
Mater thesis – Planet Europe

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Abstract

The research aim of this thesis is to investigate the learning processes in INTERREG projects based on the feedback from different project partners in the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. Beginning with the learning processes at the individual level (between project partners) the author examines further the influence of transnational cooperation on learning processes within partner’s home organizations. Additionally, the author identifies the main barriers hindering learning processes at the both levels. The idea for this research arose from comprehensive literature analysis, which suggested that there is still a paucity of in-depth empirical studies on the learning processes in the INTERREG programmes. From a more personal perspective, the inspiration for this thesis derives from the discussions with experts during author’s internship at the Joint Technical Secretariat for the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 in Rostock. Through empirical analysis, the author identifies several categories which refer to learning at the individual and organizational level. These categories are based on the extensive feedback from interviews with seventeen selected project partners from the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. As an outcome of this dissertation the author wishes to gain a practical understanding of the learning processes at the transnational cooperation forum. Additionally, the conclusions for empirical analysis constitute an input to the ongoing discussion on the learning processes in the INTERREG projects.
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1. INTRODUCTION:

Although the cooperation between regions at the EU level is a relatively old and widely occurring process, the first attempts of joint actions at the transnational scale began before any EU financial support for territorial cooperation became available. Two of the most widely-known initiatives in this area are: the *Vision and strategies around the Baltic Sea* (VASAB) and the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, also known as the *Helsinki Commission* (HELCOM). These initiatives constituted the first step towards joint spatial vision and territorial cooperation around the Baltic Sea Region. Moreover, the VASAB strategy is sometimes considered as a ‘model’ for the INTERREG Community Initiative. The evolution of the INTERREG initiative was an incremental and multidimensional process which involved the joint efforts of thousand of professionals from various fields and political backgrounds. (Dühr, Nadin, 2007). As a result of successive EU enlargement the main objectives and scope of the INTERREG programmes have broadened over time. Nonetheless, much of the understanding about the role of trans-boundary cooperation “has developed in a process of *learning by doing*” (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 234). Faludi (2008, p. 1470), emphasises ‘learning by doing’ as, “an important way of promoting European integration”. Furthermore, Faludi (2008, p. 1471) states that the European integration as well as the European planning can be understood as the “learning machines” where planners learn “about territory and territorial governance in the context of an integrating Europe”(Ibid.). Inspired by the Faludi’s approach this thesis examines whether INTERREG programmes can be similarly understood as ‘learning machines’ where project partners learn how to tackle territorial issues in the context of transitional cooperation.

1.1. INTERREG as a learning machine

The main inspiration for this thesis was an important point raised by Faludi (2008) who stated that:

*Like European integration generally, European planning can thus be understood as a learning machine, where planners learn about territory and territorial governance in the context of an integrating Europe and use transnational learning as an engine.*

Applying Faludi’s metaphor as a conceptual basis of this thesis author wants to examine whether INTERREG programmes can be understood as a learning machine, where project partners at the individual and organizational level learn how to tackle territorial issues in the context of transnational cooperation. The ‘territorial issues’ concept is discussed further at the sub- chapter: Thematic focus of cooperation.
Due to its interactive and multilateral nature, many scholars considered the learning processes in INTERREG programmes as an interesting research case (Böhm, 2005; Böhm et al., 2003; Colomb, 2007; Hachmann, 2011; Hachmann, 2008; Lähteenmäki -Smith & Dubois, 2006). Indeed, the INTERREG initiative, understood as the voluntary processes of “exchange and learning running over several years between various types of actors” (Colomb, 2007. P. 350) creates and environment for potential empirical analysis and experimenting with new approaches. Moreover, as there is still a paucity of in depth empirical research and conceptual models of the learning processes in the INTERREG projects (Colomb, 2007), the author decided that this particular aspect constitutes interesting niche for a dissertation. Following Colomb (2007, p. 363) “the nexus between individual learning, organizational learning, and changes in policies and practices is the most crucial aspect of any research on the impact of transnational cooperation”. The correlation between individual and organizational learning is another research motivation.

Hachmann (2008, p. 14) states that the study on learning in INTERREG networks “represent a special case for which there are as yet hardly any routines and models”. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the formulation of a conceptual framework to support the studies on learning processes in transnational cooperation projects such as those promoted by the INTERREG IVB programmes. Secondly, following Dabinett (2006, p. 289) “INTERREG may appropriately be seen as a transnational learning model that needs further exploration in the context of policy and institutional learning and communicative planning practice”. In response to this statement, this thesis will have a substantial input to offer to the on-going discussion on learning in INTERREG projects. Finally, undertaking studies should help to balance the paucity of in depth empirical research of learning processes in the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013.

### 1.2. The aim of the thesis

The overall aim of this thesis is to analyze in detail how learning occurs in transnational cooperation projects. In order to identify an actual learning effect the author will differentiate between “individual” and “organisational” learning (Böhm et al., 2003). While individual learning refers to all new experience and skills which project partners obtain as a result of transnational cooperation, organizational learning is understood as the transmission of learning results from project level towards the partner organization. Additionally, the author wants to investigate the main barriers to learning in the INTERREG projects. The idea for this research has arisen from the comprehensive literature analysis, which clearly stated that there is still a paucity of in-depth empirical analysis of the transnational cooperation programmes in terms of learning processes (Dabinett, 2006, Hachmann, 2008). Additionally, from the more personal angle, the inspiration for this thesis derives from the discussion with experts from the Joint Technical Secretariat for the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 where the author’s internship took place. The INTERREG Programme considered for this research is the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) Programme 2007-2013. It is through a case study of the BSR Programme that this thesis explores the learning processes through transnational cooperation.
projects. A detailed explanation concerning the choice of this particular case study Programme is covered in the methodology chapter.
As a primary outcome of this dissertation author wants to gain a practical understanding of the learning processes at the transnational cooperation forum. Additionally, the author hopes that the feedback gained from the project partners can constitute an interesting input to the ongoing discussion on the learning processes through territorial cooperation projects.

Now that all parts of this thesis have been briefly discussed, the main research question can be formulated:

*How does learning occur through the cooperation in INTERREG projects?*

In order to answer the main research question, the research will go through four support questions.

1. **How learning in INTERREG projects can be understood?**

The author will answer this question based on the literature review. As this is a descriptive question, the answer enables better understanding of the main theoretical aspects concerning learning processes in transnational cooperation projects.

2. **What kind of individual learning occurred in the Baltic Sea Programme 2007-2013?**

This is the first analytical question and is covered in the sixth chapter. Based on the feedback from project partners the author will identify several categories of individual learning. The knowledge gained as a result of empirical analysis; enable better understanding of the learning processes in practice.

3. **What kind of organizational learning has occurred in BSR Programme?**

Similarly to second support question, this is an empirical question which will be answered by analysis and categorization of feedback from project partners in chapter six.

4. **Which barriers limit the learning in BSR Programme projects?**

The aim of this question is to identify the main obstacles hindering learning processes in BSR Programme projects. Based on the feedback from project partners author will categorize main learning barriers and will distinguish between direct and indirect aspects of this phenomenon. The knowledge gained from this analysis will constitute a substantial input to the conclusions of this thesis.
1.3. Current state of scientific research

Measuring the success and establishing the value added of transnational cooperation projects is a challenging task (Böhme, 2005). Difficulties arise from the fact that most of INTERREG projects focus on ‘soft’ issues which are difficult to grasp and measure. On the one hand the INTERREG programmes have created “intangible outcomes or learning in the form of exchanges of experience and transfer of know-how on working practices” (Dühr, Nadin, 2007, p. 375). On the other hand, the standard evaluation techniques proposed by the Commission focus mainly on tangible outcomes. This situation requires better tailored and more flexible approaches. This is why various authors propose to look closer at the aspect of learning in transnational cooperation projects, as a promising alternative for evaluation.

As argued by Dabinett (2006, p. 289), “INTERREG may appropriately be seen as a transnational learning model that needs further exploration in the context of policy and institutional learning and communicative planning practice”. This ‘learning model’ can be conceptualized in two ways. Firstly, as the cooperation at a new scale in order to better address the specific issues of transitional importance. Secondly, as a process of exchanging best practice used by other partners in the transnational network in order to overcome local or regional issues. Referring to Colomb (2007, p. 347) “in both cases, the (potential) added value of transnational cooperation is a result of organizational and policy learning”. As a result of the above discussion one can assume that the learning processes are the crucial aspect of most of research on the impact of transnational cooperation. However, despite the increasing number of professionals facilitating transnational initiatives, still very few studies have actually proposed a concrete methodological approach to substantiate this claim with empirical evidence (Dühr, Nadin, 2007; Colomb 2007). Referring to Colomb (2007) the literature review shows that to date only two authors have attempted to carefully investigate the learning processes in INTERREG projects; Böhme et al. (2003) and Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois (2006).

In the report on “Trans-national Nordic-Scottish Co-operation: Lessons for Policy and Practice” Böhme et al. (2003, p. 7) focused on the cooperation processes between the Nordic Countries and Scotland which “has been an active policy area for almost a decade”. As the main research approach authors examined various projects from the transnational and interregional cooperation in the field of regional development and spatial planning. The main outcomes enabled a better understanding of learning processes among project partners as well as at a regional level. Nonetheless, the research aim was not to evaluate the programme or projects but rather to better understand the learning phenomenon within transnational cooperation. Referring to Böhme et al. (2003, p. 7) the report “reflects on the process of learning which is integral to effective cooperation, in order to investigate the nature of the tacit knowledge and experience of project participants, and to make it usable for future co-operation projects and policy making”. As the main study result Böhme et al. (2003) identified several types of learning that can occur in INTERREG projects: transnational learning, national and regional learning, organizational learning and individual learning. The last two will be discussed in detail in chapter four of this thesis.
To continue, Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois (2006), focused on “collective learning through transnational co-operation” in the INTERREG IIIB projects. In their research Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois (2006, p. 7) sought to prove that “INTERREG projects provide the framework for increased regional consciousness and learning across Europe on the issue of spatial development”. As a common denominator for undertaking study, Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois focused on the case of polycentric development with a particular emphasis on co-operation aspects in transport policy. The research aim was to analyze the features of collective learning in INTERREG IIIB projects. In order to collect data authors based their research on a survey conducted among Lead Partners of the INTERREG IIIB projects. The survey was narrowed down to the Lead Partners group for two main reasons. Firstly, the authors did not have enough capacity to interview all project partners form the INTERREG IIIB. Secondly, as stated by Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois (2006, p. 18), “the LPs tended to have the best knowledge and the widest perspective on the processes that took place during the project”. Similarly to Böhme et al. (2003), the study conducted by Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois (2006, p. 17) was not an evaluation per se, “but rather an investigation of both theoretical and empirical interests and ambitions”. The main outcomes of the research suggest that the participation in INTERREG projects not only increases regional consciousness across Europe but also shed a new light on the understanding of spatial development issues. As a result of transnational cooperation on polycentric development, project partners increased awareness and trust with their neighbours. However, more importantly the regions increased perception concerning “their own roles and position in the wider European structure” (Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois, 2006, p. 10).

The idea of INTERREG projects as a learning machine creating opportunities for planners in member states to broaden and deepen their knowledge has been recognised as an important aspect of transnational cooperation, although the empirical knowledge about the learning process in INTERREG projects is limited. It is the ambition of this study to contribute towards filling this research gap.

1.4. Thesis structure

In order to establish a comprehensive storyline the thesis is structured in five parts.

- Firstly, the literature review will provide a future reader with a comprehensive picture of up-to-date knowledge concerning learning in transnational cooperation projects. Issues such as the origins of learning, different thematic focuses of cooperation and the main barriers to learning are discussed in detailed. However, the core part of this chapter will be a theoretical framework which will constitute a theoretical basis for the next chapter.

- Secondly, the analytical framework will constitute a crucial link between the theory and practice. Establishing two analytical models based on the main theoretical
assumptions will enable a smooth shift from the conceptual discussion to empirical analysis.

- Thirdly, the methodology chapter provides a detailed explanation of research structure, data collection and analysis. It is so called a ‘cooking recipe’ for the research. This is why the each step of methodology chapter is explained in the most explicit way.

- The aim of ‘learning machine in practice’ chapter is to present and discuss the main findings of the research. The major sources of data collection are telephone interviews with various project partners. It is expected that author will collect an extensive feedback, which is presented then in the coherent and approachable way.

- Finally, in the conclusion author discusses main findings and presents potential recommendations for further study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

This chapter carefully examines the main theoretical approaches presented by various authors from the transnational cooperation field. In order to provide a future reader with a comprehensive theoretical knowledge the main chapter is divided on four sub-chapters. Each chapter discusses different aspects of the learning processes in transnational cooperation projects. Beginning with the origins of learning, the author will briefly discuss the development of INTERREG initiative. This enables better understanding of the specificity of transnational cooperation often conceptualized as a ‘soft’ and interactive learning process. (Dühr and Nadin, 2007; Hachmann, 2011). Secondly, the different thematic focus of transitional cooperation projects is discussed. Thirdly, the core literature review chapter establishes the theoretical framework. Based on organizational learning theory author will examine very nature of knowledge creation and transfer by introducing the conceptual model of “single”, “double” and “triple” loop (Flood and Romm, 1996). Finally, the main barriers to learning processes are investigated. The main findings of this chapter will constitute a conceptual basis for the analytical framework.

2.1. The origins of learning processes

From its inception in 1990, the INTERREG became a major EU financial instrument that explicitly deals with territorial and spatial planning issues at the EU level. Referring to Dühr et al. (2010, p. 233), through INTERREG “the EU has been able to focus attention on particular European problems and opportunities concerning regional development, experimenting with new approaches and emphasizing actions to promote the development of networks and cooperation between regions across national frontiers”. As a result of the successive EU enlargements and the growing scale of transnational cooperation phenomenon,
the INTERREG has evolved significantly. From its initial stage spent overcoming disparities between regions in the emerging Single Market, to the current European Territorial Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 (INTERREG IV) now covers a much wider scope of territorial cooperation issues. It is organized around four main thematic priorities (innovation, environment, accessibility, and sustainable urban development) and is divided into three cooperation levels: a cross-border (INTERREG IVA), transnational (INTERREG IVB) and interregional (INTERREG IVC).

In general, one can define INTERREG as “programmes [involving] voluntary, multilateral processes of cooperation, exchange and learning running over several years between various types of actors mainly at the subcentral levels of government” (Colomb, 2007, p. 350). It can be described also as a ‘primary’ instrument which supports transnational cooperation and which is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Nevertheless, this thesis will follow the definition presented by Dühr et al., (2010, p. 354) which assumes that:

*European territorial cooperation programmes (INTERREG IV) “offer a platform for the transnational communication, dissemination and subsequent transformation of different concepts, cultures and ideas of spatial planning horizontally across EU member states, regions and cities”.*

From the above definition two main aspects need to be emphasized. Firstly, the metaphor of the platform, which can be understood as a common ground for various partners and professionals, who then interact, exchange experience and learn from each other at the equal (horizontal) level. Waterhout (2008) discusses similar conceptualization of territorial cooperation programmes stating that “INTERREG should in particular be understood in terms of facilitation horizontal learning between actors, mostly in regions, meeting and co-operating with each other in transnational project groups” (Waterhout, 2008, p. 107). To conclude, in both definitions authors strongly emphasized the importance of learning processes between various actors in the frame of the INTERREG platform. Indeed, as argued by Hachmann (2008, p. 11) “learning can be seen as the key technique in the transnational cooperation and thus as a method for transnational networking”.

Having established a clear link between transnational cooperation and learning processes, the basic requirements for successful knowledge exchange at the transnational level can be discussed. Firstly, it requires a great effort to create the aforementioned ‘platform’ where actors from various professional, cultural, organizational and institutional backgrounds can successfully cooperate with each other. Hence, before any processes of transnational learning can occur, actors need to fulfil certain ‘entry requirements’. As stated by Hachmann (2008, p. 13) for the effective learning processes partners “need to have adequate communication and learning skills, complementary experience, the willingness to share their resources and the receptiveness and openness to new knowledge”. In addition to these ‘technical’ aspects, some interpersonal skills are also required. In order to develop mutual trust and common language for cooperation, the ability such as building up personal contacts is indispensable.

After a brief introduction to learning in transnational cooperation projects author will focus on more specific issues. The following section discusses the further thematic focus of cooperation.
2.2. Thematic focus of cooperation

The following discussion is based on the distinction between “transnational” and “common” issues of cooperation proposed by Colomb (2007). It constitutes theoretical basis for the first analytical model presented in analytical chapter. Additionally, in this thesis the ‘territorial issues’ are understood as an umbrella concept for transnational and common issues.

To begin, Dühr and Nadin (2007) remind us that the aspect of ‘transnationality’ in cooperation projects has been insufficiently elaborated in the Guidelines for INTERREG programmes. Consequently each territorial cooperation programme had to develop its own working approach. Following the definition proposed by INTERREG IIIB NEW Programme a different thematic focus of cooperation projects was divided between ‘transnational’ and ‘common’ issues. Referring to Dühr et al. (2010) the ‘transnational’ issues, such as transnational transport infrastructure or cooperation in transnational river basins were described as the most significant for territorial cooperation. Other transnational issues, “affecting a transnational area across national and regional borders, which cannot be tackled adequately at the local, regional or national level and which requires transnational cooperation”, include environmental pollution, improving river water quality, or planning infrastructure development through several countries (INTERREG IIIB NEW, 2008, p. 22).

By contrast, ‘common issues’ are those issues “faced by several cities and regions in various locations across the European territory, which could be or has been tackled at the local, regional or national level, but for which transnational cooperation would bring more innovative and effective solutions” (Ibid.). Arguably project partners are more eager to cooperate on common issues which are comparable to their national or regional problems but which can be better tackled at the transnational level. Through the exchange of experience, best practices, and know-how, project partners can commonly deal with issues such as heritage protection, urban regeneration, urban transport (Dühr et al., 2010).

To conclude, the thematic focus of cooperation can be divided between transnational and common issues. While the former focuses at the new scale of cooperation in order to address the specific issues of transitional importance better (rivers, environmental pollution, transport, common labour market) the latter refers to exchange of good practices used by other partners in the transnational network in order to overcome local or regional issues. Nonetheless, the boundary between transnational and common issues is rather blurry (Colomb 2007). Additionally, as argued by Dühr et al. (2010, p. 347) “in practice cooperation on spatial development issues that cut across borders is less in evidence than exchange of experience on issues that do not have direct transnational impact”. Depending on the types of issues dealt with, the thematic focus of cooperation between various project partners will differ, “which will in turn affect the learning processes within the partnership” (Colomb, 2007, p. 357). The link correlation between nature of cooperation and forms of learning is discussed in detailed in analytical framework chapter. The difference between cooperation on transnational and common issues will constitute an essential contribution to the understanding of the first analytical model (Figure 2).
2.3. Theoretical framework

The above discussion on origins of learning processes in INTERREG projects and thematic focus of cooperation enables only a partial understanding of learning processes in transnational cooperation projects. In order to present a more comprehensive picture requires further investigation of the theoretical basis of this phenomenon.

Drawing on the experience presented by Hachmann (2008, p.14), “learning in INTERREG networks with its particularly difficult process of transferring knowledge into the organizations, represents a special case for which there are as yet hardly any routines or model”. Hence, the analysis of learning processes in INTERREG projects is a challenging task which needs to build upon existing theories. For this reason this thesis adopts a conceptual model of different loops of learning (Figure 1) created by Flood and Romm (1996). The understanding of main theoretical assumptions is of great value for further research as each of loops will constitute a basis for second analytical model (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Different loops of learning


Based on the organizational learning theory, one can distinguish between simple (single loop) and more complex (double and triple loop) learning. In general the distinction between each loop refers to the object of the learning processes (Böhme et al., 2003). Simple learning is often conceptualized as the most basic type of collective learning which focuses on incremental improvements in existing concepts (see for example: Hachmann, 2008; Arygyris, Schön, 1978). From the individual point of view, ‘single loop’ learning helps to acquire new capabilities and skills. As presented in Figure 1, simple learning is an action-oriented process which focuses on the question: “are we doing things right?” (Flood, Room, 1996, p. 158). Due to its practical nature, authors often define this phenomenon as a; ‘simple learning’, ‘learning by doing’, or ‘lessons-drawing’ (EureConsult et al., 2013, Böhme et al., 2003). Referring to INTERREG programmes, ‘single loop’ learning takes place in almost every project and
enables “the acquisition of skills and proficiencies by the person involved in the cooperation process” (Huebner et al., 2009, p. 22). As discussed above, not only the “single loop learners” (Flood and Room, 1996, p.157) obtain new abilities and experience, but so do their organizations which are an integral part of transnational processes. The best examples of single loop learning are the lessons learnt sharing, the so-called ‘know how’ transfer, or the ‘good practice’ exchange. In order to establish a link between theoretical and analytical frameworks, the single loop will refer to the individual learning process which is discussed in detail in second analytical model (Figure 3).

By contrast, complex learning- or double-loop learning- “changes the way actors think, perceive problems and act to solve them” (Böhme et al., 2003, p. 33). In other words it is a conceptual process where actors, drawing upon transitional cooperation experience, trigger changes in organizations at the structural, behavioural and procedural level. As a result of its problem-oriented nature, authors describe the complex learning processes as ‘learning about learning’ (EureConsult et al., 2013) or as a form of ‘learning to change’ (Hachman, 2008). By asking the question: are we doing the right things? (Figure 1), the ‘double loop’ learning sheds a new light on the already exiting organizational routine. As argued by Huebner et al. (2009), the step from single loop to more complex knowledge acquisition requires time. Nonetheless, well organized transfer of experience can effect an improvement at the institutional and organizational level. Following Hachmann (2008, p. 12) “this is exactly what transnational learning should be about: not only the exchange of ideas and concepts already applied in other places, but also to learn how to learn and how to implant learning processes into institutional environments”. Double loop will constitute an important input to the development of organizational learning concept presented in the second analytical model.

Lastly, the triple-loop originates from complex learning, but is a more comprehensive process. The main distinction between triple loop and the previous two processes is the extent of diversity in the learning processes. As argued by Flood and Room (1996, p. 157) “triple loop is about increasing the fullness and deepness of learning about the diversity of issues and dilemmas faced”. Hachman (2008, p. 12) presents a similar interpretation stating that “triple-loop learning is concerned with learning in situations characterized by a high degree of diversity”. In both cases authors place a strong emphasis on diversity as a trigger for improvement in learning processes. Following this approach one can assume that the better the use and understanding of different professional backgrounds and experiences the more effective the learning processes. This is of particular relevance for learning in transnational cooperation projects. Referring to Hachmann (2008, p. 12) “in INTERREG projects, the necessity of a management of cultural differences between partners (also in terms of different organizational and professional cultures) poses a considerable challenge, in particular for differences to be seen as assets rather than obstacles”. To conclude, due to its comprehensive character the triple loop learning goes far beyond the ‘simple learning’ processes and develops further the main assumptions of the ‘double loop’. By putting the diversity of issues at the core of the learning, the triple loop is of high relevance for the conceptualization of transnational cooperation processes. It is defined as ‘learning how to learn’ (EureConsult, 2013) and it is trying to answers the question “how can we draw upon collective knowledge?” (Figure 1)? The diversity issue will be also an important element of transnational framework for learning processes discussed in the analytical chapter.
In summary, the single loop is the most common learning process and occurs in almost every transnational cooperation projects. However, as the learning during INTERREG projects is the dynamic process of knowledge flow with high level of diversity (cultural, organizational, and professional), the complex learning provides much more appropriate theoretical framework for conceptualization of this phenomenon. Better understanding of the learning processes between project partners enables more comprehensive analysis in the empirical part of this thesis.

After the extensive literature review of the main theoretical assumptions on learning in transnational cooperation projects, author will discuss further the main barriers for the learning in individual and organizational level

### 2.4. The main barriers to learning in transnational cooperation projects

The diversity in INTERREG projects can be understood in two ways. As discussed previously, the diversity among partners can be perceived as a trigger for development and knowledge creation (triple loop). Conversely, working within a culturally diverse team with one or more foreign languages as well as communication across different sectoral boundaries can cause various constraints and challenges (Böhme et al., 2003). This interpretation will be elaborated further in the following part of this thesis. The identification of barriers to learning constitutes an essential element in overall discussion on learning processes in transnational cooperation projects

The broad scope of national differences, present in almost every transnational project, often constitutes obstacles and hampers the learning processes between partners. Indeed, as argued by Böhme et al. (2003, p. 8) “at least once during almost every project, participants considered that it might be impossible to transfer knowledge and experience between countries, because of cultural, administrative and/or legal differences”. The issue of cultural and language differences in transnational cooperation projects was discussed also by other authors. Hachmann (2008) reminds us that due to the formal requirements of INTERREG IVB programme the composition of partnership has to involve at least three financially contributing project partners from three different countries. Consequently, cultural and linguistic disparities, such as different methods and working styles, “can impede effective transnational learning” (Hachmann, 2008, p. 14). Furthermore, the lack of sufficient language skills can hamper communication within the project especially at the decision-making level. Hachmann (2008, p. 14) raises an important point that a negative outcome of linguistic difficulties can be “that input to discussion does not come from those with the most authoritative knowledge”, but from those most fluent and communicative in English. This situation can cause further misunderstandings and challenges in meeting the Programme’s requirements such as deadlines, or regular reporting. Other barriers which can put the project in jeopardy are different definitions of the same terms in different languages. One of the most confusing issues concerning transnational cooperation projects is the different understanding of ‘spatial planning’ concept. It is because the term used in each country in not transferable to
other countries and is often used in different ways depending on the purpose and context (Dühr et al., 2010, Nadin 2000).

Another barrier identified by Böhme (2005) is the insufficient integration of project tasks to daily organizational work. As stated by author “the projects are often conceived to be additional to the ordinary work and not considered to be part of the ordinary work of the individual in questions” (Böhme, 2005, p. 8). This lack of integration between project’s tasks and the day-to-day work routine can cause various issues such as insufficient capacity, problems with tasks prioritization, or lost opportunities arising from overloaded agendas. As a final outcome not only the learning processes at the project level are hindered but also the “the transfer of the project results into new organizational knowledge and routines” (Ibid.). However the scale of potential difficulties during knowledge creation and learning processes depends on the position of the project partner at his/her home organization. One can assume that the more independent and decisive the project partner is within the organizational hierarchy the more effective the learning processes.

Thirdly, following the Hachmann (2008, p. 14) “INTERREG projects are typically faced with the challenge of identifying each party’s interest, as well as joint objectives and solutions”. At the beginning of partnership each actor needs to explicitly clarify what his/her input to the process and their expected outcomes from cooperation. The next important step is the identification of potential overlaps between individual work packages. Additionally, each project needs to fit into general EU policy framework, as laid out in respective guidelines such as European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) and Territorial Agenda of the European Union (Hachmann, 2011). Due to the high variety of interests- especially in the projects featuring extensive partnership- establishing a common platform for cooperation is often difficult. In other words due to the problems of defining similar interests and in finding deliverables that will benefit all participants, the learning capacity of transnational projects can often be limited (Hachmann, 2008). To conclude, the more diverse partnership in terms of legal status (supranational, national, regional, local), type of organizations (administration, private, political, academic), and sectors (economic and regional development, transport, environment), the more challenging and complex the decision making process and the necessary discussions (Hachmann, 2008).

This literature review chapter has covered four main aspects of the learning processes in transnational cooperation projects. Beginning with an introduction to the issue, the chapter discussed in detail the origins of learning processes and link between INTERREG initiatives and learning (platform for horizontal cooperation). Secondly, analysis of thematic focus of cooperation permits a substantive distinction between the project in terms of transnational and common issues. This distinction will be of relevance in the creation of the first analytical model. Thirdly, drawing upon organizational learning theory, the author established a theoretical framework for this thesis which is based on three differing loops of learning. Each of the loops will refer further to the individual, organizational and transnational framework for learning. Finally, in order to create a comprehensive picture of learning processes in INTERREG projects, the author discussed the main barriers to cooperation and learning.
Nevertheless, despite this detailed theoretical analysis, we need to remember that “the literature on inter-organizational learning does not yet provide a systematic analysis of learning in networks” (Hachmann, 2008, p. 14). Following from this statement as well as the fact that there are as yet hardly any routines and models to study learning processes in INTERREG projects (Hachmann, 2008) the aim of the next chapter is to establish a comprehensive and universal analytical framework.

3. ANÁLYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Having reviewed most of literature concerning learning processes in transnational cooperation projects, it is important to establish a conceptual link between theory and practice. The first analytical model is based on the matrix of intensity and scope of cooperation proposed by Colomb (2007). This model draws upon the theoretical discussion on thematic focus of cooperation (see subchapter 3.2.) and presents the correlation between the nature of cooperation and the form of learning. As the main outcome it facilitates the selection of project partners discussed further in the methodology chapter. Hence the first analytical model creates a clear link between theory and practice. As a second analytical model the author will use the approach presented in the “study on exchange of experience processes” in the INTERREG IVC programme developed by the EureConsult et al. (2013). In this report the authors analyze learning processes at different levels as well as the main conduits of knowledge flow between them. Although the report is not a typical academic research paper, its overall conceptual framework was created as a result “of an extensive review of scientific literature and other empirical works from various disciplines” (EureConsult et al., 2013, p. 6). As such, it ensures a good ‘bridge’ between theory and practice. The discussion will begin from transnational framework for learning, which is an umbrella concept for learning processes within transnational cooperation projects. Then author will then narrow down the analysis to individual and organizational learning. As the main outcome of this chapter the two models will constitute an analytical basis for further empirical study.

3.1. First analytical model

The main aim of the first analytical model is to facilitate the selection of projects needed for further empirical analysis. As discussed in the literature review there is a connection between the learning processes in INTERREG projects and the thematic focus of cooperation. However, as the boundary between transnational and common issues is rather blurry (Colomb, 2007), it is a challenging task to choose an appropriate project of high relevance to the research. Analyzing Figure 2 one can assume that the more transnationally oriented cooperation (working on issues such as environmental pollution, river basins, transnational transport and safety, or the common labour market) the more learning focuses on new types of networks. The new types of network can be conceptualized as a joint actions, multilevel dialogue or transnational platforms for cooperation. Similarly the more that the thematic focus
of cooperation refers to common problems (local transport, revitalization, heritage protection) the more locally or regionally oriented forms of learning.

To conclude, as the main aim of this thesis is to examine the learning and cooperation on transnational issues, the right part of the Figure 2 will be used for the further selection of projects (green rectangle). The knowledge gained from the first analytical model is of high importance for the methodology chapter as only these projects which represent strong transnational thematic focus will be taken into account.

**Figure 2: Matrix of dependence between nature of cooperation and forms of learning**

![Matrix of dependence between nature of cooperation and forms of learning](image)

Source: Colomb, 2007, p. 358
3.2. Second analytical model

While the first analytical model is based on the theoretical discussion of cooperation, the second analytical model draws upon the theoretical framework. As such individual and organisation learning refer to single and double loop learning respectively, whilst the transnational framework for learning refers to triple loop learning.

3.2.1. Transnational framework for learning

To begin the discussion, one has to emphasize that “over recent years, the ‘added value’ of transnational cooperation has been increasingly conceptualized in terms of ‘learning’ that can help to change mindsets and raise cultural awareness, and perhaps may even prompt policy innovations and institutional adaptation in the participating organizations” (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 349). Nevertheless, before answering the question of how ‘learning’ occurs in transnational cooperation projects, the author will briefly discuss various conceptualizations of learning processes. Böhme et al. propose the most general approach concerning learning in INTERREG projects. In their report on trans-national Nordic-Scottish co-operation the authors argue “that there is a learning element in every activity in every moment of our lives, even though, in some cases, the learning involved in our (or other people’s) actions can be unintentional, subconscious and even undesired (Böhme et al., 2003, p. 31). The authors discuss further that “the understanding of the concept of learning has repercussions on how (and if) this concept is translated into policy” (Ibid., p. 31). More specifically, learning is defined as the “ability of any political decision-system to invent and carry out new policies to meet new conditions related to its ability to combine items of information into new patterns (Ibid., p. 32). On the other hand, learning can be conceptualized from a more organizational perspective as an interactive process of individual or collective exchange of experience and good practices. Referring to Hachmann (2008, p. 12), learning is “an interactive process of individually and collectively making sense of a knowledge transfer by means of adapting routines, rules and practices, with each actor acting from a different socio-cultural, professional, institutional and organizational background”. Using this assumption as a conceptual basis and adding the transnational dimension discussed by Dühr et al., the principal definition of transnational learning is presented as follows:

Transnational learning is a knowledge-based search for changes, characterized by dynamic and interactive processes which enhancing individual and collective cooperation among actors from various backgrounds. It “arises when partners from different countries learn from each other, when knowledge gets transferred from one country to the other and/or when new knowledge gets generated jointly” (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 349)

For the further discussion, it is essential to clarify the ‘knowledge transfer’ concept presented in this thesis. In general, one can assume that knowledge exchange refers to the transfer and
application of previously prepared solutions, or guidelines at the top-down (i.e. from EU level to regional level), horizontal (from region to region) or bottom up (from region to state) manner. This conceptualization can be confusing for the analysis of learning processes in transnational cooperation projects. This is due to the fact that learning from its definition is much more comprehensive and interactive process than a tangible and measurable knowledge transfer. Hence, for the purpose of this research the author understands ‘knowledge transfer’ as a rather soft and flexible process which is based on exchange of experience, good practices, or transnational skills. As a result of transnational cooperation project partners can use this knowledge within their home organizations, regions or institutions and adjust it to their legal and political systems.

To conclude, the process of transnational learning, “should ideally start with learning at the project level, which then stimulates learning within the individual project partner organizations and also learning between them and other organizations” (EureConsult et al., 2013, p. 10). This mutual learning should enable further the structural changes within partner organizations and enhance knowledge flow in an EU-wide perspective as presented on Figure 2. The following subchapter will discuss respectively the individual and organizational learning processes. This will help to create a comprehensive picture of transnational learning processes.

### 3.2.2. Individual learning

This section will discuss the main assumptions of individual learning and help to answer the first research question. As stated in the report (EureConsult, 2013, p. 16) “the past experience from European Territorial Cooperation confirms that individual learning took place to a large extent within projects and was therefore also an important part of their wider outcome achieved”. This observation was developed further by the research of Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois (2006, p. 22) who argue that “transnational groups and its individual members are the most central actors within the learning processes”. Indeed as the individual actors taking part in the various initiatives are responsible for transferring knowledge from one forum to another they can be defined as a good ‘ambassadors’ of transnational learning processes.

In literature there exist various definitions of individual learning presented by different authors. Referring to Dühr et al. (2010, p. 349) individual learning can be conceptualized as a preliminary process of cooperation “which allows project partners to get know each other and individually learn through the cooperation experience”. In other words before the synergy effect occurs, first individual partners have to learn with whom they are interacting. Colomb (2007) presents a similar approach by defining individual processes as an initial form of learning between the partners involved on behalf of their organization. Hence, individual learning refers strongly to single loop learning and is the first and most basic form of learning in transnational projects. In order to better understand how the individual learning occurred in practice, the author will discuss the main aspects presented on Figure 2. As discussed above
the individual learning within the transnational cooperation project is a dynamic and multidirectional process.
At the beginning knowledge is created as a result of cross cultural-group learning. At this level individuals from different organizational backgrounds exchange experiences and best practice in order to learn about themselves and jointly achieve their project’s aims. Secondly, during the project duration phase, actors involved in the project benefit from the transnational learning. One of the main outcomes discussed in the EureConsult (2013, p. 16) report are: “learning about cooperation, learning about policy contents which exist in other local/regional contexts, socio cultural learning by being confronted to other mentalities or ways of thinking and doing”. Finally, all new experiences, knowledge and skills, learned by individual partners in transnational cooperation can be transmitted to their home organization, regional or local policy subsystems or the wider European context. There are different possible arenas of knowledge flow and specific issues which can facilitate this process.

**Figure 3: Learning in transnational cooperation projects**

Source: EureConsult, 2013, p. 17
One of the most significant aspects is the ‘hands on approach’ discussed by Böhme (2005). In his article Böhme placed a strong emphasis on the personal involvement and ‘learning by doing’ in transnational projects as the most efficient way for cooperation and knowledge exchange. As argued by Böhme (2005, p. 697) “the project experience suggest that intensive reporting and the dissemination of interesting information initially plays a role, but it cannot replace the hands-on experience provided by the transnational cooperation projects”. Furthermore, to understand different perspectives and ‘ways of thinking and doing’ strong personal involvement is required. Finally, Böhme et al. (2003, p. 66) raises an important point that learning and gathering of experience can mainly be achieved through personal engagement (hands-on approach), while only rarely “knowledge can be acquired through reading and lecturing”.

In summary, individual actors are the key players during learning processes in transnational cooperation, and individual learning constitutes the crucial link between organizational, regional and transnational learning (Hachman, 2008; Böhme et al., 2003). The ‘hands on’ approach creates a basis for effective cooperation as well as enhancing integration among project partners. The main outcomes of individual learning, such as learning about cooperation, or socio-cultural learning are transferred to the organizational, regional, or the wider European level. There are different arenas of knowledge transfer from the individual do organizational level. However this issue will be discussed at the following subchapter.

### 3.2.3. Organizational learning

Organizational learning constitutes a crucial aspect in creation a comprehensive model of learning processes in transnational cooperation projects. As presented on Figure 2 it is an integral part of transnational learning, as the knowledge and new experiences gained at the individual level are transferred outside the project area towards partner organizations. This process was discussed by Böhme et al. (2003, p. 8) who states that “once a single project member has learned something in a co-operation process, this knowledge can be transferred into the home organization of the project member where it then contributes to institutional learning, i.e. changing routines in the organization”. The importance of transnational knowledge transfer in organizational learning was emphasized further in the EureConsult report. In their report authors argued that “the project partner organizations usually seek to gain better information and new knowledge or technical know-how about a specific issue in order to improve their own policy-making processes” (EureConsult, 2013, p. 20). Finally as stated by Wolman and Page (2002, p. 478) an exchange of experience from the project level to the home organization is possible if “individuals acting on behalf of an organization and interacting with others in the organization learn in such a way that beliefs, attitudes, or values of relevant organizational members change and… organization behaviour changes”. It constitutes a direct link to the double-loop learning which “changes the way actors think, perceive problems and act to solve them” (Böhme et al., 2003, p. 33). In sum, one can assume that the organizational learning in transnational cooperation projects is an outcome of new
knowledge and experience flow from individual level to partners’ home organizations. Moreover organizational learning is often manifested through changes in routines, policy making processes, and behaviour.

Having established the conceptual basis of organizational learning, this paper will discuss further the main technical issues which are essential for effective arena of knowledge transfer. To begin Hachmann emphasized the need of strong integration between individual partners and their organizations. She states that “individual learning that is not embedded in the respective institution will be lost once the individual leaves the institution” (Hachmann, 2008, p. 16). To continue, Hachamnn (2008) presented other essential factors enhancing organizational learning, such as trust between partners, common ‘language’ for cooperation, or high level of involvement into cooperation from the beginning of project. Another important issue is well-organized project management which ensures good information and knowledge flow not only between project partners, but also from individual to organizational level. Despite well-organized partnership at the project level the knowledge transfers between forums (from individual to organizational) “is often considered as challenging or impossible” (Böhme et al., 2003, p. 66). This approach was developed further by EureConsult et al. (2013, p. 21) who remind us that “several analyses of past transnational cooperation show that learning benefits have mainly remained with the individuals who were directly involved in the activities”. This situation directly refers to aforementioned ‘hands on’ approach and reminds us that without personal experience of transnational cooperation the transmission of project-level learning experience toward partners organization is rather difficult. Within the organisation learning can be hindered by different procedural and organizational changes. In such cases, even if the individual learning is strongly embedded in the respective institution, the transnational learning processes are limited.

The analysis of organizational learning is important yet quite challenging aspect of transnational learning processes. In general most of organizations are eager to apply the new knowledge and skills, learned by their individual representatives in transnational projects, to change their organizational routine and behaviour. However, the smooth knowledge transfer is often hampered by various internal and external factors such as lack of experience in transnational reality (hands on approach) or staff turnover and restructuring within organizations.

To summarize the theoretical discussion from previous chapters, learning in transnational cooperation projects constitutes an interesting and demanding research field. There still exists a paucity of in depth empirical research, but there are few routines or models for use in analysis (Colomb, 2007; Hachmann 2008). Nonetheless, as presented above various authors from the field have attempted to establish a comprehensive analytical framework and create a clear link between the theory and practice. Drawing upon the studies developed by Böhme et al. (2003), Lähteenmäki-Smith & Dubois (2006) and EureConsult (2013), the author of this thesis was able to understand better both the theoretical background and practical dimensions of learning processes in transnational cooperation projects. Furthermore, drawing from an extensive literature review and content analysis of presented reports, the author has combined different analytical approaches to create the most tailored analytical framework. Different
learning processes (simple and complex learning) as well as learning at different levels (transnational, individual, and organizational) will constitute a theoretical basis and inspiration for the empirical analysis, which is preceded by the methodology chapter. Furthermore, the two analytical models, based on the main theoretical assumptions will be at the heart of methodology and empirical analysis.
4. METHODOLOGY

The following chapter discusses the main research objectives of this thesis and will present the overall research design and strategy. This chapter is intended as a ‘cooking recipe’ for undertaking research but also should constitute a useful approach for potential future studies in that field. This is why each step of research strategy and methods, selection of project partners, interviews and data analysis will be explained very carefully.

4.1. Research structure

4.1.1. Research approach

The main research approach of this thesis is deductive rooted in theory, which is developed from the academic literature review, continued by the creation of a research strategy, and finally tested in practice through a series of interviews. The process of deductive research is presented below by Figure 4.

Figure 4: Deductive research approach

![Deductive research approach](image)

Source: Own source, inspired by Saunders et al., (2012)

The theoretical framework of this thesis draws upon existing theories and is based on the organizational learning theory. This is the result of extensive academic literature review and argumentation of various authors who stated that there is still a paucity of empirical research and hardly any routines and models to analyze learning processes in INTERREG projects. (Colomb, 2007, Hachamann, 2008). The main theoretical assumptions are the single, double and triple loop learning which is adopted from Flood and Romm (1996). These assumptions are made in order to better understand the specificity of learning processes at different organizational levels. The theory is strongly connected with research strategy. While the first analytical model (see sub-chapter 4.1.) is based on the theoretical discussion focussing on cooperation (common and transnational issues), the second analytical model (see sub-chapter 4.2.) refers to aforementioned organizational learning theory. Fourthly the whole analytical model and theory is tested in practice by numerous of interviews with different project partners.
partners concerning their experience of learning in INTERREG projects. Data collection is based not only on telephone interviews but also on email survey and projects final reports review. To conclude, the final results are based on the extensive feedback from project partners and well design research strategy drawing upon an existing theory. In this manner the thesis follows the deductive research approach. Referring to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 144) “if your research starts with theory, often developed from your reading of academic literature, and you design a research strategy to test the theory, you are using a deductive approach”.

4.1.2. Research method

To continue, this thesis applies a ‘qualitative’ research method. Although most of qualitative research is organized on the basis of inductive approach, some begin with a deductive approach, to test already existing theoretical methods using qualitative procedures (Yin, 2009). Firstly, the qualitative research examines “participant’s meanings and the relationship between them” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 163). Secondly, referring to data collection, it is mostly a non-standardized process. As argued by Saunders et al. (2012, p. 163) in qualitative research “questions and procedures may alter and emerge during a research process that is both naturalistic and interactive”. As an example the telephone interviews used in this thesis as a primary research procedure, were organized in an interactive and rather non-standardized way. Thirdly, Saunders et al. (2012, p. 163) raise an important point that “the successes of the researcher’s role is dependent not only on gaining physical access to participants but also building rapport and demonstrating sensitivity to gain cognitive access to their data”. Applying this recommendation, the author during his interviews with various projects partners tried to establish a closer personal contact in order to get a “cognitive access to their data” (Ibid). Lastly, the qualitative method is associated with a number of strategies. Referring to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 163) “some of the principal strategies used with qualitative research are: action research, case study research, ethnography or narrative research”. Drawing upon this statement, this thesis uses case study research as its main research strategy.

4.1.3. Research strategy

The case study strategy explores a research phenomenon or topic within its context. This is an important advantage of case study strategy as, referring to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 179), “the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and the context within it is being studied are not always apparent”. As research methods the qualitative, quantitative or mixed approaches can be used in order to collect data by observation, interviews, documentary analysis, or questionnaire. To specify better the case study strategy, Yin (2009) distinguish four different cases based upon two main dimensions; the single and multiple cases and holistic versus embedded case. As for this thesis only single case is relevant the other three will not be discussed further. A single case represents mostly a critical example or,
alternatively, unique or extreme case. However, the most crucial fact about the single case concerns the “opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon that few have considered before” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 179). Applying this assumption in practice, although two main studies undertaken by Böhme et al. and Läänemäki-Smith, K., Dubois, A., there is a noticeable paucity on research learning process in the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. This is why the single case of the BSR Programme 2007-2013 is an interesting research opportunity. Secondly from more personal angle author decided to focus on the BSR Programme 2007-2013 as his internship was taken place in the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) for the BSR Programme 2007-2013 in Rostock, Germany. This personal motivation was also discussed by Saunders et al. (2013, p. 179), who stated that for many part-time studies the single case strategy is “the organization for which they work”. In order to better acquaint the future reader of this thesis with the BSR Programme 2007-2013 some facts and figures from the Operational Programme (BSR, 2012, p.6) are introduced.

“The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) Programme 2007-2013 has been designed under the European Community’s territorial co-operation objective, while integrating the objectives of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument’s cross-border co-operation (ENPI CBC). It is built on the experience of the two predecessor programmes supporting transnational co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region under the Community Initiatives ‘INTERREG IIC’ (1997-1999) and ‘INTERREG III B Neighbourhood Programme’ (2000-2006). The overarching strategic objective of the Baltic Sea Region Programme is to strengthen the development towards a sustainable, competitive and territorially integrated Baltic Sea Region by connecting potentials over the borders. The Programme will thus address the European Union’s Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies in order to boost knowledge-based socio-economic competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region and its further territorial cohesion. The Programme is focused on preparation of investments and actions aimed at improving the territorial potential of the region, minimising the considerable differences in the level of socio-economic development between the western and eastern parts of the region and at resolving several issues of common concern for all the countries around the Baltic Sea. The eligible area includes the whole territory of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden, and northern parts of Germany as EU Member States. Also the neighbouring countries of Norway, Russia (some North-Western regions – see chapter 1) and Belarus belong to the Programme area”.

In the following chapter author will carefully present the whole process of selection project partners for the interviews.

4.2. Selection of project partners

The main aim of this sub-chapter is to discuss the process adopted to select final project partners for interviews. As mentioned before the major idea of the methodology chapter is to
create a ‘cooking recipe’ for this research. This is why the argumentation for each step of selection is provided with references to the analytical framework. In order to better understand the methodology of the decision making process, author creates an analytical scheme which is presented in Figure 5.

To begin with the first methodological step, the author undertook a content analysis of each project from the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. In order to select the most relevant projects, the author carefully scanned each of 90 projects available at the projects data base on the official BSR Programme website: http://eu.baltic.net/. During the first pre-selection, author narrowed down his investigation to projects which were closely related to learning processes in transnational cooperation. Additionally to reinforce the selection criteria author applied the general assumptions from the first analytical model. Consequently 31 projects with the high relevance to transnational issues were pre-selected.

Second step of selection was fully based on the first analytical model (see sub-chapter 4.1.). This step considered the aspect of transnational learning adopted by each project such as ‘multilevel dialogue’, ‘platform for cooperation’, or ‘joint development’. One of the most decisive criteria was the transnational dimension of projects. Hence the author selected only those projects which focus on issues such as environmental pollution, transnational transport, and the European labour market. Additionally- referring to transnational outcomes- only projects which resulted in the creation of practical solutions, transnational tools and strategies, or new polices and alternative developments were picked. As a result of this twofold selection the six most appropriate projects were chosen. The list of projects with brief description is presented in the Table 1.
Figure 5: Selection of project partners for telephone and email interviews

90 projects of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013

Representative group of 31 potential projects

6 most relevant projects:
- C.A.S.H
- RBGC
- BALTRIS
- Baltic Green Belt
- Baltic Deal
- BSLN

6 most relevant projects => 82 project partners from various fields and with different experience in transnational cooperation projects

18 project partners pre-interested in interviews

17 project partners = final amount of interviewees

Source: Author’s own creation
The third step in decision-making process concerned the selection of particular partners for the interviews. The aim was to collect a possible diverse group in terms of position in project, legal status, nationality and position in organization. From the six representative projects the total number of partners amounted 82. The contact information to all selected project partners was gathered from the aforementioned Baltic Sea Region Programme database available on Programme webside (http://eu.baltic.net/). In order to make sure that the selected group meets the preliminary requirements, author asked for the recommendation the official from Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) for the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. As the experts working in JTS have the most accurate and comprehensive knowledge concerning projects in the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013, the feedback about partners was of great value for the further analysis. The next step of selecting candidate for interview was a distribution of ‘first touch letter’ (See Appendix A) to all 82 approved project partners. From the 82 ‘first touch letters’ that were sent, 18 projects partners expressed their pre-interests in interview, which corresponds to a return of approximately 20%. The final step of collecting project partners was the distribution by email the ‘interview protocols’ (See

Table 1: List of final projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project acronym</th>
<th>Full name</th>
<th>Project aim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C.A.S.H.</td>
<td>Connecting Authorities for Safer Heavy Goods Traffic in the Baltic Sea Region</td>
<td>Increase the cooperation and information exchange between the police and the logistics business to develop practical solutions and to make international road freight transport safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBGC</td>
<td>Rail Baltica Growth Corridor</td>
<td>The main focus is set on improving passenger mobility &amp; freight transportation along Rail Baltica (RB) route. Further, the project is organizing multilevel dialogue about transport policies in BSR countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BALTRIS</td>
<td>Improving Road Infrastructure Safety in the Baltic Sea Region</td>
<td>The Project focuses on the exchange of experience and joint development of road infrastructure safety management procedures. The specific objective of the BALTRIS project is to develop tools and strategies to better manage safety of road infrastructure in the BSR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltic green belt</td>
<td>Baltic green belt</td>
<td>One of the main goals of the project is to establish a permanent and growing platform for transnational cooperation between stakeholders working in nature conservation and sustainable development of the southern and eastern Baltic Sea coast. The project has furthermore contributed to the protection of the environment and natural resources by increasing awareness among the general public and decision makers and by preparing offers for alternative developments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltic Deal</td>
<td>Baltic Deal – putting best agricultural practices into work</td>
<td>Baltic Deal aims to increase the knowledge exchange of sustainable agri-environmental practices in the Baltic Sea region. The project establishes a network for farmers and advisory services to exchange knowledge about good practices and learn from each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSLN</td>
<td>Baltic Sea Labour Network - A European Model for Improvement of Interregional Labour Policy</td>
<td>Focusing on the areas of mobility of labour, active labour market policy, training and education, and the development of human resources, the BSLN was working to strengthen dialogue and open new communication channels with the objective of achieving sustainable development in labour market policies. As a forum of development for decision-makers and policy implementers, BSLN put key people together to combine knowledge and ideas to develop strategies, policies and practical solutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B). This time 17 partners responded positively, which represents a return of approximately 18%. They constitute a final amount of interviewees and are presented in Table 2. As the final decision on the form of interview depended on interviewee the final division was as follows: 13 project partners decided to answer the question via telephone, while the rest; 4 project partners asked for an email questionnaire. In both cases the same ‘interview protocol’ was sent and constituted a basis for feedback collection. Additionally, as several interviewees wished not to be named, all of them have been anonymised.

Table 2: List of final project partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewe</th>
<th>Project Acronym</th>
<th>Position in project</th>
<th>Title English</th>
<th>Legal Status Name</th>
<th>Country Name</th>
<th>Level of experience</th>
<th>Position in organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>RBGC</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Public Transport Authority Berlin-Brandenburg</td>
<td>Other public equivalent body</td>
<td>GERMANY</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>head of department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>RBGC</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Regional Planning Board Havelland-Flaeming</td>
<td>Regional public authority</td>
<td>GERMANY</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>head of unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>RBGC</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Harju County Government</td>
<td>Regional public authority</td>
<td>ESTONIA</td>
<td>quite experienced</td>
<td>head of unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>RBGC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aalto University Foundation</td>
<td>Academic/scientific organisation</td>
<td>FINLAND</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>project manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>RBGC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lappeenranta University of Technology, Kouvola Unit</td>
<td>Academic/scientific organisation</td>
<td>FINLAND</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>BALTRIS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Swedish Transport Administration</td>
<td>National public authority</td>
<td>SWEDEN</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>communication officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>BALTRIS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lund University</td>
<td>Academic/scientific organisation</td>
<td>SWEDEN</td>
<td>not experienced</td>
<td>lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>BSLN</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Finnish Confederation of Professionals STTK</td>
<td>Non-governmental and non-profit registered association</td>
<td>FINLAND</td>
<td>not experienced</td>
<td>international adviser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>BSLN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ministry of Science and Research of the Free, Hanseatic City of Hamburg</td>
<td>Non-governmental and non-profit registered association</td>
<td>GERMANY</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>project manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>C.A.S.H.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>University of Turku</td>
<td>Academic/scientific organisation</td>
<td>FINLAND</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>C.A.S.H.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>University of Turku</td>
<td>Academic/scientific organisation</td>
<td>FINLAND</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>project officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>C.A.S.H.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Norwegian Mobile Police Service</td>
<td>National public authority</td>
<td>NORWAY</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>police officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>C.A.S.H.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Police of Finland</td>
<td>National public authority</td>
<td>FINLAND</td>
<td>not experienced</td>
<td>sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>C.A.S.H.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Regional Council of Kymenlaakso</td>
<td>Regional public authority</td>
<td>FINLAND</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Baltic Deal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lithuanian Agricultural Advisory Service</td>
<td>Other public equivalent body</td>
<td>LITHUANIA</td>
<td>quite experienced</td>
<td>deputy director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Baltic Deal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre</td>
<td>Other public equivalent body</td>
<td>LATVIA</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>project manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Baltic Green Belt</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Latvian Country Tourism Association &quot;Latvijas celtas&quot;</td>
<td>Non-governmental and non-profit registered association</td>
<td>LATVIA</td>
<td>experienced</td>
<td>project manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3. Data collection

The present study is an analysis of learning processes in the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 mainly based on the feedback collected from the various project partners during telephone interviews and email surveys. The interview targeted the whole Baltic Sea Region Programme area and aimed to collect the most possible diverse group of project partners in terms of experience, legal status and nationality. This diversity is needed to establish the most comprehensive picture of learning processes in BSR Programme 2007-2013. The final group of interviewees was 17 project partners. In the following part of this chapter the process of data collection, based on the telephone and email interviews, is discussed. The main source of data collection was a primary data which is defined as “data collected specifically for the research project being undertaken” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 678). The feedback from partners was collected by using two different techniques. First and the main source were telephone interviews (13 project partners), however the email questionnaires were also used in some cases (4 project partners).

4.3.1. Telephone interviews

Before opening the discussion on the specific case of telephone and email interviews author will discuss some theoretical background of interviews as such. As argued by Gorman et al. (2005) there are two main types of interviews; structured and unstructured. The structured interviews are mostly defined as a predetermined research approach. Both questions and potential answers are decided in advanced by interviewer and are organized in the specific categories. Referring to Gorman et al., (2005, p. 127) the main research technique is an interview survey where “data is gathered by tightly controlled interviews rather than by a questionnaire. For more structured data collection and analysis, answers are coded into fixed categories hence they can be compared between interviews”. Although various advantages of survey interviews, such as a possibility to analyze a large quantity of data in a rather structured and fixed way this research approach represents some shortcomings too. The main issues emphasized by Gorman et al. (2005) are flexibility losses and a rather formal structure of interviews. To conclude, one can assume that the structured interviews are used mainly for quantitative research hence they will not be consider as a methods in this thesis.

To contrast, the main research method used in this thesis is the in-depth or in other words intensive analysis which is defined also as unstructured interviews (Gorman et al., 2005). Trying to pinpoint the main assumptions of this method, this is an exploratory interview organized in the frame of open discussion without predetermined and fixed structure of question and answers. However, as argued by Gorman et al., (2005, p. 127) “it is usual to have a set of questions or interview guide prepared as a starting point”. As the main outcome of the flexible formula, the interviews are conducted in more conversational and natural way. This leads further to much more extensive feedback which contains some detail and comprehensive data, impossible to gather in regular survey. To conclude, the unstructured
interviews allow much more interactive and honest discussion on particular issue. Hence, the feedback gathered from interviews is of the great value for the interviewer as it contains some personal experiences and ‘real life’ examples. On the other hand, the open and informal discussion can lead to rather emotional and biased responses, which can be understood as a potential threat of this method. Secondly in the unstructured interview the questions and issues emerge from the discussion itself, which cause further difficulties for the researcher to follow the main interview scenario. Finally, as mentioned above due to its exploratory and unstructured nature, “the organization and synthesis of data from such interviews is not straightforward” (Gorman et al., 2005, p. 127). The main differences between both structured and unstructured interviews are presented in Figure 6.

**Figure 6 Different interview approaches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unstructured</th>
<th>Structured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to other people’s conversation; a kind of verbal observation</td>
<td>Using ‘natural’ conversation to ask research questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Open-ended’ interviews; just a few key open questions</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews, i.e. open and closed questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording schedules: in effect, verbally administered questionnaires</td>
<td>Semi-structured questionnaires: multiple choice and open questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured questionnaire: simple, specific, closed questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gillham, 2000, p. 6

The telephone interview by definition is “data collection technique in which interviewer contacts the respondent and administer the interview using a telephone. The interviewer “reads the main questions to the respondent in a predetermined order and records his or her responses” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 683). The main advantages of telephone interviews are associated with speed, access and lower costs. Using telephone interview may allow contact with partners with whom the face-to-face discussion would be impractical because of “the distance and prohibitive costs involved and time required” (Ibid., p. 404). In other cases, even if distance is not an issue the telephone interviews provide lower costs and faster data collection. On the other hand, as argued by Saunders et al. (2012, p. 404) “there are a number of significant issues that militate against attempting to collect qualitative data by telephone contact”. One of the most problematic aspects is the establishing of trust between interviewer and interviewee especially while asking sensitive questions. Without face-to-face contact it can be difficult to have an honest and open discussion. Another issue is reliability, as without high level of trust, the feedback from partner is of less cognitive value and sometimes can be even misinterpreted. To continue, telephone interviews may cause some technical problems such as transcript and recording. Referring to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 405) “conducting an interview by telephone and taking notes is an extremely difficult process and so it is recommended to use an audio-recording”. Last but not least, a lack of non-verbal behaviour via telephone can hamper data collection. For all of these reasons, semi-structured telephone interviews are “likely to be appropriate only in particular circumstances” (Ibid., p. 405) Applying the main assumptions of above theoretical discussion, the research on the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013, is one of this ‘particular cases'. There are various reasons why
telephone interviews were the most appropriate research technique. One of the main issues was distance. Author was conducting his research from the Netherlands; hence it was impossible from technical and financial angle to have face-to-face meetings with each of partner from different Baltic Sea Region country. Referring to issues such as trust and reliability, as the aim of transnational projects is cooperation and creation of multilevel dialogue, interviewed partners were eager to share their knowledge, experience and even personal opinions with author. Thanks to this ‘positive’ and ‘open’ approach author collected substantial feedback which should be closely related to reality. In order to overcome issue of lack of non-verbal behaviour some of interviews were conducted via Skype, hence the so-called ‘eye contact’ was established.

The interviews were conducted by Skype with an extra pay option of transnational calling. The average interview time was 45 minutes, however in 3 cases the discussion exceeded an hour. During a phone call author was following the structure of ‘interview protocol’ (see Appendix B), however as the discussion was semi-structured partners were free to choose they own answering order. Sixteen interviews was recorded and transcribed afterwards in order to enable proper empirical analysis. Only one interviewee refused recording, hence the final amount of recording and transcripts is sixteen.

4.3.2. Attached Email interviews

The attached email interview by definition is “survey in which respondents are sent a questionnaire, which is received as an attachment by email” (Bryman, 2012, p. 709). The attached email interviews are organized as follows; first the interviewer sends an introductory email with attached questionnaire. It is mostly a Microsoft Word or other similar format document where respondents are asked to indicate their answers. If questionnaire has an open-questions form, respondents type a full answer in the attached file. To send a fulfilled questionnaire back it, it must be attached with reply email, “although respondents may also be given the opportunity to fax or send the completed questionnaire by postal mail to the researcher” (Bryman, 2012, p. 670). Comparing with embedded questionnaire email, where the questions “are to be found in the body of the email” (Ibid.), the attached email interview is easier to complete, better organized and clearer in appearance. This advantage derives from the well-known software like Microsoft Word, which is mostly used for this type of interviews, and which is easier for respondents to type their answers. On the other hand the attached email technique can cause some technical problems such as issues of recipients’ software or operating system to open and read attachments, or personal concerns about the possible virus with attached email.

Referring to email interviews for this thesis, from the final group of 17 partners 4 of them decided to answer the questions via email which were attached as an ‘interview protocol’ Word file. The main given reasons why the email option was chosen refer to lack of time for phone call discussion, insufficient knowledge and need for discussion with other colleagues involved in transnational project, or the organizational procedure for external interviews. There were no technical obstacles, such as software issues or viruses concerns and the
approximate time for responses amounted to two weeks. Each of email questionnaires was sent back as an attachment with the full answer for each open question. However comparing with the feedback from telephone interviews, the answers given by responders via email were much less comprehensive and sometimes ambiguous. This is due to the fact that author did not have a chance to clarify the questions and facilitate the discussion.

4.4. Data analysis

Miles (1979 in Bryman, 2012, p. 565) has described the qualitative data as “an attractive nuisance, because of the attractiveness of its richness but the difficulty of finding analytic path through that richness”. Hence it is a particular challenge to find the right approach which enables coherent and comprehensive analysis and will result in relevant outcomes. Referring to Bryman (2012, p. 565) after collecting data the researcher often asks themselves a question “what do I do with it now”? The same issue refers to the analytical process conducted by the author of this thesis. After a collection of extensive empirical data, based on the telephone and email interviews with seventeen project partners, the author faced the same basic question: what do I do with it now? This confusion derives from the fact that “unlike the quantitative data, there are few well-established and widely accepted rules for the analysis of qualitative data” (Ibid.). The qualitative analysis does not provide the same wide range of analytical procedures and codification techniques as the quantitative technique. In order to analyse the feedback from all seventeen project partners the author of this thesis used the main assumptions of the grounded theory, discussed in detail by Bryman (2012).

The grounded theory “has become by far the most widely used framework for analysis qualitative data” (Bryan, 2012, p. 567). It provides a number of specific tools such as; theoretical saturation, theoretical sampling or coding in order to analyse the wide range of data. The main tool used in this thesis is coding which is one of the widely use processes in grounded theory. To be more precise the author of this thesis used the open coding method which is “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data” (Ibid., p. 569). This means breaking concepts down to more specific ‘categories’. Following Bryman (2012, p. 570) a “category is a concept that has been elaborated so that it is regarded as representing real world phenomena”. Another important tool presented in the grounded theory is memo. Memos “are notes that researchers might write for themselves concerning such elements as coding or concepts. They serve as reminder about what is meant by the terms being used and provide the building blocks for a certain amount of reflection. Memos are potentially very helpful to researchers in helping them to crystallize ideas and not to lose track of their thinking on various topics” (Ibid., 573)

Applying these theoretical approaches the author analyzed the feedback from seventeen project partners as follows. Firstly, all the interviews and emails were transcribed. Then by writing a memo for each transcript the author crystallized the concepts and categories. While the concepts were fully based on the main assumptions of the second analytical model, the main categories were identified from the literature review and feedback from project partners. Hence the categories were based on the mix approach of theory and practice. Consequently, the author identified four main concepts (transnational framework for learning, individual
learning, organizational learning, and learning barriers) and thirteen different categories (six for individual learning, 2 for organizational learning and 5 barriers) which constitute a conceptual basis for the empirical analysis conducted in the following chapter.

To summarize the methodology part this thesis applies the Deductive Research approach with a ‘qualitative’ research method based on the case study research strategy of the BSR Programme 2007-2013. The selection of final project partners was an incremental and well organized process which led through six stages (from the original group of 90 projects to the final amount of 17 project partners). Data collection was based on the two main techniques; the telephone interviews and attached email interviews. Finally to analyse the extensive feedback from project partners the author applies the main assumptions of grounded theory. Based on different conceptualization and categorization author indentified four concepts (transnational framework for learning, individual learning, organizational learning, and learning barriers) and thirteen different categories (six for individual learning, 2 for organizational learning and 5 barriers).
5. THE LEARNING MACHINE IN PRACTICE

The aim of this chapter is to analyze learning processes in the BSR Programme 2007-2013 based on the empirical data gathered from seventeen project partners. Following the assumptions from the Second Analytical Model, the author will identify main types of learning at the transnational, individual and organizational level. Additionally, the author will identify the main barriers which limit the learning processes in the BSR Programme. The main findings will enable better understanding of the learning machine concept in practice and will constitute the basis for the final conclusions of this thesis.

The empirical analysis chapter is structured as follows; firstly the author briefly discusses learning processes in the BSR Programme following the transnational framework. Secondly the six categories of individual learning in BSR Programme project are identified. The following categorization presents the two types of organizational learning. Finally the five learning barriers are listed and discussed in detail.

5.1. Transnational framework for learning

In this subchapter the author will briefly analyze the main experiences of project partners concerning learning within a transnational framework. Based on the theoretical assumptions that INTERREG programmes offer a platform for transnational communication and learning (Dühr et al., 2010) the author will examine how this concepts applies to cooperation in the BSR Programme. As the ideas of a ‘platform for learning’ and a ‘learning machine’ share a common metaphorical meaning the author will use these two concepts alternatively. In order to achieve more tangible results the author will analyze feedback from project partners based on the different level of transnational experience. This discussion will be followed by categorization of learning processes at the individual and organizational level in subchapters 5.2. and 5.3.

Working in the frame of transnational cooperation is a distinct and often new experience for many partners. It gives a unique opportunity to establish contacts with external stakeholders who cannot be met in any other way. Consequently, transnational cooperation creates a so-called platform for discussion and learning where different project partners can meet and work at an equal level (Interviewees 4, 9, 2014). In order to examine how this platform for cooperation works in practice the author will present several examples from BSR Programme projects. The author found that regardless of the level of experience interviewees had of working in transnational projects, they consistently perceive the benefits of cooperation and learning at a transnational level.

In some particular cases, such as the C.A.S.H. project the cooperation, sharing of practices and learning was immensely increased in an area where police organization had no funding previously and no possibility of transnational cooperation (Interviewee 10, 2014). As a result
of cooperation partners developed a better understanding and appreciation of their colleagues (policy authorities) from the other side of border. They had much higher respect and understanding of their neighbouring police authorities. Referring to the Lead Partner (Interviewee 11, 2014) the added value of C.A.S.H. project was rather interesting as it established an effective platform for cooperation which is used even after the project ended. Another experienced partner argued that the RBGC project intensified cooperation and communication in the field of public transport and enhanced transnational learning within that field (Interviewee 1, 2014). Having a common platform for discussion made it much easier to exchange knowledge and learn from each other (Ibid.). Similar opinion was presented by a less-experienced partner from the BSLN project, for whom cooperation in a transnational ‘platform’ was a new experience which allowed better integration and more informal contacts with project partners (Interviewee 8, 2014). An interesting observation can be made here, that regardless of the level of transnational experience the added value of platform for cooperation is perceived similarly even by newcomers to the BSR Programme.

Another good example of a ‘learning machine’ is the Baltic Deal project, which aimed to stimulate cooperation between different agricultural advisory centers around the Baltic Sea. The main aim, understood as an ‘engine’ of the project, was to create a network between agricultural and environmental sectors and to share the experience, methods, and tools between different partners around the Baltic Sea region. Referring to the experience of Interviewee 15 (2014), who was involved in the BSLN project, it was a well-established model for transnational cooperation. The metaphor of learning machine was also used by the Interviewee 2 (2014). Being a part of part of European machine the project partners have to think, act and cooperate at the new transnational level. New level of cooperation creates new conditions for communication and learning at the equal European basis. Partners and organizations should be able to find themselves a position in this global learning machine (Ibid.).

To conclude, one of the main benefits of the BSR Programme projects is the platform that they provide for transnational cooperation. The projects function as learning machines which create equal conditions for communication and learning at the transitional level. The above analysis presents one clear outcome, that regardless of the level of experience the added value of cooperation and learning in transnational framework is perceived by project partners similarly. It is a unique opportunity to cooperate with transnational partners in the form of mutual learning and experience sharing. Additionally, transnational platforms for cooperation create a great environment to establish more informal contacts, which can last even after project ends.

5.2. Individual learning

The analysis within this subchapter constitutes a basis for the answer to the second research questions concerning different types of individual learning at the BSR Programme. As presented in the methodology chapter the author gathered quite extensive feedback from
strongly diverse representation of project partners from the BSR Programme. In order to organize the empirical analysis in the possible coherent and comprehensible way the author identified six main categories of individual learning. Each category represents common types of individual learning in the BSR Programme projects. Similarly to previous subchapter, in order achieve more tangible results the author will based his analysis on different variables such as position within the project, nationality, level of experience, and type of organization (different legal status name).

Before staring the actual analysis and interesting point was raised by Interviewee 3 (2014) who is involved in INTERREG cooperation since 2007. The individual learning is a process where partners develop new ideas mutually thorough discussions, exchanging different experiences and good practises. Consequently they gained something new but they also share their experience with others. So the learning in transnational cooperation projects is a real mutual process from which everybody can benefit (Ibid.).

5.2.1. Learning about each other

The first category of individual learning is ‘learning about each other’. As emphasized by most of partners, it is the most basic yet very important example of learning which increases awareness about partners within project and their organisations (Interviewees 1, 2, 8, 12, 2014). In order to understand better the main mechanisms of this phenomenon the author will analyse the partner’s feedback based on their different legal status name.

One of the most applied techniques of learning about partners is through empirical research. This is very effective tool, especially at the beginning of cooperation, as it facilitates gathering large quantities of data in a short period of time. It is popular method within academic bodies and research organizations which are specialized in data collection and analysis. Referring to feedback from project partners, learning through empirical researcher was undertaken by Interviewees 5 and 8. In case of the University partner from the RBGC project, the analysis of data allowed them to update their knowledge about the economic and social situation in the Baltic States and Eastern Europe (Interviewee 5, 2014). Additionally, it increased awareness concerning the development of the rail sector in those countries (Ibid.). From the perspective of Interviewee 8 (2014), who represents non-governmental organization, the series of interviews with Russian and Estonian partners enabled better understanding of labour-market development in those countries. In both cases, partners increased their awareness about each other and established good contacts for future cooperation. For more results orientated organizations, such as various national authorities, the alternative methods for learning about each other are workshops, exchanges of personnel or field trips. These tools, thanks to their face-to-face approach, ensure strong interaction between partners and intensify learning processes. Referring to Interviewee 10 (2014), who as a Lead Partner facilitated a staff exchange process, participation in the C.A.S.H. project resulted in widening and broadening of experience between different police authorities around the Baltic Sea. Each police authority had a chance to learn about the organizational and structural differences between their organizations, and this facilitated individual learning amongst participants. This experience was crucial for future cooperation on safer heavy goods traffic in the BSR.
To conclude, the first individual learning experience is termed ‘learning about each other’. This is one of the first experiences for project partners, which boosts awareness, interaction and learning processes among them. Among more academically oriented organizations the most efficient way for staff to know each other better is empirical research and then detailed analysis. For more practically oriented actors such as police organizations tools such as staff exchange or workshop are much more applicable.

5.2.2. Learning about cooperation in transnational project

The second type of individual learning refers to various aspects of cooperation in transnational projects. In order to achieve better results the author will base this part of the analysis on the different levels of transnational experience between project partners. It is not surprising that the lower and individual’s transnational experience the more basic their individual learning processes. However, the interesting research case is to examine how this situation has developed within the Baltic Sea Region Programme.

From the practical experience of Interviewee 6 (2014), a communication officer on the BALTRIS project, working in the framework of a transnational project is a great eye-opening experience that enables individual partners to become more borderless. However, in order to reach this level of borderless thinking each partner has to learn various aspects of transnational cooperation. Two main issues of individual learning are communication in transnational team, and discipline and prioritization of tasks.

Working in transnational projects differs significantly from regular project management. One can assume that transnational cooperation is a challenging and often complicated learning process which requires different types of skills. One of them is learning how to work and communicate within the transnational team. Extensive transnational experience enables individuals to consider issues from more comprehensive perspective. As argued by Interviewee 4 (2014) who participated in numerous projects such as the RBGC or the Baltic Promo, before any cooperation can occur some entry requirements need to be fulfilled. One of the most important prerequisites, which enhance communication and learning, is an effective networking mechanism to bring people together. As such, project partners who are responsible for communication within the project have to learn how to build interest between people and organizations; they have to find some common denominator or joint idea for cooperation. Individuals within a transnational team are motivated and unique where there exists something in common content-wise and there is some idea of common goal(Ibid). Awareness of the need for a common denominator is of the great value for individual learning and can significantly streamline communication processes.

For many individuals INTERREG projects are an opportunity to learn how to cooperate and communicate within transnational partnerships. In the case of the RBGC project, cooperation between 21 partners from different countries and backgrounds was of benefit for broadening and developing communication skills (Interviewee 5, 2014). From the perspective of
Interviewee 6 (2014), working as communication manager in the BALTRS project was a lesson in how to facilitate discussions at the transnational level and how to steer it to achieve better outcomes. Additionally it was an opportunity to test and improve organizational communication tools and procedures based on the transnational experience (Ibid). By contrast the difficulties in communication between different working cultures were emphasized strongly by Interviewee 7 who did not possess the same level of experience on transnational projects (2014). In general, the first learning experience of ‘new comers’ to INTERREG project are mainly problems with communication and information flow. As stated by Interviewee 8 (2014), they struggle as a team to obtain support or advice from other partners in how deal with administrative procedures during projects.

As a result of transnational cooperation partners learn how to prioritize their tasks and to keep a high discipline during their work. This is a crucial skill, as transnational cooperation is a multilevel and interconnected process where other partners are waiting for your input and reports in order to continue project development (Interviewee 6, 2014). Hence the important aspect of individual learning in transnational project is the ability to organize the work strictly to Programme rules. By following procedures it is easier to achieve discipline, good results, maintain fruitful cooperation within partnerships (Interviewee 2, 2014). Experienced partners understand the issue of discipline comprehensively. It is not only about learning how to organize your work routine in project, but also learning how to reconcile two duties in the same time; the daily work in your home organization and the responsibilities from the project (Interviewee 6, 2014). Hence, individual learning often means the ability to independently prioritize and organize one’s schedule. Following this more comprehensive approach towards learning, participation in an INTERREG project is a good opportunity for the Lead Partner to learn how to motivate the team and maintain the prioritization of tasks (Interviewee 11, 2014). As project partners generally organize their schedule accordingly to organizational duties, the role of the Lead Partner is to ensure that the project he or she represents has a high priority on partner agendas. This is an important lesson to learn in order to become a successful Lead Partner.

To conclude, communication in transnational cooperation projects can be interpreted differently. For experienced partners it is a great opportunity to test their skills at the new transnational level. For new comers it is often a problematic issue which generates anger and frustration especially at the outset of cooperation. However, referring to both cases the better the communication and networking between individual partners the higher motivation and discipline within the partnership. Furthermore, discipline and the ability to prioritize daily responsibilities is an essential skill at every level of experience and partnership. Depending on the project partner’s responsibilities we can distinguish between self-discipline learning (Intervieweees 2, 6), and project discipline learning which is one of the Lead Partner’s duties (Interviewee 11). Although this issue was presented mainly by experienced partners, the author is aware that learning about discipline and task prioritization applies to every project partner regardless of their position or level of experience.
5.2.3. Socio-cultural learning

In the third category the author identified main aspects concerning socio-cultural learning. By being confronted with other mentalities and working cultures individual partners not only extend their transnational skills but also learn about parts of the Europe to which they were unacquainted. Participation in a transnational project is an experience which increases awareness of different cultural phenomena that may not be seen otherwise (Interviewee 6, 2014). In order to understand better the main aspects of this phenomenon the author will analyse the feedback based on different nationalities of interviewees.

From the individual perspective learning in INTERREG projects enabled better understanding of different level of intercultural competences, the way of life and working routine. It sheds a new light on the cultural and mental differences at the local, regional and national level. Interviewee 1 said that, from a German perspective, cooperation in RBGC project with 21 different partners was very interesting personally because it helped to understand other people, their needs and ways of life (Interviewee 1, 2014). Practical experience gained during study visits to partner countries increased the awareness about the political situation, societal profile and economical development of countries such as Baltic States, Poland and Romania. These rather general statements apply to most cases of individual learning in INTERREG projects. However, the particularly interesting are personal experiences which partner learn from the project and which cannot be experienced in any other situation. Thanks to the study visits the Interviewee 1 (2014) realized that, although difficult history it was very fascinating to see how open Germans were welcomed in Warsaw and how extent to which development between Poland and Germany has taken place over the years. This knowledge helped in understanding differences in partnership, not only cultural but also social and political (Ibid.).

Another important point in discussion on individual socio-cultural learning was raised by a Finish partner (Interviewee 11). The partner himself is a good example of multicultural expert as having a double nationality (Finish and German) his cultural awareness is high. During interview he emphasized the importance of different cultural stereotypes which exists all over the Europe. While working in transnational team partners learn about different habits and different ways of thinking. Cooperation with partners from different countries from within the Baltic Sea Region enables learning about specific kinds of cliché of different working habits which may or may not be confirmed in practice (Interviewee 11, 2014).

On the topic of cultural clichés, an interesting learning experienced was a specific knowledge about cooperation with Russians presented by three Nordic partners (Interviewees 5, 11, 12 2014). It is very specific case as the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 gives an opportunity to establish partnership with non-European actors from Russia, Belarus or Norway. From the project partners experience cooperation with Russians created some difficulties as they often have different view on things (Interviewee 11, 2014). When it comes to communication or project development it was difficult to get a binding decisions or even regular contact with respective decision makers. Furthermore, difficulties around a lack of regular contact cause further problems in developing project research and data collection (Interviewee 5, 2014). Although mostly negative learning experience there are some good
examples of cooperation. Interviewee 12 (2014) found that working with different Russian police authorities becomes better over the years. Learning about their organizational culture and way of working was a long yet interesting process. On the other hand Russian partners learned from the European partners how to deal with crime at the transnational level. So far this mutual cooperation on issues such as European traffic safety or European-Russian crime has brought a lot of fruitful outcomes (Ibid.).

To conclude the general benefit of socio-cultural learning in BSR Programme projects refers to the increase in awareness about political situations, societal profiles and economic development among Baltic countries. This type of learning occurs on most in INTERREG projects. The more relevant examples of socio-cultural learning are personal experiences. While for a German partner a study visit to Poland shed new light on current relations between those two countries. The Finish partner emphasized the importance of individual learning about specific kind of cliché of different working habits, particularly in cooperation with Russian partners. Especially for Nordic partners, whose working culture differs significantly from Russian colleagues, different approaches to communication and cooperation were important lessons learnt. However, there is an optimistic issue as the closer transnational cooperation between partners the less difference between Russia and Europe.

5.2.4. Technical learning about the BSR Programme

The fourth type of individual learning focuses on the technical aspects of participation in the BSR Programme. It is a common knowledge that the INTERREG programmes are characterized by a substantial bureaucratic burden and time-consuming reporting procedures. However, the author’s aim is to analyse the relation between partners from different organizations (different legal status name) and their experience with the BSR Programme.

The first challenge for ‘new comers’ in the INTERREG programmes are often the complicated procedures and technical requirements. Several interviewees shared the opinion that some programme procedures should be streamlined and the bureaucracy level should be lowered. Especially for partners from more result oriented organizations, such as non-governmental associations, the amount of procedures is often overwhelming. Referring to Interviewee 17 (2014), who represents a Tourism association, the first personal learning experience about the BSR Programme was of ‘shock’ at how complicated it is. Nonetheless, once the project partners learned about the ‘rules of the game’ participation in Programme and following its main procedures becomes less problematic. Similar feedback yet a different metaphor were used by the Interviewee 8 from another non-governmental association. As a Programme ‘new comer’ the bureaucratic part, was a ‘nightmare’ for the partner her colleagues from project office (Interviewee 8, 2012). Learning about the procedures caused lots of stress and waste of resources especially at the beginning of cooperation. In general, at the beginning of transnational cooperation ‘adventure’ issues such as high bureaucracy burden, reporting and other formalities make the participation more difficult. However once partners learn about the ‘rules of the game’ the whole complexity of programme seems to be manageable (Interviewee 17, 2014).
Learning about the rules of the programme is a time-consuming and self-driven process. Nonetheless, only through individual learning about reporting, different forms and templates or financial issues can a project partner acquire the necessary transnational knowledge and skills. Organizations such as Universities or national authorities those are more familiar with highly bureaucratic environments. For them participation is not a ‘shock’, but rather a routine. To representatives of regional authorities participating in the BSR Programme looks like a challenge when in fact it is a schematic process (Interviewee 3, 2014). Each project is different but all of them following the same application forms and procedures (Ibid.).

In summary learning about formalities and technicalities of INTERREG programmes is an important yet difficult process. For partners from non-governmental sector, who are more practically oriented, the first experience is a ‘shock’ which reminds more a ‘nightmare’ rather than fruitful learning process. However once partners learn about the ‘rules of the game’ the complexity of the Programme seems to be manageable.

5.2.5. Learning through the mirror approach

The fifth category of individual learning was identified based on the empirical experiences of selected project partners. It is a new concept created by the author himself; hence it constitutes a novel input to the theoretical discussion on learning processes in INTERREG projects. The ‘mirror’ approach applies to almost every project partner regardless his/her nationality, level of experience, or organizational background. This is why the following analysis is based on rather open discussion and presents different individual experiences in semi-structured way. First the author provides a brief explanation to ‘mirror’ concept and then discusses some specific cases from different BSR Programme projects.

To indentify this category, the author draws upon the feedback from Interviewee 2 (2014). Referring to his extensive experience from RBGC and many other projects, the interviewee found participation in the INTERREG project to be like looking into a mirror. At the beginning of co-operation the interviewee realized that the partners faced very similar regional or organizational problems. Each partner tries to tackle the problems differently but the origins of the problem are often the same. Hence, it is like looking at the mirror because you can see the same issues but in a new, ‘mirror’ perspective. It is a great experience because from the mirror perspective you can learn about similarities in your neighbouring countries both in detailed perspective and also from wider spectrum. This experience further helps to tackle your regional or organizational problems more comprehensively and effectively (Ibid.). Referring to Interviewees 3, 14, 16, 17 (2014) there are several examples of ‘mirror’ learning. From the C.A.S.H. project perspective, the mirror approach was applied to learn how road safety and national crime issues are dealt with in other countries and was compared (mirrored) to the situation in Finland (Interviewee 14, 2014). Another interesting case comes from the Baltic Deal project where Interviewee 16 (2014) got a glimpse in the way that First Level Controllers are organized in different countries and the FLC attitude towards the organization.
from their home countries. Learning about different working qualities and styles of the FLC in different countries helped the partner to become more familiar with his own FLC in Latvia (Ibid.). Thirdly the experience from the Baltic Green Belt project about different ways of dealing with military heritage protection and sustainable development of rural tourism services was presented by Interviewee 17 (2014). Learning through the mirror approach enabled the interviewee to better understanding how military heritage and tourism service issues could be better tackled in their own country (Ibid.).

The mirror approach is a great example how cooperation at the transnational level can enhance development of locally (common) oriented issues. It gives a fresh look on the internal issues and helps individuals to think ‘outside the box’ on how to deal with them. By drawing from transnational experience the mirror approach gives hope to project partners that you can solve every issue mutually.

**5.2.6. Expert learning**

For the sixth category the author narrows down his identification of learning processes to a more specific group of partners. The first part of the discussion refers to the top-down learning understood as a sharing of knowledge and skills with less experienced partners. The following part focuses on the learning experience of Lead Partners. As the feedback from the Lead Partners is characterized by high empirical value, this can be a substantial input to discussion on learning processes it the INTERREG projects. Hence, the second categorization is of particular interest for this thesis. In order to derive relevant conclusions author will analyse the first part according to different partners’ nationality. The identification of learning experiences of Lead Partners is already a specific approach which is why only experienced partners will be taken into account.

While analyzing the learning in the INTERREG projects we have to be aware that these processes occur not only at the horizontal level, but also can be defined as top down knowledge sharing. This particular situation refers mainly to the experienced project partners, who have substantial transnational skills and can successfully facilitate cooperation within projects. Referring to the German partner (Interviewee 1, 2014), who described himself as a key expert in the RBGC project, the main aim as a project partner was to transfer knowledge and experience about existing travellers information systems to the new partners from Poland and Finland and provide them with the technical skills to join this wider Baltic forum. While the transfer of technical knowledge as such was not a challenge, an interesting learning experience was the issue of organizing this transfer in the most approachable way and how to adjust a previously developed German system to the emerging system in Poland (Ibid.). In order to tackle this issue the project partners established regular expert seminars meeting twice a year. During each seminar, which served like a platform for cooperation, partners exchanged best practice and know-how and jointly developed new standards for traveller information systems.
The partner from Sweden presented another relevant case (Interviewee 6). Working as a communication officer in the BALTRIS project, one of the most fascinating learning experiences was sharing of good practices of communication by using more informal and open approaches. As the communication standards and procedures in Sweden are already highly developed, Interviewee 6’s aim (2014) was to disseminate these best practices within the team. Exchanging knowledge and experience in the top-down form, increased the communication standards within the project and created more space for informal and honest discussions. Consequently, good communication facilitated information flow and optimized the decision making processes (Ibid.). In the end project partners from countries such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania or Poland were grateful for introducing this ‘new style’ of communication and appreciated the effectiveness of this approach. For the Interviewee 6 (2014) personally this knowledge sharing was a wonderful mutual learning experience she could contribute to.

To shift the discussion to Lead Partner learning, the better the top-down communication and cooperation within the project the more beneficial the project outcomes (Interviewee 10, 2014). In order to be able to run the transnational project successfully the Lead Partner has to obtain various skills and experiences beforehand. The first issue of learning at the LP level refers to the social aspect of cooperation. Across the LP experience the initial stage of a project is often the most challenging but at the same time the most crucial for further project development. It is very important to establish a good understanding among all partners individually and collectively (Interviewee 10, 2014). As stated by Interviewee 9 (2014) before even thinking about participation in transnational project the LP needs to collect a real team with common goals which is highly motivated and ready for hard work. This was developed further by Interviewee 4 (2014) who titled this experience as learning ‘how to run transnational project team’, which in the optimum case is a team in which everybody feels the part of the same group.

Another important learning aspect is the overall technical skills which refer to already mentioned high bureaucracy burden and complicated Programme procedures. The first aspect is learning how to carefully organize and divide the project budget. This is an essential skill as once the budget has been approved it is difficult to make changes and ask partners for extra engagement after the whole work schedule to financial support are planned (Interviewee 4, 2014). Closely related to the budgetary issue is learning about the eligibility of costs when it comes to procurement. The role of LP is to constantly check whether the particular cost is relevant for project activity and can be eligibly co-financed by the Programme. Having a good sense of understanding what can be done in project and what cannot streamlines many procedural issues.

Finally being a LP in transnational project requires a high level of flexibility and ability to adjust to dynamically changing environment. Drawing upon experience of Interviewee 10 (2014), during the project duration phase the Polish partner suddenly reported that due to the governmental changes they have to withdraw from the partnership. After the intensive discussions the situation did not change and Polish partner dropped out the project. Despite
the failure of negotiations, the whole experience was of great value for the LP to learn how to deal with sudden changes in the partnership (Ibid.). Another case refers to organizational changes caused by the merger of two universities. As a result of merger of two academic institutions new administrative and communication procedures were introduced within the organization. This caused an internal need to adjust the new system and routine to the procedures and formal requirements of INTERREG projects. Through individual learning the LP learned how to cope with the internal whilst simultaneously functioning as the main project coordinator. It was crucial to learn how to manage this sort of rather dynamic project environment where many variables are changing (Interviewee 11, 2014).

To conclude the first part of analysis, the top down learning is a widely occurring process in almost every BSR Programme project. It is found in situations where more experienced partners share their know-how and good practice in order to facilitate project development and jointly reach project aims. Focusing on the relation between top-down learning and partner’s nationality it can be observed that in most cases the know-how experts were partners from developed countries such as Germany or Sweden. The main recipients, on the other hand are mainly partners Eastern European countries. The thematic focus of knowledge exchange differs among projects. While in more technically oriented cooperation the top-down sharing refers mainly to new specifications and updates of information systems. In case of learning about soft skills such as communication, experienced partners introduced more open and informal approaches to cooperation.

With regards to learning at the Lead Partner level the first essential skill is social awareness. This refers directly to the ability of collecting a high motivated and well integrated team from the beginning of cooperation. A real transnational expert has to know how to organize and divide the project budget well. This is important for the financial liquidity in the project but also for project partners to organize their work schedule. The LP should also possess an extensive knowledge about the eligibility of different costs. Finally the high level of flexibility and ability to adjust to dynamically changing environment are very crucial skills for the LP. As the management of transnational team is a challenging task the LP has to be prepared for the sudden changes in personnel, partnership or internal reorganizations which can jeopardize the project.

5.3. ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

As presented in second analytical model, once the individuals have learned something in the cooperation process this experience can be transferred into their home organization where it contributes to institutional learning (Böhme, 2003). However the border between individual and organizational learning is rather blurry and it is difficult to distinguish between these two phenomena. Hence, the aim of this subchapter is to categorize main examples of organizational learning in the BSR Programme. Based on the feedback for project partners the author identified two main categories which are presented as follows: changes in
organizational routines, and organizational learning as a collection of transnational experiences.

5.3.1. Changes in organizational routines

The first type of learning at the organizational level refers to changes in organizational routines. Although transnational learning does not trigger organizational changes directly, it can have substantial impact via double loop learning. Referring to various project partners the transnational experience and new skills from individual learning generated further changes in their home organizations. In general, participation in INTERREG projects reinforced organizational changes towards a more flexible and transnational structures, behaviours, and processes. In case of Interviewee 11 (2014), the merger of two Universities resulted in the need to adjust the new organizational structure to the requirements of transnational cooperation. After a long internal discussion between the project partner (Interviewee 11) and administration department they reached a mutual agreement to replace some systems and tools and become more useable for transnational projects. For more relevant conclusions the author based this part of analysis on different organizational backgrounds (legal status name). From within an organisation’s perspective, transnational experience can enhance organizational development and learning about latest strategies and research approaches. In case of the Lithuanian agricultural association, the experienced gained from the Swedish partner facilitated organizational learning towards a broader understanding of the environmental approach (Interviewee 15, 2014). This approach is widely used in Nordic countries, while for organizations from Baltic States it is a kind of novelty. Transferring experience from transnational to organizational level also triggered better decision making processes based on more comprehensive and up-to-date data. Referring to Interviewee 5 (2014) the more comprehensive vision and knowledge the more accurate decisions making process.

To conclude, changes in organizational routine based on the transnational experience are widely occurring learning phenomena. They apply to organizations of different legal status and in general change organizational routines towards more flexible and transnational approaches. While in some cases transnational learning reinforce organizational systems to become more useable for INTERREG cooperation. For the others it triggers better decision making processes based on more comprehensive and up-to-date data.

5.3.2. Collection of transnational experiences

Learning as a collection of transnational experience is essential for organizations for various reasons. It makes organization more aware about its own transnational capacity and gives a chance to learn new skills such as writing successful proposals. It also prepares organizations for more responsible transnational roles such as being a Lead Partner. These issues are discussed at the following part of this subchapter based on the different levels of experience.
Participation in transnational projects is a so-called ‘eye-opener’ for the organization as it helps to realize how tricky and challenging the Programmes are (Interviewee 11, 2014). For many organizations especially ‘new comers’ the first experience with INTERREG is often their last as they are already facing a lot of bureaucracy issues so the extra work from EU is simply overwhelming (Ibid.). Nonetheless, once organizations decide to take part in cooperation the learning process about the Programme is dynamic and effective. The first crucial experience which organization can learn quite fast is the ability to write a successful project proposal. From the experience of regional authority, the transnational know-how is a crucial factor in writing project proposals which increase the probability of receiving extra funding (Interviewee 3, 2014). To continue the wider an organization’s experience in INTERREG initiative the greater their resource of specific knowledge about project management. As stated by the head of regional planning authority well organized project preparation is like being at the half way to the Mount Everest (Interviewee 2 2014). Of course it requires a lot of effort but generates much better final results (Ibid.). In summary, participation in the INTERREG project makes partners aware about their organizational capacity when it comes to the EU bureaucracy. Lessons learnt from previous project enables better application and increase the chance for the EU funding. Experienced organizations know much better what to do and what to expect when it comes to transnational cooperation.

From a broader perspective, participation in the BSR Programme enables better preparation for the future participation in the INTERREG projects. An interesting but at the same challenging aspect of transnational cooperation is that each project focuses on something new so for the organization it is a ‘new story on each time’ (Interviewee 3, 2014). It creates a great variety of experience on the one hand. However it is also a challenge because organization has to adjust every time to new situations and requirements (Interviewee 17, 2014). From analyzing organizational learning, one can observe that experience gained from cross border cooperation often allows the organization to become a lead partner in transnational cooperation project (Interviewee 16, 2014). This is a real outcome of organizational learning as the higher the level of cooperation the greater the prestige for the organization. Finally an important learning experience for organization is more extensive knowledge about different financial means available in the BSR Programme. As an example the SEED money facility can enhance organizational development at the transitional level (Interviewee 17, 2014).

To conclude, organizational learning is much more difficult process to categorize compared to individual learning. As organizational learning is understood as the transmission of learning results from project level towards the partner organization it a challenge to indentify a specific categories for this group. Additionally the boundary between these two phenomena is blurred, hence making a clear division is rather challenging. Despite these obstacles the author distinguished three main categories of organizational learning which can contribute an interesting input to overall discussion on learning within the BRS Programme.
5.4. LEARNING BARRIERS

As stated at the literature review chapter, working in the framework of a transnational project with culturally diverse partners from different organizational backgrounds leads to various constraints and challenges (Böhme et al., 2003). The analysis of main barriers which limit learning in INTERREG projects is the core of following discussion. Based on the main findings from theoretical discussion and individual experiences of selected project partners the author identified five different types of barriers. In order to achieve meaningful outcomes the author distinguished between issues that directly hamper learning process and those that have an indirect impact. The main findings are used to answer research question four, presented in the final conclusion chapter.

5.4.1. Internal issues

The internal issues which occur in almost every organization can negatively impact learning processes within INTERREG projects. One of the most explicit examples is discussed above the merger of two universities from Finland. In this particular case the most problematic issue, which affected project management, was changing of internal procedures for the bookkeeping (Interviewee 11, 2014). From the Lead Partner perspective it was a very time consuming process to explain to University administration that their internal problems and new working routine can affect badly the cooperation in transnational project the budget for which amounts around 3.5 million euro (Ibid.).

Another internal issue can be defined as conflict of interest between project partner and home organization. Putting theory into practice, the Interviewee 4 (2013) emphasized the inability of the University management body to see the scientific value of transnational cooperation projects. This barrier is a widely occurring phenomenon that refers mainly to the problems of incorporating transnational cooperation projects into institutional goals. The main aim of the Finish University is to support academic research and scientific development not cooperation on transnational issues. The head of the academic unit emphasised the lack of relevant academic publications made by transnational cooperation projects as the main reason of this conflict (Ibid.).

Both of these issues have their origins at the organizational level. When it comes to institutional changes such as mergers of two organizations, the influence on projects is a secondary effect. Similar observation can be made while analyzing the conflicts of interest. The internal problems firstly affect project partner and then can cause difficulties at the project level. Hence the ‘internal issues’ are defined as an indirect barriers.

5.4.2. Challenge of a good partnership

From the Lead Partner perspective the INTERREG projects often face the challenge of establishing good partnership and effective task division. This is the first direct barrier for
learning as the less transparent the project structure the more difficult conditions for cooperation and experience exchange become. In the case of the RBGC project due to the big number of partners it was challenging to establish a well-organized partnership. Another problematic issue was finding a competent and experience leader for each work package (Interviewee 1, 2014). The importance of well-organized partnership, which generates further fruitful learning processes, was emphasized also by Interviewee 2 (2014). The more effective and better organized the partnership the more beneficial learning outcomes and the higher motivation for cooperation (Ibid.). Motivation within the team was an issue discussed by Interviewee 8 who identified it as a problem of finding a common platform for cooperation. Too many partners in projects give problems in finding the common denominator or common platform for cooperation (Interviewee 8, 2014). A lack of community spirit could cause further problems with communication, information flow and mutual understanding. Consequently the learning potential is much lower and learning outcomes are dissatisfying.

### 5.4.3. Language barrier

The lack of sufficient English skills is one of the most common obstacles for cooperation at the transnational level. It has a direct impact on cooperation as without sufficient language skills communication and learning in transnational teams is technically impossible. It is not a surprising outcome that the lack of adequate English skills was the most often discussed problem. For the Interviewees 3, 5, 7, 15, 16 (2014) language barriers were presented in various aspects. As most of regional and local planning document are in their national language, it is difficult for partners from other countries to study them and learn something new (Interviewee 3, 2014). In countries like Poland and the Baltic states lack of translation is the main barrier. Interviewee 5 (2014) pointed out that it is not necessarily lack of language skills on the project level but on the local decision maker’s level which is a barrier to projects. The insufficient language skill was also problematic for end users such as farmers in Baltic Deal project. When it come to learning from project communication tools such as web-side or newsletters, farmers had problems with following the news as most publications were released in English (Interviewee 15, 16, 2014). However, referring to Interviewee 12 (2014) the language situation is changing rapidly. Currently, thanks to INTTEREG cooperation, the language skills among partners have improved significantly.

### 5.4.4. Bureaucracy and reporting

The bureaucracy is second to language as the most commonly emphasized barrier, especially among the less experienced partners. High bureaucratic burden in the BSR Programme is another not very surprising yet important aspect which hampers learning process in projects. It was a big problem especially for partners who have never been involved in INTERREG projects before and did not have a substantial knowledge how to deal with the Programme requirements. As discussed above the first clash with bureaucracy burden is often a shock or
nightmare that less experienced project partners have to overcome by themselves. Due to its complicated structure the bureaucracy is understood twofold. First as a direct barrier this discourages many partners to participate in future cooperation. Secondly as a more indirect issue, a high bureaucratic burden occupies time which could be better invested for cooperation and learning in the project.

**5.4.5. Other issues**

Finally the author briefly discusses the last two barriers both of which are highly relevant to learning processes and transfer of transnational experience. However each of them focuses on a rather different issue.

Firstly, the ‘hands-on approach’ refers to the problem of sharing experience and outcomes outside the project. This problem was raised by Interviewee 2 (2014) who argued that it is difficult to transfer learning outcomes outside the project to the people who are far from the cooperation’s reality. The issue was named by the Interviewee 2 (2014) as an ‘outsider complex’ which generates more resistance than opening for learning. Being an outsider you do not realize the relation between the project partners and the transnational phenomenon (Ibid.). Additionally the resistance to learning is based on the conviction that personal experience and competence are not enough to participate in meetings and draw upon transnational knowledge. Consequently, the ‘hands on approach’ is an important aspect for successful cooperation at the project level; however, it can hamper learning transfer to the people indirectly involved in cooperation. Hence it is an indirect barrier for learning processes.

Last but not least the dynamic flow of experts between projects was emphasized as a potential problem for organizations when it results in their losing transnational tacit knowledge. This problem occurs in practice, when the expert after the project ends is leaving the organization with their personal experience and transitional skills. Referring to experience of the Lead Partner form the C.A.S.H. project, hiring new people for the project means that they are employed for quite a short period and once the project is finished they are moving out (Interviewee 11, 2014). The problem is that when the experts leave they take with them their resources of tacit knowledge and experience. Hence, for the organization it is a terrible loss in terms of losing transnational know-how (Ibid.).

The main outcome of this sub chapter is the identification of five specific types of barriers which hindering learning processes within the BSR Programme. Issues such as organizational and cultural differences, challenges with establishing good partnership, language barriers and the hands on approach have a direct impact on learning processes in transnational projects. Similarly internal issues and dynamic flow of experts with their tacit knowledge indirectly hamper exchange of experiences. However, the future reader has to be ever aware that this is only a selective categorization as for each project partner different factors constitute a real barrier to cooperation and learning. As with organizational learning this is an individual and hard to define issue.
The aim of this chapter was to identify the main types of learning at the transnational, individual, and organizational level as well as to pinpoint the main barriers which limit the learning processes in the BSR Programme projects. As a result of detailed empirical analysis the author defined specific categories of learning which occurred at each level. Hence for individual learning the specific types are as follows; learning about each other, learning about cooperation in INTERREG projects, socio-cultural learning, technical learning about the BSR Programme, learning through the mirror approach and expert learning. With regards to organizational learning the author distinguishes between; changes in organizational routine and collection of transnational experiences. Finally, the main learning barriers are categorized in five different groups; internal issues, the challenge of good partnership, language barriers, bureaucracy and reporting, and other issues. The main findings from this chapter enabled better understanding of learning machine concept in practice and will constitute a basis for the final conclusion of this thesis.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of this thesis was to analyse in the learning processes occurring in transnational cooperation projects. Based on the comprehensive literature analysis which clearly stated that there is still a paucity of in-depth empirical analysis, the secondary aim of this thesis was to make a substantial input to on-going discussion on learning processes in the INTERREG project. Additionally, as there are few routines and models in this area, the thesis contributes to the formulation of conceptual framework to support studies in this area. In order to establish a conceptual analytical model, the author based his theoretical discussion on two issues. Firstly, the thematic focus of cooperation constituted a theoretical basis for first analytical model. Secondly, drawing upon organizational learning theory, the three different loops of learning were introduced.

While the first analytical model was used for better selection of project partners, the second analytical model was used in empirical analysis. In order to examine how the learning machine concept works in practice the author distinguished between the following three levels; transnational framework for learning, individual learning, and organizational learning. Based on the feedback from selected project partners the author identified different types of learning at each level. Additionally the author identified main barriers hampering learning processes in transnational cooperation projects. The final conclusions from undertaking research are presented as follows.

6.1. Findings in relation to research questions

Learning within transnational projects is characterized by a high level of interaction, mutual learning, and exchange of good practices and experiences. By creating platforms for
cooperation, which are one of the main outcomes of INTERREG projects, partners from different organizational backgrounds and different countries can work at an equal level, communicate with each other and jointly achieve transnational goals. Regardless of the level of experience the added value of cooperation and learning in transnational framework is perceived by project partners similarly. Additionally transnational experiences collected from cooperation in effective learning machines trigger positive reactions and willingness to participate in the future BSR Programme initiative.

The first type of individual learning was defined as ‘learning about each other’. Although it is one of the most basic types of learning it is of great value for the awareness of project partners. Referring to different types of organisations the more practically oriented organizations (police, transport authority) focus individual learning ‘about each other’ on interaction and face-to-face cooperation. The conclusion can go one step further and assume that for the more transnationally oriented issues (i.e. European traffic safety) cooperation focuses on establishing joint actions and strategies.

The second category of individual learning was presented as learning about cooperation in transnational projects. Referring to relations between the level of experience and the ability to communicate within transnational team some simple conclusions can be made. Firstly, the broader the transnational experience the more comprehensive learning processes between individual partners. Secondly for the most ‘new comers’ in the BSR Programme the communication is often associated with difficulties between different working countries. However, while analyzing this process the author should avoid generalizations. The communication is a relative issue which can be interpreted differently according to the individual experience of each project partner. Learning about discipline and tasks prioritization applies to every project partner regardless of their position or level of experience. As transnational cooperation is a multilevel and interconnected process all partners have to present a high level of discipline in order to ensure smooth and successful project delivery. While regular partners learn mainly about self-discipline and prioritization of their own tasks (project and home organization), the role of the Lead Partner is to ensure the high discipline of work at the project level.

The analysis of third type of the socio-cultural learning, based on the different nationality of project partners reveals some important conclusions. First the general benefit of socio-cultural learning in BSR Programme projects relates to increased awareness of political situations, societal profile and economical development amongst different Baltic countries. This issue applies in most of cases of individual learning in INTERREG projects. From the research viewpoint more relevant are personal experiences as each case is a different learning story. For some it is learning about new standard of neighbouring relations (German partner with Polish colleagues). While for the other this is important individual experience about specific clichés of different working habits. Finally a more ‘exotic’ case is the possibility to cooperate and learn about Russian culture. Especially for Nordic partners, whose working culture differs significantly from Russian colleagues, the lack of transparency and communication were important lessons learnt. Nevertheless an optimistic correlation can be observed as the closer the transnational cooperation between partners the less difference between Russia and Europe.
Fourthly the conclusion from technical learning about the BSR Programme amongst organisations is rather simple. The more result oriented organization (i.e. non-governmental associations) the bigger ‘shock’ concerning participation in the BSR Programme. A rather different learning experience accrues to individual partners from academic organizations or public authorities. For them it is more a routine action as they are more familiar with highly bureaucratic environments. Nonetheless, once partners learn about the ‘rules of the game’ the whole complexity of Programme seems to be manageable.

The specific case of identifying different types of learning is the fifth category. The mirror approach is a concept created by the author, which is based upon the individual experiences of selected project partners. It constitutes an interesting input to theoretical discussion on learning processes in INTERREG projects and sheds a new light how the cooperation at the transnational level can enhance development of more locally (common) oriented issues. While for some partners it was learning about similarities in their neighbouring countries, for other it was more technical learning about different FLC systems (Baltic Deal) or how the road safety and national crime is dealt in other countries (C.A.S.H.)

Finally the last category refers to the learning at the expert level. This concept can be analysed twofold. Firstly as top-down learning, where more experienced partners share their know-how and good practice in order to facilitate project development and jointly reach project aims. With regards to different nationality of project partners the following relation can be observed. In most cases the know-how experts were partners from developed countries such as Germany or Sweden, while the main recipients were partners form emerging countries from Eastern Europe. Secondly the author analyse learning during transnational cooperation projects from the Lead Partner perspective. Various aspects were identified in that matter. The major skill is the ability to organize and motivate well functioning transnational team. Once successful the Lead Partner should have an extensive financial knowledge. Issues like financial liquidity and eligibility of costs are crucial for smooth project management. Finally the flexibility and ability to adjust to a dynamic transnational environment is an important feature of experienced Lead Partners.

Another main concept which was used to analyse the theory of learning processes in practice was organizational learning. Referring to theoretical discussion from previous chapters organizational learning is understood as the transmission of learning results from project level towards the partner organization. The analysis of feedback from project partners reveals the practical conclusions discussed below.

The first type of organizational learning refers to changes in organizational routine. In general, participation in INTERREG projects reinforced organizational changes towards more flexible and transnational approach. However, the type of organizational changes differ between institutions and can be more externally or internally oriented. While for some universities participation in project triggered structural improvements to become more useable for transnational cooperation, the knowledge gained by the Lithuanian agricultural association facilitated organizational learning towards broader understanding of the environmental approach.
Referring to second type of organizational learning participation in the INTERREG project is a good opportunity to collect various transnational experiences. For the new comers the first experience with the INTERREG reality increases awareness about organizational capacity when it comes to the EU bureaucracy. Secondly, lessons learnt from previous cooperation enables better project proposals and increase the chance of gaining EU funding. All in all, experienced organizations know better what to do and what to expect when it comes to transnational cooperation. From a broader perspective, participation in the BSR Programme enables better preparation for the future responsibilities in the INTERREG projects. As every project is a ‘new story on each time’ it helps to collect an extensive knowledge about the BSR Programme as a whole. Finally organisations can benefit from the experience gained from previous projects by assuming greater responsibility in future projects. Becoming a leader of a works package or the Lead Partner for the whole project requires a higher level of cooperation and delivers greater prestige for organization.

Finally, in order to define main barriers which limit learning in the BSR Programme the following conclusions are presented.

First type of barriers identified by the author refers to internal issues within organization. It is of particular challenge for the individual partner, because he or she has to deal with organizational problems and be fully involved in project tasks at the same time. The main practical examples from the BSR Programme were as follows: the merger of two Universities which required long adaptation process to new routines, and the conflict of interests between partner and University management. Both issues affect the organizational level first and can subsequently hamper learning processes in projects where they act as indirect barriers to learning.

The second barrier indentified by the author relates to the learning skills of the Lead Partner. Poorly organized partnership and task division could cause further barriers for learning and cooperation. The less transparent the project structures the more difficult conditions for cooperation and experience exchange. Another issue is the size of the partnership. The greater the number of partners in one project the more diverse the thematic focus of cooperation and the harder it is to find a common platform for cooperation. The lack of community spirit could cause further problems with communication, information flow and mutual understanding. The second type of barrier has a direct impact on project cooperation and can significantly hinder learning processes throughout the project duration.

The third barrier focuses on one of the widest occurring problem which is the insufficient English skills among the partners. It has a direct impact on cooperation as without sufficient language skills communication and learning in transnational team is technically impossible. The language barrier refers to many aspects of learning in INTERREG projects. As most of planning documents are published in their own national languages it is a challenge for other partners to study them carefully. When it comes to daily project routine in countries like Poland or Baltic States fluency in English is still an issue. Finally from the perspective of project end-users, being updated with the programme news and publication is often problematic as most of communication tools are released in English. However, during last few
years the language skills among partners have improved significantly. This is a promising sign for future transnational cooperation.

To continue the fourth type of barrier is the high bureaucratic burden. Learning about project technicalities and procedures is often a time-consuming and stressful process especially for partners who have never been involved in INTERREG projects before. For many the first clash with the BSR Programme administration is a shock or nightmare which project partners have to overcome by themselves. Due to its complicated procedure the bureaucracy issue is understood twofold; as a direct barrier which discourage many partners for future cooperation and indirect process which occupies time which is needed for project development.

The last type of barriers refers to ‘other’ issues which can be a category by itself. The first, the ‘hands-on approach’ refers to the problem of sharing experience and outcomes outside the project. From project partners’ experience it is difficult to transfer learning outcomes outside the project to the people who are far from the cooperation’s reality. This may propagate the ‘outsider complex’ which generates more resistance than opening for learning. Being an outsider you do not realize the relation between the project partners and the overall transnational phenomenon. Additionally for many the conviction that they possess insufficient personal experience and competence discourages them from participating in meetings and transnational knowledge-transfer. Another barrier was defined as problem for organizations associated with losing their transnational tacit knowledge. This is more an indirect barrier which occurs when the experts leave the organization after a project ends. Their departure deprives the organization of valuable tacit knowledge and experience.

From the extensive empirical analysis, which clearly demonstrated that the majority of projects in the BSR Programme create a platform for cooperation and function as a learning machine, the summary conclusion of this thesis is as follows:

The INTERREG programmes can be understood as a learning machine, where project partners at the individual and organizational level learn how to tackle territorial issues in the context of transnational cooperation.

6.2. Recommendations

The recommendations of this thesis are based on the findings from the main barriers for learning in the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. Although barriers were indentified for the BSR Programme, the recommendations can be applied to the wider public such as other transnational cooperation programmes. There are various aspects which can streamline the Programmes’ procedures and make the participation more affordable and effective.

In order to overcome the difficulties with Programme procedures and specific groups such as new partners, less experienced partners or first time lead partners could receive more targeted trainings. This may include seminars and training sessions organized by the Programmes managing body, but also mutual learning and workshops organized by project partners itself.
A focus should be set on trainings in financial issues at early stage in order to enable potential applicants to better evaluate the risk. From the perspective of the first time lead partners the specific project development workshops may be an option to widening and broadening their managerial skills.

In order to overcome the issue of dissemination news and up-to-date information about the Programme to the end-users and small partners some more interactive initiatives should be undertaken. Information events in the region around the BSR, if possible in national language or with translation could be organised. The cooperative approach of such events should be strongly emphasised. As the potential outcomes events may help to attract smaller partners, particularly from rural local authorities and local entrepreneurs such as farmers. They may also serve as network events and to enhance contact between partners and the Programme’s managing body. As an addition effect, such events may enhance the communication between partners at the local level.

Finally to overcome a high bureaucracy burden issue some simplification and clarification should be made. Complexity-wise it is a challenge task to introduce some major changes in the Programme procedures. However, through incremental steps such as simplification in financial reporting, standardised forms and procedures in all EU programmes or more support from the Joint Technical Secretariat while preparing project application the overall procedures can be streamlined. In order to make participation in Programme less like a ‘shock’ or ‘nightmare’ more like a good ‘learning machine’ some good practices from other Programmes can be copied. The good example is a cross-border Latvia-Estonia Programme mentioned by the Interviewee 16 (2014).

### 6.3. Critical reflection and further research

The critical reflection on undertaking thesis reveals some which can be helpful for the potential future research:

- There is a risk of potential ‘selection bias’ in this research that is worth mentioning. It is possible that the interviewed partners have a more positive point of view about the outcomes of the projects than in reality because of their personal involvement and high level of commitment. Critical feedback from your own work is like scoring an ‘own goal’, hence the gathered empirical data may be not entirely reliable.

- In order to avoid the risk of potential bias the future researcher should focus on more diverse group of potential project partners. It is recommended, to contact the project end users whose practical knowledge is of high relevance for the project analysis. Additionally the feedback from the external project stakeholders can give a more neutral picture for actual project outcome and learning processes.

- Finally from more theoretical perspective the more elaborated theoretical framework can be an advantage for the potential future research. Knowing better how the learning
processes are discussed by various authors from the fields can be of the great value for better understanding the learning processes in the transnational cooperation programmes.
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APPENDIX 1 (First touch letter)

Dear Ms/Mr X,

The colleagues from the Joint Technical Secretariat for the Baltic Sea Region Programme in Rostock highly recommended your <municipality> as an ambitious and innovative project partner in the various European Territorial Co-operation Programmes. I am contacting you, as I would like to ask you for a telephone interview or email survey concerning your experience in those Programmes with particular emphasis on the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007 - 2013. If it is suitable for you I would like to interview you within the next two to three weeks.

I am currently working on my dissertation which focuses on learning processes in INTERREG projects. The feedback from the interviews will constitute a crucial input for the empirical analysis of my thesis. Your experience is of great interest to me as I would like to better understand how the learning processes (e.g. ‘best practice’ exchange, knowledge flow, mutual problem solving) are developed at the project partner (individual) level. The interview will take about 30 minutes and will deal with the practical issues related to your transnational cooperation project’s background.

During my internship in the Joint Technical Secretariat in Rostock (September 2013) I conducted a similar survey on the main barriers for participation in Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. Having considered the constructive feedback I received from the project partners, I am looking forward to an effective cooperation again this time. I would be very grateful to talk to you or to another responsible person from your team, who is familiar with these issues. If you can support me in this I would request a short response to set a convenient date and specify further details.

With kind regards,

Jacek Peszko
APPENDIX 2 (Interview protocol)

Brief introduction:

I am a student on a PLANET Europe scholarship (www.planet-europe.eu) which is a two-year (120 ECs) integrated Erasmus Mundus Masters programme for aspiring planners wishing to address economic, environmental and spatial challenges in an international perspective. During our final semester we are obliged to conduct a research from the European Spatial Planning field. My dissertation will analyze the learning processes of the territorial cooperation programmes (INTERREG IVB). The thesis topic is as follows:

**The added-value of transnational co-operation programmes. Learning processes and knowledge transfer in the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013.**

The objective of this thesis is to investigate the ‘added value’ of transnational cooperation, which over recent years has been increasingly conceptualized in terms of ‘learning’. Beginning from the learning processes at the individual level (between project partners) I would like to examine further the main channels of knowledge flow and learning processes at the partner’s home organizations. The idea for this research has arisen from comprehensive literature analysis, which suggested that there is still a paucity of in-depth empirical analysis of the ‘added value’ arising transnational cooperation programmes in terms of learning processes. Additionally, from a more personal angle, the inspiration for this thesis derives from the discussions with colleagues during my internship at the Joint Technical Secretariat for the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 located in Rostock. The thesis is written solely for my own use and the feedback from the interview will not be used for any purpose of analysis by the Joint Technical Secretariat.

As an outcome of this dissertation I wish to gain more practical understanding of the learning processes at the transnational cooperation forum. Additionally, I hope that the feedback from you can constitute an interesting input to the ongoing discussion on the learning processes in territorial cooperation projects.
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL:

Interview date:

Personal data:
- Name:
- Organization:
- Legal status name:
- Your position in organization:
- Your position in project:

Hypothesis:

The nexus between individual learning, organizational learning, and changes in policies and practices is the most crucial aspect of any research on the impact of transnational cooperation.

Main questions:

1. What is the main profile of your organization? At what field are you specialized?

2. Referring to INTERREG IVB projects, what are you responsible for?

3. How could you describe yourself and your organization?
   - as an experience project partner
   - or more like a ‘new partner’ at the BSR Programme

4. Can you provide some information concerning the project you were involved in? (Topic, main objectives, partnership, main project outcomes)

5. What have you as individual learned from the participation in the transnational cooperation project? (e.g. professional experience or rather ‘soft’ skills)

6. Can you give any examples of how knowledge and ‘new’ experience from the project was used in your home organization?

7. What was the main ‘channel’ of the knowledge transfer?
   - rather a basic knowledge transfer (more informal organizational learning)
   - more complex way of sharing experience

8. How can you define the main ‘added value’ to your organization as a result of the transnational cooperation experience as a whole?

9. Referring to main barriers for knowledge flow, did you face any problems in transferring knowledge from the project level to your home organization?