Governance of Transnational Cooperation in the EU Regional Policy: From INTERREG to Spatial Planning

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1. Introduction

With the progression of the European integration, the status of regions¹⁾ in the EU has changed remarkably. Having established a direct contact with the EU Commission and participation in the political process, they are gradually becoming important actors in EU politics alongside national governments and EU institutions. The Multi-Level Governance (hereafter MLG) accounts for this unique nature of the European governance. Under such a situation they began to form horizontal networks of cross-border cooperation bypassing national boundaries.

Such cooperation had been largely enhanced by the INTERREG program, which is one of the EU regional policies emphasizing transnational cooperation. It induces regions which have common geographical and cultural elements to implement transnational projects in EU territory. The preliminary experiences of transnational cooperation within INTERREG have promoted the application of spatial development on the EU level. *The European Spatial Development Perspective* (hereafter ESDP) published in 1999 was the first grand design of European space. It emphasizes polycentric and balanced space of EU through vertical and horizontal cooperation.

However, some questions arise here: what has caused the EU to

undertake such spatial planning? What kind of space does the EU seek to create and through which way? What impact could be expected to affect EU regional policy? This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the idea of EU spatial development, from the viewpoint of EU regional governance explaining the arising tendency of growth of horizontal networks at the subnational level in the framework of INTERREG.

2. Multi-Level Governance in EU Regional Policy

The governance approach has been accepted by many scholars as an useful model for explaining EU polity and its functional and political process.²⁾ This approach goes beyond the confrontation between the state-centric approach and the supranationalism approach in conventional EU integration theory and is frequently used by researchers of European integration because it sheds light on the original and unique character of the EU. The word 'governance' originates from Latin, meaning "to guide", and has been used in the field of international politics from the early 1990s.³⁾ Since governance is a comprehensive concept that changes with the fields to which it is applied, a general definition is difficult. However, it will be useful to consider MLG as a significant governance model in EU integration research. The main reason for this is that, while regional and local governments are not the leading forces of the European integration, the present EU political system shows that the state has lost its monopoly as the sole actor in this process.

In regional policy, Gary Marks' theory of MLG brought regional policy analysis into the limelight. The main features of MLG are following: corrosion of the monopolistic authority of the state in the policy making process of EU, importance of subnational actors, pluralism in policy decision, shared authority among the EU national and regional level and interaction among them.⁴⁾ When looking back upon the development of EU regional policy, a substantial reform was conducted in 1988. The partner-

ship principle⁵⁾ was introduced not only to the regional governments, but was also applied to other public organizations. In 1993 the Maastricht Treaty introduced the subsidiary principle, which meant that the EU could only act in domains that were not better addressed at the national or regional level. In addition, the Committee of the Regions (hereafter CoR), representing the interest of regional and local governments, was founded. Although CoR is a consultative body, it also has the right of its own initiative. The CoR is the nodal point where regional and local governments of member states contact the EU directly bypassing their national government as well. Many regional and local governments and interest group representatives⁶⁾ came to have a branch office in Brussels from the end of the 1980s. This period could be described as the heyday of the 'Europe of the Regions' discourse.

In 1990, with the beginning of INTERREG program, the regions in EU started to form networks of horizontal cooperation. This cross-border cooperation offered some changes to the conventional conception of the region in EU governance. In the national context, subnational governments have been considered within a center-periphery relation and not as an independent actor. However, by participating in INTERREG they have gained official access to a new arena at the EU level, cooperating with other subnational governments belonging to other member states in the framework of INTERREG. They formed inter-regional and transnational cooperative space alongside with the three fundamental EU, national, and regional levels in MLG theory. With the beginning of INTERREG IIC it was incorporated in the framework of EU spatial planning. The following sections examine INTERREG more closely, tracing its evolution from a narrower cooperation of the first period to a more comprehensive policy including spatial aspects.

3. The Evolution of the INTERREG and Cross-Border Cooperation in the EU

INTERREG is a cross-border cooperation program for regions of the EU. It is one of the Community Initiatives (hereafter CIs) led by the European Commission as part of its regional policy. Contrary to the Community Support Framework (hereafter CSF), the CIs is more problem-oriented, addressing the geographical and natural characteristics of the area. The most important feature of INTERREG is that regional and local governments belonging to different countries create transnational cooperation to carry out common projects.

Before INTERREG began in 1990, the notion of social and economic cohesion was taken up officially in the Single European Act of 1986. In order to realize the single market by 1992, the economic and social imbalance at the regional level in the EU was a serious obstacle. The EU has therefore tried to maintain the balance through assistance to underdeveloped areas. However, there was a critical problem that infrastructure and transport policies were fixed under different regulations for each member states. The purpose of the initial INTERREG I (1990–1993) was to remove the obstacles in the bordering area of member states.

The four objectives of INTERREG I were (1) assistance in removing obstacles to local development, (2) expansion of cross-border cooperation network, (3) border area assistance with non-member states and EU, and (4) cooperation in the peripheral regions of EU. These four objectives took up about 10% of the total structural fund. The REGEN program started in the same year was dedicated to trans-European networks development for energy supply and traffic maintenance.

INTERREG II was introduced from 1994 to 1999 succeeding the INTERREG I. It was composed of two different programs. The A program promoted cross-border cooperation program for border area development

such as information infrastructure, development of the European network system, and cross-border cooperation in education fields. The B program aimed to maintain domestic energy network maintenance in Southern European countries. Cross-border cooperation and the European network were therefore promoted by the INTERREG IIA/B framework, expanding from the internal transnational area to cooperation within external bordering areas i. e., candidate states.

It can be said that with the INTERREG II, cooperation across national borders in EU developed in both number and quality. It also had a budget of 2900 million ECU (1996 prices), becoming the biggest program in CIs. However, while INTERREG A and B were based on cross-border cooperation, they were restricted to cooperation between neighboring states, and the more inclusive vision to development across EU was lacking. In facing this reality, the CoR addressed the necessity for local level initiatives, expansion of infrastructure building and consistency of CIs. The European Commission had also started to research on the spatial development program.⁷⁾ Studies on spatial planning at EU level were developed.⁸⁾ *Europe 2000*⁹⁾ and *Europe 2000+* have outlined the concept of spatial approach in the EU. As a result of these factors, INTERREG IIC was newly introduced in 1997 which was centered on transnational cooperation in regional and spatial development planning. The total budget increased later to around 3519 million ECU.¹⁰⁾ Within this, IIC took up 413 million ECU, approximately one seventh of the total. The Article 10 pilot program¹¹⁾ also was implemented according to the article 10 of ERDF regulation.

The IIC program emphasized the cooperation over broader areas to solve common regional problems. The most important feature of the program however was a spatial perspective that considered the EU regional governance in a more inclusive way, exceeding the national borders and sector divisions. The program was concretely divided into three problem fields: a) transnational cooperation, b) flood prevention, and

c) drought prevention.¹²⁾ The budget distributed 121 million ECU, 148 million ECU, and 114 million ECU respectively. There were 7 general transnational cooperation and 4 pilot actions. It showed that the environmental management was an important issue in transnational cooperation. With these issues in mind, it would be useful to look briefly at how INTERREG program is managed. Firstly, there are two types of project related to the decision making process in EU regional policy. Contrary to the Community Support Framework (CSF), in which the project must be incorporated into plans already developed by the national government, INTERREG takes community initiatives drawn up by the European Commission. In regard to the number of participants, more than three member states are needed for each project. This condition poses some difficulty when looking for partners in different countries. Many programs in fact have their own website on which they post information and call for participation.

Secondly, the main actors for the management of project are transnational groups installed in every projects: transnational secretariat, steering committee, monitoring committee, management authority, and payment authority. They have a series of specific tasks to adjust the networks during the project implementation. These transnational working groups are mainly composed of governmental bodies. Although other organizations such as the Chambers of Commerce or universities participate, the number of private companies and NGOs is very small.

Thirdly, there are three stages in the evaluation process: All projects are examined through a preliminary condition report, a mid-term report, and an ex-post evaluation report. These evaluations are useful to improve the quality and validity of the programming. It functions as a tool of coordination for participating actors to attain the common purpose and best practice. Evaluation must be secured independently, and for the purpose of fairness, one or more external consultants' participation is recommended.

After INTERREG II program, several obstacles to the transnational cooperation have emerged. For example, let us consider REGIONALP¹³⁾ program. It is one of the pilot action programs in the framework of INTERREG IIC, managed by 6 countries and 19 regions. The reasons for taking up the Alpine area are its specific historical background and geographical position. As a crossroad of different cultures, commerce and human exchange, the Alpine region has always been one of the most important areas because of its location. Naturally, a lot of political tension¹⁴⁾ has arisen between France and Italy in the last half of nineteenth century and the problem of South Tyrol has emerged between Italy and Austria after the First World War up to 1989. After long years of these strained relationships, people living in the Alps have tried to make a cooperative relationship between neighboring local communities as many important transnational organization and convention groups demonstrate it. Among others, Alpine Convention has been the most important association including eight states. The REGIONALP program is composed of 3 member states which are Italy, Germany, Austria, and with 3 non-member states, Slovenia (became a member state of the EU after 2004), Liechtenstein and Switzerland. The main objective of this program was to strengthen inner-Alpine cooperation and spatial development by setting up a transnational cooperation network optimizing the integration of the Alpine space into EU policies, which make it possible to draft the joint vision for Alpine space and its position in the EU.

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According to the INTERREG ex-post evaluation, the main problems for cooperation were the following: lack of experience in transnational cooperation, the length of the period from project proposal to its implementation, difference between the administration systems in each country, locus of authority in which the responsibility resides, difference in the concept of space, and the lack of a common communication language. Due to the multi-level management system in INTERREG, the capacity of subnational government here has been crucial. Success of these transnational coopera-

tion also depends greatly on administration system and central-local relation in the member state. Additionally, the difference of spatial planning approach in member states was pointed out. For example, compared with Germany or France which have traditions in spatial planning and where effective resource supply was comparatively easy, Italy does not have such traditions.¹⁶⁾

Contrary to Alpine area, transnational cooperation has been developed in certain areas especially in Northern Europe. It is important to underline that certain cooperation framework were formed even before the beginning of INTERREG IIC. The VASAB 2010 of Baltic Sea Region settled in 1994 is one good example. Based on both preliminary experience of INTERREG IIC and other transnational cooperations, the needs of spatial development policy for EU territory was gradually recognized at EU level.

4. From INTERREG to EU Spatial Planning : A Grand Design for the European Space

In addition to the elements mentioned above, there were other factors related to the European integration which caused the EU to focus on spatial planning. Firstly, the EU single market increased various networks which led to relative disappearance of the regional border. It promoted the inter-dependency within the whole territory of the EU between cities, regions, and states.

Secondly, the economic globalization promoted cooperation beyond borders between actors. While increasing capital concentration to big cities promotes productivity and innovation, such change intensifies competition between cities and regions simultaneously. It would result in the economic imbalance within the EU territory bringing overconcentration of people, capitals, information to the big cities, and economic and population decrease to surrounding rural and suburban areas.

Thirdly, the enlargement implied that the politics, economies and cultures in Europe became much more heterogeneous. In particular, important economic disparity exists in new member states compared with the old member states. The income ratio was 4.4 times bigger in the richest country. Regarding the GDP, when the EU average was set to 100, there is a difference of 218.3 to 40.9 in Luxembourg and Latvia in 2003.¹⁷⁾

In order to make enlargement successful in such a situation, it was necessary to offer efficient assistance to the new member states. However, the limit in effectiveness of the regional policy was becoming visible. Although the economic disparity between states was partly narrowed with the structural fund, the gap between regions nevertheless remained. The core of the entire question is how to create a balanced EU space in which all can receive the benefit of the integration, while strengthening economic development.

Therefore it was indispensable to show a clear concept of the common EU space, based on fundamental measures, more effective policy implementation, and closer cooperation. Conventionally, it was thought that spatial planning was not the competence of the EU but of the national governments. However, deriving the above mentioned factors, the European Commission started spatial development according to the Article 10 of ERDF.¹⁸⁾

The Committee on the Spatial Development, (hereafter CSD) started to make a framework document for EU spatial policy involving the EU commission and ministers for spatial development of each member states. The first ESPD meeting was held in the form of an informal meeting in 1989 in Nantes in France. Jacques Delors, then the President of the Commission, emphasized the need to show the spatial vision of Europe. The idea of giving the spatial aspect to regional policy had large influence on the national agency for territorial development in France (*Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale*: hereafter DATAR). However, it is important to point out that EU spatial planning has a

neutral meaning. The term 'spatial' here is an umbrella term invented by European Commission that includes vertical and horizontal cooperation. It is also a method for influencing the arrangement of many activities in space to keep the balance between the needs of environmental protection and social and economic development.¹⁹⁾²⁰⁾

The European commission and France have taken the leading role in making the document from the early stages of the meeting. In this process, a conflict arose in defining the map of the EU space. There were two different images: the 'bench of a grape' in which the EU territory is consisted of many middle-sized central areas, and the 'blue banana', centering on a single development area. Both visions have constructed a common image of the EU as a territory without borders, though in different ways. At the end of the meeting process, members of the CSD reached a broad consensus that the "grape" was more appropriate to represent the diversity of the EU. After ten years of debates and negotiations, the ESDP was finally approved by CSD in 1999 in Potsdam.

The ESDP is based on the fundamental political aims of the EU. These are: economic and social cohesion, preservation of natural and cultural heritages, and balanced competitiveness of the European territory. According to these aims, the ESDP set the three political objectives below: 1) polycentric spatial development and a new urban-rural relationship, 2) parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge, and 3) management of the natural and cultural heritages. In order to realize these principles, the ESDP lists up several public policies which have significant impact to EU space and territory as follows: the regional policy, common agricultural policy, competition policy, trans-European networks, and research and development policy.²¹⁾

As mentioned earlier, the EU is tackling the disparities at the regional level through structural fund. However, overconcentration and the disparities between and within regions are yet to improve. This problem will not be solved by the analysis from a macro-economic viewpoint only. ESDP

underlines the need to include the spatial aspect in analysis, focusing on type of the area, as well as accessibility. At present, the area in the EU that is considered an important part of the world economy is only the area shaped by London, Paris, Milan, Munich, and Hamburg, namely the 'Pentagon'. The first objective of ESDP is to form a number of broader areas with the potential of adapting to the global economy, as alternatives of a single developed area. The second objective of ESDP establishes the new network of city and rural areas to secure equal access. Accessibility means not only in transport system but also access to knowledge base and information. Education and job training are thus deeply concerned. Finally, management of nature and a cultural heritages have significant value for the EU space.

Briefly speaking, the EU spatial planning aims to achieve the balanced functioning of society, nature, and economy. Good living environment and equal opportunities to access have a value as public-goods to all people that live in the EU space. To this end, the EU spatial policy should be managed by the coordination and partnership on the EU level, trans-national, national, and regional or local level combining vertical, horizontal, and transversal cooperation. However, policies at each level are not always compatible. In order to prevent expansion of the unbalance resulting in ineffective policy implementation, the EU public policies should be implemented not in a separate context but in coordination, creating a synergic effect. From a long-term viewpoint, it could be said that ESDP offers the fundamental basis of the governance of EU as public space. Øresund Region is considered as a successful example of spatial development.²²⁾ It is formed by Copenhagen and Malmö in Sweden. It has a population of 3,5 million. Traffic has become much easier by construction of a bridge which connects two cities. The accessibility from the continent to Scandinavian countries has improved. Actually, Øresund has a possibility to become a junction point of Western Europe, East Europe, and Northern Europe.

5. Post-ESDP Process and Further Challenge to the European Spatial Planning

In order to develop the spatial planning demonstrated in ESDP, the important issue seems to be that the EU does not have the competence on spatial development and how to incorporate the concept of spatial development to EU policies. On one hand, there is the possibility of ESDP developing further and that the authority in spatial development of the EU level should be specified. On the other hand, however, some argue that competence should be left to the national level or the regional and local level on small or middle city planning. France and Germany are in favor of the EU having authority in this field. However, these problems are still on their way to be solved.²³⁾

Considering the lack of competence at EU level, INTERREG IIIB is in fact the main policy, which best realizes the ESDP concept. INTERREG IIIB aims to encourage harmonious and balanced development of the European territory, overcoming internal borders and barriers between member states and reducing the isolation of peripheral regions.²⁴⁾

Another point to be verified is the linkage between political fields directly concerned to spatial planning. Although ESDP covers extensive policy fields, there is not much reference to it except in the field of regional policy. In addition, the different reaction of member states should be mentioned. It is pointed out that South European countries except France are skeptical of the ESDP. For example, Italy has the tradition of city planning at the local level deriving from its history of city states, even though spatial planning at the national level is lacking. In Spain, where spatial planning is mainly placed under regional level, autonomous communities are rather cautious about the possible risk of re-centralization. In Greece, the central government's role was strengthened due to the necessity for adjustment of the national planning to ESDP.²⁵⁾

The spatial development process after ESDP was taken over by Subcommittee on Spatial and Urban Planning and European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON)²⁶⁾. These institutions coordinate the networks between the research institutions of each member state while adjusting the national spatial planning at EU level.

Although many problems still remain, the ESDP has drawn the attention to the EU spatial planning and policy from a synthetic viewpoint towards economic, social, and territorial cohesion in the EU. Further European spatial planning needs more concrete research taking account of the diversity of the EU territory and the administrative differences of each member states. Furthermore, it is necessary to offer more information and opportunity for open discussions among citizens for the sake of the realization of the EU public space.

6. Conclusion: Governance of Transnational Cooperation; Towards Territorial Cohesion in the EU

The experience of transnational cooperation within INTERREG revealed the necessity of a more inclusive approach to the integration of EU territory dealing with the practical policies and strategic visions. The grand design demonstrated in ESDP will be realized only by the closer cooperation at different levels and coordination among them. It needs a flexible framework combining MLG and horizontal networks at regional and local level. From such a viewpoint, it could be argued that the ESDP incorporated an example of the governance model for the future EU public space. The concept shown in the ESDP gives a new perspective of the EU territory to subnational units in the EU. It enables regional and local governments to have a new meaning in the framework of EU spatial planning. They are not only the subnational unit of member states, but participating simultaneously as actors in the transnational broader area within the EU. At the same time, the EU spatial planning connects them

to the concept of EU territory without the border. On the other hand, the subnational level in the EU will increase in importance to promote the EU integration as the closest unit to citizens. They have a pivotal role in involving the civil society participation in the process of the European integration. The discourse of the EU spatial planning brings a change in the modality of EU regional policy. It is no longer a policy implemented in isolation but is in coordination with other policies for the EU spatial development, promoting cohesion of the whole EU territory.

In the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, “territorial cohesion” was newly quoted in article 3, together with economic and social cohesion as the main objectives of the EU integration.²⁷⁾ It can be interpreted as the third dimension to strengthen convergence and solidarity within the EU. Related to spatial planning, it entails a comprehensive interpretation of the EU territory as whole, while taking into account territorial diversity at different levels within Europe itself. This implies that the nation of region and regional matters in EU have been elevated from the national level to the level of the EU as a whole. In this context EU regional policy is shifting towards a broader approach, including the aspect of spatial planning. It is just the beginning of the EU spatial approach and there is room for further discussion and concrete research. How to crystallize spatial policy into the enlarged EU is crucial question for the territorial cohesion, as well as for further European integration.

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- 5) Council Regulation 2052/88, Article 4.
 - 6) Simon, Hix (2005) *The political system of the European Union* (2nd Edition), Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 220-223.
 - 7) Committee of the Regions Own-Initiative Opinion, OJ, C 217, 06/08/1994.
 - 8) European Commission (1991) *Europe 2000 — Outlook for the development of the Community's Territory* —.
 - 9) European Commission (1994) *Europe 2000+ — Cooperation for European territorial development* —.
 - 10) http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/interreg3/inte2/inte2.htm
 - 11) OJ, No. L193, 31/07/1993, pp. 34-38.
 - 12) The importance of common management of natural resources was emphasized by the Rhine river flood in the middle of the 1990s.
 - 13) REGIONALP official website: <http://www.alp-info.net/en/index.html> (25. 01. 2006)
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 - 15) European Commission *Ex-Post Evaluation of the INTERREG IIC Community Initiative 1994-1999*, Available from: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/interreg3/inte2/inte2.htm (25. 01. 2006)
 - 16) Luisa Pedrazzini (2005) "Applying the ESDP through Interreg IIIB", *European Spatial Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Routledge, London, p. 301.
 - 17) Source from Eurostat. <http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int>
 - 18) Règlement du Conseil No. 2083/93 du 20 juin 1993, JO, no. 193, 31. 07. 1993. pp. 34-38, portant dispositions d'application du règlement, No. 2052/88.
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 - 22) Ole B. Jensen and Tim Richardson (2004) *Making European Space: Mobility Power and Territorial Identity*, London, Routledge.

- 23) Academie Für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (2003) *Spatial Development Policy in the European Constitution Treaty*, Studies in Spatial Development, No. 3, Available from : www.arl-net.de/veroe/SSD3.pdf
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- 27) Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, Part I, Title I, Art. I-3.

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This paper examines governance of transnational cooperation in the EU regional policy, tracing its evolution from a narrow cooperation of the first period to a more comprehensive policy including spatial aspect in the framework of Community Initiative INTERREG. With the development of the European integration, the status of regions (hereafter the same meaning as subnational governments) in the EU has changed remarkably. Having established a direct contact with the European Commission and a participation in the political process, regions are gradually becoming important actors in EU politics alongside national governments and the EU institutions. Multi-Level Governance accounts for this unique nature of the European regional policy. Regions began to form horizontal networks of the cross-border cooperation bypassing national boundaries. It could constitute a new political space at transnational level alongside with the three fundamental levels: the EU and the national and regional levels.

With the beginning of INTERREG IIC at the end of 1990s, the aspect of spatial planning has been incorporated in these cooperations. The first grand design for EU territory has been crystallized in *European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)*.

It combines vertical and horizontal networks for better management of the EU space based on the fundamental political aims of the EU as an economic and social cohesion, preservation of natural and cultural heritages, and balanced competitiveness of the EU.

However, as the EU does not have the competence in the field of spatial planning, the question of how to incorporate the idea of ESDP to EU public policies remains. Moreover, the difference in administrative systems and traditions of spatial approach between member states could be an obstacle. This problem became even more complicated with the enlargement. Therefore the spatial planning for post-ESDP process requires further discussion.

In conclusion, this paper states that although many problems still remain, the idea of the EU spatial planning gives a new role to regions of member states connecting them to the concept of the EU territory as a whole. Regions are not only the administrative units of the member states, but they also assume a pivotal role to pursue transnational cooperation involving local societies. In this sense, transnational cooperation became more important for territorial cohesion as well as for the success of the European Integration.