9 Transdisciplinary perspectives of research in administrative science

Public administrations play a prominent role in the development and implementation of cross-border cooperation in Europe. Whether at local, regional, national or EU level – wherever policies, cooperation approaches, projects, programmes, structures, etc. are conceived and developed in a cross-border perspective, the question arises as to which administrative level is involved, in what form and in what vertical and horizontal inter-dependence. The public administration is thus both the object and the acting subject of cross-border cooperation. It is all the more interesting that administrative science in continental Europe, despite more than 50 years of post-war development, has so far only rarely dealt with the re-search topic of cross-border cooperation. This can be explained primarily by two factors: Firstly, despite increasing internationalisation and beyond all Europeanisation, the actual subject matter of administrative science is still strongly oriented towards the context of national administrative systems – even in its comparative form. Experiments in implementing internationally valid concepts such as the New Public Management (NPM) movement of the 1990s have hardly changed this. On the contrary, imple-mentation analyses show that despite the increase in certain congruencies, the persistence of national systems remains high. And especially within Europe, public administration is still a very different phenomenon from one member state to another – despite the different legal harmonisation efforts of the European institutions[586].

On the other hand, approaches in administrative science as such are characterised by a high degree of disciplinary plurality. Even if administra-tive science in the singular certainly pursues the goal of an integrative single discipline[587], it is de facto the case that research in administrative science – despite an increasing inter- or transdisciplinary orientation in recent times – is still strongly monodisciplinary. As a rule, the specific view of a discipline on the subject area of public administration still dominates, which then also determines the respective approach in administrative science. Accordingly, it can be observed that within business administra-

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586 Summerman 2015
587 König 2008; Bogumil/Jann 2009; Becker 1989

tion a specific research approach of public business administration[588] has developed. Sociology has already opened up a research field of public administration in the social sciences since the 1970s[589]; – with reference to the work of Max Weber, it can even be considered *the* mother discipline of administrative science besides public law.[590]Political science has increasingly reflected research approaches to questions of policy development[591], policy implementation[592], policy-field analysis[593] or, more recently, governance[594], in each case also with an explicit reference to public administration; in the legal sciences, too, the analysis of the specific functions and structures of government and administration has been established as a separate branch of research alongside established approaches to the study of state and administration[595].

However, all of the mono-disciplinary approaches mentioned are ultimately to be understood as an extension or differentiation of a traditionally jurisprudential view of public administration in continental Europe, in which law still plays a dominant role in the practical functioning of public administration[596]. It was not until the 1970s that administrative science substantially developed its subject of study by drawing on research results from organisational science, especially from the Anglo-Saxon context[597], whereby the question of the transferability of identified rationalities, structural principles and functional logics of the private sector to the public sector was not always critically reflected[598]. More recently, however, this classic duality has been increasingly differentiated by more integrative concepts of multirational management[599].

In thematic terms, too, a broad spectrum is covered in administrative science. If one looks at textbooks on public administration or studies the curricula of corresponding training programmes at Bachelor's and Master's level, it very quickly becomes clear that the subject of public administra-

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588 Bals/Fischer 2014; Barthel 2016; Beck/Böhmer et al 2019
589 Mayntz 1985
590 to the overview: König 2008;2015
591 Mayntz/Scharpf 2005
592 Wollmann 2000; Sanderson 2002
593 Héritier 1993; Schubert 2012
594 Benz et al. 2007
595 Cf. Thieme 1995; Hesse/Ellwein 2012
596 Püttner 2007
597 Seibel 2017
598 König/Beck 1997
599 Schedler/Rüegg-Stürm 2013; Fleischmann 2014

tion is dazzling in the diversity of its thematic differentiation: More classical topics such as public and private law, the basics of public organisation or personnel and financial management or even decision-making are now being expanded to include topics such as IT, project- and programme-management, planning and strategy formation, marketing and communication, intercultural-management, e-government, participation-management, change-management, team-building, leadership, controlling, cost and performance accounting, etc. As with sociology, one can easily get the impression that administrative science is about to become a "hyphen science".

Administrative science has often been referred to as "reform science", since many of its theoretical concepts have in the past both influenced the design of practical reform approaches, but have themselves in turn been influenced by the practical challenges and patterns of such reforms. This can be well illustrated for Germany already by the example of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms in Prussia, and since the post-war period by the reforms on territorial organisation in the 1960s, the modernisation of state planning in the 1970s, the redesign of public tasks in the 1980s, the introduction of instruments of New Public Managment in the 1990s or the strengthening of intersectoral participatory approaches in the form of the governance debate or by new concepts of Open Government around the turn of the millennium. Most of these approaches were conceptually promoted and reflected with the support of academics from the established centres of administrative science, such as the Universities of Speyer, Konstanz, Potsdam and Berlin, but also and especially by the Universities of Applied Sciences on public administration. Overall, however, a certain predominance of normative (wishful) thinking over empirical evidence of changes in administrative reality can still be observed in administrative science. One reason can be seen in the fact that there is still a strong recourse to management and organisational theories developed from the private sector context. To date, administrative science has still not developed an original theory[600] – a task that, due to its high practical relevance, offers specific perspectives fort he Universities if Applied Sciences in this field[601].

Against this rather complex and diverse background of administrative science, this chapter must limit itself to a few selected questions of administrative science. Since the subject of study has so far been analysed primarily by historians, geographers, lawyers and, more recently, increasingly by political scientists, the core question of administrative science dealt with

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600   Seibel 2017
601   Beck/Stember 2018

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here will be limited to working out what conceptual contributions can be made to a better understanding of cross-border cooperation as a horizontal level of integration within the European Administrative Space[602].

From the perspective of administrative science, three questions are addressed to this subject area, each of which refers to fundamental principles of construction and function of public administration: 1.) What is the connection between tasks and territoriality in a cross-border context and to what extent can this connection be used as a basis for institutional configurations? 2.) To what extent is it possible to empirically establish a separate institutional capacity to perform cross-border tasks and functions that is independent of the political-administrative systems of the partners involved? 3.) To what extent is cross-border cooperation as a transnational sub-system capable of development-oriented adaptation in order to be able to react to changing environmental conditions in a future-oriented way? Based on this, questions for future transdisciplinary research approaches will be developed.

9.1 Task structure of cross-border cooperation

Territoriality is a central construction principle of public administration. In the classical understanding, administrative territoriality is linked to the concept of the nation state, which is characterised by internal and external sovereignty over its territory, symbolized by national borders[603]. Accordingly, administrative boundaries, which are usually designed according to spatial criteria such as accessibility, efficiency in the sense of organisational redundancy avoidance or effectiveness in terms of public service provision, usually not only determine the external competence boundary of an administrative unit, but also define the relationships and interfaces between different administrative levels and/or units within a state. For many approaches to administrative modernisation, the redesign of administrative boundaries is crucial – be it in the horizontal perspective of adapting a given administrative structure to new socio-economic interdependencies and challenges and thus expanding the territorial scope of action of the administration (e.g. the creation of new inter-municipal structures, the incorporation of smaller municipalities into larger territorial units, the restructuring of the functional interdependence between cities and their

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602 see in more detail Beck 2018
603 König 2008: 27

neighbouring municipalities, but also the formation of clusters and new inter-sectoral networks at the local and regional level) or in the vertical perspective of reshaping the functional competences transferred to the different administrative levels (concepts such as concentration vs. deconcentration, centralisation vs. decentralisation are relevant in this regard.

A second classic design principle of public administration can be seen in its function as an institutional capacity for the effective and efficient performance of public tasks. Whenever a public administration is to be established or changed, this is not an end in itself, but rather this should be directed towards the finality of optimising the production and provision of public goods. As a rule, public administrations in this respect can be thought of as a structural/institutional capacity designed according to the public function assigned to it (the common denominator here is the famous management phrase "structure follows function"). In this respect, the institutional choice of public administration should not be separated from the functional needs and structural requirements of the related public tasks. Different degrees of institutionalisation can thus lead to different organisational designs, each of which in turn has specific advantages and disadvantages.

A third fundamental design principle of public administration is its function as an open social system. In public administration, as in any organisation, membership, competence, task orientation, formal and informal structures etc. are all defined by the boundaries of an organisation, which can be understood as a constituting criterion. Social systems are characterised by specific codes that govern the communication and connections between their members[604] and which at the same time distinguish a system from its environment. However, a social system does not stand in isolation from its environment; in fact, it is dependent on systemic external interaction and cooperation for its own survival. Interdependence and open communication with a system's environment are therefore essential – especially for public administration, which draws both resources and legitimacy from its political-social environment. Beyond the classical approaches of systems theory, newer concepts of administrative science therefore underline the increasing blurring of systemic boundaries and argue from unilateral public governance towards more complex inter-systemic / hybrid patterns of a cross-sectoral network governance ("New Public Governance") of the future. Change and changeability of a system in re-

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604 Cf. Luhmann 2001

lation to its increasingly complex environment are thus central assessment yardsticks of a modern public administration.

The fundamental starting point of any consideration of the role and function of public administration in a given state is its explicit reference to public tasks. Unlike private or social sector institutions, public institutions must be justified by, or able to refer to, codified public tasks and missions in order to provide the basis for the public sphere in a country/state. The sources of such public tasks are manifold: at the macro level, constitutions (albeit with very different cultural expression across systems and continents) define basic public tasks and functions in the form of state goals, followed by myriad norms defined at the level of thematic and organisational public law. Furthermore, public tasks and missions can also be identified below the level of law itself, e.g. in the form of directives, communications, decisions of public bodies and or even in the preambles of contracts concluded and/or implemented by public institutions[605].

Consideration of the (re)definition and fulfilment of public tasks and missions, and thus the related question of public institution building, has been discussed in administrative science along the concept of vertical and horizontal differentiation. Vertical differentiation refers to the question of how public tasks and missions should best be located at different spatial levels of a state. In federal states, for example, this includes both the division of tasks between the federal and state governments, their internal territorial differentiation, and the division of labour between them and the level of local government. In unitary states, vertical differentiation is primarily a (often still quite normative) question of how (centralised and/or deconcentrated) state competences and tasks at the various spatial levels (local, inter-municipal and regional) can/should ultimately be transferred to the level of territorial self-government. The classical concepts applied by administrative science in this respect are decentralisation and deconcentration of public functions within the public space of a given country and in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of task fulfilment[606].

Horizontal differentiation, in turn, refers to the broader question of which tasks are de facto public and which tasks are (or should be) rather dependent on the private sector or society and therefore have to be performed by it. The necessity and scope of this horizontal differentiation of tasks are often questioned and – depending on political or societal values and/or leitmotifs – different horizontal divisions of labour between the

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605 Cf. Bogumil/Jann 2020; König 1989
606 Wagener 1974

public and private or societal sectors and thus also different public institutional designs and profiles can be observed when comparing different countries and states, both within Europe and at the global level[607].

Both the vertical and horizontal differentiation of public tasks are subject to permanent change, and issues such as territorial reforms, deregulation, privatisation and/or re-regulation continue to determine the reform agendas of many countries in Europe. Institutions can be understood as stable, permanent bodies for the production, regulation or implementation of specific purposes[608]. Such purposes can refer to social behaviour, norms, concrete-material as well as non-material objects. Following the understanding of administrative science, institutions can be interpreted in this way as corridors of collective action that play the role of a "structural proposal" for the organised interaction of different actors[609]. The question of the emergence and changeability of such institutional arrangements in the sense of an "institutional dynamic"[610] is shaped by the school of thought of neo-institutionalism[611], whose conceptual foundation is in turn closely related back to the public task reflection.

Cross-border cooperation is confronted with and sometimes even comes into conflict with the principle of territorial sovereignty of the respective nation states involved[612]. Even in those regions where the level of cooperation is well developed, cross-border cooperation must therefore be considered as a transnational political-administrative *subsystem*[613] created and composed by the respective "domestic" national partners. The level of reference of this subsystem is clarified by the definition of cross-border regions as "functional and contractual spaces capable of responding to common problems in similar and convergent ways" "[614]. On the other hand, the fact that cross-border cooperation does not take its place, but – on the contrary, is highly dependent on the competence and role of the respective national partners[615], does not automatically mean that this cooperation is a priori less effective than regional cooperation taking place in a domestic

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607 Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2014
608 Schubert/Klein 2015
609 Scharpf 2000; Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2014: 51
610 Olsen 1992
611 Cf. Benz 2004
612 Beck 1999
613 Frey 2003
614 Ricq 2006, p. 45
615 Blatter 2000; Rausch 1999

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context[616]. Research on multi-level governance in Europe has shown that productive interweaving and networking of different actors from different administrative levels and backgrounds can be just as effective as classical institutionalised problem solving[617]. However, the institutional and functional preconditions for cross-border cooperation are far more complex and subject to different conditions, which also has a direct impact on the way cross-border institution building can de facto be practised. The central criterion for evaluating such cross-border institution-building is both the degree of mobilisation and participation (structure and quality) of the relevant institutional and functional actors and the effectiveness of the problem-related output produced by this subsystem of cooperation[618] – and both are in turn closely related to the cross-border tasks in question.

With regard to the functional task priorities, the practical approaches of cross-border cooperation in Europe cover a wide range of material fields of action. Depending on the territorial context, these include classic areas of regional development (e.g. spatial and urban development planning, economic development, research and development, transport, etc.), or specific approaches to cooperation in sectoral policy areas (health, social security, education and training, science and research, environment, nature conservation and tourism, etc.). A classification of these different tasks as a basis for cross-border institution building, can be made on the basis of the criteria of "thematic orientation" as well as the characteristic "functional role" that cross-border cooperation de facto plays in this context. With regard to the criterion of *thematic orientation,* a task classification as outlined above in Chapter 7 can lead to the following typology[619] :

Type A: Cooperation within the framework of monothematic projects (bridges, cycle paths, bus routes, kindergartens, information services for citizens, businesses, tourists, etc.) ("single issue");

Type B: Cooperation in entire policy areas (environment, health, transport, education, science and research, etc.) ("policy-related")

Type C: Cross-thematic cooperation such as programming/implementation/management of the INTERREG programme; cooperation within political bodies such as government commissions, euroregions, Eurodistricts; cross-sectoral cooperation within innovative networked governance approaches to territorial development ("integrated cross-sectoral") ...

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616 Cf. Fürst 2011; Kilper 2010
617 Benz 1998; Benz/Scharpf /Zintl 1992; Grande 2000
618 Casteigts/Drewello/Eisenberg 1999
619 Beck 2017

In contrast, the typology of the *"functional role of cooperation"* criterion refers to a variation in the intensity of the demands on cooperation and the associated fulfilment of duties and tasks. Six ideal-typical functional levels of cross-border cooperation can be identified here, which in practice – in the sense of a core process – build on each other and are therefore sequentially linked in the sense of different development stages: Encounter, Information, Coordination, Planning/Strategy Building,m Decision, Implementation (see above chapter Governace). This division into six successive, cross-border functional levels stands for the empirical observation that both the intensity, the binding nature and the integration of cooperation grow from one level to the next. Each level itself represents a necessary and legitimate dimension and prerequisite for the effective fulfilment of cross-border tasks. Furthermore, the six levels also represent different interaction logics between the actors involved: while the first two levels primarily represent a discourse level, the following two levels are more about structuring the interaction relations as such, while the last two levels refer to implementation-related joint actions in a transnational context. Reliable cross-border task fulfilment is thus only given (and possible) if all functions are realised in all six reference levels. The observation that the two functions "decision" and "implementation" often still show empirical deficits[620], illustrates the challenges regarding the implementation status of an integrated cross-border policy in many cross-border constellations.

The new generation of territorial cooperation seeks to increasingly promote the integrated development of cross-border potentials[621]. The question of which means of transnational and interregional institution building can best achieve this territorial development is therefore increasingly on the agenda in many border regions[622]. From an administrative science perspective, classical concepts (and related academic literature) such as decentralisation/centralisation, deconcentration/concentration or integration/differentiation, understood both vertically and horizontally, can inform and/or even rationalise the debate on how transnational institutional frameworks should best be designed to meet changing transnational tasks and missions and the challenge of fulfilling them together on the basis of inter-institutional division of labour. In terms of a better understanding of the logics of transnational institution-building, it may be useful to consider the related needs of territorial cooperation as a

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620 Beck/Pradier 2011
621 Ahner/Fuechtner 2010
622 Cf. Hooper/Kramsch 2007

starting point, which in turn are derived from the different thematic and functional tasks of territorial development itself and can be understood as intervening variables of such forms of transnational institutionalism: Different degrees of cooperative institutionalisation, the related hypothesis would be, can be interpreted as a territorially influenced function resulting from the collective adjustment between 1. different historically evolved and therefore still persistent national systems (public administration, law, political, economic and social order, characterised by divergent functionalities), 2. the interest-related interaction between the actors involved (local communities, local authorities, companies, associations, universities, etc.) 3. the respective group-related constellations (administrative and organisational cultures, norms, guiding principles, mental models, etc. of the collective and individual actors). This function is in turn influenced by (interdependent) intervening territorial variables such as geographical location, socio-economic situation, practical handling of functional development needs, policy typologies and/or policy mix, mutual intercultural understanding[623].

The confluence of different interests and political-administrative systems within the subsystem of cross-border cooperation shapes both the complexity and the conditions under which common institutional solutions can be developed cooperatively at the transnational level. The model of territorial institutionalism described above in chapter 7 takes this circumstance into account**.**

9.2 Institutional capacity to act

Social differentiation can be considered a central feature of modernity.[624] Accordingly, division of labour can also be seen as the starting point of modern management theories, which have strongly influenced management science. In scientific management thinking and writing, the ultimate goal is always to achieve the basic principles of effectiveness and efficiency through effective management of the division of labour. Organising in the sense of optimising order must therefore be seen as a prerequisite for management. A distinction must be made between the institutional dimension (those who manage) and the functional dimension (the various tasks and activities of management). While the former is closely related to the for-

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623 For further explanations see Beck 2017
624 Cf. König 2008

mal position of the actors in an organisation (the management/leadership level), the latter encompasses a wide range of activities that differentiate the basic need for organisation into a number of classical management functions, which are described under the famous POSDCORB acronym (Planning, Organising, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, Budgeting), or described as the classic life cycle of management with its phases of "problem analysis", "goal setting", "strategy development", "alternatives evaluation and selection of the preferred option", "resource provision", "implementation", "evaluation", "closure / redesign"[625].

Public management and organisational theory provide two interesting assumptions that can be applied to the case of cross-border cooperation: At the macro level, theories of policy development and implementation (policy cycle thinking) can be used in combination with (theoretical and empirical) insights into decision-making processes to better understand and interpret the functional characteristics of the subsystem as such. Classical public administration approaches, in turn, allow to compare and interpret the very specific characteristics and functional challenges of cross-border structures in comparison to the domestic administrative context and can provide methodological and instrumental guidance for further optimisation[626].

As the independence of an emergent institutional capacity is a key assessment criterion, the total number of transnational institutional arrangements at different functional levels was determined above in Chapter 7 – this indicator refers to the path dependency hypothesis of neo-institutionalism[627] and assesses the distinction between the given institutional capacity path of the national partners involved and the specifically created transnational / cross-border capacity path. The second indicator in Chapter 7 measures the staff capacity of cross-border cooperation, measured in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE = Full-time equivalent, i.e. 100 % job capacity). This indicator is relevant for the identification of an independent institutional capacity in the sense that RTD created/provided exclusively for handling cross-border tasks also points to a specific transnational/cross-border capacity that is distinct from the domestic context.

As shown above, the overall analysis of the indicators points to a paradoxical conclusion: On the one hand, these certainly point to the existence of an independent institutional capacity for dealing with cross-

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625 Schreyögg/Koch 2015
626 Beck 2018
627 Pierson 2004

border issues at the horizontal administrative level. However, the general contextualisation of this finding points to an overall relatively weak profile of the comparatively young transnational / cross-border institutional path compared to the well-established domestic institutional path: In the European border regions the 21,676 FTEs who deal with cross-border cooperation matters on a full-time basis contrast with 10,765,424 FTEs of public servants whose fields of activity relate exclusively to the performance of domestic public tasks[628].

9.3 Systemic development capacity of cross-border cooperation

Institutions and organisations can be interpreted as structural configurations that serve to fulfil the tasks and functions assigned to them. Their main purpose is thus not necessarily change, but stability and reliability to ensure effective and efficient fulfilment of tasks. Unlike projects, which are secondary patterns of organisation, primary organisation institutions, such as public administrations and/or political-administrative systems, are usually created with the temporal perspective of permanence. On the other hand, institutions and organisations are obviously also social systems that become established and rely heavily on functional exchange with their respective environments. While this interdependence with the environment is very obvious in the case of private organisations and leads to a more or less well-developed direct ability to react and adapt to changes perceived as essential (if companies or entire economic sectors do not react to new developments and challenges of the markets, they will be eliminated in the medium term), the issue of change within public systems is less obvious. Of course, public institutions also have to change and do so de facto, but the specific functional (the nature of public tasks and their respective legal bases), structural (constitutional law and civil service regulations), procedural (political decisions that have to be made and justified on a democratic basis) and temporal (administrative cultures that – unlike organisational culture – represent and express national cultures that have often existed for centuries or at least several decades) prerequisites for such change often create more obstacles than opportunities in the public sphere.

With regard to the question of cross-border cooperation and in order to ground a reflection on possible practices of institutional change, three lines of research in administrative sciences may be of interest. First of all,

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628 Cf. Beck 2018

the school of comparative public administration has recently gained more and more insights into the question of institutional dynamics[629]. Strongly influenced by the interdependent reform developments of European integration[630], the emergence of a European Administrative Space and a European Administrative System[631] on the one hand, and the implementation of internationally conceived normative approaches to administrative modernisation (the New Public Management movement of the last two decades) on the other, two main conclusions can be put forward: The hypothesis of *persistence* is developed on the basis of the observation that, at both European and international levels, the historically evolved national patterns and cultures of public administrations override most attempts at harmonisation/unification at supra- and/or international levels. This confirms the assumptions made by historical neo-institutionalism.

The *convergence* hypothesis, on the other hand, suggests that increasing exchanges between national experts and systems will eventually lead to convergences at many levels (individual, technological, theoretical) of public administration, especially when it is not constructed according to normative models but develops on the basis of the practical experiences and professional standards of the respective experts involved.[632]. Recent research on international public administration (IPA) confirms specific patterns of international and transnational public administrations. It is assumed that the emergence of functional transnational patterns of public administration depends, among other things, largely on the degree of autonomy of these IPAs in relation to their domestic / founding partners[633].

The practice of cross-border cooperation in Europe can rather be interpreted as confirming the hypothesis of the persistence of national versus transnational or European administrative structures. Both the relatively low degree of use of existing legal solutions for cross-border issues, such as the EGTC, and the practical functioning of cross-border institutions, which is still primarily oriented towards the legal and administrative rules and standards of the respective home state, point to relatively strong preferences of the actors involved for national political-administrative systems. Alternative approaches to supranational integration, such as the principle of mutual recognition, which could bring many advantages at

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629 Olsen 1992
630 Beck 2017
631 Bauer/Trondal 2015
632 Cohendet/Grandadam/Simon/Capdevila 2014
633 Bauer/Ege 2016; Beck/Larat 2017

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the territorial level of cross-border cooperation (trust as a relevant prerequisite for mutual recognition could also be built up much more easily by neighbouring administrations than at the rather anonymous inter- or supranational level), have not been developed to any significant extent either[634]. Furthermore, innovative administrative methods and processes such as e-government show a significantly lower degree of implementation at the cross-border level compared to the national level. Finally, concepts of administrative modernisation are also mostly conceived and implemented in a national context – here, for example, the many practical difficulties in integrating the different budgetary rules and practices of the national partners within the framework of a joint cross-border INTERREG project should be mentioned.

On the other hand, surveys seem to indicate that in cross-border cooperation spaces characterised by a high continuity of institutional arrangements over time, such as the Upper Rhine, patterns of a specific transnational working culture emerge that can be conceptualised as a distinct transnational administrative culture. These patterns are the result of well-established "horizontal professional fraternities" that represent a specific form of hybrid transnational public administration[635].

Theoretical assumptions of policy analysis and organisational learning, which are among the most important concepts in public administration, can provide useful indications and insights for further analysis of issues of change in the context of cross-border cooperation. For example, policy analysis[636] not only allows a distinction to be made between the formal (structural level), procedural (decision-making) and the actual substantive level (different thematic and functional policies) of cross-border cooperation, which in turn provide interesting dimensions for a differentiated understanding of different levels at which possible changes within a cross-border cooperation system can be captured. The more fundamental distinction within the so-called "policy-cycle" between different phases of policy-making (problem analysis, goal setting, policy formulation, policy decision, policy implementation, policy evaluation, policy reformulation or termination) also explicitly refers to the notion of change in the sense of policy-oriented improvement and learning: To what extent policy learning takes place in a cross-border context and which factors contribute to

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634 Beck 2015b
635 Beck/Larat 2015
636 Schubert 2012; Héritier 1993

and/or hinder this kind of learning can be answered through approaches of administrative policy analysis.

Another question that arises in this context is to what extent cross-border policy-making is ultimately evidence-based and what kind of change this can bring about in practice. Beyond the concept of evidence-based policy making[637], which – as part of the general policy of better regulation – is currently a prominent approach at the level of the European institutions[638] (promoting change-oriented approaches such as a better quantification of problems with their causes and negative effects, a consideration and impact assessment of different policy options or the generation of real monitoring information during implementation), the concept of "organisational learning" in particular can provide relevant and stimulating scientific support in this regard. The concept of organisational / systemic learning may seem irritating at first sight, since "organisations have minds and senses other than those of their members"[639]. In this respect, what characterises this kind of supra-individual/collective learning as part of a broader understanding of organisational/systemic change?

According to organisational theory[640], organisational learning is the ability of an organisation and/or system not only to discover and correct errors, but also to change the value and knowledge base of an organisation in such a way that new problem-solving and action competences can be generated. Learning at the first level of the individual members of an organisation leads to changes in the relevant, collective theoretical frame of reference at both the cognitive and operational levels of action. Organisations are understood in this respect as knowledge systems, whereby organisational learning leads to a broadening of the organisational knowledge base – which includes both the active acquisition of new knowledge and the active forgetting and discarding of outdated knowledge and action routines. A prominent concept in this regard is the differentiation of three levels of intensity of organisational learning: At the first level of learning (so-called *single-loop learning*), learning takes place in the more mechanistic form of external challenges that come from the perceived organisational environment evaluated according to predefined norms, values and standards – but both the normative and the actual framework for action remain unchanged. At the second level of learning (so-called *double-loop*

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637 Beck 2015c
638 See https://ec.europa.eu/info/better-regulation-guidelines-and-toolbox_en
639 Hedberg, 1981: 6
640 Cf. Gourmelon/Mroß/Seidel 2014: pp 300–323

learning), the external challenges require an active forgetting and discarding of the predefined framework, a new framework on both normative and operational levels has to be developed, which replaces the old frameworks (completely or at least partially). Ultimately, organisational learning at the third, so-called *deutero level*, leads to a reconsideration of past levels of learning as such, which takes the form of self-reflection and the analysis of underlying motives and norms for future and past successes or failures[641].

Knowledge and its associated management is a key concept for all organisational learning, as learning accordingly takes the form of a systematic shaping of the organisational knowledge base, encompassing both factual and practical, explicit and tacit, individual and collective, operational and strategic knowledge stocks. Among many other approaches, the cycle model of knowledge management developed by Probst/Raub/Romhardt (2012) offers a holistic and applied orientation here. The authors distinguish between eight phases of knowledge management: 1. the definition of knowledge goals that cover the knowledge relevant to the entire organisation, 2. the identification of existing relevant internal and additional external knowledge, 3. knowledge acquisition and the closing of knowledge gaps at all organisational levels, 4. knowledge development in order to develop innovative ideas and skills within the organisation, 5. Knowledge diffusion to ensure the right level of penetration, 6. Active use of knowledge by all members of the organisation, 7. Knowledge retention to avoid the loss of important (tacit) knowledge in case of staff leaving 8. Knowledge assessment to reflect the defined objectives and optimise the organisational approach as such.

Surveys among cross-border cooperation actors in the Upper Rhine region[642] show that – unlike at the level of individual actors, where acculturation and experience exchange processes are reported as positive side-effects of engagement in cross-border cooperation approaches – very little mutual learning takes place between entrepreneurial actors. Despite being partners in many joint INTERREG projects over many years and/or representing the participating organisations of cross-border institutions, neighbouring administrations linked by cross-border territorial constellations (thus creating a transnational sub-system of cooperation) hardly seem to adopt good administrative practices from the other side of the border and incorporate them into their national and even transnational context. With regard to the functioning of the cross-border cooperation system,

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641 Schreyögg/Koch 2015: pp. 302 – 304
642 Beck/Becker-Beck/ Beck/Dussap, 2015

on the other hand, studies from the same region[643] point to a relatively pronounced adaptability and system-specific internal learning over time. Using indicators such as common self-image and motives for action, common symbols, common standards (written and unwritten rules), common values or common solutions to standard situations, it can be shown that the transnational system changes over time and adapts its functional framing[644]. However, whether this can be interpreted as learning at any of the above three levels is not evident per se. While standard business processes and the relatively well-established transnational work culture can be seen as a strong and hardly changeable framework, the adaptation to new challenges, such as the opening to new categories of actors in the context of new transnational governance models[645], can be seen as an indication of reflection on given mental and functional frameworks. New generations of actors also bring in new ideas, expectations, professional profiles and ways of working, which can be seen as impressive impulses for internal changes and learning processes. Another element that brings change – but within a stable institutional framework and based on the overarching pattern of pragmatic search for feasible solutions – is that the presidencies of delegations, working groups and/or cross-border institutions usually change between national partners. This always provides a new thematic, strategic and, above all, internal cultural stimulus for changes in the way such institutional frameworks operate de facto. A whole series of INTER-REG projects could also be interpreted from the perspective of "successful failure"[646] : The originally envisaged objectives were not necessarily fully achieved – but the project has produced quite different and valuable divergent results that have led to impressive learning effects for the partners involved. On the other hand, there is also a tendency to "imitate" national thematic conjunctures[647], which tend to be taken over and continued in a loop internally by the given internal mechanisms and frameworks.

However, systems of knowledge management in the sense described above are difficult to find in most cross-border cooperation contexts. One reason for this is the lack of transnational inter-organisational learning, which itself must be considered a relevant prerequisite for the creation of cross-border knowledge. The knowledge available and applied in a transna-

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643 Nagelschmid 2005; Weber/Jacob/Regio Basiliensis 2013; Wassenberg 2007
644 Beck 2008
645 Beck/Wassenberg 2011
646 Seibel 2017
647 Beck 2008

tional perspective is mostly of a practical, tacit, individual and operational nature rather than factual, explicit, collective and strategic. A relevant example illustrating this challenge is the lack of territorial information systems in most cross-border regions: robust problem analysis, policy development, impact assessments, etc. Approaches that promote e.g. policy learning are hardly possible in a cross-border perspective due to the lack of relevant basic data and information due to incompatibilities in national statistics and/or technical difficulties in producing such information. Finally, the literature on change management in public administration can also provide additional insights for a more fundamental understanding of how cross-border cooperation systems can (or cannot) adapt to new external and/or internal challenges. Two analytical concepts are relevant in this context: the distinction between the form (intended vs. unintended) and the intensity/complexity (first and second order level) of the concept of change itself[648].

The concept of *intended change* refers to a linear understanding of change and changeability of organisations, assuming that the identified weaknesses/challenges can be solved through the rational (top down) implementation of predefined change projects/measures (classical methodological approaches are business reorganisation, restructuring, organisational/systems analysis). The assumption of *unintended change*, in turn, is based on the notion of evolution and life cycle thinking: organisations go through different phases of "maturity" and/or growth, each representing both developmental stages and challenges for change, which are not necessarily controllable, but which are crucial for the further development (and survival!) of the organisation. The main impetus for change here is not external challenges but internal crises caused by and symbolising the transitions between different stages of life-cycle growth.

Differences in the intensity of change are both a prerequisite and an expression of how change is managed. Whereas *first-order change is* limited to single dimensions and aspects,, focuses on a quantitative dimension and is incremental,, factually rational and designed without changing the underlying organisational paradigms, *second-order change is* much more far-reaching in the sense that change is multidimensional, encompasses different organisational levels at the same time, refers to qualitative dimensions, intends new directions and paradigms and is assumed to be non-rational and non-linear.

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648 Gourmelon/Mroß/Seidel 2014: pp. 281–286

A formative theoretical framework for the issue of change management was developed as early as 1958 by the social scientist Kurt Lewin. Interested in the question of how group performance could be enhanced, and considering that "...group decision-making is a process of group management or self-management"[649], Lewin developed a model of change as a three-stage process. Based on the observation that groups tend to return to earlier levels of equilibrium after a short period of change, and the analysis that this is due to two antagonistic forces (progressive and reluctant), he concluded that it is not enough simply to formulate the goal of change, but that it is necessary to ensure the "...permanence of the new level"[650]. Therefore, it is important first to unfreeze the first level of antagonistic equilibrium (L1), then to lift the group to the new level (L2) and then to re-stabilise group life at the new level (Lewin calls this "refreezing"). The figurative unfreezing (and later refreezing) is essential both as a prerequisite and as an initiation of successful change processes, as it implies both challenging and overcoming well-rehearsed behaviours, norms and habits – which in itself can be a very challenging situation: "In order to break open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness, it is sometimes necessary to deliberately induce an emotional stir"[651]. Lewin's model can be seen as a basis for participatory change processes of systemic organisational development[652], it also underlines the importance of the role and profile of good "change agents"[653], both for the initiation and the successful course of change processes in organisations and systems.

Changes in cross-border cooperation systems can be interpreted as unintended patterns that take place primarily at the first level of change. In a historical perspective[654], the analysis of institutional arrangements at the cross-border level allows for the detection of evolutive developments that are characterised by a distinct temporality and can indeed be interpreted as life cycles of different degrees of maturity: While in the initial period (after the Second World War and until the early 1970s) peace, reconciliation, mutual trust and exchange were the basic prerequisites for cross-border cooperation, especially at the local level, the 1970s and 1980s are characterised by formalisation and institution-building as well as joint planning

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649 Gourmelon/Mroß/Seidel 2014; 211
650 Gourmelon/Mroß/Seidel 2014: 211
651 Lewin 1958: 211
652 Schein 2010
653 Lunenburg 2010
654 Wassenberg 2007; Reitel/Wassenberg 2015

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approaches at the territorial meso level; with the provision of funding by the EU, much more concrete project-based cooperation emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, while more recent cooperation approaches envisage integrated policy-making stimulated by territorial governance models[655]. However, as institutional and functional arrangements have been relatively stable over time and cross-border cooperation hardly ever leaves its "niche position" in terms of dominance of domestic over cross-border issues on the policy agendas of the partners involved, this change has mostly not (yet) reached the broader dimensions of second-level change.

Three main factors may explain this. First, any approach to change requires a corresponding degree of pressure in the sense that the driving forces become stronger than the constraining forces, which can then be used to "unfreeze" a given stable situation and enter a phase of more fundamental change. However, such an incentive does not usually exist in institutionalised cross-border constellations, which are shaped by and – following the idea of micro-diplomacy – even built for the *purpose of* avoiding conflict and risk. Secondly, change processes are heavily dependent on leadership in the form of change agents who are able to "unfreeze" a given situation. These are difficult to find in a cross-border, i.e. transnational constellation, as they would have to have the necessary power and assertiveness at all levels of the different participating national legal systems and administrative systems. Ultimately, change that is to be successful and sustainable must include action at the deeper levels of mental frameworks and values. However, such dimensions are deeply culture-bound phenomena that usually have very different connotations in a transnational context[656]. The transnational cooperation culture, in turn, is both an expression and a symbol of the intercultural bridging function that a cross-border cooperation institution stands for, and can therefore be interpreted as a functional equivalence between divergent national systems. A change in this relationship would jeopardise the long-term achievements of mutual learning and understanding – a common understanding that subsequently leads to stability rather than promoting a climate of change between the partners involved.

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655 Beck/Pradier 2011
656 Beck 2011a; 2014

9.3 Research perspectives

Cross-border cooperation in Europe is now on the threshold of a new functional and conceptual phase. As the process of European integration will become more difficult in the coming years, but in any case more differentiated[657], cross-border cooperation, understood as a specific form of horizontal European multi-level administration, conveys an increasingly attractive perspective, also and especially from the perspective of administrative science. Many of the reform proposals currently being discussed at both European and national level show a direct connection to the role to be changed in the future that the established legal and administrative systems will have to play in this transformation. Clearly, approaches such as mutual recognition, thematic law testing clauses, new joint cross-border public services, implementation of legislation such as the EGTC Regulation, new cross-border e-government applications[658], new approaches to cross-border institution building and (participatory) multi-level governance based on new functional territorial justifications, etc. have a direct link to issues that are currently also being discussed in administrative science. This normative shift from cross-border cooperation perceived as a means to develop and implement pragmatic project-based solutions to specific problems to an understanding of cross-border cooperation as a means to develop integrated territorial potentials in a 360° perspective, based on flexible legal and administrative structures that enable smooth interaction between individual and collective actors across borders[659], will certainly require appropriate scientific support in the near future.

Based on the operating principle of "horizontal subsidiarity"[660], which aims to strengthen the role and function of cross-border territories for the future design and implementation of European integration, the following four research questions in particular seem to be of special interest in the field of administrative science:

1. How can approaches to make the institutional framework of cross-border cooperation more flexible through mutual recognition and experimentation clauses be concretely designed and what new and innovative forms of transnational public administration can this lead to?

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657   Cf. already Eppler/Scheller 2013
658   Cf. Beck 2015a
659   Cf. Amilhat Szary 2015
660   Beck 2012

2. How can approaches such as open government and agile public administration and management promote flexibilisation and innovation in the way both cross-border programmes and projects are managed in practice? In the inter-systemic and inter-cultural perspective, what specific functional and structural requirements need to be met within the cross-border cooperation sub-system for this to happen?

3. How can new approaches to shared services and cross-border business process management lead to a new quality of cross-border service provision, what are the structural and management implications of this, how can specific e-government and open data offerings be practically designed in this context between the administrations involved?

4. what is the role and function of institutionalised approaches to cross-border cooperation as specific forms of an International Public Administration (IPA)[661] and what contribution do they thus make to the realisation of a European multi-level governance system and a differentiated understanding of the horizontal dimensions of the emergent European Administrative Space?

Administrative science research can be understood as a particularly viable approach to transdisciplinarity[662]. The starting point of the concept of transdisciplinarity is the thesis that the constant differentiation of the science systems of developed countries leads to a continuous increase in the number of different (sub-) disciplines. This leads to an ever smaller specialisation of science through processes of sub-disciplinary demarcation and thus hides the diverse thematic interdependencies that de facto exist in most areas of the natural sciences, but above all in social object areas, with the consequence that actual knowledge gain and thus ultimately theory-oriented knowledge generation is less and less possible. This poses the danger of a decoupling of the science system from real-world object areas and a focus of scientific research on sub-disciplinary, ultimately normative self-referentiality[663].

Accordingly, a transdisciplinary research approach not only aims at a (re)integration of differentiated disciplinary perspectives, but also and above all intends a fundamental change in the starting point of scientific knowledge: not the knowledge interests developed in the internal discourse of the science system should form the starting point of research approaches, but practical questions of the respective research object. In

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661 Cf. Ege 2016; Bauer/Ege 2016
662 Cf. König 2020
663 Cf. Mittelstrass 2005; Hirsch et al 2008

a transdisciplinary approach, the classical separation between science and the object area is abandoned, as is the narrow disciplinary demarcation. In contrast, it is assumed that within the individual disciplines involved in a research project, specific specialisations have developed for the respective research object, through which corresponding subject representatives of the individual disciplines are able to actually develop integrative questions and methodological approaches in a way that does justice to the complexity and interdependence existing in the respective research object. Moreover, in a transdisciplinary understanding, the science system opens itself up in the research process to the respective practice of the object of study: this means not only that a consistent empirical approach must be taken, but above all that the development of integrative questions and methods is closely coordinated with the respective community of practice in each of the individual research steps. In this respect, a transdisciplinary approach to science not only produces integrated theory-oriented knowledge – a very important objective is also to generate action-oriented knowledge for the respective practice[664]. Thus, the transdisciplinary research approach is based less on a scientific-theoretical than on a research-guiding self-conception, with which the objectives of interdisciplinarity can nevertheless be promoted in the corresponding areas of investigation. Accordingly, it is not so much institutional (specific institutes, journals, platforms) as programmatic and project-related approaches to networking between science and practice that are at the centre of corresponding transdisciplinary stabilisation. The following diagram summarises the basic approach of a transdisciplinary approach to administrative research:

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664 Beck/Stember 2019

Fig. 13: Transdisciplinary research approach of administrative science

Transdisciplinary Approach in Public Administration (PA) Research
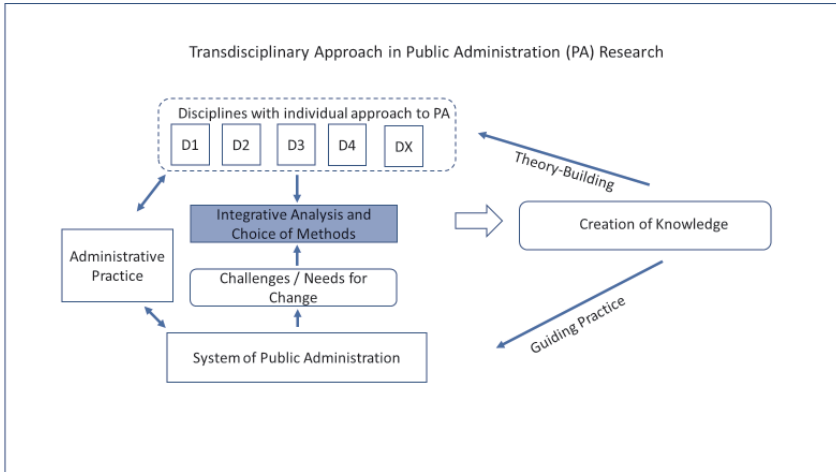
Source: (Beck 2023)

In a real-world perspective, however, a narrow disciplinary demarcation can hardly be observed today. Particularly in the social sciences, but also in the relationship of these to law and economics, not only a pluralism of methods but also theory-based interrelationships and conceptual transitions can be observed in many research approaches.

For a research perspective in administrative science that relates to cross-border cooperation as a horizontal dimension of the European Administrative Space, a transdisciplinary research approach that defines itself less normatively than as a method appears to be particularly purposeful[665]. On the one hand, an administrative science of integration defined in this way refers to an object of research which, although its purpose is not initially directed towards change, but rather towards continuity and predictability with regard to a defined and expected fulfilment of tasks, is nevertheless to a large extent also related back to social developments and is thus definitely open to development. Accordingly, the history of ideas in administrative science in Europe, especially after the Second World War, provides numerous examples in which real-world challenges to public administration have always been the cause and thematic focus of research in administrative science – be it the fundamental question of the role and

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665 Cf. for example the contributions in Beck 2019

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position of public administration in democracy, the question of opening up to and greater participation of target groups of public administration, the question of reorganisation of the local and regional level oriented towards the standards of effectiveness and efficiency, the question of better planning to rationalise the contributions of public administration with a view to achieving welfare state objectives, the question of making public administration and its procedures more flexible and streamlined in the context of economic rationalisation, the question of changing national administrative systems that have grown up in the context of increasing European integration and international interdependence, the question of recruiting personnel and changing the way tasks are performed in the context of demographic and value-oriented social change, or the question of optimising target group-oriented services and business processes in the context of more or less comprehensive digitalisation.

On the other hand, these practice-oriented questions also refer to the dimension of action-oriented knowledge generation: thus, administrative science not only has the task of scientifically analysing real-world phenomena and preparing them in a theory-oriented way, it has also always defined itself in its history as a science that formulates science-based design recommendations for administrative practice. In this respect, administrative science can be understood as an integrative science not only from a transdisciplinary perspective, but also and especially as a reform science in which the science-theoretical distinction between basic research on the one hand and applied research on the other, which is increasingly questioned today, is overcome in favour of an integrative transdisciplinary perspective.

However, a transdisciplinary integration science defined in this way, if it wants to counteract the double danger of both fragmentation and marginalisation[666], cannot do without a plausible answer to the question of what its unique selling point is that integrates both the disciplines involved and administrative practice. Following the established basic understanding of the sociology of science, a scientific discipline is primarily constituted by its respective object of study. In the case of administrative science, this is undoubtedly public administration in Europe, which is characterised by considerable diversity and differentiation. In order to make this subject area accessible for scientific categorisation and corresponding analyses and theorising from a transdisciplinary perspective, the Speyer administrative scientist Klaus König recently proposed[667] to base an

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666 Cf. Bauer/Grande 2018: 14
667 Cf. König 2020

integrative administrative science that sees itself as a "discipline-carrefour" on the theoretical approach of a systemic institutionalism[668].

Such an approach appears to be groundbreaking in two respects in particular. On the one hand, the theoretical approach of systemic institutionalism can perform the integrative function of a resilient bridging concept between established individual social science disciplines[669]. Thus, in a neoinstitutional perspective, corresponding questions are being pursued today both in economics (new institutional economics, systemic management theory) in political science (actor-centred institutionalism, policy research and government studies) in sociology (sociological institutionalism, network research, governance research) and also in jurisprudence (new administrative law theory, better lawmaking). Technology-centred approaches, such as the digitalisation of administration[670] or approaches that attempt to relate scientific theorems to social issues from a more fundamental perspective[671] are also mostly based on a systemic view of administrative institutions. From this in turn, a corresponding integrative view of the subsystem of cross-border cooperation as a horizontal, inter-systemic level of integration of the European Administrative Space can be developed.

On the other hand, systemic institutionalism allows for the differentiation, relevant to public administration as an object of study, between a systemic institutional internal view on the one hand (research into the constitutive system features of public administration as well as their characteristic development and changeability = systemic micro-level) and on the other hand the relationship of the system of public administration to its various surrounding systems, from which it not only receives institutional impulses for stabilisation and change (culturally differently shaped in the international comparative perspective), but on which this in turn has a feedback effect (research into the interdependent relationship between administration and its social, economic, political, technical etc. environment as well as the specific culturally shaped environment of public administration). (research into the interdependent relationship between administration and its social, economic, political, technical, etc.

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668 Of course, there is no such thing as systemic institutionalism in the singular; what König proposes in this context is a systemic institutionalism as contoured in particular by the early work of Niklas Luhmann; cf. also Luhmann 2021
669 König 2020
670 Cf. already Reinermann/von Lucke 2002; Windoffer 2018;
671 Cf. Böhret 1990; Zohar/Marshall1995

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environment as well as the specific culturally shaped paths of systemic administrative design in a given state = systemic macro level). Such a differentiation between the internal and external perspective, oriented towards the thought model of systemic institutionalism, can be of particular analytical use for the development of an integrative view of the object of study of cross-border, inter-administrative cooperation, since its functionality in the real-world perspective is shaped precisely by this *interplay* between the territorial-transnational "micro-level" of the cooperation subsystem on the one hand and the support services of the participating national or European "macro-systems" on the other.

The specific and sustainable systemic capacity building that results from the interplay between micro and macro levels in a horizontal perspective will ultimately determine the actual function that cross-border territories can play in the wider European integration process. Administrative science research, understood as a transdisciplinary approach, can provide applied research to both inform and stimulate such a systemic approach to capacity development in the field of cross-border cooperation. At the same time, it can help to better establish cross-border cooperation as a promising thematic field within administrative science by integrating the hitherto rather separate administrative science research lines of "Public Management/Governance" on the one hand and "European Multilevel Administration/European Administrative Space" on the other hand via this subject area.[672]

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672 Cf. Beck 2023