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Bridging Borders: Theorising and Explaining European Cross-Border Integration
(provisional title)

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SNSF Project “The Rise of the *Sub*: Territorial challenges of nation-state sovereignty in Europe and North-America”, directed by S. Müller

Summary (*draft version*)

Borders are erected to define the limits of sovereignty and statehood. Nonetheless, de-bordering dynamics promoted, among others, by the European Union (EU) have changed the significance of state boundaries across the EU. Especially over the last thirty years, new forms of governance have been established at a “meso”-level through cross-border cooperation. This doctoral dissertation scrutinises cross-border cooperation along the EU’s internal borders by focusing on one aspect that has so far been overlooked in the scholarship – cross-border *integration*. Indeed, although cross-border regions in the EU are considered living laboratories of European integration by both scholars and EU institutions, little academic attention has been devoted to analysing cross-border cooperation as a process of political integration. How can we define and explain European cross-border integration? The thesis addresses this broad research question by developing a new approach – both on a theoretical and empirical level – to study this phenomenon. The manuscript is structured as follows. First, a review of the scholarship on cross-border cooperation is provided. Second, mainly drawing on multi-level governance and post-functionalism, this thesis develops a new theory to explain cross-border integration, thereby incorporating the interplay of functional and identity factors into a single theoretical framework adjusted to that particular governance scale and type. Third, a measure of integration in cross-border regions is developed and applied to all the EU’s cross-border spaces. Finally, by focusing on a few cross-border regions as case studies, mechanisms of causality are explored. Overall, this large-N and comparative approach combined with in-depth case studies help assess not only whether and to what extent processes of integration take place along the EU’s internal borders, but also why some cross-border regions are more (or less) integrated than others. In providing a new and comprehensive angle to study cross-border cooperation, this PhD thesis mainly contributes to the literatures on EU cross-border cooperation, in particular, as well as European integration and multilevel governance, more generally.

Version of November 2021