CHAPTER 25

Conclusion: Patterns and Drivers of Horizontal Coordination—Insights from a Comparative Perspective

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Introduction

The literature on intergovernmental coordination is guided by the distinction between horizontal coordination, involving representatives from the same level of government, and vertical integration, connecting representatives from different levels of government. As outlined in the introduction, the focus of this volume is on horizontal coordination within multilevel contexts. One key insight across the chapters is that several horizontal coordination mechanisms have a vertical component and involve members

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of higher-level administrative or political units as part of the coordination effort. This insight might not come as a surprise, considering the complexity of the policy issues outlined at the start, but it has implications for the study of intergovernmental coordination as well as for recommendations about their design to achieve effective policy solutions.

The chapters in this book cover a variety of coordination mechanisms introduced to solve complex policy problems in a broad range of countries with varying political and socio-economic conditions. As such, the chapters showcase the experiences of actors involved in policymaking to solve those complex or wicked policy problems within their respective legal, political, and socio-economic contexts. Before we discuss the different coordination mechanisms and their workings in practice in greater detail, we will outline the current policy challenges that political leaders are facing across the countries represented in this book. Among those policy challenges are the well-known suspects of wicked problems, such as climate change, environmental standards, or pollution targets. In addition, we find migration, urbanisation, and regional inequalities to be relevant to current policy problems. Interestingly, horizontal coordination efforts are focused on issues beyond that list and often deal with economic development, investments, tourism, or the delivery of public services to local communities.

The examples covered in this volume also demonstrate that horizontal coordination at the local level often involves governments of different party affiliations. The institutional context matters for the substantive focus of coordination. Attempts to achieve more effective policy or service delivery in younger democracies or unitary states often coincide with attempts to create territorial units of an adequate and functioning size, respecting historical or community boundaries or matching the size of the policy problem, for example, in case of urban sprawl and metropolitan areas. In ethnically divided contexts, coordination efforts to address regional inequalities in public service provisions are, at times, overshadowed by party competition over power and resources, and parties' interests in maximising the benefits for the group they claim to represent.

Current Challenges and Wicked Problems

At the time of writing, the impact of COVID-19 was still felt across countries, for example, in the form of lower economic growth, slow economic recovery, or limited resources for public sector investments resulting from the increase in government spending during lockdowns and imposed mobility limitations. Public budgets were additionally stretched due to

international commitments in response to the war in Ukraine, including changes to defence spending as well as the acceptance and accommodation of Ukrainian refugees in numerous countries across Europe. Resulting higher debt burdens and spending commitments are limiting the opportunities to make necessary investments in welfare services, in physical and digital infrastructure, or in energy transition. The combined effect of those events is felt by several governments and communities (e.g., in Poland, Türkiye, Iceland, Germany, Georgia, or the UK), faced with higher levels of inflation, lower economic growth, and higher costs of living, exacerbating already existing regional socio-economic disparities.

Apart from unpredictable events, socio-demographic trends and internal migration have changed the population fabric of countries and, in some cases, contributed to a further increase in regional inequalities or urban-rural cleavages. Over time, these changes have accumulated to form more complex policy challenges and wicked problems that governments and policymakers can no longer ignore. Current challenges that are policymakers face across the countries included in this volume are an ageing population, urbanisation, 'metropolitan sprawl', migration, and immigration, as well as the consequences of climate change for nature and human life. The precise manifestation of these policy problems and challenges, however, varies between the countries and intersects in different ways. To give an example: while urbanisation and population concentration in metropolitan areas are widespread phenomena, they intersect with an inward migration of younger people into urban areas in Iceland in the context of economic growth but coincide with an overall population decline, outward migration of young people, and depopulation of certain areas in Poland or Serbia. Another set of connected policy areas comes into play in countries affected by a larger intake of refugees, either passing through the country towards a different destination or seeking asylum in the respective country. Different policy frames and priorities can be formulated as a response, for example, a focus on housing to deal with the pressures on property prices in Reykjavik; a focus on economic investments and opportunities to work and build a career outside capitals and major cities (e.g., in Poland, or the UK); or a focus on health and social care services for an increasingly diverse population in urban areas. Those focused interventions, however, are likely to remain incomplete and less successful in dealing with the underlying policy issue if they do not take its complexity and the concomitant involvement of multiple policy areas and departmental responsibilities into account during the design stage. The literature on complex and wicked problems has emphasised the need to broaden the

perspectives, to include different problem understandings, and to coordinate and collaborate in order to find solutions that work at least partially or temporarily (Head & Alford, 2015; Conklin, 2006). The need for intersectoral coordination across government departments has been recognised among policymakers and scholars alike, including suggestions on how to incentivise cross-departmental communication and to use existing institutions and personal networks to facilitate sector-spanning exchanges (Behnke & Hegele, 2024, pp. 167–168; Husted & Danken, 2017).

Several instances of horizontal coordination covered in this volume reflect the intersectoral nature of complex policy problems. Coordination mechanisms chosen to address those complexities include a network approach involving experts and non-governmental actors (e.g., in the case of task forces in Estonia), interdepartmental coordination within the central executive (e.g., in the form of the Presidential Office for Disaster and Emergency Management in Türkiye, or interagency councils in Georgia), or peak intergovernmental councils with the remit to formulate guidelines for other departments (e.g., used for the COVID-19 response in Germany). The majority of coordination mechanisms described in the chapters in this volume, however, deal with local or regional policy coordination in areas such as public transport, tourism, planning, and economic development. Coordination mechanisms are established to share information with neighbouring municipalities or regions within or across state borders, to facilitate mobility and business investments, or to acquire funding from higher levels of government or the EU. While we find similarities in the major challenges that governments are currently facing, the main policy areas in which governments regularly coordinate horizontally are more often directed at local issues, at regional economic development, or the improvement and efficiency of the delivery of public services that fall within the jurisdiction of local and regional governments.[1]

Policymakers in all countries covered in this volume recognise the benefits of coordinating their responses across sectors, levels of governments,

[1] We do not argue that no intergovernmental coordination exists to deal with issues, such as migration, climate change, or refugee integration in the countries covered in this volume. The responsibilities of local and regional governments tend to cover only aspects related to environment (such as waste collection, sewerage, nature conservation), or migration and refugees (such as access to housing or health services for refugees), but do not provide them with influence over visa regulations, refugee quotas, or climate change agreements. As a result, coordination mechanisms described in this volume cover those aspects that lie within the jurisdiction of local and regional governments while it is often central governments that lead on the development of migration policies or climate change policies often including coordination at supranational and international arenas.

and/or borders to neighbouring countries. The legal provisions for a variety of coordination mechanisms and purposes (e.g., joint delivery of services, contracting, or access to facilities) have been put in place in all cases under investigation. Nevertheless, we find variation across time and countries in terms of how often and for which policy problems governments and policymakers initiate or make use of those coordination mechanisms, and with whom coordination becomes more institutionalised.

Intergovernmental Coordination Within and Across Countries

Apart from the distinction between horizontal and vertical coordination, we can organise the range of coordination mechanisms according to their degree of institutionalisation or formalisation as a first dimension. For intermunicipal cooperation, the OECD suggested a spectrum of low formalised arrangements, such as informal handshake arrangements and contractual relations including private sector actors, to more formalised cooperation involving the local authority associations or the creation of legal or territorial entities with delegated authority (OECD, 2019, p. 74). Secondly, we rely on Feiock's dimension of scope to organise the empirical landscape of coordination mechanisms, distinguishing between single-issue-focused coordination from those covering multiple issues, often involving a larger number of political actors, and coordination mechanisms designed to be encompassing, complex, and collective (Feicock, 2013, pp. 401–404).[2]

Empirically, we find mechanisms of horizontal coordination with varying degrees of institutionalisation across the countries. However, most coordination efforts include the creation of a governance architecture, boards, or councils to allow for regular exchanges over time. Even if the original coordination initiative focused on a single issue, for example, public transport, we find that several initiatives end up being expanded over time to cover more policy issues that the involved actors have a shared interest in. Most coordination mechanisms are used to manage multiple issues that fall within the jurisdiction of local governments or affect the territory that local and regional actors have jurisdiction over, for example,

[2] Feiock's second dimension of the formal base of coordination to solve collective action problems (with categories of political authority, contracts, societal embeddedness) is unsuitable for our focus on governments and intergovernmental coordination. While societal and non-governmental actors are occasionally part of the discussed coordination mechanisms, they were not the focus of the chapters in this volume.

public transport, local tourism, and housing in metropolitan areas. The constellation of actors and the duration of the coordination process differ depending on the characteristics of the coordination mechanism. Coordination initiatives that focus on single issues are often time bound and restricted in funding, but offer an opportunity for societal actors, NGOs, or specialists interested in a specific policy problem to participate, share their knowledge, and potentially improve the resulting policy response. More institutionalised coordination mechanisms, in comparison, cover multiple policy issues or expand their scope over time and provide a regular forum for information exchange, aggregation of interests, and an opportunity for developing more coherent policy responses to policy challenges recognised by all involved actors.

The following sections provide an overview over the dominant coordination mechanisms described and analysed across the countries covered in this book. Not all instances of coordination will be showcased here, but the main policy issues for which coordination mechanisms are assembled along the criteria of their policy scope (encompassing, multiple, or single issue focused), their degree of institutionalisation in the sense of regularity of usage and permanence of coordination, and the number and type of actors that are involved in the processes of coordination (e.g., from two municipalities to multiple actors representing local governments or even involving representatives from regional or central governments).

Coordination Mechanisms with Encompassing Scope and Scale

Horizontal coordination often comes in the form of voluntary coordination initiated by governments with a shared interest in solving a complex policy problem or in gaining more clout for the representation of regionally specific interests in relation to regional or central governments or for engagement with EU institutions and diverse funding streams. In all countries covered in this volume, local authorities have the legal right to engage in coordination, form joint boards or councils, delegate responsibilities to other local authorities or agencies, and to own for-profit companies connected to their responsibilities (e.g., waste recycling or energy provision). We find that local authorities do make use of those legal provisions and form associations to coordinate with each other to exchange information and protect their common interests in all policy areas that fall within their jurisdiction but also to manage and improve overall economic development. The respective names of local government associations

might differ in each country, but the range of purposes and tasks is comparable: to protect the autonomy and interests of local authorities from central government encroachment, to provide legal advice, and to share information about new legislation, as well as to aggregate, represent, and advocate shared local interests in relation to central governments. In that sense, this form of horizontal coordination has a vertical intergovernmental component built into its list of purposes while covering all policy areas that fall within the jurisdiction of local authorities within each country.

Membership in local government associations is voluntary, but we find that all local authorities have become members once associations are established, independently of the institutional context or age of democracy that the cases in this volume display. The success and influence of local government associations differ, and factors such as the degree of centralisation, a corporatist political culture, or the respect of local autonomy matter, as the comparison of cases such as Norway or Germany (high degree of local autonomy, corporatist culture, trust in local authorities) with Israel or Georgia (high degree of centralisation, central control of coordination mechanisms, distrust in local authorities) illustrates.

Regarding their purpose of aggregating and representing interests in relation to the central government, local government associations serve as a functional equivalent for local governments to the intergovernmental conferences or councils used to coordinate the interests of regional governments within federal states. In contrast to the broad range of policy areas covered by associations, intergovernmental councils are often more differentiated, distinguishing policy-specific councils from peak councils, with the former being composed of cabinet ministers responsible for the policy area and the latter uniting the heads of regional governments. Amongst the countries covered in this volume, Germany has the most elaborate set of intergovernmental councils and a tradition of using them with regularity to share best practices, coordinate positions, and defend regional areas of jurisdiction against encroachment from the federal government (see Chaps. 6 and 21 in this volume).

Coordination Mechanisms with Mid-Range Scope and Territorial Scale

Local governments across the majority of cases use their legal right to form associations or councils for coordination with neighbouring municipalities for policy issues affecting a territory or citizens beyond municipal

borders but of smaller scale to be relevant for the entire country. The motivation to coordinate is often driven by considerations of effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of key public services as well as of economic development and the attraction of funding and investments. Common policy areas covered by those coordination mechanisms connecting a limited number of local actors are regional infrastructure, waterworks, water supply, sewerage, transport, tourism, active travel, or recreational activities. Intermunicipal councils in Norway focus in addition on welfare services; regional development councils in Lithuania focus on all areas related to economic growth and investment, while regional clusters in Israel take on a range of tasks from public transportation, tourism initiatives, economic development, employment opportunities to data management and cyber security (see Chaps. 9, 11, and 12 in this volume). They represent some of the coordination mechanisms that Hooghe and Marks subsume under type II multilevel governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2003), displaying characteristics such as overlapping memberships, a plethora of boards and committees involving private- and third-sector actors with the aim to increase efficiency in the delivery of public services. However, coordination mechanisms are less task specific than the public service boards (such as fire rescue service boards or health boards) that Hooghe and Marks are describing in their seminal paper.

In some countries, we find further variations of this type of coordination mechanism, capturing the same purpose of matching scales of policy problems with the territorial jurisdiction of actors but using a variation of coordination bodies. In Poland or Greece, local authorities can form municipal unions between a minimum of two municipalities that are more encompassing in policy scope but limited in territorial scale. Another more country-specific manifestation of this coordination mechanism is commune-county unions in Poland. In the absence of regions with legislative authority, communes (i.e., municipal governments) have the legal right to coordinate with counties (i.e., administrative units with indirectly elected members) in areas of their jurisdiction and can even form unions with them to facilitate coordination. These commune-county unions have become popular and have taken over areas such as public transport, tourist infrastructure, or environmental protection to match the larger scale of the policy problems (see Chap. 13 in this volume).

A special form of territorial re-scaling comes in the formation of metropolitan areas. In several cases, local and central governments are grappling with slow-moving processes of urbanisation, resulting in what has been

called 'urban sprawl', stretching the boundaries of capital cities or larger cities into the adjacent, suburban municipalities. Similar to the regional clusters or councils mentioned above, the creation of metropolitan areas aims to match the size of the territorial reach of administrative or political units to the size of newly emerging policy problems as a result of internal migration and immigration. Pressures to provide adequate public transport, sufficient and affordable housing, and also education and health care services are shared across the capital cities in different countries faced with the problem of urbanisation (see Chaps. 10, 11, and 18). The main city adopts a more prominent role within this coordination mechanism than the regional clusters or unions between municipalities mentioned above. While metropolitan areas serve to deal with the pressures on service delivery in urban areas, the same approach of re-scaling of territorial governance does not help to address the flipside of urbanisation, that is, problems associated with the depopulation of rural or peripheral parts of the country.

These examples of medium scope and scale coordination share several characteristics: (a) they are voluntary; (b) they are formed by agreement between a small number of neighbouring municipalities; and (c) they might be legal entities but are not designed as additional political actors. The resulting governance architecture is layered on top of local councils and executives, preserving, at least in legal terms, the autonomous decision-making authority of local governments. In that sense, metropolitan areas sit somewhat between type I and type II MLG, as they are neither encompassing jurisdictions, nor non-permanent, task-specific special districts (see, Hooghe & Marks, 2003, pp. 236–238).

Cross-border cooperation between municipalities of different countries can be considered a second special form of horizontal coordination with a mid-range scope and territorial scale. In terms of scope, we find cross-border cooperation projects to cover multiple issues, often related to cross-border mobility, tourism, transport, and economic development across the region. The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and Interreg Cross-border Cooperation programmes are relevant institutional and financial facilitators through which cross-border infrastructure and service delivery, such as cross-border hospital management, project funding for sustainable agriculture, or the preservation of cultural heritage, can be realised.

In contrast to the examples mentioned above, however, the involved actors operate within different legal contexts, face variations in their areas of jurisdiction and funding, as well as electoral cycles and party systems.

Despite these additional challenges, we find examples of local authorities and regional governments, successfully initiating and using cross-border cooperation for the benefit of all jurisdictions. Estonian and Latvian municipalities cooperate, for example, for the development of cyclist and pedestrian routes cutting across the border of the two states, while the twin towns Valga-Valka take their cross-border cooperation further to cover joint district heating, energy infrastructure, or the development of a joint tourism strategy. Facilitating tourism and economic development in the border region is also at the heart of several cross-border initiatives, for example, in the border region between Estonia and Russia (see Chap. 4 in this volume), or the EGTC in the Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino, with minority language education and intercultural dialogue being additional areas of cooperation between municipalities situated along the Danish-German border. The examples also demonstrate that cross-border relations are often established in regions with a shared history or with a history of border changes that saw parts of the territory belonging to a different state (see Chaps. 17, 23, and 24 in this volume). Apart from specific funding streams, the shared access to resources or waterways provides another driver to establish cross-border cooperation between actors from neighbouring countries with a similar interest to preserve, sustain, or develop the usage of those resources (see, e.g., the Black Sea Cross-border Cooperation Programme).

Mergers as Special Type of Re-Scaling at the Local Level

The cases covered in this volume show that size of territories and scale of policy problems matter as reasons for actors to engage in coordination. A special type of this presents itself when territorial units are considered too small and a stronger, enduring coordination mechanism of merging authorities into larger units is chosen to adjust the size of decision-making bodies. Mergers at the local level are common across the countries included in this volume. They are also initiated to reduce the disparities in population size among existing municipalities. Small-sized municipalities face problems of capacity and a shortage in resources to deliver essential services to their residents. While voluntary mergers were the first choice in all cases, the success of central governments to achieve a homogenisation of the size of municipalities differed as local governments were resisting the process in several cases. Mergers took place in a more top-down orchestrated process in countries with high levels of centralisation, absence of

strong constitutional protection of local autonomy, and high dependence of local governments on funding from the central governments, resulting in a reduction of size disparities across municipalities and a more consistent reform across the entire country (see Chaps. 7, 4, 10, 11, and 18, in this volume). The experiences in Norway or Iceland, in contrast, show that municipalities successfully resisted central government pressures for mergers. Local referenda in Norway have resulted in a backlash against mergers, while in Iceland, municipalities with independent local revenue resources were successful in maintaining their constitutionally protected local autonomy. When local governments can rely on their own financial resources to buy the provision of essential services from their neighbours, the pressures, or 'push-factors' in favour of mergers do not apply in a similar way as they would for financially dependent municipalities (Strebel, 2019, pp. 657–659). Cooperation and contracting with neighbouring municipalities remain an alternative to mergers, allowing local governments to preserve their autonomy while delivering essential services to their residents at the same time.

Single-Issue-Focused Coordination Mechanisms

Coordination efforts that deal with very specific policy issues were part of the empirical picture in most of the countries, even if they were not described as the dominant horizontal coordination mechanism. Across the examples discussed in this volume, single-issue coordination does not follow a common pattern of the mechanism used but involves actors from different governments, can include societal actors, and is used more ad hoc in response to specific crisis situations or stimuli. The location of the crisis determines the constellation of actors, but the central government is often part of the coordination effort in particular when financial resources are required to mitigate the impact of the crisis. The central government in Türkiye responded with the introduction of central institutions to the experiences of dealing with the consequences of earthquakes and with the increase in refugees and migrants following the war in Syria—creating the Presidency of Disaster and Emergency Management and the Presidency of Migration Management. At the same time, the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye—a purely horizontal coordination body—established a Migration and Cohesion Centre to support municipalities to access funding and to manage the impact of the increase in the migrant community locally. In this example, both levels of governments recognise the need to coordinate

their activities, but different coordination mechanisms have been chosen without being fully connected with each other.

A more coordinated example comes from Iceland, where a volcanic eruption in November 2023 resulted in joined-up efforts by the central government and municipalities to manage a crisis affecting an entire town (Grindavík and its 3500 people), in an unprecedented and life-changing way. While the central government used its financial resources to buy up the real estate, neighbouring municipalities and the capital pooled their efforts to re-settle the entire town, provide schooling for the children, re-housing people, moving the municipal council into Reykjavík City Hall, and opening the entire range of local facilities to the people of Grindavík. The example demonstrates that, despite frictions between the central government and several municipalities about mergers, or housing shortages, or immigration and urbanisation, the emergency mobilises the solidarity between governments to provide support to local institutions and people (see Chap. 8 in this volume).

Another example of coordination between local and regional actors on a specific policy is the police coordination in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the Brčko District and four cantons along the western border of the country. The initiative started with a specific policy focus on police assistance and operational cooperation in border surveillance to increase the effectiveness of illegal migration prevention. Further coordination agreements were formed afterwards in areas of traffic and environmental protection managed by the Office of the Coordinator of the Brčko District established in 2005 (see Chap. 3 in this volume).

Finally, task forces were established in Estonia to deal with the complexity of specific policy issues (e.g., skills development, higher education funding, public sector innovation, or e-health) and to formulate policy recommendations based on expertise and without being influenced by day-to-day politics. Bringing together actors from central government institutions, local authorities, experts, non-governmental, and private sector organisations, task forces were funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), specifically directed at dealing with the complexity of single policy issues, and to deal with each issue separately. Once the funding ended, the task forces were discontinued as well (see Chap. 19 in this volume).

Despite their differences, what these single-issue-focused coordination examples have in common is a specific stimulus that drives the initiation of intergovernmental coordination, either in the form of an emergency or of funding criteria. The duration of the coordination effort is not

predetermined but often connected with the lifespan of the stimulus driving the initial adoption of coordinated action. Once the stimulus fades, the coordination body may be repurposed for a new policy, connected with other existing coordination mechanisms, or discontinued entirely, as the original issue is no longer requiring a coordinated response.

Factors Impacting Success and Failure of Horizontal Coordination

The range of coordination mechanisms discussed and evaluated in this volume offers an overview of how actors respond to complex problems and how different approaches to manage the problem (i.e., territorial re-scaling, voluntary networks, mergers, or delegation of tasks) work in different contexts. The chapters do not cover all existent coordination initiatives, nor do they provide a final statement of what works in practice. However, taken together, they do reveal factors that facilitate the establishment and functioning of coordination mechanisms that may also result in more effective policy solutions. The following sections focus on those factors that have been found to be beneficial or challenges to effective coordination across different political, socio-economic, or situational contexts.

Knowledge, Information Sharing, and Data Accuracy

One important factor in driving effective coordination is the level of knowledge and shared understanding of the underlying policy problem, and connected to that, the accessibility and accuracy of data. As outlined in the introduction, wicked problems are complex and cut across disciplinary boundaries and departmental responsibilities. A coordination body with interdisciplinary or interdepartmental membership can help to bridge knowledge gaps and to reach a shared level of understanding of the nature and the complexity of the policy problem. The example of the task forces in Estonia also shows that bringing in external experts or asking externals for reports and assessments of situations contributes to the depoliticisation of the issue and a reduction of the relevance of political competition within the coordination forum (see Chap. 19).

Connected to the problem of shared levels of knowledge are questions about the availability and accuracy of data about the policy issues as well as about the plans of other governments for dealing with them. Transparency and the willingness to share information and data with other actors are

important factors for providing a foundation for more coherent policy-making in multilevel settings. The regularity and frequency of intergovernmental meetings matter and can be designed in a way to facilitate information sharing. The reports on Georgia and the UK demonstrate how infrequent and irregular meetings as well as a lack of transparency by central government actors hinder the efforts made by local or regional actors to present their positions and to work together towards more effective policy solutions. As the case studies on creating joint phone applications for public transport in Sweden (see Chap. 20) and on the regulations for financing climate change in Türkiye demonstrate, the quality of data and data sharing across relevant actors also form essential ingredients for innovation and improvement of public services. Gaps in the data are a challenge for the design of functioning climate change funding schemes, for example, when estimation of potential pollution reductions of industry innovations is inaccurate due to lack of precise data (see Chap. 22).

The level of success of the coordination mechanism in terms of an agreed policy that is effective in practice is not guaranteed. But gathering information and reaching a point of shared problem definition forms a first step towards that aim and can be facilitated by the design of the coordination mechanism, its membership, openness to external expertise, regularity of meetings, and a willingness to create and share information and data with relevant actors.

Political Will and Leadership

Most of the horizontal coordination mechanisms are based on voluntary membership and initiated by actors in order to achieve joint benefits for their respective territories. Actors, however, may differ in what purpose the coordination mechanism should serve and be more cautious with the delegation of decision-making authority to coordination bodies. We can observe, on the one hand, how the political will of all involved actors to look beyond short-term gains or electoral cycles helped to establish a formalised cross-border cooperation body with decision-making authority and considered beneficial for all involved regions (see Chap. 24 on the Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino). On the other hand, a stronger focus on autonomy and the preservation of autonomy within each territory may leave actors reluctant to use coordination mechanisms for decision-making purposes rather than for information sharing and knowledge exchange. We find that in countries with strong national identities in regions, and more recent federalisation in Belgium or devolution

processes in the UK (see Chaps. 2 and 18), the willingness to coordinate conflicts with a simultaneous aim to preserve regional autonomy or intentions to increase the authority of the regional level of government. Similarly, a coordination mechanism can become less used or less effective over time when actors shift their orientation from cooperation on shared interests to an emphasis on differences, especially when election cycles vary. Selected actors may find themselves under pressure to demonstrate leadership—not leadership within the coordination mechanism to reach an agreement, but leadership in promoting territorial interests and in standing up for the citizens within their region (see Chaps. 2 and 6).

Degree of Autonomy and Clarity of Responsibilities

The country reports and case studies demonstrated that local and regional governments need a certain level of decision-making autonomy in order to respond to current policy problems and engage in coordination with each other. The majority of local governments enjoy a constitutionally protected status and decision-making authority for matters in their jurisdiction. In addition, we find that local authorities with their own sources of revenue or tax-raising authority are in a better position to plan joint activities or coordination initiatives with neighbouring municipalities to pursue joint interests (see, e.g., Chap. 12 on Norway). In contrast, we find that in countries in which the central government routinely interferes in the jurisdiction of local governments, local actors face challenges to establish and make effective use of bottom-up initiated coordination mechanisms, such as regional councils, or to successfully represent local interests in those councils in contrast to central government interests as the reports on Serbia, Israel, or Georgia demonstrate (see Chaps. 15, 9, and 5).

Related to this point is the scope and legal status of the coordination body itself and the question of whether it is equipped with decision-making authority. The connection between the coordination forum and actors involved in policymaking (e.g., parliamentarians, civil servants, policy development units) matters for whether and how agreements or recommendations developed in the coordination body are translated into policies. A more institutionalised form of coordination, with clear competences and acceptance from all affected governments, facilitates this connection and the incorporation of recommendations into the actual policy formulation process. The case study of cross-border cooperation in the Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino provides an example of the benefits when high levels of autonomy of regions in all three countries are combined with a

highly institutionalised form of coordination with delegated decision-making authority accepted by all involved actors. The permanence and legal status of the European Grouping of Territorial Coordination creates a context in which regular exchanges between political actors of the three regions take place, including taking decisions jointly for the region. It also lays the foundation for increased personal contacts, for building stronger networks over time, and for expanding cross-border initiatives beyond the initial policy issues of safety to public transport, or access to recreational facilities on each side of the border (see Chap. 24). The continued willingness of actors to coordinate in different policy areas is still a necessary condition for success, but the high degree of autonomy of actors to take decisions within an institutionalised framework of regular meetings opens the opportunity for actors to find new areas of shared interests and to reap the benefits of coordinating their decisions in those areas.

Timing and Time Frames

Time matters in multiple ways in relation to coordination mechanisms. We can distinguish between the temporary characteristics of the coordination mechanism itself (ad-hoc or permanently created), the time given to actors to produce an outcome from the coordination effort (e.g., a report or recommendations), as well as the timing of the coordination effort in relation to the decision-making process (e.g., prior to policy formulation, consultation during decision-making, or dissemination of decisions). The latter understanding of time is also related to questions of decision-making capacity of the coordination body or the existence of linkages between the coordination mechanism and decision-making bodies (e.g., legislative processes or executive decisions).

The majority of coordination mechanisms covered in this volume are created as forums for exchanging information about policy issues and policy preferences, for coordinating policy implementation, or for better representing shared interests, for example, via joint committees between local and regional executives, governance boards involving actors from the third and private sectors, associations, or intergovernmental conferences. By design, those coordination mechanisms have a longer time frame even if the involved actors or discussed policies are adapted over time. Short-term or ad-hoc coordination mostly starts with an external stimulus of specific, short-term funding or disaster (see, e.g., the task forces in Estonia in Chap. 19, or the examples of coordination in relation to natural disasters in Chaps. 8, 17, or 21 in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic).

A limited time frame for coordination increases the pressure on actors to come to an agreement in order to be able to present a result and claim success for their efforts. The examples presented in this book show that this kind of temporary coordination effort works for 'softer outcomes', such as information sharing and knowledge gathering at the preparatory stage for policy formulation, while the actual development of a policy proposal requires a longer time frame and more continuous coordination mechanism. The linkage between the coordination mechanism and the policymaking process matters for the question of whether recommendations or agreements resulting from the coordination activity may be reflected in the content of decisions or legislation and may better address the complexity of wicked or collective action problems. The timing of linkages matters as well: coordination efforts taking place before the drafting of new policies have an opportunity to shape the initial proposal and the framing of the problem, while coordination mechanisms that start only after policy drafts are written are more likely to serve an information-sharing purpose about the potential impacts of policy drafts, including their chosen frame and objectives. If in addition actors are provided with a limited time frame to formulate responses to those drafts, even the information-sharing purpose might be less effective as not enough time is available to gather evidence from all affected stakeholders.

Resources and Funding for Specific Coordination Mechanisms

One factor comes out as recurrent and dominant ingredient for successfully establishing coordination mechanisms and for realising the benefits of coordination for all participating governments and ultimately for citizens. That factor is funding and resources for achieving specific goals linked to coordination initiatives (e.g., economic growth, harmonisation of standards, capacity building, or cross-border relationship building). The time frame and objectives of the funding matter for the scope and scale of the chosen coordination mechanism as well as for its duration.

EU funding streams play a central role as an incentive for governments to start coordinating with other political and civil society actors. The aim and prospect of accession to the European Union was a key driver for countries in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe to create new or adjust existing territorial units (i.e., NUTS2 units) in order to build or improve the administrative capacity necessary to manage EU funds. Several countries created new units at the regional level (political or administrative) during the process of accession and were supported financially in

those efforts to build administrative capacity and soften the impact of newly created borders with neighbouring countries. Applying for EU funding streams and managing funding and funded projects requires municipalities within those regional units or across the border to work together, decide on priorities, and coordinate the delivery of joint projects. While the capacity-building objective is prevalent during accession to EU membership, it lays the foundation in terms of personal contacts, shared knowledge about funding, and expertise in managing funds and meeting the requirements of the funding stream, all of which are important for the continued acquisition of funding and successful coordination between governments and civil servants in the long run. Since EU funding is not limited to a specific policy area, we find coordination and projects within coordination initiatives to be covering a range of policies, such as tourism and economic growth, education of young people and adults, citizen involvement and e-participation, inclusivity and widening access to public services, and more and more related to climate change and sustainable energy. Similarly, instances of cross-border cooperation are directly linked to EU funding, in particular Interreg for cross-border projects, and the EGTC that provides for more institutionalised and permanent coordination with the establishment of a legal entity with delegated decision-making authority and an annual budget.

Funding and resources were also found to be relevant for local authorities to protect their autonomy and to engage in coordination mechanisms according to their local preferences. Local authorities with their own sources of revenues, tax-raising autonomy, or shared ownership of companies are in a better position to shape the scope and direction of coordination efforts. In comparison to funding provided by the central government or the EU, own resources allow local or regional governments to focus on their local or regional priorities and preserve their autonomy, despite engaging in coordination, instead of being bound by the aims and objectives presented by the funding scheme, often shaped along the priorities of higher-level governments.

Challenges of Horizontal Coordination and How to Overcome Them

Despite the variation in duration of democratic regime, institutional architecture, or economic development, the country reports and case studies demonstrate that commonalities exist in the factors that stimulate the

creation of coordination opportunities or arenas, facilitate their effectiveness, or act as barriers to successfully achieve the envisioned aim of the coordination effort. Among the facilitators of coordination, political will, leadership, shared information, or problem pressure as well as funding matter for starting a coordination initiative, as well as for producing tangible outcomes. High inflation rates and expenditures related to COVID-19 have put a strain on public finances and changed the macroeconomic conditions in which actors attempt to solve complex policy problems. Reduced resources and pressures on public finances pose a challenge for the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms, as they limit the capacity of actors to engage in coordination and to flexibly respond to policy challenges. Coordination efforts will follow the availability of funding streams rather than the demand or requirements nested in the policy issue. Funding with fewer conditions attached to the way it is spent, hence, opens more opportunities for actors to take decisions on whom to coordinate with and for what, than funding streams with very specific objectives, time frames, and benchmarks.

Among the barriers to effective coordination, diverging political interests of actors necessary for agreeing on joint aims or a new policy initiative as well as an unfavourable macroeconomic context and lack of resources come out as very important factors across countries and case study examples. Political contexts and variations in the political composition of governments, in contrast, matter more for vertical coordination but seem to be less important in the case of horizontal coordination. The timing of election cycles, however, plays a role for vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms, as they may lead to different levels of pressure to reach an agreement between the involved actors, as well as different degrees in their ability to compromise without risking the loss of voters (see the cases of cross-border cooperation of regional and local governments in Chaps. 23 and 24 for example).

Trust between actors of different levels of government and trust in the capabilities of other governments matter as well for the degree to which actors make use of formally available coordination mechanisms. In contexts of trust and acceptance of the distribution of power and resources, government actors engage in more institutionalised coordination mechanisms or delegate decision-making authority to coordination bodies. In contrast, in the context of ethnic divisions and distrust between communities or levels of government, opportunities to coordinate are less often realised, or coordination efforts may become politicised, and hence

ineffective in producing tangible results that address the underlying policy issue. Furthermore, the examples of encroachments into the areas of jurisdiction of lower levels (e.g., in Georgia, Serbia, or Israel in Chaps. 5, 15, and 9) show that apart from the constitutionally guaranteed authority, the respect of the distribution of responsibilities matters for the leeway political actors have to de facto coordinate in policy areas that are de jure in their areas of jurisdiction.

In terms of the design of coordination mechanisms, the examples covered in this book allow us to draw several conclusions: (a) separating the time frame for coordination activities from electoral cycles supports the focus on the policy issues and policy impacts rather than on political divisions and short-term electoral gains; (b) providing funding for coordination efforts and allowing actors to influence the policy focus in which they wish to coordinate incentivises actors to drive coordination processes in a bottom-up fashion according to problem pressures and needs they understand best; (c) bringing in experts and non-governmental actors can help to depoliticise the coordination efforts; (d) linking coordination mechanisms designed with the purpose of information sharing and interest aggregation with the arena in which policy decisions are eventually taken is crucial for the development of policy solutions that are more widely accepted and considered to be more effective in addressing the original policy issue.

Coordination efforts, no matter how well designed, remain connected to the institutional framework and history of relations between governments and communities within a country. The degree of autonomy and resources granted to lower levels of government matters for their opportunities to initiate and engage in coordination mechanisms with governments of the same level within or across the border. Whether those opportunities are used by governments, further depends on their willingness to coordinate and agree on joint activities with other governments. The recent experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic have brought to light the necessity to coordinate even in divided societies in which actors tended to focus more on the preservation of their autonomy. In a context of ethnic divisions and distrust, coordination initiatives will have to contribute to the (re-)building of trust and network relationships, and information sharing can be a first step towards that aim before additional benefits of coordinated activities can be achieved.

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