 1997). Collective agency can thus be defined as "*people's shared beliefs in their collective power to produce desired results are the key ingredient of collective agency. A group's attainments are the product not only of shared knowledge and skills of its different members, but also of the interactive, coordinative and synergistic dynamics of their transactions*" (Bandura, 2000, p. 75-76). Building collective agency requires joint reflexivity, defined as the ability of a group of people to continuously reflect, monitor and act upon their actions and activities to access their outcomes and adapt their actions accordingly (Gray and Lawrence, 2000). As Storper (1993) explains, however, each domain – industry, academia and state – has its own institutionalised conventions, associated with specific practises, routines, agreements that organize and coordinate interactions and behaviours associated with a coherent set of activities. These sets of behaviours, rules and institutions constitute to specific 'worlds of production' (Storper,

1993), and differ between domains, creating different cultures (Johnson and Lundvall, 1992). Institutions thus play a significant role in the way in which academia, industry and government learn to work together (Gertler, 2010). At this point, I want to make clear that when I refer to institutions in this thesis, I am referring to "*sets of habits, routines, rules, norms, laws which by reducing the amount of information necessary for individual and collective action make reproduction and change of society possible*" (Johnson and Lundvall, 1992, p.112). Formal and informal institutions thereby "*reduce transaction costs of different actors, generate predictability in respective behaviours, providing assurance, helping converging mutual expectations in a collective choice dilemma and help in evolving rules that are seen as fair, just and accessible in a given distribution of power*" (Gupta, 2012, p.4). Learning to work together is thus institutionally embedded, driving continuous institutional change and innovation, i.e. new institutional arrangements to 'work together' across the different domains (Johnson and Lundvall, 1992; Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). Institutional arrangements are hereby defined as "*place-specific customs and procedures that shape interaction*" (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013, p.1042). Depending on the history of a place, the formation of new institutional arrangements can be a lengthy process (Johnson and Lundvall, 1992). In this process, joint reflexivity leads to an understanding that certain development objectives can only be effectively addressed when people learn to work together and, by doing so, build collective agency (Swanson, 2001). The resulting collective agency is then key to producing innovative practises as innovations arise from combining different kinds of knowledge, whereby the greater the difference between different kinds of knowledge, the higher the chance that learning and innovation results (Johnson and Lundvall, 1992).

Sociologists Henry Etzkowitz and Loet Lydesdorff visualised the focus on institutional arrangements between the state-, industry- and academia domains in their similar work on the 'triple helix thesis' (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000; Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz, 1996). Instead of domains or 'worlds of production' (Storper, 1993), they use the metaphor of DNA strands and refer to the three domains of state, industry and academia as intertwining helices. Like Florida (1995), Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff

(2000) argue that successful economic regions are characterised by "*overlapping institutional spheres, with each taking the role of the other and with hybrid organisations emerging at the interfaces*" (p. 111). As shown in figure 1.2, their particular focus concerns the overlapping institutional spheres of all three helices. Communication, networks and organisations between the helices, they argue, transform the different helices, making them co-evolve (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000).
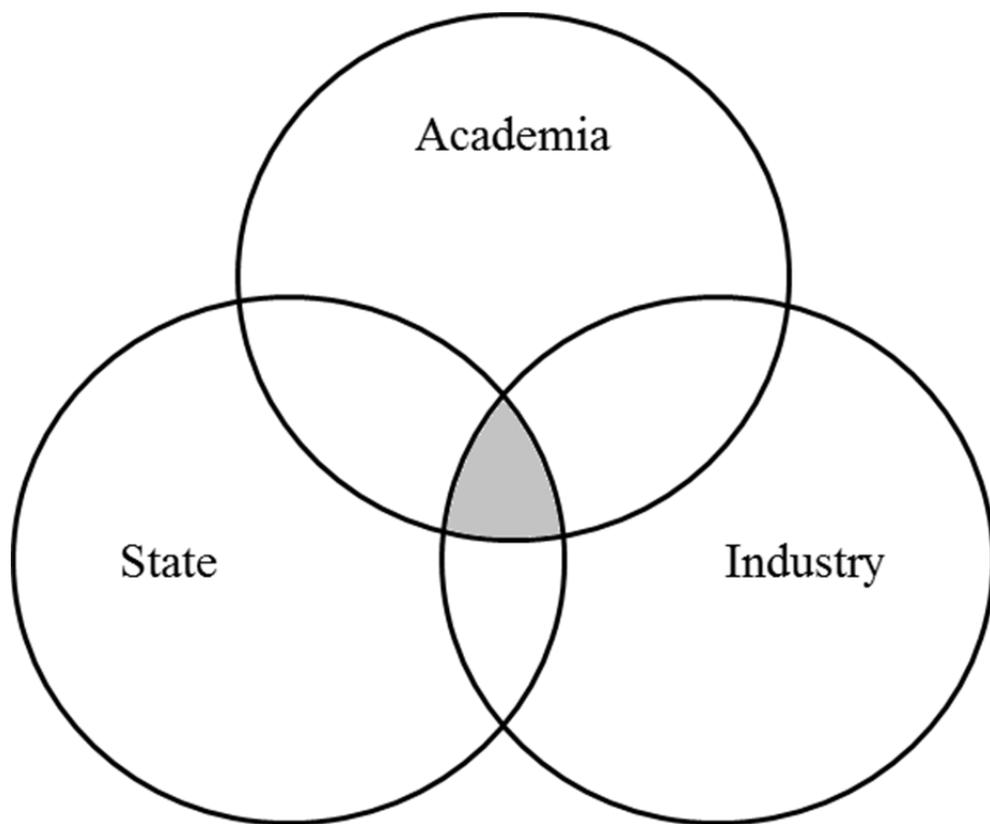
Figure 1.2 Focus of triple helix thesis, adapted from Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000)

1.1.3 Collaborative modes of governance and collective capacity building

Collaborative modes of governance are increasingly being recognised as important for building robust and sustainable development (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Arnouts et al., 2012; Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013; Somorin et al., In Press). Collaborative modes of governance also suggest that boundaries between different domains of practises blur (Stoker, 1998). This implies that people with different interests, perceptions, values, believes, experiences and knowledge must learn to work together to decide on effective sustainable policy options (Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013). Institutional capacity building is thus also necessary for rural and regional development outside industrial core areas (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013; Stoker, 1998).

Within the field of rural development, there have been numerous studies concerning governance and related support for collective capacity-building (Amin, 2004; Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Gibney, 2011; Gieryn, 2000; Healey et al., 2003; Massey, 1991; Roep et al., 2009; Swanson, 2001). The following authors particularly emphasise the importance of partnerships, an ethos of social inclusion and collaborative leadership (Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Gibney, 2011; Horlings and Padt, 2011; Swanson, 2001). Existing arrangements have, however, been criticised, suggesting a need for further improvement (e.g. Amin, 2004; Cleaver, 2002; Lee et al., 2005; Ray, 2006; Shortall, 2008; Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001).

1.1.4 DERREG WP4 Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems

The learning region concept provides an analytical perspective for studying the institutional arrangements operating between different domains and supporting different actors to learn to work together (Florida, 1995; Johnson and Lundvall, 1992; Morgan, 1997; Rutten and Boekema, 2007; Storper, 1993). The concept has been used widely as a normative lens to analyse and refine how institutional arrangements between the different domains can best be supported by public policy (Hassink and Klaerding, 2012). Also in practice, the learning region concept of clustering and proximity has shaped various regional economic development strategies across the globe (Hassink and

Klaerding, 2012). It can therefore add an innovative perspective to the study of support for collective capacity building and governance in rural areas (Woods, 2011).

The learning region concept is, however, not attuned to study support for joint learning and innovation in rural areas. First, rural areas are characterised by a greater diversity of actors and activities than industrial districts (Roep et al., 2009). Secondly, initiators of rural development activities are in need of diverse forms of support and knowledge, extending well beyond scientific insights and include, to give a few examples, technical advice, local and tacit knowledge and practical advice (Tovey, 2008). In addition, empirical evidence for ways in which learning regions operate in reality is fragmented (Woods, 2011). One objective of our research team in WP4 was thus to adapt and apply the learning region concept to rural areas.

Although our research team was multi-disciplinary, none of the researchers were experienced in using the learning region concept as an analytical tool. Also, there were no previous examples of applying the learning region as an empirical tool in the literature that we could have learned from. Consequently, our research task was a learning-by-doing process. Our WP coordinator provided us with a draft framework that was based on Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff's (2000) figure and that included, as shown in figure 1.3, the public administration, region and knowledge infrastructure domains.

Within the domains, the framework specified the focus on those policies supporting joint learning and innovation, those facilities supporting joint learning and innovation and those grassroots development initiatives active within our case study areas. Grassroots development initiatives were thought to be initiated bottom-up by people residing within an area and as a response to challenges presented by global forces (see also Escobar, 2001; Gupta et al., 2003). Arrows a-c, in figure 1.3 reminded us to look for operational features of institutional arrangements between the different domains, supporting joint learning and innovation. From this starting point, we simply engaged in explorative research to find actual examples of support for joint learning and innovation within our case study areas. Our findings were then used to adapt and refine the learning region concept to the particularities of rural areas. The adaptation of the learning region concept and its application as a research tool were therefore intertwined.
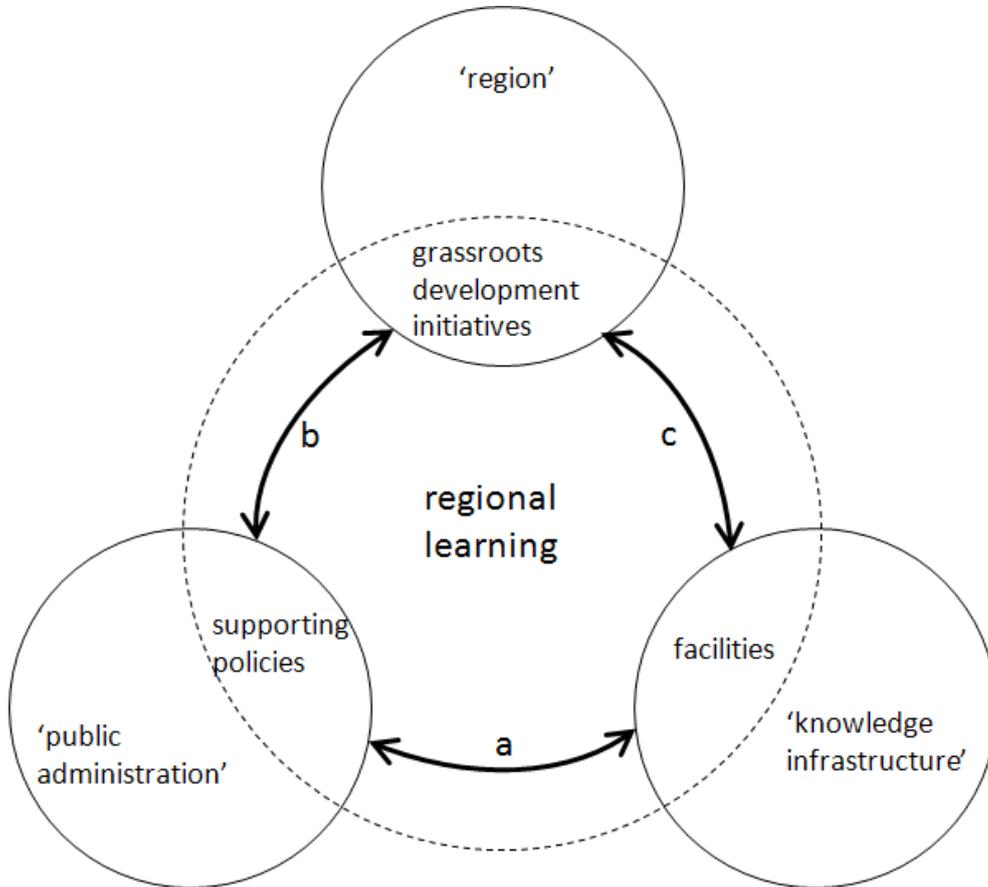
Figure 1.3 Framework at start of research in WP 4 (Wellbrock et al., 2010, p. 14)

1.1.5 Operational interfaces

During our research process, we had to develop a common language and concepts to analyse and compare the activities that we were exploring. The focus of our research on operational features of arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation, for instance, was jointly conceptualised as *operational interfaces*. Long (1984) argues that interfaces are critical sites in which face-to-face encounters occur between individuals or groups representing different interests, resources and power. They are nodes in which "*the goals, perceptions, interests and character of people may be reshaped*" as a result

of their interaction (Long, 1984, p. 177). Interfaces can thus be defined as nodes in which support for joint learning and innovation is operationalized and people learn to work together. In our study, we referred to *operational* interfaces, because we only focussed on those interfaces that were actually working and visible.

1.2 Research aim and questions

This thesis has two intertwined aims: The first aim is to develop and refine a conceptual lens that can be used to frame arrangements supporting the collaboration of public officers, facilitators of joint learning and innovation and rural development initiators. The second aim is to apply the conceptual lens as a research tool and analyse supportive arrangements, particularly focussing on operational features that successfully enhance joint learning and innovation and bring about more collaborative modes of governance. With this, I want to contribute to improving arrangements that aim to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance in rural areas. The research is guided by the following questions:

1.   How can existing theoretical frameworks be revised to conduct an institutional analysis of support for joint learning and innovation in rural areas?

2.   How do the different domains of the analytical framework connect and what problems and blind spots are encountered in the analysis?

3.   How are arrangements operationalized to support joint learning and innovation in rural areas of Western and Eastern Europe?

4.   Does the proposed analytical framework serve as a research tool to investigate the operational features of arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in rural areas?

1.3 Case study areas

The case study areas[1] included (see figure 1.4): County Roscommon in the Republic of Ireland, the Comarca de Verín in Spain, the Westerkwartier in the Netherlands, Saarland and Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia in Germany, and Alytus County in Lithuania.

Alytus County is situated in the South of Lithuania, bordering Poland and Belarus and comprises five municipalities (one city municipality and four district municipalities). It has a size of 5,425 km² and a population of 177,040 people in 2008 (32.6 inhabitants per km²). Forests occupy 44 % of the County, rivers and lakes a further 4.3 % of the territory. It has numerous protected features such as unique nature, mushroom forests, architecture and cultural heritage. It is considered a less favourable area in the EU, due to population decline, high unemployment rates and economic regression. Nevertheless, the County is ascribed great potential for agro-tourism.

Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia is part of the Direktionsbezirk Dresden in the Free State of Saxony, located on the German border to Poland and the Czech Republic. The Direktionsbezirk Dresden has a size of 7,931 km² and a population density of 151.4 inhabitants/km², excluding Dresden, Hoyaswerda and Görlitz. The development of the Direktionsbezirk Dresden is marked by an on-going process of economic catch-up to the German national level. After a period of economic down-turn in the early 1990s, and a consequent out-migration of the regional population towards more prosperous regions in Germany, it struggles today with above average declining and ageing of its population. In addition, the primary sector activities (agriculture, forestry, and fishery) are declining more rapidly than in other regions in Saxony and in Germany.

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[1] All information on the European case study areas were taken from the DERREG contextual reports which can be found on www.derreg.eu.

1 County Roscommon
2 Comarca de Verín
3 Westerkwartier
4 Saarland
5 Upper Lusatia- Lower Silesia
6 Alytus County

Figure 1.4 European case study areas participating in WP 4

Saarland shares its borders with Luxembourg and France and is therefore engaged in many transnational ties. It has an overall population of 1,024,000 million inhabitants and a population density of 357.1 inhabitants/km², excluding Saarbrücken. It is a typical example of a 'post-industrial rural region', where extractive industries and manufacturing have economically always been more important than agriculture in the

modern era, and where deindustrialisation in the late twentieth century has presented major social and economic challenges. The service sector is the most important economic activity, with agriculture accounting for only 1% of the regional economy.

The Westerkwartier is a predominantly rural area situated in the West of Groningen province in the North of the Netherlands. It comprises an area of 345 km² -of which 80 % is agricultural land- and had a population of 59,869 in 2007 (173.4 persons per km^2). It includes four municipalities and has been identified as a LEADER region in 2007. Since it is not an administrative unit, the Westerkwartier does not have any authoritative or regulative powers. The Westerkwartier has a good infrastructure, connecting it with nearby urban centres. Accordingly, the Westerkwartier is an attractive residential area for commuters and their families. The economy of the Westerkwartier is highly dependent on its relation with urban centres and dominated by the service sector. Nevertheless, agriculture still plays an important role in maintaining the nationally acknowledged landscape of the area.

The Comarca de Verín, an EU convergence region, is located in the South of Galicia (Spain). A Comarca is a land division unit and has only limited official recognition and no administrative function. The Comarca de Verín has an area of 1,007 km2 and comprises eight municipalities. It has maintained a population below 30,000 inhabitants over the last decades (28,672 in 2006), and has around 29 inhabitants per km². It is marked by population decline and the economy depends mainly on the service industry and agriculture.

County Roscommon in the West Region of Ireland is classified as a traditional agricultural area. In 2006, the population of County Roscommon stood at 58,768 people, representing 14.1% of the 415,500 living in the West Region. This places Roscommon 22nd out of the 26 counties in terms of population size and gives it a relatively low population density of only 23.1 persons per km2. Agriculture has been the main economic activity in the County, being slowly replaced in recent years by the service economy (including tourism), high tech and the construction industry.

1.4 Research methodology, methods of data collection and analysis

Our aim was to find out how support for joint learning and innovation can best be arranged to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance in rural areas. The thesis does therefore *not* focus on the learning process itself or the innovations produced as an outcome of the collective agency built. This has been extensively reviewed by other scholars (e.g. Dlouhá et al., 2013; Sol et al., 2013 ; Wals et al., 2011). The thesis focuses on how *support* can best be arranged to help people build collective agency in any field of activity contributing to rural development. In this section, I will first outline the ontology and epistemology that guided our research in WP4, because the research methodology determines the methods chosen for data collection and analysis (Dillon and Wals, 2006; Haverland and Yanow, 2012). Then, I will proceed to outline the methods for data collection and analysis.

1.4.1 Ontology

To support joint learning and innovation successfully and thus to contribute to effectuating more collaborative modes of governance, it is important to find out what features of interfaces are perceived as operating well and what features are perceived as problematic by those learning to work together. Since interfaces are sites where people with different interests, power and resources interact (Long, 1984), one may expect the concepts of well-working and problematic operational features to vary between individuals (Edwards, 1997). By talking to development actors active within the different domains of the analytical framework, differences in perceptions were revealed that helped us to understand and conceptualise retrospectively what are well-working operational interfaces. The process of developing our own concept of well-working operational interfaces was, however, difficult. Our research team was composed of scientists from different academic disciplines and there was no previous empirical experience that we could have drawn from to guide our investigations. So even if we referred to the same phenomena, we may have used different mental models to construct

it (Aarts and Woerkum, 2006). The conceptualisation of well-working operational interfaces amongst us researchers was thus a joint learning and innovation process in itself.

1.4.2 Epistemology

Lacking a definition of 'well-working' operational interfaces and assuming that its concept was highly variable between individuals, our research was exploratory. For us as researchers, this meant that we needed to "*discover through our own experience*" (Stebbins, 2001, p. vii) and use an open character, flexibility and pragmatism in dealing with our research question (Stebbins, 2001). The explorative approach of this thesis entails an interpretative methodology that follows an aim to understand the meaning of well-working operational interfaces to those involved in joint learning and innovation (Haverland and Yanow, 2012). This required the research team to collaborate amongst each other and to engage and interact with involved development actors in the different case study area. The investigations thus touched upon the criteria associated with action research as defined by Herr and Anderson (2004). The physical presence of the researchers in the different case study areas was thus an important factor influencing the availability and quality of the information obtained (Haverland and Yanow, 2012). The methods of data collection and analysis were then chosen to match the explorative and interpretative research methodology of our WP4 research (Dillon and Wals, 2006).

1.4.3 Methods of data collection and analysis

All information used in this thesis was obtained from the DERREG research project. Empirical research was carried out simultaneously by the DERREG WP4 partners between February 2009 and December 2011. During this time, I carried out research in the Westerkwartier and additionally visited the Comarca de Verín, Alytus County and Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia.

In each case study area empirical investigations were carried out following the same, three successive research steps. The research steps were designed to build up on each other; the information obtained in one research step provided the basis for engaging in the following research step, thereby reflecting our own learning-by-doing progress as researchers. The research commenced with mapping and analysing policy strategies and knowledge facilities. Subsequently, grassroots development initiatives were mapped and analysed concerning their support received from public administration and knowledge facilities. Finally, interfaces operating between the different domains of the framework were identified and analysed for features that would constrain or enhance joint learning and innovation. From this information, features of well-working operational interfaces were identified and analysed to understand why they were working well in the particular case study areas. In the following the method of data collection and analysis of each research step is presented.

Step 1: Mapping and analysing policy strategies and knowledge facilities

We commenced our investigations with a review of public policy documents and programmes supporting joint learning and innovation in the different case study areas. This initial overview provided us with some first insights into the type of joint learning and innovation supported by public administration in the different case study areas. It also helped us to identify development actors involved in implementing the different support programmes. To find out more about the implementation of the different policies and programmes and the problems encountered in the implementation process, 10-15 key informants were questioned using semi-structured interviews in each case study area. A full interview guideline can be found in Appendix II[2].

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[2] Where applicable, the research team would translate the interview questions into another language than English. In these cases, the answers were translated back into English for analysis by the research partners

We also mapped available knowledge facilities (such as education, research and consultancy) and analysed their contribution to capacity building, learning and innovation. Also here secondary data in form of reports, studies, and the internet were consulted and key informants of knowledge facilities questioned using semi-structured interviews (see Appendix III). Furthermore, the intra/extra regional networks of co-operating public and private agents and agencies involved in regional capacity building, learning and innovation were analysed.

All informants were identified using internet research and snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews were chosen, because it allowed producing comparable answers between the case study areas, while at the same time leaving room for modifications and additional research questions that allow the interviewed person to express their views on a specific topic freely (Flick, 2009).

For each case study area, the results were compiled and presented in a descriptive text. Interview results were used to add information to results obtained from secondary data and to deal with upcoming questions and the need for occasional clarification. Afterwards, the results of the different case study areas were compared and similarities and differences in the findings noted. The results of this first research stage were mapped out in tables and figures and presented in the DERREG research document D4.1 *Overview of learning and innovation support strategies* (Wellbrock et al., 2010).

Step 2: Mapping and analysing grassroots development initiatives

The inventory of grassroots development initiatives was started earlier in the Westerkwartier area than in the other case study areas. From these first experiences, guidelines were drawn for the research partners in the other case study areas, so that they could follow the same method. I will therefore explain in more detail how I conducted research in the Westerkwartier.

From April until July 2010 and again in September 2010, I lived in the Westerkwartier. During this time, I had conversations with local development actors (such as members

of development initiatives, municipality and provincial employees and NGOs), and I searched the internet to find formally organised grassroots development initiatives (such as networks, associations, organisations and foundations) and informally organised grassroots development initiatives. I took care to select development initiatives covering a wide range of development aspects, such as rural economy, agriculture, nature and landscape, and civic (cultural) development for the inventory. During this process, key members of 13 grassroots development initiatives (such as long-term members with administrative functions) were identified and approached for an interview which lasted approximately one hour. The semi-structured interview (see Appendix IV) was divided into four parts. First, general information about the goal, organisation, participant's activities and evolution of the development activity was identified. Secondly, the support they received from public administration to carry out their activities was inventoried and evaluated. Thirdly, support and facilitation received from knowledge facilities were inventoried and evaluated. Lastly, the initiators were asked to formulate their future goals. Based on the information provided, a matrix was designed to capture and synthesise the key characteristics of the type of support received by the grassroots development initiatives inventoried.

With the permission of the interview partners, conversations were recorded using a SHARP digital voice recorder. Additionally, a picture was taken of the interview partners. In cases where no picture was made, the picture was taken from the internet and the source cited. The recorded interviews were saved as mp3 files on the computer and transcribed into word documents. The word documents were translated from Dutch into English and the information ordered according to the different development aspects as mentioned above.

The research step was repeated in all case study areas, although not all researcher partners installed themselves in their respective case study areas. The matrices of the different case study areas where subsequently compared for notable similarities and differences in the type of support provided for grassroots development initiatives and the way in which the support was made available to the grassroots development initiatives. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying and comparing what kind and

way of delivering support was evaluated positively by the grassroots development initiatives and what and way of delivering support was evaluated negatively. The results of this research step are presented in the DERREG research report *D4.2 Support of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives: operational quality of arrangements* (Wellbrock et al., 2011b).

Step 3: Analysis of interfaces operating between the different domains of the framework

In the final research step, operational interfaces were identified and analysed to learn about well-working and problematic operational features of the different interfaces. In each case study area, 4-6 operational interfaces that were actually operating and supporting people to learn to work together were selected for an in-depth study. Involved stakeholders were invited to discuss about the operation of the interfaces they were involved in, in order to identify well-working and not so well-working operational features. This allows us not only to identify what works well, but we also learned why some interfaces were not working well or why they where even lacking. This was then used as basis for identifying well-working features of operational interfaces and led to the selection of good practises examples for the DERREG project.

Except the Westerkwartier, the in-depth study of operational interfaces was done using face-to-face interviews with relevant informants. In the Westerkwartier, a discussion round was held including representatives of public administration, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives. In this case, the framework was used as a visual aid to map the different development actors and the interfaces found and to jointly reflect on the way the development actors were working together. Part of the research in the Westerkwartier was therefore to test whether the framework, apart from being an analytical tool, could also serve as an interactive research tool for evaluation which also allowed us as researchers to become participants of the research process, potentially influencing the development process in the area (Herr and Anderson, 2004).

The results of this in-depth analysis are presented in the DERREG research report *D4.3 Summary of good practise examples: Well-working arrangements for support of joint learning and innovation in Europe's rural regions* (Wellbrock et al., 2011c). The results of all research steps were synthesised in the DERREG D4.4 Summary report (Roep et al., 2011), where an extensive comparative analysis was added.

All interviewees were informed about the purpose of the research and later debriefed about the outcomes of the different research stages. In addition, feedback events were held to present and discuss the research findings, to help stakeholders reflect on their involvement and activities, and formulate recommendations on how to best arrange support for joint learning and innovation in each case study area.

1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis comprises four empirical chapters that are based on independent scientific publications. In chapter 2, I show how the learning region concept and triple helix thesis can be reframed to address arrangements supporting collaboration in rural areas. In chapter 3, I reflect on the experiences of using the conceptual lens as a research tool to study the operational features of arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in the case study area Westerkwartier. In chapters 4 and 5, I deal with the question of how to best arrange support for collaboration by comparing operational features of arrangements across the German and European case study areas. In chapter 6, I conclude with a discussion of the lessons learnt concerning a) well-working operational features of arrangements supporting collaborative modes of governance, b) the development and refinement of a conceptual lens to frame empirical examples of arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation, and c) the potential of the refined framework to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance. The thesis concludes with the references and a summary. Appendices along with an extended conference abstract showing the application of the framework as a research tool in a non-European rural development context and research guidelines follow.

CHAPTER 2

AN INTEGRATED PERSPECTIVE ON RURAL REGIONAL LEARNING

Impressions from the Westerkwartier, *Source*: Wiebke Wellbrock

ABSTRACT Regional learning and innovation is a key to promote more resilient, robust and inclusive rural areas. Current analytical frameworks focus on support for knowledge spill-over from academia to industry and sector-oriented learning. The high diversity of actors and activities contributing to rural regional development is thereby not addressed. In this paper, existing frameworks are revised to offer an integrated perspective on the support for rural regional learning. The revised framework is used to identify, map and analyse supportive arrangements and their operational interfaces. It also offers an analytical perspective for beneficiaries to evaluate the support received. The DERREG case study area Westerkwartier is used to illustrate the use of the revised framework and its relevance for empirical research. The revised framework can be used to compare supportive arrangements for learning across different rural regions.

Key words: rural regional learning, place-based development, supportive policies, joint learning and innovation, public-private arrangements, capacity building, regional reflexivity

2.1 Introduction

In 2006, the OECD stated that rural development policies need to focus on places instead of sectors to ensure more robust and resilient rural areas in an era of globalisation (OECD, 2006a). The focus on places instead of sectors requires a coordination of actors across sectors and different levels of governance (OECD, 2006b). As Woods (2007) states: *"The impact of globalisation in reshaping rural places is manifested through processes of negotiation, manipulation and hybridization, contingent on the mobilization of associational power and conducted through but not contained by local micro-policies"*. The coordination of different actors in different sectors and across different levels of governance requires partnerships, an active role and high commitment of stakeholders, as well as effective knowledge sharing and competences (OECD, 2006b; Tomaney, 2010). Successful place-based development approaches therefore place capacity-building and innovation at their centre (Tomaney, 2010).

Support for regional capacity-building has largely been studied with regard to the production and transfer of new, scientific knowledge and human capital within high-tech, science, media, and communication and information industry in urban, economic centres (Woods, 2009). Studies have thereby focussed on the public support for knowledge spill-over and provision of related human capital from academia to industry (e.g. Asheim, 1996; Rutten and Boekema, 2007; Storper, 1993). The triple helix thesis (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000) and the learning region frame the underlying government-industry-academia interactions in economic core areas (Rutten and Boekema, 2007). Dargan and Shucksmith (2008) and Shucksmith (2010), however, argue that since rural regions usually lack a high density of businesses and business networks, learning and innovation taking place in rural regions is not well incorporated into standard approaches defining and measuring learning and innovation.

With regard to rural areas, capacity building and innovation has mainly been regarded as sector-oriented learning and innovation processes. This sector-oriented approach to development, however, is making it difficult to recognize potential conflicts of interests

and act upon them (Reimer and Markey, 2008). With regard to sector-oriented learning, the role of extension services for agricultural development has, for example, been studied extensively (e.g. Leeuwis, 2004). Other studies (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Shortall, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010) focussed on participatory processes and the formation of social capital through programmes such as LEADER, while still others (Ellström, 2010; Fenwick, 2010; Wals, 2007) looked at the underlying social learning processes and the role of knowledge or innovation brokers (Howells, 2006; Klerkx et al., 2009; Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009; Suvinen et al., 2010). An integrated, regional approach as offered by the triple helix thesis (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000) or the 'learning region' concept (Rutten and Boekema, 2007) is, however, still missing.

Using an integrated approach to the study of how learning and innovation in rural areas is actually supported and how this support is arranged could help to provide an integrated view on how rural places deal with globalisation, taking into account differential geographies of globalisation across space (Woods, 2007). In addition, an integrated, regional approach will be able to account for the heterogeneity of activities caused by globalisation and account for the diversity of identities and interests in a particular space (Massey, 1991). It is therefore questionable whether the normative focus of the current theoretical frameworks on linkages between the industry, government and academia (Asheim, 1996; Buesa et al., 2006; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000; Huggins et al., 2008; Rutten and Boekema, 2007) can account for the diverse support needed to ensure regional learning and innovation in rural areas (Tovey, 2008). Since current theoretical frameworks focus on industry-state-academia linkages as well as support for scientific, technological expert knowledge, their use for studying support for regional learning and innovation in rural areas must be challenged (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Doloreux, 2003; Terluin, 2003).

With this paper, which is based on the EU FP7 project DERREG (Developing Europe's Rural Regions in the Era of Globalisation), we want to advance the theoretical as well as empirical understanding of regional learning and innovation in rural areas. We will do so by revising two existing frameworks - the 'learning region' concept and the 'triple helix thesis - to develop an integrated perspective on the support for learning and

innovation in rural areas. First, we will outline and critically discuss the two existing frameworks. Next, we will explain the particularities of learning and innovation in rural areas. This is followed by an elaboration of the integrated framework based on a revision of the existing 'triple helix' and 'learning region' frameworks. The potential of the integrated framework is shortly illustrated with preliminary findings from the Westerkwartier in the Netherlands, one of the DERREG case study areas. We will end this paper with a few concluding remarks about the use of the integrated framework for studying rural regional learning and innovation.

2.2 Support for learning and innovation in economic core areas

In urban-centred, economic core regions, support for regional learning and innovation has received considerable scientific attention (Asheim, 1996; Asheim and Coenen, 2005; Buesa et al., 2006; Huggins et al., 2008; Lawson and Lorenz, 1999; Rutten and Boekema, 2007, 2009; Storper, 1993). Here, it is defined as the support of a rapid exchange of new, scientific, tacit, regionally embedded knowledge and human capital between academia and industry which aims to ensure a leading role of regions in the globalising economy (Lawson and Lorenz, 1999). Successful support for regional learning and innovation is argued to depend on well-working linkages between the industry, the state and academia (Storper, 1993). Their collaboration is facilitated through spatial proximity (Asheim, 1996).

The study of these linkages has given rise to the 'learning region' (Florida, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Rutten and Boekema, 2007; Storper, 1993) and the 'triple helix thesis' (Etzkowitz, 2003; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000). Spatially clustered 'learning regions' are thus defined by Rutten and Boekema (2007) as "[the space where] *regional actors engage in collaboration and coordination for mutual benefit, resulting in a process of regional learning. Regional characteristics affect the degree to which the process of regional learning leads to regional renewal*" (p.136). The authors of both theoretical frameworks argue, as illustrated by the example of the triple helix in figure 2.1, that the industry, the state and academia all have separate functions but they interact

with each other similar to the DNA strings of a triple helix (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000). The industry, for example, is associated with the site of production, academia acts as a source of new knowledge and human capital, and the state ensures stable and contractual relationships (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000).
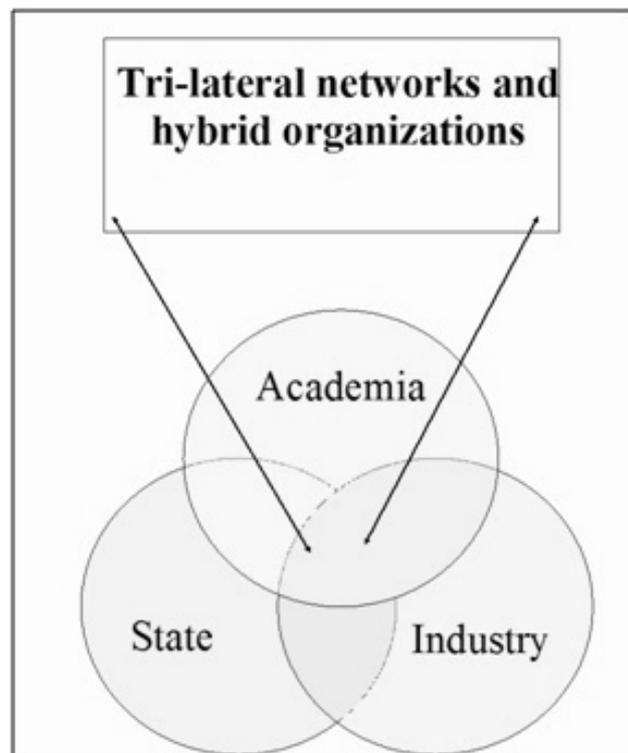
Figure 2.1 Triple helix thesis (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000)

According to Asheim (1996) and Florida (1995), the success of support for regional learning and innovation depends on arranging effective, co-operative and operational partnerships between actors of the different strings. Thereby, it can be assumed that the various partners have different expectations and interests. To make compromises and to reach a constitutive agreement involves arguably an exchange and negotiation of meanings, goals, stakes and strategies as well as values, norm and codes of conduct. Codes of conduct, norms and values are referred to as institutions. Institutions are thus

regarded as: "*a set of common habits, routines, established practises, rules or laws that regulate the relations and interactions between individuals and groups*" (Edquist and Johnson, 1997, p. 46).

Agreeing on a common institution requires the partners to reflect on existing, shared codes of conduct and to change them accordingly (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002). Partnerships are thus characterised by an on-going process of negotiation. This process is referred to as institutional learning or institutional reflexivity and occurs through learning-by-learning and learning-by-doing (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002). Hence, in order to arrange the support and facilitate learning and innovation, supporters and facilitators engage in continuous learning-by-doing processes themselves.

Operational interfaces are needed to provide support for regional learning and innovation (Etzkowitz, 2003). These operational interfaces are defined as critical focal points, enabling people to learn together and from one another thereby acting as channels for dialogue and cooperation (Nyhan, 2007).

Regional learning and innovation is supported in two ways: by supporting knowledge spill-over and volarization of knowledge from academia towards industries to commercialise it into innovative products in order to create competitive advantages for regional businesses (Keeble et al., 1999; Morgan, 1997; Storper, 1993). Examples are the close collaboration of Cambridge University and businesses in Cambridge business park in England (Keeble et al., 1999), the knowledge transfer between Stanford University and businesses in the science park of Silicon Valley, California (Rutten and Boekema, 2007). Recently, this model is referred to as the Golden Triangle by Wageningen University and Research Centre and the Dutch Ministry of Economy, Agriculture and Innovation to promote the volarization of scientific knowledge through a close cooperation between science, business and policy. A second way is to focus on the support for developing human capital, arguing that it is crucial for understanding and using new, scientific knowledge that can lead to a successful competition in the globalising economy (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002). Wolfe and Gertler (2002) thus argue that the key to successful regional learning and innovation does not lie in supporting knowledge spill-over and valorisation but in providing businesses with the abilities to

develop skills and capacities to filter and use new, scientific knowledge to their competitive advantage. Building competitive advantages that are based on specific assets and resources of a region, and in particular human capital (Barca, 2009a) is also important for rural areas. Local knowledge appears to be a crucial factor for success (Reimer and Markey, 2008).

Both, rather normative, interpretations of regional learning and innovation are mainly focussed on economic growth and have influenced the formulation of regional development policies and to some extent rural development policies. The focus of these development policies has thereby shifted from compensating disadvantaged regions to creating more competitive regions based on a re-appreciation of place-based resources and assets (see Barca, 2009a). Some policies aim to facilitate a copy-pasting of the 'Silicon Valley' example (Gustavsen and Ennals, 2007). It is therefore argued that support for regional learning processes does not deal with supporting 'learning' but with transforming new, scientific expertise into commercial goods (Cooke, 2007). Other policies focus on support for developing human capital, as for example the 'Lernende Regionen' concept in Germany, Austria and other European countries (Resch, 2006).

2.3 Support for joint-learning and innovation in rural areas

In contrast to economic core areas, development in rural areas is characterised by a high diversity of actors and activities (Roep et al., 2009). As illustrated in figure 2.2, these different actors all operate within an 'arena' and their actions contribute jointly to the development of a versatile and vital countryside (Roep et al., 2009).

versatile and vital countryside   *development of area*

↑   ↑
| ⋮
| ↓

Diversity of practices   *arena*

various actors & all sorts of processes
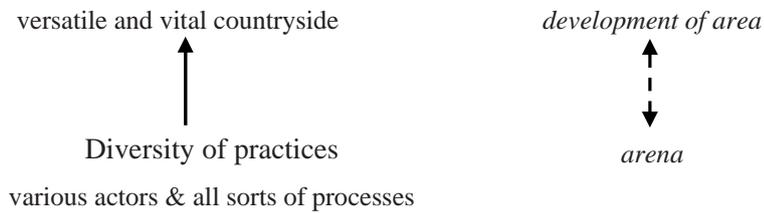
Figure 2.2 Diverse actors and processes engaging in rural regional development (Roep et al., 2009)

Rural areas differ from each other and show unique dynamics (Roep et al., 2009). Their specific development processes co-evolve with socio, economic and ecological processes (Stagl, 2007). Some rural areas are referred to as 'cold-spots' of development and are often faced with problems such as becoming interchangeable and losing their regional identity in the globalising economy (Wiskerke, 2007). The consequences are perceptible in multiple ways. For example, economic and non-economic activities become spatially disentwined (Wiskerke, 2007). Inhabitants feel less connected to their living area and are less interested in investing time and capital in sustaining the liveability of their rural habitat. Furthermore, possibilities for inhabitants to seek attractive employment opportunities in disadvantaged rural regions are small, forcing them to leave their areas in search for job opportunities (Stockdale, 2006). In this regard, it is argued that highly educated persons are often the first to leave, causing a so called 'brain-drain', resulting in rural areas with low potentials to develop and a lack of opportunities to participate in the globalising market (Stockdale, 2006). Other rural regions are performing well in seizing opportunities arising from globalisation and are thus referred to as 'hot-spots' of development (Wiskerke, 2007). These areas are often characterised by population and economic growth (Terluin, 2003). In both cases, however, it is argued that in order to enhance rural economies, producers and consumers need to be reconnected within the region, products need to be re-embedded in the region, economic activities diversified and non-economic and economic activities

entwined (Wiskerke, 2007). Support required for learning and innovation in rural areas is therefore highly context dependent and problem specific (Tovey, 2008). Development processes that contribute to the quality of and vitality of particular rural regions can thus be of natural, social and technical value and the required support and facilitation may differ between different locations, goods and services (Roep et al., 2009).

According to the OECD (2006a, p.3) this "*multi-disciplinary nature of rural development calls for comprehensive analytical frameworks to analyse and evaluate multi-sectored, place-based approaches*." The OECD (2006a, p.106) argues further that monitoring and evaluation are keys to an integrated rural policy: "*Evaluation becomes an opportunity for actors at different levels to jointly assess how well they are doing and how the effectiveness of their actions can be improved*" Monitoring and evaluation is also necessary because institutional arrangements often lack the power to deliver policy or to engage in networks of governance (Hajer, 2003). By monitoring and evaluating support for rural regional learning and innovation, one can thus argue to identify institutional voids which have "*no clear rules and norms according to which politics is to be conducted and policy measures are to be agreed upon*" (Hajer, 2003, p.175).

Hence, given the aforementioned constraints of existing approaches, we argue that it is necessary to revise the current, normative frameworks of regional learning into an empirical research tool to analyse and evaluate to what extent existing (policy) arrangements are able to support regional learning and innovation processes in rural areas and to identify possible institutional voids.

2.4 Revising the 'triple helix and 'learning region' frameworks

To address the discrepancy between existing frameworks to study the support for regional learning and innovation and the need for frameworks to address regional learning and innovation in rural areas, existing frameworks need to be revised. As a starting point, we will borrow from frameworks to study learning and innovation in urban, economic areas and take the triple helix thesis (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff,

2000) and learning region model (Rutten and Boekema, 2007) as the basis for revision. To adapt the triple helix thesis and learning region model in such way that it can address support for regional learning and innovation in rural areas, three steps need to be followed:

First, the components of the framework need to be adjusted to account for the high diversity of actors and activities contributing to place-based development in rural areas. As figure 2.3 shows, the string 'industry' will be replaced by the term 'region' representing various actors and activities. Following Nyhan (2007) and Roep et al. (2009), the region can thus be regarded as an 'arena' which comprises diverse actors and their different grassroots development initiatives. The shift of focus from industry to region, and within the region towards activities of grassroots development initiatives, offers a tool for investigating neo-endogenous development in a rural area, which focuses on the needs and capacities of local areas from the perspective of local people (Ray, 2006).

According to Nyhan (2007) education and training facilities are 'spiders in the web' of support for learning and innovation. One can, however, argue that other knowledge support structures, such as public and private knowledge institutes, private consultancy services, public institutes, NGOS, private development experts as well as grassroots development initiators can act as knowledge facilitators. Instead of using the string 'academia', the revised framework will therefore include the string 'knowledge support structure', attempting to comprise all kinds of facilitating agents and agencies within it.

The string 'state' will be replaced by 'public administration', including supporting policies and operational actors that implement these. In contrast to the term 'state', which refers to the political organization of society or the institutes of government, the term 'public administration' refers to the implementation (e.g. the planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and controlling) of government policies and operations (Encyclopedia, 2011a, b). By exchanging the term 'state' for 'public administration', the focus of the framework thus shifts from describing the actors involved in providing support for rural regional learning towards the actions taken to support rural regional learning.
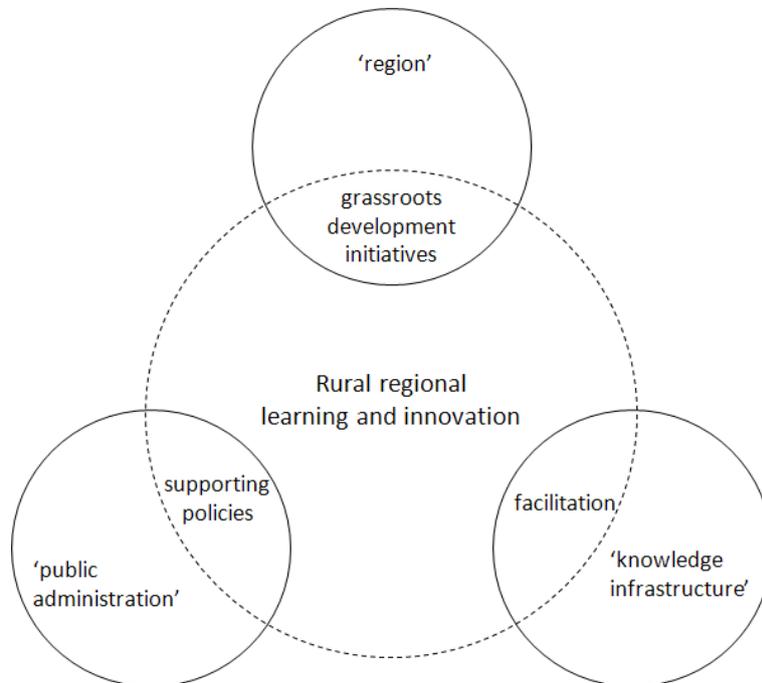
Figure 2.3 Integrated conceptual framework of rural regional learning

Secondly, it is necessary to consider the type of interactions studied. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) and Rutten and Boekema (2007) both focus on studying interfaces between the state, industry and academia which aim to facilitate a knowledge and human capital spill over from academia to industry. Rural areas also need to be given support for innovation, including arrangements that facilitate knowledge transfer between research, education and the industry (Crevoisier and Jeannerat, 2009; Doloreux, 2002, 2003; Skuras et al., 2005). Here, however, place-based development depends highly on interactions between diverse actors and their on-going development processes (Roep et al., 2009). At the same time, however, the high diversity of actors and activities arguably also demands a higher diversity of knowledge and human capital than in economic core regions. Tovey (2008) thus argues that learning and innovation processes in rural regions do not only require support and facilitation of spill-over of technological, expert knowledge and related human capital from academia to industry, but support and facilitation also needs to address the use and acquisition of indigenous

knowledge about local places and locally-embedded resources. It is further argued that local and lay knowledge is also important, for instance, to encourage novelty production and to develop endogeneity (Ploeg and Marsden, 2008) or to secure the enrolment of local resources in global networks by using knowledge about local markets, cultural preferences and sustainable resource management (Jasanoff and Martello, 2004; Skuras et al., 2005; Woods, 2007).

In contrast to the need for developing skills and capacities to filter and use new, scientific knowledge (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002), the study of regional learning and innovation in rural regions is thus argued to require a shift from focussing on forms of knowledge towards focussing on knowledge processes, exploring dimensions of knowledge building, collaborative social learning and the re-embedding of local knowledge (Bruckmeier and Tovey, 2008). Since many, diverse actors are trying to carry out different development activities in the same rural place, they need to learn to work together (Roep et al., 2009). This occurs through 'joint learning-by-doing' (Wielinga et al., 2009). These processes cannot be understood as formal learning settings with a sender and a receiver but they are informal, interactive, social, situational learning-by-doing processes (e.g. Asheim, 2007; Franklin et al., 2011; Glasser, 2007; Roep et al., 2009; Wals, 2007).

As illustrated in figure 2.4, the key focus of the integrated framework is therefore centred on highlighting existing interfaces, as indicated by the arrows a, b, c, that aim to support and facilitate knowledge processes, exploring dimensions of knowledge building, collaborative social learning and the re-embedding of local knowledge in grassroots development initiatives as opposed to the transfer of new, scientific, expert knowledge.

The framework can be used as a heuristic tool to map, analyse and evaluate active interfaces through which support for joint learning and innovation is provided in a particular rural area, and analyse how these interfaces are arranged. In contrast to the triple helix thesis (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000), the integrated framework does not focus on what learning and innovation is supported or what type of support is given.

Instead it focuses on how support for regional learning and innovation is actually arranged and how and by whom it is mediated, thus how interfaces are operating.
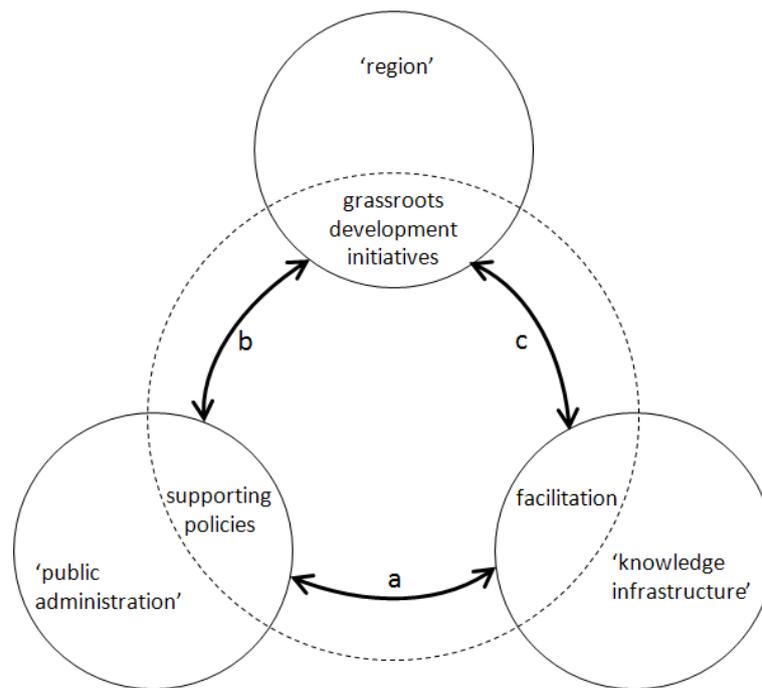
Figure 2.4 The arrangement and operation of interfaces: core of rural regional learning

According to the OECD (2006b), place-based development requires an integrated coordination of support at governmental and local level. To find out how and by whom the interfaces are operated, the revised framework is able to guide research along four lines. First, it helps to map supporting policies and actors as well as the support provided in the three domains identified: supportive policies, grassroots development initiatives and the knowledge support structure. Secondly, it helps to map existing interfaces and analyse how these are arranged. Thirdly, the heuristic framework can be used to evaluate existing arrangements. The second and third steps can also be done in an interactive way, jointly with supporters and beneficiaries. This can be done by first mapping existing supportive arrangements and interfaces and then discussing how these operate. Finally, based on the mapping, analysis and (interactive) evaluation, well and

less well-working operational interfaces can not only be identified, but also an understanding of why some interfaces work better than others can be generated. On the basis of these findings, lessons can be drawn on how to improve existing arrangements or how to create new ones.

The integrated framework has the potential of a multifaceted tool that can enhance the reflexivity of the respective stakeholders involved in the development of a rural area and helps to support regional learning and innovation processes leading to capacity building. In doing so, it enables to identify institutional voids as "*discrepancies between the existing institutional order and actual practises of policy making*" (Hajer, 2003, p.176).

2.5 Preliminary findings from the Westerkwartier, Netherlands

Guided by the integrated framework, research was carried out in six case study areas to investigate how support for rural regional learning and innovation is actually arranged and, subsequently, how it can be best arranged. In this section, the potentials of the integrated, analytical framework on rural regional learning will be briefly illustrated with preliminary findings from the Westerkwartier case study area, as part of on-going research (Roep et al., 2011; Wellbrock et al., 2011b). The Westerkwartier is a predominantly rural area in the province Groningen in the North of The Netherlands (see figure 2.5). It comprises four municipalities and has been a LEADER region since 2003 and has one Local Action Group which advises the municipality on questions regarding the socio-economic development of the region.

Three research steps were followed. First, policies and available knowledge facilitators were mapped. Secondly, place-based grassroots development initiatives and supportive institutional arrangements were inventoried. Finally, existing arrangements to support rural regional learning and innovation were evaluated using discussion rounds. The research was conducted through qualitative interviews with key stakeholders amongst the beneficiaries and supporters as well as through interactive discussion rounds with both, supporters and beneficiaries, over a period of two years. Specifically, the findings

of the first two research steps will be illustrated: 1) mapping supporting policies and actors as well as the support provided in the three domains identified: supportive policies, grassroots development initiatives and within the knowledge support structure; 2) mapping and analysing existing interfaces and how these are arranged.

Figure 2.5 Location of Westerkwartier (Western part of Groningen Province) in the Netherlands (Source of Map: www.world-geographics.com)

Ad1) Mapping of supporting policies, actors and available knowledge facilitators

In the Westerkwartier, the investigations have shown that development is predominantly guided by rural development policies. Regional development policies influence the Westerkwartier mainly indirectly by creating extra-regional development circumstances. Regional policies only target small areas of the Westerkwartier, which are involved in development projects of the region North Netherland. Support for place-based

development in the Westerkwartier can thus mostly be expected from rural development policy. Here, the LEADER programme appears to be particularly relevant (see also Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010).

A wide range of public actors is involved in formulating and implementing policy objectives and financial support means for the Westerkwartier. These include, for instance, the European Union, ministries such as the Ministry for Economy, Agriculture and Innovation and the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science, but also the province of Groningen, representatives of local municipalities and water boards.

Also with regard to knowledge facilitators, a wide range of actors and agencies can provide support for rural regional learning and innovation in the Westerkwartier. These include publically funded knowledge institutes, such as Wageningen University, as well as numerous private agencies and consultancies. Finally, in the Westerkwartier, as well as in other DERREG case study regions, it has been shown that grassroots development initiatives can cover a wide range of development aspects, such as nature, landscape & environment, civic & community development, SME support and culture & history. To a lesser extent, the inventoried initiatives also deal with (multifunctional) agriculture, agriculture & forestry, tourism, and education, training & employment (Wellbrock et al., 2011b). All of these contribute to place-based development in the Westerkwartier and need to get involved in an integrated, place-based development vision for the region.

Ad2) Mapping and analysing operational interfaces and how these are arranged

Figure 2.6 demonstrates how the analytical framework can be used to map supportive arrangements on the basis of the empirical research in the Westerkwartier (Roep et al., 2011; Wellbrock et al., 2010, 2011b).
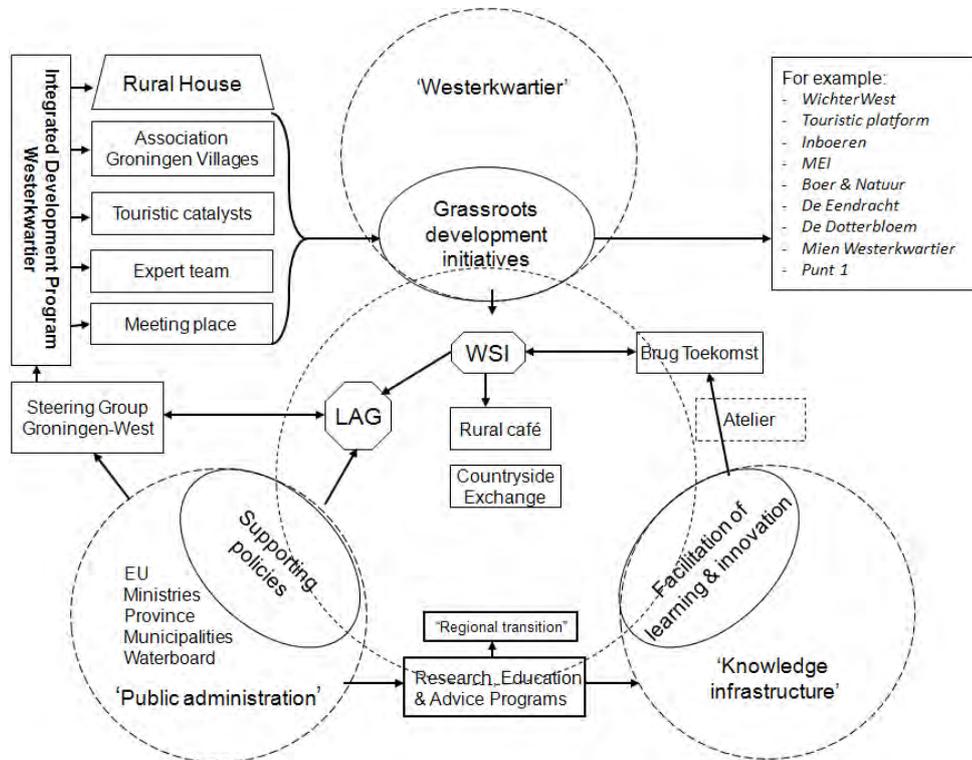
Figure 2.6 Map of the support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation in the Westerkwartier

As figure 2.6 shows, the investigations in the Westerkwartier have revealed a number of different operational interfaces. With regard to direct support from public administration, these range from regional development networks (such as associations, NGOs or individuals) to public-private partnerships (such as the Local Action Group), to public institutes (such as governmental services and public knowledge institutes) and professional services (e.g. development advisors) (Wellbrock et al., 2011c). With regard to support from the knowledge support structures, interfaces were operated by public and private knowledge facilitators, private consultancy services, public institutes, NGOS, private development experts. In addition also grassroots development initiators themselves were seen to provide education, training and research (Wellbrock et al., 2011b, c).

The support and facilitation provided can be grouped into five categories: 'financial support' (i.e. different kinds of subsidies and procedural support), 'knowledge and skills' (for example advice, facilitation, education and research activities), 'physical infrastructure' (for example meeting spaces, biosphere reserves and information centres) and 'social infrastructure' (for example in form of network incubation and cluster forming) (Wellbrock et al., 2011b).

As figure 2.6 shows, most of the operational interfaces were providing support from administration. LEADER money was, for example, used to hire catalysts in form of independent development advisors, in order to incubate networks of touristic entrepreneurs in the region. Their aim was to stimulate economic development within the Westerkwartier by promoting its visibility inside and outside the region. To do so, the touristic entrepreneurs needed to be associated in order to work for a common, place-based development agenda instead of focussing only on individual benefits. In addition, a local NGO called the Association Groningen Villages has been assigned by the local government to incubate entrepreneurial networks and to develop vision plans with villages in the region.

Operational interfaces engaging the knowledge support structure with grassroots development initiatives in the Westerkwartier, however, were less frequently found. The operational interface 'Brug toekomst' as shown in the framework, for example was a temporary, terminated research project (Wellbrock et al., 2011b, c). The project 'Atelier' is a new work and knowledge network that should bring people together, who are involved with regional questions in a particular area. These people may include students, researchers, lecturers, public administrators, experts, citizens and other stakeholders (Wielinga et al., 2009).

Finally, the investigations in the Westerkwartier have also shown that grassroots development initiators themselves can create operational interfaces. As figure 2.6 shows, the Westerkwartier Initiative Group (WSI) is a platform for numerous development organisations in the Westerkwartier and represented in the Local Action Group. Together, they act as a 'think tank' for development ideas in the Westerkwartier

and organize, amongst others, a rural café which serves an informal exchange of information and ideas between denizens and imitators.

Interestingly, all operational interfaces mentioned are located in a 'rural house' (see fig. 2.6) situated in the case study area. This house acts as a single window to all types of public support, hence reducing the amount of bureaucracy for beneficiaries and increasing inter-sector communication and development cooperation.

The empirical results of the Westerkwartier show that operational interfaces to support regional learning and innovation can be numerous and highly diverse in appearance. Furthermore, they can be informal or formalised (institutional) arrangements. The results further suggest that two types of operational interfaces can be distinguished, those through which public administration provides direct support to grassroots development initiatives and those operational interfaces through which public administration enables the knowledge support structure to engage with grassroots development initiatives. The conceptual framework has worked as a heuristic, research tool to identify, map and analyse the different interfaces operational in the Westerkwartier.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the presented, analytical framework of rural regional learning and innovation enables an integrative, empirical perspective on rural areas and facilitates an analysis and evaluation of the active support for joint learning and innovation in rural areas.

As a research tool, the integrated framework offers the possibility to map, analyse, evaluate and compare how support for rural regional learning and innovation is arranged in different rural areas. The core focus of the framework is on identifying what interfaces work well, given the contextual differences across rural areas. The integrated perspective on rural regional learning presented in this paper offers a tool to monitor and evaluate the design of existing arrangements and the actual working of interfaces.

The basic assumption is that better working interfaces will render supporting policies more effectively. The framework further enables reflexivity among the practitioners from the perspective of the three domains (e.g. policy makers, initiators, facilitators), which facilitates an integrative approach to joint learning and innovation in rural areas. Thereby, it enhances regional reflexivity, which is widely seen as key to enhance an inclusive, place-based development in rural areas across Europe. It highlights once again the crucial facilitating role of education, research and advice in enhancing regional reflexivity and regional capacity building.

The integrative framework has been introduced and developed in the context of the DERREG project. The first, rather explorative, empirical application of the newly developed, integrated, heuristic perspective on rural regional learning and innovation has clearly revealed the inextricable web of interrelations between supportive policies, grassroots development initiatives and facilitators of learning and innovation, the many stakeholders involved and the various activities employed. An unambiguous unravelling and categorisation of the different threads and arrangements, as nodes in the web, appeared to be difficult. Nevertheless, the potentials of the perspective are clear and promising. Both, the theoretical and empirical grounding of the integrated perspective on rural regional learning, will be further elaborated as part of an on-going research in and beyond the DERREG project, further excavating its potential.

2.7 Acknowledgements

CHAPTER 3

THE LEARNING RURAL AREA FRAMEWORK: A HEURISTIC TOOL TO INVESTIGATE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS SUPPORTING COLLABORATION IN RURAL AREAS

More impressions from the Westerkwartier, *Source*: Wiebke Wellbrock

ABSTRACT Place-based approaches require joint reflexivity and collective agency. Underlying joint learning and innovation processes are supported by various institutional arrangements, yet their effectiveness is questioned. The learning rural area framework is introduced as a tool to map, analyse and evaluate the operational features of (institutional) arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in rural areas. Its application is discussed with reference to the Westerkwartier in the Netherlands and other rural areas. It will be shown how the framework can serve as an interactive tool to enhance joint reflexivity, facilitate wider collaboration and help build collective agency. Its potential as tool for designing and implementing more effective institutional arrangements, catalysing institutional reform and effectuating more collaborative modes of governance should be further explored.

3.1 Introduction

Even though place-based approaches are increasingly favoured (Amin, 2004; Barca, 2009b; Healey et al., 2003; Lowe et al., 1995; Marsden and Bristow, 2000; Murdoch, 2000; Nienaber, 2007; O'Brian, 2011; OECD, 2006a; Ray, 2006; Reimer and Markey, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Tomaney, 2010), rural development is still largely governed by sector-oriented policies (Woods, 2007). This sector-oriented approach to development is making it difficult to recognize potential conflicts of interests and act upon them (Reimer and Markey, 2008). It has therefore been argued that place-based development approaches require a shift from a hierarchical, policy-centred leadership towards more collaborative modes of governance (Collinge and Gibney, 2010). More collaborative modes of governance require collective agency (Amin, 2004; Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Gibney, 2011; Gieryn, 2000; Healey et al., 2003; Massey, 1991; Roep et al., 2009; Swanson, 2001), which is built through joint learning and innovation processes (Wellbrock et al., 2013b). Existing strategies to support the building of collective agency are, however, regarded as inadequate (see Amin, 2004; Cleaver, 2002; Lee et al., 2005; Ray, 2006; Shortall, 2008; Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001). It is therefore necessary to investigate how existing institutional arrangements can be improved to better facilitate joint learning and innovation in rural areas.

The learning rural area framework is a heuristic tool to map, analyse and evaluate existing arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in rural areas (Wellbrock et al., 2013b). It is a re-conceptualisation of the learning region concept (Wellbrock et al., 2012). The learning region conceptualises high-tech industry agglomerations such as Silicon Valley, broadly defined as "*focal points for knowledge creation and learning in the new age of global, knowledge-intensive capitalism […]. Learning regions function as collectors and repositories of knowledge and ideas, and provide the underlying environment or infrastructure which facilitates the flow of knowledge, ideas and learning*" (Florida, 1995, p. 527). The learning region concept has greatly influenced mainstream innovation policies to focus on partnerships between industry, government and academia (Florida, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Storper, 1993). It has been used to

facilitate the formation of specialised industry 'clusters' around the globe, with the aim to ensure a rapid knowledge spill-over and the provision of related human capital from academia to businesses (Asheim, 1996; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000; Florida, 1995; Hassink and Klaerding, 2012; Healy and Morgan, 2012; Morgan, 1997; Rutten and Boekema, 2007; Storper, 1993; Wolfe, 2002).

The application of the learning region as a normative concept has, however, faced numerous criticisms (see for example Hassink and Klaerding, 2012). The focus on business-academia-government linkages is, for example, argued to often not match the support required within an area (Oughton et al., 2002). This has been particularly emphasised with regard to rural areas (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Terluin, 2003; Wellbrock et al., 2013a; Wellbrock et al., 2012). Furthermore, development in rural areas often involves grassroots innovations, which are argued to be a reaction towards environmental, economic and social problems resulting from mainstream innovation policies (Ploeg and Marsden, 2008; Smith et al.). Secondly, it is argued to be too fixed on the local context and on spatial proximity while ignoring the wider, global context (Hassink and Klaerding, 2012; Healy and Morgan, 2012). Thirdly, the region is conceptualised as the principal learning unit, a problematic reification of a social construct that disregards the diversity of actors engaged in joint learning and innovation within a particular territorial setting (Cumbers et al., 2003; Hassink and Klaerding, 2012; Healy and Morgan, 2012; Rutten and Boekema, 2012). Fourthly, the learning region concept is not able to reflect the complexity of channels, mechanisms and conditions through which technological advances are translated into improvement at firm or regional level (Oughton et al., 2002). Finally, it does not take into account the need for institutional change and policy integration (Oughton et al., 2002). Healy and Morgan (2012) thus argue that the learning region concept lacks precision with regard to the comparability of institutional contexts. Yet grassroots innovations need to be supported by informal and formal institutional arrangements that provide the necessary institutional space to experiment (Roep et al., 2003). Institutional space is thus important to "*reduce transaction costs of different actors, generate predictability in respective behaviours, providing assurance, helping converging mutual expectations in*

a collective choice dilemma and helping in evolving rules that are seen as fair, just and accessible in a given distribution of power" (Gupta, 2012, p.4).

Should the learning rural area framework contribute to more collaborative modes of governance, it needs to demonstrate that it can deal with the mentioned shortcomings of the learning region concept and that it can particularly address the institutions, i.e. the "*sets of habits, routines, rules, norms, laws which by reducing the amount of information necessary for individual and collective action make reproduction and change of society possible*" (Johnson and Lundvall, 1992, p.112) underlying joint learning and innovation in rural areas. The aim of this paper is then to show to what extend the learning rural area framework is able to address arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in rural areas. The potential is illustrated by highlighting how the framework was applied as a research tool in the case of the Westerkwartier, a peri-urban area in the North of the Netherlands[1]. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, the conceptualisation of the learning rural area framework is explained; subsequently the case study area is introduced shortly. Thereafter, the application of the framework as a research tool and the outcomes of applying the research tool in the Westerkwartier are outlined. Finally, the potential of the framework as a heuristic tool for studying support for collaborative modes of governance in rural areas is discussed with reference to the case presented and when possible generalised with reference to other cases in which the framework was applied as research tool. It will be shown that the learning rural area framework is able to address some of the shortcomings of the learning region concept and that it can contribute to better arranging support for collaboration in rural areas. It will also be shown that the learning rural area framework has the potential of a fruitful interactive tool that can help design and implement more effective arrangements to support joint learning and innovation in rural areas. It can thus contribute to catalysing effective institutional reform and help effectuated more collaborative modes of governance.

3.2 The Learning Rural Area Framework

As figure 3.1 shows, the domains of the learning rural area framework were amended from the learning region concept. The framework thus includes the domain *rural area*, comprising various assets, activities and actors in which 'grassroots development initiatives' are employed by its residents. The domain rural area can be delineated along with administrative boundaries, but not necessarily. Instead a rural area can be distinguished by its particular political history, culture, identity, natural resources and socio-economic development reflected in the landscape. Secondly, the framework includes the domain *knowledge support structure*, which can include public and private knowledge institutes, private consultancy services, public institutes, NGOs, as well as experts involved in education, research and consultancy. Finally, the framework specifically includes the domain *public administration*, focussing on the actors and activities involved in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

The framework focuses particularly on the operational features of interfaces, mediating between supporting public policy measures, the knowledge support structure and the needs of grassroots development initiatives. Operational interfaces are argued to be the result of (institutional) arrangements, based on a constitutive agreement on how to operationalize support (Roep et al., 2011). These agreements can be made just by public administration or negotiated in partnership with initiators of grassroots development initiatives and facilitators of joint learning and innovation. By agreeing on a set of rules for engagement, partners involved reflect on existing, shared codes of conduct and change them accordingly (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002). The process of coming to (institutional) arrangements can be referred to as institutional reflexivity (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002). Operational interfaces thus create space for people to learn together and from one another, thereby acting as channels for dialogue and cooperation (Nyhan, 2007) and enhancing joint reflexivity (Wellbrock et al., Accepted). Naturally, operational interfaces might be subject to conflicting values and interests as well as different levels of power (Long, 1984).
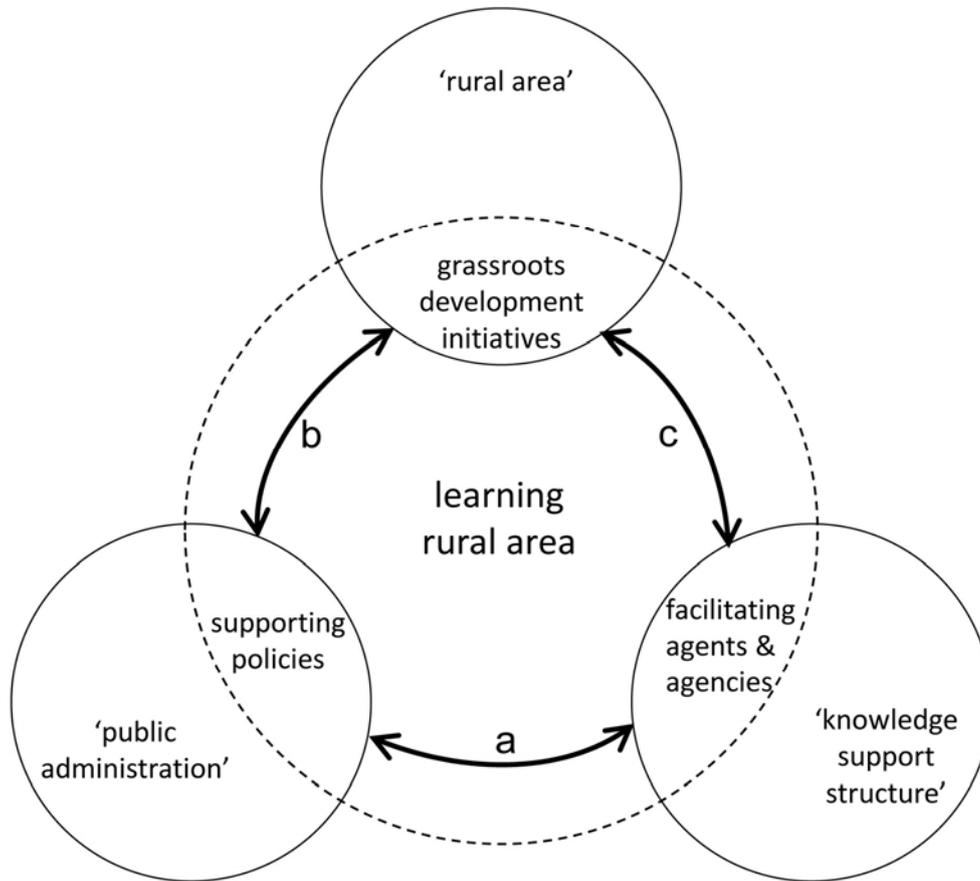
Figure 3.1. The learning rural area framework.

By focussing on (institutional) arrangements, the framework offers an analytical perspective on *how* public support for joint learning and innovation can be best arranged, focussing on the operational features of supportive arrangements. First, it helps to *map* actors engaged in the development of an area and supporting policies and programmes. Secondly, it helps to *analyse* how support for joint learning and innovation between the domains is arranged; describing the constitutive agreement and the operational interfaces with respect to: the operational agents and agencies, the delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations, and the duration of the operational interface. Third, the framework can be used to *evaluate* and compare

existing arrangements, in particular their operational features. The framework can thus be used as a tool to evaluate the appropriateness of the existing institutional setting and its arrangements and to identify institutional voids (Hajer, 2003). The second and third step can also be done in an interactive way, jointly with involved members of public administration, knowledge facilitators and beneficiaries. Interactive evaluation is thus an action research component which will contribute to joint learning and innovation, because it can reveal factors encouraging or discouraging learning (Measham et al., 2012).

3.3 The Westerkwartier, North Netherlands

Seen from a European perspective, the Westerkwartier is a peri-urban area situated in the West of Groningen province in the region North Netherlands (see figure 3.2). It comprises 345 km² and is relatively densely populated (173 inhabitants per km², about 60.000 in total in 2008)[2]. From a Dutch perspective, however, the Westerkwartier is considered to be a predominantly rural area, because 80 % of the area is used for agriculture.

The Westerkwartier comprises four municipalities: Grootegast, Marum, Leek and parts of Zuidhorn. Since 2007, these municipalities collaborate as the LEADER region Westerkwartier. The closest urban centre Groningen city hosts knowledge institutes, public administration agencies and regional business centres and is located at 20 km distance to the East. The Westerkwartier is well connected to Groningen city and other urban centres by a motor- and railway crossing the area horizontally.

The socio-economic development of the Westerkwartier is largely influenced by its interactions with nearby urban centres. One of the reasons is that the Westerkwartier is an attractive residential area for commuters and their families working in close-by cities, Groningen in particular. These newcomers bring a new interest in the rural area and the quality of life it offers, such as the attractive landscape, the opportunity to live nearby a larger urban centre and a high level of public and private services. Another reason is that businesses in the Westerkwartier profit from providing classic 'rural-

fringe' functions and services such as recreation and leisure, transport and logistics. Even though the Westerkwartier has no major industrial employer, it still is a prosperous area showing economic growth above and unemployment rates below national average.

Figure 3.2. The Westerkwartier

The area maintains a strong sense of rurality which is experienced and enacted by most local residents. Strict spatial planning policies demand that all SMEs locate in industry parks along the motorway crossing the Westerkwartier or in industrial parks on the fringes of the municipal capitals. In the rural part of the Westerkwartier only micro

firms with fewer than ten employees reside. These micro firms are of crucial importance to the vitality of the Westerkwartier. In addition, the agricultural sector, although marginal for the economic prosperity of the area, is still seen as the traditional economic pillar. Today, it plays an important part in the protection of the cultural heritage, nature and landscape in the Westerkwartier.

3.4 Applying the Framework as a Research Tool in the Westerkwartier

The presented framework was employed to carry out explorative research in the Westerkwartier between February 2009 and June 2011 (Roep et al., 2011). The framework was used in three successive research steps: First, it was used to map development actors active in the area and relevant policies and programmes, secondly it was used to analyse arrangements connecting the different domains of the framework and finally the framework was used to evaluate the operational features of arrangements through which joint learning and innovation was actually supported. In the following, a detailed description will be given of how the framework was applied as a heuristic tool in each research step.

3.4.1 Mapping

As figure 3.3 shows, actors currently engaged with development in the Westerkwartier were mapped in the respective domains of the framework. This initial 'harvest', conducted through internet research and snowball sampling, included eleven key informants associated with the domain public administration, five key informants associated with the knowledge support structure and nine key informants of grassroots development initiatives active in the area. This sample is by no means a complete inventory of all actors and activities engaged with development in the Westerkwartier. There were, for instance, numerous potential knowledge supporters in form of education facilities, research facilities, consultancy services, advice bureaus, professionals,

organisations and private persons in and around the Westerkwartier, which could have engaged with grassroots development initiatives. In fact, the number appeared to be so large that only publically funded knowledge institutes presently involved in learning processes in the Westerkwartier were inventoried while other potential supporters were denoted as experts in figure 3.3.

Using semi-structured interviews, key informants of public administration were interviewed to find out about relevant policy documents, the type of grassroots development initiatives they supported, the type of knowledge and skills prioritized, their way of interacting with grassroots development initiatives and the way in which they supported the knowledge support structure to engage with grassroots development initiatives. Key informants of the knowledge support structure were questioned about their field of competences, available means to support joint leaning and innovation, the type of grassroots development initiatives they were engaged with, the support they received from public administration to engage with grassroots development initiatives and their networking activities and cooperation with other development actors within and outside the Westerkwartier. In addition, a literature review was done to inventory available policy documents for their contribution to supporting joint learning and innovation in the Westerkwartier.

As figure 3.3 shows, grassroots development initiatives inventoried covered a wide range of development activities, including nature and landscape protection initiatives (*De Eendracht and Boer & Natuur, De Dotterbloem*), other rural economic initiatives (*Touristic platform, Inboeren, MEI, Wichterwest*), and cultural and social activities (*Mien Westerkwartier* and *Punt 1*). Using semi-structured interviews, key actors of grassroots development initiatives were interviewed about the evolution of their initiatives, their future goals and the range of actors that were engaged with them. From these interviews, it became apparent that the Foundation *Westerkwartier Initiative Group* (*WSI*), positioned in the centre of figure 3.3, was particularly interesting for our research, because it acted as an umbrella for the different grassroots development initiatives inventoried.
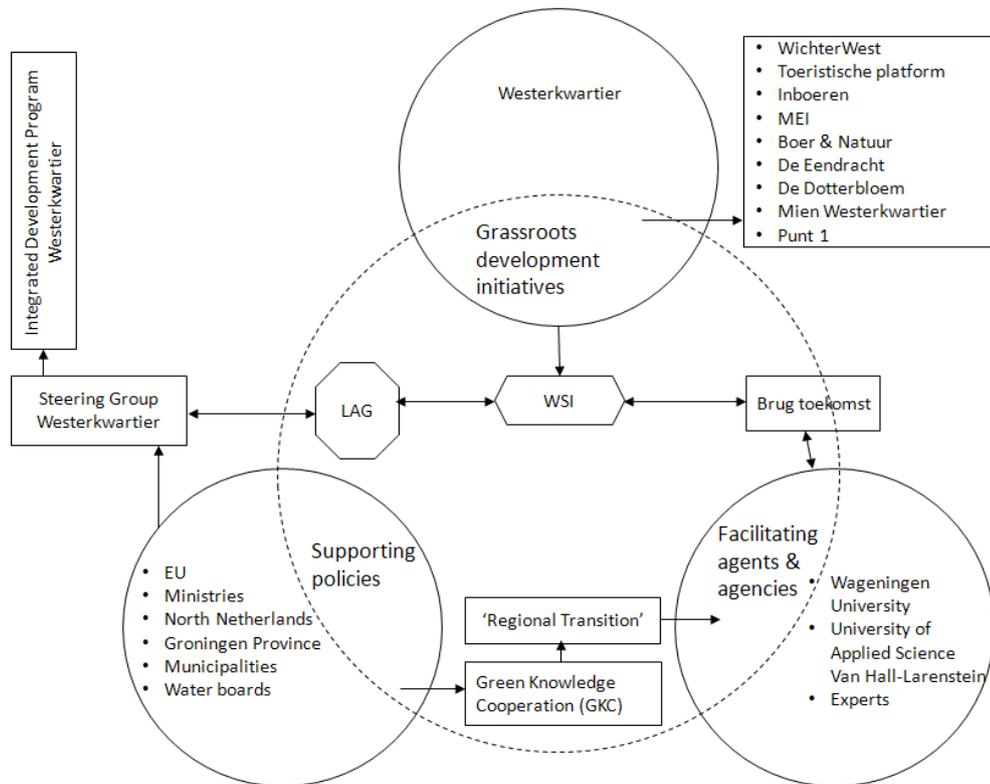
Figure 3.3. The learning rural area as a map for relevant actors and policy programmes

The WSI was one of the outcomes of the project *Brug Toekomst* (*English*: Bridge Future) shown in figure 3.3, carried out in the Westerkwartier from 2003-2008 (see also Derkzen, 2009). In this project, three public knowledge institutes partnered with grassroots development initiators to test their cooperation in an applied research context (see also Sol et al.). The Westerkwartier was chosen as a research area, because one of the lecturers was involved in a nature and landscape management organisation in the Westerkwartier. The project required various grassroots development initiatives and public administration to jointly discuss development plans. The public knowledge institutes organised and facilitated their meetings, helped to formulate academic research questions and provided students for carrying out the necessary research tasks. As shown in figure 3.3, the project 'Brug Toekomst' was partially financed by the

Regional Transition programme, made available by the (former) Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality[3] and managed by the *Green Knowledge Cooperation* (*GKC*).

The impact of 'Brug Toekomst' was regarded as a success, because it greatly accelerated place-based development in the Westerkwartier. The WSI, for instance, continued to act as a key mediator between grassroots development initiatives, knowledge supporters and public administration even after the initial project phase terminated. As figure 3.3 shows, the foundation was, for example, represented in the *Local Action Group* (*LAG*) of the Westerkwartier. The LAG elaborated a LEADER action plan 2007-2013 for the socio-economic vitality of the Westerkwartier which was taken into consideration by the *Steering Group West* in formulating an Integrated Regional Development Programme West 2008 (see fig. 3.3). The Steering Group West comprised members from the municipalities Leek, Marum, Grootegast and Zuidhorn, Groningen Province, water boards and the regional manager of the national rural development agenda 'Vital countryside'. The Steering Group West implemented the *Integrated Development Programme West Groningen 2008* shown in figure 3.3, which was based on the national rural development agenda 'Vital Countryside' and the 'Provincial Development Plan'. The agenda 'Vital Countryside' included European rural policy objectives (EARDF). In the 'Provincial Development Plan', regional policy objectives formulated for and by the region North Netherlands, comprising the Northern provinces Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen, were summarised and reformulated. These programmes incorporated the regional development policies of the European Union (ERDF) as well as the European Social Fund (ESF) used to build human capital for a transition into a knowledge-based economy. The LEADER fund was, however, the most important budget to co-finance arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in the Westerkwartier.

3.4.2 Analysing

Having mapped all relevant agents, policies and programmes in the learning rural area framework, the second research step concerned the analysis of arrangements through which joint learning and innovation was supported between actors in the different domains of the framework. For this research step, an additional four key informants, which were identified through snowball sampling as operating operational interfaces, were interviewed regarding their support provided, their support received and their activities carried out. The operational features of arrangements connecting the different domains shown in figure 3.4 were analysed along three key dimensions: the operational agents and agencies, their delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations and the duration of the operational interface.

Operational agents and agencies

All of the inventoried operational agents and agencies shown in figure 3.4 were physically located in the *rural house*, a LEADER-funded front office centrally located in the Westerkwartier. The rural house was accessible everyday by telephone and, if necessary, appointments were given out with agents and agencies operating in the house. As figure 3.4 shows, agents and agencies operating within the rural house included the NGO *Association Groningen Villages*, financed by Groningen Province, the LEADER-financed *touristic catalysts* and a *representative of the municipalities*. The operational agents and agencies met biweekly with a member of the Governance Service for Land and Water Management of Groningen Province managing the LEADER budget and a representative of Groningen Province as the *Expert team* to ensure a knowledge exchange between the different levels of public administration, to communicate development issues back to public administration organs and to evaluate the contribution of incoming proposals towards the LEADER development goals. In addition, the rural house was used as a meeting place by the LAG, the WSI, as well as grassroots development initiatives and the municipalities.
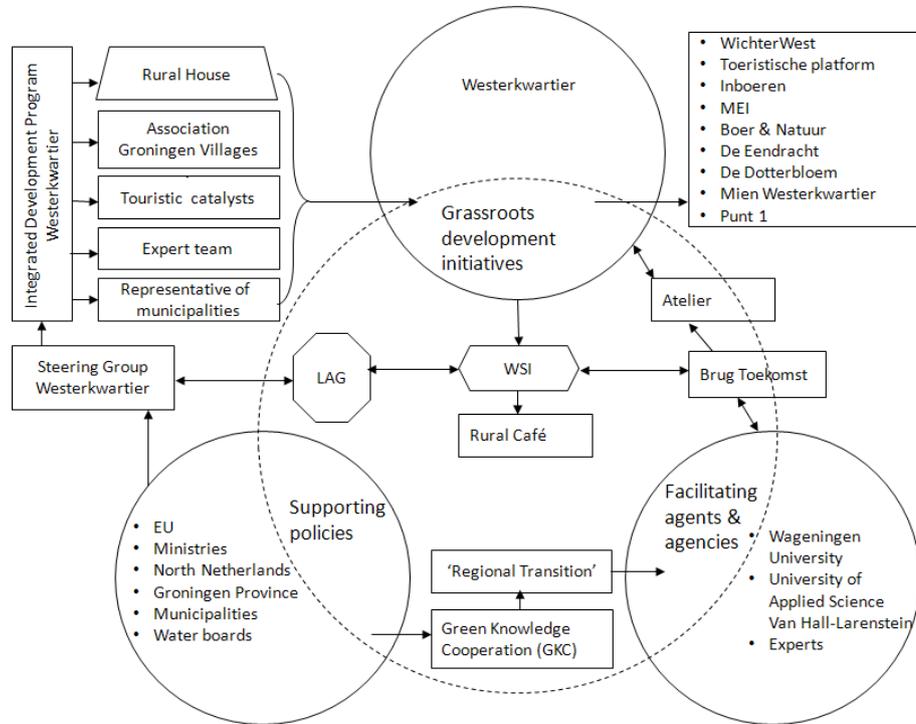
Figure 3.4. The learning rural area as a tool for analysing operational interfaces

Delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations

All representatives in the rural house were fulfilling different tasks and roles underlying different rules and regulations. The Expert Team was able to *grant subsidies* of up to 10,000 Euros from the Living Villages Window fund, a fund created with LEADER money. This money was mostly used to conduct feasibility studies of bigger project plans. The Expert team also acted as *advisor* to the LAG for LEADER subsidy requests that were larger than 10,000 Euro. The representative of the municipalities acted as *mediator* between the activities of the rural house and the municipalities of the Westerkwartier and was responsible for *carrying out and supervising projects* funded by the Expert team. The Association Groningen Villages acted as a *lobby group* for the social-economic interests of small villages in the Province of Groningen. One of their

main activities was to help *establish and maintain contact* with community houses in the different villages of Groningen Province. The NGO further helped to *initiate bottom-up development* activities as, for example, an association of business women in the Westerkwartier (WichterWest, see fig. 3.4). An important role of the touristic catalysts was to *incubate networks* and initiate an association of touristic entrepreneurs called the 'touristic platform' (see fig. 3.4) by organizing a number of get-togethers open to everyone involved with tourism activities in the Westerkwartier. In addition, they also introduced annual events to promote and stimulate tourism and recreation within and outside the Westerkwartier and organized courses on hospitality for touristic entrepreneurs. As figure 3.4 further shows, the WSI organised *rural cafés* to provide *informal meeting spaces* for citizens, representatives of public administration and knowledge facilitators with a shared development interest. The location was often chosen to represent the theme of the café. One café was, for example, organised in a natural park to raise awareness for the need of environmental education in the Westerkwartier. Finally, the project *Atelier* was being created as successor of the project Brug Toekomst and meant to act as a *relay station* between research questions from the area and public knowledge institutes.

Duration of operational interface

Except the Association Groningen Villages and Atelier, all interfaces were arranged for the duration of the LEADER funding period 2007-2013. The strong dependence on LEADER funds for operation raised questions about the continuity of support after 2013, when the current LEADER phase would terminate.

3.4.3 Evaluating

Finally, the learning rural area framework was used as a tool to evaluate the successfulness of arrangements in supporting joint learning and innovation in the Westerkwartier. The evaluation followed again the three key dimensions: operational

agents and agencies, delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations, and duration of the operational interface. The framework was thereby used as a visual aid in face-to-face interviews and a discussion round involving representatives of public administration, the knowledge support structure and six promising grassroots development initiatives. The framework was meant to help visualise exiting arrangements and discuss well-working and problematic operational features, thereby stimulating joint reflexivity and eventually effectuating institutional reform.

Operational agents and agencies

The learning rural framework, as shown in figure 3.4, visualized that while arrangements between public administration and grassroots development initiatives were high in numbers, the numbers of arrangements between the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives was relatively low. Accordingly, the evaluation focussed more on the lack of joint learning and innovation between the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives than on the involvement of grassroots development initiatives with public administration.

The lack of joint learning and innovation involving grassroots development initiatives and the knowledge support structure were based on two reasons. First, grassroots development initiatives faced financial constraints that did not allow them to get engaged with knowledge facilitators. Although expert knowledge was highly appreciated, it was nevertheless regarded as too expensive, because initiatives needed to pay for them using their own budgets or subsidies. Publically funded knowledge institutes seemed to be affordable, because their engagement was usually subsidised. The level of research carried out by universities was, however, regarded as too abstract to contribute to the development of a grassroots initiative (see also Blackmore et al., 2012). In addition, during the time of research there was a current lack of subsidies to get involved with public knowledge institutes.

Secondly, the building and maintenance of contacts with facilitating agents and agencies from the knowledge support structure was regarded as effortful by grassroots

development initiatives. Existing contacts were mostly established through personal networks or by coincidence, as it was the case of the project 'Brug toekomst'. Informal connections and trust were thereby regarded as important assets to effectuate joint learning and innovation successfully. Operational agents and agencies with networking abilities (so called brokers, see Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009) and public officers with catalysing functions were highly appreciated by grassroots development initiatives to help establish contact. Similarly, the rural house was evaluated positively, because it functioned as a meeting point between grassroots development initiatives and the municipalities. The rural cafés were also welcomed, because they were ways for grassroots development initiators to meet other development initiators, public officers and facilitating agents and agencies with similar interests, giving rise to future collaboration.

Delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations

Members of grassroots development initiatives argued that the initiation and maintenance of grassroots development activities was an effortful task for its voluntary members. Often, volunteers were too busy with their own professions and did not find enough time for voluntarily setting up and keeping an initiative running. The acquisition of subsidies, particularly from the LEADER programme, was clearly the main concern of all grassroots development initiatives inventoried, except for those involved in nature and landscape management. Acquiring funds from the LEADER programme was therefore the most discussed subject during the discussion rounds and interviews. Grassroots development initiatives remarked that operational agents and agencies provided good and clear communication about their requirements to give out LEADER subsidies, but that help could be provided faster and that despite a cooperative tenor, the process of receiving support was too slow. On the one hand, difficulties were related to administrative boundaries, which were particularly felt when trying to obtain co-funding from the different municipalities. Different municipalities often expressed different development interests and showed differences in financial liquidity, leading to time-consuming negotiations that constraint collaboration. On the other hand, grassroots

development initiatives argued that writing a subsidy request was too bureaucratic with too many rules and regulations attached. First, it meant a lot of additional and difficult work to the volunteers of a grassroots development initiative. Secondly, grassroots development initiatives needed to form a legal entity to apply for subsidies. According to some initiators, forming a legal entity had negative consequences on the willingness of members to join their activities, because it was felt to go against the nature of innovation which was seen to occur in an informal context. It was thus concluded that the administrative boundaries and strict rules and regulations created a 'bottleneck' for rural development and hampered collaboration. Operational agents and agencies that could provide support with subsidy requests, or function as catalysts and help with managerial tasks were therefore regarded as vital for initiating and maintaining grassroots development activities. Also, an infrastructure like the rural house was given particular importance since it was seen as a clear contact point for advice on subsidies and regulations, and appreciated for its low-threshold accessibility that counteracted the people's aversion against contacting public administration.

Duration of interface

The duration of the interfaces was not subject to discussion. One reason could be that all operational interfaces inventoried were active, with the exception of Brug Toekomst and Atelier, at the time of research. A further reason could be that the support provided by the interfaces was meant to establish long-term connections. Grassroots development initiatives in the Westerkwartier did therefore not rely too heavily on the existence of a particular operational interface, as comparative research in other case study areas has shown (Wellbrock et al., 2013b).

3.5 Discussion

Our results suggest that the learning rural area framework can be used as a tool to address a wide variety of actors and activities contributing jointly to the development of

a rural area. First, the learning rural area framework does not only address industrial products and production processes as advocated by the learning region concept (Florida, 1995), but it also addresses development activities dealing with nature and landscape conservation, culture and society. Secondly, the learning rural area framework broadens the initial domains academia and government, embracing a great diversity of potentially mediating agents or institutional entrepreneurs (Sotarauta and Pulkkinen, 2011). In the Westerkwartier, these included public administration officers, NGOs, public knowledge institutes, the private sector and experts. As a result, the framework serves as a lens to discover various interfaces connecting the different domains, including catalyst functions, specific infrastructures like the rural house, innovation brokers and development projects. The findings thus imply that the diversity of interfaces in which joint learning and innovation may occur in rural areas exceeds the interconnections conceptualised by the learning region concept (see Florida, 1995; Johnson and Lundvall, 1992; Morgan, 1997; Storper, 1993). This way, the learning rural area framework allows addressing several of the conceptual criticisms faced by the learning region concept.

First, it allows addressing the complexity of channels, techniques and mechanisms through which joint learning and innovation is supported in rural areas. In the Westerkwartier, for example, the framework has helped to reveal a great diversity of interfaces supporting joint learning and innovation, operated by public officers, knowledge workers, NGOs and experts. Secondly, unlike the learning region concept, the learning rural area framework does not regard regions as learning agents, but helps to focus on people and activities contributing to the development of an area. The learning rural area framework is thus a tool to take a relational approach to studying support for joint learning and innovation (Amin, 2004; Massey, 1991; Massey, 2004). Following Massey (1991), the learning rural area framework can help conceptualise rural areas as social constructs that co-evolve with the interactions and activities of people that go beyond geographical locations, administrative boundaries and borders. The boundaries of a place can then also be seen as a social construct, resulting from the relations and activities of various social groups (Massey, 1991). This way, the learning

rural area framework overcomes the criticised 'local fix' (Hassink and Klaerding, 2012) of the learning region concept. Third, the results suggest that joint learning and innovation activities occurring within the operational interfaces are highly diverse, including the provision of help for applying with subsidies, advising, project managing, mediating, network incubating, acting as relay stations and providing physical infrastructures. The learning rural area framework is thus able to conceptualise a greater variety of joint learning and innovation activities than the learning region concept and overcomes the criticised narrowness of addressing only support required for joint learning and innovation between business, government and the industry (Hassink and Klaerding, 2012; Oughton et al., 2002). The learning rural area framework is thus able to accommodate for the diverse forms of support and knowledge needed by grassroots development initiatives, extending well beyond scientific insights and include technical advice, local and tacit knowledge and practical advice (Tovey, 2008).

The findings indicate that the diversity of support required by grassroots development initiatives and the resulting variety of operational interfaces and joint learning and innovation activities requires operational flexibility (Roep et al., forthcoming). As shown in the Westerkwartier, operational flexibility can arguably be created by delegating decision powers and responsibilities to operational agents and agencies which provide them with the necessary operational flexibility to respond to the needs of grassroots development initiatives. To create operational flexibility arguably requires 'institutional voids', spaces in which more collaborative modes of governance can evolve and become institutionalised (Hajer, 2003). Other studies have shown that the degree of operational flexibility given to operational agents and agencies depends on the political, historical, social and cultural context of an area (Hidle and Normann, 2012; Horlings, 2012; Wellbrock et al., 2013a). In addition, rural areas with economic prosperity, closely-knit networks and a shared identity, public administration is more likely to delegate decision powers and responsibilities to non-governmental actors than in areas with social perforation and economic hardship (Wellbrock et al., 2013a; Wellbrock et al., 2013b). These studies also indicate that in areas where operational

flexibility is limited collaboration is less successfully effectuated. Operational flexibility is thus a key to well-working operational interfaces (Roep et al., 2011).

By focussing on the operational features of arrangements, the key focus of the learning rural area framework is on the institutional context of operational interfaces which has been criticised as lacking in the learning region concept (Healy and Morgan, 2012). As shown in the Westerkwartier, operational interfaces were perceived by grassroots development initiatives as well-working when arranged to overcome obstacles posed by formal institutions like rules and regulations as well as obstacles posed by administrative boundaries. Grassroots development initiatives were thus looking for low-threshold, easy accessible interfaces operated by agents and agencies with the necessary operational flexibility to help them initiate their activities, mediate between their needs and the resources available from different supporters, acting as network brokers as well as managing the process of establishing themselves as a legal entity able to work independently. Similar needs were expressed by grassroots development initiatives in different European case study areas (Wellbrock et al., 2013a; Wellbrock et al., 2013b). The quality of institutional arrangements underlying operational interfaces is thus central to effectuating more collaborative modes of governance.

The application of the rural area framework as an interactive tool for mapping, analysing and evaluating existing arrangements in the Westerkwartier points out a potential for enhancing joint reflexivity, facilitate wider collaboration and building collective agency. It allows, for example, identifying what grassroots development activities and interests are excluded from receiving support and for which reason, hence providing a basis on which to improve existing institutional arrangements towards social innovation (Bock, 2012; Moulaert et al., 2005). One can thus argue that when applied as an interactive tool, the framework has the potential to enhance social innovation, to help reform existing institutional arrangements or even design new institutional arrangements that effectively support promising grassroots innovations and thus bring about effective institutional reform (Roep et al., 2003). The institutional make-up of operational interfaces can then be regarded as key to raise collective agency and self-efficacy (Roep et al., forthcoming).

3.6 Conclusion

Applying the learning rural area framework to the case of the Westerkwartier has provided profound insight into its potential as a heuristic tool to map, analyse and evaluate existing institutional arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in a rural area. The learning rural area framework conceptualises a rural area as a social construct, thereby taking into account the wide variety of actors and activities contributing to development. The scope of the framework allows focusing on those relations and interconnections between supporters and grassroots development initiatives that seem relevant to them, thereby providing a tool to analyse and evaluate the institutional context in which support is arranged. This analytical and evaluative potential can contribute to enhancing and widening joint reflexivity, facilitating collaboration and building collective agency. As such, the learning rural area framework can be a fruitful tool to catalyse institutional reform and social innovation and effectuate more collaborative modes of governance. Future research should be directed towards refining the potential of the learning rural area framework as a tool to improve existing modes of governance in other rural areas.

3.7. Endnotes

[1]This paper is based on research undertaken within WP4 Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems of the project 'Developing Europe's Rural Regions in the Era of Globalisation (DERREG) financed by the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission. The paper only reflects the views of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

[2]The description of the Westerkwartier has been adapted from Roep et al (forthcoming).

[3]The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food has been renamed into the 'Ministry for Economy, Agriculture and Innovation' in 2011.

CHAPTER 4

ARRANGING SUPPORT FOR COLLECTIVE LEARNING IN RURAL AREAS OF GERMANY

Impressions from my field visit to the Free State of Saxony, *Source*: Wiebke Wellbrock

4.1 Introduction

More than ever, globalization puts Europe's rural areas at the centre of competing claims between agriculture, residents, nature protection (or exploitation) practices, tourism, recreation and industry parks. To create resilient rural areas which take opportunity from globalisation asks diverse development actors to work jointly towards a common development vision. To arrive at a common development vision requires diverse actors to learn to work together (Roep et al., 2009). It requires actors to develop synergy, joint development visions and joint development activities, for which they need to source and pool knowledge and capacities (Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Gibney, 2011). Collective learning is thereby regarded as "*the diversity of adaptations, and the promotion of strong local social cohesion and mechanisms for collective action*" (Adger et al., 2005, p.1038). Current arrangements to support collective learning for resilience in rural areas (such as LEADER) have, however, received numerous criticisms with regard to their impact on facilitating participatory development and social inclusion (Amin, 2004; Cleaver, 2002; Shortall, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010). These criticisms call for alternative modes of arranging public support. Yet, how can public support for collective learning in rural areas best be arranged?

In this chapter, we explore how public support for collective learning is arranged in two rural areas of Germany: Sankt Wendeler Land in the federal state of Saarland and the Oberlausitzer Heide- und Teichlandschaft in the Free State of Saxony. After introducing the case study areas, a framework to analyse and reflect on arrangements to support collective learning in rural areas will be presented. Then, the methods used for data collection and analysis will be described, and some background information on the organisation of support for collective learning in Germany will be provided. It will be shown how public support is operationalized and how beneficiaries evaluate the arranged support in the case study areas. Subsequently, differences in institutional arrangements to support collective learning in the respective case study areas will be discussed. It will be shown that in order to arrange public support for collective learning successfully, the operation of public support programmes needs to be delegated to agents embedded within the area. These agents need to dispose of access to wider

networks of groups and networks within and outside the area. This way, they are able to include a wide range of development actors and connect them to the appropriate supporters. In this process, the role of shared leadership is crucial (Horlings, 2012). An arrangement that works well in one area can therefore not be used as a blueprint to make arrangements in another area.

4.2 Case Study Area

Explorative research was carried out in the LEADER region 'Sankt Wendeler Land' in the federal state of Saarland and the LEADER region 'Oberlausitzer Heide- und Teichlandschaft' (English: Upper Lusatian Heath and Pond Landscape, hereafter OHTL) of the Free State Saxony. As shown in figure 4.1, Sankt Wendeler Land is located at the western border of Germany while OHTL is located at the eastern border of Germany.

The LEADER region 'Sankt Wendeler Land' is equivalent to the administrative unit 'County Sankt Wendel' which, according to the European urban-rural typology, is classified as predominantly rural (Eurostat, 2012). The county covers 476.2 km² and inhabits 93.290 people (196 inhabitants/km²) (KuLanI, 2007). It consists of eight municipalities and its centre is the city of St. Wendel (KuLanI, 2007). Most inhabitants work in the service sector outside of the county and the income is relatively high in comparison to other rural areas of Saarland (KuLanI, 2007). Within the county, agriculture, forest and timber work are dominating the landscape. Tourism is another important source of income. Interesting to note is that Saarland has a long history of being shifted between France and Germany during the last 200 years. This is often named as the reason for the closed social networks and social cohesion in Saarland and the saying that each person in Saarland knows somebody and at the end is connected to any other person living in Saarland.
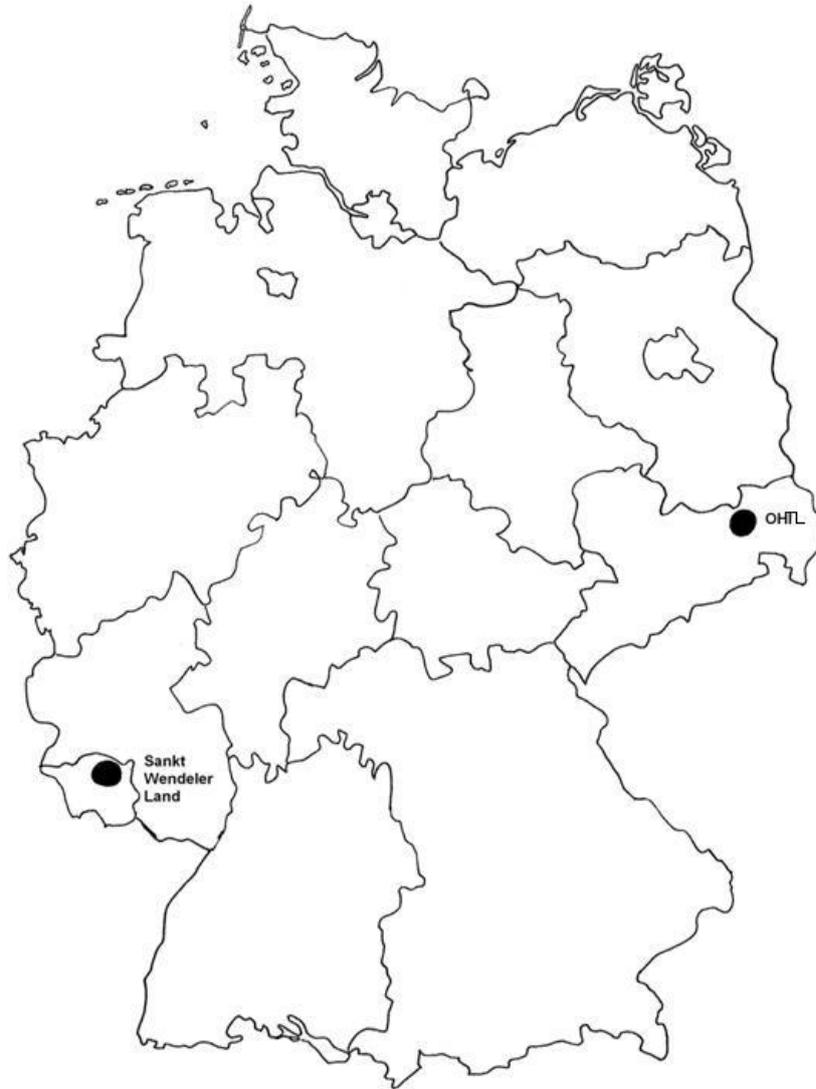
Figure 4.1. Location of Case Study Area 'Sankt Wendeler Land' in Saarland and 'OHTL' in the Free State of Saxony

The LEADER region OHTL covers parts of the County Bautzen, which is classified as intermediary in the European urban-rural typology (Eurostat, 2012). The northern, more sparsely populated parts of the LEADER region are protected as a UNESCO biosphere

reserve. OHTL consists of 17 municipalities and towns and comprises an area of 657 km². It provides home to 86,403 people (132 inhabitants/km²), of which 42,480 live in the region's economic centre of Bautzen city (Panse, 2007). The ponds of the region are an important economic source, as they are used for fish production. Also agriculture and nature conservation play an important role in shaping the landscape of the area. Unlike Sankt Wendeler Land, the development of OHTL, as for the whole Free State of Saxony, is marked by an on-going process of economic catch-up to the German national level and characterised by high unemployment, a declining and ageing population and a loss of young, well-educated people due to out-migration. Most parts of the OHTL belong to the settlement area of the Sorbs, a minority living in Saxony and the South of Brandenburg. They still practise their own culture and language and through this they significantly coin the area.

The two case study areas are exemplary for two major divergences in political as well as socio-economic backgrounds of rural areas in Europe: a case study area representative of former West-Germany and a case study area representative of former East-Germany. Comparing the two German cases has thus implications for supporting collective learning within the wider European context. At the same time, both case study areas are governed under the same national policy scheme, increasing the comparability and omitting confounding factors that often influence comparisons of rural areas between two or more countries. In addition, both case study areas are part of wider border regions, sharing similar experiences with cross-border activities.

4.3 Theoretical Framework

Joint learning and innovation for building collective capacity and resilience has mainly been studied with regard to the production and transfer of new, scientific knowledge and human capital within high-tech, science, media, and communication and information industries in urban, economic centres (Woods, 2009). The aim of these 'learning region' studies has been to analyse how public support can facilitate spatial proximity and the formation of 'clusters' which then facilitate a rapid knowledge spill-over and the

provision of related human capital from academia to businesses (Asheim, 1996; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000; Florida, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Rutten and Boekema, 2007; Storper, 1993; Wolfe, 2002). The success of support for collective learning is argued to depend on arranging effective, co-operative and operational partnerships between actors of the state, academia and industry (Asheim, 2007; Florida, 1995). Yet, learning regions are argued to fail to represent most present day regions (Oughton et al., 2002). In particular, the business-academia-government linkages have been argued to fail to serve the study of support for place-based learning in rural areas (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010; Terluin, 2003; Wellbrock et al., 2012), grounded in the particularities of place: that is assets, challenges and political dynamics (Woods, 2007).

Wellbrock et al. (2012) put forward an amended framework, offering an integrated perspective in studying the public support for collective learning in rural areas. In contrary to the usual (or conventional) 'learning region' framework, studying arrangements between partners of the triple helix (Etzkowitz, 2003) in support of regional learning and innovation in economic core regions, the integral framework considers all joint development activities undertaken in a rural area and the wide range of actors engaged (Roep et al., 2009).

As figure 4.2 shows, instead of focussing on 'businesses', the amended framework focuses on 'rural areas' and the diverse actors and activities contributing to the development of the area. These areas can coincide with administrative areas but not necessarily. Instead the areas distinguish themselves by a common political history, culture and identity as well as socio-economic development. The domain 'academia' is replaced by the 'knowledge support structure', including all potential public as well as private agents and agencies that can facilitate collective learning processes in grassroots development initiatives. These can include, for example, public and private knowledge institutes, private consultancy services, public institutes, NGOs, private development experts as well as grassroots development initiators acting as knowledge facilitators (Wellbrock et al., 2012). Finally, the revised framework refers to the domain 'public

administration', referring to those involved in the making and implementation of supporting policies for collective learning in rural areas.

Operational interfaces between the different domains and connecting the various actors and activities are critical focal points of the theoretical framework, because they enable the different actors to learn together and from one another, thereby acting as channels for dialogue and cooperation (Nyhan, 2007). The revised framework proposed by Wellbrock et al. (2012) thus focuses on highlighting existing interfaces that aim to support and facilitate knowledge processes, exploring dimensions of knowledge building, collaborative social learning and the re-embedding of local knowledge in grassroots development initiatives, as indicated by the arrows a, b and c.
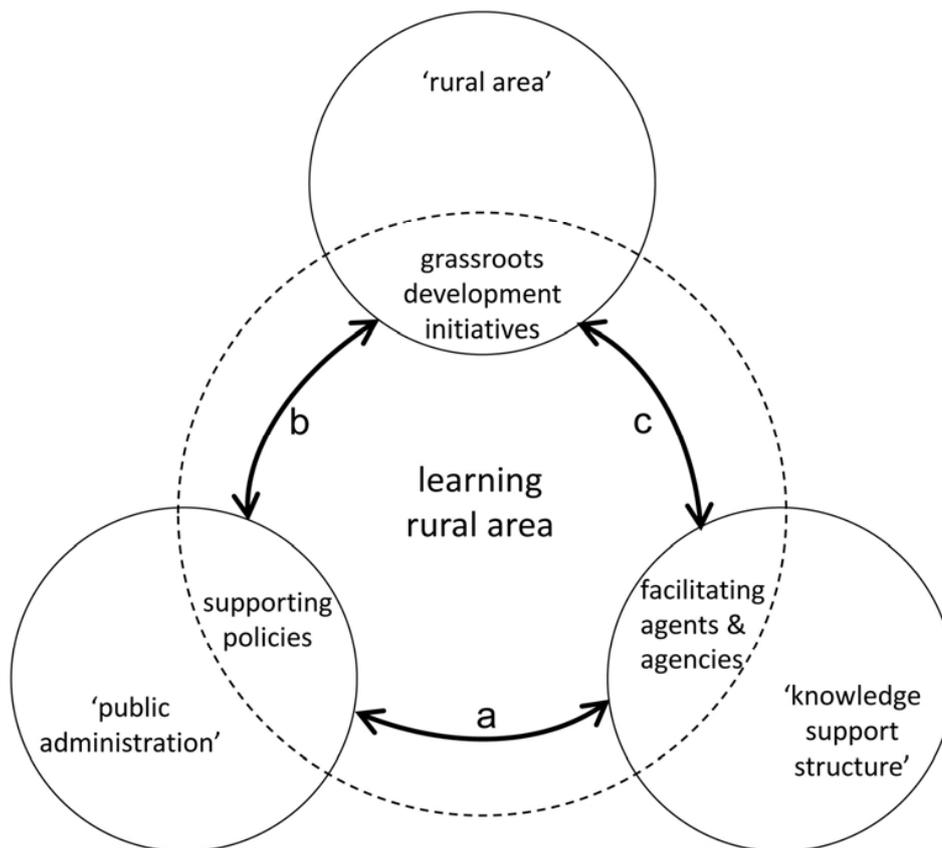

Figure 4.2 Analytical Framework (Adjusted from Wellbrock et al. 2012)

The revised framework is able to guide research along three lines (Wellbrock et al., 2012). First, it helps to map supporting policies and programmes as well as actors operating these. Secondly, it helps to map existing interfaces and to analyse how these are arranged; describing their constitutive agreement and the operational interfaces with respect to: the operational agents, the delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations and the shape of the operational interface. Finally, the framework can be used to evaluate and compare existing supportive arrangements, and particularly whether their operational features are working well or not. The second and third step can also be done in an interactive way, jointly with involved members of public administration, knowledge facilitators and beneficiaries.

Based on the mapping, analysis and (interactive) evaluation, an understanding of why some arrangements work better than others can be generated. On the basis of these findings, lessons can be drawn on how public support can best be arranged in order to facilitate collective learning in rural areas.

4.4 Methodology

The study extends on empirical research conducted within a larger European research project (Roep et al., 2011). Within this research project, explorative research was carried out in both case study areas simultaneously between February 2009 and June 2011. Three research lines were followed:

First, an overview of public policies to support collective learning and the facilitating knowledge support structure was generated. This was done through extensive literature reviews and semi-structured expert interviews with relevant informants (ranging from 10 to 15 in each case study area). Secondly, in each case study area, 10-15 grassroots development initiatives, covering diverse fields of development (agriculture, nature & landscape development, civic & community development and economic activities), and receiving public support for collective learning were inventoried, regarding: their aim, initiators, actors engaged, the type of support received and the relevant supporting policy arrangement. The inventory was done using semi-structured interviews.

Operational interfaces were identified through internet research and snowball-sampling. Finally, in each case study area, four to five promising operational interfaces were selected for an in-depth study involving face-to-face interviews and group discussions with selected key informants, from public administration, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives focussing on factors that supported and/or constrained their achievements. In addition, a substantial part of the results gathered in Sankt Wendeler Land are based on qualitative interviews that were carried out during the LEADER evaluation process and the mid-term evaluation of the LEADER regions in 2008-2010.

The research and analysis gave specific attention to describing the operational interfaces with respect to: the operational agents; the delegated tasks and roles and associated set of rules and regulations (regimes); and the shape of the operational interface.

4.5 General Organisation of Public Support for Collective Learning in Rural Germany

In order to understand how support for collective learning can be best arranged in Germany's rural areas, it is first necessary to get an overview of how public support is actually arranged.

In Germany, public support for collective learning is arranged hierarchically at different public administrative scales. The majority of public subsidies are derived from European funds. Consequently, the way in which public support is arranged within a rural area is highly dependent on the thematic orientation of the EU Commission. At national level, the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection incorporates the European goals into the National Strategic Plan for the Development of Rural Areas. This plan forms an interface between the European Rural Area Development Fund and the development concepts of the different federal states in Germany. The Ministry and the different federal state governments collaborate in a task force which aims to finance public or private institutes which are involved in rural

development initiatives in different rural areas. At federal state level, the main political task is to facilitate an integrated rural development approach (Integrierte Ländliche Entwicklung). In doing so, the federal state allocates and redirects financial resources and policies towards different development fields. At county and municipality level, specific integrated rural development concepts (Integriertes Ländliches Entwicklungskonzept: ILEK) are formulated. The integrated rural development concept can then be used by the counties and municipalities to apply for funds from the integrated rural development approach or from the LEADER programme, which has higher subsidy rates than the national programme. The application for funds is highly competitive and only the best integrated rural development concepts are considered for the LEADER programme.

Both of our case study areas have been LEADER regions since 2002. The LEADER programme is regionally managed by a Local Action Group (LAG), consisting of representatives from public administration, business and civic organisations. In each case study area, the LAG is a formal association. It is supported by 'coordination circles', a group consisting of public and private members, who control and evaluate the development progress in the LEADER region. The coordination circle is assisted by a regional management team that elaborates development projects for the coordination circle. In addition, several themed working groups are run that are open for members of the general public to come and elaborate development project ideas. The way in which public support for collective learning is arranged in different rural areas is thus arguably restricted, because although the local circumstances vary strongly, all development projects have to fit standardised EU criteria on the local level.

4.6 Results

Despite the common public administrative structure and institutional arrangements that both case study areas are subordinated to, the features of operational interfaces and the actual support differed considerably: the agents and agencies differed, as well as their

delegated tasks and roles and the shape of operational interfaces providing direct public support for collective learning in grassroots development initiatives.

4.6.1 LEADER Region Sankt Wendeler Land

In Sankt Wendeler Land, operational interfaces were common in form of public-private partnerships. Public and private agents engaged, for example, jointly in associations or public-private development projects. Public administration also selected existing grassroots development initiatives to mediate public support. One such example is the association 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' (referred to as KuLanI in figure 4.3) which focuses on preserving and developing the cultural landscape of St. Wendeler Land.

In 2002, the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' successfully applied for funds from the LEADER + programme, and in 2007 again from the LEADER programme, in order to realize their regional development concept 'Local commodity market Sankt Wendeler Land'. Since 2002, the concept of the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' had thus formed the basis for an integrated development approach along three lines: awareness raising, marketing of local products and supporting cultural tourism. During the LEADER phase 2007-2013, a fourth line was added, alternative energy production. The implementation of the development concept of the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' had various implications. First, the grassroots development initiative 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' was transformed into a legal association, taking members of public administration on board.
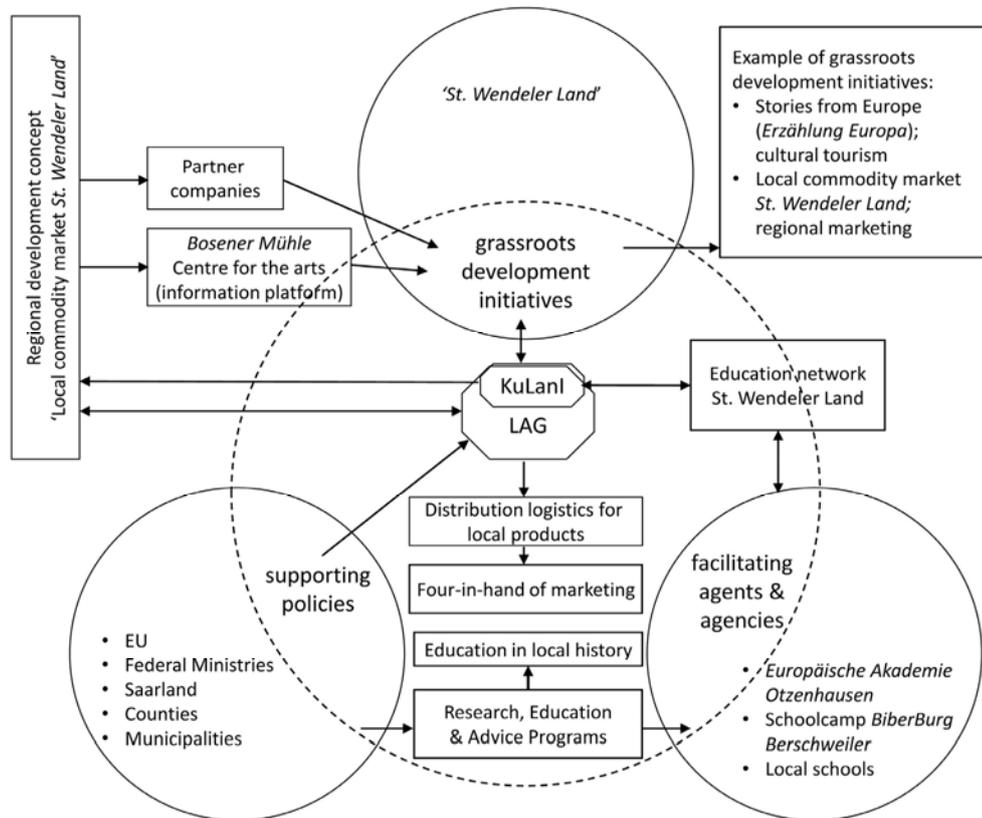
Figure 4.3 Arrangements to Support Collective Learning in Sankt Wendeler Land

As figure 4.3 shows, in this constellation, it became the LAG for the LEADER region Sankt Wendeler Land. Within the different development lines of the concept, the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' delegated different roles and tasks to other operational agents and agencies in the area. As figure 4.3 further shows, in order to realize the cultural tourism line, 'Bosener Mühle' a centre for arts within Sankt Wendeler Land, was chosen as operator. Its task was to coordinate and elaborate on cultural and tourism projects within the area that were able to fulfil the development goals of the concept. In doing so, it facilitated other development projects, such as the cultural history awareness raising campaign 'Stories from Europe' in collaboration with the 'European Academy Otzenhausen' (see figure 4.3). Other activities in the development line 'awareness raising' initiated by 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St.

Wendeler Land' included an educational network with local schools and the school camp 'BiberBurg Berschweiler'. Finally, as figure 4.3 shows, for the development line 'local marketing', the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' organized a local commodity market 'Lokalwarenmarkt St. Wendeler Land'. To support the marketing of local products, the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' further initiated projects such as the 'Distribution logistics for local products' and the 'Four-in-hand of marketing' as shown in figure 4.3. For these latter projects, the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' also engaged with the knowledge support structure in order to facilitate collective learning in the area.

4.6.2 LEADER Region OHTL

Turning towards the LEADER region OHTL, the LAG 'Association Oberlausitzer Heide- und Teichlandschaft' was formed in response to the establishment of the LEADER + region in 2002. In contrast to the LAG in Sankt Wendeler Land, it did not connect to an already existing grassroots development initiative. Instead, a marketing firm with a strong network of contacts inside and outside the area was assigned with the task of formulating an integrated development plan for OHTL. A LAG was formed with public administration, local businesses and civic organisations out of the LEADER programme requirements for a public-private partnership.

Central to the integrated development concept was the conservation and development of nature and the Sorbian culture, because they were seen as unique economic assets in the area. As a result, figure 4.4 shows that next to the LAG, other operational interfaces identified in OHTL were either focussing on nature and landscape management or on Sorbian culture and cultural tourism. The operational interface 'Krabat e.V.' shown on the left side of figure 4.4 was, for example, concerned with the marketing of regional products and the development of tourism in OHTL. Starting out as a grassroots development initiative, Krabat e.V. eventually initiated other networks and grassroots development initiatives aiming at producing and marketing regional products and tourism. In this course, it transformed from a grassroots development initiative into an

umbrella organisation for the marketing of regional products in the area. As an umbrella, it owned the licence for the brand 'Krabat', which could be used by producers in the area against payment of a fee (for example Krabat milk world (German: Krabat Milchwelt, see figure 4.4)). 'Domowina' also supported activities of Sorbian associations in the area. The operational interface 'Sorbischer Kulturtourismus' started as a grassroots initiative, consisting of regional organizations, associations and enterprises from the (cultural) tourism sector. Meanwhile, it initiated several activities, projects and initiatives related to gastronomy and Sorbian handicraft. Similar to Krabat e.V., the 'UNESCO Biosphere Reserve OHTL' operated as an interface and initiated development projects such as the production of bio carp (Oberlausitzer BioKarpfen) shown in the right-hand corner of figure 4.4. Today, the production and marketing of bio carp are operating almost independent of the operational interface through regional fish farming firms and external fish processing companies. One can therefore argue that some of the operational interfaces supporting Sorbian associations started out as (grassroots) development initiatives themselves and shifted towards being incubators of new, independent grassroots development initiatives.

Figure 4.4 further shows that in OHTL the knowledge support structure consisted, next to public schools and vocational training institutions, mainly of the University of Applied Sciences Zittau/Görlitz, and the Dresden Technical University. These were located outside the OHTL area. Within the area, the Sorbian Institute in Bautzen might be mentioned as a partner for all initiatives dealing with Sorbian issues. Unlike in Sankt Wendeler Land, the engagement of the knowledge support structure was not linked to the activities of the LAG and the development concept, but organised through different operational interfaces. As figure 4.4 shows, there were two main ways in which the knowledge support structure facilitated collective learning in grassroots development initiatives. First, they sent students to the grassroots development initiatives as interns or when writing degree theses. Secondly, they provided the latest scientific knowledge to grassroots development initiatives. Here, the role of professors/scientists was considered more important than the role of students.
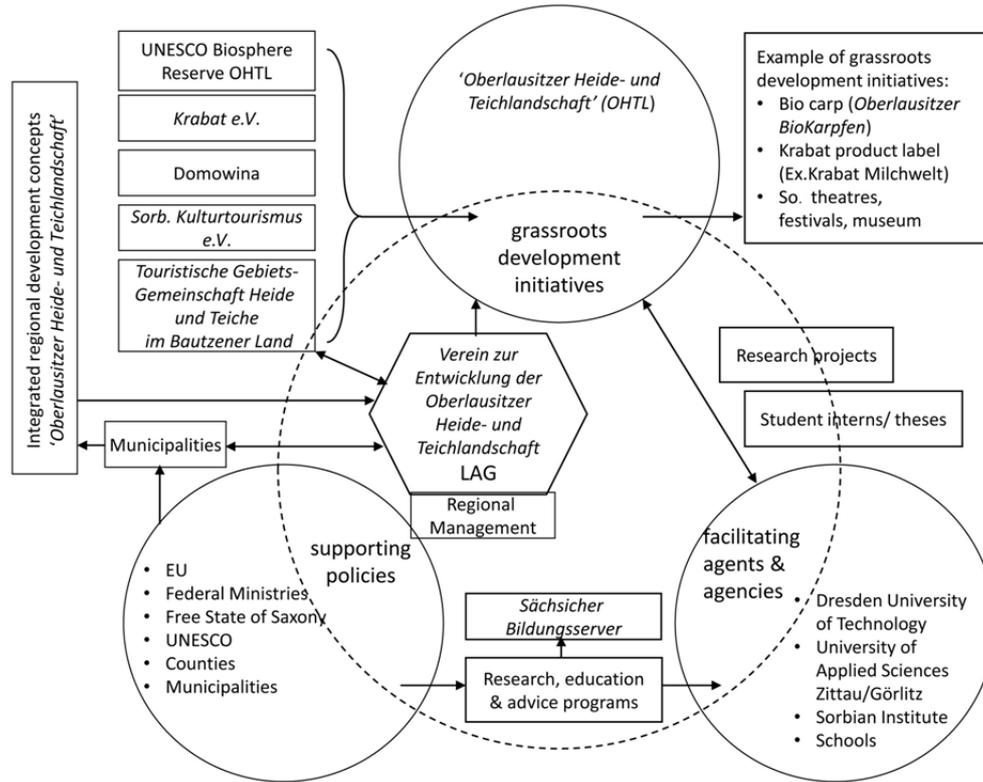
Figure 4.4 Arrangements to Support Collective Learning in OHTL

4.7 Evaluation of Public Support for Collective Learning in the Case Study Areas

Comparing figures 4.3 and 4.4 shows that the shape of the operational interfaces, the operational agents and agencies as well as the delegated tasks and roles differed considerably between the two case study areas. These differences were also reflected in the evaluation of the available support by the beneficiaries.

In both case study areas, beneficiaries argued to be strongly dependent on public funds for their activities. In OHTL this meant that self-sustaining initiatives were the exception. A great deal of initiative work could only be initiated because a public funding scheme was available. However, this form of support included difficult

bureaucratic procedures and long application phases for short funding periods. Complex administration and public expenditure guidelines thus served as a disincentive for applying for public funds, and hence to put development ideas into practise. In addition, short funding periods and unclear future perspectives were argued to be counterproductive for long-term development processes. The strong involvement of public administration in the operation of public support was perceived differently in the case study areas. In OHTL, public administration was argued to strongly determine the activities of development initiatives, making them dependent on political agenda setting. Electoral changes in public policies resulted in frequent changes of arrangements, prevented the establishment or institutionalisation of long-term partnerships as well as long-term, joint development visions in the area. Beneficiaries also felt a spatial and cognitive distance between public administration and their own needs, resulting in a perceived lack of interest and attention towards their development ideas. Moreover, application for the limited, public funds resulted in a strong competition, long, complex bureaucratic procedures and small revenues for short funding periods. At the same time, public funds were often invested in hard, visible infrastructure that could serve to gain votes in the next election campaign.

In Sankt Wendeler Land, the resulting nearness to public administration was appreciated, because initiatives benefited from a high social reputation and support of politically independent circles. Nevertheless, the high involvement of public administration was also perceived as a constant form of control.

Another example of different perceptions of public support is the attempt of public administration to establish networks. In OHTL, the initiation of networks by public administration was argued to be too artificial to have a significant impact. People across long geographical distances where brought together, which facilitated knowledge exchange but did not support everyday contacts in the region. In addition, it was argued that even if today efficient networks existed, they would be endangered by a social perforation, as more and more potential stakeholders leave the region. The social perforation was regarded as a challenge in OHTL. On the one hand, it helped to form good work relations between certain actors, because the relations were based on mutual

trust and informal work routines. However, these positive effects only provided advantages for the ones involved. On the other hand, interviewed actors mentioned that there were always the same people involved in activities as no others were present in the area or did not immigrate as new actors.

In Sankt Wendeler Land, in contrast, the establishment of networks, by public administration as well as knowledge bodies, was highly welcomed among grassroots development initiatives, and the networks tended to persist after initiation. Particularly women appreciated the opportunity to network. During network meetings, informal talks with scientists, who were mostly known personally, were valued in order to access the latest knowledge and information. Networking amongst grassroots development initiatives in the region was another important source of support. Support for collective learning was also provided to the initiatives by networks among their own ranks, as these were often linked to federal umbrella organisations.

With regard to the involvement of the knowledge support structure, these appeared to play a minor role for grassroots development initiatives in Sankt Wendeler Land and OHTL. Still, in OHTL, knowledge bodies were well networked within the region and the cooperation between regional development initiatives and knowledge facilities was perceived as working well. Students were hereby important actors in building bridges between grassroots development initiatives and knowledge institutes. Expert knowledge from companies and individuals was also highly valued by initiatives. In Sankt Wendeler Land, regional universities and academies involved less frequently with grassroots development initiatives, because of too high costs associated with scientific research and resources. Nevertheless, also here students joined occasionally initiatives for thesis and internship work.

4.8 Discussion

To conclude the chapter, let us return to the opening question of how public support for collective learning can best be arranged to enhance resilient rural areas.

Comparing the two cases, one can argue that in order to arrange public support for collective learning successfully, it is necessary to delegate operational tasks and roles to agents with extensive networks in and outside the area. These operational agents can arguably be regarded as 'spiders' in a web of networks (Nyhan, 2007). As the results indicate, operational agents are able to mediate between the different worlds of policy, knowledge and development practitioners. As such the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative Sankt Wendeler Land' was able to facilitate projects connecting all three domains of the analytical framework. In addition, operational agents can take a lead in coming to joint development vision. This was for instance the case of the regional management of the LAG who was able to involve the Sorbian minority in the joint development process. One implication is therefore that in order to create resilient areas, public administration needs to seek out operational agents that are well rooted in the area and thus have networking abilities. These agents have the ability to connect their networks to the institutional environment, influencing agenda setting and changing of rules (Horlings, 2012). This way, public support for collective learning can be better attuned to the needs of grassroots development initiatives.

In order to create resilient rural areas, it is necessary that diverse development actors learn to work together (Roep et al., 2009). A further role of operational agents is therefore to connect, include and coordinate as many diverse actors as possible in the development process. The cases demonstrate that the best way to include diverse development actors is to connect to already existing networks and cohesive groups in the area. In OHTL, for example, the Sorbian minority was strongly involved in the development process. They received operational tasks from public administration or the LAG, incubated further development initiatives and carried out development activities in the area. In Sankt Wendeler Land, the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative Sankt Wendel' was able to use the strong social ties and networks which evolved historically through the shifting of Saarland between Germany and France. Through empowering the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative Sankt Wendel' with operative and decision power, public administration was arguably able to unravel a whole network of operational agents, networks and development projects, engaging other grassroots development initiators as

well as the knowledge support structure. One further implication that can be drawn from this example is that in order to create resilient rural areas, it is necessary to find the right scale of operation. The results suggest that the scale of operation should be related to areas sharing a common regional identity. This can arguably trigger residents to engage in development activities.

Taking the need for a 'spider' and the need to mobilize and connect existing social groups and networks, the results once again point to the importance of shared leadership which builds on trust, commitment, energy and joint development agendas (Horlings, 2012). By doing so, operational agents contribute to the building of shared knowledge and understanding, capacity and synergy between stakeholders (Collinge and Gibney, 2010).

Social perforation, out-migration and economic hardship make it, however, difficult for operational agents to engage diverse actors in the development process. In OHTL, it was thus argued that the attempt of public administration to initiate networks in the area remained unsuccessful. In addition, in cases where public administration is taking the leadership, this was perceived negatively by grassroots development initiatives. A clash of interests, dependencies on political agenda settings as well as a high dependence on short funding periods was reported. Also Padt (2012) argues, that the managerial style of leadership often shown by public administration with a clear focus on short-term solutions does not help sustainable development. Indeed, Friedrich (2003, p.22) remarked that most grassroots development initiatives in Upper Lusatia - although capitalized with different public funding resources - were working without visible success or had already disappeared.

Leadership thus needs to be embedded in and needs to draw on networks, trust, cooperation and commitment of people (Horlings and Padt, 2011). Leaders can therefore be regarded as 'boundary spanners', bridging between their own networks, public administration and the knowledge support structure (Horlings, 2010). In addition, they are arguably able to motivate residents, to bridge different interests and connect actors across conventional development domains. Leaders are therefore required to frame new regional concepts and agendas, facilitate coalitions and have the capacity to

act within the institutional context (Horlings, 2012). This way, a joint, place-based development vision for the creation of resilient rural areas can be facilitated.

4.9 Conclusion

Comparing operational features of arrangements to support collective learning in Sankt Wendeler Land and OHTL raised several issues concerning the arrangement of effective (public) support for developing resilient rural areas that go beyond the particularities of the German context. Crucial for creating resilient rural areas are leaders able to build collective agency and thus support the working together of diverse actors and activities towards a common development vision. Connecting different development actors is best done by tapping into culturally and historically grown networks and groups (as being place-based) and connecting these via operational agents stemming from and being familiar with the area. At the same time, it requires an alignment between grassroots development initiative and supportive public policies with their aims, procedures and programmes. Successful arrangements to support collective learning appeared to delegate executive and decision powers from the start to operational agents and agencies rooted in the area. Ideally, these dispose of a wide network of different contacts outside and inside the area: they know the particular assets and available capacities, the initiators or visionary, collaborative leaders and have bonding and bridging capacities. This way, the inclusion of a wide range of actors in developing a resilient area can be facilitated.

4.10 Acknowledgements

CHAPTER 5

ARRANGING PUBLIC SUPPORT TO UNFOLD COLLABORATIVE MODES OF GOVERNANCE IN RURAL AREAS

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Impressions from my field visits to the European case study areas, *Source*: Wiebke Wellbrock

ABSTRACT Raising collective agency is key to successful place-based development approaches. Existing policy arrangements have, however, been criticised, suggesting a need to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance. This paper shall contribute to a better understanding of how public support can best be arranged to raise collective agency for a more collaborative mode of governance in rural areas. The paper elaborates on findings of empirical investigations conducted within the EU FP7 project DERREG. It will be shown that differences in effectuating more collaborative modes of governance can partly be ascribed to different political dynamics, economic and demographic situations as well as the presence of a shared sense of place. To raise collective agency effectively requires a joint reconsideration and restructuring of the division of roles and tasks, including those of public administration. This can be supported by facilitating joint reflexivity among development actors and giving room for collaborative leadership and operational flexibility within policy arrangements.

5.1 Introduction

In the European Union, place-based approaches to rural development are increasingly favoured, because they aim to strengthen the resilience of rural areas against global pressures by decreasing state dependencies and increasing the economic competitiveness of rural areas (Amin, 2004; Barca, 2009b; Bristow, 2010; Healey et al., 2003; Lowe et al., 1995; Marsden and Bristow, 2000; Murdoch, 2000; Nienaber, 2007; O'Brian, 2011; OECD, 2006a; Ray, 2006; Reimer and Markey, 2008; Shucksmith, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Tomaney, 2010). Place-based development approaches require an increased self-efficacy of rural residents, which can be stimulated through bottom-up development and decentralisation of decision making processes (Amin, 2004; Böcher, 2008; Bruckmeier, 2000; Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008). In this process, various development actors need to develop joint visions and joint activities and create synergies (Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Gibney, 2011). Raising collective agency is thus key to place-based development (Amin, 2004; Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Gibney, 2011; Gieryn, 2000; Healey et al., 2003; Massey, 1991; Roep et al., 2009; Swanson, 2001).

Public policy can raise collective agency through supporting communication and dialogue, meaningful partnerships between local and extra-local practitioners, an ethos of social inclusion, and structures for democratic decision making (Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Swanson, 2001). In rural areas, however, supportive arrangements aimed at raising collective agency have received numerous criticisms with regard to their effectiveness and operationalization (see Amin, 2004; Cleaver, 2002; Lee et al., 2005; Ray, 2006; Shortall, 2008; Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001). High and Nemes (2007) argue that institutional arrangements such as LEADER may even suppress participation when implemented as a general recipe showing indifference to the particularities of place. Bruckmeier (2000), for example, contends that LEADER only benefits the elites with considerable agency, that is, with the knowledge and power to influence decision making in their favour, while failing to include marginalized groups. Shortall (2008) further argues that participation might introduce power imbalances and that targeted beneficiaries may choose not to participate as they do not see the benefits. Multi-level

governance arrangements seemingly constructed to raise collective agency can thus mask realities about how power and authority remains with central government (Hadjimichalis and Hudson, 2006; Jessop, 1990; Jones, 2001). Place-based development approaches thus need more reflexive approaches to governance, replacing hierarchical, policy-centred leaderships with collaborative modes of governance and cross-boundary leadership (Collinge and Gibney, 2010).

This paper shall contribute to a better understanding of *how public support can best be arranged to raise collective agency for a more collaborative mode of governance in rural areas*. The study should thereby extend the discussion of institutional reform in participatory and place-based development approaches (Healey, 2006b; Healey et al., 2003; Shucksmith, 2010). Public support is defined as public policies and programmes, funds, infrastructure and knowledge facilitation provided by European, national or subnational levels of public administration. The paper elaborates on the findings of comparative empirical investigations into supportive arrangements intending to raise collective agency in six European and highly diverse rural areas conducted within the EU FP7-funded project DERREG (Roep et al., 2011). In the following section, the research tool is introduced. This tool, referred to as the learning rural area framework, can be used to map, analyse and compare how public support is arranged to support interfaces through which various development actors learn to work together. Following the framing of the learning rural area, the six case study areas will be highlighted briefly, and the research method will be explained, particularly focusing on the use of the learning rural area framework as research tool. Afterwards, selected policy arrangements are described and compared. Differences in modes of governance across the case study areas will be analysed and discussed with regard to their significance for understanding key developments in rural development policy and practise. It will be shown that the way in which support for joint learning and innovation between grassroots development initiatives and facilitating agents and agencies is arranged differs considerably between the case study areas. Some case study areas seem to be more advanced in effectuating collaborative modes of governance than others. Differences in collaborative modes of governance can arguably be ascribed, at least in

part, to the different historical political dynamics, their different economic and demographic situations, as well as an explicit, shared sense of place. To raise collective agency thus encompasses a joint reconsideration and redefinition of the division of roles and tasks, including those of public administration. This can be supported by facilitating joint reflexivity among development actors and giving room for collaborative leadership and operational flexibility within policy arrangements.

5.2 The learning rural area framework

Public policy can support the raising of collective agency by facilitating interfaces through which various actors jointly learn and innovate. This has been extensively studied and supported with regard to regional development policies (see for example Asheim, 1996; Florida, 1995; Rutten and Boekema, 2007). Within the rural development literature, however, little attention has been given to the way in which public support can facilitate the creation of interfaces through which joint learning and innovation between facilitating agents and agencies and grassroots development initiatives can occur. Instead, research has focused on facilitating learning and innovation within grassroots development initiatives, such as the role of extension services (e.g. Leeuwis, 2004), or the role of LEADER and participatory processes (e.g. Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Shortall, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010), or the role of social learning processes (e.g. Ellström, 2010; Fenwick, 2010; Wals, 2007) and the role of knowledge or innovation brokers (Howells, 2006; Klerkx et al., 2009; Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009; Suvinen et al., 2010). In response to this gap, Wellbrock et al (2012) proposed a research tool, the learning rural area framework, to investigate interfaces through which facilitating agents and agencies and grassroots development initiatives learn to work together in rural areas.

The rural learning area framework is based on the learning region concept, broadly defined as '*focal points for knowledge creation and learning in the new age of global, knowledge-intensive capitalism […]. Learning regions function as collectors and repositories of knowledge and ideas, and provide the underlying environment or*

infrastructure which facilitates the flow of knowledge, ideas and learning' (Florida, 1995, p. 527). Within regional development, the learning region concept has extensively been used to study and formulate public policy aimed at supporting joint learning and innovation between academia and industry in order to facilitate the production and transfer of new, scientific knowledge and human capital within high-tech, science, media, and communication and information industries in urban, economic centres (Woods, 2009). Public policy can facilitate the creation of learning regions by ensuring spatial proximity between knowledge institutes and businesses in form of so-called economic knowledge 'clusters' (Asheim, 1996; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000; Florida, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Rutten and Boekema, 2007; Storper, 1993; Wolfe, 2002).

The current focus of the learning region concept on business-academia-government linkages, also referred to as triple helix (Etzkowitz, 2003), does not, however, serve to study the support for joint learning and innovation in rural areas (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Shucksmith, 2009; Terluin, 2003; Wellbrock et al., 2013a; Wellbrock et al., 2012). In contrast to economic knowledge clusters in industry, rural areas are characterised by a high diversity of actors and activities contributing to the development of an area (Roep et al., 2009). Consequently, unlike in economic knowledge clusters, the support for joint learning and innovation required in rural areas is highly context-dependent and problem-specific (Tovey, 2008). Wellbrock et al (2012) thus broadened the scope of the learning region concept to account for the diversity of actors and activities which jointly contribute to the development of a rural area. This amendment reflects a realisation that development in terms of economic success, particularly under globalising conditions, cannot be achieved by only focusing on economic issues. It is also part of non-economic social, cultural and institutional dimensions operating at more local and regional levels (Jones, 2001; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999). It also entails a focus on how dynamics unfold in a particular place (Lyson, 2006; Marini and Mooney, 2006; Woods, 2007).
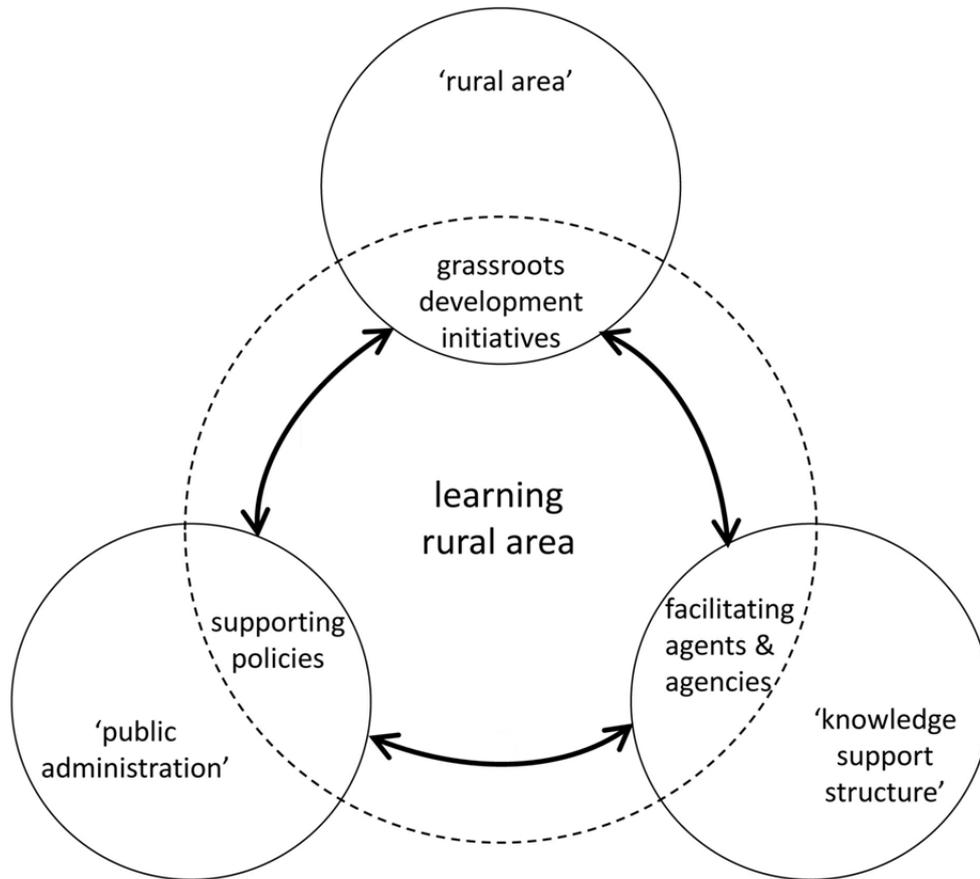
Figure 5.1. Framework for an integrated perspective on learning rural areas. (Adapted from Wellbrock et al., 2012)

As illustrated in Figure 1, the learning rural area framework includes the pillar rural area comprised of various assets, activities and actors in which 'grassroots development initiatives' are employed by residents of a rural area. Grassroots development initiatives are defined as development activities initiated in response to pressures on the livelihoods of rural residents (Smith et al.). Rural areas can coincide with administrative boundaries but not necessarily. Instead these places distinguish themselves by a particular political history, culture, identity, natural resources and socio-economic development reflected in the landscape. A further pillar of the framework is the

knowledge support structure, including 'facilitating agents and agencies' which jointly learn and innovation together with grassroots development initiatives. These can include public and private knowledge institutes, private consultancy services, public officers, public institutes, NGOs as well as experts involved in education, research and consultancy. Finally, the framework includes the pillar public administration, involved in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Some public policies specifically aim at supporting joint learning and innovation among facilitating agents and agencies and grassroots development initiatives (e.g. LEADER); others aim at attuning research, education and advice to the needs of rural development.

Following the learning region concept, the analytical focus of the learning rural area framework is on policy arrangements that facilitate interconnections through which facilitating agents and agencies and grassroots development initiatives learn to work together. These interconnections are referred to as 'operational interfaces', and are defined as critical focal points, enabling people to learn together and from one another, thereby acting as channels for dialogue and cooperation (Nyhan, 2007). Operational interfaces are based on constitutive agreements on how to operationalise the available public support. Constitutive agreements are the result of a negotiated, novel way of 'doing things together' and hence reflect the collective agency that is being built. Constitutive agreements can be made just by public officers or negotiated in partnership with facilitating agents and agencies as well as grassroots development initiators. As Roep et al (2011) have shown, negotiations concern a) the type of development actors that learn to work together (operational agents and agencies), b) their tasks and roles as well as rules and regulations governing their joint learning and innovation and c) the duration of joint learning and innovation. By agreeing on a set of rules for engagement, partners involved reflect on existing, shared codes of conduct and change them accordingly (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002). Governance is thus not just the formal organisations of government; it is also those norms and standards that influence society's formal and informal ways of thinking and acting (Healey, 2004). The process of coming to a constitutive agreement can therefore be referred to as institutional reflexivity (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002). An institutional perspective on governance as

advocated in this study stresses the socially constructed nature of the world in which individuals may be constrained by structure, but where choice can also be exercised (Giddens, 1984; Healey, 2006a; Murray and Murtagh, 2004). Naturally, operational interfaces might therefore also be subject to conflicting values and interests as well as different levels of power (Long, 1984). Gonzáles and Healey (2005) draw attention to the shifting emphasis towards governance, and the need to create the necessary institutional space for all relevant partners to promote innovative actions and to control potentially dominant networks of influence. Arguably, this will lead to institutional reform and the creation of a favourable institutional setting for place-based development. The framework can be used as a tool to evaluate the appropriateness of the existing institutional setting and its arrangements, to help identify institutional voids (Hajer, 2003), and to design new institutional arrangements.

5.3 The Six Case Study Areas

Explorative research was carried out within six European (predominantly) rural areas: County Roscommon in Ireland; Comarca de Verín in Spain; the Western part of Groningen Province in the Netherlands (the Westerkwartier); Saarland (west) and Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia (east) in Germany and Alytus County in Lithuania (see fig. 5.2). All case study areas were covered by the European LEADER programme.

Some case study areas coincide with existing administrative units, others can be considered as newly emerging development areas crossing administrative borders. Roscommon County and Saarland coincide with existing administrative units. Alytus County, the Comarca de Verín, Westerkwartier and Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia are emerging development areas. Emerging development areas have no authoritative or regulatory power. The delegation of decision-making power has to be negotiated at the respective government levels. Their unity is expressed in shared cultural, economic and

political development. Alytus County[3] identifies with the ethno-cultural identity of Dzūkija region. A Comarca is a traditional Iberian unit that uses common criteria (territory, agrarian or economic activity) to group neighbouring municipalities. The Westerkwartier consists of four municipalities collaborating as a LEADER region since 2007. Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia is a cultural area (*Kulturraum*) that includes the eastern parts of the Free State of Saxony in Germany. It consists of the districts Bautzen and Görlitz which were formed in the context of the latest administrative reform in 2008. Subareas of Upper Lusatia have traditionally been inhabited by Sorbs who still practise their own culture, tradition and language.

Figure 5.2. Case study areas.

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[3] In 2010, the administrative unit of 'Alytus County' was dissolved. Administrative functions were handed over to municipalities.

Each case study area has its particular dynamics. Table 1 only summarises their main contextual differences. Saarland is the largest case study area (2,568.65 km²) and the Westerkwartier is the smallest (345 km²). The Westerkwartier has, however, the second largest population density (173.4 inhabitants/km²). Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia, Alytus County and the Comarca de Verín are characterised by a shrinking economy, out-migration and an aging population. In Alytus County, for example, the population density decreased by 3.6% from January 2010 to January 2011 (Jones et al., 2011). Population growth in County Roscommon was also well below the regional and national average. The Westerkwartier and the Western part of Saarland are attractive residential areas for young families and commuters working in close-by urban centres. Along with Roscommon County, their economies depend increasingly on the service sector and construction businesses, while witnessing a steady decline of primary sector activities, particularly those connected to agriculture.

Table 5.1. Case study areas

	Alytus County	Coma. de Verín	County Rosc.	U. Lus. – L. Silesia	Saarland	Westerkwartier
Country	Lithuania	Spain	Ireland	Germany	Germany	Netherl.
Size (km²)	5,425	1,007	2,547	4,500	2,568.65	345
Pop.[a]	177,040	30,000	58,768	592,000	1,024,000	59,869
Pop./ km²[b]	32.6	30.0	23.1	131.6	357.1	173.4
Landscape	Forests, lakes, rivers	Valleys, mountains	Agri. lowland, grassland, hedgerows, hills, lakes	Heath and ponds in North; mountains in South	Hills, forests	Grassland, hedgerows
Ad. unit	1 County	8 mun.	1 County	2 districts	1 federal state	4 mun.
Economic activity	Tourism, recreation, wood, furniture, transport	Service sector, agric.	Public sector/ health service, agric., constr.	North: Decl. brown coal mining; South: Textile ind., mach., engineer.	Industry, manufacturing	Service sector, agric.
Particularities	Pop. decline, aging, unempl., emigr.	Pop. decline, aging, unempl., low activity rates	Low activities in tourism, IT/computer, financial, brain drain	Pop. decline, aging, unempl., emigration	Attr. resid. area in West	Attr. resid. area, in-migration

[a] Demographic data retrieved from DERREG case study reports (2009-2011): www.derreg.eu, amended where appropriate.

[b] In Saarland, Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia and Alytus County, urban centres were included in the analysis. This might have influenced the comparative analysis.

5.4 Research Method

Empirical research was carried out simultaneously in all case study areas between February 2009 and June 2011(Roep et al., 2011). The learning rural area framework was thereby used as a research tool to guide the investigations along three lines (Wellbrock et al., 2012):

First, the learning rural area framework was used to map supporting policies and programmes and facilitating agents and agencies from the knowledge support structure. To do so, an inventory of public policies and programmes specifically supporting joint learning and innovation was made in each case study area. This was done through extensive literature reviews and semi-structured expert interviews with 10-15 relevant informants from public administration and the knowledge support structure in each case study area.

Secondly, the learning rural area framework was used to map and analyse policy arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation between grassroots development initiatives and facilitating agents and agencies. Policy arrangements were described with regard to their constitutive agreement on a) their operating agents and agencies, b) their delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations, and c) the duration of the operational interface. To do so, an inventory of 10-15 grassroots initiatives was constructed, identified through snowball and internet research as receiving some sort of public support for joint learning and innovation, in each case study area. The initiatives covered diverse fields of development (agriculture, nature and landscape development, civic and community development, and economic activities) and were assessed in relation to their aim, their initiators, the range of actors that were engaged with them and particularly the type of support received and the relevant supporting policy arrangement. The inventory was done by questioning key-actors of the initiatives using semi-structured interviews.

Third, the framework can be used as a tool to facilitate a comparison and evaluation of existing policy arrangements, and in particularly their operational features. For this, up

to eight promising policy arrangements were selected in each case study area for an in-depth study of their operational interfaces. This involved face-to-face interviews and group discussions with selected key informants from public administration, from the knowledge support structure and from grassroots development initiatives. The focus was on identifying factors contributing to or constraining the achievements of grassroots development initiatives.

5.5 Arrangements to raise collective agency in rural areas

In this section, we focus on comparing promising policy arrangements that were identified by Roep et al. (2011) using the research method and framework as explained in section four. The different policy arrangements are compared with regard to their constitutive agreements on 1) the operating agents and agencies, 2) their delegated tasks and roles, and associated sets of rules and regulations (regimes), and 3) the duration of the operational interface. The core of the analysis is specifically targeted at those features that make operational interfaces work well from the perspective of grassroots development initiatives, knowledge facilitators and public administration, taking into consideration the contextual differences across the case study areas.

5.5.1 Operational agents and agencies

Roep et al. (2011) revealed four basic types of operational agents: public-private partnerships, grassroots development initiatives, public officers (including officers from institutes of research, education and advice) and private consultants, defined as self-employed experts or professionals working for a private agency.

Most interfaces operated as public-private partnerships, consisting of public officers and grassroots development initiatives. The most obvious examples here are the Local Action Groups (LAGs) which were found in all case study areas.

Table 5.2. Types of operational agents and agencies

	Public-private partnerships	Grassroots development initiative	Public officers	Private consultants
Alytus County	5	0	0	0
Comarca de Verín	2	2	1	0
Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia	3	2	1	0
County Roscommon	1	1	6	1
Saarland	2	1	0	0
Westerkwartier	3	1	7	1
Total number	**16**	**7**	**8**	**2**

In some countries, like Alytus County, public-private partnerships were still considered a novel means of arranging public support but nevertheless emerging. Here, public administration played a dominant role in setting up development agendas. This reduced the trust of rural residents in the support programme and raised sensitive questions about authority and development visions between rural initiators. Grassroots development initiators expressed, for example, their concern that public administration officials entered the LAG as civic partners, for instance as leaders of development initiatives. The number of representatives from public administration thus increased and as a result, grassroots development initiators felt that the LAG did not represent their interests. In other case study areas, like the Westerkwartier, public-private partnerships were more commonly found. One example is the project 'Brug Toekomst' (Bridge Future, 2003-2008) in the Westerkwartier (see also Derkzen, 2009). In this project,

public knowledge institutes and grassroots development initiators partnered to test the cooperation of a university and an institute for vocational education located near the Westerkwartier. The Westerkwartier was chosen as a research area, because one of the lecturers was involved in a nature and landscape management organisation in the Westerkwartier. The project required various grassroots development initiatives and public administration to jointly discuss development plans. The knowledge institutes organised and facilitated their meetings, helped to formulate academic research questions and provided students for carrying out the necessary research tasks. The impact of 'Brug Toekomst' was regarded as a success, because it greatly accelerated place-based development in the Westerkwartier. As a result, the Westerkwartier Initiative Group (WSI) was formed, representing the majority of grassroots development initiatives. It continued to act as a key mediator in networks such as the LAG and provided continuity in collaboration between public administration, grassroots development initiatives and facilitating agents and agencies, thereby enhancing trust.

Grassroots development initiatives also acted frequently as operational agents. They would either turn into operational agents by introducing members of public administration and the knowledge support structure into their ranks, or by substituting for public administration in providing support for joint learning and innovation between other grassroots development initiatives and knowledge facilitators. As Table 1 shows, the latter form was particularly important in the case of the Comarca de Verín, where relations with municipalities were considered to be 'ruptured'. Here, public officers changed when political colours of the government changed after any election. To secure votes for the new election phase, decisions regarding development were made by public administration alone, leaving little space for negotiation with grassroots development initiatives. In the context of the LAG, for example, tasks and roles were limited to administrative functions such as arranging payments of funds, and providing advice and consultancy. The change of public officers involved in the operation of the LAG after an election further caused a lack of continuity in development agendas and hampered the establishment of trust between supporters and beneficiaries. In contrast, beneficiaries referred particularly positively to the grassroots development initiative

"Centro de Desenvolvemento Rural Portas Abertas" (thereafter Portas Abertas). In 1990, Portas Abertas was initiated by a priest, an active development actor in the area at that time, in order to facilitate social inclusion and development in the Comarca. The initiative was integrated into the national NGO 'Confederación de Centros de Desenvolvemento Rural', receiving funds from public and private organisations. In the first two LEADER periods, the association and the local government followed the same political ideologies and Portas Abertas was chosen to operate public funds available through the LEADER programme. During the LEADER period 2007-2013, however, Portas Abertas and the municipalities had different political colours and the association distanced itself from the government in order to avoid problems and political power struggles. Even when the budget was cut, it remained an important operational interface, because of its extensive network including representatives within public administration beyond the Comarca and the knowledge support structure. Portas Abertas was regarded as a gateway to public support from European, national and regional government, while circumventing conflict-prone engagement with local government. It helped initiatives with application processes, provided training and knowledge exchange and set up further operational interfaces to support joint learning and innovation. Another example is the LAG of St. Wendeler Land in Saarland. In 1994, this association started as a grassroots development initiative with an informal association of several interest groups engaged with nature and landscape conservation. In 2003, they jointly elaborated a development plan for the area with which they successfully applied for LEADER funds. In 2004, they formalised their collaboration, established the association 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land', and were acknowledged as leaders of the Local Action Group Sankt Wendeler Land. Because they were well known in the area, they were perceived as a well-working interface between supporting policies, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives.

Public officers were the most frequent operational agents in County Roscommon. They were characterised as providing highly professional development support and advice. The Irish Agricultural and Food Development Authority 'Teagasc', a semi-state authority, established in 1988, was for example responsible for learning and innovation

in the agri-food sector. In County Roscommon, the authority was represented with three advisory offices. It also had links with universities. It provided a range of support, such as training programmes to assist individuals and grassroots initiatives in innovation and diversification for economic viability. Teagasc's policy remit and funding came via the Department of Agriculture and Food. Members of the farming community were also able to take out membership, which entitled them to certain advisory services. Teagasc assisted Local Action Groups with the delivery of training programmes to rural-based communities. Teagasc was valued by its beneficiaries because of its supportive agenda towards rural communities, through having built up long-term connections with them, through listening to their needs and by providing specific advice and supports. Their strong connection to the farming community was a key aspect of this enduring positive relationship. The strong presence of public officers also meant, however, that development strategies were closely tied to policies which continued to be decided at central government level, with little real devolution of decision-making power to lower administrative levels. This created non-negotiable conditions for grassroots development initiatives and constrained supporters who were in favour of more collaborative modes of arranging public support. For example, financial support that flowed from central decisions and criteria did not make any allowances for place-specific demands and deficiencies. Procedural inflexibility and lack of decision-making power at lower levels were seen as main obstacles to an effective arrangement of public support.

Finally, *private consultants* were also operating as agents. In the Westerkwartier, LEADER funding was used to install 'catalysts' for a period of two years. They stimulated touristic entrepreneurs to envision and carry out joint development plans and to form an association.

5.5.2 Delegated Tasks and Roles

Roep et al. (2011) showed that tasks and roles delegated to operational agents and agencies included the provision of the following: financial support (i.e. different kinds

of subsidies and procedural support), knowledge and skills (for example advice, facilitation, education and research activities), social infrastructure (for example network incubation and cluster forming), and physical infrastructure (for example meeting spaces, information centres).

The *provision of financial support* was the most frequently-mentioned task. It included the provision of subsidies, support for writing subsidy requests and advice on different kinds of subsidies. Yet, grassroots development initiatives in all case study areas complained about excessively high levels of bureaucracy. The way in which public funds were made available was also not always attuned to the specific needs of an area, as the following examples demonstrate:

Since funds from the LEADER programme were only provided to legal entities, some development activities providing community supports in Alytus County could not be funded. One individual interested in operating a regional internet TV, one producing regional folk costumes for local organisations, and another wishing to establish a foster home could not apply for the available support as private persons, even though their activities supported the community. The formation of legal entities was effectively hampered by the low numbers of residents able to engage in local development, thus acting as a constraint on place-based development in Alytus County.

In the Comarca de Verín, public funds were often oriented towards visible, short-term development goals which would benefit local politicians in the (re-) election phase. The increasing power, clientelism (Hopkins, 2001; Máiz and Losada, 2000) and self-centred interests of local government were argued to jeopardise long-term development visions. In Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia similar concerns about short-termed political agenda setting and investments were raised. In both areas, public administration arguably showed little reflexivity when allocating public funds, thus constraining a place-based approach to development.

The *provision of skills and knowledge* included courses, training, formulating and investigating research questions, providing students to assist with research, and information. In County Roscommon, publically-funded organisations such as Teagasc,

FAS (The Industrial Training Authority), the Vocational Educational Committees and the County Enterprise Boards all provided training on a short- or long-term basis to grassroots initiatives. Their support was generally evaluated positively, and also led to long-term relationship between supporters and beneficiaries who in turn helped to create trust. In the Westerkwartier, Saarland, Upper Lusatia, the Comarca de Verín and Alytus County, in contrast, public knowledge institutes providing education, research and advice were engaged with grassroots development initiatives through short-term projects. The practice of involving knowledge institutes was frequently questioned, because the link between development questions of grassroots development initiatives and educational and research programmes appeared to be missing. The service of professional consultants was evaluated positively across the case study areas, but was seen as too expensive to afford on a regular basis.

The *provision of social infrastructure,* as for example network brokering activities, was referred to in all case study areas. First, network brokers could be rooted, informal, collaborative leaders. This was particularly the case in Saarland, the Westerkwartier and the Comarca de Verín. Collaborative leaders were characterised as having connections with members of public administration and the knowledge support structure. They were also able to motivate others, stimulate joint reflexivity and thus enhancing a joint vision. Examples include the lecturer who introduced the project 'Brug Toekomst' in the Westerkwartier or the priest initiating the association 'Portas Abertas' in the Comarca de Verín.

Secondly, network brokers were experts in certain fields of development activities. For example, in Alytus County there were two business development organisations 'Alytus Business Advisory Centre' and 'Alytus Region Business Association' which became network brokers for other networks and clusters.

Thirdly, to encourage networking activities, informal networking events were organised. In Saarland, these events were organised by public administration. Even though the high involvement of public administration was perceived as a form of constant control, the nearness gave initiatives a high social reputation and support from politically-independent circles. During these events, grassroots development representatives could

talk informally with scientists and public officers through whom they could access knowledge, information and other forms of public support. Networks established by public administration tended to persist after initiation. In Upper Lusatia, in contrast, networking events organised by public administration were not welcomed by grassroots development initiatives. They argued that get-togethers with residents who were spread over such a large area as Upper Lusatia did not contribute to the daily work of grassroots development initiatives. Public administration was also perceived as dominating and controlling the operationalization of public support. To save costs, administrative units were constantly enlarged over the last two decades. The enlarged geographical distances resulted in a spatial and cognitive distance between public administration and beneficiaries, and a perceived lack of interest and attention towards development ideas raised by grassroots development initiatives. In addition, the identity of residents and their sense of belonging did not align with the new administrative boundaries.

Fourthly, in County Roscommon and Alytus County, initiators were frequently involved in other initiatives, for example by being members of their Boards of Directors. Along with their official remit, these groupings constituted opportunities to discuss informally with public officers about development policy and funding issues. These networking activities were valued as key for initiatives to focus on their development objectives and operate in an efficient, business-like way. In Saarland networking amongst grassroots development initiatives was another important source of support, because the initiatives were often linked to federal umbrella organisations.

Finally, grassroots development initiatives in the Westerkwartier organised networking events themselves using public funds. Examples include the rural cafés which were organised by the foundation 'Westerkwartier Initiative Group'. They were meant to create an informal space for networking, information-exchange and presentations of grassroots development initiatives for citizens, initiators, public administration and knowledge facilitators. Rural cafés were organised twice a year along different themes so that persons with the same interest would be able to meet each other.

The *provision of a physical infrastructure* refers to the availability of meeting spaces, information centres or office spaces. In the Westerkwartier, for example, an expert team consisting of governmental and non-governmental supporters and associated with the LAG, operated a physical front office called the rural house. This front office housed the different governmental and non-governmental supporters in the area. Being a single access point, it ensured a fast, low-threshold and easy accessible support to beneficiaries. The presence of a physical front office and the instalment of the expert team, mediating between grassroots initiatives and LEADER funding with the decision power to decide on applications for funding up to €10.000, greatly accelerated the provision of public support. In the Comarca de Verín, a front office was also established. Although it was built to facilitate rural development initiatives, it was used by only two initiatives. This is somehow indicative of the mismatch between political dynamics and development initiatives in Comarca.

5.5.3 Duration of an Operational Interface

The results suggest two types of operational interfaces, long-term commitments to raise collective agency in an area, and short-term 'on the spot' assignments targeted to specific tasks. Long-term commitments of public officers or grassroots development initiatives were the most common form of arranging public support for joint learning and innovation. Long-term commitments, for example those of public offices such as Teagasc, FAS (The Industrial Training Authority), the Vocational Educational Committees and the County Enterprise Boards in County Roscommon were valued, because they created continuity and facilitated the formation of trust and partnership. Changes in operators and rules and regulations were regarded as negative for the operation of the support. In County Roscommon, changes in national governments translated into changes in development ideologies, operational agents, programmes, rules and regulations. This often necessitated grassroots development initiatives to reframe their development activities in order to align with the prevailing development ideology, and to invest time and effort in building up relations with new operational agents. This hampered the formation of trust amongst beneficiaries and supporters and

presented on-going practical challenges in terms of formulating applications for financial supports. An example is a local employment support programme. It was regarded as a very important source of support, because it enabled grassroots development initiatives to take on workers and reduce the reliance on voluntary efforts. A recent change in political agenda, however, resulted in a focus on social inclusion which did not allow an initiative to look for staff with specific skills that would have fitted its economic activities. This implied that the initiative had to put time into staff training, which temporarily deflected the focus from development of their core economic strength. Long-term commitments thus also seem to create an element of dependency.

At the same time, short term 'on the spot' assignments were regarded as positive. Short-term assignments were often used as catalysts, for initiating networks or for starting up grassroots development initiatives. The touristic entrepreneurs in the Westerkwartier, for example, helped to envision and carry out joint development plans and to form an association. The reason for installing catalysts was the lack of initiative amongst touristic entrepreneurs to form networks and to engage in joint development projects. The primary role of the touristic catalysts was to act as network incubators. They initiated a network of touristic entrepreneurs called the 'touristic platform' by organizing a number of get-togethers open to everyone involved with tourism activities in the Westerkwartier. These initial get-togethers helped connect the different entrepreneurs and to support the realization of their development plans. Eventually, the entrepreneurs recognized the benefits of networking and collaboration and an independently functioning, legal business association was formed. These types of short-termed assignments were arguably meant to facilitate long-term development.

5.6 Towards unfolding more collaborative modes of governance

The comparative analysis shows that the way in which public support is arranged to raise collective agency differs considerably between the case study areas. Some case study areas seem to be more advanced in effecting collaborative modes of governance

than others. In this section, we first discuss factors that arguably contribute to the differences in collaborative modes of governance. Afterwards, the findings will be discussed regarding their significance for understanding rural development policy and practice.

5.6.1 Factors influencing the unfolding of more collaborative modes of governance

Factors which, at least partly, influence the effectuation of more collaborative modes of governance are (historical) political dynamics, economic and demographic situations, as well as an explicit, shared sense of place.

The results indicate that a particular political regime can hamper institutional reform, showing more prevalence for policy-centred modes of governance. In Roscommon County, the central government was, for example, reluctant to cede decision-making authority down to lower governmental levels. Accordingly, public support was mainly operated by public officers. The example of Comarca de Verín shows how promising interfaces, such as Puertas Abertas, can be interrupted by a change in political colours of public administration. This indicates the fragility of initial institutional reform. In Comarca de Verín as well as Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia public administration was also regarded as acting out of self-interest in order to win the next election phase. As Hidle and Normann (2012) suggest, public administration may be accused of abusing their function to realise their own political interests.

Historical political dynamics can also influence the way in which support for joint learning and innovation can best be arranged. Historical political dynamics as for example the forced collaboration and policy-centred modes of governance as experienced in Alytus County seem to be working against a collaborative spirit. Although Alytus County, being part of a transition country and subject to profound institutional reform, is advancing, a more collaborative mode of governance had to be built more or less from scratch. Historically institutionalised centralised power structures thus impact on the prevailing mode of governance (Hidle and Normann, 2012).

Saarland and the Westerkwartier, in contrast, showed more collaborative modes of governance. In these cases, public administration showed well-established practices in delegating decision making power to facilitating agents and agencies as well as grassroots development initiatives. This was reflected in more joint reflexivity, joint capacities, lasting collaborations and tailored arrangements, thus creating a more favourable institutional setting. Arguably, the economic prosperity, net-migration, higher population density and stronger social-cultural ties seemed to favour the effectuation of collaborative modes of governance in the Westerkwartier and Saarland, the two economically most prosperous case study areas. In addition, the political history of Saarland, alternating between French and German territory has resulted in an explicit, shared sense of place and attachment to the area (Wellbrock et al., 2013a). An explicit, shared sense of place reinforces the willingness and incentives of residents to collaborate (Horlings, 2012). In Saarland and the Westerkwartier, collective agency thus increased as a result of a raised joint reflexivity and a growing collaborative spirit among grassroots initiators and facilitating agents and agencies, engaging in joint development activities. An increased collective agency, in turn, resulted in tailored arrangements to support vibrant collaborations and joint development activities thus providing a more favourable institutional setting.

Shrinking rural economies and related out-migration as experienced in Alytus County and Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia weaken social relations and vitality by creating 'voids' and posing severe obstacles for initiating a collaborative spirit and uptake of joint development activities. Furthermore, the sense of belonging and attachment to the large scale administrative units like in Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia explain the apparent reluctance of residents to engage in area-wide, joint development activities. Arguably, public administration has to deal with these unfavourable conditions which hamper the effectuation of more collective modes of governance.

5.6.2 Significance for understanding rural development policy and practice

The analysis suggests that well-working policy arrangements aimed at raising collective agency encompass a joint reconsideration and redefinition of the division of roles and tasks, including those of public administration.

Raising joint reflexivity among residents, facilitating discussions about issues that really matter to them and their place, appears to be a first step towards more collaborative modes of governance. As the cases of Westerkwartier and Saarland show, raising joint reflexivity can be a major incentive to inspire residents, create a collaborative spirit, develop a joint development vision and generate joint activities. In these case study areas visionary leaders made the difference. They enjoyed considerable trust and generated inspiring, bounding ideas. They were also capable of bridging diverging interests and transcending (at least temporarily) actual conflicts, and could access additional resources by means of their wider networks. Examples are the members of the Cultural Landscape Initiative Sankt Wendeler Land in Saarland and the founders of the Westerkwartier Initiative Group. These visionary leaders did not operate alone; in fact they enacted collaborative leadership. They initiated and enabled the participation of residents in low threshold meetings, networks, collaborative (private-public) partnerships and wider collaboration in employing development activities. This was also done by the Westerkwartier Initiative Group which organized of rural cafés with LEADER funding to stimulate joint reflexivity. As Gibney (2011) argues, these visionary leaders were well able "*to adopt and to mediate the complex interplay of power, resources and people*" (p. 618-619). Collaborative leadership thus provides an incentive for joint reflexivity, building collective agency and institutional reform. In Saarland and County Roscommon similar successful networking events were organized by public administration. Yet, such network events do not always succeed as the results in Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia have shown. Here networking events were organized by public administration and not well perceived by residents, because they lacked a shared identity.

In order to react to the particularities of place, operational flexibility appears to be crucial to the success of a policy arrangement. Yet supportive policies schemes often

appear not tailored to the particularities of an area they apply to. Even LEADER procedures, designed to effectuate a collaborative mode of governance with the aim of enhancing collective agency and resilience, can become an obstacle to their own objectives. In the Westerkwartier this has been overcome with advanced, tailored arrangements, such as the touristic catalysts and the expert team to which decision power was delegated. Alytus County, in contrast, had to deal with major political and economic challenges and despite the effort made, it was not able to advance that much in effecting collaborative modes of governance. An inherited unfavourable institutional setting can thus be a major obstacle for institutional reform (Kiisel, 2012). A one size fits all approaches do not work. New arrangements have to be tailored to the particularities of a place should they result in effective institutional reform.

5.7 Conclusion

This paper commenced by advancing a series of ideas about the effectiveness of collective agency as a means of delivering successful place-based rural development, drawing broadly on contemporary theoretical perspectives that establish the need for more collaborative modes of governance to ensure sustainable place-based development approaches. The comparative analysis supports the assumption that the successful implementation of place-based development approaches requires more collaborative modes of governance. The findings also sustain the assumption that collective agency is key to more collaborative modes of governance. Beyond that, the comparative analysis shows that the unfolding of collaborative modes of governance is influenced by favourable political, economic and demographic situations as well as a shared sense of place. The comparative analysis also suggests that more collaborative modes of governance can be effectuated by supporting joint reflexivity among development actors and giving room for collaborative leadership and operational flexibility within policy arrangements. Building on this perspective, the key findings from this research also suggest that understanding the way interfaces between different domains of activities are operationalised and supported in the rural, and how this in turn impacts on the

process of joint learning and innovation, provides a more complete picture of the dynamics involved in building collective agency. Developing the ideas advanced in particular by Tovey (2008) and Wellbrock et al (2012) about the significance of the rural context, the results suggest a broadening of public policy focus that adopts the learning rural area as a framework for targeting development support that will maximise the likelihood of successful joint learning and innovation to occur. Eventually, this will bring about a negotiated, tailored institutional reform, increasing self-efficacy and resilience as currently advocated in EU-policies.

5.8 Acknowledgements

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this thesis, my aim has been to understand how support can best be arranged to successfully effectuate more collaborative modes of governance in rural areas. For this, I have dealt with two intertwined research objectives: The first objective has been to develop and refine a conceptual lens that can be used to frame arrangements supporting the collaboration of public officers, facilitators of joint learning and innovation and rural development initiators. The second objective has been to apply the conceptual lens as a research tool and analyse supportive arrangements, particularly focussing on operational features that actually work well to enhance joint learning and innovation and effectuate more collaborative modes of governance. The thesis has been guided by the following research questions:

1.   How can existing theoretical frameworks be revised to conduct an institutional analysis of support for joint learning and innovation in rural areas?

2.   How do the different domains of the analytical framework connect and what problems and blind spots are encountered in the analysis?

3.   How are arrangements operationalized to support joint learning and innovation in rural areas of Western and Eastern Europe?

4.   Does the proposed analytical framework serve as a research tool to investigate the operational features of arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in rural areas?

In this chapter, I will reflect critically on the last research question. This will be done in three sections. The first section will discuss the lessons learnt concerning well-working operational features of arrangements supporting collaborative modes of governance. I will do this by reflecting on the empirical research findings collected in the European case study areas as well as by referring to my research experience in Colombia (see Appendix I). This will mainly address research questions three and four, but I will also consider research question two. The second section will reflect on the research methodology and our learning process as a research team concerning the development

and refinement of a conceptual lens to frame the empirical examples of arrangements supporting collaboration in the different case study areas. Both research question one and two will be dealt with. The third section will return to research question five and discuss the potential use of the refined framework to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the lessons learnt.

6.1 Arranging well-working operational interfaces

Operational interfaces are the realization of a constitutive agreement and the outcome of *joint reflexivity*, leading to an understanding that certain development objectives can only be effectively addressed when people learn to work together and, by doing so, build collective agency (Swanson, 2001). Joint reflexivity refers to the ability of a group of people to continuously reflect, monitor and act upon their actions and activities to access their outcomes and adapt their actions accordingly (Gray and Lawrence, 2000). The process of enhancing joint reflexivity can either be effectuated by policy incentives or by collaborative leaders.

6.1.1 Policy incentives

Public administration can effectuate joint reflexivity and collective agency through policy incentives and arrangements. These can, for example, take the form of institutional blue-prints, often implemented as top-down policies. The LEADER programme is, for example, an institutional blue-print that was implemented to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance in all our European case study areas. Yet, within each case study area, the LEADER programme was operated differently, suggesting an adaptation of the blue-print arrangement to local circumstances (see chapter 5). This shows that institutional arrangements agreed upon at national or supra-national level need to provide sufficient '*wiggle room*' (p. 1044), to allow change and adaptation to place-based contexts (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). As recent criticisms of the LEADER programme have suggested, however, there is still room for improving the

operational flexibility or 'wiggle room' within the LEADER programme should it be able to address place-specific development problems (e.g. Bruckmeier, 2000; Shortall, 2008; Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001). Hence, even the adaptation of blue-print arrangements to place-based contexts requires joint reflexivity on how to best support collaboration in a particular place.

6.1.2 Collaborative leaders

Collaboration can also emerge bottom-up from 'collaborative leadership' (Horlings, 2010; Horlings and Padt, 2011). This seems to occur often in reaction towards problems associated with top-down policy implementation and is the result of a period of experimentation within an area (Ansell and Gash, 2008). It involves what I refer to here as *collaborative leaders* (see also Horlings, 2010; Horlings and Padt, 2011). Collaborative leaders can be highly diverse, including aldermen, teachers, professors, farmers, public officers and citizens (see also Sotarauta, 2010, Note 1). As the results have shown, often they operate 'informally' out of work-related contacts, private networks and coincidental encounters. They include people with an understanding that, in order to enhance development, it is necessary to create a collaborative spirit, collective action and a shared development vision, but they have not been given advice on how to do it (Sotarauta, 2010). 'Informal' collaborative leaders could thus not always be identified through analysing secondary data and internet research. Instead, they became visible through interactive research methods such as snowball sampling and paying attention to frequently mentioned names.

Our empirical findings point to three key characteristics of collaborative leaders: First, they have an extensive network reaching into all domains and the necessary relations and access to mobilize assets and capacities. They seem to be 'spiders' (Nyhan, 2007), wandering in a web of relations, making new connections and fixing broken links. Secondly, they distinguish themselves by excellent leadership skills and the ability of creating shared development visions, motivating others to participate by creating ownership and collaborative leadership (see chapter 4, Collinge and Gibney, 2010;

Gibney, 2011; Horlings, 2010; Sotarauta, 2010). Finally, they appear to have what I call an 'appealing charisma' that helps to span institutional differences, create an atmosphere of trust and belongingness, motivating people to follow a certain development vision and foster a collaborative spirit (see also Roep et al., forthcoming). This charisma comes along with negotiation, bridging and communication abilities that help to span institutional differences and underlying conflicts which, if left unattended, will spoil any attempt of collaboration (see for example Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013).

Examples of 'informal' collaborative leaders are the knowledge workers in Saarland, Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia and the Westerkwartier (see chapter 3 and 4). They were motivated by their own interest in a specific development topic and thus laid connections between the different domains. Another example is a public officer of the national forest management agency in the Westerkwartier who was confronted by the resistance of farmers who were approached to release part of their farm land for nature conservation. Since the designation of nature conservation areas was a national policy that could not be ignored, and the farmers were resistant to designating parts of their land for nature conservation, the public officer needed to find ways to work together with the farmers to carry out the policy requirement. The public officer succeeded, creating a sense of ownership among the farmers for nature conservation in the Westerkwartier and was able to effectuate collaborative leadership.

6.1.3 Operational interface

The research has taught us that operational interfaces are the result of collaborative leaders making 'experimental' connections between different domains and creating a shared development vision. Those involved in shaping the idea will come to a constitutive agreement in which they formalise their idea of collaboration. Constitutive agreements can either be made by public administration alone or negotiated with knowledge facilitators and grassroots development initiatives on how to operationalize support for joint learning and innovation. Our empirical findings point to four key

dimensions that partners need to agree upon in order to arrange well-working operational interfaces. This insight evolved gradually and was reframed throughout the study, bearing witness to our own learning-by-doing process.

Initially, in DERREG reports D4.3 (Wellbrock et al., 2011a) and D4.4 (Roep et al., 2011), we identified three dimensions that partners need to agree upon: a) the shaping of the operational space (e.g. the type, procedures, rules and regulations); b) the scale (or scope) of operation (e.g. a territory, a business sector, a community or a specific group or development topic) and c) the delegation of specific operational tasks and roles to agents and agencies. From chapter 3 onwards, these key dimensions were refined to a) the operational agents and agencies, b) the delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations, and c) the duration of the operational interface. Through this refinement, the dimension 'scale (or scope) of operation' was replaced with 'duration of the operational interface'. I will show, however, that all four dimensions are important for arranging well-working operational interfaces. Moreover, I will show that place-based contexts and related (formal and informal) institutions also influence the way in which support can be operated well.

Operational agents and agencies

Operational agents and agencies are defined as those people realizing the agreed upon support. We encountered operational agents and agencies in form of public-private partnerships, grassroots development initiatives, public officers and private consultants (see chapter 5). During our research, we gradually learned that operational agents and agencies need to be distinguished from collaborative leaders. Collaborative leaders are the creative minds behind the agreement leading to an operational interface. Operational agents and agencies are those that carry out tasks and roles delegated to them and which are attached to certain rules and regulations. Operational agents and agencies seemed to be chosen based on their topical relevance, their ability to reach out to those that should learn to work together and their ability to organize support for joint learning and innovation. Operational agents and agencies may thus be referred to as 'innovation

brokers' (Klerkx et al., 2009; Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009), which are defined as intermediaries connecting different domains within innovation systems (Howells, 2006). They are regarded as catalysts, creating networks and being neutral facilitators of interactions between people of different domains (Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009). In our case study area, the touristic catalysts in the Westerkwartier (see chapter 3), 'Krabat e.V.' and 'UNESCO Biosphere Reserve OHTL' in Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia (see chapter 4) and various public officers in Alytus County and County Roscommon (see chapter 5) can all be regarded as innovation brokers.

Delegated tasks and roles, and associated rules and regulations

The dimension 'delegated tasks and roles, and associated rules and regulations' defines the responsibilities and decision powers of operational agents and agencies and the associated rules and regulations. In line with Ansell and Gash (2008), our examples of well-working operational interfaces indicate that the delegation of responsibility and decision powers is important for well-working operational interfaces (see also chapters 3, 4 and 5). In Saarland, for example, a grassroots development initiative was given decision powers to carry out the LEADER programme (see KuLanI, chapter 4). In the Westerkwartier, the Westerkwartier Initiative Group (WSI, see chapter 3) was represented in the Local Action Group and given decision power regarding the formulation of policies shaping the socio-economic development of the area. By delegating responsibilities and decision powers to non-governmental actors, public administration can thus provide opportunities for innovations to unfold and new knowledge to form. If responsibilities and decision powers are not delegated, as our example of the Comarca de Verín shows, collaborative modes of governance will not be effectuated (see chapter 5). Thus, as Ansell and Gash (2008) rightly observe, collaborative modes of governance are more than just focus group meetings, surveys and partnerships in which one party deputes tasks and duties to another party.

Duration of an operational interface

The dimension 'duration of an operational interface' refers to the time period that a supportive arrangement is operating. Joint learning and innovation requires repetitive interactions and trust which are built over a long period of time (Gertler and Wolfe, 2002; Johnson and Lundvall, 1992; Morgan, 1997). Long-term arrangements therefore seem necessary to ensure collaborative modes of governance, and most operational interfaces that we encountered in our study were indeed operating on a long-term basis.

As shown in chapter 5, however, some aspects of long-term arrangements were also evaluated negatively, because the resulting collaboration was argued to be too much influenced by the availability of supporting policies and funds. In County Roscommon, it was for example argued that policies and available funds would change with each new election period, bringing about a change of rules for collaboration. To continue collaboration and to receive support, grassroots development initiatives were required to adapt their objectives to the changing policies and support programmes each time new elections occurred (see chapter 5). In these cases, public administration seems to choose a hierarchical mode of governance which is based on top-down ordination from government and the compliance of subordinates to public authority (Van Buuren and Eshuis, 2009). One can argue that the display of underlying power differences over long periods of time is an obstacle to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance, whereby the longevity of these arrangements can be interpreted as a long-term form of control by public administration over the activities occurring within the other domains. In the case of hierarchical government, collective action does not occur voluntarily and reduces the willingness to share resources, responsibilities and commitments of the parties involved (Van Buuren and Eshuis, 2009). The long-term engagement as experienced in County Roscommon, one may conclude, serves thus little to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance.

In Santa Cruz de la Colina and the Westerkwartier, I also found short-term operational interfaces. In Santa Cruz de la Colina, these suffered from the same problems as described above, with public administration and NGOs trying to impose their development ideas on grassroots development initiatives. Yet, in the Westerkwartier

short-term arrangements were evaluated positively. The 'touristic catalysts' as described in chapter 3 and 5 were, for example, only hired by public administration for a period of two years. During this period, they were given the responsibility to effectuate collaboration between entrepreneurs, NGOs and public officers engaged with tourism and recreation in the Westerkwartier. Their task was to create an independent association that would keep on working once the catalysts retreated. The idea behind creating such a short-term operational interface was to help establish contact between relevant stakeholders and thus establish connections between the domains through which joint learning and innovation could continue into the future.

The results therefore suggest that preparing the basis for long-term collaboration is indeed necessary. Arranging support on a long-term basis can, however, also hamper collaborative modes of governance. In cases where supportive arrangements are dominated by members of one domain, mostly public administration, and these are trying to impose their institutions onto members of the other domains and share only little responsibility, long-term arrangements seem rather unhelpful (see also Van Buuren and Eshuis, 2009). I would thus argue that the length of time that supportive arrangements are operating is not decisive as long as they fulfil their purpose of laying well-working connections between the different domains. In this way, people will get to know each other, will be able to find each other in times of need, and will have fewer inhibitions in approaching members of other domains for future collaboration.

Scale of operation

The final dimension was defined as 'scale (or scope) of operation' and refers to the spatial (i.e. scale) and relational (i.e. scope) proximity of people learning to work together. Our results suggest that both types of proximity entwined can have a positive effect on the operation of interfaces.

Our findings imply that spatial proximity can enhance the accessibility and visibility of an operational interface and can thus have a positive effect on the interest and motivation of people to learn to work together (see also Florida, 1995; Storper, 1993).

As Morgan (2004) points out, spatial proximity is necessary to allow the formation of trust, the exchange of tacit knowledge, the building of team skills and organization which involves face-to-face interactions and are thus locally '*sticky*' (p.6). In the Westerkwartier, for example, the 'rural house' (see chapter 3) was evaluated positively, because it brought together people which would usually reside in spatially distant domains, such as the public officers from the province in the city of Groningen and scientists in knowledge institutes outside the area or even province. If spatial proximity is lacking, people may be uninspired to work together, because the accessibility and visibility of an interface is reduced. In the light of negative demographic and economic development, however, rural administrative units are often scaled up; resulting in the closure of smaller administrative units and integrating them into one large administrative unit (see for example Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia in chapter 4). Our results suggest that operating support at the scale of an enlarged administrative unit can have several negative effects on the well-working of operational interfaces. First, an administrative unit can be so large that residents do not feel a sense of belonging to their unit, which reduces their motivation to engage in grassroots development initiatives (see chapter 4). Secondly, the available support within an administrative unit may not be attuned to the requirements of grassroots development initiatives, because such initiatives can be very diverse and can target a specific problem or opportunity in a specific location within a large administrative unit (see chapter 5). As a consequence of the above, grassroots development initiatives and their potential supporters residing in the same administrative unit may have a different sense of place, resulting in a lack of trust and willingness to learn to work together (see chapter 4, 5 and Appendix I). This was also the case in Santa Cruz de la Colina where accessibility and visibility was further reduced by a badly maintained communication system and physical infrastructure (see Appendix I).

Yet, what if people with shared development interests to do not reside in spatial proximity? We discovered that people actively sought contact with each other regardless of administrative boundaries and spatial distances. In the Comarca de Verín, well-working interfaces were discovered that spanned large spatial distances brought

about by an interest in a specific development topic (see chapter 5). In Saarland, the Westerkwartier and Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia, for example, knowledge workers from cities close and far away were involved with grassroots development initiatives through their (often personal) connections with members of different grassroots development initiatives in the areas (see chapter 3, 4 and 5). Proximity can thus also be understood as relational (Asheim and Coenen, 2005), resulting from a shared interest in a particular development topic. I would therefore argue that spatial proximity does not necessarily result in a well-working interface. The 'Bürgerwerkstatt Bad Muskau' in Upper Lusatia-Lower Silesia was, for example, confronted with a general lack of motivation to learn to work together and develop the area after the initiators retreated (Wellbrock et al., 2011c). Arguably, the theme of the interface has to catch the attention of public officers, knowledge workers and development initiators. In line with Amin and Coenen (2005) I would argue that spatial and relational proximity are both important for the well-working of operational interfaces. The accessibility and visibility of an operational interface dealing with a shared development interest can then be further enhanced by spatial proximity.

Formal and informal institutions in an evolving institutional setting

The way in which arrangements are operating well is further associated with and embedded in formal and informal institutional arrangements. Formal institutions are easily recognisable through printed rules and regulations, often related to financial support programmes. They can result in huge bureaucratic burdens, preventing potential innovative ideas from being realized (see for example chapter 3). The effectiveness of arrangements is, however, also largely influenced by so-called 'informal' institutions (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). Unlike formalized institutions, our experiences indicate that informal institutions are not written down and cannot be revealed by simply questioning people. As I have experienced in the Westerkwartier and Santa Cruz de la Colina, people do not seem to think about the reasons why certain forms of collaboration exist and are unable to answer questions regarding the underlying institutions. Rodriguez-Posé (2013) similarly observes that it is impossible to pin down informal institutions.

Acknowledging and considering informal institutions is, however, important for creating well-working operational interfaces. As Rodríguez-Posé (2013) points out, formal and informal institutions are both essential for successful development, yet they are also specific to an area and context-dependent (Rodríguez-Posé, 2013). Informal institutions, one may specify, seem to be shaped by past and present political, social, cultural and economic contexts in which social groups carry out their activities (Massey, 1991). This explains, for example, the differences in the effectiveness of operating Local Action Groups across the European Union despite the common European policy programme LEADER (see chapters 4 and 5), but also the lack of collaboration in the post-conflict area Santa Cruz de la Colina (see Appendix I). Arguably, well-operating institutional arrangements can thus not be imposed as blue-prints by supra-national policies, formulated in another place's context (see also Rodriguez-Posé, 2013). Rather, to bring about effective institutional reform leading to more collaborative modes of governance, it is necessary to provide 'institutional' space in which new arrangements can evolve (Roep et al., 2003). These spaces may be referred to as 'institutional voids': there are no clear rules and norms according to which politics is to be conducted and policy measures are to be agreed upon (Hajer, 2003, p. 175). This process may take a long time and requires adaptation, learning and experiments (Stoker, 1998). Without doubt, it also requires skilful operational agents and agencies that dispose of the necessary relations and access to assets, leadership skills and charisma to create a confidential atmosphere in which people are given the time and space to build trust, experiment and learn to work together (again).

6.1.4 Lessons learnt

To come back to research questions three and four, operational interfaces are the realization of a constitutive agreement and the outcome of joint reflexivity, leading to an understanding that certain development objectives can only be effectively addressed when people learn to work together. Collaborative modes of governance can either be effectuated top-down by policy incentives or emerge bottom-up from collaborative leadership. Collaborative leaders are highly diverse and characterised by their extensive

network and access to assets and capacities, their leadership skills and a 'charismatic appeal' that helps them share their development vision, create a collaborative spirit and collective agency. Four key dimensions need to be considered to operate supportive arrangements well: 1) Operational agents and agencies that are able to realize the agreed upon support; 2) Delegated responsibility, decision powers and 'institutional voids' that give enough space and time to effectuate collaboration; 3) An aim to lay long-term connections between people of different domains; 4) An operation around a shared development interest combined with spatial proximity to increase visibility and accessibility. The way in which operational interfaces work well depends further on past and present political, social, cultural and economic contexts in which people are operating. These contexts produce formal and, to a great extent, informal institutions that can constrain but also enhance collaboration between people acting under the conventions of different domains. These informal institutions are then also ´blind spots´ that were the subject of research question 2, because they cannot be studied and must be inferred from past and present development activities. Differences between the way in which support for joint learning and innovation is operated in different parts of Europe and in Colombia thus seems to be the result of different place-based contexts. Operating supportive arrangements requires sensitivity to place-specific (informal) institutional contexts.

6.2 Refining the conceptual lens

The conceptual lens of this thesis has been continuously refined through our explorative and interpretative research approach and related practice of learning-by-doing. This learning-by-doing process was highly turbulent. We constantly encountered new phenomena that were difficult to frame through our conceptual lens. These challenges resulted in several setbacks during our investigation, but in turn, helped us to reflect and refine the framework. In the end, we were able to sharpen our conceptual lens sufficiently to identify how more collaborative modes of governance were effectuated, and how operational interfaces are best arranged. I feel it is necessary to look at the

challenges and problems faced by using the framework as part of the explorative research in WP 4 and in Colombia to reflect and to draw lessons for future investigations using the framework as an analytical or interactive research tool. I will do this in two steps. First, I will explain how the framework reached its state-of-the-art as shown in figure 6.1. Secondly, I will reflect on research questions one and two and refine the framework for future use.
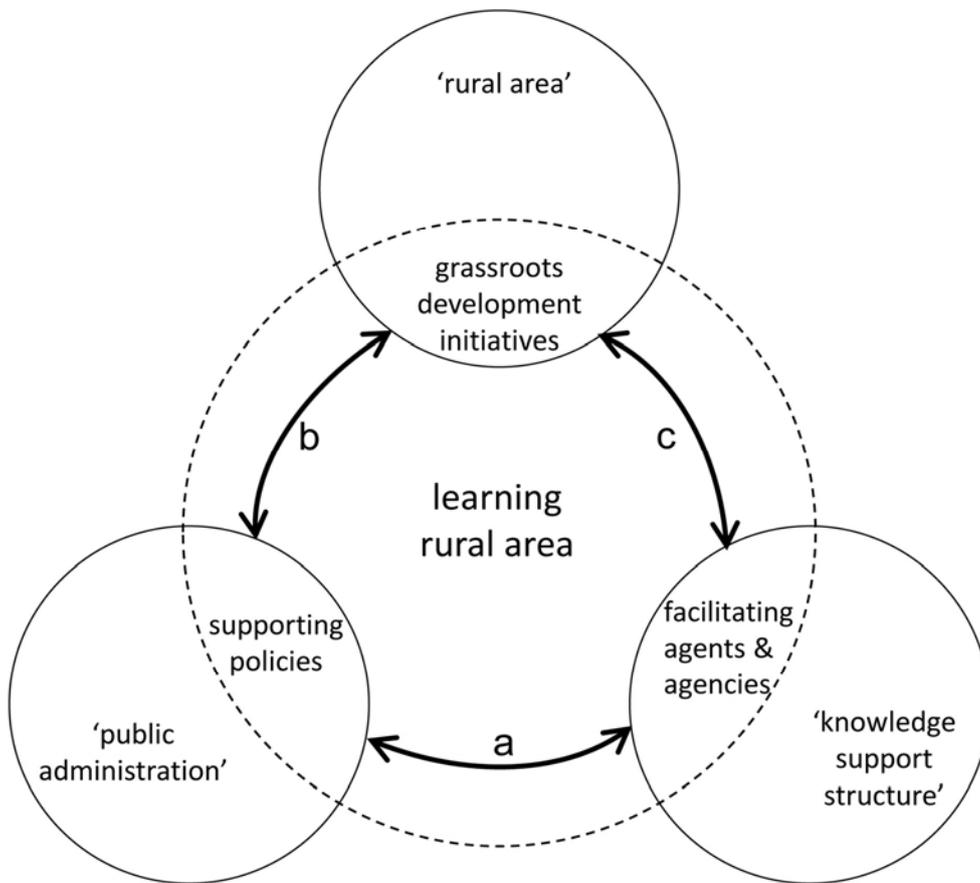

Figure 6.1 State-of the art

6.2.1 State-of-the-art

As shown in figure 6.1, our empirical challenges and subsequent conceptual reflection led to several changes in the framing of our lens when compared to our initial framework (see figure 1.3). The domain 'region' changed to 'rural area', the domain 'knowledge infrastructure' changed to 'knowledge support structure' and the focus within the domain from 'facilities' to 'facilitating agents and agencies'. Furthermore, the conceptual focus was reframed from 'regional learning' to 'learning rural area'.

The domain 'rural area'

During our empirical investigations, we often encountered people that seemed to cross the boundaries of administrative units to work together with people sharing a common development interest (see discussion in 6.1). People learning to work together in rural areas can thus not be confined to a bounded domain or geographical location as for example in economic clusters such as science or business parks (Florida, 1995; Keeble et al., 1999). By exchanging the term 'region', which we associated with fixed administrative boundaries, with the term 'rural area' we intended to regard the boundaries of our case study areas as social constructs which are not fixed but subject to debate (Massey, 1991), thereby becoming an object of our study.

The domain 'knowledge support structure'

The term 'knowledge infrastructure' was initially chosen to address the variety of knowledge and skills needed for rural development (Tovey, 2008). After briefly referring to the domain as 'knowledge' (Wellbrock et al., 2011b), we specified the frame further and named the domain 'knowledge support structure' (see fig. 6.1). The frequent renaming reflects our challenges when discovering that facilitators of joint leaning and innovation were more diverse than the formal education, training and research facilities we targeted with our interview questions and explorations (see Appendices). When speaking to actors in grassroots development initiatives in the

second research step the range of supporters included NGOs, public knowledge institutes, public officers, representatives of the private sector and even civic actors with a particular field of expertise (see chapters 3-5 and Appendix I). We were thus challenged by the question of how to frame the domain to accommodate these diverse facilitators. Who belongs to the domain and who does not? This challenge resulted in periodically diverging research focuses amongst the research partners, while some were targeting universities and academic research projects, others were including vocational schools and education offers for the general public. Finding a common research focus within this domain was thus also a process of imposing the conceptualisation of the knowledge structure that, in this case, we in Wageningen had on the conceptualisation of the domain held by other researchers in the group. Following this line of thought, the focus of the domain also changed frequently, starting with 'facilitation' (see figure 2.3), then moving on to 'facilitating agents and institutes' (Wellbrock et al., 2011b), to 'facilities' (Wellbrock et al., 2011c) and finally to 'facilitating agents and agencies' (chapters 3-5). Naming the pillar 'knowledge support structure' and naming the focus 'facilitating agents and agencies' was thus an attempt to broaden the conceptual scope of the domain.

Learning rural area framework

Finding empirical examples for operational interfaces turned out to be rather challenging as well. On the one hand, we were challenged by identifying differences between grassroots development initiatives and operational interfaces. On the other hand, it was difficult for us to unravel which people were originating from what domain and when joint learning and innovation occurred between people of different domains. This struggle for understanding is reflected in the changing name of the framework, changing from 'regional learning' in the introduction to 'rural learning area' framework in figure 6.1.

Initially, the research was driven by the idea that grassroots development activities are initiated and carried out by people residing within a particular area (see Escobar, 2001;

Gupta et al., 2003). In our concept, these people were neither part of the public administration nor knowledge support structure domains, but acted within the framework of residents that tried to deal with challenges presented by global networks. Joint learning and innovation would then bring grassroots development initiators together with public officers and knowledge workers to attune the available support better to their needs. In line with Smith et al's (2013) definition of grassroots innovations, our investigations taught us, however, that grassroots development initiatives could also be initiated by public officers and knowledge facilitators. Members of public administration were, for example, often seen to initiate grassroots development initiatives in areas with low demographic density and few involved residents (see chapter 5). In the Westerkwartier, Saarland and Upper Lusatia-Lower members of the knowledge support structure were also seen to initiate various grassroots development activities (see chapters 2, 3, 4, 5). Furthermore, grassroots development initiators could also strategically introduce members of public administration and the knowledge support structure into their ranks (see example Country Roscommon, chapter 5). In Saarland, for example, the grassroots development initiative 'Kultur und Landschaftsinitiative St. Wendeler Land' became an operational interface by being appointed as LAG and introducing members of public administration into its association (see chapter 4). Also in the Westerkwartier a grassroots development initiative, the Westerkwartier Initiative Group, became involved in the LAG and hence partnered with public administration (see chapter 3). Grassroots development initiatives can also substitute for public administration in mediating support for joint learning and innovation between other grassroots development initiatives and knowledge facilitators. This was particularly the case in the Comarca de Verín where relationships with public administration were regarded as 'broken' (see chapter 5). Grassroots development activities can thus be initiated and carried out by any actor in the framework, regardless of their domain. The proposition was thus that if grassroots development initiatives are carried out by people belonging to different domains, there must be interfaces in which joint learning and innovation already occurs. The question we were asking ourselves then was what the difference is between a grassroots development initiative and an operational interface?

The answer to this question can be found by looking back at the changing description of our research method. Throughout the study, all researchers followed the same three research steps as explained in chapter 1 of this thesis: First, the framework was used to map and analyse policy strategies to support joint learning and innovation. Secondly, it was used to map and analyse regional development initiatives. Third, it was used to guide the analysis and synthesis of crucial features of well-working arrangements to support joint learning and innovation. In chapter 2, the description of the first research step changed to: mapping and analysing supporting policies and actors implementing these, grassroots development initiatives and the knowledge support structure. The second research step was described as mapping and analysing operational interface of arrangements, and the third research step was referred to as the evaluation of these arrangements. From chapter 3 onwards, the description of the research steps were further modified to first mapping supporting policies and programmes as well as actors operating these, analysing how operational interfaces are arranged, and finally evaluating and comparing existing arrangements. The description thus shifted from referring only to grassroots development initiatives to including both grassroots development initiatives and operational interfaces, to finally omitting grassroots development initiatives.

Reflecting on our research process, I have come to the conclusion that there is indeed no clear demarcation between grassroots development initiatives and operational interfaces, because grassroots development activities can be initiated or joined by people acting under the conventions of any domain. Furthermore, operational interfaces are not necessarily stable, as the broken relationships of Portas Abertas in the Comarca de Verín show (chapter 5). If one returned to the different case study areas, one would surely find different arrangements (see for example Roep et al., forthcoming).

6.2.2 Refinement

Returning to research question two, the challenges described point out the two main blind spots of the conceptual lens. First, we struggled with placing people in the frames

of the different domains in the framework. As reflected by the renaming of the domains, one of the biggest challenges was to deal with people 'wandering' between the domains and carrying out tasks under the conventions of different domains at the same time. A further challenge was the diversity of actors that would carry out an activity associated with a particular domain. The second blind spot was finding empirical examples for operational interfaces. On the one hand, we were challenged by identifying differences between grassroots development initiatives and operational interfaces. On the other hand, it was difficult for us to unravel which people were originating from what domain and when joint learning and innovation occurred between people of different domains.

In returning to research question one, in order to address the challenges mentioned and to conduct an analysis of support for joint learning and innovation, the conceptual lens needs to be refined further in the following three aspects:

Domains are demarcated by a coherent set of activities, not by people

Domains are not demarcated by people but by a set of coherent activities. People can 'wander' between worlds, but they carry out tasks under the specific conventions of a particular domain. Boundaries are thus social constructs – we make them to order the complexity of reality – but reality is not ordered in itself and does not neatly conform to our constructed boundaries (see also Paasi, 2010). This is best illustrated by the diversity of actors and agencies carrying out activities under the conventions of the knowledge support structure (see chapter 5). Accordingly, boundaries do not only blur (Florida, 1995); they are not even real. Instead, as Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) argue, joint learning and innovation are characterised by interactions, relations and activities that span different domains. Activities carried out within one domain can be transformed by the activities occurring within another domain when these are interconnected (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000). The focus of the conceptual lens is hence on the interaction between people carrying out activities associated with a specific domain. People themselves can, however, not be ordered into the categories of the framework.

The domain 'rural area' needs to be exchanged for 'everyday life practises'

Grassroots development initiatives arise from everyday life practices and related issues. Following Smith et al (2013) grassroots development initiatives are responses to development problems that are not adequately addressed by public policies. These problems become apparent in the everyday life practises of business people, residents, public officers or knowledge workers (Smith et al., 2013). Grassroots development initiatives can thus be argued to arise from everyday life practises and related issues. As Halfacree (2006) points out, however, everyday life practises contribute only one part of many to the complexity of a rural area. Activities in rural areas are thus much broader than our focus on grassroots development initiatives. In fact, also the knowledge workers and public officers that we encountered, as well as their activities, are part of the relations, networks and activities shaping the rural area that we studied. Including the domain 'rural area' and demarcating it from the domain of public administration and knowledge support structure therefore does not reflect reality and causes difficulties in empirical investigations. Rather, grassroots development initiatives need to be regarded as the focus within '*everyday life practises'* occurring within a rural area.

Place-based development and joint learning and innovation

A rural area can be seen as the outcome of the interconnections, relations and joint activities of people that act under the institutions of different domains, thereby learning to work together and creating new, shared institutions. Arguably, operational interfaces frame the relations and activities that occur within Massey's nodes (1991) and well-working operational interfaces are key to successful place-based development. Place-based development is thus a joint learning and innovation process. The conceptual lens can aid the process of place-based development, because it can be used as a frame to analyse the interconnections between the different domains. This insight is the result of our struggles with placing different people and their activities in the domains and realizing that we are actually not interested in categorizing people into different domains, but that we instead should look for interconnections. To reflect the

relationship between place-based development and well-working operational interfaces, the conceptual lens must turn its focus towards *place-based, joint learning and innovation*, replacing the idea of regional learning or a rural learning area. The refined framework would then look as illustrated in figure 6.2.
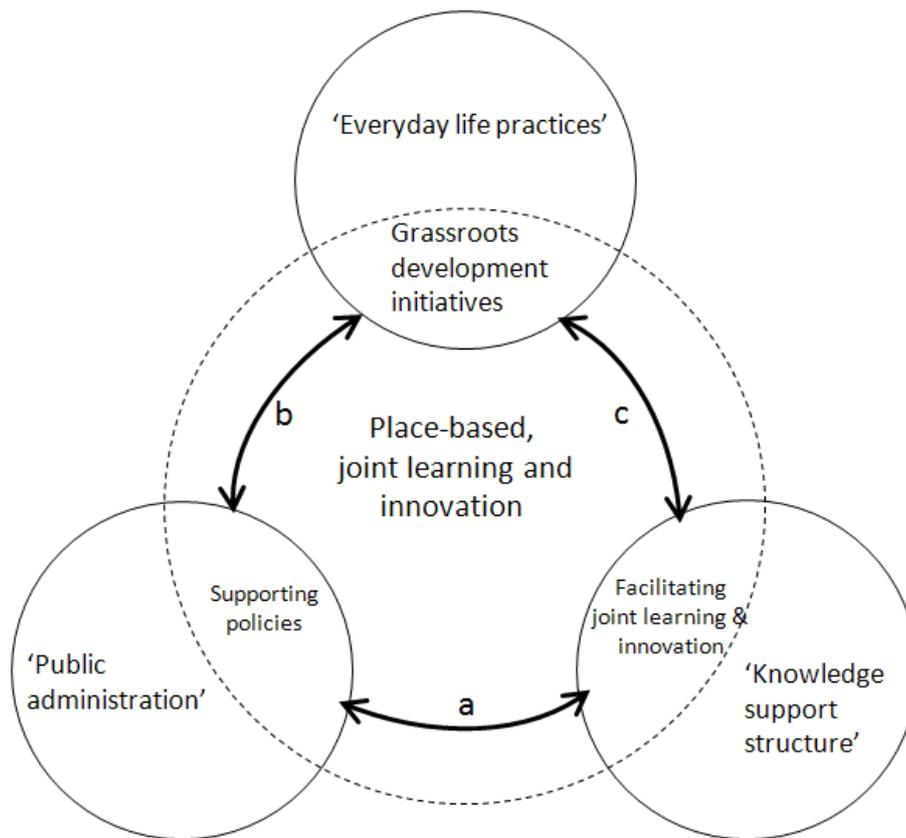

Figure 6.2 Refined framework

6.3 Potential of framework

The antecedent sections have shown that the proposed framework can indeed be used intertwined as a research tool and conceptual lens. The proposed framework can also be used as an instrument for effectuating more collaborative modes of governance when

used in three successive steps: First, it can be used as a tool to map and analyse operational features of arrangements supporting collaboration in a particular area. Secondly, the framework can be used as an interactive tool to map and evaluate existing arrangements and institutions guiding their operation. In the end, the raised joint reflexivity may lead to institutional reform enabling more collaborative modes of governance.

6.3.1 The framework as a research tool

Many challenges faced during the empirical application of the conceptual framework were part of the explorative nature of this study. We started out broadly by first focussing on the mapping of policies, followed by the mapping of all potential knowledge supporters, before finally looking at on-going development activities. From there we tried to infer operational interfaces in which joint learning and innovation occurred. Reflecting on this process, it seems that we took a long detour to come to our research focus on operational interfaces. Still, this process of exploring, making reflexive detours and turning our findings around like pieces of a puzzle, before positioning them in the framework, was necessary to further refine the research method. These challenges and the explorative approach employed enabled me to reflect on the research method and to adjust it based on my experiences. I would therefore argue that for future studies it is necessary to reorder the research steps.

It may, for example, be an idea to start with an inventory of on-going development activities. Engaged actors should be identified and described with special attention to their roles in the development activity and the conventions guiding their involvement. Their activities and conventions can then be sorted into one of the framework domains. Those development activities in which people carry out activities associated with the conventions of different domains can then be defined as operational interfaces and should be selected for in-depth study. In the second research step, the institutional aspects of arrangements shaping the operational interfaces should be inventoried. Arrangements should be investigated by addressing the way in which they were created

(i.e. through policy incentives, innovation brokers etc.) and by analysing the constitutive agreement along the four key dimensions identified: a) operational agents and agencies; b) delegated tasks and roles and associated rules and regulations; c) the duration of an operational interface and d) the scale and scope of the operation. Third, support provided by public administration should be identified and linked to its underlying policy. This will show which actors are encouraged to jointly learn and innovate in a particular area and how support for this is arranged.

6.3.2 The framework as an interactive tool

In the Westerkwartier the framework was briefly applied as a participatory action research tool to evaluate the current way of collaboration in the respective case study areas. In this case, our "outsider studies insider" mode of action research to a collaborative mode of action research (Herr and Anderson, 2004). We changed our position from being an outsider to facilitators of a discussion-round including public officers, knowledge workers and grassroots development initiators. In this joint reflexivity event, each person mapped themselves onto the framework and a discussion was facilitated concerning the problems and strengths of their collaboration. The framework was thus applied as a visual aid to enhance joint reflexivity through an interactive research process (Measham et al., 2012). As we experienced in our research, applying the framework as an interactive research tool was clearly not possible in all case study areas. The place-specific context influenced whether such evaluation processes was possible and whether people active within the different domains activities are able and willing to discuss about their perception of on-going collaboration. Having an interactive research tool is thus not the only factor that enables a researcher to do participatory action research. Place-based circumstances appear equally important.

It would of course be interesting to use the refined conceptual lens for a second evaluation round. Since this is not feasible, I would like to theorise about using the refined framework to visualise operational interfaces found in the Westerkwartier (see chapter 3) and Santa Cruz de la Colina (see Appendix I).

As shown in figure 6.3, all interfaces, in which people acting within the institutional frames of different domains carry out joint activities, are mapped in the centre of the framework and referred to as 'place-based, joint learning and innovation'. In the Westerkwartier, this shows that all studied operational interfaces could be regarded as nodes in which joint learning and innovation occurred. Moreover, in contrast to figure 3.4, in the suggested framework the Association Groningen Villages and the touristic catalysts are not regarded *per se* as operational interfaces. They are now associated with the domain 'facilitating agents and agencies' (see figure 6.3). The interface through which joint learning and innovation occurs with grassroots development initiatives are the activities they are involved in. In figure 6.3, these are placed in the centre of the framework and noted as 'projects of the Association Groningen Villages' and the 'touristic platform' (previously regarded as a grassroots development initiative, see chapter 3). Other arrangements which do not include members of different domains are not placed in the centre, making it easier to visualize where joint learning and innovation occurs. The envisioned framework is further able to show different flows of support from public administration for joint learning and innovation. As figure 6.3 shows, some operational interfaces were supported through the 'Integrated Development Programme Westerkwartier' while others were supported through the 'Regional transition programme'.
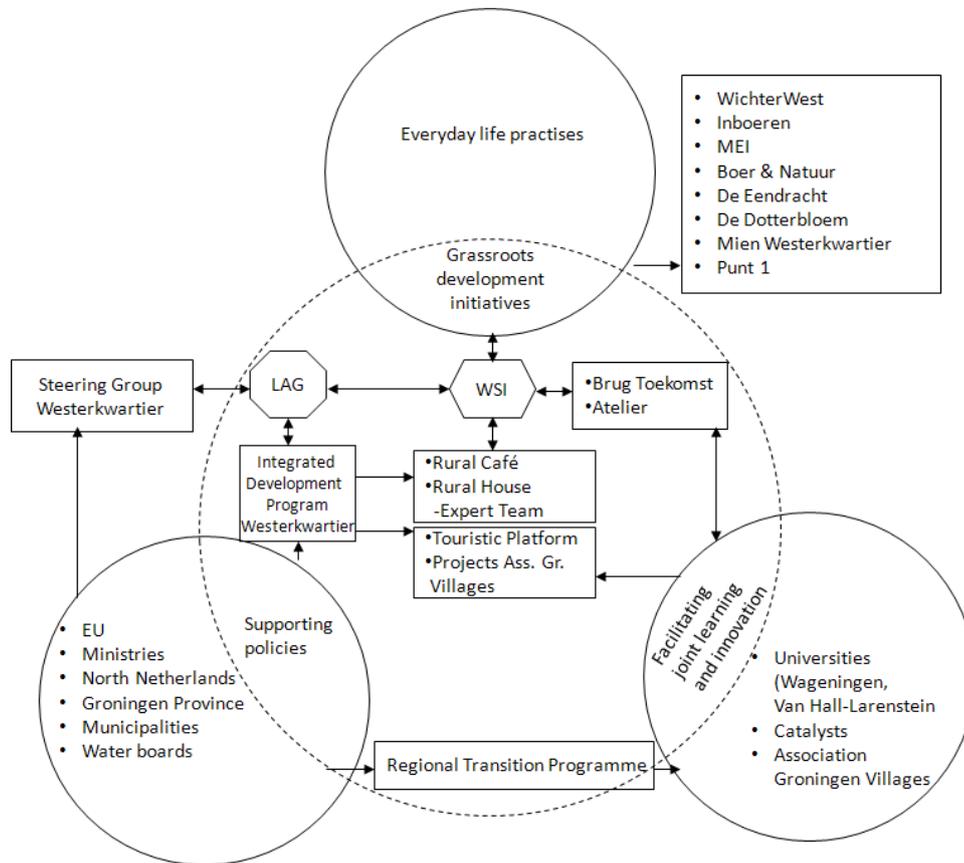
Figure 6.3 Refined framework applied to the case of the Westerkwartier

In Santa Cruz de la Colina, I was faced with great difficulties applying our European conceptual lens to the arrangements found. The biggest challenge was that many grassroots development initiatives engaged with (international) NGOs that were not collaborating with the government. As stated in Appendix, using the proposed framework in Santa Cruz caused difficulties, because many grassroots development initiatives received support from (international) NGOs that were not supported by public administration. I was puzzled how to frame this prominent group of development actors through the proposed conceptual lens.
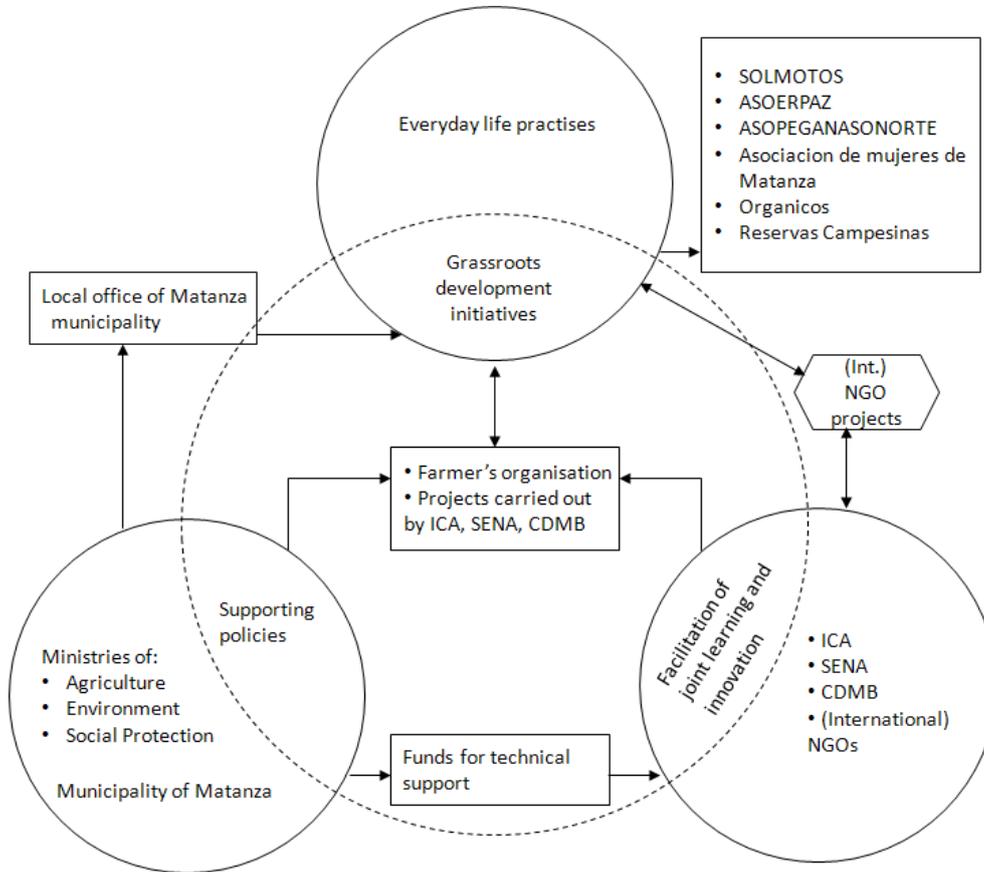
Figure 6.4 Refined framework applied to the case of Santa Cruz de la Colina

Using the refined framework, not only can I include the NGOs active in Santa Cruz de la Colina, I can also indicate that they are not an operational interface facilitating joint learning and innovation.

In figure 6.4, the NGOs are thus included in the domain 'knowledge infrastructure' but their activities are outside the circle. Moreover, the refined framework shows that collaborative modes of governance seem sparse in Santa Cruz de la Colina. It illustrates that collaboration mainly appears to be centred on providing technical support for increased productivity and related capacity building. Direct collaboration with public administration, as for example through Local Action Groups, appears to be missing. The

local office of Matanza municipality is thus not an interface supporting joint learning and innovation but merely a point of information. It does therefore not qualify as an operational interface and cannot be placed in the centre of figure 6.4.

Arguably, by placing interfaces through which joint learning and innovation is supported in the centre of the framework, the result is an easier tool for assessing the degree of collaborative modes of governance in an area. Comparing figure 6.3 and 6.4, it is clear that the Westerkwartier is governed under a more collaborative mode of governance as compared to Santa Cruz de la Colina were less collaborative modes of governance were found.

6.3.3 Contribution to effectuating more collaborative modes of governance

Through questioning different development actors aiming to learn to work together and through our own learning-by-doing process, eventually we were able to identify well-working operational features of arrangements supporting collaboration in rural areas. In addition, having used the framework as an interactive tool to discuss these findings, we can arguably generate increased joint reflexivity ourselves. Since joint reflexivity is a pre-requisite for effectuating more collaborative modes of governance, it seems likely that the framework is able to contribute to this process. Operational interfaces in which people acting under the conventions of different domains actually learn to work together should be placed in the middle of the framework. These represent new institutional arrangements that occurred as a result of joint learning and innovation (see figure 6.3). Visualizing whether or not people are learning to work together, the framework can potentially bring about institutional reform (see also Roep et al. 2003), and hence lead to more collaborative modes of governance. The application of the framework will thus help raise joint reflexivity and the assessment of institutions governing current collaborations in a rural area.

6.3.4 Lessons learnt

Returning to research question five, the refined framework can contribute to more collaborative modes of governance when applied in three successive phases. First, the framework is used as an analytical tool to analyse and compare the operational features of arrangements supporting collaboration in a rural area. The analysis should start by mapping on-going development activities, people engaged in these activities and their actions, and finally mapping policies supporting joint learning and innovation. Based on the results of the first phase, the framework can be used as a reflexive tool for an interactive evaluation of the way in which collaboration is currently arranged, and the (formal) institutions under which people learn to work together. Operational interfaces in which people acting under the conventions of different domains learn to work together should be placed in the middle of the framework. This suggests new institutional arrangements that occurred as a result of joint learning and innovation (see figure 6.3). Visualising whether people are learning to work together or not, the framework can potentially effectuate institutional reform (see also Roep et al. 2003) and hence more collaborative modes of governance. The application of the framework will thus help raise joint reflexivity and the assessment of institutions governing current collaborations in a rural area.

6.4 Conclusion

This thesis contributes to effectuating more collaborative modes of governance with a refined conceptual lens that serves, on the one hand, as a relational, place-based approach to collaboration in rural areas, and, on the other hand, as a research tool with guidelines that can be used to analyse, evaluate and improve operational features of supportive arrangements. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

1. To effectuate more collaborative modes of governance, public officers, knowledge workers and development initiators need to reflect jointly on their current actions and activities, thereby building collective agency.

2. Collaborative leaders can enhance joint reflexivity by creating a shared development vision, collaborative spirit and collaborative leadership. Well-working collaborative leaders are characterised by an extensive network, access to assets and capacities, leadership skills and a 'charismatic appeal'.

3. Operational interfaces are the outcome of constitutive agreements between partners with a shared vision concerning the operationalization of support for more collaborative modes of governance. Four key dimensions need to be considered for arranging well-working interfaces: 1) Operational agents and agencies that are able to realize the agreed upon support by acting as 'innovation brokers', catalysts and facilitators; 2) Operational agents and agencies need delegated tasks and roles associated with rules and regulations that give responsibilities, decision powers and the necessary 'institutional voids' to create the space and time for effectuating more collaborative modes of governance; 3) An interface needs to operate for an adequate amount of time allowing effective long-term collaboration, but prevents long-term control by public administration; and 4) Operational interfaces need to be in relational and spatial proximity to those people who need to learn to work together.

4. The way support can best be operationalized depends on the place-specific context such as past and present political, social, economic and cultural dynamics, and place-embedded institutions governing or preventing current collaborations.

5. The conceptual lens proposes collaboration between three domains of activities that are all necessary to develop a rural area. These include public administration, everyday life practises and the knowledge support structure. These domains can best be distinguished by coherent sets of (institutionalized) activities, but cannot be differentiated by categorizing people, because these may 'wander' between different domains and may fulfil multiple tasks and roles associated with the specific sets of institutions governing activities in the different domains.

6. Grassroots development initiatives arise out of everyday life practices and related issues. Development initiators can be residents, knowledge workers or public officers. They are rooted in an area and have a key role in initiating or acting as agents (of change) towards rural development practises.

7. Learning to work together by joint reflexivity and building collective agency is instrumental to place-based development and can best be supported by arranging well-working operational interfaces that are attuned to the particularities of a place.

8. The application of the framework can help to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance in three successive phases: a) as an analytical tool to identify well-working operational features; b) as an interactive tool to enhance joint reflexivity; and c) to generate insights for effectuating institutional reform and more collaborative modes of governance.

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SUMMARY

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

SAMENVATTING

RESUMEN

Summary

In this thesis, I contribute to effectuating more collaborative forms of governance in rural areas. For this, I pursue two intertwined research objectives: I first develop and refine a conceptual lens that can be used to frame and analyse existing forms of collaboration in rural areas. To do so, the concepts of 'rural governance' and 'collective or community capacity-building' are extended by drawing on the wider literature of human and economic geography, adding the 'relational approach', the 'learning region' concept and 'triple helix thesis'. The conceptual lens thus serves to investigate arrangements through which stronger collaborations between public officers and development initiators can be supported. Particular attention is paid to the role of research institutes, schools and consultancies in facilitating more collaborative modes of governance. Existing forms of collaboration between the introduced actors are conceptualized as 'operational interfaces'. Second, the conceptual lens is used to analyse empirically arrangements through which joint learning and innovation is actually supported in rural areas. Specific attention will be paid to identifying supportive features that work well to enhance joint reflexivity and effectuate more collaborative modes of governance.

This study is based on empirical research I carried out as part of a multi-disciplinary research team in WP4 'Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems' of the European FP7-funded research project Developing Europe's Rural Regions in an Era of Globalisation (DERREG, 2009-2011). WP4 was coordinated by the 'Rural Sociology Group' of Wageningen University and involved empirical research within six European rural case study areas: All partners adhered to the same research methods and started by mapping and analysing a) policy strategies to support joint learning and innovation, b) potentially involved research institutes, schools and consultancies, and c) active grassroots development initiatives. Finally, crucial features of well-working arrangements of collaboration between the different actors were analysed and synthesised. Using the same research method, I undertook additional research in a rural area of Colombia. The information was obtained through literature and internet research, expert interviews and, in the Westerkwartier, a discussion round.

Summary

This thesis comprises five chapters that are independent scientific publications. In the first chapter, I show how the 'learning region concept' and 'triple helix thesis' can be reframed to address support for collaboration in rural areas. In the second chapter, I reflect on the experiences of using the conceptual lens as a research tool for studying the operational features of arrangements supporting joint learning and innovation in the case study area of Westerkwartier, the Netherlands. In the third and fourth chapters, I deal with the question of how to best arrange support for collaboration by comparing the operational features of arrangements across the German and European case study areas.

This thesis concludes with a discussion of the lessons learnt concerning: 1) well-working operational features of arrangements supporting collaborative modes of governance, 2) the development and refinement of the conceptual lens, based on experiences of using it as a heuristic research tool, and 3) the potential of the refined framework to effectuate more collaborative modes of governance.

1) The empirical investigations show that operational interfaces are the outcome of joint reflexivity, leading to an understanding that certain development objectives can only be effectively addressed when people learn to work together. Operational interfaces are thus the realization of constitutional agreements between different actors on how to support joint learning and innovation. Collaborative modes of governance can either be effectuated top-down by policy incentives or emerge bottom-up from collaborative leadership. The following four key dimensions need to be considered to operate supportive arrangements well: a) Operational agents and agencies that are able to realize the agreed upon support; b) Delegated responsibility, decision powers and 'institutional voids' that give enough space and time to effectuate collaboration; c) An aim to lay long-term connections between people of different domains; and d) An operation around a shared development interest, combined with spatial proximity to increase visibility and accessibility. Furthermore, past and present political, social, cultural and economic contexts influence the way in which arrangements work well in a particular area. Operating well-working supportive arrangements thus requires sensitivity to place-specific, institutional contexts.

2) The 'learning region' concept and 'triple helix thesis' are refined in three aspects: 1) the domains of the framework- public administration, knowledge support structure and rural area- are not demarcated by people. They are better distinguished by a set of coherent activities. People can have several functions in different domains. This means that boundaries of domains do not reflect reality but are socially constructed in an attempt to order the complexity of reality. 2) Grassroots development initiatives arise from the domain of everyday life practices and related issues; and 3) Operational interfaces are a key to successful place-making. The focus of the conceptual lens is thus on the interconnections, relations and joint activities of people that act under the institutions of different domains, thereby learning to work together and creating new, shared institutions.

3) Using the refined framework contributes to more collaborative modes of governance when applied in three successive phases: First, the framework is used as an analytical tool to analyze the operational features of arrangements supporting collaboration in a rural area. Secondly, based on the results of the first phase, it can be used as a reflexive tool for an interactive evaluation of the way in which collaboration is currently arranged and the (formal) institutions under which people learn to work together. Finally, the framework can serve as a tool to effectuate institutional reform and hence contribute to more collaborative modes of governance, based on increased joint reflexivity and the assessment of institutions governing current collaborations in a rural area.

This thesis thus contributes to more collaborative modes of governance with a refined conceptual lens that serves, on the one hand, as a relational, place-based approach to collaboration in rural areas, and, on the other hand, as a research tool with guidelines that can be used to analyse, evaluate and improve operational features of supportive arrangements.

Zusammenfassung

Mit dieser Arbeit möchte ich zu mehr gemeinschaftliche Lenkungsformen (*collaborative modes of governance*) in ländlichen Gegenden beitragen. Hierzu gehe ich zwei ineinander greifenden Forschungszielen nach: Zum einen wird ein konzeptioneller Rahmen entwickelt und verfeinert durch das bestehende Formen der Zusammenarbeit erforscht werden können. Hierfür werden die Konzepte „gemeinschaftliche Lenkungsformen in ländlichen Räumen" und „Bildung von kollektiven oder gemeinschaftlichen Kapazitäten" aufgegriffen und durch Literaturaspekte der Human- und Wirtschaftsgeographie, wie dem „relational approach", dem ‚Lernende Regionen' Konzept und der „triple helix thesis" erweitert. Mit diesem Rahmen sollen dann Absprachen erforscht werden, die zu einer stärkeren Zusammenarbeit zwischen Amtsträgern und Initiatoren ländlicher Entwicklungsaktivitäten beitragen. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit wird hierbei den unterstützenden Aktivitäten von Forschungseinrichtungen, Schulen und Beratungsstellen zugeteilt. Eine bestehende Zusammenarbeit zwischen diesen vorgestellten Akteuren wird dann als „funktionsfähige Verbindung" (*operational interface*) konzeptualisiert. Zum anderen soll der konzeptionelle Rahmen verwendet werden um Absprachen, die bereits bestehenden Formen der Zusammenarbeit unterliegen, zu analysieren. Dabei wird ein besonderer Wert darauf gelegt Wege zu identifizieren, durch die Absprachen am Besten in die Tat umzusetzen sind und somit gemeinschaftliche Reflexivität und eine stärkere Zusammenarbeit herbeiführen.

Die Studie basiert auf einer empirischen Forschung, die ich als Teil eines multidisziplinären Forschungsteams im WP4 ‚Capacity building, goverance and knowledge systems' des europäischen FP7-finanzierten Forschungsprojektes Developing Europe's Rural Regions in an Era of Globalisation (DERREG, 2009-2011) durchgeführt habe. WP4 wurde von der Fachgruppe „Ländliche Soziologie" an der Wageningen Universität koordiniert und umfasste empirische Forschungen in sechs europäischen ländlichen Gebieten. Alle Mitglieder des Forschungsteams verwendeten die gleichen Forschungsmethoden und machten eine Übersicht und Analyse von a) politischen Hilfsstrategien zur Förderung des gemeinschaftlichen Lernens und

Innovierens, b) dem potentiellen Engagement von Forschern, Lehrern, Schülern und Beratern sowie c) betriebsamen Entwicklungsaktivitäten. Hinterher wurden die entscheidenden Merkmale gut funktionierender Absprachen zwischen den verschiedenen Akteuren analysiert und zusammengefasst. Zusätzlich führte ich unter dem Einsatz des gleichen Methodenablaufs eine empirische Forschung in einem ländlichen Gebiet in Kolumbien durch. Die Informationen wurden durch Literatur und Internetrecherche, Experteninterviews und- im niederländischen Studiengebiet Westerkwartier- durch eine Diskussionsrunde zusammengetragen.

Die Arbeit setzt sich aus fünf Kapiteln zusammen, die alle als unabhängige, wissenschaftliche Publikationen erschienen oder eingereicht sind. Im ersten Kapitel beschreibe ich, wie das Konzept der ‚Lernenden Regionen‘ und die ‚Triple helix thesis‘ verändert werden können um Absprachen für eine stärkere Zusammenarbeit bei der Entwicklung ländlicher Gebieten mit einzubeziehen. Im zweiten Kapitel reflektiere ich über die Erfahrungen, den konzeptuellen Rahmen als Forschungswerkzeug im niederländischen Studiengebiet zu nutzen. Im dritten und vierten Kapitel widme ich mich der Frage, wie Absprachen am besten in die Tat umgesetzt werden können um eine stärkere Zusammenarbeit zu fördern. Hierzu werden Merkmale vorhandener Zusammenarbeitsformen zunächst in den deutschen und dann in allen europäischen Studiengebieten verglichen.

Die Arbeit endet mit einer dreiteiligen Diskussion der gewonnenen Erkenntnisse: 1. Zunächst werden die Merkmale vorhandener Zusammenarbeitsformen besprochen, die auf gut funktionierende Absprachen hindeuten. 2. Als nächstes wird die Entwicklung und kontinuierliche Anpassung des konzeptuellen Rahmens während seines Einsatzes als empirisches Forschungswerkzeug diskutiert. 3. Abschließend wird durchdacht, ob der veränderte konzeptionelle Rahmen zu einer stärkeren Zusammenarbeit in ländlichen Gebieten beitragen kann und ob seine Verwendung zu mehr gemeinschaftliche Lenkungsformen führt.

1) Die empirischen Untersuchungen haben gezeigt, dass eine verstärkte Form der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Amtsträgern und Bürgern entsteht, wenn die Akteure sich bewusst werden, dass bestimmte Entwicklungsziele nur durch gemeinschaftliches

Handeln zu erreichen sind. Funktionsfähige Verbindungen durch die stärkere Formen der Zusammenarbeit entstehen sind somit das Ergebnis gemeinschaftlicher Reflexivität und die Verwirklichung konstitutioneller Absprachen. Diese Art von gemeinschaftlichen Lenkungsformen können entweder durch einen politischen top-down Anreiz oder aber bottom-up herbeigeführt werden. Hierzu legen sich die Akteure in konstitutionellen Einigungen darauf fest, wie ihre Absprachen in die Tat umgesetzt werden sollen, so dass eine stärkere Zusammenarbeit unterstützt werden kann. Dabei ist es notwendig *vier Schlüsseldimensionen* zu beachten: a) Es werden Funktionäre benötigt, die fähig sind die besprochene Hilfestellungen für eine stärkere Zusammenarbeit umzusetzen; b) Verantwortung und Entscheidungsgewalt müssen delegiert werden und „institutionelle Lücken" geschaffen werden, die genug Raum und Zeit geben um stärkere Formen der Zusammenarbeit herbeizuführen; c) es muss die Absicht bestehen langandauernde Verbindungen zwischen Amtsträgern und Mitgliedern von Entwicklungsinitiativen zu schaffen; und d) Absprachen müssen in räumlicher Nähe zu Ihren Nutzern realisiert werden und auf ein gemeinsames Entwicklungsinteresse aufbauen. Dadurch kann die Sicht- und Erreichbarkeit erhöht werden. Darüber hinaus beeinflussen vergangene und gegenwärtige politische, soziale, kulturelle und ökonomische Zusammenhänge, ob Absprachen gut oder weniger gut umgesetzt werden können. Eine gut funktionierende Zusammenarbeit setzt also eine Sensibilität für ortsbezogene und institutionelle Zusammenhänge voraus.

2. Der konzeptuelle Rahmen wurde in drei Aspekten angepasst: 1) Amtsträger, Initiativnehmer ländlicher Entwicklungsaktivitäten sowie Forscher, Lehrer, Schüler und Berater unterscheiden sich nicht auf Grund ihrer Funktionen. Eine Person kann nämlich mehrere Funktionen ausführen. Viel mehr Sinn macht es, zusammenhängende Aktivitäten zu gruppieren und zu unterscheiden. Diese Gruppierungen entsprechen dann auch nicht der Realität, sondern sind eine soziale Konstruktion, durch die versucht wird Ordnung in die Komplexität der Realität zu bringen. 2) Entwicklungsinitiativen werden als Bestandteil des Alltaglebens konzipiert; 3) Starke Formen der Zusammenarbeit, das heißt also gut funktionierende Verbindungen, sind wichtig für eine erfolgreiche, ortsbezogene Entwicklung. Das Augenmerk des konzeptionellen Rahmens richtet sich

somit auf solche Verbindungen, Beziehungen und gemeinschaftlichen Aktivitäten durch die Amtsträgern, Mitglieder verschiedener Entwicklungsinitiativen, und Forscher, Lehrer, Schüler und Berater lernen zusammen zu arbeiten. Dabei werden bestehende Verhaltensmuster hinterfragt und neue, gemeinsame Verhaltensmuster entwickelt.

3) Der verbesserte konzeptionelle Rahmen kann helfen mehr gemeinschaftliche Lenkungsformen herbeizuführen. Dazu muss er in drei aufeinander folgenden Phasen angewandt werden: Zunächst wird der Rahmen als analytisches Werkzeug verwendet um bestehende Formen der Zusammenarbeit in ländlichen Gebieten zu analysieren. Darauf aufbauend kann der Rahmen in der zweiten Phase als ein reflexives Instrument für eine interaktive Evaluation, zusammen mit den Akteuren, verwendet werden. Der Rahmen kann hierbei helfen die bestehenden Formen der Zusammenarbeit zu veranschaulichen und dient als Instrument um die unterliegenden Verhaltensformen zu analysieren und zu evaluieren. Letztendlich hilft der konzeptionelle Rahmen eine institutionelle Reform herbeizuführen und somit zu mehr gemeinschaftlichen Lenkungsformen beizutragen. Insbesondere hilft der Rahmen eine gemeinschaftliche Reflexivität zu unterstützen und Verhaltensmuster zu hinterfragen, auf deren Basis die gegenwärtigen Formen der Zusammenarbeit ausgeführt werden.

Der entwickelte Rahmen bietet somit einen rationalen, ortsbezogenen Ansatz zur Analyse von Absprachen, durch die stärkere Formen der Zusammenarbeit in ländlichen Gebieten unterstützt werden können. Auch bietet sich der konzeptionellen Rahmen als Forschungsinstrument an, durch das existierende Formen der Zusammenarbeit analysiert, evaluiert und verbessert werden können. Folglich trägt die Arbeit dazu bei, mehr gemeinschaftliche Lenkungsformen herbeizuführen.

Samenvatting

Met dit proefschrift wil ik bijdragen aan meer gemeenschappelijke vormen van governance (collaborative forms of governance) in plattelandsgebieden. Om dit te doen ga ik twee verstrengelde onderzoeksdoelen na: ten eerste ontwikkel ik een conceptueel raamwerk of „lens" om de opzet en werking van bestaande arrangementen te bestuderen. Het raamwerk wordt toegepast en verder verfijnd door bestaande concepten zoals "collaborative governance in rural areas" en "collective capacity building" te gebruiken en door literatuuraspecten vanuit de sociale- en economische geografie, zoals de "relational approach", "lerende regio", "triple helix thesis" te verbreden. Het raamwerk draagt bij aan het onderzoeken van afspraken die meer samenwerking tussen vertegenwoordigers van bestuur en beleid en initiatiefrijke bewoners in plattelandsgebieden willen bevorderen. In dit proces wordt speciale aandacht gegeven aan de ondersteuning vanuit onderzoek, onderwijs en advies. Een bestaand samenwerkingsverband wordt dan geconceptualiseerd als een functionerende verbinding tussen de verschillende actoren. (operational interface). Ten tweede wordt het raamwerk gebruikt om afspraken te analyseren die bestaande vormen van samenwerking ondersteunen. Hierbij geef ik specifieke aandacht aan het identificeren van kenmerken die zo goed mogelijk bijdragen aan gemeenschappelijke reflexiviteit en een sterke vorm van samenwerking.

Het onderzoek was een onderdeel van het door de Europese Commissie gefinancierde onderzoeksproject Developing Europe's Rural Regions in an Era of Globalisation (DERREG, 2009-2011). Dit is een vergelijkend onderzoek in zes plattelandsgebieden uitgevoerd door een internationaal, interdisciplinair team van onderzoekers waarvan ik deel uitmaakte onder leiding van de Leerstoelgroep Rurale Sociologie van Wageningen Universiteit. Het onderzoek omvatte het in kaart brengen en analyseren van: a) beleidsstrategieën en afspraken die het samen leren en innoveren ter plaatse beogen te bevorderen; b) de onderzoeks-, onderwijs- en adviesinstellingen in en rond het gebied en de eventuele betrokkenheid van deze of andere kennisinstellingen en personen bij het faciliteren van het samen leren en innoveren en de aard van de geboden ondersteuning; c) de ontwikkelingsinitiatieven ter plaatse, de initiatiefnemers en andere betrokkenen. In

elk van de zes gebieden is een selectie gemaakt van wat door de betrokkenen zelf als goed werkende afspraken en operationele interfaces werd gezien. Deze zijn vervolgens meer diepgaand geanalyseerd: hoe deze afspraken in elkaar zitten, zoals de betrokken partijen, de gemaakte afspraken over opzet en uitvoering, de uitvoering en de aard van de geboden ondersteuning. Hieruit is vervolgens lering getrokken over hoe het samen leren en innoveren effectief kan worden ondersteund. Ter aanvulling heb ik nog een vergelijkbaar onderzoek gedaan in een plattelandsgebied in Colombia.

Dit proefschrift bevat vijf hoofdstukken die elk afzonderlijk zijn of worden gepubliceerd. Het eerste hoofdstuk betreft vooral het ontwikkelen van een aangepast conceptueel raamwerk en hoe dit toegepast kan worden. Het tweede hoofdstuk betreft de toepassing ervan in één van de zes studiegebieden, het Westerkwartier in Nederland. Het derde en vierde hoofdstuk bieden een vergelijking tussen vooral operationele aspecten in respectievelijk twee studiegebieden in Duitsland en alle zes studiegebieden.

Het proefschrift eindigt met een discussie van de bevindingen en trekt conclusies wat betreft: 1. De operationele aspecten van samenwerkingsvormen die laten zien hoe afspraken goed kunnen worden gerealiseerd om bij te dragen aan een effectieve ondersteuning van het samen leren werken en innoveren ter plaatse; 2. De toepassing en verdere verfijning van het conceptuele raamwerk of 'lens' door het gebruik van het raamwerk als heuristische tool voor het bestuderen van samenwerkingsvormen en operationele interfaces; c) de potentie van het raamwerk als instrument om de ondersteuning van het samen leren werken en innoveren via goed werkende afspraken en operationele interfaces te verbeteren.

1) Samenwerking bij de ontwikkeling van een gebied kan gestalte krijgen via arrangementen: afspraken tussen betrokken partijen over hoe samen te werken aan het ontplooien van gezamenlijke activiteiten en hoe die vervolgens uit te voeren, die worden vastgelegd in een arrangement. Uit het onderzoek blijkt dat samenwerken verbindend leiderschap vergt, een gemeenschappelijke reflectie op de ontwikkeling die resulteert in een gedeelde visie en een agenda van samen te ontplooien activiteiten en het opbouwen van een gezamenlijk handelingsvermogen (collective agency). Voor een geslaagde uitvoering of operationalisering is het van belang dat: 1) bekwame

uitvoerende personen (operational agents) de benodigde ondersteuning zelf kunnen geven of anderen daarvoor kunnen inschakelen; 2) operationele bevoegdheden aan deze personen worden overgedragen om zelf operationele beslissingen te kunnen nemen en de ruimte te hebben om naar eigen inzicht tussen de partijen te opereren; 3) de betrokken partijen de intentie hebben om een langdurige samenwerking aan te gaan 4) het ontplooien van gezamenlijke activiteiten vanuit een gedeelde interesse en in de nabije omgeving van de betrokken partijen zodat het zichtbaar en breed toegankelijk is. Welke arrangementen goed werken blijkt af te hangen van de specifieke politieke, sociale, culturele en economische context en moeten daar dan ook op afgestemd worden.

2) Een verdere verfijning van het conceptuele raamwerk of 'lens' betreft: a) het afbakenen van de domeinen 'publiek bestuur', 'gebied' en 'faciliterende instellingen en personen' kan beter op grond van samenhangende activiteiten of werkvelden plaatsvinden en niet op grond van personen. Dezelfde persoon kan meerdere activiteiten ontplooien in verschillende domeinen; b) initiatieven van inwoners ontstaan meestal vanuit hun dagelijkse praktijk en alledaagse vraagstukken; c) operationele interfaces vormen de sleutel tot een geslaagde bijdrage aan plaats-eigen ontwikkeling. De 'lens' is gericht op verbindingen, relaties en het ontplooien van gezamenlijke activiteiten die de brug vormen tussen de verschillende domeinen en van waaruit nieuwe geïnstitutionaliseerde vormen van samenwerking kunnen ontstaan.

3) Het raamwerk kan worden gebruikt als instrument om het samen leren werken en innoveren en vormen van collaborative governance in een gebied te bevorderen door: eerst bestaande arrangementen in kaart te brengen en te analyseren; vervolgens samen met betrokkenen op interactieve wijze de arrangementen en operationele interfaces op hun werking te beoordelen; om zo bestaande arrangementen te verbeteren of nieuwe te maken. Het bevorderen van gezamenlijke reflexiviteit kan zo bijdragen aan een effectieve institutionele hervorming.

Kortom, vanuit een plaats-eigen perspectief op plattelandsontwikkeling draagt het proefschrift bij aan het bestuderen en evalueren van het samen leren werken en innoveren en daarmee hoe dat op effectieve wijze kan worden ondersteund.

Resumen

Esta tesis es una contribución para efectuar formas mas colaborativas de gobernanza en áreas rurales. Para tal fin, persigo dos objetivos ínter-relacionados de investigación: El primer objetivo es el de desarrollar un marco conceptual que pueda ser usado para investigar arreglos que promuevan la colaboración entre funcionarios públicos, científicos, profesores y consultorios, e iniciadores de actividades de desarrollo rural. Los conceptos de "gobernanza rural" y de "construcción de capacidades comunales o colectivas" son ampliados con aspectos de la literatura en geografía humana y económica, como el "relational approach", el concepto de la "región en aprendizaje" y la "tesis de la triple helice". Las colaboraciones entre estas personas están conceptualizadas como "interfaces operativas". El segundo objetivo es el de utilizar este marco conceptual como una herramienta de investigación empírico. Para tal fin, el marco conceptual se centra particularmente en las características operativas que trabajan adecuadamente para mejorar la reflexividad conjunta y para efectuar formas mas colaborativas de gobernanza.

Este estudio se basa en investigación empírica, que realice como miembro del equipo de investigación interdisciplinaria WP4 'Construcción de capacidades, gobernanza y sistemas de conocimiento' del proyecto de investigación 'Desarrollando las áreas rurales europeas en la era de la Globalización" (DERREG, 2009-2011) que fue financiado por el programa FP7 de la Unión Europea. El trabajo con WP4 consistió en investigaciones empíricas en seis estudios de caso en áreas rurales europeas. Ademas, realice una investigación empírica en un área rural en Colombia. Todos los miembros del grupo de investigación utilizaron los mismos métodos de investigación. Ellos comenzaron por hacer un balance general y análisis de: a) las estrategias de política para apoyar el aprendizaje colectivo, b) la contribución de los institutos de investigaciones, las escuelas y las asesorías para apoyar el aprendizaje colectivo, y c) las actividades de desarrollo en las regiones escogidas y sus iniciadores. Después, las características mas cruciales de los arreglos que operaban bien fueron analizadas y sintetizadas. La información fue obtenida a través de revisiones de literatura, del Internet, entrevistas

con expertos y, en el caso del área Westerkwartier en Holanda, a través de un foro de discusión.

La tesis comprende cinco capítulos que a su vez son artículos científicos independientes, publicados o entregados. En el primer capitulo empírico, ilustro como el concepto de la "región en aprendizaje" y la "tesis de la hélice triple" pueden ser reformulados para incluir las estructura de apoyo para la colaboración en áreas rurales. En el segundo capitulo empírico, reflexiono sobre las experiencias de utilizar el marco conceptual como una herramienta de investigación en el caso de Westerkwartier, Holanda. En los capítulos empíricos tres y cuarto, se aborda la pregunta de como estructurar el apoyo para una mejor colaboración. Para ello, las características operacionales de los estructura de apoyo son comparados entre los diferentes casos de estudio en Alemania y Europa.

Esta tesis finaliza con una discusión del conocimiento adquirido sobre a) las características de la estructura de apoyo que trabajan bien para apoyar formas mas colaborativas de gobernanza, b) el desarrollo y refinamiento de un marco conceptual, y c) el potencial de este marco conceptual para efectuar formas mas colaborativas de gobernanza.

Con relación al punto a), esta investigación muestra que las interfaces operacionales son el resultado de acuerdos constitutivos y de una reflexividad conjunta. Esto se basa en el entendimiento de que ciertos objetivos de desarrollo solo pueden ser efectivamente tratados cuando la gente aprende a trabajar conjuntamente. Las formas mas colaborativas de gobernanza pueden ser efectuados "desde arriba" por incentivos de politica o pueden emerger "desde abajo" a través de un liderazgo colaborativo. En los acuerdos constitutivos, los participantes acuerdan como operacionalizar la estructura de apoyo para el aprendizaje conjunto y la innovación. Las siguientes cuatro dimensiones son claves para operacionalizar bien la estructura de apoyo para el aprendizaje conjunto y la innovación: 1) Se necesita funcionarios que puedan implementar la estructura de apoyo acordado; 2) Es necesario delegar responsabilidades y poderes de decisión y se necesita crear "vacíos institucionales" que den suficiente espacio y tiempo para efectuar la colaboración; 3) las conexiones entre la gente de diferentes dominios tienen que ser

establecidas con una perspectiva de largo plazo; 4) las estructuras de apoyo tienen de estar operacionalizadas en la cercanía de los usuarios, alrededor de un interés de desarrollo común, para incrementar la visibilidad y accesibilidad. Por otra parte, el contexto político, social, cultural, económico presente y pasado influye tanto en la manera en que las estructuras de apoyo funcionan en áreas particulares. Entonces, las estructuras de apoyo que funcionan bien presuponen una sensibilidad específica hacia los contextos (informales) institucionales de cada lugar.

Con respecto al punto b), el concepto de la "región en aprendizaje" y la "tesis de la hélice triple" son refinados en tres aspectos: 1) Los dominios no están demarcados por las personas pero por un grupo de actividades coherentes. Como así, los limites de los dominios no reflejan la realidad pero son construidos socialmente en un intento de ordenar la complejidad de la realidad. 2) Las actividades de desarrollo son parte de los actividades cotidianas y entonces surgen del dominio de las practicas del día a día y de los problemas relacionados con estas. 3) Las interfaces operacionales son claves para un 'place-making' exitoso. Entonces, el foco del marco conceptual esta en las interconexiones, las relaciones y las actividades conjuntas de la gente que usualmente trabaja con las instituciones de los diferentes dominios, y que ahora se reúnen para aprender a trabajar conjuntamente y en este proceso se crean instituciones nuevas y compartidas.

Con relación al punto c), usar el marco conceptual reformulado contribuye a formas mas colaborativas de gobernanza si este es aplicado en tres fases sucesivas: Primero, el marco conceptual es usado como una herramienta analítica para el análisis de las características operativas de las estructura de apoyo que apoyan la colaboración en áreas rurales. Segundo, con base en los resultados de la primera fase, el marco conceptual puede ser usado como una herramienta reflexiva para una evaluación interactiva. De esta manera, la forma actual de colaboración y las instituciones (formales) bajo las de que las personas aprenden a trabajar conjuntamente pueden ser analizadas y evaluadas. Finalmente, el marco conceptual puede servir como una herramienta para efectuar un cambio institucional de tal forma que contribuya a formas de gobernanza mas colaborativas. El concepto coadyuva para una mayor reflexividad conjunta y la

evaluación de las instituciones que actualmente gobiernan la colaboración en las áreas rurales.

Entonces, el marco conceptual sirve como un enfoque relacional que es relativo al lugar para el análisis de la estructura de apoyo para la colaboración en las áreas rurales. El concepto también sirve como una herramienta de investigación para analizar, evaluar y mejorar las características operativas de las estructuras de apoyo. Por ende, esta tesis contribuye con un marco conceptual reformado que sirve para efectuar formas mas colaborativos de gobernanza.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I think about the last four years that I devoted to writing this PhD thesis, I picture myself as an explorer who embarked on a personal expedition into the largely unknown world of the social sciences, leaving behind the known shores of the natural sciences. And indeed, arriving in the land of social science meant learning new ways of conducting research, learning new languages (not only scientifically speaking but also for real: Dutch and Spanish!) and new ways of communicating (particularly noticing that in social science land they use a lot more words than in natural science land, since it always seems necessary to first explain readers how you see the world and how you define a problem before you can actually start doing research). The past four years have thus been a true challenge for me, but at the same time it was also an enriching experience that- retrospectively- I would not have wanted to miss.

I could not have succeeded in accomplishing this expedition without the help of many well-intended and inspiring persons, some of which I only met along the way. I would like to thank all of you for your invaluable help. It has meant a lot to me.

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My PhD thesis is based on research I carried out as part of a European, multi-disciplinary research team. The research findings giving rise to this book are thus the outcome of a joint research endeavour and could not have been accomplished without the research activities, joint discussions and publication efforts, involving: Dirk Roep,

Lola Domínguez García from the University of Vigo, Marie Mahon, Maura Farrell and John MacDonagh from the National University of Ireland, Galway, Emilija Kairyte from NeVork, Slovenia, Wioletta Frys (formerly University of Saarland), Birte Nienaber of Luxembourg University (formerly University of Saarland, Germany), Robert Nadler and Joachim Burdach from the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig, Germany and Michael Kriszan from the i.green Institute in Soest, Germany (formerly Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography). It has been a pleasure to work with you and I want to thank you for all your efforts and feedback along the way. In addition, I especially like to thank Lola, Paul Swagemakers, Emilija, Robert, Michael and Joachim for allowing visiting and explore their case study areas. These trips have greatly contributed to my understanding of the research topic.

None of what has been written in this book could have been possible without the help and information provided by those that we visited and spoke to in the different case study areas. I would like to express my thanks to all of you. I want to particularly thank the people of the Westerkwartier, where I spent a substantial time of my PhD doing field research. Thank you, members of WSI for allowing me to join your meetings, Frans Traa for helping me to arrange a work space in the rural house, giving me the opportunity to work alongside Alinde Holsappel, Nienke Vellema and Klaas van der Veen. I also want to thank Nico Boele for our inspiring conversations and his help in finding me accommodation in the area. Frits Schuitemaker, your tour through the Westerkwartier has left a lasting impression- thank you. Klaas van der Veen, I truly enjoyed our conversation and fresh fruit supply. Last but not least, a special thanks to all the entrepreneurs and development activists in the area. Your engagement, devotion and energy were a joy to witness. Each stay and visit to the Westerkwartier was a boost of energy for my research.

I would also like to thank the WASS graduate school for providing me with a Junior Research Grant to visit the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. This research stay has helped me to reflect about my research topic and to gain a broader perspective. I am very grateful to all staff members at the Centro Interdisciplinario de Estudios sobre Desarrollo (CIDER) of the Universidad de los Andes that shared their

time, suggestions and ideas with me. I would particularly like to thank Maricel Piňero for her warm welcome and help during my stay.

I used my time in Colombia to conduct an additional field investigation in Santa Cruz de la Colina, a rural area in the department of Santander. This period has left a deep impression on me. I am proud to have met such hard-working and optimistic people as the development activists in Santa Cruz de la Colina who, despite several hardships and throwbacks, continue to work for improving the quality of their lives. I am particularly honoured to have met and have been accompanied by Laura Velasco. Thank you for introducing us to the people of your village, for your help as field research assistant and your family for their hospitality.

My PhD time in Wageningen has not only widened my scientific horizon. During this time, I also encountered inspiring people and some of these I am honoured to call my friends now. I would therefore like to thank Bart, Sjoene, Vanilla, Hans and Joopie as well as the old and new boerderie crew for reminding me that there is a life outside work. Elske, Natalia, Anja, Simona and Charlotte, I am very lucky to consider such strong and inspiring women my friends- thank you.

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The expedition I mentioned earlier actually started not with my PhD but already in 2003, with the discovery of natural science land and my decision to leave Germany and commence my studies in England. I guess at that time no one at home would have

thought that it should take me 10 years to finally come back- if only to the South of Germany. Although it was not always easy to be so far away from home, somehow my parents Barbara and Hartmut Wellbrock, my family and friends in Germany have managed to make it feel as if I was not really that far away. I think this is one of the main reasons which has kept me going over the last years and for which I am endlessly thankful. Even when I was really far away- in Colombia- I felt at home. Thank you, Betty, Germán, Tom and the Rodríguez family for welcoming me so warmly.

At last, I would like to express my thanks to my husband Jean Carlo Rodríguez, not only for his help in conducting my research in Colombia and for the Spanish translation, but in many other ways. You mean the world to me and I cannot thank you enough for your support and comfort. Somehow you always find the right words at the right moment. Te quiero! ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CURRICULUM VITAE

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION PLAN

Curriculum Vitae

Wiebke Wellbrock was born on the 29th of April 1982 in Bremen, Germany. After finishing her Abitur, she enrolled in a BSc (Honours) course in Animal Behaviour with Psychology at the Anglia Ruskin University, England in 2003. While doing literature research for her BSc thesis, she discovered the Animal Science Group at Wageningen University. After completing her BSc *first class* in 2006, she enrolled at Wageningen University and completed her Master in Animal Production Systems (minor in Communication Science) with *cum laude* in 2008. Intrigued by the strong relation between human and animal welfare in rural areas that she witnessed during her UFAW-funded field investigations in Croatia, Wiebke became interested in investigating the social side of rural life. Then, in 2009, she was given the opportunity to take on a PhD position at the Rural Sociology Group in Wageningen. Here, she worked as a researcher in the European FP7-funded research project Developing Europe's Rural Areas in the Era of Globalisation (DERREG), focussing on capacity building, governance and knowledge systems and completed her PhD thesis within this project. Currently, Wiebke works for the Rural Sociology Group at Hohenheim University, Germany where she teaches a BSc course on Empirical Research Methods in Social Sciences and works on further developing her research career.

List of Publications

Refereed publications

Roep, D., Wellbrock, W., Horlings, I., 2013. Raising self-efficacy and resilience: collaborative leadership in the Westerkwartier, in: M. Woods, B. Nienaber, J. McDonagh (Eds.), *Globalization and Europe's rural regions*. Ashgate, Surrey.

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Copus, A., Dubois, A., Hedström, M., Kairyte, E., Stastna, M., Slavič, I., Wellbrock, W., 2011. DERREG D1.4 Summary of Research Findings. Stockholm, Sweden.

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Wellbrock, W., Roep, D., 2013. Learning to Work Together in Rural Colombia. Proceedings of XXVth Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology, Florence, Italy. http://www.florenceesrs2013.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/ESRS2013_eProceedings.pdf.

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Completed Training and Supervision Plan

Wiebke Wellbrock

Wageningen School
of Social Sciences

Name of the learning activity	Institute/ Department	Year	ECTS*
A) Project related competences			
Understanding Rural Development: Theories, practices and methodologies (RSO 32806)	RSO/ WUR	2009	6.0
Research proposal	WASS	2009	5.0
Qualitative Data Analysis for Development Research	CERES/ ISS	2009	1.0
Innovation for Sustainability	TransForum	2010	3.0
Techniques for Writing and Presenting a Scientific Paper	WASS	2011	1.2
Capita Selecta on Place-based Development (RSO 50806)	RSO/ WUR	2012	6.0
B) General research related competences			
Introduction course	WASS	2009	1.5
Endnote X2 Advanced	WUR Library	2009	0.0
'Exploring effective interconnections between supporting policies, a facilitating knowledge infrastructure and rural development initiatives-Towards learning rural regions.'	ESRS, Vaasa	2009	1.0
'Harmonization of pig welfare with the EU welfare directives: the case of Croatia' and 'Low motivation and unawareness in small farmers as an obstacle for implementation of the EU pig welfare rules'	Animal Science Days, Padua	2009	2.0
'The governance of rural regional learning and innovation -towards an analytical, reflexive research framework'	WASS PhD day	2010	1.0

'The governance of rural regional learning and innovation- Towards an analytical, reflexive research framework' and 'Smallholder Pig Farming in Croatia: Destined to become extinct or worth saving?'	IFSA Vienna	2010	1.0
'Arranging support of collective learning and innovation in rural areas, some good practices from the Westerkwartier, Netherlands'	IGU Conference, Vechta	2011	1.0
'Support and Facilitation for Regional Rural Learning and Innovation: No "One Size Fits All" Solution'	ESRS Chania	2011	1.0
'Shifting support from sector-oriented learning to support for regional learning'	AU, Wageningen	2012	1.0
'Producing and Reproducing Farming Systems- New Modes of Organization for Sustainable Food Systems of Tomorrow'	IFSA Aarhus	2012	1.0
'Learning to Work Together in Rural Colombia'	ESRS Florence	2013	1.0

C) Career related competences/ personal development

Career Assessment	WASS	2012	0.3
Lecture in RSO 32806	WUR	2012	1.0
Tutor Intensive Program, Lublin, Poland	Ghent University	2009	1.0
Tutor RDS 10306 Inleiding Beheer van Natuurlijke Hulpbronnen	RDS/WUR	2010	1.0
Teacher RSO 10806 Animals in Society	RSO/WUR	2012	1.0
Total			**39**

*1 ECTS equals a study load of 28 hours

APPENDIX I

LOOKING BEYOND THE EUROPEAN UNION:

LEARNING TO WORK TOGETHER IN RURAL COLOMBIA

Impressions from my field work in Colombia, *Source*: Wiebke Wellbrock

ABSTRACT This paper deals with the question whether a research tool based on the learning region concept can be used to map, analyse and evaluate support for joint learning and innovation in non-European rural areas, such as post-conflict rural areas in Colombia. The framework served for mapping supportive arrangements, but it fell short on analysing supportive arrangements involving international organizations and interconnections not supported by public administration. A future refinement seems necessary.

I.1 Learning regions and rural development

The learning region concept (see for example Florida, 1995) has greatly influenced regional development policies and facilitated the growth of knowledge-based industry clusters. Recently, the underlying assumptions of the concept have been criticised (Hassink and Klaerding, 2012) (Hassink and Klaerding, 2012) (Hassink and Klaerding, 2012) (Hassink and Klaerding, 2012). In particular, the assumptions do not seem to match the needs of rural areas (e.g. Wellbrock et al., 2012). Wellbrock et al (2012) revised the regional learning concept into a research tool to map, analyse and evaluate interfaces through which public administrators, knowledge facilitators and grassroots initiators learn to work together towards development. The revised framework was applied empirically to identify considerable differences in arrangements to support joint learning and innovation in six European rural case study areas (Roep et al. 2011). In this paper, we will investigate if the framework can also be used to study support for joint learning and innovation in a non-European context.

I.2 Santa Cruz de la Colina

As figure I.1 shows, Santa Cruz de la Colina is a rural township in Matanza municipality, Soto Province, Santander, Colombia. It consists of the village Santa Cruz and 13 rural settlements (veredas). It has an area of about 110 km² and a population density of approximately 11 inhabitants/km² (~ 1,500 inhabitants in total) (data adapted from CDMB, 2008). The landscape is characterised by pastures, forests, and coffee and plantain plantations. The local economy depends mainly on agricultural activities such as coffee, plantain, cacao and blackberry production and cattle ranging. Farm sizes range from <1ha to >100ha with a common size of 5 to 20 ha (CDMB, 2008). The closest urban centres Rionegro and Bucaramanga can be reached via daily bus services. Yet, infrastructure is poorly maintained with negative effects on travel times and communication. The image of the township is further influenced by its history of conflict, lasting until around 2005.
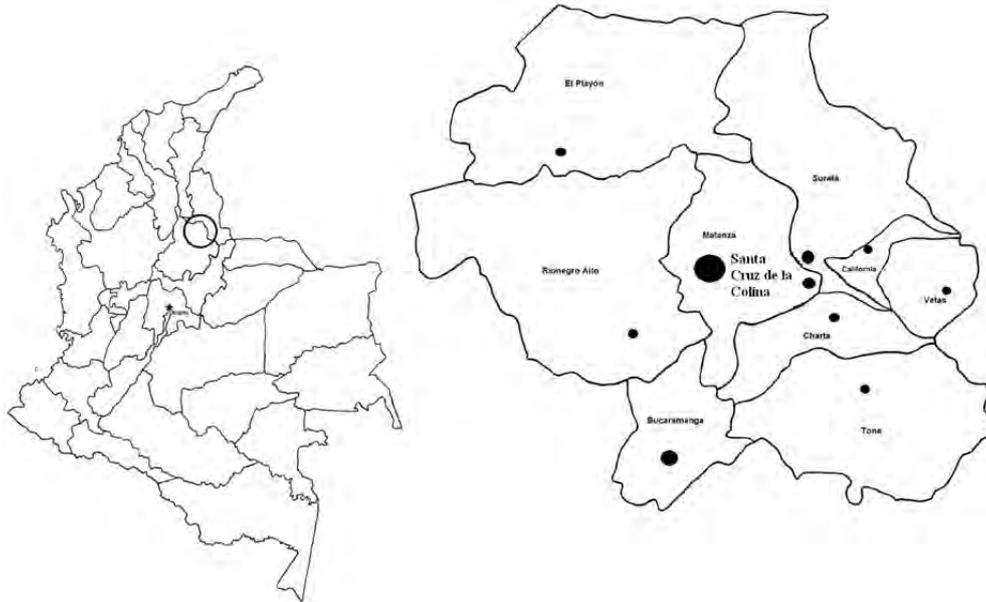
Figure I.1 Colombian case study area

I.3 Research method

Research in the Colombian case study area was carried out between November 2011 and February 2012. I was accompanied by a research assistant, Laura Velasco of Santa Cruz de la Colina, and fellow PhD researcher Jean Carlo Rodríguez de Francisco. Both helped me to make contact with key informants, to overcome language barriers and to conduct the necessary interviews. A combination of literature reviews and semi-structured interviews was used. A total of 21 key informants were interviewed, ranging from public administration, universities and NGOs (all at national and provincial level) to grassroots development initiatives in Santa Cruz de la Colina. Interview partners were identified using the internet and snowball sampling. The investigations entailed three steps: 1) an overview of public policies and available facilitators from the knowledge support structure; 2) an inventory of facilitating agents and grassroots

development initiatives active in Santa Cruz de la Colina; and 3) an evaluation of available support for joint learning and innovation by supporters and beneficiaries. Interviews were recorded using a 'Sharp' Voice Recorder, transcribed and translated into English. The framework was used to map, analyse, evaluate and compare the interfaces found.

I.4 Support for joint learning and innovation
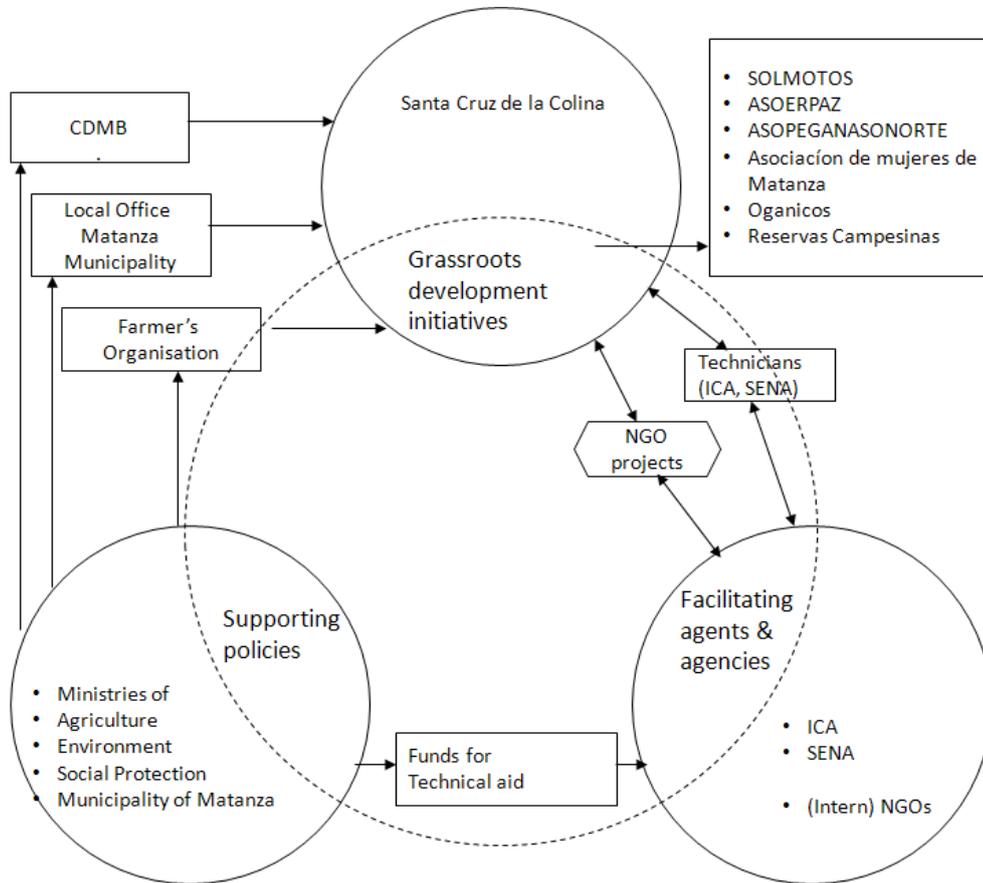
Figure i.2 Public support for joint learning and innovation

I.4.1 Mapping

In Santa Cruz de la Colina, six grassroots development initiatives were inventoried that engaged in activities such as agriculture, opportunities for peasant women, motorcycle repair, human rights and nature conservation (see upper right corner of Figure i.2). Public administrators interacted directly with these grassroots development initiatives through three distinct interfaces. The Ministry of Environment interacted with grassroots development initiatives through the environmental public organisation 'Corporación autónoma regional para la Defensa de la Meseta de Bucaramanga (CDMB)'. Secondly, the municipality of Matanza interacted with grassroots development initiatives through a local office in the village of Santa Cruz. The farmer organisation 'Centros Provinciales de la Gestión Agroempresarial' functioned as an interface between grassroots development initiatives and the Ministry of Agriculture. Support from the knowledge support structure was delivered through the 'Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA)' and the 'Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario (ICA)'. In addition, there were a number of (inter)national NGOs engaged with grassroots development initiatives in Santa Cruz de la Colina. These were also mapped in the pillar 'knowledge support structure' (see Figure i.2).

I.4.2 Analysing

Publically financed agents and agencies implemented distinct public development programmes. The CDMB implemented national nature conservation plans, the local office of the municipality implemented the social welfare programme 'Accíon Social' and the farmers' organisation worked towards operationalizing the policy goals of the agricultural ministry. Public administration also provided funds to the SENA and ICA of the knowledge support structure to facilitate technical support. The NGOs included in the knowledge support structure did not receive funds from public administration. Their activities were funded by (inter)national NGOs or international governments. The lack of interaction with the pillar 'public administration' makes it questionable whether these

NGOs can be included in the revised framework, because it does not connect to the original idea of the learning region concept.

I.4.3 Evaluation

Grassroots development initiatives and supporters mentioned a lack of confidence and a lack of motivation by grassroots development initiators to learn to work together with potential supporters. This was first based on experiences with corruption, top-down policy implementations, frequent changes in policies associated with legislation periods and past experiences with the armed conflict. As an exception, the technical support provided by SENA was evaluated positively, because it was able to respond to the needs of grassroots development initiatives. Secondly, people were argued to be individualists who did not value collaboration. Third, there was a lack of trust between all development actors. In the case of NGOs, this was often grounded on the fact that they were competitors for funds or that they would work along different ideologies. Also, joint learning and innovation between grassroots development initiatives and NGOs was regarded with scepticism, because NGOs wanted to implement their own projects into the area instead of linking up with the needs of the people. Fourth, grassroots development initiators mentioned a lack of transparency regarding the different development policies, and a lack of organisation amongst the implementing agents and agencies. One can therefore conclude that public support for joint learning and innovation between supporters and grassroots development initiatives was not well arranged and collaborative modes of governance not well developed. Yet, in cases where public administration and grassroots development initiatives shared a development interest or when there was a prospect of receiving particular development funds as a result of working together (for example water management), joint learning and innovation nevertheless occurred.

I.5 Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we investigated if the revised framework proposed by Wellbrock et al. (2012) can be used to study support for joint learning and innovation in a non-European, post conflict rural area. Its application helped to understand that joint learning and innovation, and hence collaborative modes of governance are not (yet) developed in Santa Cruz de la Colina. The application also showed that the scope of the framework is too narrow to account for NGOs and other international organizations that are trying to fill institutional voids occurring between public administration, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives. It can therefore be argued that the assumptions underlying the revised framework are still too close in line with the assumptions of the learning region concept, envisioning close ties between public administration, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives. To better address joint learning and innovation in non-European contexts, and in particular in post-conflict areas like Santa Cruz de la Colina, the scope of the framework needs to be enlarged. A future refinement of the framework will therefore be necessary.

I.6 Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Laura Velasco and Jean Carlo Rodríguez de Francisco for their support during the field work phase in Colombia.

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APPENDIX II

DERREG INTERVIEW GUIDELINE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

From the pillar 'public administration', regional (public) policies need to be identified that support strategies and instruments for capacity building, learning and innovation directly and indirectly. Questions you asked should complement the information you may have already found in the literature. I therefore suggest the following set of questions:

1. **Check-up: Relevant policy documents**

   1. Do we have listed all relevant policy documents for regional learning?

   2. Which documents are missing?

   3. Can you provide us with access to these documents?

2. **Investigation of policy implementation process**

Type of support and selection of supported actors/ institutes

- Which sectors are supported?

  o How are these selected?

  o Why is the selection process structured like this?

- What actors are supported?

  o How are these selected?

  o Why is the selection process structured like this?

- Who is responsible for choosing which actors/ sectors to support and which not to support?

  o How are these selections made?

- Do you get requests for support from within the regions?

  o Who requests your support?

  o How is the procedure for applying for support?

  o Are there many requests for support?

  o What type of requests to do get? Can you give me an example?

  o How are the incoming request handled? Which requests are prioritised?

- Do you get requests from outside the region?

  o Who requests your support?

- o How is the procedure for applying for support?

- o Are there many requests for support?

- o What type of requests to do get? Can you give me an example?

- o What requests are prioritised and why?

Identification of prioritised skills and competences

- What skills are needed in the region and how do you support their creation?

  - o Why are these skills needed?

  - o How did you identify the need for these skills?

  - o What possibilities are there to build the necessary skills?

  - o Do you think of the impact of the available supporting strategies?

- What types of competences are needed in the region and how do you support their creation?

  - o Why are these types of competences needed?

  - o How did you identify the need for these types of competences?

  - o What possibilities are there to build the necessary types of competences?

  - o How would you evaluate the impact of the available supporting strategies?

3. **Direct support: Interaction between public administration and local actors (e.g. citizens, business people, networks, initiatives….)**

- Do you interact with local actors in order to formulate and implement governmental strategies and initiatives regarding regional learning?

NO:

- Why not?

- Do you think an interaction could be useful? Why?

- What needs to be done to establish an interaction?

- Would you personally be interested in supporting such an interaction? Why (not)?

YES:

- With whom do you interact?

- What issues does the interaction cover?
- How do you approach each other?
- How did the interaction evolve?
- Do you have regular meetings?
- Do you make future plans for the region together with local organisations?
- According to your own opinion, who provides more ideas for regional learning development, colleagues from the administration or local actors?
- Which suggestions are more likely to be realised yours or those from local actors?
- Is there a distinction between suggestions stemming from local organisations and the public administration sectors?
- Where do you get your ideas for project suggestions?

4. **Indirect support: Interaction between public administration sector and knowledge institutes in formulating and implementing regional strategies and initiatives for learning:**

- Do you interact with knowledge institutions in order to formulate and implement governmental strategies and initiatives regarding regional learning?

NO:

- Why not?
- Do you think a interaction could be useful? Why?
- What needs to be done to establish an interaction?
- Would you personally be interested in supporting such an interaction? Why (not)?

YES:

- With whom do you interact?
- What issues does the interaction cover?
- How do you approach each other?
- How did the interaction evolve?
- Do you have regular meetings?
- Do you make future plans for the region together with knowledge institutes?
- According to your own opinion, who provides more ideas for regional learning development, colleagues from the administration or colleagues or from knowledge institutes?
- Which suggestions are more likely to be realised, yours or those from knowledge institutes?
- Is there a distinction between suggestions stemming from the knowledge sector and the public administration sectors?

- Where do you get your ideas for project suggestions?

5. Gender equality and young people in regional learning:

- Is gender –equality an objective in supporting regional learning strategies?

  o How do you operationalize gender equality?

  o Why do you approach this issue in such way?

  o Do you think gender inequality is a problem in this region? Why?

- How do you address young people in regional learning?

6. Clarifications

- In addition, you might want clarify issues which you have already identified during your literature study but which are not clear to you yet. For example, in the Westerkwartier, one question shall deal with:

- Regarding programma landelijke ontwikkeling, which objectives are given most priority in the Westerkwartier

  o How are these realized?

APPENDIX III

DERREG Iɴᴛᴇʀᴠɪᴇᴡ ɢᴜɪᴅᴇʟɪɴᴇ ғᴏʀ KNOWLEDGE SUPPORT STRUCTURE

From the pillar 'knowledge' the regional (supportive) infrastructure for capacity building, learning and innovation: education, research and consultancy (agents and agencies) needs to be investigated.

Documentation and analysis of regional (supportive) infrastructure

1. **Check up**

- Do we have a complete list of relevant knowledge institutes?
- Do we know their fields of activity?

2. **Available regional supportive infrastructure**

Fields of competences considered

- Which fields of competences are considered by the regional means to support regional learning (e.g. projects, programmes, facilities) ?
    - Why has this selection been made?
    - Who has selected these fields?
    - What is the significance of these fields for the future sustainability of the region?
- In your opinion, are these fields the most important to consider for regional development and regional learning?
    - In your own opinion, if you had no restrictions, which other fields of competences would you like to support in the region? Why?

Available supportive means to support regional learning (e.g. projects, facilities…)

- What kind of means to support learning do you (your institution) offer for the region?
    - Why did you provide this type of means to support learning?
    - Who decided on this mean of support?
    - Who finances this mean of support?
- For which sectors do you provide supportive means for regional learning?
- In your opinion, which additional sectors will need a supportive means for regional learning?

  o Why do these sectors need a supportive means for learning?

  o Why are these not yet provided?

  o What needs to happen so that these sectors can also be supported?

<u>Supported regional actors</u>

- Towards which kind of actors are the regional supportive means for learning directed to?

  o Who selects these actors?

  o How did you select for these actors?

  o Why did you select these actors?

3. Gender equality and young people

- Is gender –equality an objective in providing an infrastructure for regional learning?

  o How do you operationalise gender equality?

  o Why do you approach this issue in such way?

  o Do you think gender inequality is a problem in this region? Why?

4. Interaction between knowledge pillar and local actors (e.g. citizens, business people, projects…):

- Do you interact with local actors in order to decide on necessary fields of knowledge, actors to support and learning means to create?

- **NO:**

  o Why not?

  o Do you think an interaction could be useful? Why?

  o What needs to be done to establish a interaction?

  o Would you personally be interested in supporting such an interaction? Why (not)?

- **YES:**

  o With whom do you interact?

- o What issues does the interaction cover?

- o How do you approach each other?

- o How did the interaction evolve?

- o Do you have regular meetings?

- o Do you make future plans for the region together with local organisations?

- o According to your own opinion, who provides more ideas for regional learning development, colleagues from knowledge institutes or people from local actors?

- o Which suggestions are more likely to be realised yours or those from local actors?

- o Is there a difference between suggestions stemming from local actors and knowledge institutes?

- o Where do you get your ideas for project suggestions?

5. Interaction between knowledge institutes and public administration:

- Do you interact with public administration in order to decide on necessary fields of knowledge, actors to support and learning means to create?

- **NO:**

  - o Why not?

  - o Do you think an interaction could be useful? Why?

  - o What needs to be done to establish an interaction?

  - o Would you personally be interested in supporting such a interaction? Why (not)?

- **YES:**

  - o With whom do you interact?

  - o What issues does the interaction cover?

  - o How do you approach each other?

  - o How did the interaction evolve?

  - o Do you have regular meetings?

o Do you make future plans for the region together with public administration?

o According to your own opinion, who provides more ideas for regional learning development, colleagues from the public administration or colleagues or from knowledge institutes?

o Which suggestions are more likely to be realised, yours or those from public administration?

o Is there a distinction between suggestions stemming from the knowledge sector and the public administration sectors?

o Where do you get your ideas for project suggestions?

6. Clarifications

- In Westerkwartier, for example, I will ask them about specific instruments and programmes to facilitate regional learning because I have not found this information in the literature.

Analysis of intra/ extra regional network of co-operating public and private agents/ agencies

1. Check up

- What networks are there?

2. Cooperation of (public/ private) agencies within the region

- Which public sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

  o How do public sectors cooperate? What do they do?

- Which private sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

  o How do private sectors cooperate? What do they do?

- Do private and public sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

  o How do they cooperate together? What do they do?

- Can you give me practical examples of the different types of co-operations?

3. **Cooperation between (public/ private) agencies between neighbouring regions**

- Which public sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

    o   How do public sectors cooperate? What do they do?

- Which private sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

    o   How do private sectors cooperate? What do they do?

- Do private and public sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

    o   How do they cooperate together? What do they do?

- Can you give me practical examples of the different types of co-operations?

4. **Cooperation between (public/ private) agencies across national boarders**

- Which public sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

    o   How do public sectors cooperate? What do they do?

- Which private sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

    o   How do private sectors cooperate? What do they do?

- Do private and public sectors cooperate together to ensure regional learning?

    o   How do they cooperate together? What do they do?

- Can you give me practical examples of the different types of co-operations?

5. **Accessibility of supra-national agencies for regional actors**

- How accessible are supra-national agencies for regional actors?

- Specify by field of knowledge and type of sector

- Which supra-national agencies can be approached and what are their aims?

APPENDIX IV

DERREG INTERVIEW GUIDELINE FOR GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

1. General information:

- Can you briefly explain the purpose of INITIATIVE+?
- Since when does it exist? When was it established?
- Who are your members?
- What is your role in this initiative?
- How long have you been part of this initiative?
- Why did you decide to join the initiative?

2. Evolution and support:

- Who is the founder of this initiative? Who had the initial idea?
    - Why did the idea arise to create this initiative?
    - What sort of problem does the initiative want to solve?
- Did the initiative receive support to establish itself?
- From the public administration pillar:
    - Who supported you?
    - Why did they support you?
    - How did they support you?
    - Do you have someone else in mind you would like to collaborate for support but which has not yet been realised?
    - Are you still receiving support?
- From knowledge institutes:
    - Who supported you?
    - Why did they support you?
    - How did they support you?
    - Do you have someone else in mind you would like to collaborate for support but which has not yet been realised?
    - Are you still receiving support?
- How did the initiative develop from its beginning until now?
    - Did you make formulised agreements?
    - Does the initiative have a physical space to meet or to show that it exists?
- How would you evaluate the evolution of the initiative?

3. Activities:

- What activities do you do within the initiative?
- Do you remember the first activities in the initiative? Did the sort of activities you do change of the years?

- o Why did they change?
- I am specifically interested to know whether this initiative helps its members to learn from each other, to develop skills and to exchange experiences with each other. Would you say your initiative provides room for these activities?
  - o How would you say that members learn from each other? Can you give me an example?
  - o Do you also provide trainings/ workshops? Organise meetings with experts etc?
- Can you give me an example?
  - o How do you finance these meetings?
  - o How do you decide what training to offer/ expert to invite?
- What is your personal opinion about the activities of this initiative?
- Do you think you have benefitted from the activities offered?
  - o How?
  - o Can you give me an example?
- Do you think that the initiative as changed something for its members?
  - o How?
  - o Why?
- Where do you get ideas for these workshops?
  - o Do members of the initiative ask for specific trainings?
- Do you receive many requests from non-members who would like to join?
- How do they find out about you?
  - o Do members have to pay to participate?
  - o Do they have to fulfil certain requirements?
  - o Is there a certain group of people that cannot participate? Why?

4. Future & Goals:

- What is the goal of your initiative?

  What are your future plans? Can you give me a concrete example?

  What is your personal goal for your future with this initiative?

  Can you name other initiatives that I could interview?

Notes