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The spatiality of trust in EU external cross-border cooperation

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that effective cross-border cooperation (CBC) networks closely interrelate with the building of ‘trust’ between actors. The aim is to contribute to the CBC literature by investigating the different forms of trust, their spatial attributes and impact on actor relations in the context of the Finnish–Russian European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) of CBC. The paper applies a specific spatial approach by identifying the territorial and relational aspects of four different forms of trust: rational–personal decisions, social–cultural understanding, general–personal interactions and the historical–institutional environment. The analysis, based on policy documents and semi-structured interviews with relevant Finnish ENI CBC actors, shows that the study of transnational cooperation networks benefits from a conceptualization of trust recognizing its spatial characteristics. The study concludes that sub-national actors are key agents in the formation and maintenance of trust. These actors negotiate with socio-cultural differences through the development of personal relationships which increase social capital in the actor–network. However, the cooperation network is vulnerable towards geopolitical circumstances affecting foreign relations. The paper demonstrates that Finnish ENI CBC actors are operating in a transnational network in which their activities are challenged by territorial constraints such as national border-crossing regulations.

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Introduction

The Finnish–Russian border sparked scholarly interest due to its geopolitical and historical development. The Cold War period rendered this border as a geographic contact point for economic trade relations, but cooperation beyond economic agreements was initiated only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Finland and Russia ratified the ‘Intergovernmental Agreement on Neighbouring Area Cooperation’ in 1992 (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2009) and more than two decades later, Finnish–Russian CBC has been embedded into the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and currently receives funding from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) for the period 2014–2020.

EU – Russia relations are characterized by a dichotomy between cooperation and conflict particularly since the Ukrainian crisis and the resulting economic sanctions threatened the continuation of Finnish–Russian ENI CBC programmes (European Council, 2014;

Haukkala, 2015). Regardless of such geopolitical struggles, cooperation between Finnish and Russian partners under the ENI CBC framework has remained relatively stable. Therefore, this paper argues that trust within the actor–network is a vital element for sustainable cooperation.

During the last decade, scholars have started to investigate the relevance of trust and social capital in transnational relations (see Rippl, Petrat, Kindervater, & Boehnke, 2009) and cross-border cooperation (see Malecki, 2012; Princen, Geuijen, Candel, Folgerts, & Hooijer, 2016). The concept of trust has received attention in the field of geography, planning and other disciplines, often following Putnam's (1993) work on trust in local communities. Planning scholars have emphasized the importance of trust in policy networks as it provides additional assurance in circumstances of incomplete knowledge and fragmented risk assessment (Switzer, Janssen-Jansen, & Bertolini, 2013).

Even though trust-building and social capital have been studied in the EU internal CBC and planning context at the Finnish–Swedish border (Jakola & Prokkola, 2017), the external dimension of ENI CBC consists of very different characteristics which challenge trust-formation among actors. Thus, rigorous conceptualizations of trust in the context of transnational governance and CBC beyond the EU borders are needed. As Princen et al. (2016, p. 509) propose, 'a more systematic analysis of intra-governmental dynamics is crucial to understand the existence, form and timing of CBC' and the investigation of trust and its spatial attributes provides a key to understand these dynamics.

This paper addresses two research gaps unveiled by two recent criticisms on studying cross-border networks in the CBC literature: first, conceptualizations of transnational cooperation are usually treated as inferior to national interests and practices (Varró, 2016) which is problematic because research perspectives remain territorially trapped (Agnew, 1994; Häkli, 2009a). Indeed, most research on CBC concentrates on the territoriality of cross-border regions from a state's perspective (see Chilla, Evrard, & Schulz, 2012; Korosteleva, Natorski, & Simão, 2013; Popescu, 2008) but less on the interactive processes within cooperation practices and their underlying factors, such as trust (see Klein-Hitpaß, Leibenath, & Knippschild, 2006; Saari, 2011b). Second, studies in the field of planning and human geography often focus on the institutional challenges to CBC (Decoville & Durand, 2016) and cross-border governance (Stoffelen, Ioannides, & Vanneste, 2017). However, the aspects influencing trust-formation processes and the impact of trust on such aspects require further research (Welch et al., 2005, p. 468).

Saari (2011a, p. 117) has argued 'trust is an elusive notion that is hard to pin down [...] trust like distrust has different dimensions, logics, and degrees'. Therefore, the concept of trust requires a comprehensive research approach which takes into account different varieties of trust. Three different forms of trust have been identified in the planning literature: the rational–personal decision to cooperate based on a cost/benefit analysis, social-cultural awareness and general–personal relations (Laurian, 2009; Switzer et al., 2013). Moreover, CBC literature suggests that foreign relations (Dias, 2013), geopolitics (Popescu, 2008) and the institutional dimension (Jakola, 2016; Tennberg, 2007) impact on the formation of trust between actors. Therefore, a fourth form of trust, the historical–institutional perspective, is included in the analysis.

These forms of trust are analysed from a spatial perspective taking into account actor dynamics in Finnish–Russian ENI CBC. These dynamics are influenced by various territorial and relational aspects that derive from the particular geographical and institutional

positionality of actors. Such spatial perspective provides a new understanding of the complex trust-formation processes by recognizing that the relational framework of cooperation continues to operate within territorial constraints of national planning. To avoid conceptualizing these processes as ‘territorial still images’, Häkli (2009a, p. 20) criticizes quantitative methods for neglecting the fluctuating spatiality of social and political processes by representing the social – or social trust – within fixed containers limited to national or regional differences (see Agnew, 1994). Consequently, the analysis is based on qualitative data in the form of policy documents and interviews. The theoretical framework builds on various forms of trust scrutinized in the context of the territorial/relational debate (i.e. Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016).

The study will seek answers to the following questions: (1) Why is trust important and in which forms does it occur in Finnish–Russian ENI CBC? (2) What is the impact of relational and territorial aspects on trust-formation among cooperation actors? The research material, through which it is possible to investigate the origin, meaning and implication of trust for the cooperation process, derives from three Finnish–Russian ENI CBC programmes (Karelia, Kolarctic and South-East Finland – Russia).

The paper is structured as follows: Firstly, a conceptualization of trust based on its complex spatiality is developed through four forms (‘rational-personal’, ‘social-cultural’, ‘general-personal’, ‘historical-institutional’) of trust formation. Secondly, the research area, materials and methods of the analysis are presented. In the next section, the research materials, consisting of semi-structured interviews and policy documents, are analysed by focusing on the different forms of trust and their spatial attributes to investigate challenges and opportunities for trust formation among the actors. The concluding section highlights the role of the sub-national actors as main agents in the trust-building process.

Definition of trust in CBC

The concept of trust has received increased scholarly attention throughout the last decade in planning, human geography and regional studies literature (Häkli, 2009a; Jakola & Prokkola, 2017; Laurian, 2009; Malecki, 2012; Rippl et al., 2009; Switzer et al., 2013; Tennberg, 2007). The relationship between trust and cooperation has become a research focus during recent years (see Saari, 2011a). Previous studies have investigated the impact of social capital on power and trust relations (see Jakola & Prokkola, 2017); however, research that focuses on the particular territorial and relational aspects influencing trust-building processes in CBC have been scarce. Within the fields of human geography and planning studies (see Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Murphy, 2006; Puustinen, Mäntysalo, Hytönen, & Jarenko, 2016), researchers distinguish between institutional and interpersonal trust. Häkli (2009b) defines trust in the context of CBC as the mutual acceptance of vulnerability among actors. From the perspective of CBC, the definition of trust as ‘a continuum between functional co-operation and interpersonal bonding’ by Natorski and Pomorska (2017, p. 56) is particularly useful. This definition not only captures the systematic formation of trust between institutions but also the role of interpersonal relations. Both are distinguishable but correlated spheres in which the actors operate.

The concept of trust is interlinked with literature on social capital that emphasizes the pivotal role of relations, networks, trust and solidarity in social integration (Rippl et al., 2009). Putnam (1993) argues that social capital includes public/private spaces and the

quality of human relations within such space. The analytical focus on space presents social capital as an interesting angle to identify spatial patterns of relations in the context of cooperation activities (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). Putnam (1993) highlights voluntary participation in associations and unions as a crucial aspect for linking society and building social capital (Rippl et al., 2009). However, this argument remains ambiguous because Putnam fails to define the specific type of participation required for increasing social capital (Mohan & Mohan, 2002).

Rippl et al. (2009) extend the use of social capital theory to the investigation of ‘transnational’ social capital. The formation of transnational social capital is challenged by territorial borders which are often dividing lines between languages and cultures. Rippl et al. (2009) further argue that transnational social capital requires actor-networks with a high level of ‘bridging’ capacities (Putnam, 2000, p. 411) to accommodate the participation of actors from different socio-cultural backgrounds by creating transparency (Switzer et al., 2013). Furthermore, transnational cooperation networks are vulnerable towards political fluctuations and periods of diplomatic crises because they threaten participation and decrease social capital within transnational spaces. Nevertheless, familiarity among actors helps to stabilize cross-border activities by generating social capital for cooperation in the Finnish–Russian ENI CBC region of Karelia (Scott, 2013).

Dense policy networks with a large amount of actors usually result in higher degrees of trust because of the frequent interactions and the consistent exchange of information (Switzer et al., 2013). ‘Transparency’ is thus a key requirement to avoid mistrust (c.f. Prokkola, 2011). Switzer et al. (2013) estimate that dense cooperation networks correlate with an increased frequency of communication. However, ‘sub-national mobilisation via extra-channels would challenge the gate-keeping position of the state’ (Callanan & Tatham, 2014, p. 194) thus national state actors attempt to maintain their decision-making authority which affects responsibilities for sub-national actors.

In addition to the theory of social capital, scholars have applied the rational choice perspective to trust in cooperation networks (Princen et al., 2016). This approach, integrated into the social sciences by Coleman (1990), is based on a cost/benefit analysis to identify the perceived benefits of cooperation in relation to the possible costs and risks. The rational choice theory acknowledges the involved parties as rational actors who, by aiming to obtain maximum utility, perform calculations based on the available information. These calculations result in a form of trust in which the trustor expects the trustee to behave in a certain pattern serving their goals in the future (Sztompka, 1999). The element of time is an important factor to consider because actors decide to trust each other based on an expected behaviour in the future, therefore displaying vulnerability in certain social and political situations (Coleman, 1990).

Natorski and Pomorska (2017) criticize the rational choice perspective for omitting the aspect of human relations. Instead, the authors suggest that cooperation builds up confidence among the actors resulting in personal relationships which facilitate information exchange. Nevertheless, the rational choice perspective provides an important rationale for scholars to understand people’s decision to trust (Coleman, 1990).

Social capital and the rational choice to trust are understood as important elements of cooperation networks supporting integration between multi-scalar and transnational actors. Actor’s participation in Finnish–Russian ENI CBC depends on the transparency of institutional frameworks in which the EU can be considered as an ‘institutional

broker' (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017, p. 1029; Stoffelen et al., 2017, p. 136) for facilitating cross-border projects. Cooperation emerges from cross-border differences and the inability of authorities to obtain certain benefits domestically (Princen et al., 2016). Cooperation thus commences if the institutional framework provides transparency and benefits without exceeding the costs of CBC.

The establishment and implementation of the Finnish–Russian ENI CBC projects are based on verified and re-adjusted action plans and policy structures ('learning effect') (Boedeltje & van Houtum, 2011; Laine, 2017). This path-dependent character of cooperation (see Jakola, 2016) often indicates an institutionalization of trust (Kroeger, 2011). Trust facilitates social interaction and decreases the relevancy of 'pre-set institutional norms' (Häkli, 2009b, p. 207). However, it is important to acknowledge the ENI CBC institutional framework provided by the EU Commission as a central component for facilitating interaction (Kroeger, 2011).

Forms of trust and their spatiality

The spatial perspective towards trust does not only recognize distance and proximity between actors (Nilsson & Mattes, 2015) but also the territorial/relational dichotomy that cooperation actors and planners have to negotiate with since the increased policy focus on transnational networks throughout the last two decades (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016). Spatial planning literature and strategies often refer to cross-border relationships as 'networks, webs, corridors [...]' (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016, p. 76). Trans-national networks are acknowledged as relational spaces; however, criticism has sparked among planning scholars and human geographers towards the relational/territorial debate. Rather than an either-or discourse, the relational approach has to acknowledge planning as an important relational political technology of territory (Luukkonen, 2015). Relational thinking in CBC planning implies the social construction of regions as results of power relations, and therefore, the region's borders are shifting and transforming according to dominant interests (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016).

Following Paasi's (2008, p. 408) argument that 'relational and territorial spaces may exist concomitantly'; this paper examines the Finnish–Russian actor-relations based on four forms of trust that are coexisting and overlapping: first, the 'rational-personal' decision to cooperate depends on the rational choice of individuals who are aware that cross-border problems require joint solutions. It consists of a cost-benefit analysis comparing the benefits of trust with possible risks of cooperation (Switzer et al., 2013); however, it lacks a focus on personal relations. Second, the 'social-cultural' form of trust derives from shared social values, norms and ethical standards that create predictability towards individual and institutional actions (Switzer et al., 2013). Third, the 'general-personal' form of trust consists of the individual and interpersonal relations within the cooperation network which are built on familiarity and mutual interests (Switzer et al., 2013). This form of trust closely interlinks with the establishment of social capital while increasing cultural awareness and recognition of each other's vulnerabilities.

Additionally, the conceptual framework includes a fourth element to capture 'historical-institutional' developments that recognize the historic contingency and importance of institutional path-dependency of cooperation practices (see Jakola, 2016; Klein-Hitpaß et al., 2006). The identification of these four forms of trust help investigating

the spatial pattern of trust-formation in the actor-network of Finnish-Russian ENI CBC. Each of these forms consists of spatial attributes representing both territorial and relational features reflected in the cooperation process. The analysis applies a context-sensitive approach to acknowledge the ambivalent character of the relational Finnish-Russian ENI CBC actor-network which remains constrained by territorial attributes (Allmendinger, Chilla, & Sielker, 2014).

Research design

The Finnish-Russian border region is characterized by a ‘hard’ but relatively stable security border dividing two distinct socio-economic societies with different languages. The current ENI CBC 2014–2020 has provided funding for Finnish-Russian projects administered and managed by three transnational programmes, the Karelia, Kolarctic, and South-East Finland – Russia ENI CBC programmes (see Figure 1). Their joint management authorities (JMAs) are based in Finland and characterized by Finnish sub-national involvement and decision-making.

Policy documents and semi-structured interviews are used to analyse the different forms of trust and their spatial attributes. This material includes policy documents issued by the European authorities, the Finnish national ministries and the programming documents published by the JMAs managing the Finnish-Russian ENI CBC programmes. A qualitative content analysis generated a list of key themes serving as a basis for the semi-structured interviews. This material includes twenty interviews conducted by the author

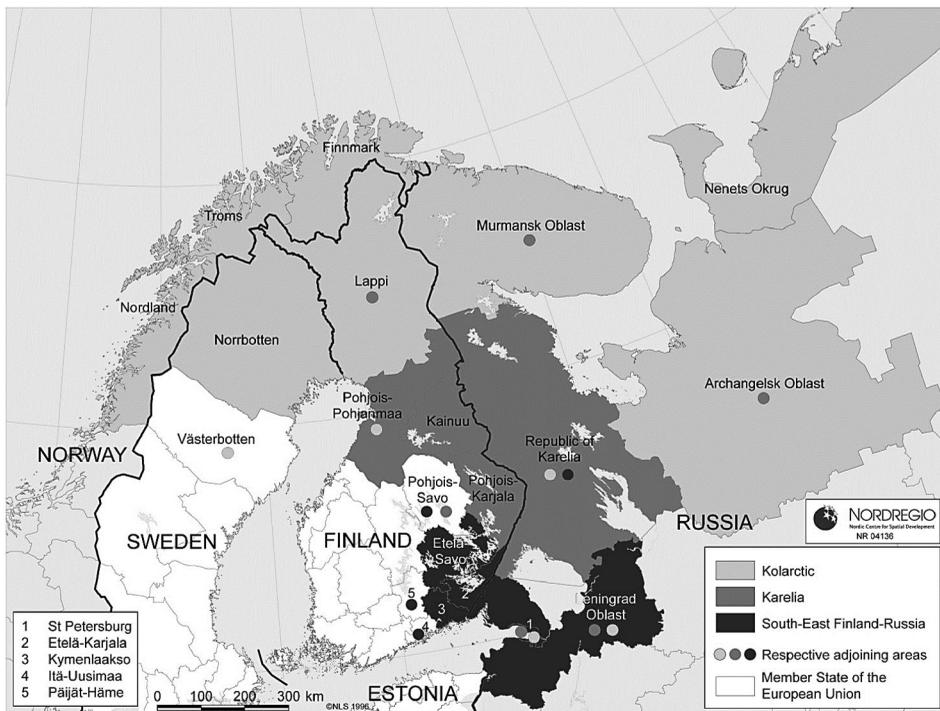


Figure 1. Finnish-Russian ENPI/ENI CBC Programmes. Source: NordRegio (2007).

with the following actors: the European External Action Service (EEAS); Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement negotiations; Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy; the Finnish Ministries of Foreign Affairs (Formin), Economic Affairs and Employment (TEM), and the Ministry of the Interior (Intermin); the JMAs located in the regional councils of Oulu, Lappeenranta, and Rovaniemi and project managers representing lead partners in the three ENI CBC programmes.

Potential interview partners were initially contacted in the Finnish region-based JMAs because they are responsible for the implementation and management of the ENI CBC programmes. A snowball sampling strategy helped identifying further key contacts in the Finnish ministries in Helsinki and in European institutions in Brussels. Moreover, Finnish project managers who received ENI CBC funding from the three case study programmes were interviewed. The governmental structure of the ENI CBC programmes, which are implemented and managed by the JMAs in Finland, explains the absence of Russian interview partners. The JMAs are transnational governmental bodies merging decision-making, auditing and implementation responsibilities. The Russian national authorities responsible for coordinating the programmes within Russia are frequently consulting with the JMAs in Finland.

Furthermore, most ENI CBC projects are led by Finnish participants, which demonstrate the uneven distribution of management tasks among cooperation partners.¹ Finnish actors dominate Finnish–Russian cooperation under the ENI framework, thus activities are influenced by their perceptions and opinions. Accordingly, this paper will show the ‘people’s nationally shaped knowledge’ (Varró, 2016, p. 186) regarding Finnish–Russian ENI CBC from a Finnish perspective. This does not imply the failure of Russian partners to communicate and present their own interests regarding the cooperation; however, non-EU states are legally not permitted to be part of the ENI CBC programming negotiations, thus decisions are taken by the EU Commission and the 27 EU member states unanimously (see Khasson, 2013). This paper presents an EU actor perspective, and therefore, analyses exclusively the perceptions of Finnish cooperation actors towards the participation of Russian partners within projects.

Each interview lasted one hour on average and all have been recorded and transcribed, with the exception of three. The interview questions were arranged into themes derived from the content analysis of the policy documents. The key themes are communication, decision-making responsibilities, impact of language and culture, financing agreements and funding practicalities, and challenges during CBC activities. Furthermore, questions were adapted in accordance to the particular institutional backgrounds of the interview partners. The question catalogue was arranged to match the particular professional and institutional background of each interviewee. Most interview conversations moved beyond the pre-defined question catalogue and interviewees were explicitly invited to elaborate on important issues which were not considered during the analysis of the policy documents. This provided an important perspective on the distinction between the textual level of the documents and the practical experiences of the interviewees.

The interview material is organized in accordance to the multi-level governmental framework of cooperation, meaning that the material reflects the particular background of the interviewees. The analysis was conducted with the help of NVivo 11® software for organizing the interview quotes according to previously defined nodes. All interview transcripts were coded in correspondence to the interview themes and analysed from the

perspective of the four forms of trust identified in the literature. Relationship nodes helped to identify the relations between quotes and to maintain a spatial perspective according to the institutional background and geographical location of each interviewee.

Statements from EU or Finnish ministry actors are analysed in their institutional context while interview quotes from regional and project managers acknowledge the particular sub-national perspective towards Finnish-Russian ENI CBC. The interview material, once coded, offered a remarkable homogenous perspective in the sense that actors from the same background (i.e. EU level) had similar views on certain questions. This helped to find a saturation point after which no significant new statements and information were gained from the interviews. Particular emphasis was placed on contradictions within the material, that is, the view of Finnish policy-makers on the border in comparison to the experiences of project managers. Such contradictions are important observations because they reveal the particular perceptions towards cooperation among actors and the impact of its multi-level character on trust-formation.

Forms of trust in the Finnish–Russian ENI CBC network

Rational-personal considerations for trust

The idea of the rational-personal form of trust is based on a cost–benefit analysis. The territorial aspect of rational-personal trust relates to the expected benefits for programme applicants by reducing individual costs for cooperation (Murphy, 2006). This territorial aspect is reflected in interviews with project managers who emphasize the motivation to initiate the application process derives from the prospect of receiving EU funding. Therefore, the decision to trust in cooperation depends on the availability of ‘institutional brokers’ (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017, p. 1029) to provide transparent funding frameworks. This is both a relational and territorial attribute because despite the integration of the previous territorially defined ‘Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States’² (TACIS) instrument into the ENPI (Fritsch, Németh, Piipponen, & Yarovoy, 2015), the framework for cooperation is defined by the EU actors in Brussels whose decisions are influenced particularly by national actors, that is, the Finnish ministries. Non-EU actors are not permitted to participate in the initial establishment of the cooperation programmes (REGIONAL/JMA/2) and Russian actors are hesitant to manage their own funds:

The Russian partners would have preferred if we (*Finnish lead partners*) took care of all the financial coordination of the project in a central manner. However, I did not want to do that ... I insisted that partners have their own financial responsibility. (PROJECT/ENPI/1)

The interviews with regional programme managers working for the JMAs suggest two reasons explaining the Russian hesitation towards the management of funds and applying as lead partner: first, the Russian partners perceive the Finnish actors as experts in EU projects and, therefore, prefer to delegate responsibilities to EU partners. Second, a considerable mistrust among Russian project partners exists towards their own national institutions (PROJECT/ENPI/1). This mistrust into institutions is problematic for planning because it increases the required resources and thus diminishes capacity for cooperation activities (Laurian, 2009).

The amalgamation of internal and external funding of the TACIS and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) into the single ENPI CBC funding aimed at increasing transparency and facilitating Russian participation:

When we had the INTERREG period, we were able to use the EU funding only on the Finnish side and the Russians should find their funding somewhere else. (TEM/NATIONAL/2)

This has created a spatial imbalance of trust reflected in the high number of Finnish lead partners¹. Finnish interview participants demonstrate a high level of trust into Finnish and EU institutions, which corresponds to the findings of Puustinen et al. (2016). Finnish ministry officials, when asked about prominent changes in cooperation activities, highlight the revisions and transformations of financial aspects throughout the cooperation period to ensure equal participation of all actors (TEM/NATIONAL/1). Finnish national authorities share the opinion that trust between cooperation actors creates a stable border region and, therefore, they see trust as an important condition for effective cooperation:

Cross-border cooperation creates a culture of trust and this cultural trust contributes to stability in the border regions and therefore even beyond (*the border region itself*). (FORMIN/NATIONAL/1)

This observation of the Finnish foreign ministry responds to the argument of Kroeger (2011, p. 753) who demonstrates that institutions are developing a “path-dependent” [*sic*] trajectory of trust determined by the institution’s history as well as the agency and creativity of the actors who participate in continuing it’. Institutional trust is a crucial asset for planners because it prevents power imbalances emerging from interpersonal relations (Puustinen et al., 2016).

Three spatial determinants, consisting of both relational and territorial aspects, can be identified to contribute to the formation of rational-personal trust: First, transparency of funding structures (see Prokkola, 2011) increases trust into institutions based on the ability of all actors to prepare a cost/benefit analysis for cooperation. However, the interviews with the JMAs and project managers suggest that transparency is at risk in Finnish–Russian ENI CBC due to the territoriality of national banking services, which complicate financial cross-border transfers. Furthermore, Russian authorities may encounter problems adopting European financial regulations into their own domestic accounting systems (PROJECT/ENPI/3).

Second, the recognition of regional and local actors as decision-makers during the establishment of CBC programmes helps to increase transparency of CBC activities (Fritsch et al., 2015). For example, Finnish project managers attempted to increase transparency among Finnish and Russian project participants by highlighting individual contributions in the reports to the JMAs:

I wanted it to be seen that it is not only one person (*the Finnish project manager*) writing the report but that it consists of several viewpoints from different persons responsible for particular actions. (PROJECT/ENPI/3)

The third aspect of rational-personal trust relates to the guidelines and support provided by the JMAs during the project application and implementation processes. The interviews reveal that the Finland-based JMAs had frequent contact with the Finnish lead partners via phone calls, e-mails and regular meetings while Russian partners were mainly represented

in formal events such as information seminars. This spatial asymmetry of communication influences trust formation among actors. However, the JMAs located in Finland seem to be more accessible for Finnish lead partners, which shows a spatial inequality derived from territorial distance (Welch et al., 2005).

Knowledge exchange is an important rationale for actors to trust (Tennberg, 2007) and thus emphasizes the relational character of ENI CBC. The JMAs in the Finnish regional councils note an increase of trust in the ENI cooperation framework due to the flow of information:

In the past, it was mainly about building networks and transferring information and expertise from Finland to Russia. Nowadays, this information is flowing across the border; it is coming from both Russia and Finland. (JMA/REGIONAL/3)

Project managers invest a significant amount of financial and human resources to enter the application process and thus a cost/benefit analysis is an important first step for cooperation actors (DGNEAR/1) to establish trust. The analysis of the rational-personal form of trust and its spatialities shows that the rational choice to cooperate is an attribute reflecting both institutional and personal trust.

Social-cultural differences in the inter-actor relations

Several scholars (Boman & Berg, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Svensson, 2015) have evaluated the impact of socio-cultural and linguistic differences on cross-border regionalism and cooperation. Boman and Berg (2007, p. 212) conclude in their study on Estonian–Russian relations that ‘the existence of historical-cultural identity may facilitate CBC [...] but it does not appear to be a necessary condition for successful CBC’. Language and socio-economic differences create territorial barriers for cooperation that affect trust-building processes.

The interviews suggest that those lead partners with previous work experience in Russia have an important advantage by being familiar with the working culture in Russia. Furthermore, acquiring the Russian language facilitates communication for Finnish project partners, which diminishes the perception of the border as a barrier (see Trippl, 2010) and increases transnational social capital within the cooperation network. The working language within the CBC programmes is English; however, translators and interpreters are often required during meetings (REGIONAL/JMA/2). Russian experts, whose English language proficiency was insufficient, were a cause of concern for Finnish project managers:

Most of the time, it was just out of pragmatic reasons that we collaborated and communicated with those Russian experts which were sent to Finland for project seminars. These people were mainly chosen because they spoke English but most of the time, these people were not the experts on the topics presented. (PROJECT/ENPI/1)

Project managers frequently encountered language as a barrier for effective cooperation that has to be addressed by acquiring Russian in addition to excellent English language skills (JMA/REGIONAL/2). Speaking the native language of project participants is an important factor for trust by raising cultural awareness among actors (Klein-Hitpaß et al., 2006) which diminishes barriers to cooperation.

Trippl (2010, p. 154) suggests ‘cultural, social and institutional forms of proximity are recognised to influence the intensity of collective learning’. The ‘learning’ aspect in CBC

(see Saari, 2011b), mentioned by several interviewees who raise the importance of equal exchange among all actors, is also highlighted in the official ENPI regulation (Council Regulation, 1638/2006). Representatives of the JMAs see a trustful relationship as the ability to learn from each other's culture (JMA/REGIONAL/3). However, the learning effect is yet asymmetrical because of the Russian hesitation to act as project leaders. Finnish lead partners, even those who had no prior work experience across the border, explained that the Russians were looking at them for leadership:

In general, the Russian partners regarded me as the person 'who knows everything'. They expected me to know everything and to check regularly on their work and progress. In Finland, it is expected of the project manager to give responsibility to other people and then to wait for their reports. This is not the case in Russia, you agree on something and they expect frequent follow-up meetings with the manager. (PROJECT/ENPI/4)

This interview quote emphasizes social-cultural trust as depending on the ability to adapt to different working methods and ethics across the border. This can be considered to strengthen the relational dimension of trust and to increase social capital which contributes to the establishment of the long-term transnational professional networks facilitating future cooperation. Surprisingly, one Finnish project manager, who has been active in Russia for many years, rates the influence of cultural differences on the projects rather low (PROJECT/ENPI/5). Thus, exposure to foreign work cultures can diminish the perceived impact of cultural and organizational differences and helps deteriorate territorial barriers for transnational cooperation.

Policy officials from the EU and the Finnish national ministries were considerably less affected by socio-cultural differences. The interviews suggest that national and supra-national authorities, when in direct contact, develop a neutral diplomatic work culture detached from national sensitivities based on formal institutional agreements. Similarly, partnership agreements signed prior to the start of the projects help reinforcing trust among project participants:

I think it was very important that we made this partnership agreement. It was not compulsory at that time but nowadays I think this must be done with all the partners, so that agreement ensures the commitment of the partners. (PROJECT/ENPI/3)

This statement resonates with the argument that institutions act as brokers who provide knowledge and establish ethical norms supporting trust formation (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017; Tennberg (2007). Another important factor in transnational cooperation networks, however, is the economic inequality between partners. The project partners are paid in accordance to their national wage level. Thus, Russian partners receive lower payments. This territorial aspect, which highlights the impact of socio-economic difference on trust, may even risk effective and sustainable cooperation. The wage inequality between Finland and Russia influences the motivation of Russian participants and furthermore affects the trust relationship between Finnish and Russian actors (PROJECT/ENPI/2). Finnish partners may feel obligated to take greater responsibilities during decision-making processes. This shows the great influence of territorial differences in the form of spatial socio-economic diversity on cooperation activities and trust.

The social-cultural form of trust is dominated by territorial spatial aspects. It is yet based on territorial differences, in the form of national regulations, language and different

work ethics, which challenge cross-border activities. A common agreement on working practices however lowers territorial barriers between actors and can diminish the impact of socio-cultural differences on trust.

General-personal relationships influencing trust

The general-personal form of trust is based on individual experiences which define trust-worthiness into another individual, group, organisation or practice. The general-personal perspective focuses on the personal relationships between actors. This category is defined by communication frequency and familiarity (see Switzer et al., 2013). Furthermore, it includes a temporal aspect in which past interactions shape future practices, thus highlighting the importance of path-dependency and learning (Kroeger, 2011). Trust hinges upon institutional path-dependency (Jakola, 2016) and learning processes where previous personal experiences determine the willingness to cooperate with individuals and institutions in the future.

The first part of this section discusses the relationships between project leaders and the JMAs as the interview material suggests that this relationship is a crucial characteristic for sustainable cooperation. Project managers highlighted the importance of familiarizing themselves with all project participants before the application process to ensure a smooth implementation and successful finalization of the project. The following interview quote reflects the experiences of project managers who had no previous professional network across the Russian border:

I learned how important it is to have the right partner and to ask if we have a common understanding on the project objectives and if we can work together, not only on a general but also on a personal level. (PROJECT/ENPI/4)

The average duration of ENI CBC projects is two years during which the project partners have periods of frequent contact. In the case of Finnish-Russian ENI CBC, the main tools for communication are video conferences or phone calls because travelling across the external border is not always feasible due to time constraints or visa requirements, creating a barrier for trust-building which is understood to prosper during face-to-face encounters (c.f. Mohan & Mohan, 2002). Nevertheless, cross-border communication in the form of information events and seminars has been identified as transnational social capital which enhances trust in the cooperation networks (Malecki, 2012). However, the territorial constraints of border-crossing requirements do not prevent knowledge exchange. Finnish project managers explained they tend to utilize their long-term professional networks and local knowledge to form project ideas and establish teams of experts. However, the selection process of project participants can be challenging for Finnish lead partners who have less work experience across the border:

Concerning the project partners, we should have made a more careful selection because two partners were competitors in Russia. They only communicated through the Project Manager even though they had agreed on certain issues beforehand. (PROJECT/ENPI/3)

Therefore, despite the EU's efforts to enhance transparency of the ENI CBC frameworks, the role of interpersonal trust – or its absence – can affect a project's progress:

We had trust issues with one particular person. He committed fraud during the reporting process and I asked the Russian project partners to replace him. I do not know why he behaved in this way ... (PROJECT/ENPI/4)

The second part of this section discusses the role of trust among institutional actors. Interviewees from the Finnish national ministries in Helsinki and the EU in Brussels have highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships among the institutional network of Finnish–Russian ENI CBC. The interviews with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland (NATIONAL/FORMIN/1) suggest that the national actors rely on consistent personnel choices throughout the programming period, not only within the EU but also in the Russian institutions. Concerns were raised by both Finnish sub-national actors in the JMAs and the Finnish ministry officials about the abolishment of the Russian Ministry of Regional Development in 2014. A Finnish national official explains:

The persons who are now partly working for the Russian Ministry of Economic Development are the same. The key person used to work at the Russian Ministry for Regional Development but not directly with these ENI CBC programmes. However, she knew the basic ideas of the programmes. So luckily, the transition goes quite smoothly. (TEM/NATIONAL/1)

This quote highlights the importance of professional long-term relationships between the authorities working on the national and EU level. The interviews with all three JMAs show that Finnish–Russian ENI CBC is implemented and managed by a group of European, Finnish and Russian institutional actors who are familiar with each other since several years. Similar to the conclusion of Klein-Hitpaß et al. (2006), such personal relations facilitate the formation of trust in the cooperation network despite its territorial restrictions on face-to-face meetings.

Historical–institutional relations affecting trust

During the TACIS period, Finnish–Russian CBC was acknowledged as an ‘assistance’ and ‘support’ for developing the border regions (Council Regulation, 99/2000). The establishment of the ENPI in 2006 was supposed to enhance the partnership character of the cooperation process (Browning & Christou, 2010) transforming the discourse in the EU policy documents towards greater equality. The 2014 ENI regulation uses the term ‘partnership’ and equivalent key words frequently to emphasize the equal character of EU–Russia relations (Council Regulation, 232/2014).

The ENP and its funding instrument for CBC are a territorial strategy for gaining influence in the neighbouring states by applying the principle of conditionality (Ademmer, 2015). The idea is to offer incentives for the neighbouring states to adopt EU legislation into their domestic policy frameworks. This approach has created mistrust among neighbouring states, particularly during the Georgia and Ukrainian crises (see Figure 2).

Trust between actors in the Finnish–Russian ENI CBC cooperation network is vulnerable towards territorial aspects such as the foreign policy decision of the EU to introduce sanctions against Russia. Sub-national Finnish actors raised for example concerns towards the maintenance of funding. The interviews show both the Georgia and Ukrainian crises have sparked insecurities among JMAs regarding the continuation of projects. Rippl et al. (2009) discovered that historical conflicts affect cooperation activities in the German-Polish borderland and similarly, the historical relationship between Finland and Russia is decisive for future cooperation practices. On the regional level, a programme manager mentioned that:

It (*Ukrainian crisis*) constantly affects the programmes. We had a meeting in Helsinki with the Finnish ministries and all three Finnish-Russian ENI CBC programmes. At that time, we

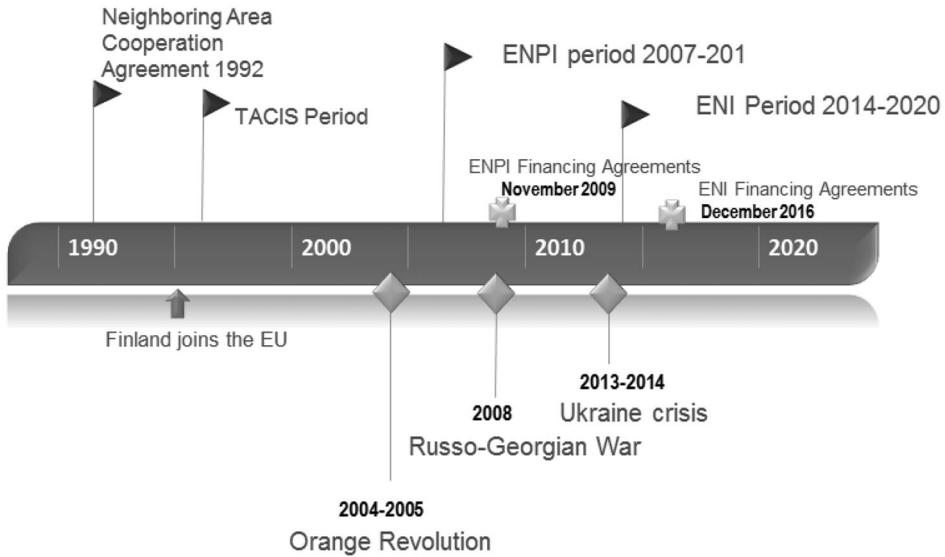


Figure 2. Geopolitical events during the development of Finnish–Russian ENI CBC. Source: Katharina Koch.

already saw the possibility that the EU might fully stop CBC in accordance with the economic sanctions against Russia. The diplomatic level started to work immediately and contacted other member states, trying to convince that this is something Finland does not want to include into the list of sanctions. (JMA/REGIONAL/1)

The interview suggests that a path-dependent trajectory (Jakola, 2016) of institutional activities favours the establishment of trust in the sense that cooperation activities can withstand geopolitical challenges. However, the decision of the EU to impose sanctions on Russia undermines regional and local efforts aiming to ensure smooth cooperation in a challenging geopolitical environment (McCall, 2013). Furthermore, the policy documents referring to the current ENI programming period state that possible future sanctions may yet affect Finnish–Russian CBC programmes (EEAS & European Commission, 2014). Nevertheless, the interviews with the EU Commission reveal that the geopolitical situation has not yet reached a level of emergency or crisis, despite the possibility of including the ENI CBC programmes into the sanctions list (EU/DGNEAR/4). Puustinen et al. (2016) suggest that the impact of institutional trust between cooperation actors helps to resolve conflicts. The JMAs attempt to maintain a relationship among project participants that remains relatively unharmed by these ‘higher political’ decisions (JMA/REGIONAL/2). This impact of sub-national institutional actors is stressed in the formal ENI 2014–2020 strategy (EEAS & European Commission, 2014):

One policy element of critical importance for the successful implementation of CBC programmes is the institutional capacity of local and regional authorities in the ENP countries and Russia to take part in this type of cooperation. (p. 15)

An ENI CBC programme manager from the JMA compares this rhetoric with the initial Russian reluctance to communicate with the Finnish regional actors:

The Russian officials are not used to give so much power to the regions. Therefore, in the beginning, we had difficulties because all the information always went first to our Finnish ministries and then they were contacting us (Finnish regional councils). Now we have this kind of trust with the Russian ministries; they are contacting us directly. (JMA/REGIONAL/3)

The institutional structure of the cooperation framework, which promotes the involvement of regional stakeholders, affected the trust relationship with Russian institutional actors in the past because Russian participants were unfamiliar with the capacity of Finnish regional authorities. However, from a Finnish perspective, regional stakeholders create and maintain stable actor-relations over the border. A learning process takes place that enhances transnational social capital in the actor-network and this spatiotemporal effect creates familiarity towards ENI CBC structures. Another important factor in the formation of trust is the border between Finland and Russia, which is perceived as a mental barrier rather than a strict territorial division. The interviews show, however, that the border continues to demarcate ‘us’ and ‘them’ or the ‘inside/outside’ dichotomy (Kazantsev & Sakwa, 2012) despite cooperation activities:

The border between Finland and Russia definitely has an effect. Of course, it is easy to cross with a visa but it is more a cultural barrier. How we (*Finnns*) think about certain issues differently from the Russians. Especially also regarding the current EU- Russia relations. (PROJECT/ENPI/4)

Regardless of the path-dependent institutional character of CBC, the Finnish-Russian border is a ‘hard’ Schengen border with specific security requirements. Project managers have experienced occasional struggles with visa requests and customs control (PROJECT/ENPI/1). For example, contrary to ad hoc and informal solutions adopted by ambulance drivers in the German–Dutch borderland (see Princen et al., 2016), Finnish and Russian CBC actors are subject to strictly enforced border policies. Therefore, historical-institutional trust is affected by border-crossing requirements that can affect trust among actors in cooperation activities.

Conclusion

The analysis has examined the spatial attributes of trust by focusing on four forms of trust: the rational-personal decision to trust and participate in cooperation; social-cultural trust affected by different languages and working methods; general-personal trust based on relations that are influenced by experiences of trustworthiness and familiarity and the historical-institutional trust depending on the path-dependent development of cooperation activities and foreign policies. These forms of trust interlink and reveal the ambivalence of cooperation practices, which are subject to territorial and relational characteristics. Therefore, trust among actors in cooperation networks is crucial to overcome territorial constraints through relational actions that strengthen the transnational actor-network by transcending the border in various ways. Nevertheless, inter-actor relations continue to be influenced by territorial elements such as socio-cultural differences, national regulations and geopolitics, which continuously affect trust between CBC actors. The analysis of these elements provides a spatial view on the actor-network in Finnish–Russian ENI CBC by highlighting the impact and relevance of trust for various governmental and non-governmental actors.

The concept of trust has previously received little attention in the context of EU external CBC literature, despite its recognized relevancy for transnational cooperation networks (Häkli, 2009a; Princen et al., 2016). The analysis of three Finnish–Russian ENI CBC programmes reveals trust as an important element for cooperation; however, it is influenced by several spatial aspects with different effects for the actor-relations. Three conclusions can be drawn from this study: first, the concept of trust and the identification of its various forms help understand the spatial characteristics of actor-relations in ENI CBC networks. The investigation of spatial attributes influencing trust in the actor relationship points out that cooperation networks are underlying both territorial and relational aspects. This reflects Paasi’s and Zimmerbauer’s observation that ‘territorial dimensions and networks exist simultaneously, causing a degree of inconsistency and friction in the thinking and work of planners’ (2016, p. 89). This observation is also relevant for Finnish–Russian ENI CBC actors. Territorial differences and frictions create relational patterns in the sense that actors become aware that common problems require cooperation. Consequently, CBC actors initiate cooperation activities based on the rational choice to combine resources. Even if the Finnish–Russian ENI CBC has been threatened by the sanctions after the Ukrainian crisis, cooperation activities continue almost unfettered by the geopolitical environment. The formation of trust and social capital creates familiarity (Scott, 2013) between actors that ensures continuation of cooperation activities even within challenging geopolitical environments.

Second, EU policy documents indicate the transformation of Finnish–Russian ENI CBC from an ‘assistance’ to a ‘partnership’ type on the rhetoric level; however, this has not been translated into practice. Therefore, policy documents show how the cooperation ought to take place while the interviews uncover cooperation practices and relationship characteristics from a Finnish perspective. The Finnish–Russian border constitutes a territorial barrier not only in the form of border-crossing requirements but also because Russia mistrusts the ENI as an attempt to enter its own sphere of influence (Dias, 2013; Kazantsev & Sakwa, 2012; Laine, 2017). The role of trust in Finnish–Russian ENI CBC is, therefore, crucial to preserve cooperation activities.

Trust eliminates the need for complicated institutional measures and procedures for ensuring interaction (Häkli, 2009b). However, the analysis of Finnish–Russian ENI CBC does not support this argument. Instead, the interviews emphasize the top-down structure of Finnish–Russian ENI CBC as an important trust-building element that supports project managers to define objectives and to seek guidance. Institutional cooperation frameworks established by the EU legitimise cooperation activities and ensure that CBC practices match with policies. The effectiveness of such structures derives from the high level of institutional trust Finnish sub-national actors have towards Finnish national and EU institutions (see Puustinen et al., 2016).

Third, regional and local actors are key agents during the formation and maintenance of trust in the relational actor–network by attempting to overcome territorial constraints imposed by the border, national laws and regulations. However, these actors struggle most with negotiating the territorial aspects of cooperation, such as socio-cultural differences, because they are directly involved in the implementation and management of projects. Nevertheless, this aspect also shows the relational attribute of the cooperation network because sub-national actors develop a high level of cultural awareness (Klein-Hitpaß et al., 2006).

Transnational cooperation networks, such as Finnish–Russian ENI CBC, require structural frameworks to maintain trust among cooperation actors, particularly when personnel changes and new actors join the cooperation activities. Clear guidelines help to establish a sense of familiarity and confidence among actors from different socio-cultural backgrounds. The role of trust in Finnish–Russian ENI CBC is, therefore, crucial to preserve cooperation activities that are dependent on the relations between actors who represent different political and economic interests. An opportunity for future research is to investigate the power relations within transnational networks in the European neighbourhood and to analyse how trust stabilizes actor-relations in acute crisis-situations.

Notes

1. Distribution of lead partners: Karelia ENPI CBC: 43 (FI)/23 (RU); Kolarctic ENPI CBC: 25 (FI)/8 (NO)/6 (SW)/12 (RU); South-East Finland – Russia ENPI CBC: 36 (FI)/19 (RU). Source: Keep.eu. (2017).
2. The Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States was a programme established by the European Commission to support 12 Eastern European and Central Asian countries in their transition towards a democratic form of government and a market-oriented economy. From 2007, this programme has been replaced by the ENPI.

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