Obstacles to achieving cross-border tourism governance: A multi-scalar approach focusing on the German-Czech borderlands

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify distinctive obstacles to the establishment of tourism destination governance in both transnational and within-country borderlands. Analysis of the German-Czech borderlands, a region also incorporating within-country borders between three German federal states, indicates the multi-scalar and political contestations of cross-border tourism collaboration. Local tourism projects are generally successful, both on a transnational German-Czech level and between the German states of Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia. However, structural cross-border destination management does not exist because of (transnational) multi-scalar institutional alignment problems and (internal) tourism-specific destination-level power contestations. Understanding destination management processes in borderlands, therefore, requires: (i) explicit multi-scalar analysis; (ii) recognition of both transnational and within-country contexts; (iii) more cross-pollination between tourism planning and cross-border governance research.

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Introduction

Tourism can function as a viable strategy for transboundary regions to overcome border-related barriers that otherwise inhibit socio-economic development and political cooperation (Prokkola, 2007; Timothy, 2001). Observers have established that structural governance and planning processes are fundamental when utilizing tourism to achieve regional development aims in such areas (Blasco, Guia, & Prats, 2014). Through inclusive and participative stakeholder contact, governance processes could empower all tourism-related stakeholders so that the positive and negative impacts of tourism development are socially and spatially balanced throughout the destination (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016). However, previous research in cross-border settings has indicated that the creation of tourism governance structures has generally been unsuccessful (Blasco et al., 2014) with potentially adverse effects. Absence of participative cross-border cooperation leads to growing competition between neighbouring areas, duplication of efforts in marketing or infrastructure development, and faltering regional innovation due to weak knowledge transfer (Ilbery & Saxena, 2011; Ioannides, Nielsen, & Billing, 2006; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017; Weidenfeld, 2013). Such situations weaken bottom-up support for projects (Lim, 2016), thus undermining long-term stability of the borderlands as attractive destinations.

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Several research gaps exist when it comes to explaining the noted lack of success in attempts to establish tourism governance in borderlands. First, the tourism planning literature covers borders only implicitly by reflecting on territorial limitations of decision-making power. Second, studies on cross-border tourism generally concentrate on the transnational level, ignoring the fact that territorial delimitations ranging from municipal and regional boundaries to national borders all pose management complexities (Lovelock & Boyd, 2006; Timothy, 2001). Third, both cross-border governance research and cross-border tourism studies have paid sparse attention to power relations. Yet, tourism planning scholars have widely acknowledged that destination-level governance is highly politicized and involves power relations among different stakeholders, who aim at shaping the tourism system in their favour. They have shown that the distribution and use of power is key toward understanding the development direction of tourism in destinations and for deducing who profits from these processes (Farmaki, Altinay, Botterill, & Hilke, 2015). Intrinsic contestations between tourism stakeholders, resulting from the composite and global-local characteristics of the present-day tourism sector, may limit the success of destination governance in reaching intended regional development outcomes (Farmaki, 2015). Flexible ways of network governance have been identified to counter this tendency, yet evidence relating to their higher empowering capacity is sketchy (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008).

These research gaps lead us to ask three questions. First, how do multi-scalar power processes in larger cross-border governance structures influence tourism destination management in borderlands? Second, in what way does the inherently
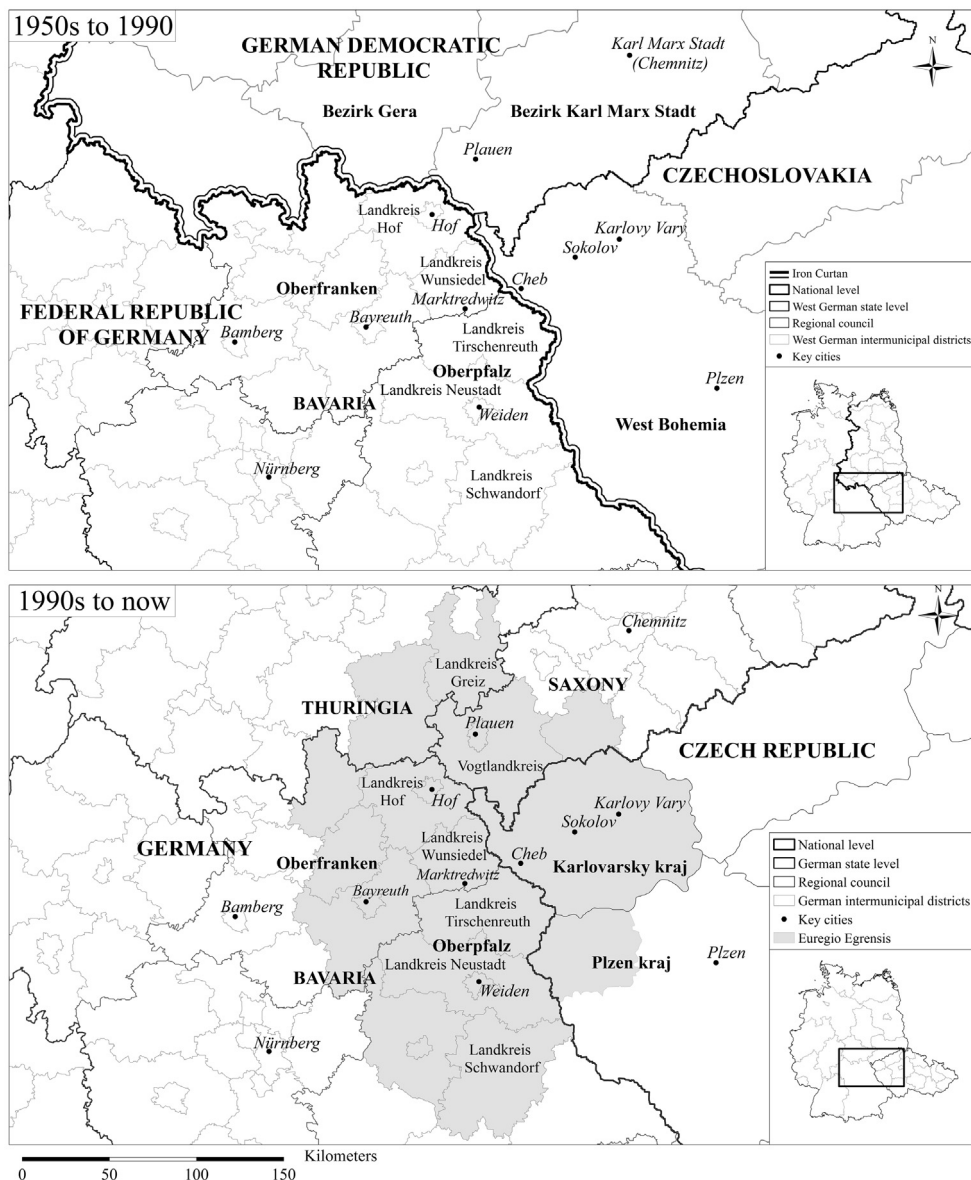

Fig. 1. Evolution of the administrative delineation of the German-Czech borderlands.

contested nature of tourism governance and planning facilitate or hinder cross-border destination management? Third, how do transnational and within-country borderlands compare in this respect?

We argue that strengthening the links between the tourism planning literature – with its explicit discussion of power relations, and cross-border governance research – with its attention to the impact of borders and borderland settings on cross-border cooperative arrangements, could help tackle these questions. Positioning our research at the intersection of these literatures enables identification of distinctive obstacles to establishing borderland tourism governance; improves the conceptualization of tourism as a multi-scalar, power-infused process in borderland settings; and transcends the often axiomatic transnational region-to-region analysis in cross-border tourism research.

Governance in the German-Czech borderlands

We chose a case study of a Central European region to illustrate the multi-scalar and politicized nature of cross-border tourism governance. The borderlands between Germany, covering parts of the federal states of Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia, as well as Karlovarsky kraj in the Czech Republic have witnessed fluctuating relations over the last century (see Fig. 1). Though highly integrated before World War II when German was spoken throughout the region, the forced removal of German-speakers from the Czech Republic and the inflow of new people in the Czech borderlands following the War broke down previously existing social ties. The Iron Curtain drastically separated other aspects of political and economic life between the West German Bavaria, the East German councils that comprise present-day Saxony and Thuringia, and Karlovarsky kraj. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the general policy rhetoric has rapidly shifted, given the increasingly positive reflection on the development potential of this specific Central European transboundary region (BermanGroup, 2013; Freistaat Bayern, 2007; Working4Talent, 2012). The region currently aims to cooperate on equal terms between Bavaria, Saxony-Thuringia, and Karlovarsky kraj. One example is Euregio Egrensis, an organization established in 1993 with region-building aims for these borderlands. Because of the recent cooperation in the 'within-Germany' but also the German-Czech borderlands, which have connected histories but different administrative structures, the complexity of borderland tourism governance can be clearly crystallized and compared across scales.

Literature review

Scalar power relations in cross-border governance

Since the 1970s, EU regional policy has gradually increased emphasis on cross-border cooperation to promote the functioning of Europe as a single economic market, improve regional competitiveness, and foster social cohesion (Jakola, 2016; Johnson, 2009). Commentators have documented the enhanced permeability of administrative boundaries as influenced by increasing flexibility in scalar governance configuration and proliferation of political actions on global and regional scales (Brenner, 1999; Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2004).

However, the literature on territorial restructuring and cross-border governance has identified important political and scalar dynamics making it "incorrect to assume that regionalism occurring with the financial blessing of the EU is simply the regional scale (transboundary place) being activated by another scale (EU) to create success stories at yet another scale (global)" (Johnson, 2009, p. 187). The so-called Euroregions constitute a good illustration of this scalar interplay of cross-border levels. These territorial configurations are often mentioned as key drivers for the EU-inspired cross-border development logic. Euroregions simultaneously function as cross-border information brokers, horizontal networks of public authorities, and vertical networks of multi-level agencies on both sides of the border (Perkmann, 1999).

Simultaneously, previous research demonstrates that Euroregions remain embedded in nationally organized territorial and administrative structures as well as socio-cultural characteristics (Church & Reid, 1999; Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). This embeddedness serves to limit their autonomy, while asymmetry in institutional organization on both sides of the border impedes their decision-making power (García-Álvarez & Trillo-Santamaría, 2013; Knippschild, 2011). For example, while cooperation in the German-Czech Euroregions can be described as successful, Jurczek (2002) argues that the contrasting national planning systems in which these Euroregions are embedded lower the effectiveness of transnational projects.

While the dependency of cross-border arrangements such as Euroregions on national structures is regularly noted, Princen, Geuijen, Candel, Folgerts, and Hooijer (2016) call for a broader focus to understand cross-border governance outcomes. They argue that cross-border cooperation is framed in complex governance arrangements and political and identity discourses that operate not only in but also beyond existing formal institutions. The lack of integrated cross-border practices results in "the collection of, largely ad hoc and unrelated, activities by professionals and organizations within local government, which together produce a specific pattern of cross-border co-operation" (Princen et al., 2016, p. 502). Cross-border development plans from EU regional policy can become locally internalized, yet with contextualized path-dependency in adopting these perspectives (Jakola, 2016). Johnson (2009) adds that local and regional actors do not simply abide by top-down regionalization strategies, but have appropriated the power to use existing European-level cross-border development frameworks to pursue their own strategies. In the process, local stakeholders may even move local projects away from the intended goals of EU regional policy in favour of their particular interests (Johnson, 2009). For instance, Ioannides et al.

(2006) show that spatial mismatches between extra-regionally oriented, EU-inspired development territories and the local clustering of concrete project aims on the Swedish-Finnish border were not conducive to fostering effective cross-border collaboration.

Following from the noted power of local stakeholders to adopt and change top-down cross-border cooperation programs, the importance of local informal agreements in enabling exchange between two legal-institutional frameworks separated by a border cannot be underestimated. Studies indicate that beyond formalized transboundary political cooperation it is the personal contacts between the two sides that often strengthen innovation and knowledge exchange (Weidenfeld, 2013). In the German-Dutch borderlands, for instance, informal arrangements allow transnational legal mismatches to be overcome. Ambulances are officially not allowed to cross the German-Dutch border due to German laws prohibiting cross-border transport of certain medications. In practice, however, ambulances cross the border despite such rules since local practitioners assess the necessity to align the regional healthcare system themselves (Princen et al., 2016). Conversely, the importance of individuals in adapting to cross-border governance complexities may also make such processes vulnerable to a variety of factors, such as linguistic differences or the willingness of key stakeholder to cooperate in the first place. For example, when referring to Euregio Egrensis in the German-Czech borderlands, Jurczek (2002) shows that cross-cultural prejudices stunt the otherwise positive transnational cooperation in the area. Trust creation through both formal and informal cooperative arrangements is, therefore, paramount for cross-border governance stability (Trippl, 2010).

Hence, European cross-border regionalization processes are characterized by struggles for power and sometimes contrasting policies of stakeholders operative at different scales. The emerging pattern of cross-border cooperation does not always occur because of formalized strategies. Rather, it may result through decentralized and contextual processes occurring within formal cooperation frameworks (Perkmann, 1999; Princen et al., 2016; Tölle, 2013). This intricate scalar composition of cross-border cooperation regularly leads to high net transaction costs for coordinating between multiple stakeholders with different power positions (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). Informal arrangements could lower these although they increase the gross transaction costs. As such, balancing between internal and border-crossing goals may place growing pressure on organizational capacities of local administrations and other local stakeholders, trust relations, and socio-cultural dimensions in cross-border governance (Leibenath, 2007).

Scalar power relations in tourism destination management

Within the general transnational governance literature, tourism regularly features as a prominent political strategy in European cross-border development plans and a major source of transnational municipal project work in Euroregions (Blasco et al., 2014; Church & Reid, 1999; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017). However, using tourism as a strategy to increase regional competitiveness requires integration of the sector and its stakeholders in regional socio-economic and political contexts, something that is complicated (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016). Adiyia, Stoffelen, Jennes, Vanneste, and Ahebwa (2015) point to the inherently overlapping multi-scalar and multi-sectoral composition of tourism governance in this respect. They identify an internal-external and horizontal-vertical tourism governance dichotomy (see Table 1) to explain the often observed disempowerment of certain actors in the web of tourism stakeholder relations.

The composite and multi-scalar characteristics of tourism governance mean that tourism planning and policy inherently must deal with contestations and power struggles for control over stakeholder interactions, discourses, and development directions (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007). Hall (2011) distinguishes between hierarchical, market, network and community governance types, each having different characteristics in dealing with this situation. In the hierarchical sphere, state governments are still seen as the main coordination levels between different stakeholder interests. However, dealing with horizontal-external governance complexities such as interjurisdictional planning, and vertical-external governance in multi-scalar public-private cooperation, is often limited (Adiyia et al., 2015). Market-based governance, where private tourism stakeholders have been empowered with planning influence, has by and large failed to achieve self-regulation, and equity aspects of corporatist planning are notoriously limited. Network governance is increasingly seen to achieve a balance between public and private sector interests, but may also be self-serving rather than benefiting the interests of the larger collective. Community governance has highlighted the importance of participation in tourism planning to maintain power and control over decision-making processes among local stakeholders, but has received criticism for exaggerating

Table 1
Spheres of tourism governance. Based on Adiyia et al. (2015, p. 116).

	Internal	External
Horizontal	Coordination between same-scale governmental tourism-related policy domains (e.g. tourism, spatial planning, economy)	Coordination between same-scale tourism-related stakeholders from public, private, community and voluntary sectors, also across territorial units
Vertical	Multi-scalar coordination between governmental tourism-related policy domains	Coordination between tourism-related stakeholders from public, private, community and voluntary sectors, operating on different scales and in different territorial units and networks

community benefits. Altogether, the "integration capacity might depend on the inclusiveness of the planning process and the conditions influencing actors' perceived pay-offs from participation" within each governance type (Hall, 2011, p. 447).

From these tourism policy and planning perspectives, borders can be interpreted as being part of the solution through establishing horizontal and task-specific modes of governing. The focus on tourism for cross-border regional development by administrative-governmental actors can, in this framework, also be seen as a tool for gaining socio-economic and political power through adhering to larger European-level development rhetoric (Jakola, 2016). Conversely, territorial delimitations and borders may also function as additional hindrances to sustainability. They may lead to situations where "different inter-est groups in the region are participating in the regionalization process in different ways" (Prokkola, 2007, p. 133). For exam-ple, Ilbery and Saxena (2011) show that incompatible visions on tourism branding among businesses, tourism boards and local authorities on either side of the English-Welsh border consolidate rather than overcome competition between both sides. In this respect, additional efforts to establish effective stakeholder coordination are required in cross-border contexts to avoid the cementation of power (im)balances and the asymmetrical development of borderland destinations (Altinay & Bowen, 2006; Ioannides et al., 2006).

Study area and methods

The German-Czech borderlands symbolize larger political processes of EU-inspired cross-border region-building. While the opening of the border has been regarded as an asset for future regional development since 1989, the area's socio-economic situation has remained marginal. Absolute economic contrasts between these borderlands are noticeably high, with purchasing power levels in Karlovarsky kraj being 50% and in Saxony 67% of those in northern Bavaria (Eurostat, 2015). However, these regions' socio-economic characteristics are similarly weak when compared to the state or country they are respectively located in (see Table 2). Decline of the porcelain, glass and textile industry in the last decades has undermined the regional economy, giving the Bavarian part the nickname *Bayerisch Sibirien* (Identität & Image Coaching AG, 2007). Further, because it is geographically and economically peripheral, the region has witnessed high out-migration rates, population ageing, low educational levels and suppressed incomes (BermanGroup, 2013).

Cross-border tourism development and resource management have been noted in German-Czech INTERREG funded policy documents as possible solutions for dealing with these socio-economic issues (BermanGroup, 2013). Various

Table 2
Socio-economic and tourism indicators that reflect the peripherality of the study area. See also Stoffelen and Vanneste (2017, p. 6).

Area	GDP in purchasing power standard (2011)[a,x]	Unemployment % (mid-2014)[c,d]	Unemployment ratio (mid-2014)[b,x]	Net migration per 10,000 (2012)[b,c]	Rate of natural increase per 10,000 (2012)[b,c]
Oberfranken	0.82	4.1	1.14	18.4	−47.1
Oberpfalz	0.92	3.3	0.92	49.7	−26.4
Bavaria	1.00	3.6	1.00	73.4	−14.7
Vogtlandkreis	0.86	7.1	0.85	−18.3	−76.6
Saxony	1.00	8.4	1.00	28.9	−41
Karlovarsky kraj	0.72	8.8	1.47	−39.2	−8.33
Czech Republic	1.00	6.0	1.00	9.8	0.36

	Ratio people aged 65 + to 15− (2013)[a]	Avg. number of tourist beds per 1000 inhabitants (2012)[b,c]	Avg. number of beds per tourist establishment (2012)[b,c]	Avg. number of nights spent by tourists (2012)[b,c]	Domestic tourists in total arrivals% (2012)[b,c]
Oberfranken	1.70	35.09	38.49	2.60	89.97
Oberpfalz	1.45	36.96	40.38	2.62	85.26
Bavaria	1.47	44.15	43.59	2.70	76.59
Vogtlandkreis	2.46	34.05	52.08	4.45	96.95
Saxony	2.06	29.23	55.42	2.60	88.95
Karlovarsky kraj	1.09	109.29	65.74	5.90	35.21
Czech Republic	1.13	44.93	61.85	2.90	47.50

Sources:
[a] Eurostat (2015).
[b] Regionaldatenbank Deutschland (2015).
[c] Český statistický úřad (2015).
[d] Bundesagentur für Arbeit. (2015).
[x] ratio with the average of the state of reference.

important tourism resources are spread throughout this transboundary region and are relatively compatible on both sides of the border. These include high-profile spas attracting many international tourists, most notably in Karlovarsky kraj, possibilities for outdoor activities in the region's low mountains, and cultural offerings and festivals in various towns. Additionally, several small Bavarian museums nostalgically highlight the integrated cross-border life in the area before World War II.

Study methods

Our aim to analyse not only the composition of cross-border tourism governance relations, but also the existence of power struggles and the experienced obstacles by key stakeholders in this process, led us to organize a qualitative inquiry. We focused on semi-structured in-depth interviews combined with policy document analysis to compare the content of the main policy strategies, institutional contact channels and cross-border experiences of tourism stakeholders. Prior to conducting field work, we mapped expert stakeholders through desk research and an initial policy document study. We contacted these stakeholders via email and telephone to arrange interview dates. During the two field stages in the summers of 2013 and 2014, additional snowball sampling complemented the stakeholder mapping. A total of 65 stakeholders were approached with interview requests. Especially in the Czech Republic, contact with regional gatekeepers of the multi-scalar tourism system proved key for overcoming low initial response rates. In the end, the interviewees included policymakers and public-private stakeholders operating from local to state scales, who are directly or indirectly connected to tourism. They also included stakeholders in regional development, community development, planning, and/or natural resource management sectors. A total of 17 interviews were conducted in Bavaria, 12 in the Czech Republic and 6 in Saxony and Thuringia. The comparatively small number of interviewees in Saxony/Thuringia is explained by the low territorial and thematic overlap of tourism and regional development organizations in this area (see the 'Structuring role of national tourism governance systems' section), the presence of fewer administrative levels than in Bavaria (see Fig. 1), and non-response from state-wide agencies.

In some interviews we addressed more than one stakeholder. Thus, in final analysis, a total of 51 interviewees discussed their views and experiences on the researched topics. While we achieved a high coverage of public and public-private stakeholders with cross-border tourism and regional development aims, private sector stakeholders were underrepresented in this sample.

All interviews had a similar set-up. A semi-structured topic list was created on the basis of the literature analysis to define the main items discussed in the interviews. These items included the position and role of the contacted stakeholder in the national tourism governance structure; destination-level marketing and management structures; cross-border actions and strategies from the contacted stakeholder; and more generally, socio-economic study area characteristics. Considerable freedom was given to the interviewees to elaborate on their experiences and bring up their own assessments of the discussed items, while the overall focus of the interviews was safeguarded with use of the topic list.

We recorded and transcribed all interviews. After member-checking, the interview transcripts were thematically processed with the use of NVivo® 10. To deal with the broad range of socio-spatial contexts, the multidimensional nature of the topics covered, and the different qualitative data sources, we created an iterative coding and post-coding scheme that guided us during the data analysis. First, we assigned descriptive topic labels to the content of the unprocessed interview transcripts and policy documents (Cope, 2010). We followed a 'middle-order approach' to simultaneously categorize larger structures and maintain close descriptive connection to the data (Saldaña, 2009). The resulting nodes were aggregated in a pattern coding scheme to create structure and initially explore relations between the emerging empirical topics. Subsequently, we used the literature analysis for preparation of the semi-structured interviews to create a predetermined set of researcher-generated nodes. This occurred after the descriptive and pattern coding to avoid an overly determining effect of the conceptual framework on the empirical data analysis.

The resulting provisional coding scheme was subsequently compared to the earlier derived pattern codes of the empirical material. This way, the emerging interview findings were structurally compared and combined with the underlying conceptual framework of the study. In turn, this resulted in a new hierarchical coding blueprint (Saldaña, 2009). More hierarchical nodes have a higher level of conceptual abstraction while lower levels are more descriptively connected to the empirical data. Thus, one interlinks explicitly grounded first order concepts with second-order themes and, finally, aggregate dimensions that relate to more tacit processes implicitly discussed in the data such as different practical operationalizations of the multi-level governance concept (Altinay, Saunders, & Wang, 2014; Corley & Gioia, 2004). The interview transcripts were re-coded according to this new scheme.

In the post-coding phase of the data analysis, an analytical document was created through shortly summarizing per node the main content of the hierarchically coded data. By cross-linking between nodes, policy documents and field notes, we identified relevant themes, larger processes, interactions and contestations in the coded data. A higher level of conceptual abstraction was sought by a new round of connecting the triangulated summaries to scientific literature. We selected the quotes presented below on the basis of their illustrative value for larger tendencies identified in the analytical document.

Results

Transnational and within-country cross-border tourism projects

Since the early 1990s, Euregio Egrensis and European funding programs have institutionally supported cross-border contact between Germany and the Czech Republic (Jurczek, 2002). Referring to the increased process of European region-building after the fall of the Iron Curtain, most interviewees identified tourism but also culture and nature as the most important sectors for cross-border cooperation. This finding conforms with the scientific literature (Blasco et al., 2014; Church & Reid, 1999). Of particular note has been the surge of cross-border trails; at least 11 waymarked transnational and interstate routes exist now in the study area. Interestingly, most transboundary tourism projects, including these trails, traverse the German-Czech border rather than the administratively and socio-culturally more similar within-Germany borderlands.

Transnational Germany-Czech Republic tourism projects

Several explanations exist as to tourism's important role in local-level project development between Germany and the Czech Republic. First, considering the preponderance of small scale projects, success in their establishment depends on the personal network of individual key stakeholders, such as municipal mayors, rather than formal institutional alignment. Intensive personal contacts help overcome language barriers and cultural differences in professional habits, both of which have been identified by the interviewees as bottlenecks for cross-border cooperation in most other sectors. Second, some interviewees see tourism as a sector with a symbolic role for breaking down existing mental barriers. To them, tourism is an important tool for creating a shared community feeling, for refuelling regional self-esteem that had broken down because of the Iron Curtain and the recent socio-economic decline, and for increasing the quality of life of the area's inhabitants. Therefore, many cross-border tourism projects aim both at reaching tourists and local community members. The following two quotes highlight these findings:

> I think it's often a question of [who the] person [is]. When you have a person who is not the devil [himself] in person [laughs] you can work together. It's a normal fact. (Mayor, German borderland town)
> It's about getting to know other countries, getting to know your neighbour. I mean, it's the easiest instrument or tool to make people know each other better. (. . .) And the [cycling] trail, it's not so difficult to develop. It's not like a highway infrastructure. (Czech NGO with cycling tourism aims)

Finally, local stakeholders wish to engage in cross-border tourism projects since these provide indirect economic gains or advantages in competitiveness. Mostly, they mention the possibility for Czech stakeholders to tap into the German source market for tourists. For German interviewees, the connection to the internationally high-profile spa towns in Karlovarsky kraj is a key motivation. They regard cross-border shopping trips as significant add-ons on both sides:

> I think nowadays it [the borderland location] is becoming more and more an advantage because we also learn to profit from Marienbad, Karlsbad and all those [spa] sites, and the touristic attractions that are just over the border. (Regional development department, German inter-municipal district)
> It's an advantage to be a border region because you have really a lot of tourists from Germany. And also, (. . .) there are shopping trips from Germany to the Czech Republic, or Germans go to the hairdresser and to the dentist and to anyone on the Czech part. (Representative, Czech national tourism association)

Considering the weak socio-economic profile of the borderland towns, all local stakeholders see the possibility to co-fund projects with INTERREG support as an important incentive for cross-border project development. These findings render support for the success and necessity of the Euregio Egrensis practices. Personal contacts among policy makers have become widespread on local scales as a result of Euregio Egrensis coordination of the INTERREG small project fund. However, interviewees from (semi-)public institutions like Karlovarsky kraj administrations, German Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and Euregio Egrensis note that, despite positive developments, most cross-border practices are performed by a limited number of public sector professionals. Private sector cross-border tourism cooperation is practically absent due to high inter-firm competition. Reaching community members with local cross-border tourism projects remains a challenge.

Within-country Bavaria-Saxony/Thuringia tourism projects

Tourism practices across the 'within-Germany' border are also project-based but, generally speaking, entail a lower involvement of municipalities and local social groups. The regional Bavarian and Saxonian-Thuringian DMOs dominantly initiate projects in absence of cooperation incentives by European co-funding for local stakeholders. Therefore, interviewed representatives from Bavarian municipalities, Bavarian DMOs, and Euregio Egrensis area offices all reflect that there are fewer tourism projects across the Bavaria-Saxony border compared to the Bavaria-Czech Republic context. Also, representatives from the Saxonian borderland DMO note the generally low intensity of interstate projects. Nevertheless, their contact with Bavarian stakeholders remains simpler than their cooperation with Karlovarsky kraj. General relations between the German states are still described as 'normal'. Supporting the argument that socio-economic differences and cultural

exchange possibilities are prime incentives for cross-border contact (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011), interviewees noted a lower necessity to cooperate because of fewer socio-economic and language contrasts than with the Czech Republic:

> *I guess it's less necessary to make the projects, because everything is built up and this… you don't need to support it from a public fund or in a public way. (…) And, [in any case] there are no funds! (German borderland DMO)*
> *It's 20 or 25 years after the revolution, there's no more problem in communication or something between Saxony and Bavaria. I think there's a normal communication over borders. I think there's no problem. We have partnerships. (Area manager, Euregio Egrensis)*

Transnational tourism governance on a structural basis

On local levels, a relative intensity of cross-border tourism projects could thus be identified, especially across the transnational German-Czech border. Yet, no local-level structural cross-border alignment of tourism strategies and joint destination management currently takes place. All interviewees operating from local to extra-regional scales highlight the necessity to coordinate this structural governance in regional institutions. On the one hand, local levels are unable to position themselves at the crossroads of local project actions, destination-wide tourism efforts and extra-regional strategic institutions. On the other hand, extra-regional tourism projects such as the *Iron Curtain Trail* are not in a position to become central destination management institutions because of their weak local embeddedness. The centres of decision-making of the projects are located far away from the actual borderlands where they occur. Practical local implementation of these projects is, therefore, often slow. All stakeholders interpret regional institutions to be in a prime position to combine contextual knowledge with strategic policies with a higher spatial, political and social distance from the actual border region:

> *I think most important would be on the regional level. Because the main decisions are made at the regional level, also in the Czech Republic. (…) I think it's much better to have transboundary cooperation between the regions or at least between the states. This is really important. (German NGO with cross-border projects)*
> *If you're thinking about cross-border development you need a person who is there, who is really there, who is near you. (…) It would be helpful if there was a partner at this place at the other side of the border. Not somewhere in Prague or whatever. (Regional development department, German inter-municipal district)*

Despite unanimity in judgement that structural tourism governance should be coordinated on the regional scale, border-related barriers for regional alignment of tourism efforts proved significantly higher than for actors operating on local scales. Specifically, for the tourism sector, there exists a noticeable contrast between high priorities for tourism projects by local stakeholders, and relatively low strategic emphasis on tourism in cross-border actions among regional political interviewees and policy plans. Consequently, the assessment of regional executive tourism resource managers on the success of their cross-border tourism actions is low compared to actors engaging in local-scale cross-border projects. The only positive remarks are made by an administrator at the Karlovarsky kraj council, who mentioned the presence of information flows on tourism products and two UNESCO world heritage status applications between the Czech region and the German borderland DMOs.

Structuring role of national tourism governance systems

Generally, the clear institutional mismatch between the German and Czech tourism governance systems impedes strategic transnational coordination and alignment of tourism management structures. This situation is most concretely reflected in the missing DMO structure in Karlovarsky kraj. Thus, German borderland DMOs lack a potential partner with similar responsibilities and organizational structures to cooperate with. Awareness of the functional mismatch of Czech and German tourism systems is present in all parts of the study area (BermanGroup, 2013):

> *In the Czech Republic every municipality makes its own tourism, and in our region we have the destination [organizations], who make common tourism managing. And so, sometimes it's a bit difficult to join the interests of both sides. The system is different. (Area manager, Euregio Egrensis)*
> *I understand at this moment in Bavaria they don't have appropriate partners on the Czech side. I understand it. Unfortunately, I think the main problem is in the political situation, and in their willingness (Karlovarsky kraj administration A)*

The absence of a Karlovarsky kraj DMO is just one of the structural mismatches of the German and Czech tourism governance systems. The Bavarian and Saxonian-Thuringian tourism governance systems have a strong vertical core structure with a clear scalar division of responsibilities among semi-public tourism institutions. State-wide organizations have responsibility for international marketing of the whole state. On the regional scale, the DMOs are highly empowered. They have daily responsibilities to internally manage and externally promote tourism destinations. The DMOs simultaneously represent the interests of their entrepreneurial members, align municipal touristic information centres, and subsume local destination agencies and community organizations. This way, they act as gatekeepers for the multi-level tourism governance system. Their decision-making is semi-independent, although most of their funding comes from inter-municipal districts, which also politically approve their strategies.

Indirect tourism governance organizations provide horizontal extensions to this vertically institutionalized governance structure. These extensions, which are more pronounced in Bavaria than in Saxony, result in spatial-territorial and thematic

overlaps of institutions. One example is the partial overlap in goals and territories of the Bavarian DMOs, nature parks and the geopark. Consequently, one nature park interviewee questioned the organizational efficiency, despite his positive assessment of the actions of individual organizations:

> *I think there are a lot of possibilities to fix some organizations better together. Say 'okay, this is your [organization A's] part of the work, this is your [organization B's] part of the work, but the administration, the head of it all is one organization'. It would make sense. (German borderland nature park)*

Both Bavarian and Saxonian interviewees highlighted the necessity, and the recent enhanced success, of the regional 'umbrella' functioning of the DMOs to counter the traditional village-centred mentality in the area. They identify this preference of working in small units as a bottleneck for destination-wide integration of tourism practices. This situation limits tourism's earlier mentioned symbolic role for breaking down mental barriers and creating a shared community feeling. Hence, the key scale of operation of the DMOs, the presence of indirect tourism institutions, and the traditionally disintegrated local mentality, force the DMOs to intensively focus on internal cooperation to successfully assume their regional role as brokers. Combined with a relatively low organizational workforce, most DMOs have an inward rather than transboundary orientation in their actions.

The Czech Republic's tourism governance structure differs markedly from the German system. While it is nationally institutionalized in one marketing agency, no regulation for destination-level management and funding exists:

> *So everything is… well, on a very wild basis. (…) It's like the wild east, you know. (…) Nobody knows who does what. (Representative, Czech national tourism association)*

As a result of this deregulated and underfinanced system, the destination management structure in the Czech Republic varies from region to region. In Karlovarsky kraj, the formal responsibility for marketing and managing tourism is located within the tourism administration of the political regional council. While this administration has recently developed an inclusive online platform and annual meetings where local tourism stakeholders can contribute, several mechanisms still impede its integrative functioning. First, some interviewees noted the impossibility of functionally integrating all tourism products and stakeholders in the large Karlovarsky kraj territory. Second, the tourism administration is notoriously underfunded with, for example, the spa town Karlovy Vary alone having a higher tourism budget. Third, the administrations are inflexible and slow due to limited autonomy. Every decision has to be individually approved by the political council. Moreover, contact between the tourism administration and the regional development administration, which manages cycling tourism and cross-border European programmes, is often minimal, leading to practical overlaps and inefficient resource use. Fourth, no public-private cooperation is present apart from individual contacts with large hotel groups and tour operators. Combined with a generally noted public-private distrust, small and medium enterprises miss out and are not directly represented on a regional scale (Working4Talent, 2012).

Tourism governance processes in Karlovarsky kraj are thus not conducive to integrating tourism in broader regional economic, political and social contexts. This results in the disempowered position of regional tourism managers in Karlovarsky kraj, following from national tourism politics and destination-specific cooperation struggles. This situation also seeps through to lower governance levels, thereby locking power relations between local public and private tourism actors in the multi-level governance system. One consequence is that every town in Karlovarsky kraj undertakes tourism projects without exchanging information with neighbouring villages (BermanGroup, 2013). The presence of tourism hotspots in the spa towns Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně further creates high competitiveness contrasts with their surrounding areas, despite recent trends towards extra-local cooperation in the Karlovarsky kraj tourism administration, LEADER Local Action Groups and Euregio Egrensis.

Despite the often positive reflections on the success of tourism in cross-border project development, this case shows that the tourism sector actually conforms to more generally noted cross-border governance complexities, at least when it comes to structural destination management rather than project development. Institutional asymmetry provides mostly extra-local coordination costs for structural transnational tourism governance between Germany and the Czech Republic (see Fig. 2). The scalar jump necessary to align the German DMOs with the Karlovarsky kraj tourism administration provides another major cooperation hindrance. Internal management issues – such as the inward orientation of German DMOs and the locally competitive tourism environment in Karlovarsky kraj – provide additional complications that can be traced back to the internal-external and horizontal-vertical tourism governance dichotomy as conceptualized by Adiyia et al. (2015). Reaching community and entrepreneurial stakeholders in cross-border cooperative structures is difficult and potentially unequally divided across the border because of contrasting multi-level power relations and, hence, the position of local stakeholders in the tourism governance structures of Germany and the Czech Republic.

Within-country tourism governance on a structural basis

Because of governance mismatches, tourism dynamics between regional institutions across the international German-Czech border are limited to the coordination of larger projects rather than structural management of shared resources and stakeholder relations. This is reflected in the development strategy of the INTERREG IV programme document. The document predominantly centres on creating tourism infrastructure and common marketing, mostly by-passing structural cooperation problems (Freistaat Bayern, 2007).
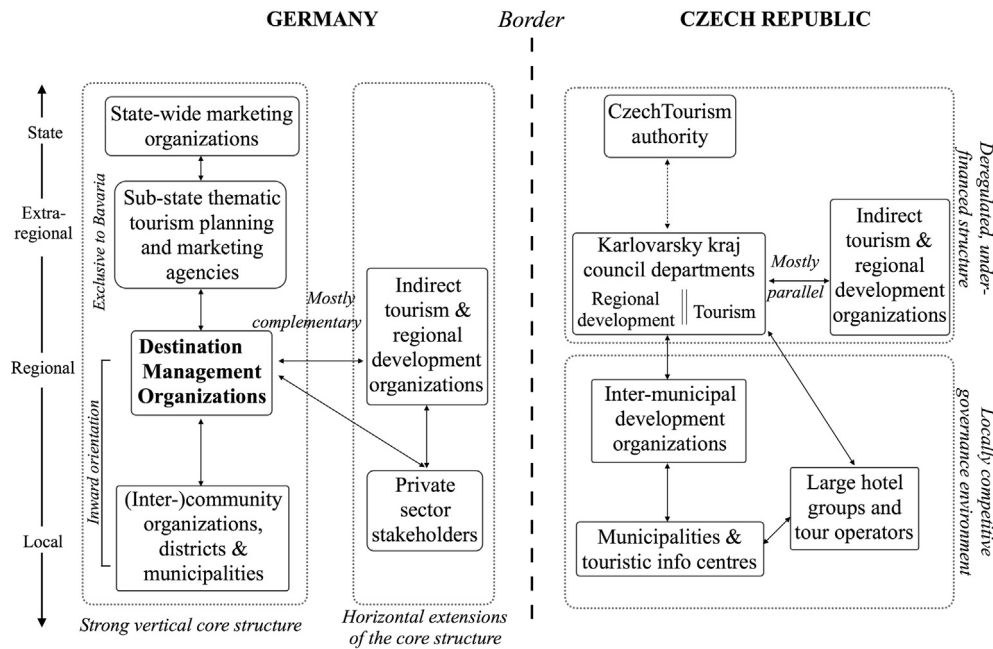
Fig. 2. Schematic representation of contrasting tourism governance systems in the German-Czech borderlands.

Considering the similarity of the vertically organized tourism governance systems in Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia, these German states do not encounter transaction costs resulting from scalar institutional incompatibilities. Nevertheless, interviewees indicate that structural interstate tourism management is also absent between these states. The inward orientation of the DMOs has resulted in a situation of simultaneous cooperation and competition ('co-opetition'), even between German DMOs within Bavaria or within Saxony. This limits most of their cooperation to common tourism products on a project base, for example standardizing the e-bike system of battery chargers and bike transport. No long-term strategic exchange of management information takes place between DMOs. One exception is the Vogtland DMO that, due to financial constraints, covers the south of both Saxony and Thuringia (Tourismusverband Vogtland, 2014). Since the German within-country borderlands are a meeting place of overarching tourism organizations with similar organizational structures but different strategic actions, establishing interstate DMO relations requires more efforts than inter-destination cooperation within the same state.

Further, different spatial planning systems and contrasting tourism funding structures make it difficult to pool funding sources in a single cross-border project. Hence, the interstate border also partly functions as a barrier for information flows and insights in strategies, motivations and concrete action plans, despite similar vertical tourism governance structures (Tölle, 2013). Taking into account the low level of human resources in tourism agencies, the system is dependent on the willingness and capacities of individuals in key positions. Additionally, the presence of two separated INTERREG schemes along the Bavaria-Karlovarsky kraj and Saxony-Karlovarsky kraj border means that financial incentives to overcome planning and financing mismatches are absent in the within-country Bavaria-Saxony/Thuringia borderlands. The aims of Euregio Egrensis to work in a triangle between Bavaria, Saxony-Thuringia and Karlovarsky kraj are consequently only facilitated across international borders.

One example highlighting these difficulties is the *Rennsteig* hiking trail. This is mostly located in Thuringia but crosses northern Bavaria for a short distance. When attempts were made to develop the Bavarian part of the trail, practical information sharing as well as structural planning and financing efforts were blocked because of breached information flows between the responsible agencies. The earlier noted 'taken for granted' attitude towards cooperation across the within-Germany border by some tourism-related stakeholders, resulting from relative similarity of tourism governance structures and socio-economic situations, further limits the intensity of cooperation:

> *We had some bad experiences in the past. We tried to make a project and this was very… difficult to get information, to get contacts, to speak together. (…) I can't order a planner to make these things when I don't have the information on how the Rennsteig looks, how the [corporate identity] is. (German borderland DMO)*

Hence, while the Bavaria-Saxony/Thuringia border has proven to be less limiting considering the absence of multi-scalar institutional mismatches and less explicit socio-economic contrasts, tourism governance across this within-country border is neither necessarily easy nor comprehensive. These findings reflect the absence of EU influences in within-country borderland tourism cooperation, not just because of the absence of project co-financing with INTERREG but also by lacking

Table 3
Cross-border tourism dynamics and their evaluation in the German-Czech borderlands.

	Cross-border tourism dynamics	Obstacles for cross-border tourism governance	Evaluation by stakeholders
Germany–Czech Republic	– Intensive local-level project work, mostly facilitated by INTERREG – No structural management or exchange between regional institutions – Limited amount of extra-regional projects	– Institutional incompatibility between Czech and German tourism governance systems – Internal destination management complexities in both borderlands – European funding support oriented at projects rather than structural alignment – Socio-cultural contrasts on operational levels	– Highly valued cross-selling potential with Czech spas and access to German markets – Large willingness to act on local levels – Rather negative evaluation of actions on regional management levels
Bavaria–Saxony/Thuringia	– Individual efforts to make projects compatible – Cross-border hiking, cycling trails – Strong Saxony-Thuringia DMO integration	– 'Co-opetive' relations between DMOs – Funding, planning mismatches within compatible governance systems – Absence of European funding support – Absence of (incentives to create) insights in the value of cooperation by key stakeholders	– Acknowledgement that not many projects are present – Rather positive in terms of relations – No priority for increasing contact intensity

adoption of larger EU-inspired development rhetoric among institutional brokers (Jakola, 2016). Tourism governance practices in both the transnational Germany-Czech Republic and the within-country Bavaria-Saxony/Thuringia borderlands are thus remarkably similar despite different underlying causes. In both cases, cross-border tourism dynamics are limited to local and regional projects while structural alignment of shared cross-border tourism resources and stakeholder relations remains marginal (see Table 3).

Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed to identify distinctively tourism-related barriers that complicate destination management in transnational and within-country borderlands. In a context of increased flexibility of governance structures and related cross-border regionalization processes, the study builds on the literature on cross-border governance and tourism policy and planning in three ways.

The first contribution regards the identification of the specificities of the tourism sector in cross-territorial cooperation. Scientists regularly tout tourism as one of the main themes in which cross-border project development could successfully take place (Church & Reid, 1999; Timothy, 2001). However, the results of the German-Czech borderlands case study indicate that while local project development may indeed be relatively successful, acting upon these cross-border projects for regional development is complicated. We have unravelled evidence that this results from the complex interplay between: (a) the inclusion of tourism in larger multi-level governance structures in borderlands, and; (b) the politicized and power-laden characteristics of tourism governance and planning following from the sector's multi-scalar, composite features.

Regarding larger cross-border governance structures, multi-scalar alignment issues such as institutional asymmetry are researched in detail in cross-border planning (e.g., García-Álvarez & Trillo-Santamaría, 2013; Knippschild, 2011; Perkmann, 1999; Tölle, 2013), but curiously, are underplayed in cross-border tourism studies. In the German-Czech borderlands, results indicate that such institutional asymmetry may largely influence the transnational management of tourism resources. In this area, structural destination management is most intensely affected because of the complex task regional institutions have for balancing between their broker role within their own territory and in transboundary arrangements. At the local level, German and Czech stakeholders prove more capable of overcoming cooperation difficulties. They locally empower themselves in the cross-border tourism governance landscape via contextual knowledge, personal contacts between policy-makers, and improvisation. These results confirm previous findings that when it comes to the local level and the case of project arrangements, informal contacts and trust relations reduce net transaction costs, hence facilitating cross-border information exchange in tourism (Altinay & Bowen, 2006; Princen et al., 2016; Trippl, 2010). This is not, however, the case when it comes to structural cross-border destination governance. Paradoxically, these findings show the limits of support schemes like INTERREG, at least for the German-Czech borderlands, that aim to overcome barriers for cooperation but do not fundamentally alter structural multi-scalar mismatches in cross-border tourism governance.

Regarding tourism-specific management complexities, the research supports the well-documented notion that inclusive stakeholder integration is an inherently arduous task due to the multi-scalar and multi-sectoral composition of tourism governance (Adiyia et al., 2015; Farmaki, 2015; Hall, 2011). It also reveals that borderland contexts put extra tension on power relations in tourism governance. For example, tourism coordination efforts adopt different forms in Germany and the Czech Republic, with an intricate combination of market-steered and hierarchical governance in the Czech Republic and more integrative networking in Germany (Hall, 2011). Consequently, the decision-making power regarding coordination of the tourism governance system is distributed differently among stakeholders with different scalar actions and power positions. These findings correspond with those of Ioannides et al. (2006) and Ilbery and Saxena (2011) who found that

cross-border tourism practices regularly remain conditioned by national institutional structures. However, contrary to these authors who note increased competition between borderland destinations, national institutional embeddedness and the meeting of fundamentally different ways of operationalization of tourism governance at the German-Czech border mostly moved regional development trajectories in different directions, without necessarily increasing inter-destination competition.

Hence, borderland contexts could be interpreted as inextricably interweaved with general destination management complexities and power relations as discussed in the tourism planning literature. Farmaki's (2015, p. 385) finding that "network governance-related challenges interact with region-specific characteristics, inhibiting the effectiveness of regional tourism governance", entails that the functioning of tourism governance in cross-border contexts cannot be understood when analysed in separation from their embedding in broader socio-political borderland settings. By cross-pollinating such insights in tourism cooperation with research on cross-border governance and institutional asymmetry, we demonstrate the folly of simplistically regarding tourism as a relatively 'easy' tool for cross-border regional development.

Our paper's second contribution is the explicit multi-scalar character of the destination management analysis in borderlands. The cross-border governance literature has emphasized the need to assess complex multi-scalar relations in cross-border regionalization processes (e.g. Jakola, 2016; Johnson, 2009), and tourism planning research stresses territorial and scalar contestations in destination management (e.g., Farmaki et al., 2015; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016). Studies on tourism development in cross-border contexts lag behind in this respect. A clear multi-scalar mapping of (cross)border governance institutions, similar to the effort of Knippschild (2011) for spatial development actors in Central European borderlands, is novel for tourism studies. Through combining tourism planning and cross-border governance literature, we moved beyond the mapping of tourism stakeholders and organizations to also include power relations and contestations in these systems. For example, the high priority of tourism in local projects and the low strategic assessment of the sector among regional political German-Czech interviewees could only be explained using this extant literature combination. While our paper is by no means the first to combine these literature strands (see e.g., Ilbery & Saxena, 2011), further interdisciplinary research to improve the understanding of multi-scalar cross-border power dynamics in tourism can only be supported.

The paper's third contribution is the structural comparison of transnational and within-country borderlands tourism cooperation, thereby transcending the often taken-for-granted transnational region-to-region unit of analysis in most cross-border tourism research. While subnational borderland settings are implicitly covered in the tourism governance literature through reflections on interjurisdictional planning and horizontal cooperation (Adiyia et al., 2015), the present research has shown that within-country border-related dynamics should be taken into account explicitly rather than implicitly. The within-Germany case study reflects that with more fluid borders, cross-border tourism cooperation may be less evident than expected due to lower (perceived) needs and lower reflection by stakeholders on institutional and socio-cultural contrasts between neighbouring areas (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). Within-country borderland governance also provides an analytical lens from a transnational perspective. The empirical observation that EU cross-border policy has limited influence on within-Germany tourism cooperation, both in co-funding and in adoption of EU-inspired development discourses, provides insights in the distribution and adaptation of top-down borderland development mechanisms.

Critical remarks, however, must be made relating to the empirical research presented in this paper. We deemed a case study approach most suitable to deal with the focus on multi-scalar barriers distinctive for tourism that complicate cross-territorial destination management. While this allowed us to gain in-depth insights in power relations in borderland destination management processes, it must be recognized that the results cannot be directly generalized. Additionally, the ever-changing role of borders, as for example highlighted by the recent migration crisis in Europe, reflects the temporal sensitivity of findings from short-term case studies, even when they, like we see in this paper, consider historical contingency and path-dependency of cross-border actions.

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