# ECOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE: TRANSBOUNDARY ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION IN THE CARPATHO-DANUBIAN AREA

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**ABSTRACT**

The dissertation examines the contemporary environmental governance complex covering the transboundary area of the Carpathians and Danube with a focus on ecoregional approach. The strategic importance of these two geographical objects accounts for an intertwined system of varied institutions and initiatives contributing to addressing ecological challenges in the area through international cooperation. Using qualitative research methods and secondary literature, the study tackles the factors determining the governance's architecture and content, the forms of involvement of actors, and ecoregional governance effectiveness aspects. The starting point is the locus of a region, then one looks at the specificity of borders to finally arrive to conclusions on European space. The main findings of the present inquiry confirm certain governance development tendencies discussed in the works of other scholars. The concursion of administrative borders and landscape boundaries moves border and montane areas to the center of international attention. The natural setting serves as a foundation for invoking specific environmental regimes, but actors have a great measure of discretion in shaping the collaboration system, whereby ecoregion is utilised as a composit element of a comprehensive sustainability approach.

*Keywords*: environmental governance, Central and Eastern Europe, European Union, border.

# Contents

## INTRODUCTION

The present work was conceived as an attempt to capture a view of the state-sectioned area of the Carpathian Mountains as a single space threaded by governance elements and obduced with the key contemporary discourses of Environmentalism, Bordering, Cooperation, and Europeanisation. Over the past centuries the Carpathians have been honoured in their importance and thus inevitably drawn by geographers, drilled and sifted by geologists, scouted by ethnographers, recognised by political scientists and set up at the discretion of such writers as Jules Verne and Bram Stoker. They exist therefore also as a notion that in many evokes pieces of powerful imaginary, be those rocky and woody landscapes or the turbulent historical past of a zone of logistic and cultural transition.

A part of Eastern and Central Europe, the Carpathians were once an object of medieval feud and imperial contestation. Nowadays, the conflict connotation is especially salient for the Balkan area where the Western Romanian, Southern and Serbian Carpathians repose. Thus, it might be of practical interest to work towards "de-framing" from conflict the inter-ethnic embers of the peninsula by exploring concrete cooperation development paths (for a Western Balkans example see Börzel and Fagan, 2015). While the flow of the Danube and its tributaries is another inextricable element of the region, the omnicast question of the environment is both vital and promising. The environmentalist discourse that has received its lot of attention from anthropologists (e.g. Freilich, 1967; Kopnina, 2016; Lockyer and Veteto, 2013), understandably, cannot be narrowed down to narratives of rural or anti-globalist inspiration. It crystallises itself in variegated forms, including private groupings, customary practices, policies ordained and intuitions learned. In this particular study of ecological cooperation, environment is regarded as the material field influencing the structure and content of cooperative relations, an ideational factor causing imbalances in proclivity to collaborate transnationally, a common point of reference balancing diverse value perceptions, but also as a resource and a tool.

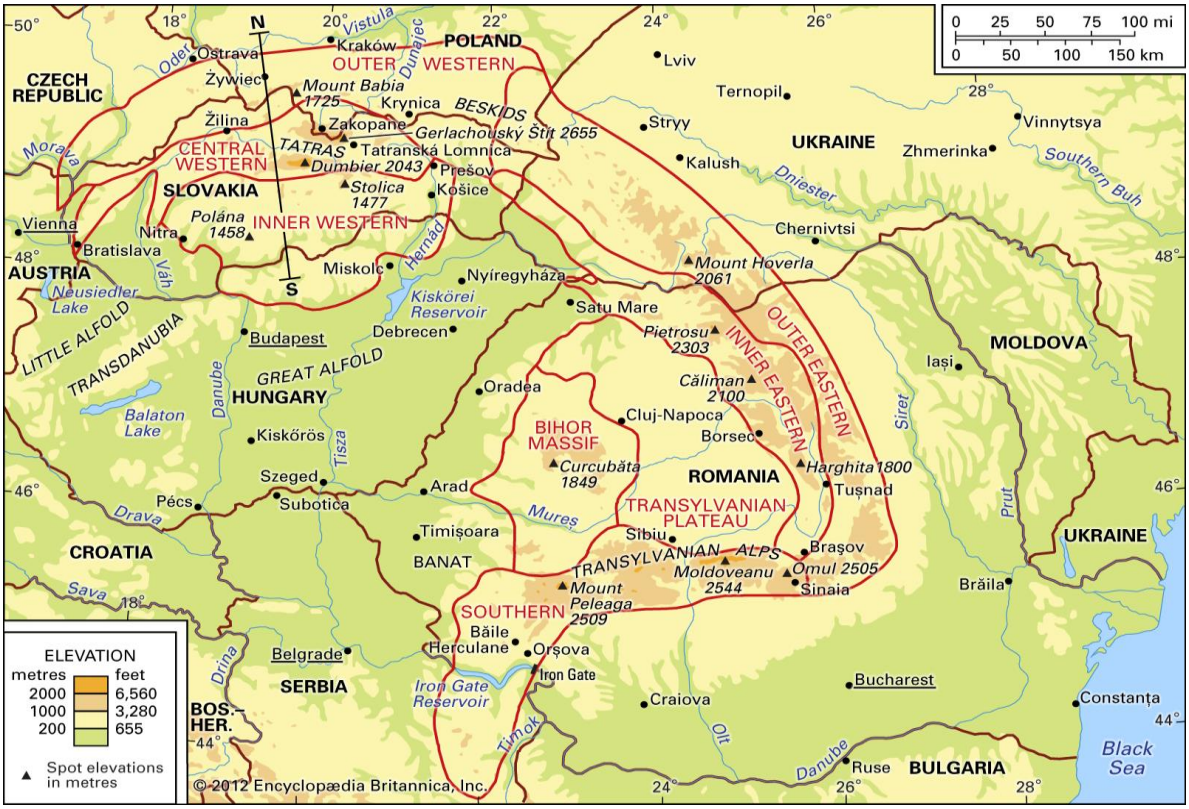
The concept of ecoregion has been at the display since the 1980s, and hence, remarkably, the sprouting of the holistic approach in environmentalism coincided with

the transborder cooperation upswing in Europe. So-called border regions not only make up for a large portion of the area under examination, but occupy as well an important place in governance architectures. Division, stitching, and carving are all prominent components of the European spatialisation, while bordering is a key European Union (EU) experience. As the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Kiefer concluded, even smaller cross-border activities can be, instrumentally, ice-breaking for international cooperation programmes, which confirms the role of 'frontier regions' as 'laboratories of European integration' (Kiefer, 2014, p.72).

In the context described above, the problem statement for this dissertation can be formulated in the following way:

At the backdrop of intensive environmental policy development and harmonisation efforts as well as of the elaboration of such tools as the ecoregional approach, there is a lack of scholarly reflection on how an integrated governance system can be woven from varied initiatives contributing to solving ecological challenges through transboundary cooperation in a distinct, non-politically-defined unit, specifically, in the area of the Carpathians and the Middle and Lower Danube, taken as a whole.

The choice of the study's focus responds to the promising combination of the typical and unique in the characteristics of the area, from the governance examination point of view. A wide range of environmental problems (e.g. floods, wildlife loss, or soil degradation), each of which can be encountered elsewhere, combine into a busy regional agenda. At the same time, the area stretches across a group of countries (as can be seen on the map, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2012) connected by their social, political and economic particularity. To a significant extent the latter is due to their historical experiences, including a period on the Socialist path of development, relatively uncommon for the countries' other current environmental policy realisation partners. The resulting geographically compact specimen of international cooperation underlay offers an opportunity for exploring multiple sides of the application of one of the scientific approaches in Environmental Governance (EG), that is ecosystems regions.




Map of the Carpathian Mountains. Source: Encyclopædia Britannica.

### Research Questions and Objectives

The dissertation has the respective regional environmental governance complex as the object of study and seeks to answer the below research questions:

I. What is the body of factors driving and governing transboundary environmental cooperation in the Carpatho-Danubian area?
II. How does the natural framework of ecoregion influence the structure of environmental governance, including stakeholder and actor exchanges?
III. And hence: What is the relation between the ecoregional approach and governance effectiveness?

It was hypothesised that only in part "natural lines" are respected and that cooperation patterns are to a great degree contingent upon political and economic conditions and rationales. The answers to the research questions are presented in a three-fold way: descriptive, analytical, and explanatory. Thus, the first objective of the

dissertation was to sketch the ecoregional governance picture in the Carpatho-Danubian area, so as to uncover the content and the density of cooperative relations in the domain of ecology. The second objective was to attempt at interpreting this picture with the help of analytical tools. The third objective was to take an explanatory step by applying selections from the existing cross-subject body of theory to the information gathered in the frames of the study and to obtain conclusions that could be consequently used in theory development, comparative case research, and policy practice.

The four chapters of the dissertation, sequentially: introduce the main theoretical concepts that the research steers astern of; provide an overview of the historical and economic context of the Carpatho-Danubian area, describe the legal framework of the environmental cooperation; look at the stakeholder composition, tackle the problem of initiative and practices in transboundary project undertaking; and, finally, review the resulting structure and significance of specific cooperation mechanisms as well as present three case-studies. The closing section of the dissertation contains conclusions summarising the answers to the research questions.

The significance of the research produced consists in: a) the scale of the object captured in a single work and the overarching – both disciplinarily and geographically – framework of the project that looked at multiple sites, institutions, actor classes, and interaction layers from more than one angle, which implies also a certain practical usefulness of the dissertation for a relatively large array of scholars and policy practitioners; b) the bibliography pulled together through the selection of a corpus of sources decently covering the complex argument explored; c) the systemic approach in the performed terminological and analytical tool development work relying on interpretative engagement with both theoretical and practical phenomena; d) the applicability for the policy domain (in the region of the research and beyond) thanks to the high relevance of the problematique studied for the contemporary international agenda as well as to the evincing and mapping of historical, legal, social, political and other factors and dependencies, supplemented by the discussion of comparable cases and experiences found in the academic literature.

**Literature Review**

Let us move on to specifically reviewing the literature existing on the object of research. There is a consistent interdisciplinary corpus of texts engaging with different aspects of the range of problems tackled in the present study. A plenitude of works is dedicated to regionalisation in the European context (for example, Giordano, 2010; Kiefer, 2014; Pálné Kovacs and Mezei, 2016) and to the transposition of the EU policies to its near abroad (Dimitrova, 2001; Popescu, 2008). An array of studies relates the phenomena of regions and bordering in Europe and beyond (Blasco et al., 2014; Perkmann, 2003; 2007).

So as to comprehend and to interpret the governance structure in the chosen area, it is indispensable to prop up the theoretical backbone of the dissertation with theories explaining international cooperation (Axelrod, 1984), its strategies (Jervis, 1978; Putnam, 1988), the incentives (Olson, 1971) and forms of collective action (Ostrom, 1990) as well as, in particular, governance as a composite and dynamic phenomenon (Jessop, 2003). Traditionally, institutions are deemed the pivotal element of the latter (on institutionalism see March and Olson, 1998; Haas et al., 1993; Mearsheimer, 1994), however situations in which such are absent (Keohane, 2001) or the state is bypassed (in the postinternational optics of Rosenau, 1990) are also being analysed. A recent classification (de Burca et al., 2013) outlines three (often intertwined) "modes" of governance existing in practice. Mode one is based on state-centric regimes, best explained by the neoliberalist regime theory (Krasner, 1983; Levy et al., 1995), and institutions operating in it – by the principal-agent model (the subject is thoroughly examined in Delreux, 2011); among the "best practices" there count operational adherence to the principle of subsidiarity (Jordan, 1999) as well as aiming at the reduction of individual actions' externalities (Keohane, 2001, p.2). Mode two is geared up with networked patterns involving non-state actors (Anhelm, 2002). Mode three termed as Experimentalist Governance implies non-hierarchical multilateral decision-making which is reminiscent of the pattern currently being advocated by the EU as a means of overcoming the "democratic deficit".

Importantly, both cooperative governance and environmentalist theories are closely related through philosophical liberalism (Woodhouse, 2008, p.53), or have even

germinated within the liberalist paradigm (Elliott, 2016, pp.7-8). The rationale for exercising governance in the field of ecology is supplied by the literature picturing contemporary threats to the environment. The fundamental *Silent Spring* by Carson (1962) and *Risk Society* by Beck (1992) discuss environmental risks at the global level and can be well complimented by the studies classifying environmental problems (Ausubel et al., 1995). The views that underlie the concept of environmental governance, apart from advocating managerial efficiency (Koulov, 2012), can argue for the priority of proceeding from the natural order in the man-nature relationship (O'Riordan, 1976, pp.10-11), present environmental factors as paramount in region definition (Mumford, 1938, p.313) and, consequently, instigate bioregionalist critique of administrative borders arbitrariness, often much more pungent than the following sentimental line in McCloskey's work (1989, p.127): 'Far too often such lines on maps bear little relation to the life that passes over, under, around, and through them.' All of it, still, contributes to justifying zoning and land protection strategies (Ausubel et al., 1995). Case-studies provide evidence of subdivision of political responsibility on the grounds of the local physical geography (Duray et al., 2010). EG is commonly regarded as synonymous to "cooperation" (Vogler, 2005, p.835) and constitutes a distinct field of study (e.g. Speth and Haas, 2006; Haas, 2008; Lowe and Paavola, 2005). Researching it includes exploring different levels, problems (for example, conservation in Wolmer, 2003; or fresh water resources in Bernauer and Kalbhenn, 2010), and types of actors (Raustiala, 1997), such as governments (Jasanoff, 2004), civil society (examined in Lipschitz and Mayer, 1996; Newig and Fritsch, 2009) or business (Cullen-Knox et al., 2017).

When it comes to scrutinising environmental regulations, scholars generally dedicate their studies to specific instruments, countries, or institutes (Jordan et al., 2003). As to the latter, there exist comprehensive studies of environmental treaties (Sand, 1997), organizations involved in environmental policy regulation or having impact on such policies (Biermann et al., 2009). Then, certain aspects are looked at more closely: cooperation in fighting environmental crime (Burlacu, 2008), governance and deforestation (Doherty and Schroeder, 2011), regional commons governance (Ostrom, 1990), EG's contribution to peace-building (Feil et al., 2009). When exploring the EU, it seems especially important to grasp EG at all levels as a source of political benefits, a

method of gaining clout: exemplifying would be to regard ecological initiatives as a key to gaining regional leadership, such as Japan's attempts at arranging its own Northeast Asian "condominium" (Central Environmental Council, 2005). It is noteworthy that even if these are states that introduce regulations (Bastmeijer, 2016), when there is a need for proactive initiatives, the latter often come from NGOs (Finger and Princen, 1994). Their role in the transnational environmental cooperation and their "action space" (which depends rather on the relational structure than on material resources available) was studied by Tynkkynen (2008) and is an entry point for analytical beading on the relational capital thread. All that apparent diversity in environmental activities undermines the idea of such a universal regime as a panacea, although some argue in favour of global environmental governance (Lipschutz and Mayer, 1996). Thus, regional solutions could be better tailored, should the efforts of all the actors involved be well coordinated and more efficient (Kanie and Haas, 2004) resulting in regional EG (Conca, 2012).

Under the aegis of regional EG, some explore concerns with environmental degradation and action taken at the subnational level (Balsiger, 2011; Jänicke and Quitzow, 2017). The studies of environmental cooperation and governance in particular regions often have an applied thrust: for instance, comparing environmental governance throughout the major geographical macro-regions (Elliott and Breslin, 2011). A broad overview, inclusive of the political aspect, has been done with regard to the regional environmental cooperation among Southeast Asian countries and their joint environmental management projects (Koh and Robinson, 2002). The regional approach argument is currently well studied also in relation to the Northeast Asia integration capacities (Zarsky, 1995; Yoon, 2013). Bilateral ecoregion management matters have been envisaged in detail for the U.S.-Canada border case (Buckley and Belec, 2006). An example of problem-specific studies is the volume on wilderness in Europe and legal forms of its protection with country cases (Bastmeijer, 2016). Importantly, as the tracing of the Europeanisation of environmental policy ideas (Meyer, 2011) showed, at the foundational stages of that process, unlike the so-called core EU member-states that could internalise environmentalist ideas and suggest new ones concomitantly, national

institutions from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)[1] did not partake. For CEE, the research work on regional EG has been gaining pace (Turnock, 2001; Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009; Gaberell, 2013). Yet, the focus on the ecoregional approach is relatively new to the literature beyond ecology; case-studies predominantly deal with ecoregion management and do not attain the governance plane of analysis.

The Environmental Turn in humanities – diligently reviewed by Sorlin (2014) – touched, among others, anthropologists that ever since have often engaged with our understanding of environmental matters (for example, Escobar, 1999; Nita, 2016). Environmental Anthropology has corroborated that an anthropologist lives through a phenomenon to then ultimately describe it with the code of his or her own culture, employing introspection, social intellect, and empathy. Some would even work on studies bonding together ecology and borderland communities (Grygar, 2016). Moreover, there are first signs of the appropriation of the ecoregion category by political and social scientists (Balsiger, 2011; Klinke, 2012).

Scholars necessarily pay due respect to the socio-economic importance of the Danube and the Carpathians. In the case-studies regarding immediately this area, with its complex horizontal and vertical relation systems, environmental scientists tackle: wilderness areas in the South Western Carpathians (Măntoiu et al., 2016), Carpathian ecoregion development (Turnock, 2001), institutions in the Carpathian basin (Niewiadomski, 2004; Duray et al., 2010, via a historical approach; Koulov et al., 2016) and in the Black Sea region (Aydin, 2005), practical aspects of cooperating in the latter (Koulov, 2012), Western Balkanic environmental threats (Nagy, 2012), the security dimension of the Balkan environmental cooperation (Lasaridi and Valvis, 2011), cross-Danube integration (Ieda, 2014). A few publications are specifically dedicated to the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative (e.g. Nelson, 2004). Remarkably, Mihajlov (2004) introduced the 'environmental cohesion' concept and performed a quantitative and factor analysis of the subject. Naturally, environment-related problems were explored in mountain areas across the world (e.g. Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2008; Mannia, 2010),

[1] Strictly speaking, Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) is an OECD term for the group of countries comprising Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and three Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

including the multi-site research conducted under the auspices of the EUROMONTANA Association in the frames of the SARD-M project (Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions) that was put on hold in 2010.

### Interdisciplinary Perspective

The outlook in the present dissertation is interdisciplinary *par excellence*, for it has to address a whole complex of intertwined problems in the geographical area. In that sense, it continues the tradition of exploring a "microcosm" – as de Mora and Turner (2004) put it for the Caspian Sea region – in a meta-case-study format with an ambition for inductive conclusions. It also takes advantage of 'the fact that the real world phenomena are *locally connected*' (Hägerstrand, 1976, p.331). The problematique of cooperation beyond borders clearly belongs with the sphere of International Relations (IR), so Structural Constructivism – while much younger in IR than in Anthropology and not yet a paradigm – can provide a perspective on the consolidation of the heterogeneous ecological governance web. Castells (1977, p. 8) noted that 'it is absolutely necessary to study the production of spatial forms on the basis of the underlying social structure'. In the case of the environmental governance spatio-institutional arrangements, the inquiry is then extended to the socio-political structure in the area. Therefore, when undertaking a deeper examen, it is necessary to make sense of how institutions and individuals interact; and the basis for it is found in Anthropology and Relational Sociology. At the meso-level (and with a multitude of governance stakeholders therein) Anthropology is the aptest to offer tools of investigation, such as ethnography, one of the multi-site methods needed for an incisive study of EG (Morin et al., 2013, p.573). It can be stated that the very notions of "[human] environment" and "anthropogenic factor" appear only under a specific angle of view, in the context of natural resource use and man's activities. Studies of the latter in many aspects belong with Anthropology. The scale and the piercing nature of the present research spell excessive epistemological complexity of the intertwinings which, nevertheless, essentially constitute the everyday reality of the area under investigation. And this vision needs to be translated. It can be then a good objective for an anthropologist: to give a naive – but eclectic and saturate – vision, avoiding "Procrustean research".

From the methodological point of view, this also determines the relatively high importance of processing digital sources for the dissertation. The Internet is renowned for its instrumental convenience.[2] The richness and accessibility of digital material help to achieve a multidimensional research outlook, a broader scale of investigation, and a better recognition of 'a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures' (Geertz, 1973, p.7) in place. (The term "digital" is understood here – following the definition offered in the *Digital Anthropology* volume (Miller and Horst, 2012, p.3) – as reducible to the binary code.) For an anthropologist the window of a browser is a *de facto* interface of a grand, formidably unsystematised archive, while the intrinsic hypertextuality allows for most diverse readings of the "primary source". The digital allows for treading the synchronic and diachronic research paths: on the one hand, it is the largest example of the Castellsian space of flows, where co-presence is exercised in terms of contemporaneity rather than physical collocation; on the other hand, most of the digital activities can be traced back along extensive periods of time. Hence, cyberspace is simultaneously one of the least static and least ephemeral worlds. Digital field phenomena are ontologically dichotomic, since engendered by both the material and the social.[3] The cyborg type of research[4] characteristic of the present dissertation, makes use of information from both "realities", fed into the triangulation. Since presently virtuality is also being increasingly

[2] The advent of new technologies and the shift from the analogue to the digital, no less dramatic for the humanities than for the sciences, required from scholars to adapt themselves to the changes in the nature of their fieldwork environment. Since the early 1990s when the World Wide Web became accessible to the general public, anthropologists have been among the most enthusiastic researchers working to comprehend the development of the digital universe.

[3] Mutual penetration of the analogue and digital worlds has been described in varied ways: from pictures of 'reciprocal relations and links' between the online and inner societal processes (Sade-Beck, 2004, p.50) and augmented reality to the testimonies that 'we live in a society that is increasingly shaped by events in cyberspace' (Johnson, 1997, p.19). More specifically, the extent to which virtual and material realities are interwoven becomes manifest in all sorts of phenomena of composite nature: from performance of belonging to imagined communities in the digital to juggling with off- and on-line communication within hybrid spaces (de Souza e Silva, 2006).

[4] Research studies employing digital data, based on the type of data form and potential knowledge produced, can be subdivided in the following way: first, analog research facilitated through obtaining data in the digitized form; second, the study of virtual worlds; third, what can be called "cyborg research". Sade-Beck (2004, p.48) pointed out the following when discussing problems faced by a qualitative researcher: 'Ethnography solely based on online research <...> cannot be the sole source of data as it provides only a partial and limited picture.' Similarly, Wittel (2000, par. 22) argued for a syncretic study of material and digital spaces so as to 'concentrate on the similarities, connections and overlappings'; and Beneito-Montagut (2011) came up with the technique of expanded ethnography. The latter serves as a way to compensate for the lack of larger ethnographic context and to overcome 'the common dichotomous outlook' (Sade-Beck, 2004, p.48) that compartmentalises the virtual world online and the 'real' world off-line.

regarded as 'a fundamental dimension of our reality' (Castells, 2010, p.xxxi), the technique transcends the analog-digital divide. The operational environment of the study is, thus, 'hybrid reality' created by 'the mix of social practices that occur simultaneously in digital and in physical spaces' (de Souza e Silva, 2006, p.265), consequently putting forward 'the integration of data-gathering methods online and offline as the key to achieving rich ethnographic material' (Sade-Beck, 2004, p.50).[5]

The IR Constructivism is focused – in a probably more exclusive manner than Social Anthropology – on the "one thing" of power as the factor and the outcome of interactions. The constructivist approach upholding a process perspective (originating in Onuf, 1989; processual constructivism in Qin, 2009) was proven fruitful in analysing issues on the environmental agenda at the example of the climate change debate (Pettenger, 2007) or region construction in the frames of the transnational regionalization of the environmental discourse in Europe (VanDeveer, 2004). Instruments for the analysis can be borrowed from Structural Constructivism (Wendt, 1999) and Constructivist Institutionalism (although judged superfluous by some, e.g. Bell, 2011) postulating that agents are constrained by the institutions they create and change (Schmidt, 2008; 2010; bellwethered in Guzzini, 2003).

In the present case, this toolkit is primarily applicable to the study of the impact of various institutions taking interest in the region in question (the EU system, the United Nations (UN) family, private NGOs etc.): e.g. the EU influence on national policies (like in Jordan et al., 2003) through supranational governance orchestration (Rosamond, 2005), collective identity construction, and regime building in a specific ethno-cultural area (for ASEAN see Elliott, 2003) or even regime spillover beyond the polity's borders in the context of the Neighbourhood Policy (Buzogány and Costa, 2009).

Another crucial theoretic input can be drawn from the conglomerate of Border Studies (BS). Boundary is the epistemological unit in the present work: it is there to convey the natural, political, economic, social partitioning of the area. The Spatial Turn

[5] Integrated interpretational framework for qualitative digital data examination can be made more corporeal through the triple metaphor of parallax (data from the analogue or digital medium against the counterrespective background in the space of flows or space of places), refraction (changes that data undergo passing from one medium to the other), and interference of the two fields (having the sought thickening effect of heterogeneous data combination).

(for a review see Pattaroni, 2016) that in the late 1960s directed the spotlight to material manifestations of social structures and processes (developed, for instance, with Agnew, Schloegel, and Foucault) was followed by the ramping to the BS byroad in the 1980s. Summing up the state of theory in Border Studies, Tony Payan (2014, p.3) reported their 'renewed importance'. The revival of interest in the border meant exploring political regionalism, cross-border cooperation, divided cities (Best, 2007, p. 7) and reached a peak lately with the studies on people movement. The Contested Borderscapes Conference, held in 2017 in Greek Mytilene and abounding in case-studies on the humanitarian dimension of borders, is representative of that latest trend.

However, the recent surge in the borders research output has resulted also in works that aim at a fuller theoretical (re)conceptualisation of the phenomenon (Haselsberger, 2014; Bossong et al., 2017; the whole EastBordNet project dedicated to rethinking the concept of border in the eastern peripheries of Europe). For example, Ribas-Mateos in *Border Shifts* (2015, p.3) valorously asserted that 'borders are defined as key sites in the construction of the world today'. There is a lot of universal and constant in the border phenomena, not to speak of unified institutional practices and standards. Intrinsic in human societies, institutionalised borders are at the same time put in question, negotiated, fought, transferred and abolished. The editors of *Critical Imaginations in International Relations* Ní Mhurchú and Shindo out of the sixteen key concepts chose borders to be the first presented to the reader by Nick Vaughan-Williams (2016) who, along with Rumford and others, advances the current of Critical BS. The cinematographic herbarium of the *Visions of Europe* (2004) put border forward as one of the principal themes in conceiving of the European Union. And yet, every border narrative is unique, as each border itself is. Significantly, borders are polysemic: in the words of Newman (2006, p. 147), '[f]or political scientists, borders reflect the nature of power relations and the ability of one group to determine, superimpose and perpetuate lines of separation, or to remove them'. At the very same time, '[f]or sociologists and anthropologists, borders are indicative of the binary distinctions <… > between groups at a variety of scales, from the national down to the personal spaces and territories of the individual' (Idem). Herein, it is no less important that borders institutionalise exchange and are a framework for inter-group contact.

A certain methodological standard for European border studies has been set by the multi-level analytical framework of EXLINEA (Scott and Matzeit, 2006) comprising supranational, national and regional levels of border policies, perceptions and practices fostering Europeanisation and nationalization. For applied research it can be augmented with the soft-space analytical framework 'based upon three territoriality categories that provide a heuristic against which to compare the concrete case-studies of the Europeanization of territory' (non-, pooled and supra-territoriality in Allmendinger et al., 2014, p.2708).

## Research Methodology

In order to address the research questions at the intersection of science and policy realms, qualitative methods were preferred. Data collection was performed through familiarization with programmatic documents of governments and organisations, reports, speeches of officials, web-sites and brochures, contemporary mass-media publications. Additionally, it was supported by site visits across the area (the regions of Lesser Poland, North West in Romania, Presov in Slovakia, Western Transdanubia and Central Hungary) and ethnographic observation (including, the events of the Danube Forum, Carpathian Convention) as well as semi-structured and unstructured interviews during which notes were taken. The interviews were aimed at eliciting information from practitioners representing diverse high-profile actors of environmental cooperation in the area and those conducting work on the ground (e.g. collaborators of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Regional Environmental Center (REC), JOINTISZA Project, Archdiocese of Cracow, CEEweb). The conversations in the form of a personal meeting or computer-mediated call lasted on average one hour; moreover, specific open-ended questions regarding organizations' activity and cooperation experience would be sent and answered via e-mail.

Desk research (using monographs, edited volumes, journal articles, reports) and grounded theory techniques supported the reconstruction of the overall governance architecture picture for 2015-2019 and the examination of its wider context. Given that regulations, plans, and activities concerning the Danube and Carpathians are well reflected in policy and communication materials, for the processing of the data thematic,

content and discourse analysis were chosen as an instrument for tracing the influence of the ecoregional approach on cooperation mechanisms. In particular, such were helpful in identifying broader themes, key concepts, patterns of notion use and narrative shaping. That, consequently, allowed for gaining an overview of priorities and objectives of institutional actors, along with factors, means, directions, and effects of governance development. An array of tools was employed so as to guide the analysis and presentation of findings: e.g. it was methodologically necessary to introduce a coherent perspective on the transboundary area, to utilise the Gramscian concept of dominance, Donati's relational capital, and Gibson's affordance.

Besides, the dissertation recurs to the case-study format. The three included case-studies are concerned with the borderland areas in Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria, and Poland and Slovakia, respectively, as well as with the formation of a Carpathian macro-region. The dissertation contains a diachronic element inspired by the post-colonial theory and Anssi Paasi's historisist approach to border identity formation. The work is complementary for the existing structural constructivist case-research in terms of the attention paid to the actors embedded in institutional structures, their perceptions and behaviour, the economic, social, cultural and symbolic capitals weld by them. It also linishes a theoretical collecting lens for the observation of Eastern and Central European developments. Additionally, the viewpoint chosen departs from the commonly practiced gazing from one side of the border in favour of a bird's-eye view of the region with multiple internal border areas. The dissertation hence attempts at going beyond typical frameworks in the studies of borders that impose epistemic limitations by either taking borders as a formalised abstraction or treating them as single case-studies. While much of research in environmental humanities focuses on natural elements integrated into artificial environments, through an ecoregional perspective the present work contributes to observing human-managed systems aligned with the natural givens on the ground. Another grey area that a contribution is being made to, at least for the domain of environmental politics, is the cross-institutional governance picture for the specific region outside of the EU core.

The dissertation has a range of limitations. There is a deal of arbitrariness in how a geographic object was picked to shape the perimeter of the study. But as the argument

unfolds, one is able to recognise that object as one the possible "meeting points" for scientific and political discourses examined in the present work. The dilemma of whether to explore in depth one aspect of a truncated governance complex – or to prefer the risk of wider-reaching superficiality – was resolved in favour of the second option. The drawbacks of that approach were addressed by reviewing pertinent case-studies authored by other researchers. The work does not aim at building a comprehensively detailed governance picture by including a discussion of all of the geographically relevant environmental cooperation instances. It however looks only at those parts of international mechanisms that are concerned with the area in question. Not unimportantly, the opportunities for conducting interviews could often depend on chance, and representativeness of actor types hardly can be claimed for the informants. The analytical tools chosen are fraught with the risk of outcomes' subjectivity, mitigated by data triangulation. Lastly, it must be noted that each scholar selects and systematises the findings along the line of her or his research interest, making it even redundant to appeal to the constructivist epistemology.

## CHAPTER 1. Ecoregional Approach and Key Concepts: Theoretical Grounding

This Chapter has the objective of outlining the key ideas underpinning the wider governance setting in which environmental cooperation in the area of the Carpathians and Danube takes place. To that effect, it discusses the relevant aspects in the debates around the concepts of Ecoregion, Environmental Governance, and Transboundary Area. It also introduces the applicability of the ecoregional approach to the geography in question. According to the hypothesis, concepts related to environmental governance are polysemic and complex, allowing for different interpretations and discursive work by the many parties concerned, and therefore make possible a distinct combination of articulated meanings behind pro-ecological activities in the geographic area under consideration, while the transboundary can be used as a framework for analysing the former.

### 1.1. Phenomenon of Ecoregion

The present work is bound to examine the problem of governance configuration at the microstructural level in the global frame of reference (Wendt, 1992). The Carpathian Mountains are hosted within the territory of seven European states (Serbia, Ukraine, and five EU members: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia), four of which, along with Bulgaria, also have Danube running through them, while the Czech Republic, Poland, and Ukraine still share the catchment area. At the same time, the perspective on the area takes root in a distinct approach to regionalisation originating from ecology and later – biogeography. Far from being original, it seemed still a curious idea to take a concept from natural sciences and to explore with its help practices of transfrontier governance, regardless of whether the practitioners of the latter themselves are acquainted with the concept or not. The area in the focus, which roughly corresponds to the middle and lower flow of Danube, contains the Carpathian, Balkan and Pannonian mixed forests and Rodope montane forests ecoregions (the mapping principle formulated in Omernik, 1987) classified by the World Wide Fund for Nature as

endangered and, thus, abounding in ecological issues which in a certain context can be seen as cooperation opportunities.

In line with the thesis that 'researchers acknowledge the fact that there are no 'natural' regions: definitions of a 'region' vary according to the particular problem or question under investigation' (Hettne, 2005, p.129), scientists have laboured to develop and refine a system of principles for the zoning of the Earth's surface, as sociologists or ethnographers could have done. Again, the grounding idea of a region is boundary confirming the act of subdivision. The ensuing "ecological region" is seen as an instrument of space production and management (environmental and at large), but also as an analytical lens. If taken as an ontologically real unit, it becomes an anchor to the natural scientific viewpoint and can serve to fetch out political premises of environmental cooperation projects defined by the Euro-integration against the background of natural givens. If eviscerated critically, the concept of ecoregion swings into collision ownership rights (be they public or private) and the forehanded post-politics subsumed by the Europeanisation. The latter is meant to denote 'the process of influence deriving from European decisions and impacting member states' (Héritier et al., 2001, p.3).

In the domain of ecology, it is currently a world-widely accepted approach to divide the sea and land into ecoregions. The division naturally ignores the lines traced by political geographers as alien to the discipline. Yet, in doing so it leaves many of the eco-units transboundary in the understanding of the managing authorities and, hence, with a burden of respective environmental management problems. But turning the things around, the solution is found: '[t]he need for a regional ecology approach is clear' (Bailey, 2007, p.6). Such approach appears to be simply feasible in the times when it is not revolutionary anymore to undertake activities that transcend borders (Best, 2007, p.2). There ripens an extremely suggestive idea of spatial primordiality that pervades not only the ecoregional, but also more generally, the environmentalist, thought voiced, for instance, by a collaborator of the Switzerand-based Foundation for the Eastern Carpathians Biodiversity Conservation in Poland Niewiadomski (2004, p.168):

> 'Although political borders may divide an ecoregion, ecological systems develop beyond these virtual boundaries. Therefore a transboundary

approach towards ecological concerns and sustainable development is necessary, both in local and eco-regional scale.'

The argument is typical of the scaling-to-the-problem regionalisation: '[e]nvironmental problems are best assessed in the context of geographic areas defined by natural features rather than by political or administrative boundaries' (Bailey, 1998, p.1; similar can be found in Olson and Dinerstein, 1998). In practice it may look like the case in point brought by Wolmer (2003, p.264) who noticed the following when describing the logic of expansion of protected areas: 'It is held that the 'ecological integrity' of certain bioregions, such as watersheds, mountains and river basins, (also variously described as biomes, biospheres, heartlands, eco-zones, eco-regions or eco-spaces) is hindered by environmentally arbitrary barriers to biotic fluxes in the form of administrative and national boundaries.' The applied value of the approach is conservation strategies optimised for an ecological region, which respond to the related concern with the imperative 'question about the appropriate scales of action' driving new environmental regionalisation (Balsiger, 2011, p.44).

Zoning ("*raionirovaniye*") has been a fundamental part of the Soviet and Russian physical geographical tradition based on examining genetic interrelationships between geographic components and grounded in the positivist belief in the possibility of distinct zone delineation. This 'landscape science' (Shaw and Oldfield, 2007) has operated with "continuity" and "discreteness" as the basic analytical categories and took origin in the works of such scholars as climatologist Alexander Voeykov, geographer Vasiliy Dokuchaev who first described the coincidence of zonalities of soil, climate, vegetation, and animal life, or zoologist and geographer Lev Berg who in the 1920s defined landscape as a harmonic whole. Only in the late XX$^{th}$ century interest for landscape surged in other parts of the world. The studies on world geographical regions (Dokuchaev, 1899; Herbertson, 1905; Udvardy, 1975) and ecosystem ecology (Odum, 1963) fused into works on ecological land classification which link ecology and geography for mapping ecological regions (Blasi et al., 2011, p.75).

Ecoregions, rather than being a fruit of a quest for new knowledge, are instrumental, though loosely tuned. They are positioned as a heuristically encountered category and accepted without a rigorous definition under the influence of

postmodernism in natural sciences: they could be better called an approach rather than a notion. Meanwhile, the epistemic community is aware of the problem touching the very notion of "ecosystem": 'in ecology, the concept of an ecosystem is highly multi-dimensional, difficult to define and hard to measure quantitatively' (Barbier, 2009, p.618). Characteristically, ecoregions are large, region-scale ecosystems (Bailey, 2007, p.3), rarely coinciding with administrative territories. Natural scientists have struggled with elaborating a more precise abstract description: '[l]arge portions of the Earth's surface over which the ecosystems have characteristics in common are called an ecosystems region, or ecoregion' (Bailey, 1998, p.1). The latter was preceded by more cautious definitions, e.g. 'regions of relative homogeneity with respect to ecological systems involving interrelationships among organisms and their environment', and importantly, 'at various scales' (Omernik, 1995, p.49), or 'recognizable regions' that 'exhibit similarities in the mosaic of environmental resources, ecosystems, and effects of humans' (Idem). But it was also followed by a more detailed one:

> 'We define ecoregions as relatively large units of land containing a distinct assemblage of natural communities and species, with boundaries that approximate the original extent of natural communities prior to major land-use change.' (Olson et al., 2001, p.933)

Evident is the disagreement on the inclusion of the human factor, let alone humans as such (Blasi et al., 2011, p.76). A vague explanation of the term is given by one of its major champions, WWF: 'large unit of land or water containing a geographically distinct assemblage of species, natural communities, and environmental conditions' (which is based on the "Global 200" definition (Olson and Dinerstein, 1998)) and also 'complex pattern determined by climate, geology and the evolutionary history of the planet' (WWF, n.d.a). All in all, for non-ecologists these remain 'vaguely defined eco-regions' (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013, p.8), covering though the whole planet in a consistent manner.

Another grand idea behind the ecoregion is holistic capture. A famous Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand (1976, p.329) premonished the colleagues: 'How can any sane person dare to confess a hope that he can say something about how to view Nature as a wholeness?' Nevertheless, he advocated an integrative scientific effort in

human and biological geography and bequeathed (Ibidem, p.334): 'I see a central task for Geography to investigate carefully the workings of collateral processes under the perspective of all thing's togetherness and use its insights to teach the lessons of finitude.' Under the influence of landscape geography, in landscape ecology a 'holistic and future-oriented conception' of landscape (Naveh, 2000, p.7) has been developing since the aftermath of the World War II (in particular, in Czechoslovakia and later in Slovakia) to embed innovative methods of planning and management in the vision of singularity. The latter is similarly incorporated in the study of ecosystems (Omernik, 1995). Ecoregional holism, in its turn, offers a paradoxically Cartesian facilitation in response to the positivist itch: it goes vertical in each of the contiguous partitions – as Bailey (2007, p.7) insisted, relying on the ecological land classification technique of Rowe and Shread (1981) – to grasp 'a composite whole where the most significant features converge in a distinct and sustained way' (McCloskey, 1989, p.131). This provides not only a *sui generis* container for scientific surveying of systemic interconnection and emergent properties, but also a scalable governability matrix, for 'the natural resources of an area do not exist in isolation' (Bailey, 1998, p.1) and consequently require anti-Cartesian holism changing the science and practice of resource management (Naveh, 2000). This holistic syntheticism bears a promise for grounding other concepts, such as sustainability.

Going further, an ecoregional approach helps to overcome the social-natural binary opposition, since under certain circumstance it permits to incorporate into a holistic analysis the social component, additional to the biocoenosis framework. In this vein, 'human activities in the watershed' are judged to be as one of 'the most important factors influencing or determining the composition, structure, pattern, process and function of aquatic ecosystems' (Gao et al., 2011, p.4370). Traditionally, human development is discursively set as a thing apart from the realm of Nature. For example, Nita (2016, p.2) reminded us of Lynn White Jr.'s line of argument in the 1966 *Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*:

> 'the ecological crisis was a result of our inculcated Judeo-Christian belief in a transcendent God whose most valued creation <…>, 'Man', was given dominion over the rest, and was thus separated from it'.

However, there is a counter-tendency in depicting humans (Boyce, 2002, p.3) or the whole humanity (like in Badiou's philosophy in Johal, 2015) as a part of Nature or of the global ecosystem (Naveh, 2000, p.14, using Carson's metaphor of the web of life).

The third important aspect is that ecoregions are systemic: they are defined (with eventual imperfections) based on a number of interconnected characteristics, such as vegetation, soil, climate, and specific ecosystem components. The classification can follow one characteristic, like Bailey's genetic approach to the delineation of natural communities of the Earth (Bailey, 1998, p.4). But in that case it is less robust, such as the one based on watersheds: a watershed does not necessarily comprise a single ecosystem, thus, failing to give a neat 'spatial context' to frame environmental problems (Omernik, 1995, p.61). Thus, some put forward the 'principle of comprehensiveness and dominance' of ecosystemic factors (Gao et al., 2011, p.4371). Biota and its distribution is yet an important criterion (Olson et al., 2001, p.935), because ecoregions are expected to address the threat of biodiversity loss and degradation; this basic element can be interpreted even more narrowly turning ecoregions into 'regions of similar geographical distribution of animal species' (ICPDR, 2005, p.44). Interestingly, it is suggested that subdivision can be 'reflections of the people living in place' (McCloskey, 1989, p.131) and follow 'cultural practices' (like dairy farming) along with 'geographical boundaries provided by the watershed' (like a series of lakes) (Schermer and Kirchengast, 2008, p.638). The work on aquatic ecoregions is even more intricate (Gao et al., 2011, p.4370): 'The objective <…> is to reveal the hierarchical structure and spatial variability of watershed-scale aquatic ecosystems and to provide support for the differentiated management of aquatic ecosystems and the water equality targets management at a watershed scale', having as an early step the discovery of 'the spatial distribution and pattern of biological species, community and population'. For the present work it gives a clue to the integrity of the Danube basin area, since in delineating an aquatic ecoregion the principle 'of including land area' is stated: 'That is to say, the watershed or subwatershed characteristics could control or influence the aquatic life in rivers, streams and other types of water.' (Gao et al., 2011, p.4370) Whichever set of parameters is used, the outcome desired is that ecoregions 'occur in predictable locations in different parts

of the world and can be explained in terms of the processes producing them' (Bailey, 1998, p.2).

Conceiving of that patchy, but all-comprising space inevitably evokes boundary as one of the necessary components, embodying the minimum of order. Allegedly, 'the basic unit of most ecological processes is spatial and is synonymous with the land or *natural landscape* that defines the boundary of the system' (Barbier, 2009, p.618). The indicative delineation principle invites to separate zones, keeping the most of differences in structure and function of ecosystems apart and the most of similarities within an ecoregion (Gao et al., 2011, p.4371), the fact being that 'most ecoregions contain habitats that differ from their assigned biom' (Olson et al., 2001, p.935). According to WWF (n.d.a), the systemic 'boundaries of an ecoregion are not fixed and sharp, but rather encompass an area within which important ecological and evolutionary processes most strongly interact'. What is noteworthy, at the same time, is that each ecoregion is a complete unit and there is 'no separation [space] and overlap between' them (Gao et al., 2011, p.4371). Indeed, this is a *sine-qua-non* for the scientific ideation, as we are reminded by Wullweber (2015, p.81): 'Limits of a system require a radical exclusion – they are not neutral but antagonistic limits.' Thus, on the ground, within each unit there needs to be a transitional element to balance ecological continuity and differentiation. One of the suitable tools is the concept of ecotone that refers to a zone accumulating tensions coming from the bordering biological communities (Bobra, 2007). It dates back to the XIX$^{th}$ century and was scientifically developed, for example, in the works of Frederic Clements (who published the seminal *Research Methods in Ecology* in 1905) and Boris Kuznetsov (who introduced in 1936 the term "synperate" meaning the limit for a multiple species range).

However, ecoregion as an intentional object is put into discrete models of organisation of the geographic space, having a pronounced manageability orientation. On a map, from a system it is transformed into an object, a compact piece of a colourful tool. Evidently, finding boundaries of an object is far easier than coming to an agreement on the limits of a system; on the other hand, these are also "natural limits" that have the weakness of being surprisingly discursively mouldable. It might be a reason behind the narrowing of the holistic vision in the applied perspective to favouring vertical

interconnectedness, while obscuring the links between spatialised ecological systems. Ecoregions appear to have an inbuilt administrative perspective crafted through scientific self-empowering of man, so that he does not feel helpless if faced with the Whole of Nature. (This also brings about an interesting insight in the patchwork of states, for which the studies of ideation and of practice are kept separate. There might be a way to think of states' immediate, systemically pervasive, ontological interrelation without having to 'jump scales' (Herod and Wright 2002, p.10) to the global or regional issue level.) Additionally, ecoregion delineation in the same area can encompass a single type of division (Omernik, 1987, p.119) or multiple hierarchical levels to be 'operated at different spatial scales' (Gao et al., 2011, p.4371). In that way, being a minimally discrete parcel of a global system and eventually containing subdivisions, ecoregion is one of the 'mediating levels between local and planetary life' (McCloskey, 1989, p.131).

Fourthly, ecoregions ought to be manageable as well as to support the management system. Environmental policy at a natural region level was envisioned already in the XIX$^{th}$ century by John Wesley-Powell, among others (Balsiger, 2011, p.44). In our times, as Hägerstrand (1976, p. 331) commented, '[l]andscapes or regions with their total content of connected natural and societal phenomena are again coming up on the agenda, if not for other reasons than the practical ones'. This required developing globally scaled but locally implementable policies: 'Decision-makers are looking around for experts who are willing to provide broad assessments of alternative courses of action.' (Idem) There was, though, a regrettable impediment: 'Existing maps of global biodiversity have been ineffective planning tools because they divide the Earth into extremely coarse biodiversity units <…> typically well beyond the size of landscapes tractable for designing networks of conservation areas' (Olson et al., 2001, p.934). Therefore, in tinkering a more convenient instrument a substantial role has been played by the corpus of publications produced by NGO-affiliated scholars (WWF, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) etc.) who also used biogeographic maps developed by area experts in the past, including the Digital Map of European Ecological Regions (DMEER) of the European Environment Agency (EEA). Thus, the terrestrial world was subdivided on a qualitative map 'into 14 biomes and eight biogeographic realms' with 867 ecoregions within, of which 402 are comprised by 237

units of the "Global 200" identifying conservation priority areas (Idem). As a geographical project, ecoregion is constructed "backwards": from an administrative need – greened back to nature. The approach may involve large-scale bricolage and certain geopolitical ambition (Balsiger, 2011, p.45).

In practice, WWF has conservation planning at ecoregional scale and IUCN follows a similar area approach, in part because 'using this base map to frame discussions' (Olson et al., 2001, p.936) helps to advance conservation projects through bureaucracies. The Nature Conservancy worked on an ecoregion framework for conservation planning in terrestrial, freshwater, and nearshore marine environments (Groves et al., 2000) and, furthermore, the planning approach was tested and improved during the preparation, implementation and individual review of ecoregional and regional conservation plans for the United States and other countries around the globe (Idem). Ultimately, ecological region 'has been increasingly accepted and adopted in the ecological management by various governments in many counties' (Gao et al., 2011, p.4368). Ecoregions as units of environmental management are used in such countries as Austria (Schermer and Kirchengast, 2008), Bolivia, Canada, and Peru. Ecological strategies have to take into account also socioeconomic conditions, since ecoregions may be undergoing rapid change (Groves et al., 2000, p.2-2) caused by a sharp modulation in the anthropogenic factor (Ibidem, p.6-2, the authors distinguish biodiversity loss affecting an ecoregion and human activities as its source). This can be especially practical for the countries in the process of political and economic transition.

Even if it is still vague as a natural scientific notion, ecoregion is a valid managerial concept. It determines the scale and eventually the hierarchical level of problem-solving. For a landscape analogy Barbier (2009, p.613) wrote that 'by adopting ecological landscape, or land area, as the basic unit, modeling the ecosystem as a natural asset is relatively straightforward'. Such a ready model also contains the idea of bordering applied in the interpretation of Sendhardt (2013, p.31), which 'is communicating by drawing border' or 'by making a distinction'. Such communication is extended to all the stakeholders in the unified environmental management process, and the new 'spatial schema' determines their decisions and behavior (Moore, 2008, p.216). Then, 'scale-

matching' of tools to the ecosystem level (Dallimer and Strange, 2015, pp.132-133) becomes possible.

A fresh development in moving toward more abstraction has been the landscape archetype for simplified spatial categorisation facilitating ecological management: the assumption is 'that the same processes shape units in the same category and that these processes are subject to the same drivers and constraints in a particular category' (Cullum et al., 2017, p.97). The archetype serves 'as a starting point for the description of a landscape' by providing 'useful ways of articulating the assumptions underlying geo-ecological classifications and maps, guiding the selection of scales and variables' (Ibidem, p.98).

### 1.2. Ecoregion and Insights from Environmental Governance Theory

Environmental concerns seized place on the global agenda in the 1960s with the advent of the "New Environmentalism", while the first Earth Day in 1970 symbolically ushered in a new era of eco-consciousness: it is now widely understood that the state of environment to a large extent determines human well-being. The mankind found itself facing a full range of planetary-, regional- or local-scale challenges that have a transnational character: 'Human undertakings have reached such a large scale and begun to encroach so visibly upon Nature and collective social life that landscape evolution as a wholesale problem is beginning to force itself unto the political arena.' (Hägerstrand, 1976, p.331)

The particular feature of the green domain is that stand-alone strategies are seldom productive and a transboundary response is often required, hence states were the first to address the environmental problems and to negotiate them at the international level (Breitmeier and Rittberger, 1997, p.8). Moreover, environmental disasters constitute 'a distinct challenge for legal process' due to their undetermined time and place of occurrence, transboundary consequences and general prohibition for states to use territory 'in a way that can harm the interests of other states' (Morin et al., 2013, p.565). In the whole state-driven process ecology might have lost its 'subversive edge', regretted by Gary Croll, as 'popular environmentalism succumbed to

professionals' (Nita, 2016, p.13). At the same time, the centralized perspective has positioned environmental issues as closely intertwined with other global challenges, such as poverty (Wolmer, 2003, p.261), economic development (Zarsky, 1995), healthcare or nutrition.

The acuteness of the reaction to the looming ecological crisis is conditioned not only by the fear for waning resources, but also by the perspective on the role that pertains to humans. Man is accustomed to the idea of 'mastery, control, and ultimate responsibility' (Bauman, 2015, p.744) with regard to the planet, and environmental problems clearly defy this idea. According to a Stanford archaeology professor Ian Morris, a relatively stable climate and fossil fuels determined the type of civilization that we have developed (Morris, 2015). Relating to this fact, in her passionate article, Whitney Bauman argued that the climate recorded throughout history 'is misread as a background for an ordered world in which we are largely in control' (Bauman, 2015, p.744). Consequently, leaning upon a wacky assumption, humans 'project a sense of order onto the world that is not really there' (Idem). Such attitude was being however continuously corroborated by other arguments. James O'Connor, setting path in the oxymoronic Ecological Marxism that uses environmental evidence to build a case against capitalism, wrote that our idea of nature is rooted in capitalism itself (O'Connor, 1998, p.3), and thus, to believe Max Weber, in religion. During the age of industrial capitalism nature was understood in the mechanistic vein as the sum of material parts which could be reassembled at man's will (Ibidem, p.22). Or, as it was put by Escobar (1999, p.7): 'Capitalist nature is uniform, legible, manageable, harvestable, Fordist.' For Marxists nature made part of the means of production and in practice was an object of taming and domination. Therefore, both camps were a fertile ground for the typical 'output-centered postpolitical rhetoric that has dominated discourses of development since the late 1970s' (Raco, 2014, p.25). Within these westernized representations of nature an 'eco-frontier paradigm' of thinking (Guyot, 2011) has matured. It supports human domination of the global transitory and temporary spaces where nature needs to be conserved to be used differently (Idem).

Moreover, even within the same "domination paradigm" we cannot speak of a single nature: the kaleidoscope is rich enough. The natural can be opposed to the social,

be comprised by it or itself comprehend the social. The separation of the natural is necessary for human identity building, as explained by Appadurai (1996, p.183) with regard to place construction: 'neighborhoods are inherently what they are because they are opposed to something else and derive from other, already produced neighborhoods', for example, 'conceptualized ecologically as forest or wasteland, ocean or desert, swamp or river'. Importantly, it is the material activity of human beings that serves as the "interface" through which society molds the environment, inscribes change and history into nature (O'Connor, 1998, p.26). But there are those who overtly disagree with the insistence on such separation (Bauman, 2015). Critical social scientists count the constructed nature together with the mass of the anthropocentric (Crist, 2004) and Enlightenment projects. A different case for overcoming the nature and culture divide comes from landscape ecology (Bridgewater and Bridgewater, 2005, p.207). Sharply contrasting with the modern vision are accounts of indigenous attitudes involving living undetached from a natural cosmos and obeying its laws in own social and economic customs (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1976; Crivos et al., 2004) – or negotiation with natural forces as equal or superior (Endres, 2013) in what Escobar (1999, p.7) called the organic nature regime. This behavior is embedded in the understanding of Nature, not dissimilar to the Badiouvian conception whereby it '*concerns the earth and all its phenomena in the material world, existing independently, with or without, human activity or civilization*' (Johal, 2015, p.52).

In the 1972 *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* Marcuse advised that mankind had worked out a new relation with nature. That year the UN held the Conference on the Human Environment, and *International Organization* published a special issue on Environmental Politics (Morin et al., 2013, p.562). In the same 1972 Arne Naess coined the term "deep ecology" implying humans are not separate from the rest of the natural world. He was one of the eminent students of Environmental Ethics, along with Albert Schweitzer (cogitated on environment and colonialism in *The Philosophy of Civilization*), Erazim Kohak (authored, among others, *The Green Halo*) and Aldo Leopold (famous for *A Sand County Almanac*). Nevertheless, their fellow radical ecologists still belong to marginal currents. In the political spectrum they are represented by "deep greens" and

'see science and technology very much as part of the problem rather than the solution', denying man the role of 'a superior resource 'manager'' (Jordan, 1999, p.19).[6]

The mainstream 'strand of environmental thought' falls 'under the trope of stewardship' (Bauman, 2015, p.743) and can be exemplified by the Earth Charter institute. Similarly to the case of wilderness being explained as a product of human excogitation (Escobar, 1999), it should be recalled that the term "environment" itself (for the genesis of the term see Jessop, 2012) already contains a reference to man (i.e. "what surrounds us"), therefore, being nothing else but "nature" problematised. Therefore, using that term automatically includes in the discourse only the man-centered aspects, which invests humans with a special responsibility for the decisions and outcomes: what man can do and that is this what counts. Bauman (2015), for instance, unwearyingly questioned the last premise. Political "light greens" believe the mankind can find a solution with the same means that caused the problem – its ingenuity: with 'better technology' or by turning 'to live more simply and lightly on the land' (Ibidem, p.743). This their conviction, understandably, often falls under criticism (Elliott, 2016). According to Escobar (1999, p.7), '[t]he discourses of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation are a reflection of this tendency' of a new phase of capitalism implying 'incorporation of nature into the twin domains of governmentality and the commodity'. Still, the "light green" position is shared by the leading economies, business entities, and NGOs. Pragmatically oriented, they advocate avoiding the 'gloom and doom' of reducing living standards, as scientist and conservation practitioner Marvier (2014, p.519) put it, defining successful conservation as the one that links nature protection to human livelihoods and economic development. "Light greens" concentrate on elaborating adequate instruments, a sort of 'a judicious mix of regulations and market based instruments, such as green taxes, to correct market failures and ensure that the environment is fully considered in decision-making' (Jordan, 1999, p.19).

The predominant vision among decision-makers is that the humankind would not even consider giving up the idea of development, though acquiesces to make it

[6] If WWF can be seen as moderately radical and respectable (with sporadic "hooliganist" exceptions, such as a campaign for spamming the Bulgarian prime minister's mailbox), Deep Green Resistance and the alike gather marginalized ecologists.

sustainable. Connected to our managerial idea of nature and environment is the one of "natural capital", that is natural resources as a special type of capital stock (Barbier, 2009, p.612). Such understanding 'refers to the living and nonliving components of ecosystems — other than people and what they manufacture — that contribute to the generation of goods and services of value for people' (Guerry et al., 2015, p.7349). Over the last decades the notion of the environment as natural capital has gained ground in economics (Barbier, 2009, p.612) and has also spilled over to specific social and political domains. Scholars offering critique of the Capitalocene (Moore, 2016) from the moderately green Ecological Modernization School point of view still share the "capitalist" vision and find 'a fundamental asymmetry at the heart of economic systems' rewarding short-term cycle tactics 'at the expense of stewardship of natural capital necessary for human well-being in the long term' (Guerry e al., 2015, p.7348).

Natural capital logically entails the problem of the valuation needed to demonstrate the economic efficiency of conservation and other natural environment-centered activities, fostering 'incentive structures' (Ibidem, p.7349). Otherwise, as noticed by Barbier (2009, p.620), 'the failure to consider the values provided by key ecosystem services in current policy and management decisions is a major reason for the widespread disappearance of many ecosystems and habitats across the globe'. Various 'accounting frameworks for natural capital have been developed' (Guerry et al., 2015, p.7351). Quantifying the value is a gateway to prioritization, and if economy is about making choices, this constraint is imposed also on the man-nature relationship. Some of conservation strategies are willing to make up for it: for instance, the logic behind the "Global 200" is that such specific regions as tundra or polar seas, 'while they may not support the rich communities seen in tropical rain forests or coral reefs', harbour 'unique species, communities, adaptations, and phenomena' and run the risk of extinction if are not preserved (Olson and Dinerstein, 1998, p.199).

Thus, interestingly, this perspective is also incorporated in NGO programs. The eponymous Natural Capital Project was ventured together by Stanford University, the University of Minnesota, the Nature Conservancy and WWF in 2006. It operates in the Western hemisphere, Asia, and Eastern Africa with the main goal 'to transform decisions affecting the environment and human well-being by providing clear and credible

ecosystem service information for decision makers' (Ruckelshaus et al., 2015, p.12). Under its arch, environmentalists, instead of attempting at an "enlightening" education, turned to speak the language of economics, pragmatically advertising "values of nature". This conforms to the disenchanted description of Johal (2015, p.57): '[I]n capitalist subjectivity, humanity is reduced to self-interested, rational animals, known as homo economicus, whose sole motivation is driven by competition for profit.' Trading with each other in terms of value is inevitable, since '[i]n this logic, there cannot exist any other form of collective existence' (Idem).

When the significance of nature is understood, utilization or preservation of the valuable come next. Illustratively, Nita (2016, p.13) emphasized the utilitarian cynicism of conservationism: 'preoccupied with what we need to preserve/ reserve/ conserve for human aesthetic pleasure'. One of the existing approaches in conservation is the representation approach. It permits balancing nature protection efforts across wider areas (Meessen et al., 2015) and, logically, conveys the idea of artificial curation based on the human knowledge about nature. As to the nature restoration approach, its theoretician William Jordan (1994, p.19) acknowledged that exact replication is virtually impossible, while Robert Elliot chose to answer to the restoration thesis with publishing the *Faking Nature* (1982) monograph. He underscored the importance of the perceived value and of the genesis of areas untouched. Sporadically around the globe, attempts are undertaken at environmental reconstruction by the introduction of previously extinct species. Moreover, not only industrially-minded humans claim to know how to improve the creation of Nature, leaving rewilding initiatives far behind: 'the scope for positive human impacts of environmental quality is not limited to the reversal of past damages. Humans also can <…> enhance environmental quality above and beyond what would exist in their absence.' (Boyce, 2002, p.3) In all these endeavours, as Olson et al. (2001, p.937) argue, an 'ecoregion perspective' can help to identify gaps in conservation patterns 'across political boundaries'.

Specifically, one of the relatively recent developments within that perspective is the so-called community-based conservation. It 'takes into account not only ecological interactions but also economic and sociocultural aspects' (Meessen et al., 2015). This means that conservation has to be set in a larger sustainable development framework in

order to draw people's interest and support, so that under a paradigm shift protected areas turn into spaces of collaboration between conservation professionals and local (including indigenous) people (Phillips, 2003). Such a "compromise" approach is oriented toward a certain balance (not necessarily an equilibrium) between conservation and development objectives through participatory protected area management. It is being also applied beyond protected areas, in general territorial management: to stabilize the relation between biodiversity conservation and interests of local populations (Meessen et al., 2015).

The environmental question is thus explicitly comprised within economic discussions: from resource depletion to the build-up of a green economy, to "green industrial policy" (Jänicke and Quitzow, 2017, p.123). Economy, in its turn, is implicit in the environmentalism. Among the assimilated green business jargon terms count "ecosystem services", the services that humans receive from particular ecosystems. As any other notion, it can be exploited analytically: '[u]nderstanding who affects the generation of ecosystem services <…> and who benefits <…> allows assessments of the costs and benefits from a given policy, including the distributional consequences across affected parties' (Guerry et al., 2015, p.7349). This formula is also a good basis for an ampler political economic critique of environmental projects. Overall, the approach of natural capital and ecosystem services valuation has been corroborated by a range of publications by scholars associated with WWF (McKenzie et al., 2014; Ruckelshaus et al., 2015; Guerry et al., 2015), in particular to explain conceptual, strategic, and instrumental uses of ecosystem services knowledge (McKenzie et al., 2014). Playing on with the lexicon of the Tertiary Sector, one can extend the metaphor to eventual (sovereign) "providers" of "ecosystem as a service" in the times when an ongoing discursive (and beyond) re-division of natural resources conceptually places them at the mankind's disposal undermining the sovereign ownership of states. This triggers a shift from the state perspective on nature as "resource", "stock", and "riches of the land" to the business perspective of asset to be put in use for making profit instead of letting it lie idle as well as something that needs maintenance. And ecoregions are a part of this mobilization for joint governance of resources that belong to one country.

The respective need for a global steward is validated through "ecologies of fear", of which the following may be a good example: 'the planet is being assaulted on many fronts as the result of human-generated changes in the global environment' (Foster et al. 2010, p.15). Reflecting on this, Bauman (2015, p.751) returned to 'the famous Lynn White critique' that the problem at heart of the environmental crisis is a religious one and requires a religious solution. The ideological content in environmentalism is indeed dense, and in many respects stance-taking thereby is a matter of 'faith' (Jordan, 1999, p.19). The modern eschatology is also largely environment-centered: 'We do know that the environmental catastrophe is already here' (Swyngedouw, 2011, p.70). And some invest ecology with their messianic hopes: 'In ecology', as Johal (2015, p.53) writes, 'there is a desire for a new, modern tradition' aiming at 'overcoming the violence and destruction organized by humanity over Nature'. At times, the social ecological thought, just like most others, takes utopist turns. In the foreword to *Environmental Anthropology* (Lokyer and Veteto, 2013) ecologist E.N. Anderson remembers starting to use the term "ecotopia" in 1969, while the editors of the volume borrowed the expression as the appropriate one to characterize the foundations of the contemporary bioregionalism (Ibidem, p.7).

Observing these developments, geographer Erik Swyngedouw gave shape to a theory of post-politics in the sphere of ecology, that is, an approach of consensual managerial governing. The anatomisation of the "production of nature" impelled 'a profound re-consideration and re-scripting of the matter of Nature in political terms' (Swyngedouw, 2011, p.70). Although the environment is an argument in politics, it is beyond the political: 'the elevation of the environment to a public concern it is both a marker of and constituent force in the production of de-politicization' (Idem).[7] A political scientist, Zurn (2013, p.414) shares this understanding at large: 'Beyond the nation state <…> the political space – is missing.' To be less generic, for biogeographic regions it was testified by Allmendinger and his colleagues (2014, p.2711) that these 'remain the technical reference, but political negotiations ended with the end of the site selection process', resulting solely in 'the legislative anchorage' of the regions. In the domain of

[7] In particular, the New Economic Geography and New Regionalism currents 'are believed to contribute to a depoliticisation of spatial development' (Loewen, 2015, p.209).

depoliticization it would be complementary to employ Latour's *Dingpolitik* (2005), the idea of an object-oriented policy complex, in order to segregate the discourse inclusive of environmental matters from the rest.[8] In that composite optics, what provides for the theme of a debate, itself is not an object of the contention.

Hence, the majority of environmental action strategies are being elaborated under technocracy. As noticed for the exemplary case, the functional drive in handling nature dominates: the biogeographic regions 'are soft spaces as they constitute technically driven, functional planning spaces that cross territorial boundaries' (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p.2711).[9] On the universal scale, Balsiger and Debarbieux (2011, p.2) noticed a peculiar tendency that 'during the last two decades, the attention of scientists, politicians, and the media has focused more and more on the so-called global level of the environmental crisis and governance', where the post-political consensuality has been brewing, while environment in single regions was left to more technical institutional and specialist discussions. Moreover, the instrumental role of the scientific argument was also noticed in that 'biodiversity conservation policies relying on ethical and moral arguments' with time have 'been backed up by elaborate science-based arguments about the habitat condition, size and connectivity that species and populations require' or 'long-term benefit arguments, often operationalized through monetary values' (Primmer et al., 2015, p.159). Or, at the amusing observation of Milutinović (2015, p.258) that is 'the model exploited by advertising agencies: connect images with emotional content, and only then engage rationality'.

Many of the notions from the environmentalist vocabulary, whether borrowed from academic disciplines or coined *ad hoc*, have become commonplace and blurred. It is exemplified by Raco (2014, p.25): 'As many authors have noted, the term 'sustainable development' has become something of a cliché that is used to justify a range of programmes that carry differing, and sometimes competing and contradictory,

[8] The uses of Dingpolitik are related to a current in organizational problem formulation: other authors have developed and applied the concepts of problem-oriented (Lowe, 1975; Selznick, 1996) and impact-focused (Stern and Barley, 1996; Stern, 2000; Riley et al., 2003) approaches.

[9] Besides, "soft spaces" invoke an overall peculiar metaphorical representation of a region. As a virtual environment, they 'are the fluid areas between <...> formal processes where implementation through bargaining, flexibility, discretion and interpretation dominate' (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2007, p.306).

objectives.'[10] Depending on the context, several terms also have the characteristics of empty signifiers, a type of phenomena being semiotically shaped by politics through general public interest construction (Wullweber, 2015, studying Laclau). "Nature", "sustainable development" and even "ecoregion" can be recognized as floating signifiers and the emptying of their signification 'becomes the embodiment of fullness' (Ibidem, p.81) permitting their universal ubiquitous use.[11]

Should we take a closer look, sustainability can be seen in a linear way 'as a broad process in which a wide range of resources <…> are brought into play' (Heinelt, 2002, p.18). At other instances, it can as well be denied that quality. Yolanda Kakabadse, a former IUCN head and the then WWF president, insisted that sustainability is not a process, but 'a utopia in itself' since 'the more you work towards it the more you have to do' (Paddison and Kakabadse, 2013), revealing that even for the vanguard of the environmentalism the perspective and needed array of actions are unclear. This, however, does not preclude the creation and propagation of instruments, such as the conservation of biodiversity using ecoregions (ecoregion-based conservation, ERBC) to ensure sustainable development at the scale of the latter (Turnock, 2001, p.18). Across the environmentalist spectrum technocratic efforts can be met with mockery ('how can humans use non-humans more efficiently' (Nita, 2016, p.13)), but also with precaution like Fern's one (Olden, 2016, p.8): 'The concept is young and the relevant timescales are long. To assess adequately whether a forest is managed 'sustainably' takes centuries'. Alternatively, a further need to include the cultural dimension is articulated, premising that 'the sustainability of ecological systems can be achieved only within the context of cultural landscapes' (Bridgewater and Bridgewater, 2005, p.207), affirming it as strategy to optimize human-made environment. Given the depoliticized status of the widely used terms, the resulting "spongy" landscape creates affordances (for affordance theory see Gibson, 1979) for policy-setters, activists, heterogeneous policy entrepreneurs (Cullen-Knox et al., 2017, p.6).

[10] Olden (2016, p.8) put it the following way: 'an ecologist, forester and social scientist would all view the sustainability of the same forest through different lenses'.
[11] In Organizational Studies this phenomenon has been examined through the lenses of multiple meanings (Kidd, 1992), interpretive flexibility of artifacts (Pinch and Bijker, 1987), politicized ambiguity (Page, 1976; Gioia et al., 2012).

In the recent past, the overall progress in telecommunication technology, consolidation of a global financial order, velocitization of transportation as well as the massive demise of "popular democracy" regimes cutting the ground from under the system stipulated in Yalta and Potsdam, have further empowered actors other than states on the international arena. As international actors were making sense of global interdependence, the distinction between high and low politics almost disappeared giving way to innovative cooperative management forms (Morin et al., 2013, p.563). In concomitance, the refinement of a respective epistemic frame went on. As described in an overview by Federwisch (2007, p.51), the term "governance" forged within the New Institutional Economics, came later to be used in the disciplines of the New Economic Sociology and IR. Thus, we can agree that in many ways in the late XX$^{th}$ century 'government metamorphosed into governance' (Jordan et al. 2003, p.6).

'Governance has been variously defined as a system of control, management or government of human activities.' (Warner and Marsden, 2012, p.3) While Jordan et al. (2003, p.6) focused on the diversity of actors in their definition of governance that 'refers to the emergence of new styles of governing in which the boundaries between the public and private sectors, and the national and international levels have blurred', Markus Jachtenfuchs and Beate Kohler-Koch (2003, p.4) underlined the political and invasive nature of the eventually unified teleology in 'the continuous political process of setting explicit goals for society and intervening into it in order to achieve these goals'. Such 'activities are justified with reference to the common good', however, significantly, 'they do not necessarily serve it' (Zurn, 2013, p.408).

The "common good" that governance mechanisms are expected to provide has also the characteristic of being public, that is beneficial for the societies concerned at large. In that vein, Morin and Orsini concluded the Westphalian paradigm was at odds with global environmental problems because they were not the biggest concern for the state (Morin et al., 2013, p.563). The production of such complex goods as benign ecological conditions needs to be founded on 'a sense of collective purpose based on mutual interests and understandings' (Shaffer, 2012, p.674), according to the logic of political realists. In the world systems theory these efforts originate from political globalization and the constructivist argument of a common interpretation of

environmental issues being generated (Paavola, 2016, p.145). The ecoregional matrix forces an apposite format of interaction in the pursuit of planning, monitoring and conservation goals.

The highest-level manifestation of the governance pattern, "global governance" (GG; for the discussion of the definitions see Biermann, 2004) is understood as a type of 'world politics' (Biermann et al., 2009, p.2). The inclusion in GG, among others, of such stakeholders as networks of experts (or "epistemic communities") and 'new agencies set up by governments' (Idem) is important, since, first, they are raised to the global level of decision negotiation and, second, they thus can exercise global influence. GG is, first and foremost, a demanding orchestration project (which can be a reason of taking it for 'a mere bureaucratic exercise' (Bridgewater and Bridgewater, 2005, p.197)). Hence, meta-governmental consultations accompany its formation. A commission was formed on Global Environmental Governance (GEG) by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, State of the World Forum, Commission on Globalization, and Globus Institute (Ibidem, p.201). There are mechanisms that ensure as well the 'incorporation of local or indigenous knowledge' into informing global policies (Morin et al., 2013, p.564). Periodically there emerge speculations about a world environmental organization (WEO) (Ibidem, p.570).[12]

State governments witnessed their role change: they own less of the power, having to share it with international organizations, business, and even civil society (Breitmeier and Rittberger, 1997, p.8) that come to negotiate with them cooperation projects, aspiring at a peer status. Internally state interdependence with society increased (Zurn, 2013, p.413); at the international level the principle of sovereign equality of states struggles on. International environmental law had to refashion its approach from an inter-state one to a more comprehensive focus, also adopting power delegation and other GEG instruments similar to those in domestic public law regimes (Morin et al., 2013, p.565), as far as somehow 'the cost of action in the national interest appears too high for local visions' (Debarbieux and Price, 2008, p.149). It must be noted, that under

[12] In 2009 the First Meeting of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance was held in Belgrade to kick off a comprehensive discussion on GEG reorganization.

certain conditions intergovernmental bodies instead of challenging state power, amplify it (let alone that 'powerful states engage in forum-shopping, regime-shifting and other cross-institutional strategies' (Morin et al., 2013, p.570)). Thus, in examining interdependence and globalization Zurn (2013, p.417) advocated going beyond methodological nationalism, while others (Hameiri and Jayasuriya, 2011, p.21) also critically approached the latter; Federwisch (2007, p.51) directly referred to 'a declined state capacity to govern'. With regard to Europe Bufon (2011, p.43) similarly proposed to replace the state-centered vision with the ideas of a Europe of regions and that of nations.

Previously subnational level actors come to be active and influential in world politics (Biermann, 2004, p.8). Zurn (2013, p.416) suggested a reverse causality in GG which 'has emerged, leading to both political mobilization beyond the nation-state and resistance to it'. These are not only regions, accounting for the growing role of sub-state entities in cross-border networks of environmental cooperation and emerging as 'local political actors in global political spaces' (Morin et al., 2013, p.571). These are also NGOs that have fought their "struggle for recognition" (Honneth, 1995).[13] Some of their lines of action are seen as subversive and opposing the state. Local bioregionalism, for example, is positioned as 'a pacifist eco-anarchist formulation' (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013, p.9). The effect is, however, combined with the support of international NGOs (if not international organizations *tout court*) and state and non-state actors that take interest in the former. Significantly, activists have an opportunity to forge collective identities globally and to launch campaigns against practices that can be transnational (bridging thus inter-state cooperation gaps) and flexibly intervene at various scales with protest activities (Cullen-Knox et al., 2017, p.6). "Brokers" for international cooperation projects, NGOs contribute to optimizing legal frameworks (Newell et al., 2012, p.370), taking advantage of their internal merger of analytical and practical activities.

[13] Betsill and Correll (2001, p.67) formulated the scope of NGOs' political operation in the following way:

> 'NGOs participate in global environmental politics in a number of ways: they try to raise public awareness of environmental issues; they lobby state decision-makers hoping to affect domestic and foreign policies related to the environment; they coordinate boycotts in efforts to alter corporate practices harmful to nature; they participate in international environmental negotiations; and they help monitor and implement international agreements.'

For the business world there are more possibilities to partake in ecological strategies negotiation, but EG equally means increased influence of non-state actors on business environmental management. It is not only about their role in regulation adoption, but also about the phenomenon of social obligations and the strategic tool of "social license", popular expectations beyond legal prescriptions that have their cost of resistance and stem from opportunities of direct engagement with business (Cullen-Knox et al., 2017, p.4). As this change was disruptive for the system, companies had to react and take preventive steps including self-imposed higher environmental standards and advertising of their eco-friendly initiatives.

Therefore, GG brings about new different forms and topography of institutions: networks of public and private actors as well as public-private partnerships (PPPs) (Biermann et al., 2009, p.2). Andonova (2010, pp.25-26) defined PPPs as agreements for collaborative governance between public actors and non-state actors, 'which establish common norms, rules, objectives, and decision-making and implementation procedures for a set of policy problems'. Quite noteworthily, they become nodes of 'institutionalization of hybrid authority at the international arena' (Ibidem, p.26). Since ecological concerns, both universal and local, represent a socially pervasive phenomenon, ways to respond to them are being elaborated by different actors and institutions across the whole spectrum of human activity domains.

Kate O'Neill, an editor of the *Global Environmental Politics* (GEP) journal launched in February 2001 with a debate on WEO, drew attention to vertical linkages, 'instances of governance across jurisdictional levels' (Morin et al., 2013, p.571). Well-architected lines of communications are what is often implied by "good governance" which is deemed crucial for environmental conservation and management (Bridgewater and Bridgewater, 2005, p.197) as it facilitates 'the movement of ideas, knowledge, or policy up *and* down' between the levels (Morin et al., 2013, p.571). At the same time, the segmentation of GG into layers increases together with its horizontal fragmentation into clusters of 'rule-making and rule-implementing' which are 'maintained by different groups of actors' (Biermann et al., 2009, p.2). Yet, van de Graaf and De Ville reassured us that firstly, such condition is ubiquitous, especially since the larger the governance domain is defined, the

greater its fragmentation is; secondly, that integration or fragmentation in governance architecture is in part a strategic choice of its creators (Morin et al., 2013, p.569).

Thus, institutional overlappings 'can emerge intentionally', since actors benefit from divisions (Idem). Gary Marks, an expert in European Affairs, introduced the term "multi-level governance" in 1993 for how 'semi-autonomous international institutions address common issue areas in different ways' (Shaffer, 2012, p.672). Originally, it referred specifically to the EU experience, 'the twin processes of Europeanization and decentralization', but later it was used 'to describe a new model of global sustainability governance with a strong focus on the local level but also on multi-sectoral economic development' (Jänicke and Quitzow, 2017, p.124). It proved to be an empirically fruitful planning approach as well, so Newig and Fritsch (2009, p.209) reported: 'Our findings suggest that the number of governance levels involved strongly correlates with environmental output quality.' And consequently, 'a highly polycentric governance system comprising many agencies and levels of governance yields higher environmental outputs than rather monocentric governance' (Ibidem, p.197). If EG 'is understood as the resolution of conflicts over environmental resources through the establishment, reaffirmation and change of institutional arrangements' (Paavola, 2016, p.144), then it should be noted that the scales of conflicts, actor scope, and the resolution process may not coincide.

The technical compartmentalization of governance, an actual *Dingpolitik* oriented to solve specific problems (Zurn, 2013, p.408), is rooted in the conceptualisation of international (thematic) regimes as largely precursors of GG (Biermann, 2004, p.5). There is a plenitude of environmental regimes, apart from the climate change, acid rain or freshwater ones (Morin et al., 2013, p.563), that are branches 'a widely ramified network regulation system' (Federwisch, 2007, p.51). Interaction management of regimes includes clustering of agreements as a mode of institutional management (Morin et al., 2013, p.570). Diverse local conditions and levels expertise available lead to the rise of regional centers which become important for the implementation and development of corresponding regimes. Nevertheless, Trudeau, Duplessis, and Lalonde pointed out that international environmental regimes 'are still not sufficient to adequately protect the global environment' (Ibidem, p.568). In the same vein, Ohta and Ishii, upon

disaggregating regime effectiveness into parameters, ruled out (Ibidem, p.581): 'Existing institutions seem unable to bring about sustainable development.'

In the present work we are interested in the transnational level. The specificity of the meso-level consists in dealing immediately with cross-boundary processes, that is, 'activities which cross, or have effects across, national boundaries' (Warner and Marsden, 2012, p.3). Under such circumstance governance refers to formal and informal regulatory processes 'which seek to assess, mitigate and compensate for the transboundary impacts of particular human activities on the natural environment' (Idem). Regulatory convenience entails fashioning functional transborder regions. It is noteworthy that in 2012 GEP dedicated one of its four issues to regional EG (Volume 12, issue 3) recognizing the role of this phenomenon from the global perspective. A few months earlier that year, in Innsbruck the Congress on Transfrontier Cooperation held a conference on multi-level governance (Kiefer, 2014, p.76), which corroborates the idea that region is one of the arenas at which diverse actors choose strategically to play up their interests and eventually engage in a tug-of-war over ecological matters.

Ecoregion had to be introduced as far as the previously existing formats were not yielding truly effective conservation: policies used to target country level, single natural objects or sources of ecological threat. The overlappings and intersections of scales and forms of governance, lamentably, could not match 'the biophysical scales at which ecosystem services are generated' (Guerry et al., 2015, p.7351). Ecoregions, on the contrary, function effectively as conservation units at coarse scales (Olson and Dinerstein, 1998, p.200). It is not enough to state that the environmental domain serves as a laboratory for new modes of governance (Newell et al., 2012, p.367): single tools like ecoregions as governance elements are deemed to be essential for evincing opportunities and stumbling blocks for EG (for the case of climate change see Feldman and Wilt, 1999). But introducing a new pattern required to mobilize the governance resource, so as to make all the stakeholders see with the eyes of biogeographers. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) of 1992 stipulated the 'ecosystem approach' that evolved into bioregionalism by the 2000s (Fall and Egerer, 2004, p.99).

In the epistemic domain ecoregion is managed as an image. In this process the governance space which comprises it, undergoes a change (stakeholder understandings,

structural dependencies etc.). As Lefebvre (1974, p.42) assured us, 'the representations of space <…> intervene in and modify spatial *textures* which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology'. The modification also touches the values belonging with the ecoregional paradigm and those shared by actors (for the research at the intersection of values and institutions see Sikor et al., 2017). Thus, like many similar projects, ecoregional governance is a "governance of values" (as in Foret and Littoz-Monnet, 2014). Both the natural and, more importantly, the overall governance setting 'influence the set of incentives' for public and private actors involved (Guerry et al., 2015, p.7349).

The introduction of a globalistic element which comes with the globality of the ecoregional approach, brings into the system knowledge about level interconnectedness and a long-term outlook. These address the systemic shortcomings of the local level identified by Paavola (2016, p.149): they are due to 'the inequitable incidence of benefits and costs of ecosystem service provision'. The ecoregion scheme steers the thought towards the Marxist ideation and the Gramscian line of Critical Theory. It is part and parcel of the marketisation and privatisation of EG taken care of by stewardship councils (Newell et al., 2012, p.375). In 1998 Chayes and Chayes in the *New Sovereignty* went as far as formalizing the then recently spread "managerial" model of assuring compliance with regime norms as opposed to the enforcement practice (Morin et al., 2013, p.582). The main idea behind ecoregion-based governance is sustainability, which has a clear economic motivation. An "ecologinomic" sense-making from the point of view of a human household category evolved out the neoliberal logic (of which Brian Elliott offers extended criticism in *Natural Catastrophe* (2016)).

Though in many aspects a convenient division, ecoregions impose constraints. The ecoregional approach is far from being the first attempt to use categories external to government and management (such as the mixture of the rhetoric of science and nature in question) in founding a division, since indeed 'ecological signs often mark boundaries' (Appadurai, 1996, p.183). Such signs were articulated as objective by Richelieu. The less subtle natural objects (rivers, mountain ridges) have traditionally served as border delineation and demarcation basis, solidifying the idea of "good", natural, and "bad", artificial, borders (dating back to Minghi's *Boundary Studies in Political Geography* of 1963). A 'mythical line in the sand' (Vaughan-Williams, 2016, p.11) may be a shimmering

trope, but in geopolitical practice such situations have been undesirable. Now we turn to operationalising the refurbished notion of good border.

### 1.3. Ecoregion and Transboundary Area

In the face of an environmentalist paradigm that unyieldingly contributes to contesting and discursively undermining administrative borders, first of all, it is necessary to sculpt out the notion of transboundary area.[14] An influential XVIII$^{th}$ century philosopher Giambattista Vico believed the division and demarcation of soil to be one of the four primeval elements of human law and history (Schmitt, 2003, p.47). And just recently Ulrich Best (2007, p.10) testified: 'Globalisation is supposed to lead to a diminishing significance for boundaries, a dissolution of boundaries, but in spite of this, borders remain highly relevant and contested.' One can fully agree with Best, except for his use of the adversative conjunction: the situation described is devoid of contradiction. Under the pressure of globalisation borders become places of increased friction and hence acquire higher profile.

The transboundary in the present work is more than a single space of which a border is not only an absorbed, but also a formative element. This category is taken as a spatial level of operation, a medium, and a tool of analysis. The theoretical apparatus behind it has matured in the discipline of Border Studies. The latter has indeed enriched academic imaginary with quite a few ways to grasp certain spatial phenomena in presenting different aspects of borders (e.g. othering, crossing, exchange). The methodological value of the concept of the transboundary also includes the possibility of applying it as explanatory for the problems across the Central and Eastern European region, that is, to cases highlighting the pitfalls of peripherality, liminality, governability, and transition.

With regard to the object of BS David Newman (2006, p.150) drew the following summary: 'The classic border literature distinguished between the border or boundary on

[14] A wealth of BS vocabulary overview works is now available in the discipline: e.g. Rankin and Schofield (2004), Brunet-Jailly (2005), Cassarino (2006), Green (2012). Yet, the many innovative, divergent and case-specific definitions make suggested non-conservative typologies and topologies seldom interoperable without additional theory work.

the one hand, and the political frontier or the borderland on the other.' This conceptual bifurcation implies two outlooks on the problems of bordering: the linear and the bi-dimensional, respectively. The first one is applicable in the spheres where discrete models and representations of geospatial organization are used (e.g. legal and administrative discourse, nimble demarcation).[15] Such border undoubtedly 'structures the modern geopolitical imagination' (Vaughan-Williams, 2016, p.11) and thus conveys immense symbolic meaning. It appears especially clear-cut, if one looks from the "center" of a territory: one recognises a line on a map and thereby becomes mindful of the rules that apply in the topos circumscribed.[16] In everyday life, most of those sharing the center-informed linear idea, crystallised and maintained over time, come at the border only as visitors.

An alternative perspective is more suitable for analysing dispositions on the ground. When one has a more immersive experience of the processes around the border, new elements add up to complement the picture, physically and semiotically, making it evident that lines are 'insufficient, in themselves, as an understanding of border' (Green, 2009, p.10). Referring to Martinez (1994), Newman (2006, p.150) described frontier and borderland as 'the region or area in relative close proximity to the border within which the dynamics of change and daily life practices were affected by the very presence of the border'. The quote points out to the pragmatics of sociality and special conditions of daily life at the limit of a territory. It should be noted that there are several models of bi-dimensional border area conceptualisation. First, as far as "frontier" was tied by Turner's thesis to the connotations of dynamics and unidirectionality, a wide-spread approach indeed relies on a vectoral component in representing borders. Second, following Barth's study (1969) of dynamic social action at the frontier, the latter has been imagined as a

[15] These understandings are an important factor in two ways. First, regionalisation that is alternative to (and at times contestant of) a state administrative division also relies on virtual lines and (re-)bordering. Second, they help in determining that a removal of physical boundaries does not equal to borderlessness (in the institutional sense): administrative representations are preserved even in the absence of material obstacles. In the context of territorial management and urban planning, an intentional step out of the administrative grid was made in the format of "soft spaces" 'which are the result of a deliberate, conscious strategy constructed by governing actors <...> to represent a geographical area in a particular way that lies outside of the political-administrative boundaries and internal territorial divisions of the nation-state' (Walsh et al., 2012, p.5). The concept appears quite fruitful for the exploration of rebordering potential.

[16] To Megoran (2012, p.465), international boundaries appear 'as vertical planes' and are distinct from borders imagined bi-dimentionally.

zone of contact and penetrating influence (for borderland interpretation see Adviloniene, 2008; Bespamiatnykh, 2012). The approach of looking at the whole border area within one country is itself transitional between the center- and the border-informed stances on spatial organisation. A continuation of Barth's idea – accentuating life-world's extension beyond the border – presents 'a coherent transnational and cross-border frontier' (the stand-point is inferrable) as a meaningful space where life flows 'as if the line between countries was not there' (Donnan and Wilson, 2010, p.9). Such view evidently opts out any border effects, regrettably simplifying the model. Third, there is a cross-border perspective, in which the region spanning both sides of a state border is taken as the unit of analysis and the factor of mutual influence is considered: e.g. the borderland defined in the works of Anderson (1983, p.1) and Baud and van Schendel (1997, p.216). Besides, Raczaszek (2011, p.16) made a handy terminological distinction between "borderland regions" lying within the borders of one state and "transborder regions" which are single spaces lying across borders.[17] Finally, it was noted that border areas are entitled to their own diffuse boundaries. For instance, they can be defined, 'where the effects of the proximity of a political border are most evident and strong, as a 25 km wide strip of land extending alongside the borderline' (Bufon and Markelj, 2010, p.20).

Representing border influence as a spatial areal object reflects the continual approach to region definition (problematised in Allen and Cochrane, 2007). The thesis of continuity has been spreading through various metaphors. For example, in suggesting the vision of 'Borderland Europe', Balibar (2004, p.12) nurtured the borderworlds interference imaginary by formulating a cross-over model of borderland political space as overlapping open regions, borders being an element of that system. The images of gradual change or blurring of characteristics in the space surrounding the border comprise the metaphor of spillover (van Gorp, 2009, p.358) and the interpretation of border areas as transition zones (Newman, 2006, p.146) and as liminal spaces of multiple challenges (e.g. for the Alpine context see Fourny, 2013). The gravitational model used in

[17] It is worth noting that the term "region" bears the connotation of purposeful and formal delineation. Specifically, distinct from borderlands are cross-border regions (Perkman, 2003) as parts of state territories subject to mandated transborder governance. Employing the approach of Walsh et al. (2012), such zones can be classified as "hard spaces", or at least "hardening" ones.

Economics permits to capture different intensity of border effects with regard to specific indicators.

Shall one need to add the third virtual dimension to the "line" and the "plane" in the scheme, the creative modality would consist in envisaging border's influence in different spheres of life as separate layers. A precursor idea transpires in Carl Schmitt's placing of boundary at the foundation of 'the orders and orientations of human social life' (Schmitt, 2006, p.42). The picturesque construct of superimposed social spaces was taken up by Lefebvre (1974, p.86) in the figure of *mille-feuille* pastry. The attempts at conceptualising the complexity of borders through layers presented a distinct model (e.g. Giaoutzi et al., 1993; Schack, 1999) and discussed the composition of the ensuing "thick border" (Haselsberger, 2014). However, superposition of boundaries and integratedness of the border stack vary depending on particular real-life cases. The extension of layers may differ, and consequently 'the border crosses the layers at *different* points' (Schack, 1999, p.5). Some authors (Herzog, 1990, p.135; Schack, 1999, p.4) underscored the importance of social formations in border areas as objects of analysis, for they result from and develop under the influence of the overlapping of networks from all layers involved.

Upon the above summarised theoretical grounding, we lay out the composite concept of the transboundary area. First, the conventional linear boundary, unsurprisingly, is seen as a crucial element of the ideation, due to the ontological role it has in the definition of the systemic rules. On each side, adjacent to this *axis mundi* there extends the area of a state that has characteristics setting it apart from the areas lying further toward the territory core, but at the same time, connecting it, in one way or another, to the area across the border. Most such characteristics are spatially manifest. Second, the prefix "trans-" is deemed well-suited, because it renders the idea of processes that can run in both directions and create a special zone of tension. Some argue that borders as systemic limits 'are neither inside nor outside the system' (Wullweber, 2015, p.81): then, in the continual perspective, that brings about certain exceptional space and thus helps to accommodate liminality in the semantic spectrum of the transboundary. Third, it is expected that any concrete area to which the notion is applied may have its own particular "bordering script" (van Houtum, 2005, p.676)

conditioning its development dynamics. Every day across the world concomitant processes lead to the strengthening of the divisive function of some borders and to the loosening of regimes at others. Depending on the factors at play, for some actors boundary becomes vital as the line of control, others value borderlands for exchange and cooperation opportunities. So, any specific transboundary complex configuration is contingent mainly on the multi-layered (and probably fragmented) regulatory space it came to be shaped in, but what is essential is that a single problem domain for the whole area still can be observed.

As a tool, the concept of the transboundary is helpful in bypassing certain contradictions and limitations, in particular: a) it serves as a homogenising framework for spatial analysis without threatening the borderline's discursive firmness by functional unit plotting; moreover, it does not necessary correlate with any formal nor *quasi* regionalisation; b) consequently, it does not steer applied research towards the cooperation bias which can be observed in studies, for practical reasons, focused on possibilities for enfranchising the contact function of borders and cross-border collaboration as a panacea; c) it does not limit the analysis to the impact of the linear border as such nor to factors on one side of it, but allows for incorporating the influences of various origin (including the spatially "dispersed" institute of border) that converged to be "read in space" for a specific area; d) it permits to integrate in one picture the legal and the anthropological dimensions of border phenomena; e) it presents also the potential for setting a comparative (cross-case) frame of reference. The designation chosen for the notion implies it may be used in kinds of boundary investigation, other than in the contexts of political geographic partition.

The shaping and maintenance modality of the transboundary area fits with the processual concept of bordering. Firstly, there is a complex of circumstances that are common for the contemporary border areas. Space production there is conditioned by the placement of boundaries, or, to quote Megoran (2012, p.465), there are 'the spaces of division and interchange created or influenced <…> by the presence of an international boundary'. Furthermore, there is often a noticeable imbalance between the neighbouring sides. A wide range of actors from multiple spheres of activity find themselves in intertwined relationships at borders, which necessitates a spatial relation

architecture model beyond the simplistic (Lefebvre, 1974, p.34). Inside the state, there is an ambiguous perspective on border areas. On the one hand, they are seen as peripheral to the centre of political power, which results in the "state retreat" syndrome and low attention to the respective regions' development. In addition, centrifugal processes push all the marginal phenomena (e.g. crime, deviant elements) as far away as possible, to the very borderline. And thus, on the other hand, due to internal and external threats, areas close to the border are conceived of primarily in terms of security, their strategic and industrial importance comparable to the value of a 'politically central location' (Hartshorne, 1933, p.213). To complete the picture, at the halt of national jurisdictions, these are international regimes that govern transversal processes.

Secondly, there is a mechanism underlying the process of work on border (in the constructivist sense). It traditionally consists in the purposeful reinforcement of the division (e.g. through demarcation), the consequent local adaptations (e.g. discursive, infrastructural) to the new status, the coming into action of the co-constructional force. Border regime 'as a materially produced form' (Shields, 1991, p.7) is aimed at organizing flows along and across the border, including the occurrences of cross-border planning and programme implementations. Its other facet is discursive practices scaffolding the margins of states and serving to affirm the linear border in the symbolic and institutional dimensions. Then, regular "linking" movement across the border plays a two-fold role. It maintains a contact zone and a certain degree of interdependence between the divided sides, and, importantly, is thus also a manifestation of the phatic function of transborder exchanges, as, unlike border, transboundary area is created continuously on the ground, rather than declaratively. But the movement 'ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion' (Lefebvre, 1974, p.33) for the dividing apparatus too. A broader set of customs and arrangements around the border belongs at the intersection of matter and discourse. For instance, while Megoran (2012, p.465) specified that 'institutional paraphernalia and practices <…> order space by creating difference', Swyngedouw (2004, p.33), in a possibilist vein, underscored the significance of affordances and rituals in spatialisation contexts. Hence, looking for affordances and their structures is a good methodological device for exploring transboundary areas.

Thirdly, one cannot disregard the temporal component of the process perpetuation. Beside the fact that a border is capable of causing socio-spacial change, the effects of bordering do not wear off easily and leave a morphologically distinct space. Restricted movement, radio jamming, and closed borders are some of the conventions that can evolve into inequalities in the physical space. If a border becomes less rigid, even disappears, border atavisms and discourse remnants nevertheless persist for a shorter or longer while. The question of time for a specific border and the zone around it still offers room for debate (Martinez, 1994; Baud and van Schendel, 1997; Anderson, 2001; Green, 2009). To grasp the phenomenon, one should look at the longevity of the outcomes of territory and place production projects: infrastructural footprint and the co-constitutive social spatialisation (Shields, 1991) and socialisation of space (Paasi, 1999). The latter keeps up a rolling lifecycle of a sea of social representations that impose inertia on social change. And according to an examplification by Appadurai (1996, p.184), the places-made may offer a context for the production of local subjects that in their turn contribute to the context creation. In transboundary areas therefore one has to deal with vernacular perceptions, latent animosity, or symbolic intertwining. The problem can be approached from a stricter sociological viewpoint of bridging and bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) and relational capital (Donati, 2011). Moreover, the relational aspect can be seen as one of the ontological cornerstones of the transboundary.

Noteworthy is the negative model of transboundary areas production. Where does the wide-spread habit of picturing the border area as a tumultuous *cul-de-sac*, a zone 'of danger requiring special ritual maintenance' (Appadurai, 1996, p.179), or, more practically, a spot of peaking crime rates take root? Probably, in the image of messiness accompanying the things disposed as not belonging somewhere ('dirt as matter out of place' in Douglas, 1966, p.36). In the linear border paradigm, states are allowed to whip up within their precinct 'homogeneous contiguous spaces of nationness' (Appadurai, 1996, p.189) which are conceived to differ from the adjacent entities. Therefore the 'sense of sharp dislocation and separation' (Newman, 2006, p.148) is cultivated intensively around the border, so as not to allow for 'ambiguous continuity' (Lefebvre, 1974, p.87) fraught with spatial tissue rebordering claims. At the same time, what is

beyond such conventional oecumene is also beyond the state's responsibility, and all what is alien within the territory has to be marginalised – driven to the rim or straight over it. (It illustrates the primordiality of the idea of possession in the *raison d'être* of borders.) That can happen to waste, toxic manufacturing or undesirable subjects. The approach can be shared on both sides of the border, inducing convergent movements of the rejected. Aggravation can result from some conditions commonly fostered at the "backyards" of states: i.e. extreme natural conditions (e.g. mountains, forests, badlands, and "no-man's-land" landscapes), depopulation, peculiar population groups, lacking social capital, ethnic or religious feud, hostility toward the neighbouring state, complex bureaucracy and restrictions, moderate coverage by transport systems etc. The problem of the transboundary area is generated by the ubiquitous set of rules which inevitably nurtures antagonisms – and eventual *sui generis* border arbitrage due to the 'juxtaposition of two or more systems of rules' (O'Dowd, 2001, p.73).

The transboundary can be operationalised as an analytical category for ecoregions only when one moves beyond argument compartmentalisation so as to consider the interrelation of the environmental and the political in creating a regulatory space for an eco-frontier as well as the implications for the real-life borders that this innovation entails. Following the logic of Foucault, one not only can recognise the so-called heterotopia in borders and ecoregions, but should seek as well for forms of domination (Foucault, 1980, p.69) designated by the notions of border and region. In particular, ecoregion analysed itself as a transboundary area can be used to interpret the current processes in Central and Eastern Europe, taking a two-fold frontier perspective. On the one hand, ecoregion as a new frontier zone for exploration, taming, construction (ultimately, a *sui generis* heterotopia for the actors involved), can be a key to unlocking contemporary governance discourses; on the other hand, there is an ongoing eco-frontier deployment taking source in environmental policies and NGOs' activities, the study of which. Officially mapped ecoregions can also be compared with the spatial configuration of specific environmental problems (and governance structures around them), if such can be articulated in terms of distinct transboundary areas.

### 1.4. Introduction of Ecoregional Approach to the Area

It was another Soviet academic tradition to organise geographic studies in line with natural macro-objects, and the Carpathians were deemed a prominent subject. Moreover, international collaborative work on the Carpathians flourished within the Bloc (Leszczycki, 1965) resulting in a scientific regional approach to the area now shared by eight countries. More recently, the region has attracted many scientists and, for instance, has been studied by biogeographers on the basis of recognised maps (Olson et al., 2001; Bryce and Clarke, 1996).

At the practical level, when analysing global trends, Newig and Fritsch (2009, p.197) concluded that since 'environmental policy in Europe and elsewhere has been suffering from a lack of effectiveness', two strategies have been mainly chosen. The first one has been 'to adapt the level and spatial scale of governance to that of the environmental problems', irrespective of 'administrative territorial jurisdictions' (Idem). And that perfectly matches the already discussed hereby concept of ecoregion. Therefore, first, it is important to have in mind that there is a subsidiarity mechanism nested in this strategy, so that as Zurn (2013, p.403) noticed, many processes being transnational but not global, certain problems will never reach the level of global concern. As a matter of example, Turnock (2001, p.18) argued the Carpathians drew attention as a consolidated objective for sustainable mountain development in Europe in the light of the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 and the then coined concept of "fragile environments" reflected in Chapter 13 of *Agenda 21* (UNDSD, 1992). Second, in the optics of such problem-oriented type of governance, it can be most illustratively seen 'how a region constitutes itself into a purposive entity' (Rosamond, 2005, p.475). As single states may lack effectiveness in addressing complex, let alone transborder, issues, intertwined regulatory systems of governance are considered to be able to compensate for such structural shortcomings and to bring about 'cooperative management between public and private actors' (Ibidem, p.472).

The so-to-say object-oriented politics paths the way for the second strategy enacted 'to enhance participation of non-state actors in environmental decision-making' (Newig and Fritsch, 2009, p.197). The optimistic scenario developed by UNEP (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, pp.12-13) was called 'Carpathian Dream' and assumed that

pro-environment and anti-poverty policies would be given top priority, while environmental sustainability would be sought though interventions undertaken by a vast spectrum of individual and collective actors. The three main fronts of action would be constituted by technological innovations, transformation of government and education system, and consumer behavior change.

The idea behind ecoregional governance is gradual, globally coordinated but locally customised transition to sustainability. In that format, establishment of successful regional models becomes a basis for the global environmental governance. Regional and global environmentalisms are thus in no functional opposition and are related through the principle of subsidiarity that the UN associates with good governance. However, it should be mentioned, that the scale of governance is important as well: while global governance provides a conceptual framework and controls, it also creates accountabilities at the level of regions. Under such circumstance the meso-level, that of ecoregional governance, at which solutions are both conceived and implemented, appears to be a most convenient and promising one for the analysis of environmental matters.

Therefore, the concept of ecoregion can be fruitfully applied to the area. This includes looking with its help at the visions projected, actor composition, environmental agendas debated. The Danube is the second largest river in Europe and a unique habitat. The Carpathian Mountains are considered to be one of the 200 most important world biomes: as part of "Global 200" ecoregions they represent some of the most biologically outstanding ecosystems in the world. Still, the transition decades have had contradictory effects on the state of ecology in the region. Unattended abandoned industrial sites and accelerated alternative economic and construction activities added new pressures on the landscapes of the post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, gradual penetration of globalistic concepts and accommodation of the European Union values winched interest for the environment. Still, quite a few ecological issues have remained neglected and relatively low public environmental awareness (or, rather, concern) has persisted.

### 1.4.1. Natural Givens and Ecological Integrity

There are several traits that make the Carpatho-Danubian area substantially important for the geography and ecology of the European Union, and probably for the whole Eurasian continent. Due to its large natural resource stock and significant economic, recreational and biodiversity conservation potential, the environmental risks and threats of transboundary character it harbours, from inefficient regulations and industrial pollution to flourishing environmental crime, present a sensitive matter for many.

In terms of geology, the Carpathian basin originated in the early Mesozoic Era, as sedimentary rock started to take shape in the Cretaceous period, about 100 million years ago, to then become a subject of the volcanic orogenesis which still makes the area prone to light earthquakes (Andrzejczyk, 2015, pp.5-7). The mountains are subdivided into three provinces (the Western, Eastern, and Southern Carpathians) and eight sub-provinces (for the division of the range into units see Kondracki, 1978). Approximately 85% of the Carpathian Mountains are situated within the basin of the Danube River. Arc-shaped, they have an outer (mostly flysch formations) and inner relief belts. For example, from the meticulous geological descriptions of the Carpathian Tatra mountains provided by Balon and the colleagues (2015, p.13) one can see that, the Low Tatras are separated in the north by the Spis-Liptow depression from the Podhale-Magura area. The former belong to the Central Western Carpathians that include also the Tatra (mesoregions of the Western, Reglowe, Belianske, and High Tatras) and Choc Mountains, while the latter is in the Western Beskids which make part of the Outer Western Carpathians (Ibidem, p.16). The summit heights vary widely across the area: from the Slovakian Gerlachovsky Peak (2655 m) and the Polish Rysy (2449 m) in the High Tatras to the Moldoveanu Peak (2544 m), the Diablak (1725 m) in the Babja Gora massif of the Western Beskids or the Three Crowns (982 m) in the Pieniny Mountains. Besides, over this whole 'longest volcanic range in Europe' more than 2000 mineral springs are scattered (Dumitrascu et al., 2011, p.325), and the Danube valley downhill is also reputed for its mineral water sources.

Circa 90% of all the rivers which drain from the Carpathians flow into the Black Sea (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.24). The European watershed passes through the Tatras,

leaving the Dunajec and Poprad to the Visla's basin and the Vag and Orava rivers to the Danube's one (Balon et al., 2015, p.13). Other main tributaries of the Danube are the Tisza, Sava, Raba, Tamis, Morava, Nera, and Timok. From the river source near Donaueschingen to Sulina the height of the stream's bed falls for 678 meters (0.25 meter per kilometer). The 949 kilometers of the Middle Danube, 300- to 1000-meter-wide, flow from Devin in Slovakia to Turnu Severin in Romania, thereafter the Lower Danube zone stretches till the Delta.

Importantly, about 73% of the Carpathian montane region's territory is covered with forests or other semi-natural landscapes (Dumitrascu et al., 2011, p.325). Forested areas in other parts of national territories generally account for a much lesser proportion (SARD-M, 2008, p.17). Moreover, the mountains' variety is reflected by 'five fairly distant vertical zones' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.91): from the mixed deciduous forest to the coniferous forest, to the arctic (in longitudinal terms). Besides, since 1996 there has been detected an ongoing semi-natural or secondary forests reforestation process (SARD-M, 2008, p.17). The resultant afforestation is especially noticeable in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.111). Besides, in some areas, especially in Romania, the quality of the stands is ensured by the fact that there have been relatively few plantations with artificially planted monocultures of fast-growing species.

Remote and difficultly accessible, Carpathian forest settlements were almost totally abandoned after the Second World War and then again in the 1990s, which helped to preserve the local wildlife and vegetation in a close-to-natural condition (Więckowski, 2013). For example, in meadow-forest ecotone habitats such abandonment led to forest succession, spread of forest species at the expense of the open habitats' ones, and increase in the density and number of species (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.120). The largest forest areas lie in the Eastern Carpathians and are so thick, that it is argued, the mountains 'in Slovakia, Poland and western Ukraine host Europe's only remaining primary beech forests' (Meessen et al., 2015), while the Romanian Carpathians 'host the largest surface covered with forest <… > in Europe (about 500,000 ha), enclosing the last pristine forests (242,100 ha)' (Dumitrascu et al., 2011, p.331). As will be discussed later (Chapter 4), the pristine status of Carpathian stands comes under debate, but these,

allegedly, 'last expanses of Europe's ancient old growth forest' are undoubtedly 'exceptionally rich in biodiversity' (Olden, 2016, p.23).

According to UNEP (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, pp.90-99), the Carpathian region is home to almost 40 thousand native and non-native species, excluding microorganisms. The impressive biodiversity of the mountains counts no less than '1/3 of Europe's flora with over 200 endemic species' (Dumitrascu et al., 2011, p.325). Among those are the Hucul pony horse, Carpathian chamois, mangalica pig and *gammarus leopoliensis* crustacean. There are still a few thousands of large carnivores, such as brown bears, wolves, and lynxes (Idem). The Eastern Carpathians 'are one of the few places in Europe with an almost full spectrum of original native wildlife species' (including one of the largest wild and free-roaming populations of European bison) and 'the most important refuge for the brown bear in Poland' (Rewilding Europe, 2016). Both Slovakia and Hungary give home to 15 bird species of global and 65 – of European conservation concern; in Romania, there are 25 and 80 such species, respectively (Staneva and Burfield, 2017, pp. 78, 125, 135). In the Danube, the sturgeon and salmon species are found.

Several conservation needs being recognised, there are already 33 natural and national parks and 42 landscape areas and landscape parks (13% of the mountain region), such as the national parks of Duna Ipoly, Bükk, and Aggtelek in Hungary, Babia Gora in Poland, the Retezat Reserve and the Maramures Mountains Natural Park in Romania, Mala Fatra and Slovensky Raj in Slovakia (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.104). Djerdap, the largest park in Serbia, overlooks – across the Danube – the Iron Gates Natural Park in Romania. The Pieninsky Eastern Carpathians Biosphere Reserve is shared by Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Other cross-border national parks (in the Tatras, Beskids, and Pieniny Mountains) 'enjoy an international status', the Polish-Slovak transborder space being 'particularly rich in such initiatives' (Więckowski, 2013). The UNESCO World Heritage List contains a few gems of the Carpatho-Danubian region: the Bulgarian long-battled-for Pirin Park and Srebarna Reserve, the Hungarian caves of Aggtelek, and the Slovak Karst.

The region remains inevitably faced with environmental threats afflicting the local population and governments (reviewed in Nikolaichuk, 2008). Non-human-induced

conditions include 'extreme meteorological events like heavy falls of snow, rain or freezing' (Więckowski, 2013), forest fires, windstorms, mudslides, floods. In the Danube River Basin droughts negatively impact the terrestrial and aquatic environment (experienced in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, the Slovak Republic, and Ukraine), but recently the river has been also prone to extreme freezing in wintertime (Horvath, 2017, p.7).

Human-induced risks and challenges are even more varied. Inadequate hunting regulation, slow introduction of the Natura 2000 site protection, multiple species facing extinction used to loom upon the region (CEEweb, 2003). Extractive and heavy industries have generated complex pollution patterns as well as soil deformation (erosion, mining-induced karst sinkholes) in several areas; the light industry and agriculture also have affected the state of soil, air, and water. Regions with 'the greatest density and diversity of active pollution sources, as well as latent pollution regions, are located in the central and northwestern part of the Eastern Carpathians, western and south-central part of the Apuseni Mountains, Western Carpathians and western and southwestern parts of the Southern Carpathians' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.126). Among the contaminants there are polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), sulfur oxides, and heavy metals. The largest accidental spill of chemicals in the Carpathians happened in Baia Mare and Baia Borsa, Romania, in 2000. That spill of cyanide by the gold mining company Aurul, a joint venture of the Australian company Esmeralda Exploration and the Romanian government, polluted the Somes, its tributary the Lapus and, consequently, the Tisza River in Hungary. In 2010 the alumina sludge spill disaster in Hungarian Ajka received high profile. More latent forms of pollution are related to waste disposal forms caused by a significant growth of municipal units since the end of the communist times, while environmental challenges are linked as well to the processes of suburbanisation, urban sprawl, and car use expansion (Ibidem, p.11). Premeditated damage to the environment is encountered in the forms of poaching and illegal logging, involving transnational criminal NGOs that operate at transfrontier scale and build up their own extra-legal governance systems (Breitmeier and Rittberger, 1997, p.14). Kluvankova-Oravska and her colleagues (2009, p.191) cited an 'alarming example' of a ski resort constructed by the Serbian government 'with the support of international bodies in the Stara Planina Mountains,

violating six national acts of law and affecting the largest protected area in Serbia'. The protests against the Gabcikovo dam in the 1990s and Rosia Montana in the 2000s are still vividly present in the collective memory.

The anthropogenic factor, notwithstanding the Carpathian "wilderness" (Kozak et al., 2013, p.4) stereotype, has in a great measure influenced the spatial structure of ecological communities (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.8) in the region as well as the dynamics of their composition. In that sense, faced with close interaction of large-scale human activity and distinctly natural processes in the region, one can agree with Peter and Celia Bridgewater (2005, p.207) who stated in a rather radical and optics-assignative manner that 'all landscapes are cultural, subject to cultural influences, defined by cultural values (which are sometimes interpreted as environmental values)'. These mountains have indeed ofttimes become an arena for the collision of various human designs and have yet maintained a fuzzy integrative structure that allowed many enterprises to succeed. The Danube, being an important transport and energy highway, is much starkerly integrated in the national economies. Thus, one might be drawn to uncover how the natural space in question can become 'populated by political forces' (Lefebvre, 1974, p.48).[18]

Having reviewed the notions basic for ecoregional governance, we can recognise it as a multifaceted and in part eclectic sphere of knowledge. As to the idea of ecoregion, its dialectical nature and varying degrees of application in practice combine with the appreciation it enjoys among some key actors in ecological conservation. The heterogeneity of views on the environment and environmental governance is attenuated by the different "weights" those have in defining regimes and the flexibility of governance instruments. Transboundary areas reflect, in many cases, the spread of by-products of territory production, but as analytical tools they are useful for tackling challenges in zones close to state borders. Examining with their help a virtual regionalisation phenomenon permits to reach a new analytical edge with regard to the

[18] "It is only the geopolitical division of the region that exceeds the morphological division. In Europe which is highly divided by political borders it is only the area of the small Benelux states which have more borders per square kilometer than this region." (Tradecarp.com, n.d.)

questions of border contestation and governance hinges. In the case-studies (Chapter 4) addressing the environmental layer of the border problematique stack, one follows how state borders behave when lost amidst the "wilderness" of an ecoregion and how the problem of the transboundary plays out. The area of the Carpathians and Danube River harbours unique natural habitats, is home to multiple endemic species and generally can be recognised as one the major centers of biodiversity on the continent. Adopting an ecoregional outlook on it is a way of linking the biological and geological factors with the governance perspective.

## CHAPTER 2. Framing and Characteristic of the Carpatho-Danubian Area

In 2007 the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) prepared the *Carpathians Environment Outlook* report which opens in a voracious tone:

> 'The Carpathian Mountain region is an excellent example of why the United Nations and its environment program are of increasing relevance in the 21st century. Seven countries <…> share the natural and nature-based resources found within this mountain range. The region, including the surrounding lowland plains represents a center of extensive biological diversity and at the same time a unique and well-preserved cultural heritage in a locale that, while in the heart of the European continent, remains relatively under-developed and 'unspoiled'.' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.2)

The excerpt blends together the utilitarian approach to nature and a frontier-like vision of the region. It imperatively prompts the following question: if the many forms of capital include natural assets which interact with its other forms 'to generate goods and services' (Guerry et al., 2015, p.7349), how is the provision of the latter incorporated in the country and regional frameworks? Bearing in mind the biases of some policy papers, in the present Chapter we will attempt at "encircling" and eventually "pulling together", geographi- and historiwise, the Carpathian area as the fundamental element of the research object. We will then proceed to discuss the existing legal framework for regional transboundary environmental cooperation. The hypothesis holds that political and economic processes in the area and especially the normative leadership of the EU have exercised a formative influence over the environmental governance's structure and content.

### 2.1. Political and Economic Landscape

Looking at the cooperation patterns requires a certain understanding of the political component in the area, i.e. who defines the regime (Ruggie, 1975), and of the economic one, i.e. who benefits from the respective set-up. The mode of articulation of the political is discursive: it is perceived to be 'engendered by communication and

interactions among various state and non-state actors' (Albert et al., 2009, p.8). This non-essentialistic nature makes it then a 'flexible and highly contested' (Idem), but undoubtedly socially dominating sphere. In the case of the Carpathians and the Danube, extra-regional actors have significantly contributed to the patterns of internal and external exchanges, above all, by fashioning common visions of the region which as a part of political mythology underlie "political rationality" (Dean, 2006, p.1) and decision-making.

On the 16th of May 2017 Harald Egerer stood under the plastic crown of the oak-like backdrop in the Ligneum of Sopron in his capacity of the head of the Carpathian Convention Interim Secretariat. Opening the meeting of the Working Group (WG) on Sustainable Forest Management, he spoke of the Carpathians as 'the Amazon of Europe'[19]. Earlier in the XXIst century, Rewilding Europe termed the Eastern Carpathians 'the wildest place in Europe', while Fall and Egerer (2004, p.98) could not resist 'the potent and seductive metaphor of 'boundless nature''. Portrayed over centuries as a barbaric zone, in the early XXth century the mountains witnessed attempts at establishing a direct colonial extractivist regime over them, for instance, via the Carpathian Mines Society. Western European great powers felt obligated to alleviate the "balkanised" condition of the minorities in the area by civilising efforts and repressions (Weitz, 2008). Apparently, in the same way in which culture is permeated by the knowledge of the landscape it reposes on (Bridgewater and Bridgewater, 2005, p.207), the natural and the cultural of the Carpathians – in the understanding of some observers – become peculiarly equalised. Those above are a few examples of fraught discursive practices that morph into action frameworks: generalisation spells neglect for the local specifics and experience, and secondarisation ushers in transfers of knowledge from some "primary" regions.

In order to better capture the developments and to 'establish and make intelligible a wider set of problems' (Agamben, 2002) of regional governance, it appears promising to consider them within the post-colonialist paradigm, not unsupportive of the

[19] The metaphor is used heavily and often, including Karl Schlogel calling in a 2017 lecture Oder the 'Amazon of Europe', while the phrase has also been used in promoting the planned UNESCO Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube".

systemic constructivist stance. As Catherine Nash (2002, p.220) rightly emphasised, the prefix "post" 'prematurely celebrates a time after colonialism and so elides continued neocolonial processes, the endurance of colonial discourses, and the economic, political and cultural inequalities'. So when the post-colonialist approach was making its way in the studies of Central and Eastern Europe, it was understood that the region had been and was still being impacted by the imperial European modernity having as the reverse side 'the condition and sensitivity of the colonized populations' (Kołodziejczyk, 2014, p.136). Although there are works reasoning from the positions of the Soviet domination heritage and decommunisation (Owczarzak, 2009), there are also those that look at European colonialism so as to focus on 'the colonial difference', the 'being in the border space of modernity which became a category defining Europe' (Kołodziejczyk, 2014, p.135).

In the present work the special condition influencing the area in question is taken to refer to the political focus on and manipulation of the existing differences and imbalances. Since there is a certain degree of arbitrariness and epistemological work involved in the delineating of historical and political regions (Troebst, 2010; Perkmann, 2007; Keating, 1997), over the last century multiple geopolitical "containers" have been tried on the Carpathian area: from *Mitteleuropa* (List's idea of Middle European economic community of 1842 then creatively reworked by Nauman in the 1920s) to *Międzymoże* that still haunts the imagination of Polish elites, from the desperate Danube conferderation plan of 1848 to the ironic *Zwischeneuropa*[20], and from the Central Europe of Halecki to the Danubia of Jaszi. After Jenő Szűcs's triptych of Europe, the "special" space made its return in the concept of Amber Road and "*das Bernsteinstrasse Projekt*" launched in 1993 (Central Europe is seen as one of the subregions of Middle Europe where peoples suffered from external powers). Unsurprisingly, that all made Troebst (2012) conclude that East-Central Europe is a 'prominent phenomenon of Historical meso-regions'. At least, there have constantly been those who had a need to galvanise the discussion around the regional identity so as to enchisel the "special" space.

[20] Includes the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Serbia, and Ukraine (Tunjic, 2003).

But for determining the structural place of the area of the Carpathians and the Danube, it might be the most critical how the concept of Europe is moulded. This concept is characterized by a persistent need for reinvention (Gasche, 2008) keeping it a valid political tool. It also thrives on tactical fuzziness: Europe is postulated to have a contractual nature and 'fuzzy boundaries' (Walsh et al., 2012, p.1). Neither does the CEE area seem to have precise boundaries (Melegh, 2006, pp.45-46). Thus, there is a segment in a dominant discourse where to a basically geographic notion no strict geographic definition criteria apply, and alternative attributes are held acceptable. A more or less extreme case in point are orders of life: 'historians have always considered Europe as a transnational space in relation to distinctive cross-national phenomena, ranging from industrialization <…> to design' (Palmowski, 2011, p.637). While Wolff (1994) dealt with the intellectual half-orientalisation and domination with regard to the eastern part of Europe, Todorova (1997), apart from looking at the Balkans through the prism of Orientalism, explored the textual borders of CEE and the East-West divide that is being operationalized no less tactically.

With a wide brush-stroke, Milutinović (2015, p.255) reflected: 'As a historical category, "Europe" <…> has always been defined relationally'. So as to fetch out the image of Europe, Central and Eastern Europe has been accepted as a part of Europe with reservations, in the role of a "close Other" (for the "distant" one see Neumann, 1999). The otherness, though, has been formulated in terms of underachievement, the West being the benchmark and the East, consequently, a collection of "lands of absence" (the notion of Ezequiel Adamovsky) eternally subject to Europeanisation. As far as such fostered inferiority has been an element of the governmentality structure, CEE has been clamped in a sort of a limbo of catching-up[21]. This has led to the ubiquity of the developmental discourse, that of backwardness (especially in terms of living standards and political order for which the frame of reference has been set by Western Europe) and, importantly, of victimisation. An integral part of the coloniality discourse, fundamental for the process of revindication with former empires (Kołodziejczyk, 2014, p.136), victimisation required engaging popular memory as a creative process and working with '*abstract, selective*, and i*nterpretative*' images of the past (Dryden, 2004,

[21] See, for example, Chirot's *Origins of backwardness in Eastern Europe* (1989).

p.257). In the outcome two "grand ideologies" in CEE were to bring it together as a region (in the sense of Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2011): the 'hegemony of the anti-communism' resulting 'in naturalization of the region's dependence from the European core' (Zarycki, 2014, p.31) and the imperative of 'joining the EU' driving the post-communist transformations (Dimitrova, 2001, p.8).

With the future-oriented idea of the past in CEE ('the mythopoetic tendency' in Ash, 1986; 'ideas about the future' in Dimitrova, 2001; the 'idea of a common future in the European community' in Bioteau, 2007), in the late 1980s and early 1990s '[t]he concept of 'returning to Europe' has served to unite the closely associated processes of democratization, marketization and European integration' (Dimitrova, 2001, p.8). From the post-colonialist perspective, it is fundamental, first, that metaphorically speaking, 'actors in the post-socialist context are rebuilding institutions not *on the ruins* but *with the ruins* of communism' (Stark, 1996, p.995). The transformations crafted then constituted not a replacement but rather a recombination (Idem) of elements, during which some parts were discarded, other were added. So, second, the EU-compliant order was not being deployed from scratch, but cut out into the existing institutional landscape of each of the new democracies, comprising as well 'already established, albeit weak, set of domestic institutions with their corresponding rules and norms' (Dimitrova, 2001, p.9). Third, public and private transformation programmes brought from beyond the region and based on a "colonial" vision have had serious limitations. The simplification of the socialist-capitalist divide (Hanley et al., 2015 may be an example), empirically debunked, for instance by Lompech (2016), has often nurtured the imaginary of 'cases of arrested development' within the common developmental paradigm (a study of a multinational's executives in Dunn, 2004, p.3) and led to ignore the local kernel (Sikor et al., 2017).

Hence, one can speak of two continuously reinforced aspects in the area's liminal condition at large: the dynamic, transitional one, and the steady one. In the symbolic dimension the transitional prefix "post-" established the status connected to temporarity, moving from one condition to another (Kołodziejczyk, 2014, p.136) and mediation between East and West (e.g. Szentivanyi's comparison of Hungary with a ferry). Transition, as may be intuited, entails the presence of a facilitator. Under the 'doxa of dependence' (Zarycki, 2014, p.2) the EU has preserved its role of a teacher "in the

East", imposing its successful model; and today the epiphenomenal CEE is also supposed to share its transition experience (Lightfoot et al., 2016) with the Western Balkan countries and beyond. Such vision of concentric zones of development was cemented in the concept of "Europe circulaire" by D'Estaing (2014). While some would shrug off the non-center as simply 'traditionally peripherial countries' (Loewen, 2015, p.206), Tomasz Zarycki was much more punctilious: drawing on Wallerstein's world-system theory for the external context and Rokkan's political cleavages for the internal one, he defined CEE's position as semi-peripheral toward the Western core (Zarycki, 2014, p.3).

The region is transitional also in the most literal – transportation – sense. In the 2000s the preparatory process and the accession to the EU set the vector for the economies' development. The Carpatho-Danubian area is now pierced by core corridors (linking the most important nodes of the comprehensive pan-EU logistics) of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) that integrates its roads, railway lines, rail-road terminals, and inland waterways, Danube being the Corridor VII. The initiative "*Via Carpathia*" envisions a cross-EU communication route through the Carpathians (from Lithuania to Greece), which was ideated in the Łańcut Declaration of 2006[22] and the Via Carpathia Declaration of 2010[23]. However, in the *Union Guidelines for the Development of the Trans-European Transport Network* (European Parliament/ European Commission, 2013) the *Via* was not regarded as a priority segment; neither was it one for the Civic Platform Polish government (thus, benefiting from the government change in 2015) (Poręba, 2018). The project was presented in 2013 in the "Europe of the Carpathians" discussion space (existing since 2007, in 2011 it was integrated in the Economic Forum in Polish Krynica Zdroj[24]). Geopolitically, the debate at the "Europe of the Carpathians" has

[22] The declaration encompassed the extension of TEN-T by the Via Carpathia and was signed by the ministers from Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary.
[23] Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece joined the initiative, and the declaration of the seven stipulated the itinerary: Klaipeda – Kaunas – Białystok – Lublin – Rzeszów – Kosice – Miskolc – Debrecen – Oradea – Logoj – Calafat/Constanta – Sofija/Svilengrad – Thessaloniki.
[24] The themes discussed at the Krynica Zdroj Conference touch upon geopolitical, regional political matters, as well as economy and environmental protection of the Carpathians.

evolved from the initial presentation of the region as an unalienable part of "Europe" into the speculations around the "Carpathian Oecumene" in 2016.[25]

Modern industrial and logistical parks have become the new titanic development hubs (the largest one in Southeast Europe is the Ploiesti West Park in submountain Muntenia). Understandably, a general lack of highway systems is still felt in the area, and existing national road networks require improvements, while the morphological complexity of the relief evidently has implications for the transport availability and connectivity. However, the number of road connections is relatively high for a mountain area (Dolzblasz, 2011, p.161), and it is in the interlinking of 'the truncated urban network in the regions and thus re-establishing functioning market areas for cities' that one of the most promising stimuli for project-based cross-border cooperation is found (Scott and Matzeit, 2006, p.12).

Cross-border interactions are what accentuates the "steady liminality" in the area. For centuries CEE has remained a fundamentally border region. In the same vein in which the authors of *Breaking Boundaries* premise that the 'book does not celebrate liminality but instead problematizes the many ways in which liminal conditions have come to shape the contemporary' (Horvath et al., 2015, p.8), one can say that the many aspects of marginality have played a key role in fashioning the CEE landscape. So it might be fruitful to use Megoran's biographic approach in the study of border space, which diachronically follows up on the 'conceptualization of international boundaries as social processes of bordering and bounding' (Megoran, 2012, p.1). The proclamation of "natural" state borders during the inter-world-war period made 'the borderlands region of Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe' (previously, the bordering space of four empires) one of the 'critical sites for the emergence of the Paris system' (Weitz, 2008, p.1316), and at the same time contributed to the Carpathian basin's being today a 'most diverse and conflict-ridden macroregion of Europe' in terms of ethnic and religious factors (Kocsis and Kocsisne-Hodosi, 1998, p.37). In a more pacific key, the *Politics of Good Neighbourhood* (Filep, 2017) analysed the cultural aspect of ethnic richness of the region, while with

[25] Recently its agenda has been developing, the focus was put on the geopolitical significance of the Carpathian region, so that in 2014 the Krynica Declaration supported the military actions of the Ukrainian government (Paruch, 2016, p.9).

regard to its hill-and-vale-pecked landscapes Lewkowicz (2011, p.169) noticed that in respect of culture the Tatra and Sub-Tatra mountains, for example, are among the richest regions in Poland and Slovakia.[26] The question of ownership and property rights marks the complex substrate of population succession in the region, closely related to the problem of (re-)settlement and migration. One of the domains where it has effect is administrative processes: like in several places across CEE, the current territories of the border-region national parks of Sumava and Podyji in the Czech Republic (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009, p.190) or of Fertő-Hanság in Hungary had been subject to displacements of germanophone populations after the World War II and to subsequent waves of land plot redistribution prior to the establishment of the environmental redoubts.

In the XX$^{th}$ century the *Pax Comunista* brought an alleviation to the tensions in the region (and even today it continues to influence the areas of agreement between the countries), but as Kocsis and Kocsisne-Hodosi (1998, p.37) justly remarked, 'no social or ideological system has succeeded in easing the tensions which have arisen from both the intricate intermingling of different ethnic groups, and the existence of the new, rigid state borders which fail to take into account the ethnic, cultural and historical traditions, economic conditions, and centuries-old production and commercial contacts'. Presently, 'states still matter' (O'Dowd, 2001, p.67), and the EU policies (of ethnic conflict moderation (Weitz, 2008) and beyond) have had ambivalent effects on the old discords brewing in the lands peculiarly charted with "thick" and "thin" borders.

The post-socialist metamorphoses maintained in the geographical dimension the 'buffer states' (O'Dowd, 2001, p.72) – in the space which once hosted the fortified alienation band of *gyepű*, the Little Entente cushion, and then the states that merely changed the camp, but not the function. And importantly, with the intensification of cross-border flows this epicenter of the periphery was additionally transformed into 'a

[26] Four small multi-ethnic border towns in the province of Banat, member of the Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa Euroregion, were picked by Bioteau (2007, p.9) 'as a model for the modernization of Central Europe in the continuation of its history': with mixed population and economic and scientific centers of Timisoara and Arad, while the historical region was divided between 3 states, forming 'cross-border spaces', 'even if they are not always rooted in clearly defined territories'. Similarly, Vinogradov and Pisarev (1966) studied Austro-Hungary as the precursor of a united Europe, and the Institute of Slavic Studies (Islamov et al., 1997) as well as Central European University (Romsics and Kiraly, 1999) examined it as an exemplary multinational state.

spatial and social 'filter' between the EU and the 'rest of the world'' (Bufon, 2011, p.35). The European Union attempted to 'create a zone of stability' in its own neighbourhood by helping in immigration and crime control (O'Dowd, 2001, p.72). Ironically, after the accession, especially during the recent migrant crisis, the situation in the former external buffer countries became inversed. Besides, a whole distinct bundle of matters concerns the areas of tangency between the EU and non-EU spaces: quite illustratively, the Subcarpathian district of Poland is represented as a part of 'the eastern wall' (Churski, 2008, p.582). Therefore, although in O'Dowd (2001, p.68) complained that borders were generally ignored in the analysis of Euro-integration, in the case of the CEE area transition they should inevitably be given special attention.

The Carpathians themselves are still a transboundary complex where natural conditions intertwine with political ones, such as regimes. Braudel (1972, p.34) offered a slightly extreme historical perspective in which 'the mountains are as a rule world apart from civilizations, which are an urban and lowland achievement'. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the mountains can be seen as amplifiers of peripherality (e.g. the Polish-Czech borderland case in Dolzblasz, 2011), and utmostly deserve attention[27]. Approximately two thirds of the Carpatho-Danubian area are the so-called border regions which on the scale of the European Union account for about 40% of the territory and are home to roughly one third of the Union's population (European Commission, 2017a, p.2). It is salient for them to economically lag behind (van Gorp, 2009) and to have weaker infrastructure and significantly higher unemployment in comparison to more central regions (Böhm, 2014, p.36). The Carpathian area similarly has faced persistent socio-economic challenges (Werners et al., 2010), though recently it has also shared the European tendencies in rural and mountainous area revitalisation and population return.

The borders in the Carpathian area are at the same time 'places of economic and political opportunity', be it licit or not (O'Dowd, 2001, p.73). For some, they could simply serve as a "grey zone", such that 'Romania's forests have provided refuge for those

[27] Among the most visible initiatives are the Mountain Partnership, an association of governmental and non-governmental members under the aegis of the UN, and the Mountain Forum, a loosely formed, predominantly internet-communication-based network supported by the Mountain Institute. It helps in policy elaboration for montane areas across the world, thus underlining the uniqueness and connectedness of mountain regions, accentuating thematic global policies for mountains and positioning the latter as policy laboratories (Debarbieux and Price, 2008).

fleeing persecution and conflict from medieval to modern times' (Olden, 2016, p.23). Or, alike, the mountains at the border were the place where *Solidarność* activists would meet with their Czech and Slovak fellow men to exchange experience and literature. At the local and regional level, the previously economically disadvantaged border areas behind the Iron Curtain (Haselsberger, 2014, p.510) have tried so far to seize the available opportunities (be it cultural mediation needs or price arbitrage), adding up to cross-border landscapes and exchanges. The importance of the latter can be illustrated by the fact that as the Ukraine Association Agreement with the EU was coming into force in 2017, those Ukrainians who benefit from the border economy started to admit that of all things, they would not like to see the border taken away from them. Indeed, in that patchy, "weird" land at the border all is scarce and all is abundant at once. From border trade this profusion-of-the-rare commodification perspective can casually be extended to protected areas scattered across the region. They are not only enswathed into complex vernacular rationalisations of their special status (for example, this phenomenon transpires in the observations on the Bialowieza National Park in Grygar, 2016), but most importantly, add another layer of liminality to this wilderness-littered montane borderlands at a European periphery.

There is then a phenomenon that focuses all those many faces of liminality into a single context as well as itself transforms the environment of CEE. The tourist and recreation industry has been propelling the growth of the tertiary sector in the region over the last three decades. It benefited from the mountainous character of the terrain (the Polish-Czech border area in Dolzblasz, 2011). Besides, a significant tourist flow has been due to natural attractions (national and landscape parks, monuments of nature), decent recreational infrastructure at affordable prices, and location in borderland areas accessible for both domestic and international tourists.

Let us further sketch the economic landscape of the area. One often finds the ancient mining zones intermittent with new facilities in the region. Its geomorphological features predetermined the "coal and ores" fate: to give a few examples, in the northern part, the Upper Silesian hard coal basin and the triangle of Tarnowske Gory-Cracow-Ostrava coal fields (with some lead and silver mines as well) have been exploited in the Czech Republic and Poland since the XVIII$^{th}$ century, which virtually shaped that area

economically and demographically. The site at the Cracow Gates of the Vistula valley supplied limestone and clay for the construction industry near and far. More to the east, Ukrainian Solotvino, a biggest centuries-old salt extraction site with a spin-off in health treatment facilities, was sunset only a few years ago. Basalt quarries were combined with active recreation in Hungarian Tardos and a natural stone reserve in Romanian Racosu de Jos. In the southern part, brown coal mining has left its imprint from Ploiesti in Romania to Kostolac in Serbia. As the outcome of regional mega-projects, hydroelectric power stations appeared, such as the Iron Gates I – the largest one in Europe – situated in the homonymous gorge between Romania and Serbia, Lotru-Ciunget in Transylvania, and Solina in the Beskids. Along with extractive infrastructure, those set a solid base for raw-material- and energy-intensive industries.[28]

The socialist centralisation of economies was rationalised rather along the macro-territorial planning lines than those of manufacturing convenience. From the 1950s onwards it supported the mushrooming of GDP-fueling large industrial complexes (and their urban "appendixes"), such as the steelworks in Galati or in the "model socialist town" of Dunaujvaros. Allegedly, those 'economies were much more polluting than economies in Western Europe' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.9) due to their specialisation and accelerated development efforts, but also to the lack of environmental awareness among state officials (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009, p.189). Hence, there appeared 'many 'hot spot' areas' of heavy pollution and human health risks (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.9). In agriculture advanced large-scale tillage and production systems resulted in deep landscape transformations, like floodplain drainage (Werners et al., 2010) or forest land conversion to other uses (a case from the Apuseni mountains in Turnock, 2001), especially in the Western and Southern Carpathians (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.108).[29]

In the 1990s the countries of the region went through the change that included, among other "recombinations", economic restructuring, standards revisions, ownership

[28] In the recent Katowice Declaration (Euracoal, 2015) the coal mining industry community called upon the member states, the European Commission and Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Energy Community to promote an 'energy and climate policy for all' and to respect the energy mix.

[29] For further reference, Bezák and Mitchley (2014) summarized the farming practices under socialism and studied changes in the agricultural landscape.

and taxation reforms. The different adaptation and transformation scenarios at the enterprise level were realised across all the countries. They would mean policy change with such consequences as increased logging and mining activities in and around mountain protected areas in 1993-2003 (Meessen et al., 2015). They could mean closures in the mining or manufacturing industry and agricultural production abandonment, which would necessitate reorientation efforts from the authorities or inhabitants. They also meant privatisation; and foreign investors stepped in[30]. Since large ex-socialist enterprises were costly to maintain, privatisation in its first years led to a downturn in the operations and output (example in Werners et al., 2010). Consequently, many villages and towns experienced population decrease and age structure disbalancing against the backdrop of worsening poverty and disparities in regional development. In the meanwhile, forestry remained important for the Carpathian economies, particularly in Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.10). In the energy supply mix of today coal and nuclear power are leading, but hydropower and renewable sources have the growing share. Therefore, on the one hand, after a period – if one may draw a bottom line – of micro-, meso- and macro-regional turbulences, the countries felt a pressure to grow – and to do so in a "smart" way – in order to reach the level of minimal convergence with the European core economies.

On the other hand, the region saw the new constraints of following high processual standards imposed on it. The pre- and post-accession (for those countries of the region that are current EU members) Europeanisation comprised such cardinal changes – meant to homogenise the new EU procedural space and contain the state authorities through decentralisation – as administrative reforms. On the wake of the CEE countries accession, the European Commission (EC) Regulation 1059/2003 introduced the classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS). That sort of reorganisation at the local level might have led 'to a loss of expertise and a loss of institutional memory' (Ryder, 2015, p.11). The reorganisation was handled differently by different national

[30] For instance, similarly to how Dacia plants entered the Renault family of companies, the leading Borsodi Vegyi chemical factory in Kazincbaricka, north-eastern Hungary, turned into BorsodChem as a part of the Wanhua Group. Today manufacturing is being largely outsourced to the region: e.g. Vokswagen and Kia Motors in Slovakia, Audi in Hungary, and Fiat in Serbia. Besides, the automotive and transportation sectors were a key priority of the Hungarian Presidency in the V4 in 2017. Hungary meant thereby to support digitalisation and autonomous vehicle development.

administrations, especially given that some areas lacked traditions of decentralisation (Palne Kovacs, 2009, p.41). In the international dimension, Robert Parkin (2013, p.48) noticed in the case of Poland[31] that the creation of new territorial units had opened 'new opportunities for the development and possibly creation of new local and regional identities <…> including those that cross national borders', especially given that the basic administrative unit of NUTS 3 is deemed small enough 'to be significantly affected by the border' (Raczaszek, 2011, p.17).

When in 1993 the EU invited the CEE states to join in, it implicitly established the model of the future asymmetric (the importance of the asymmetry discussed in Melegh, 2006, p.30) and hierarchical relations based on the so-called civilian power of the Union (the term of Duchene). In that way, it also set the direction for the transformation processes by creating an ever more elaborate web of conditions and criteria to evaluate the aspiring members' readiness, which involved institutional choices at various levels (Dimitrova, 2001, p.8). This mechanism of "governance by enlargement" (Idem) is found only in the candidate and recent accession countries: leveraging the condition of institutional and societal transformation, it impacts institution and state order formation (surpassing the scope of 'normative power' in Sjursen, 2006). Furthermore, Palmowski emphasized (2011, p.654), the relative rapidness of the acquis acceptation in CEE (as compared to the 15 core countries) and addition of a new supranational layer to the regional, national and transnational regulations virtually conditioned a change in the nature of state which was tilted toward the 'dominance of executive over the legislature'. Thus, CEE is a spectacular example of the tendency of regionalism to change the landscape of the national state noticed by Hameiri and Jayasuriya (2011, p.20) in the frames of their exploration of the regulatory regionalism argument.

[31] The reform conducted in Poland in 1999 to make the administrative structure of the country conform the EU territorial organisation was particularly radical: its 49 voivodships were reorganized into 16 along the principles of the three-tier model. The level NUTS 1 corresponds to macro-regions (6 units), NUTS 2 – to voivodships (16 units), NUTS 3 – to sub-regions that do not appear in the Polish territorial division (45 units), NUTS 4 – to districts (*powiat*) and towns with district status (379 units); besides there are communes (*gmina*). All of those have 'varying degrees of historical precedent and popular legitimacy' (Parkin, 2013, p.48). To enhance decentralisation and self-government, voivodships have their own parliaments (*sejm*) (Churski, 2008). NUTS 2 are the basic units for structural funds management (Palne Kovacs, 2009, p.41).

Still, there are external and internal structural weaknesses. In the external dimension they make possible a sort of a colonial arbitrage. For example, if relatively 'lax environmental regulations' (O'Dowd, 2001, p.74) in 2006 permitted to base a lucrative business on the import of waste from new EU-member countries to Ukraine (Ahrens, 2006)[32], in 2018 – with the shrinking of the market for the EU's hazardous refuse – waste import legislation drew attention in Poland (Moore, 2018). Though the Europeanisation of the fresh and aspiring EU-members under 'discursive stigmatization' (Zarycki, 2014, p.1) is not a new, neither a historically unique process for the region, it acquires a new edge when one observes the countries being simultaneously criticisised from a supranational tribune and misled in practical undertakings.

In the internal political dimension, the countries of the region experienced 'fragmentation subsequent to the political opening up and liberal competition' (Bioteau, 2007, pp.11-12) which showed itself in the vivid political debate from Romania to Poland and even in dramatic upheavals (in particular in Serbia and Ukraine). The polities of the region also share similar perturbations: in 2012 rule of law problems were diagnosed in Romania; in 2014, after a blow to the Hungarian judiciary three years earlier, the "go-between" prime minister Orban (an apologetic stance can be found in O'Sullivan, 2015) opted for the "illiberal democracy"; in 2015 the nationalist conservative Law and Justice party (PiS) won the parliamentary elections in Poland. Reflecting on the regional developments in 2017, the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza* Adam Michnik sarcastically remarked: '*Les extrêmes se touchent*'. Consequently, in August 2017 a special issue of the US-based *Social Europe* pronounced itself on "How to deal with Poland and Hungary" (Ekiert, 2017). In January 1990 Sachs, an overseas economic adviser to the governments of Poland and Yugoslavia, had already given clear instruction to the old and new Europeans in "What is to be done?".

The populist demarches of the conservative governments summed into the phenomenon of "back-out", "roll-back", or "backsliding" on liberal democracy, 'unilateral and systematic acts by a member state government that violates the laws and/or the norms of the EU' (Sitter et al., 2016, p.9). (The phenomenon is rather

[32]'[B]efore 1989, some 675,000 tons of toxic waste were transported annually from the former Federal Republic of Germany to the former German Democratic Republic.' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.159)

ubiquitous globally (Diamond, 2008), but strangely enough has not being "normalised" as a kind of democratic "grinding".) Given the implicit understanding of the 'subordinated' (and subsidised) position of the region (Zarycki, 2014, p.10), the attempts at effective contrarianism caused particular irritation and were met with the usual approach of branding as '"narrow-minded" and un-European' (Kauppi, 2002, p.26), which laid ground for further "democratic' discrimination between 'true' and 'untrue' Europeans' (Bufon, 2011, p.35). To generalise it for the sake of illustration, if one looks at the power array chartered by Galtung (1973), over the last decades the EU has been gradually exhausting its resource of benevolence and from the use of ideological power through that of remunerative one moved to the use of punitive power.

It should be noted that though faced with similar challenges, the countries of the region focus on different response approaches (from social development to economic priorities in the cohesion improvement plans of both members and aspirants for 2014-2020[33]) and 'demonstrate variation in the pursuit of competitiveness and growth' (Loewen, 2015, p.215). The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria are relatively comparable in terms of foreign policy resource; Serbia and Ukraine are slightly less endowed. This gives enough space for a "peers dialog", and the first four countries listed appear satisfied with their Visegrad Group (V4) collaboration format. At the moment, the Group, even if operated as a merely geographical grouping for intra-regional cooperation (Martonyi, 2017), coincidentally became the major regional forum for "alter-integrationism". After 'political and economic expansion [was] followed by crisis' (Loewen, 2015, p.206) that shook the EU member closer together, the Group has been counter-balancing the intensified solidarity-enforcement rhetoric from the post-political arsenal of the EU with the insistence on voluntary nature of solidarity measures (Visegrad Group, 2017). What can be discerned therein is squaring of accounts for the increased "maladaptation cost" within the "Greater European Union". Brousseau and Raynaud (2007, p.25) defined these as 'the difference between net output obtained by

[33] The reliance on Cohesion Policy to finance growth-enhancing investment has increased:

> 'In 2010–2012, Cohesion Policy funding was equivalent to 21% of public investment in the EU as a whole, to 57% in the Cohesion countries taken together and to over 75% in Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria <...> The impact of legislative and regulatory measures <...> on economic and social cohesion is more ambiguous.' (European Commission, 2014b, p.xxxiii)

implementing the best solution and <…> by following a more generic rule'. But unlike in their model, the 'rule' in the EU case does not necessarily come from a compromise. One of the channels (or wrappings) for the resulting pressure fatigue are 'ideologies of eastness' motivated by 'the Western domination' (Zarycki, 2014, p.24).

Although it was found that CEE is in opposition 'to many aspects of European climate policy' (Jänicke and Quitzow, 2017, p.132), in internal political arenas ecology does not appear as a remarkable cleavage-setter (Hanley et al., 2015). At a colourful expression of Stephen Whitefield, '[t]here are dogs that continue not to bark', that is there is 'absence of any real association between environmental or Green politics in the East with other political issues or with the left-right dimension' (Idem). The same is true for the vertical of internal decision-making levels. The main tension is hence assumed to be between the 'culture' (Idem) of the decision maker and the cumulative pressures from the EU experienced at that level. (For instance, Paavola (2016, p.149) sustained that 'decisions on conservation are in the end often made locally by land users and managers'.)

To put it in a nutshell, the 'patterns of ideological meaning' (Agnew, 2011, p.322) cast upon Central and Eastern Europe allow for a heteronomic reading of the regional experience: from the forsaken Westphalian equality (for a review see Krasner, 2001) to the emblematic paternalistic approach of external stakeholders to the nature and people of the Carpatho-Danubian amalgam. The area is still full of transformative processes: Europeanisation, economic modernization, (de)politicisation, peripheralisation, and more. There are both positive and negative risks – danger and power (Douglas, 1966, p.95) – arising from the condition of liminality nurtured by such 'blurriness of transformation' (Cohen, 1994, p.55). The area image, in part, goes through the process of its own negative definition, especially as it was pieced together by a 'collective need of not being only "ex"' (Bioteau, 2007, p.11). In part, it is played off in the scholastic poker of the policy makers, which takes place in the discursive and regulatory domains; and those are rich in symptomatic cues. Attila Melegh (2006, p.3) testified to the symbolical importance of the belonging within Europe for the CEE countries, when noticing how the come-back of "Central Europe" marked the change of the discourse in the early 1980s.

Otherwise, while still reduced to an adaptive position, the region remains an important industrial, transportational and environmental agglomerate.

### 2.2. Historical Experience of Environmental Cooperation

Now, the key points of regional environmental cooperation development should be addressed. The first attempt at a commission dedicated to the international regime over the Danube was stipulated in the Treaty of Paris of 1856. In 1921 the permanent International Commission for Danube was established to last less than two decades. The Danube Commission founded in 1948 is the guardian of the regime at present. The Declaration on water management questions on the Danube was issued in Bucharest in 1985. In 1994, as the Danube River Protection Convention was signed in Sofia, the cooperation architecture was strengthened with the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) having 15 contracting parties and a more environment-focused mandate. The observer's status in it is held, among others, by the Carpathian Convention, Regional Environmental Center, Danube-Carpathians Programme (DCP) of WWF, Danube Parks. In 1996 ICPDR launched its Transnational Monitoring Network (TNMN) for the Danube; and in 1998 the Sofia Convention finally entered into force.

In 1922-1931 the Carpathian Association operated to facilitate the cooperation of geologists across the region; in 1956 it resumed the activities and added the Balkans in the organisational scope. For the first time a framework for a comprehensive territorial cooperation in a part of the Carpathians appeared with the signing of the Cracow Protocol (for the protection of the Tatra Mountains) between Poland and Czechoslovakia in May 1924. The idea of creating a chain of national parks in the respective borderland remained germinal until 1948 when the Tatras National Park was created in Czechoslovakia, followed by the Tatra Mountains, Pieniny Mountains and Babia Gora Parks in Poland in 1954 (Więckowski, 2004, pp.76–77). Czechoslovakia mirrored the natural reserves with the Pieniny Mountains Park in 1967 and the Upper Orava Landscape Park in 1979 (Idem).

Thus, cooperation in the field of nature protection, including cross-border matters, within the Socialist Bloc was active, yet challenging like throughout the whole XX$^{th}$ century (Bihun et al., 2008, p.6), and covered administrative and scientific spheres (Więckowski, 2004, pp.76–77). Coordination between national park administrations was in the meantime an ice-breaker for formal cooperation across closed borders (Turnock, 2001, p.17). After the acceleration of the transformation process in the 1990s, the cooperation followed the trend toward institutionalisation (Dolzblasz, 2011, p.158; Lewkowicz, 2011). One of the most obvious motivations for collaboration was the concern that leaving important resources or routes at the discretion of one country would be an undesirable situation (the Suez Canal problem might be a historical analogy). In 1991 the first trilateral biosphere reserve in the world was inaugurated in the region – as part of UNESCO's international scientific programme "Man and the Biosphere" (MaB). The idea dating back to 1966, the proposal for such a transboundary protected area (TBPA) was submitted in May 1990. The East Carpathians mountain biosphere reserve (ECBR) with 'the total area of 2,132 square kilometers encompasses six neighbouring protected areas in Poland, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine' (Niewiadomski, 2004, p.169) and counts four distinct vegetation types. However, 'no joint management plan for the ECBR as an integral, multi-national unit' existed to back up the initiative, so the reserve 'had little impact on actual cooperation across borders' (Bihun et al., 2008, p.12).

To support the reserve the Foundation for the Eastern Carpathians Biodiversity Conservation (ECBC) was created by the World Bank as part of the Biodiversity Conservation project of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) with the co-financing from the MacArthur Foundation, WWF etc. It was registered in 1995 in the stable legal and banking environment of Geneva with the objective 'to encourage, organise, conduct and promote activities serving to protect the overall biodiversity of the Eastern Carpathians Mountains zone' (Niewiadomski, 2002, p.138). WWF gave support in 'the design and legal establishment' of the Foundation (Niewiadomski, 2004, p.169). So as to reduce operational expenses in 2012, the trust fund was reestablished as the Carpathians Biodiversity Conservation Foundation with the seat in the border village of Stakčín,

Slovakia. Currently the management board is the managing authority that consists of four representatives (from Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia and the World Bank).

The Central European Initiative (CEI) was founded in Budapest in November 1989 as a regional intergovernmental forum for supporting Euro-integration and sustainable development. Among its objectives it has contribution to the building of sustainable economy (in supporting the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) operation), addressing the climate change in the region, nature and biodiversity conservation. Importantly, it is based on the principle of consensual governance.

As civil society organizations were turning ever more numerous since the 1980s, Miklos Persanyi (1993) described Western support to the then nascent environmentalist movement at the example of Hungary. The countries were being integrated in the 'world civic politics' of Western democracies (Breitmeier and Rittberger, 1997, p.11),[34] and affiliates of international NGOs (INGOs) as well as regional and national NGOs focused on rural development and nature conservation (Werners et al., 2010). This was a period when independent local projects in economic or environmental cooperation across the region started to receive grants from environmental and charitable foundations (Turnock, 2001, p.18) and brought together local actors from NGOs, business, academia and government (Werners et al., 2010). [35] The first local "aggregator" NGOs started to appear, for example, the International Carpathian Bridge that operated in the 1990s and pulled together public ecological organisations (Turnock, 2001, p.18). The EU's funds also played their role in the cooperation development: for the pre-accession countries the major instrument was PHARE Cross-border Cooperation, a sub-programme of the PHARE

[34] Looking at other geographic contexts, Grugel (2004, p.612) discussed the EU model of regionalization, with its reliance on civil society rather than on state programmes, in Latin America:

> 'The EU now lays claim to a set of interests in the region that go beyond questions of economic governance <...> tries to encourage a shift within Latin America towards balanced growth, social responsibility, and what it sees as good governance through diplomacy and foreign policy, elite interaction, policy advice, political summits and EU-sponsored seminars.'

[35] An example of the funding institutions is the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE Trust) that existed in 2001-2012 and had environmental protection on the list of its priorities for the area of its operation (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia). It was a coalition of private foundations (the Ford Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Open Society Institute, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund) and the U.S. German Marshall Fund, financing NGOs, non-profit organisations, educational institutions, and individuals. Its goal was to create "sustainable" groups promoting civil society and the "public good", including cross-border and regional activities, as well as to cement the neoliberal order. A board member Heike Mackerron explained: 'It wasn't clear that all countries would continue on the path towards democracy and a market economy.' (Milner, 2012)

Euroregions (Dolzblasz, 2011, p.159). At the same time, the EU called for more participatory policy making, which in some cases tipped internal political balance (Werners et al., 2010), and supported 'flexible strategic alliances' between local political, administrative and business elites (O'Dowd, 2001, p.72). States would progressively become even less homogenous actors (Hamman, 2014, p.56), being involved in constant agenda harmonisation with supra- and sub-entities in the governability landscape. The "Green Carpathians" development programme ("*Zielone Karpaty*") was an early example of subnational cooperation initiative: after the creation of the Subcarpathian voivodship in Poland in 1999, Polish, Slovakian and Ukrainian regions worked together to pursue economic development of their marginalised areas and to mitigate ecology concerns.

The Conference "The Green Backbone of Central and Eastern Europe" held in 1998 in Cracow concluded with the CEE countries approving of the idea of the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN) as the means to implement the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS) for 1996-2016. In June 2001 Austria, Romania, the European Commission and the Stability Pact launched the initiative for 'giving a new political impetus to the strengthening and development of multilateral relations among Danubian countries, without creating new institutions' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, n.d.). In 2002 the Danube Cooperation Process (DCP) was formally established, the participants being 13 countries of the Danube basin (Germany, Austria, Czechia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldavia and Ukraine), the European Commission, and the Regional Cooperation Council. DCP was aligned with the Euro-Atlantic integration processes and included the promotion of democratic values. But later, with the adoption of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) the initiative lost its 'particularity' (Idem).

In August 2001 in Židlochovice Castle the Ramsar authorities of Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia signed the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the creation of the trilateral Ramsar Site to conserve and restore the Morava-Dyje floodplains (RiverNet, 2001). Important actors in the implementation of such would be NGOs Daphne (Slovakia), Distelverein (Austria), Veronica (the Czech Republic) and the WWF DCP Office, organising and promoting transborder cooperation. 2001 to 2007 was the running time of

the Danube Regional Project "Strengthening the Implementation Capacities for Nutrient Reduction and Transboundary Cooperation in the Danube River Basin". It was led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and GEF (in cooperation with ICPDR) and supported local information gathering and knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

The Carpatho-Danubian area became also part of a global change in the approaches to cooperation, the so-called New Regionalism[36] that took off in the late 1980s and retains a prevalent role today. In 1980 the Madrid Convention on transfrontier cooperation between territorial authorities was signed, and Euroregions gradually became one of the forms of cross-border cooperation (CBC), defined by Perkmann (2003, p.155) as activities between subnational public authorities aimed at solving practical problems and able to generate a cross-border region. The CEE countries felt enthusiastic about the Council of Europe's borderland cooperation initiative[37] through which historical and geographical areas could be transformed from objects into subjects 'capable of articulating the transnational interests' (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000, p.461). The first euroregional initiatives between Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic date back to the second half of the 1990s, and right from the outset municipalities were able to co-operate on the administration of European funds with national ministries (Böhm, 2014, p.45). Perkmann (2003) followed the evolution of the Euroregion format to give the example of the Carpathian Euroregion[38] shaped in implementing PHARE and CREDO measures. It stretches from the High Tatras in the North-Western Carpathians to the Ciucului Mountains in the southeast. Apart from the Carpathian one and Biharia within it,

[36] The ways to label new developments in regionalisation and cooperation have not come in unison: for instance, along with Neoregionalism of Balme there is New Regionalism of Keating (Perkmann, 2003, p.153).

[37] Andreas Kiefer (2014, p.71) argued that country borders in Europe are more and more often seen as a source of cooperation opportunities (especially in the times of economic crisis) between authorities and citizens; that the benefits include improved governance through common economic management (including infrastructure sharing between local and regional actors) and the economies of scale as well as higher territorial cohesion.

[38] According to Niewiadomski (2004, p.169), the Carpathian Euroregion was established in 1993 under an agreement signed in Debrecen by representatives of local and regional governments of the border regions of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Since 1997 the region includes border areas of Romania (the counties of Satu Mare, Sălaj, Maramureş, Botoşani; Harghita since 2000) and totals in 161 $km^2$ with circa 16 million inhabitants. The Council of the Euroregion is composed of 3 members from each country. The seat of the International Secretariat is in Nyiregyhaza. Expert consultations are held in Work Commissions.

there are 17 other Euroregions[39] in the Carpatho-Danubian area; and they 'have promoted cross-border cooperation in everything from trade to culture' (Parkin, 2013, p.56). Some of those later evolved into the EU's European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), entitled with legal personhood, along with units created *ex-novo* the cumulative number being 22[40]. Both Euroregions and EGTCs can be members of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), have environmental matters on their agenda and can process funding allocated. Such organizations as Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (CESCI) take the position of collaboration facilitators.

However, after the accession, as Parkin reported, some of the local authorities started to 'argue that the Euroregions are now redundant, especially given the lack of formal power' (Idem).[41] Given the difficulties faced by the project developers, he also had grounds to liken Euroregions to tribunes for 'exhortations to better cooperation' (Idem): in the first decades cooperation could hardly advance in economic and cultural domains – beyond formal rituals – since some Euroregions were 'too large and cumbersome to be operationally effective' (Scott and Matzeit, 2006, p.12). Although the EU made it a point 'to replace cross-border conflict with cooperation' (O'Dowd, 2001, p.68), at times old popular animosity would stand in the way, like in the Hungarian–Ukrainian and Hungarian–Romanian border regions (Scott and Matzeit, 2006, p.12).

In terms of institution building, another document adopted in Bucharest was crucial. In 2001 the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative (established in 1999 as CEI; CERI since 2004)[42] – launched by WWF under DCP and based on the "Global 200" – drafted the *Status of the Carpathians* and in April convened the Carpathian-Danube Summit "Green Light for Europe" in Bucharest focused on nature protection and sustainable development. There, 14 states signed the Declaration on Environment and Sustainable

[39] Namely, Beskidy, Tatras, Silesia, White Carpathian, Danubius, Danube 21, Kras, Slaná-Rimava, Ipoly, Eurobalkans, Neogradiensis, Ister-Granum, Podunajský Trjspolok, Vagus-Danubius-Ipolia, Danube–Criş–Mureş–Tisza, Cieszyn Silesia and Stara Planina Euroregions.

[40] Namely, Tatras, Pons Danubii, Abaúj-Abújban, Bánát-Triplex Confinium, Ister-Granum, Karst-Bódva, Ung-Tisza-Túr-Sajó, NOVUM, Novohrad-Nógrád, Gate to Europe, European Border Cities, Europe - building common future, Central European Transport Corridor, Bodrogközi, Via Carpatia, Tritia, Tisza, SVINKA, Spoločný region, Sajó-Rima, Rába-Duna-Vág and Pontibus.

[41] Benč et al. (2015, p.22) concluded that the participating regions of the Carpathian Euroregion 'shifted their focus more to the various CBC and transnational initiatives' of the EU, so that the institution struggled to survive, being 'only driven by its inertia'.

[42] The CERI Secretariat is hosted by the Daphne Center for Applied Ecology in Slovakia.

Development in the Carpathian-Danube region[43], underlining their intention to use, in particular, the EU funds (such as Interreg). Ukraine put forward its initiative to conclude a convention for the region. During the intergovernmental consultations organised by UNEP in 2002 in Bolzano a framework convention was recommended. Then, the Carpathian Convention was signed in 2003 in Kiev.[44] The temporary Secretariat was opened within the UNEP office in Vienna.[45] For the subsequent activities under the auspices of the Convention, what is summarised in the following observation has been quite important: 'In the Carpathians, the precise area covered by the Convention is still unclear.' (Fall and Egerer, 2004, p.99) Thus, the Convention 'defined the geographical scope of the region', but did not unambiguously define its boundaries, as far as 'historical, geographical or economic criteria were not the guiding criteria' (Paruch, 2016, p.3), unlike the political will.

Different conceptualisations of a region are common for contexts with multiple actors (Wassenberg and Beck, 2011; Soja, 1999). The 'purposefully-vague spatial definition' (Fall and Egerer, 2004, p.98) of the area under the Carpathian Convention falls well under the fuzzy boundary type, that is, through this deliberate spatial ambiguity (Walsh et al., 2012, p.3) at least flexibility in the organisation's activities portfolio and partnerships has been achieved.[46] Yet, as far as it can be well assumed that '[t]he boundary encapsulates the identity of the community' (Cohen, 1985, p.12), boundary fuzziness potentially spells inconsistent visions of the region across the actor spectrum, absence of a "compelling" regional identity, and the ensuing higher risk of volatile participation. Leaving substantial room for the play with inclusion and exclusion, it renders the region '*politically-challenged*' (Latour, 2005, p.20) in the sense that – to bring

[43] According to Turnock (2001, p.20), the summit confirmed the shared need for agreed conservation programmes in priority areas: based on the focal species areas approach, a set of priority Biodiversity Important Areas (BDIAs) was identified comprising areas of habitats (48), plants (27), large carnivores and other mammals (15), amphibians and reptiles (10), and birds (6).

[44] Interestingly enough, continuity with the Alpine Convention can be seen also in the fact that the document is referred to as 'the United Nations Framework Convention' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.39).

[45] The location of the organs of the regional organization prompts one of many "fuzzy" questions, that of inclusion of Austria in the region: while most researchers refer to 7 countries, a UNEP (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.18) report reads: 'By some definitions, the westmost tip of the Carpathians occurs in eastern Austria ("Hainburger Berge" Hill near Vienna; 480 m).'

[46] The absence of an agreement on the geographical scope of the Convention and on where the Permanent Secretariat should be located were indicated as impediments to the implementation of the Convention's objectives in Ukraine (Weiß and Streifeneder, 2011, p.38).

further probably not the most innovative idea of Fall and Egerer (2004, p.100) of the political discourse-constructing role of maps, characterized as 'profoundly political objects': the looser the definition, the freer one can navigate and the more the whole architecture is power- rather than rules-reliant. The developments in the Danube and Carpathians area demonstrate examples of regionalisation rivalry, cannibalisation of civil society projects by large EU initiatives and "natural" centralisation of environmental activities.

As to CERI, it became an active element of the shift to community-based conservation approach, which took place in the 2000s (Meessen et al., 2015). It initially was envisioned as part of the Pan-European Ecological Network with, to put in WWW-biased way, biodiversity lying at its core (Turnock, 2001, p.20). CERI constituted an informal network of more than 50 different local organizations from 7 countries, focused on conservation and sustainable economy, and importantly, it had also governmental participants. In its first five years it 'set up 17 thematic working groups, carried out studies and inventories on natural resources, published the Carpathian List of Endangered Species, 17 theme reports, 9 fact-sheets in several languages, identified 30 Priority Areas for Biodiversity Conservation, developed a vision for future protected areas in the Carpathians, funded field projects, organised training' (Niewiadomski, 2004, pp.170-171). It also was captured in the process of transition from nature conservation to virtually holistic sustainability (it was seen as 'a more active approach that takes into account not only ecological interactions but also economic and sociocultural aspects' by Meessen et al., 2015).

The Carpathian Project of 2005-2008 (protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians in a transnational framework) involved 18 partners from all the Carpathian Convention member states. Financed under Interreg CADSES (Central Adriatic Danubian South-Eastern European Space, 2000-2006), it was aimed at setting a transnational framework for the application of EU spatial development policies throughout the region, enhancing sustainable development, building on the region's potential while safeguarding its natural and cultural heritage (Borsa et al., 2009, p.162). The activities of project included: gathering and harmonisation of spatial data and maps, developing recommendations and common vision documents, implementing pilots as

well as publishing a handbook for local authorities and development actors, the Carpathian Environment Outlook, VASICA (Visions And Strategies in the Carpathian Area) and the Atlas of the Carpathian Macroregion.

The BioREGIO project of 2011-2014 (integrated management of biological and landscape diversity for sustainable regional development and ecological connectivity in the Carpathians) with partners from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Romania and from Austria and Italy. Funded under the EU South-East Europe (SEE) Transnational Cooperation Programme, it had Romsilva – Piatra Craiului National Park Administration as the Lead Partner (among 15 others were UNEP/GRID Warsaw, UNEP Vienna, WWF DCP) and six ministries for environment as observers. The project was meant to implement the main provisions of the Biodiversity Protocol of the Convention and thus, to improve the management of the shared natural heritage (via multi-level governance and cross-sector integration) and promotion of natural values. The deliverables included the first Red list of habitats and species of the Carpathians and a list of invasive species, standards in the form of common integrated management measures (CIMM), and identified opportunities for regional development for protected areas. One of the partners, the Slovak State Nature Conservancy[47] led the set-up of the Joint Biodiversity Information System (CJBIS). Based on the WWF DCP Carpathian Countries Protected Areas Clearing House Mechanism (CCPACHM), it is an interactive public on-line platform offering visualised data on on protected areas and information on the biological and landscape diversity in the region (BioREGIO, n.d.). The project had a transformative effect on national policies and not only permitted sharing experience with the Alpine region, but also yielded the *Synthesis Report* on the transferability of the project results to the Dynaric Arc consigned by the European Academy of Bolzano (Köck et al., 2014).

Other projects within the framework of the Convention count, for example, "Access2Mountain" (Sustainable Mobility and Tourism in Sensitive Areas of the Alps and the Carpathians), Alps-Carpathians Corridor and "Bigfoot – Crossing Generations, Crossing Mountains". However, there has been space for private initiatives as well.

[47] SNC is a unitary governmental organization for the implementation of nature and landscape protection measures in the country. It was established in 2000 as an advisory body to the Ministry of Environment.

Under the EU financial framework for 2007-2013, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine completed transfrotier projects on waste management, ecological connectivity, renewable energy etc., while in the frames of the Romanian-Moldavian-Ukrainian cooperation the project "ECO-Carpathians – Eco-Business Development in Border Carpathians as Chance for Better Economic Competitiveness" was implemented. In 2009 22 environmental organizations, including the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), released the common position statement *Save the Danube as a lifeline!* (WWF, 2009) that delineated possible steps towards sustainable navigation. That same year, the Foundation Conservation Carpathia (FCC, n.d.) was established by 12 philanthropists and conservationists with the goal of stopping illegal logging and protecting Carpathian forests. The organisation purchases land (140 square kilometers so far) and leases hunting rights with private and public money.[48] These landholdings are subject to protection, reforestation, and rewilding to be later returned to the state for permanent protection as a National Park.

It is important to note that countries' authorities have experience in coordinating international environmental cooperation with regard to other parts of their territories as well. In the first place, the counterparts are the respective neighboring states (not limited to the Danube basin) both within the European Union (e.g. Germany, Lithuania, Croatia, Austria) and across its southern and eastern borders (e.g. Turkey, the Republic of Belarus). The array of such collaboration formats is wide and growing: apart from Euroregions' agendas, actions under the Helsinki Convention and an Interreg Programme for the sake of the Baltic Sea's ecology, partaking in the implementation of the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organisation's efforts, joint work on a multilateral (e.g. the including of the Republic of Moldova in the Danube Delta Project) or bilateral basis (e.g. Polish-Belarusian management of the Białowieża Forest national parks), along with receiving assistance and funding from other countries for addressing environmental challenges within their own boundaries (e.g. German support for Serbia on the Environment track (German Cooperation, n.d.)).

[48] To give an example, within the EU LIFE+ programme the project for the ecological restoration of forest and aquatic habitats in the Upper Dambovita valley, Muntii Fagaras is funded. Its objective is to accelerate rewilding and to restore the original riparian vegetation and aquatic eco-system of the Dimbovita basin.

In sum, the regional cooperation in the post-socialist times has supported the processes of Europeanisation. Cross-border projects contributed not only to region-building in social, economic, infrastructural and tourist spheres, but also to creating a network of actors sharing the interests and values (Dolzblasz, 2011, p.158). In that way transborder regions have been the "soft spaces" to hold together geographically close pieces of territories from different jurisdictions, enhancing integration and territorial cohesion (Kiefer, 2014, p.71). A large part of those policies and activities has been as a rule centered on valorisation of the Carpathians and the Danube in their various capacities.[49]

On the other hand, a solid fundament has been laid for systemic complexity of the regional ecological cooperation. There is a certain "overcrowding" of the political agenda due to multiple simultaneous negotiation processes (Breitmeier and Rittberger, 1997, p.9) resulting in overlapping solution maps. The conditions have permitted the number of actors to increase, and many of them, collocated geographically, are indeed 'heterogeneous in terms of their interests, values and notions of justice' (Paavola, 2005, p.143). Besides, even if the benefits of centralisation are numerous, with a larger number of stakeholders it is harder to find all-pleasing solutions (Brousseau and Raynaud, 2007, p.25); consequently, 'environmental decisions are becoming more difficult to make' (Paavola, 2005, p.143), and that tends to trigger decision-making simplification mechanism (e.g. criterion bias).

### 2.3. Legal Framework of Environmental Cooperation

In order to better understand the decision-making processes, it is necessary to take a look at the regulatory space – to see how the natural and historical baggage of the Carpatho-Danubian area is bundled up by a net of regulations. Besides, the intersubjective nature of norms and the liminal condition of the region combine into an opportunity to explore the regime elements across diverse and intersecting discourses and cultures 'even when [norms] are not shared' (Schmidt, 2008, p.321).

[49] More recently, in 2011 a conference entitled "Europe rich with the Carpathians" was organised by the Center of Polish-Slovak cooperation in Nowy Targ.

European countries make part of global regulatory mechanisms for the matters of environment, firmly based on the European particularist model (Lindberg et al., 2014). The United Nations system, especially UNEP, is the bedrock of the global collaboration. From the Stockholm Conference of 1972 to the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015 when *Agenda 2030* (United Nations General Assembly, 2015) was adopted, the United Nations provided for the key forum where the ecological vision of the planet's future was fashioned. After 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), conceived between 2000 and 2005, as one of the main global tools. Additionally, the new Agenda stipulated the integrative water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus principle. The second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (UNEA2) took place in May 2016 in Nairobi; it was accompanied by the 16th Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum that brought together 300 participants. With 39 donor countries on board, including the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the Global Environment Facility is the major financial mechanism for funding environmental agreements observance in developing and transition countries. Its Trust Fund is being administered by the World Bank that transfers money to the apposite UN bodies (IBRD, UNEP, UNDP, FAO, EBRD etc.).

The high-profile Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNEP in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD); then the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) entered into force in 1994. In the Article 4 it draws attention to fragile mountainous ecosystems (United Nations, 1992). The Chapter 13 of *Agenda 21* (UNDSD, 1992) specifically addresses the action plan for the mountains. The International Year of Mountains 2002 saw the Mountain Global Summit take place in Bishkek; and further initiatives have been directed at retaining local people in the montane regions and supporting sustainable livelihoods globally (Debarbieux and Price, 2008, p.152).

Apart from the subject matter, global environmentalism has been innovative also in terms of governance. For example, the REDD+ Programme (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) that offers financial incentives for lowering carbon emissions under UNFCCC presents an example of a new political architecture, as

'linkages across multiple sites at local, regional, and global levels' can be nested in a regime or in separate institutions (Morin et al., 2013 pp.571-572,). There is then a number of universal agreements defining approaches to different ecological challenges: the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (1971), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES; 1973), the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS; 1979) and the offspring Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA; 1995), the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1989), the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)[50] with 175 signatories; the Convention to Combat Desertification (1992); the UN Water Convention (1997). The Espoo Convention of 1991 and its Kiev Protocol cover the matter of strategic environmental assessment.

The Environment for Europe process for UNECE countries advances under the aegis of the UN. Additionally, the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998) is valid for the EU space. Other European agreements include: the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979), the UNECE Water Convention (1992), the European Agreement concerning International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways (2000), the European Landscape Convention (2000), and the Multilateral agreement among the countries of South-Eastern Europe for implementation of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (2008). In 1995 57 European members of the Council of Europe signed PEBLDS; as a part of it, it was agreed to establish the Pan-European Ecological Network. In most of the countries the Network has been implemented and consists of core areas of conservation for units of European importance as well as corridors or stepping stones connecting the cores (Zingstra et al., 2009, p.14).

[50] The UN General Assembly declared 2011–2020 the UN Decade on Biodiversity (Resolution 65/161), however so far policies could not stop biodiversity decline and waning 'benefits and values that humans experience'(Primmer et al., 2015, p.159).

From the point of view of global organizations, the Carpathian area shares 'the challenge facing countries and communities world-wide: namely the delivery of sensitive, sustainable and intelligent management of the biodiversity and eco-systems upon which so much wealth, livelihoods and economic prosperity depend' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.2). The normative documents which attempt to meet this challenge are built in the same spirit.

### 2.3.1. EU Environmental Norms Acceptation

The European Union not only is party to international formats of environmental governance, but it is also aiming at holding the lead in that global system (Adelle and Jordan, 2009; Jänicke and Quitzow, 2017, p.123). At the same time, leadership in this field is expected from the EU by various other actors. In *Normative Power Europe* Whitman (2011, p.1) explained the titular phenomenon, relying on the definition of Manners, as the ability to shape conceptions of the normal in IR. It is therefore closely interlinked with the above-discussed difference between the post-colonialist interpretative paradigm and the sovereign equality one. The EU as a political project with economic tools and humanitarian rhetoric has a formidable and heterogenic power resource to wield. Thus, the observation of Rosamond (2005, p.469) about the 'highly discursive' character of the EU activity can be applied not only to its external policies: both external and internal Union's environmental undertakings appear to be 'aspirational, declaratory and full of positioning statements'.

Still, so far the EU has been rather struggling with its internal environmental agenda (Adelle and Jordan, 2009, p.124). Investing much symbolism in the European spatial planning, the EU has been caught in its path-dependency as occurred along many other lines of the European integration (Jordan, 1999, p.16), several of those entanglements being stipulated in the EU norms and regulations. Importantly, the structural constructivist picture painted with such 'broad strokes', to use the metaphor of Kauppi (2002, p.19), is fundamentally spatial, first and foremost, reflecting the reworked landscape.

Some (Agnew, 1994) might insist that systems of rule do not necessary need territorial organisation, but in the case of the EU, a cardinal element of its policies is the creation of para-territorial spaces where such policies are applied. From the territorial point of view, the EU is already a complex scalar conglomerate of supranational spaces, national territories, sub- and transnational regions and networks. Moreover, given the geographical or policy scope, according to Rumford (2006, p.128), some of such spaces generated by the Union 'it alone is capable of governing'. In the world of flows and cross-border circulations, it upholds the modus operandi of 'de-bordering and political restructuring' (Malikova et al., 2015, p.26). The integration project was meant to dissolve the internal Union's borders, virtually approaching a "monotopia" (the term of Jenson and Richardson; critics discussed in Chapter 1 here). The Schengen freedoms of movement, activities of transnational corporations, or police forces cooperation – have all contributed to the borders' less being seen as a barrier. At the early stages, the prevailing format was 'negative' integration of removing impediments 'at the expense of positive integration' of supranational institutionalization (O'Dowd, 2001, p.68). The metaphors of the consequent spatial (E)unification, a 'peaceful border change' (Ibidem, p.75), are represented by specific material integrative projects that at the same time 'carry a heavy weight of symbolism' (Ibidem, p.74): a good example is the second bridge between Romania and Bulgaria, opened in 2013 and called the "New Europe" bridge.

The EU goal of overall cohesion, including territorial cohesion[51] (investigated, for example, in Medeiros, 2012) and balanced territorial development in the polities united, is a keystone of the Union's energy and environmental programmes (EEA, 2010). But it found a challenging ground in CEE, as sub-national regional polarisation increased under the impact of neoliberal transformations (in particular, the Barca Report of 2009 was drawn up in the neoliberal spirit) that are believed to contribute to the propagation of uneven spatial development (Loewen, 2015, p.208).[52] The European spatial vision is set out in the periodically reviewed European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP),

[51] First mentioned in the Amsterdam treaty of 1997, the composite indicator includes social and economic cohesion, environmental sustainability, polycentrism, cooperation or governance.

[52] Faragó (2016, pp.18-19) concluded the cohesion policy causes imbalances negatively affecting CEE countries: the policy is focused rather on strengthening supranational governance than regional development; the funding is skewed towards developed areas and metropolitan regions, which together with the EU place-based approach spells further decline of peripheral areas.

inspired by the UN Brundtland Report (United Nations, 1987) and incorporating its environmental conservation and management pillar provisions. ESDP also includes references to territorial cohesion and contains guidelines on how to harmonize nature protection within urban and rural planning (Committee on Spatial Development, 1999). The Perspective was conceived to steer national spatial development policies and EU sectoral policies of 'clear spatially transcendent development' (Ibidem, p.7), and according to the report by the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) programme, it has had significant impact on institution formation in CEE (ESPON, 2007, p.8). Additionally, the material framework support was being prepared by such steps, as Directive 2007/2/EC on the INSPIRE initiative for an integrated spatial information system across the Union. It was included in the Horizon 2020, and the data could be used as well for the purposes of environmental policy elaboration, implementation, and monitoring.

The *Green Paper 2008* reflected 'growing horizontal interdependencies between EU policies and territorial development issues' and relatively high cohesion index for the CEE area under the present examination (Medeiros, 2012, p.8). According to EU Cohesion Monitor, between years 2007 and 2017, while in the West structural cohesion suffered losses, in the countries of the Carpatho-Danubian area it increased (Janning, 2018). The issue of disparities is being addressed by the European Regional Policy, in National Strategic Reference Frameworks of the Cohesion Policy, Partnership Agreements, and Operational Programs. Even though the territorial policy was not a formal EU policy competence before the Lisbon Treaty of 2009 (Medeiros, 2012, p.2), the EU Territorial Agenda was adopted in 2007 to be reworked in 2011 for 2020: among other matters, it underscores the importance of CBC in raising territorial competitivness and encompasses environmental quality objectives. Additionally, environmental integration coupled with sustainable development orchestration has proceeded under the Cardiff process launched in 1998, whereby within the Council of Ministers strategies for specific sectors are developed and updated (Adelle and Jordan, 2009, p.118).

A substantial portion of spatial changes takes place in border regions, leading to '(re)integration of borderlands' (Bufon, 2011, p.30) in terms of infrastructure, administrative and humanitarian contacts. Ofttimes this presupposes 'joint cross-border social and spatial planning' (Idem), like in the case of transborder natural reserves.

Therefore, in 2015 a Working Group on innovative solutions to cross-border obstacles was established by Luxembourg and France, which includes national authorities and "supportive organizations", such as *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière* (MOT). And in September 2017 the European Commission adopted a new Communication on "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions".

CBC can develop in the form of supranational superstructure and then helps to overcome 'differing administrative systems' that interfere with balanced regional development, as noticed by Böhm (2014, p.36); but it can take forms referred to as 'sub-regionalism' (Duhr, 2011, p.15), that is cooperation between contiguous clusters of European countries. Moreover, such transnational coordination created an effective scalar format for dealing with the 'in-between issues', marginal for national and supranational levels (Ibidem, p.47), which permitted to restate the "laboratory" role of border areas, showing that 'it is the transboundary space which helps to address many of the spatial queries prompted by on-going globalization trends' (Malikova et al., 2015, p.27). In their turn, new formats of collaboration engendered 'new frameworks for thinking' (O'Dowd, 2001, p.75) and conceiving of lands in Europe: the Carpathian Euroregion, the Danube Macro-region etc. Hence, since the early 1990s collaboration opportunities have been a powerful criterion for the condensation of 'frontier zones spanning borders', key for the emergent European political community (Ibidem, p.71).

Therefore, the restructuring aspect of integration is defined by the condition that instead of obliterating state borders, the EU has been reconfiguring them (Ibidem, p.68). Importantly, this reconfiguration inevitably triggers securitisation concerns (Rumford, 2006, p.128) and has had administrative repercussions in inducing 'reterritorializing' (Markus et al., 2008, p.3), or generation of 'new territories though subdivision and combination', what Sack (1986, p.34) in *Human Territoriality* posited to be a common trend. In that way, reterritorialisation is indeed one of the forms that regulatory regionalism takes (Hameiri and Jayasuriya, 2011, p.24). The new territorial units may be of different etiology: e.g. having genuine new administrative territoriality; affordance-driven

soft spaces[53] etc. The multiple contexts of belonging of those units not only aggregate into a 'more complex spatiality of governance' whereby regional collaboration brings together varied actors and 'elements of central, regional and local institutions' (Allen and Cochrane, 2007, p.1163), but also support the case for multi-level governance[54]. The EU plays an important role in the ongoing transformation of the relationship between space, border and governance (Rumford, 2006, p.138) by introducing new spatial governance formats and coordinating the systemic changes.

The collaborative nature of the new regional spaces accounts for the 'unprecedented 'network' of co-dependence' (Bufon, 2011, p.32) built through joint problem resolving by the many actors. The importance of local and regional communities and of their role in spatial development was also envisioned in ESDP (Committee on Spatial Development, 1999). These networks of interaction (quite in line with the reasoning of Donati (2011)) are deemed constitutive of the new regions. In this relational understanding, they also can include physically discontinuous, non-territorial "virtual" spaces showing 'little or no respect for the regional boundaries imposed upon them', which is met with a political effort to construct the 'coherence' (Allen and Cochrane, 2007, p.1162).

Though not conceived within the EU, but paragonated to 'genuinely European spaces' (Rumford, 2006, p.127), Euroregions have been an important instrument of the europeanising spatialisation. For the CEE countries, transboundary Euroregions along the external EU borders were one of the institutes preparing them for the membership (O'Dowd, 2001, p.71) and thus one of the matrices applied to their transforming space. They were reported to foster investor trust, economic development in rural areas, and experience exchange at the local level (Bioteau, 2007, p.7). At the same time, Euroregions have been criticised for their 'divergent and sometimes contradictory agendas' (O'Dowd, 2001, p.75) and even called 'matryoshkas' (Bufon, 2011, p.32) because of their organisational complexity.

[53] Within the soft-space analytical framework, when sovereignty remains with the nation states and at the same time exists a formal EU mandate for spatial development, pooled territoriality takes place (intergovernmentalism in integration); supra-territoriality is in place, when along with the mandate the power is at the EU level (the neo-functionalist approach) (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p.2708).
[54] Such questions motivated the study on Territorial approaches to new governance (TANGO), a project sponsored by Nordregio and finalized in 2013.

Macro-regions are another attempt at organizing territorial politics in the EU (Fourny, 2013) as well as another layer of supranational governance (Duhr, 2011). Supporting European solidarity and polycentric spatial development, since 2007 they were included within the budget period of 2006-2013. The respective special Task Force was set up in June 2012 within the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions to further explore macro-regional strategies (MRS) at the European level and to establish guidelines for the planning and implementation of these strategies (CPMR, 2012, p.1). The Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission (DG REGIO) defined them as integrated frameworks that permit to tackle specific opportunities or problems that cannot be addressed by single regions or countries in a satisfactory manner: environmental challenges are among them. It has been noticed that structurally MRS include an explicit East-West dimension of EU and non-EU countries (Duhr, 2011, p.9).[55] Currently four macro-regional strategies have been put in place to cover an unconventionally large 'range of concerns' (Samecki, 2009), from the environment to economic development: for the Baltic Sea region (adopted in 2009 through Polish-Swedish patronage), for the Danube region (2011), for the Adriatic and Ionian region (2014), and for the Alpine region (2015).

In his programmatic keynote address on the EU Baltic Sea Strategy at the 2009 Ministerial conference in Stockholm, the then European Commissioner for Regional Policy Pawel Samecki, being very broad-minded about definitions, described macro-region as an area 'including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges (…) of a geographical, cultural, economic or other nature' (Idem). Thus, macro-regions are operated in even greater measure as "soft spaces", 'developed between different layers of decision making' (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p.2712) – that involving 'EU, national and regional expertise' (Samecki 2009) – and "object-oriented" (Latour, 2005). Their format smoothly disrupts traditional forms of regulation in favour of 'cross-regional planning areas' (Allen and Cochrane, 2007, p.1166). Since boundaries of macro-regions are defined more in

[55] MRS is positioned, according to Urschitz et al. (2017, p.2) as

> 'an interface between European integration and EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, and could be strategies to foster social and economic development, <…> in outer border areas of the EU, in (potential) candidate and neighbourhood countries'.

terms of problems, opportunities, and types of geographical features contained within them (CPMR, 2012, p.3) rather than spatial criteria or homogeneity (Fourny, 2013), they are drawn on a new plane of border-making. Samecki (2009) referred to the principles of operational functionality and flexibility as fundamental characteristics of the macro-region concept. So as not to overload the institutional architecture, the regions are based on the "three NOs principle" (no new legislation, no new structures, no new financial resources), though the EU 'help is given in directing Cohesion Policy programmes to the pursuit of shared goals' (European Commission, 2014b, p.185).

That kind of problem-focused agility docks well with the global governance framework. At least in what concerns environmental matters, the global dimension has been firmly consolidated as a realm of post-politics. In parallel, the state level has seen the political also being withdrawn from it through Europeanisation and normative homogenisation processes. The regional format of cooperation consequently requires a strictly technocratic approach and pooling and functional grouping of joint resources. As a brochure for civil society stakeholders clarifies, MRS 'are catalysts for institutional change, fostering the process of Europeanisation, democratisation and reform within and outside the Union' (Urschitz et al., 2017, p.2).

The regulation of environmental policies has been undergoing various modifications. Adelle and Jordan (2009, p.118) underlined that the EU has two contemporary long-term environmental strategies, the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS, since 2001) and the Environmental Action Programme (EAP, since 1973), along with two cross-sectoral integration processes (Lisbon and Cardiff). The periodically reviewed SDS spills into the dimension of National Sustainable Development Strategies. Besides, in supporting the global Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 the EU also committed to achieve by 2030 the globally agreed upon Sustainable Development Goals. Importantly, having adopted the classic definition of sustainable development from the Brundtland Report, the EU 'focuses on inter-generational equity' which is 'operationalized through the integration of the environment into other policies spheres' (Ibidem, p.112).

A series of documents bridging environmental policy and other domains have solidified this nexus: for example, Directive 2008/98/EC on waste management, Directive

2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (CAFE), the Renewable Energy Directive (2009), the Environmental Liability Directive (2004) and the Environmental Crime Directive (2008), Regulation No 1257/1999 in the Common Agricultural Policy providing for the payments to Less Favoured Areas (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.122), the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, the Rotterdam Urban Acquis (2004) or the Bristol Accord (2005) on sustainable communities. In 2017 the provisions on EU support in case of natural disaster, 'a tangible sign of EU solidarity', entered into force (European Commission, 2017b). It is quite noteworthy, that in the implementation of the Energy acquis (inevitably addressing a range of environmental themes) is mandatory for all of the countries of the Carpatho-Danubian area, including Serbia and Ukraine, as far as they are members of the Energy Community existing since 2006.

In the control dimension, along with the system of bi-yearly country Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), there exist the procedures of environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) introduced in 1985 and aimed at integrating environmental considerations into the decision-making process[56]. Moreover, the REFIT programme provides for a "health check" at the Union policy level: as far as the Commission's "better regulation" priorities are at times found to contradict the EU environmental goals, the programme ensures that the EC's fitness checks are of no detriment to the environmental policy and no trade or investment agreements are in conflict with the EU environmental legislation or its regulatory autonomy (European Environmental Bureau, n.d.). In January 2018 the European Commission adopted a nine-point Action Plan for 2018-2019 to enhance compliance with the EU environmental law and national rules implementing it. It was intended for the member states, networks of environmental agencies, inspectors, auditors, and law enforcement structures. The actions planned were directed at helping in fighting environmental crime, knowledge management, complaint handling improvement etc. Ecologic Institute leads a consortium that supports the implementation. As to institutions, along with such EU bodies as the European

[56] The EC is gradually incorporating the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) and Organisation Environmental Footprint (OEF) methods into the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS, since 2009), Green Public Procurement (GPP), and the EU Ecolabel.

Environment Agency having an analytical support function (including DMEER and nine EU biogeographic regions) and the European Economic and Social Committee being a consultation forum, there are multiple flexible structures that crystallise the presence of environmental issues across other policy agendas: that can be units within Directorate-Generals or those supported by other EU bodies, such as the Green Diplomacy Network of experts chaired by the European External Action Service (Adelle and Jordan, 2009, p.118).

Such transversal approach is maintained in the 2014-2020 period (European Commission, 2014a, point 29), permitting to centralise the policy regulation and target achievement. Adopted as a law in 2013 and in force since 2014, the General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 stipulates the political mandate for the Commission's environmental action. Its subtitle "Living well, within the limits of our planet" clearly refers the public to the concepts of "*vivir bien*"[57] and the notion of planetary boundaries[58]. Leaning toward the post-environmentalist logic as a perspective of unhindered growth, it sets out the objective of timely decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation during the transition to green economy (point 18) and to a low-carbon and resource efficient model (point 1). Preceded by the Raw Materials Initiative (2008) and the Sustainable Consumption and Production Action Plan (2008), closely linked with the energy efficiency theme (e.g. the Ecodesign Directive 2009/125/EC), the Circular Economy Action Plan (European Commission, 2015) set forth the priority of turning waste into a resource and moving towards a lifecycle-driven circular economy. The implementation of such economy-focused and potentially environment-friendly initiatives is led by the Directorates-General for Environment and for Growth and involves other Directorates. In 2018 the Plan grew into the thick pile of the Circular Economy Package. In parallel, by 2017 the EU green infrastructure strategy of 2013 reached the status of a burning topic for environmentalists.

[57] Originating in the Latin American social thought, "*bien vivir*" encompasses matters of socio-economic justice, alternatives to development, ways of moving away from extractivism (Gudynas, 2011).

[58] 9 planetary boundaries (including global freshwater use, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution) were identified by the Stockholm Resilience Center (Foster et al., 2010, p.14). In 2010 the EU adopted its ten-year jobs and growth strategy for 2020, which gave rise to flagship initiatives, such as the 2011 Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe, which sets out milestones for the 'EU economy to grow in a way that respects resource constraints and planetary boundaries' (European Commission, 2011b, p.3).

In terms of ecoregional perspective, the following provisions of the Programme document (European Commission, 2014a) are especially noteworthy. Article 2, paragraph 1 (a) states the EAP's priority target 'to protect, conserve and enhance the union's natural capital'. Within this managerial paradigm, the Union deems biodiversity loss and degradation of ecosystems 'costly for society as a whole' especially in sectors that 'depend directly on ecosystem services' (point 23). Hence, ecosystem service approach remains the primary device for holistic policy design and governance (Primmer et al., 2015, p.158). Significantly, the EAP not only recognize the global character of many environmental challenges that should be met with a global approach, but also points out that other ones 'have a strong regional dimension' requiring 'cooperation with partner countries, including neighbouring countries' (point 31). In that way the document confirms that ecological cooperation is a channel for the Union's political work in region-building. Consequently, multi-level governance is the preferred tool in advancing the agenda: various actions are to be taken at different levels of governance in line with the principle of subsidiarity (point 21) and non-governmental actors are to be engaged in a transparent way (point 22). For example, the independent Ecologic Institute moderated brainstorming discussions on EU climate and energy policies support, EU reform sustainability, innovation and climate action, and democaratic sources of energy (Meyer-Ohlendorf, 2018).

A basis for ecoregionalisation is contained as well in other Union's documents, such as the EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC). While the EU aimed at a good status of all its waters by 2015 (European Commission, 2014a, point 13), the Directive mandates river basins as the relevant unit for planning, management, and protection of inland waters. Moreover, it serves the backdrop for the development of such regional agreements as the Baltic MRS (Balsiger and Debarbieux, 2011, p.5) and the Danube MRS. As to biodiversity policy ensuring that biodiversity is protected, valued and restored in ways that enhance the EU society's resilience (European Commission, 2014a, p.13), the primary legal framework at the EU level is formed by the Habitats (92/43/EEC) and Birds (79/409/EEC, amended as 2009/147/EC) directives.[59] Besides, over 18% of the land and 4%

[59] For example, in Ukraine full implementation of the Birds Directive means not only designation of new special protected areas (SPAs) which in some EU countries function at the same time with traditional

of the sea of the EU members' territory were designated as protected areas (Ibidem, p.14) so as to meet the aims of the Biodiversity Strategy 2020 (European Commission, 2011a). [60]

The Habitats Directive triggered the creation of the Natura 2000 network (the European network of special areas of conservation (SACs)) of Sites of Community Interest and Special Protected Areas.[61] The selection of Natura 2000 sites takes place at the level of the nine biogeographical regions. (To the contrary, sites under the Birds Directive are selected at the country level.) In November 2010 the European Commission announced it had started a new biogeographic process on the management of Natura 2000 (NBP) which would include multiple cooperative activities, such as collection of information on threats and conservation needs for species and habitats, exchange of best practices, identification of common priorities and cross-border cooperation frameworks etc. NBP was launched at the suggestion of the Central and Eastern European Web for Biodiversity (CEEweb, n.d.a), an NGO specialized in analytical support and lobbying for environmental collaboration in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, Natura 2000 ecological management is supposed to encompass socio-economic objectives. Hence, the Habitats Directive was analyzed by Allmendinger et al. (2014, p.2710) as a case of an EU territorial game[62] whereby the *divide-et-impera* of the EU was put into play in the pursuit of other actors' manageability:

> 'This is where the second phase started that we consider as reterritorialisation phase. <…> following the perimeters of the respective

protection units, but also requesting assistance to meet the needed financial and scientific resource gaps (Society and Environment, 2016). So far protected areas in Serbia and Ukraine fall under the Emerald Network under the Bern Convention; moreover, the Emerald and Natura sites are 'of global and European interest' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.40).

[60] After 2007 Romania had to move from 7% to 17% in protected surface of the national territory by means of such conservation tools as Natura 2000 (Dumitrascu et al., 2011, p.328).

[61] Before their accession, the V4 countries relied heavily on the EC's financial support in implementing the network. Besides, an EU-wide Ministerial Conference "Natura 2000 – Chance for Sustainable Development in Europe" was held in Polish Tuczno in September 2006.

[62] As they explained it, 'it was not easy to convince skeptical member states to adapt the competence transfer – and here territorial othering came into play' as 'biogeographical regions were installed <…> biological arguments of nature conservation were put forward, detached from their (bio-)geographical meaning'. Then

> 'conflicts came up, in particular between environmental/biological arguments on the Commission side, supported by ENGOs from all levels, and the non-environmental arguments from sub-national levels like regional planning authorities or national economic lobbying' (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p.2710).

biogeographical regions, representatives of the concerned states and the Commission negotiated in different parallel committees. This spatial and institutional reorganisation gives the Commission a powerful role in coordinating and directing the policy development.'

In CEE Natura 200 became an example of an entirely new institution placed in the post-socialist governance structures of the new EU member states (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009, p.192). For the region the interlinkage of SACs with the SAPARD funding is also important in terms of bundling together the environment and agriculture topics at the policy level and realising the model of integrated and sustainable development of rural areas envisioned in the Cork Declaration of 1996 (Beckmann and Dissing, 2005, p.138). However, financial mechanism supporting EU ecological policies are quite varied.[63]

The Union's structural and investment funds (ESIF) are the main source of support for multi-level governance initiatives inclusive of governments at different scales and NGOs (Allen and Cochrane, 2007, p.1166). They were comprised by the Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2014-2020. In the domain of reterritorialising the EU funding distribution framework (based on population size, NUTS, creation of new cross-border territories) demonstrates the persisting 'territorial conceptualizations' (Terlouw, 2012, p.352) aligned with the ongoing regionalisation. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)[64] in particular supports transnational cooperation programmes (e.g. for Central Europe, Danube Area). Not only does it keep environment included as one of the action areas in most development and cooperation programmes, but it also co-funds the convergence objective together with the Cohesion Fund through the instrument of Operational Programmes (for the environment, among them). Another and most specialized funding programme of the European Commission, the Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE; 3.4 billion euros for 2014-2020) exists since 1992

[63] Palne Kovacs (2009, p.40) studied administrative reforms in Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary and observed the 'intensive invasive effect of the Structural Funds on national administrations' in CEE, for there has existed 'strong motivation to acquire development resources' (a shortcut to conditionalism).

[64] In the EU financial perspective, the widely-applied in the CEE LEADER method has been extended beyond the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to ERDF, ESF, and EMFF under the name of the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) method. At least 30% of the funding for each Rural development programme (RDP) must be dedicated to measures relevant for the environment and climate change and at least 5% - to LEADER.

and is currently subdivided into three components: "LIFE-Nature" (for Natura 2000), "LIFE-Environment", and "LIFE-Third countries". The means from the LIFE programme are used in combination with those of the European Investment Bank to maintain the Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCFF) conceived for projects dealing with biodiversity and climate adaptation (such as Rewilding Europe Capital, 'a core component within Rewilding Europe', issuing loans to 'wilderness based businesses' (Rewilding Europe, n.d.)[65]). As most EC programmes, it implies co-financing of projects by project partners or member states, which according to de Sadeleer (2012, p.67) happens to prove a substantial deterrent for funding applications by the states. Besides, there is the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) that sets standards for the involvement of environmental governance partners into the EU funds' programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

An ERDF instrument, Interreg (European Territorial Cooperation, ETC) based on the NUTS 3 territorial perspective remains the core instrument of the top-down approach (Bufon, 2011, p.39) to cross-border relations intensification in which the EU has primarily a financial stake (Perkmann, 2003, p.155). If CBC falls within the scope of Interreg A funds[66], and Interreg C funds are dedicated to four interregional programmes (Interreg Europe, Urbact III, Interact III, and ESPON), Interreg B funds are one of the financing sources for Macro-regional Strategies (others are Horizon 2020, COSME, LIFE etc.). Ofttimes Interreg funding creates significant imbalances on the ground, since grant allocation relies on central planning of cross-border cooperation at the local level, while cross-border regions based on administrative division 'are much larger than the areas most strongly disadvantaged by the border' and for regional administrations the border is 'by definition' a peripheral matter (Terlouw, 2012, p.363). Thus, power is shifted to regional centers and relations between neighbouring administrations turn competitive (Ibidem, p.362). Furthermore, when it comes to distribution of funding for EGTC projects, as exemplified by Böhm (2014, p.48), power games can be triggered between central and regional authorities. The program has also been commonly criticized for its 'erratic

[65] The Rewilding Europe organisation was previously named the Wild Europe Field Programme.
[66] The Hungarian-Romanian Phare CBC programme started as early as in 1996; within the EU the cooperation continued in the format of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) 2007-2013.

funding patterns' (O'Dowd, 2001, p.71), creating 'additional boundaries' by defining funding areas and thus partner eligibility (Duhr, 2011, p.47) as well as 'insufficient resources, mismatched competences, duplication of effort' on the specific projects realised (O'Dowd, 2001, p.71).

The Union's environmental policy, first, is developed as a part of a complex response to challenges in different spheres. It is part of full-fledged dynamic regional governance understood as 'regulation of a broad area of social and economic life' (Hameiri and Jayasuriya, 2011, p.21). Second, it requires integration, implanting of the environmental parts of solutions across the respective range of policies as well as tactical mobilization of non-environmental implementation stimuli for wide ranges of actors (such as economic interests manipulated for climate governance in Jänicke and Quitzow, 2017, p.123). At the same time, the social-ecological systems (SES) in place, 'traditional durable institutions', experience pressure from markets and the EU's unifying legislation (Kluvankova and Gezik, 2016, p.176). Under such circumstances, ecoregional features mark possibilities of geographically compact policy bundling. Hence, factors that condition the tailoring of the environmentalist argument and appearance of such instruments as the 'deterritorialized biology' (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p.2710) of ecoregions are multiple and come from various domains of EU interest. There are still a few sets of problems related to the realisation of the Union's vision: the forcefulness of EU regulations implementation, its usage for power projection and creation of new conditionalities. In characterizing the EU environmental policy framework Adelle and Jordan (2009, p.125) operate with the notion of 'extensive implementation deficit'[67]: they emphasize that 'supranational bodies are given the power to initiate new legislation and thereby shape political agendas' while member states remain the implementing party. This condition can in certain cases spill over into the problem of "supranationalization", arising, according to Zurn (2013, p.409), if 'international institutions develop procedures that contradict the consensus principle and the principle of nonintervention'. Another

[67] De Sadeleer (2012, p.68) summarized the situation:

> '[W]here the subject matter has been harmonised under secondary law, EU law does not allow the Member States to pursue an environmental policy as they understand it. In such case, the Member States must simply implement secondary law. If they do not do so, infringement proceedings may be commenced against them before the Court of justice...'.

matter is the unyielding European "imperialism" that, though is underpinned by thoughtfully deployed 'opportunity structures' (Jänicke and Quitzow, 2017, p.124), leverages, as Bufon (2011, p.37) put it, on 'the system of 'soft' spread and implementation of certain 'values' and 'mechanisms' of co-dependence'. Therefore, importantly, along with positive synergies, new relations of dependence have proliferated.

The Central and East European EU member-states were first introduced to the ecological agenda at the EU Laeken Summit of 2001, famous for the Declaration on the future of Europe, when the ready candidate countries were announced together with new key environmental indicators. Not unlike in other spheres, the particular mode of "governance by enlargement" with regard to the CEE countries influenced the shaping of institutions of environmental governance throughout the region. To put it into a larger context, Kauppi (2002) suggested to use Bourdieu's structural constructivism as an alternative way to look at the EU integration. This would place the spotlight unto such aspects as: the discourse of struggle for domination which can be recognized as pervasive across the Union's levels and scales; the participation of the dominated in the symbolic violence, which legitimizes the domination when candidate and member countries' administrations, for instance, accept the EU's requisitions as the yardstick for everyday choices (Dimitrova, 2001, p.8); propagation of concepts and values as a build-up of *idées-forces*.

In the light of the above, the non-EU-member status of Serbia and Ukraine makes their cases stand apart from the rest of the region in question. Although counting among official membership candidates since 2012, Serbia has not reached yet the stage of discussing the Chapter 27 of the *acquis communautaire* (Environment and climate change) in the frames of the accession negotiations. At the same time, since 2009 Ukraine has been one of the six Eastern Partnership (EaP) target states in the frames of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The latter was inaugurated in 2004 for the total of 16 partners and permitted to successfully channel to the neighbour countries also the EU's environmental influence (Buzogány, 2018, p.246). Within the EaP, environment and climate change aspects of a country's Action Plan are dealt with by one the four thematic platforms so as to facilitate policy and environmental legislation adoption. The Luxembourg Declaration stipulated the intent of the EaP countries to progress against a

broad environment, climate action and sustainable development sectoral agenda (European Commission, 2016b), albeit the questions of ecology are "not among the most important policy fields in EU-neighbourhood country relations" (Buzogány, 2018, p.246). The EU assistance for the purposes of environment protection and sustainable development is provided to Ukraine in line with the Association Agreement as bilateral support, Regional Programme financing, and cross-border (*vis-à-vis* Romania, Poland, Hungary, Romania) cooperation funding (Bossuyt et al., 2017). The outreach to the Neighbourhood is characterized by the formation of networks of policy adoption and implementation 'between sectoral bureaucracies from the EU' and partner states (Buzogány, 2018, p.238). At the backdrop of a limited EU conditionality leverage, the main environmental standard implementation stimulus in the EaP is of economic nature (fund and assistance allocation linked to performance; access to the single market opportunities) (Ibidem, p.236), which can result in 'economic framing' of environmental issues in policy documents (Ibidem, p.239).

In terms of their effect on the CEE countries, environmental policies as a subset of EU spatial political endeavours have been a channel of the ongoing Europeanisation. Although inter- and intraregional comparisons of Europeanisation's impact are beyond the scope of the present work, a peculiar parallel can be drawn with the operation of private actors in the freshly post-socialist countries. One might struggle with accepting the sloppily fraught metonymic style of anti-Sovietism in *Privatizing Poland*, but Elizabeth Dunn (2004, p.3) interestingly served there a constatation of a strategic mistake: 'The designers of postsocialist economic reform believed the people of Poland were essentially the same as people in Western capitalist countries.' In the pursuit of cohesion, the EU proceeds more carefully.

### 2.3.2. National Environmental Regulations

Over the years of transformation, environmental legislations in the countries of the Carpatho-Danubian area have been harmonised with the respective EU regulations, and directives have trickled down into national and local plans, though not without certain difficulties (Primmer et al., 2015, p.160). They were also modified and amplified,

following national initiatives. At the state level, environmental policy retains its cross-cutting position with regard to other governance sectors (Wurzel at al., 2013, p.6).

The decentralization of state administration and property rights redistribution resulted in a new architecture of responsibility for ecology matters. From the perspective of regional governance, that means compositions of heterogeneous actors varying from topic to topic and decision-makers gatherable *ad hoc*, multiple steering bodies, and different cooperation opportunity formats. For example, Kluvankova-Oravska et al. (2009, p.190) reviewed the developments around the protected areas in the region: decision-making here is conditioned by multiple ownership. While in the Czech Republic most land in national parks remained in state ownership and some powers stayed with park administrations, in Slovakia protected areas have also private owners that often lack incentives for sustainable land management. Biodiversity in Slovakia is taken care of by regional authorities and the centralized State Nature Conservancy (park administrations act as advisory bodies): hierarchical elements dominate there as well as in Poland, in contrast to the Czech Republic where the system is rather polycentric (Ibidem, p.192) and includes the Agency for Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection and the Government Council for Sustainable Development (in the Department of Sustainable Development of the Government Office) running the inter-sectoral coordination.

A number of strategic documents have been adopted by the countries over the transformation period. Such questions as nature conservation, pollution prevention, sustainable development are addressed in national-level programmatic documents (i.e. National Development Programme 2020 of Bulgaria, Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030, National Development Strategy 2020 of Poland, National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Slovakia, Szechenyi Plan 2020 of Hungary, National Sustainable Development Strategy 2013-2020-2030 of Romania, National Sustainable Development Strategy of Serbia and the Serbian National Environmental Protection Programme for the years 2010-2019, Strategy of Sustainable Development by 2030 of Ukraine[68]). Then, they are elaborated upon specifically in local-level and thematic

[68] In the case of Ukraine, a National Environmental Policy Strategy and a National Action Plan 2009-2012 were one of the key deliverables on the environmental track of the Association Agenda, strictly controlled and tied to the provisioning of sectoral budget support from the EU. (Buzogány, 2018, p.239)

documents (e.g. the Ukrainian Moratorium for Final Harvesting on Mountain Slopes in Fir and Beech Forests of the Carpathian Region of 2000, the Czech Nature and Landscape Protection Act No. 114/1992-2009, the new Hungarian Forest Law of 2009 that is said to be more favorable for nature conservation, the Hungarian National Landscape Strategy 2017-2026 or the Slovak Act No. 223/2001 on waste management). One of the most effective strategic instruments of prioritising and awareness-raising is securitisation. An example of establishing a focus areas through this process is the new Romanian Forest Code and in particular the law declaring illegal logging as well any action endangering Romanian forests, waters, and land a threat to national security (Olden, 2016, p.11), deemed an adequate response to popular manifestations.

Thus, a complementary current of policy development flows from the local level upwards. Drawing upon problems and experiences on the ground, new approaches are incorporated in the national strategic and regulatory documents. A case in point is the new water policy for the Tisza River of 2003 (Werners et al., 2010): a negotiation with researchers and local municipalities led to the introduction of objectives of floodplain revitalisation, nature conservation, and rural development (however, further implementation concentrated on the build of retention reservoirs). Through a similar bottom-up procedure, in 2012 criteria were set for virgin forests identification in Romania (Rewilding Europe, 2012). This demonstrates that it is also at the national level that some normative definitions of ecological categories take place.

Apart from national biodiversity conservation strategies, a basis for ecoregionalisation is contained in the administrative division: e.g., as discussed by Turnock (2001, p.19), the Slovak Act on Nature and Landscape Protection of 1994 defined five levels of territorial protection (protected landscape areas, national parks, small protected sites comprising biocorridors or biocenters of local or regional importance, and nature reserves and monuments of nature). Moreover, the ecoregional framework can encompass national programmes for specific zones, such as montane regions. The importance of mountains is reflected in plans for territorial development of concrete areas (for example, the plan for the Apuseni in 1993-1995 gave impulse for larger regional development planning in Romania), legislation (e.g. the Mountain Law of 1994 developed by the Romanian National Agency for the Development of Mountain Zone and the

Sustainable Development Strategy of Mountain Regions of 2004) as well as national strategic approaches to mountainous areas as lagging in socioeconomic development like in Bulgaria (Koulov et al., 2016). Besides, the region is connected through national ecological networks, already in place in Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland.

### 2.3.3. Regional Environmental Agreements

It can be observed that the Carpathian and Danubian cooperative processes have developed in parallel in the region and presently are reaching a point of convergence. Both of them stem from countries' ambition to have more influence on the regional affairs. Due to the fluidity of their geographical scope definitions, the perimeters of the two processes overlap significantly[69]. From the point of view of the Carpathian Convention 'the transfrontier Carpathian region came to include, in the geographical sense, both mountains, highlands, lowlands and hollows' (Paruch, 2016, p.3). Moreover, in cooperating with DG REGIO, the Convention is making mountains mainstream and high-profile at the EU level, both in the macro-regional strategies and through new possible initiatives, the final aim of which will be the possibility to develop a Mountain Agenda for Europe. At the same time, regardless of the valorisation approach that they have in common, there is a key difference: the main drivers for the Carpathian format lie in the sphere of politics, while for the Danube the primary motivation is economic.

The European Commission prepared the Danube Strategy at the request of the European Council. It was a landmark for the Danube region, nurturing expectations and debate: for example, the history of the Strategy development was traced, imprinted and discussed by the group of authors in the two edited volumes, *Europeanization of the Danube Region* (Ágh et al., 2011) and *The Challenge of the Danube Strategy* (Ágh et al., 2013). On the 16th of September 2010 the EESC plenary adopted the EUSDR. The document was presented by rapporteur Miklos Barabás and co-rapporteur Mihai Manoliu, conveying the values of territorially balanced economic growth,

[69] For example, according to the official site of the Convention, within this cooperation, an Expert Workshop on "Mountain Dimension in the Danube Region, the case of Carpathians. Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Cooperation in Mountain Areas" was held in Brussels on November 25, 2015.

interconnectedness, and fitting with the Union's 2020 perspective. There are four Pillars in the EUSDR, the Second and the Fourth being important from the environmental policy perspective: Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region and Strengthening Institutional Capacity. Of the total of 11 Priority Areas (PAs) that mostly work in a logically isolated way and have their own PA coordinators each, the Second Pillar contains: PA4 Water Quality, PA5 Environmental Risks, and PA6 Biodiversity and Landscapes.

In the Carpathian process, the sessions of the Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention have adopted five protocols: on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity, on Sustainable Forest Management, on Sustainable Tourism, on Sustainable Transport, on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development. The Convention also has ten strategic partners which reside in dimensions that are global (the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention), EU (EEA, EURAC), and regional (CERI, CEI, the Science for the Carpathians Initiative, ICPDR, the EUSDR Priority Areas[70]) as well as extra-regional (the Alpine Convention (in force since 1995)). These partners also have in their own right contractual ties to specific issues in the region.

In late 2017 the fifth COP of the Convention gathered in Lillafüred, Hungary, to adopt a new article and the latest protocol. The new article recognised 'the particular vulnerability of the Carpathians to climate change' and undertook not only to adapt to the latter by taking it into account in decision-making, but also to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions (WWF, 2017). The Protocol on Agriculture provides for joint efforts 'to address the complex social, economic and environmental challenges related to agriculture and rural development', including the preservation of traditional rural lifestyles (Idem). In December 2017 a Memorandum of understanding was signed between the Danube Strategy Priority Area 5 and the Carpathian Convention during the PA5 Steering Group Meeting in Vienna.[71]

Other international documents on environmental cooperation in the region have a multi-lateral character (like the convention on the Tisza River protection of 1986), but

[70] The two institutions work on, literally, Joint Synergy Papers.
[71] The Carpathian Convention has similar forms of cooperation of with other international institutions, e.g. the Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ramsar Convention of 2006 and the Memorandum of 2016 with the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC).

most often are bilateral. One of the common formats are transboundary water agreements between neighbouring countries: the recent Polish-Czech agreement on Border Waters Management (2015), an analogous Czech-Slovak document (1999) and the Hungarian-Ukrainian one (1999); the Slovak-Polish agreement on Transboundary Water Management (1997); the matter has not passed by Romania and Ukraine (1997), nor Romania and Hungary (2004). Hungary and Serbia have worked on updating the agreement of 1955, since when the first bilateral meeting on the issue took place in May 2017. A Serbian-Bulagarian agreement on cooperation in water management is at the negotiation stage. There are in place the Romanian-Bulgarian convention on environmental protection (1991), the Romanian-Hungarian agreement on environmental protection (1997), the Hungarian-Slovak agreement in the field of environmental protection and nature conservation (1999), the Czech Republic's agreements on environmental protection cooperation with Bulgaria (2000) and Serbia (2006) at the Ministry level as well as the Czech-Polish agreement at the government level (1998), the Czech-Slovak agreement in the field of protection and creation of the Environment (1992). Examples of more peculiar documents were furnished by Vashchyshyn (2018) who explored the case of the Ukrainian Carpathians: the agreement on transboundary cooperation between the Uzhanian National Nature Park and the Polish Bieszczady National Park and the Memorandum between the Ministry of Environment and UNDP regarding cooperation in the field of sustainable development.

The contemporary stage of the international environmental cooperation among the seven Carpathian countries is simultaneously a continuation of the long-standing tradition of ecology-related collaboration and scientific exchanges in the region as well as an element of the transformative processes in the new and aspiring EU member states. Transboundary environmental cooperation in the Carpatho-Danubian area can cover a broadest set of themes: ecosystems conservation and biodiversity protection, natural disasters response and climate change action, landscape use and restoration, waste disposal and water management, green infrastructure and sustainable energy sources, environmental quality indicators and ecological regulation development for business.

The economic competitiveness, and that of regions in particular, is primordial for the EU (Tulumello, 2016, p.4). Its economic track of action envisages spatial curation and boundary work, appropriate unified legislation and the latter's implementation encouragement – as the policy vehicles. Such a pragmatic approach, combined with states' increasingly standardised managing of their "natural assets", creates benign conditions for the application of ecoregional practices. The latter takes place against the backdrop of the international system of legal provisions existing in the Carpatho-Danubian area and laying a foundation for the cooperation in the format of 'assemblages of central, regional and local actors' (Allen and Cochrane, 2007, p.1171). Importantly, the 'non-exclusive nature of European spaces' (Rumford, 2006, p.137)[72] here takes its toll, and such political assemblages are interpreted as "regional" because of their capabilities' focus, regardless of the territorial origin and ascription. Besides, the holistic Union territory management confirms for ecoregional projects their status of essentially territorial (in the EU), although border-spanning, undertakings. According to Kiefer (2014, p.71), along with investment in territorial cohesion, new actors that 'are more geared towards concrete results of co-operation', is what accounts for transfrontier cooperation 'spur'.

[72] They are said to be 'simultaneously local, national, European and global' (Idem).

## CHAPTER 3. Stakeholder Participation Structure

The category of stakeholders, well established in political anthropology (Cheater, 2003), is tightly connected with the categories of interest and capability and offers an appropriate way of looking at the entities with a distinguishable interest in the environmental cooperation in the Carpatho-Danubian area. Many of them are located outside of the region, some have no direct actorness on the ground. Therefore, the regional governance system can be characterized as scalarly open, whereby interest formation is exogenous to the intraregional interaction. For analytical convenience, stakeholders can be grouped into governmental institutions, non-profit and business organizations. In the axiological dimension, it is clearly traceable how the vision of an ecological problem, distinct for each actor or sphere of activity, becomes incorporated into local and regional environmental projects and policies.

The increase in fragmentation of the sites and sources of authority in global environmental governance is, allegedly, pervasive (Gupta et al., 2016, p.356) and inheres therein, notwithstanding the latter's ongoing reconfiguration. Regional governance, in its turn, is deemed 'a process that is constantly contested and accommodated within the institutional spaces of the state' (Hameiri and Jayasuriya, 2011, p.23): prevailing importance and competence of national agencies in it is challenged by multiplying private actors. In an interesting attempt to discover the organisational resource behind the Carpathian Convention, a report of EURAC in Bolzano (Weiß and Streifeneder, 2011) meticulously counted the "driving forces", promoters, and supporters of the institution. In the present Chapter we are looking from a broader perspective at the degree of involvement of those institutions that take interest in the Carpatho-Danubian EG.

It was hypothesised that in the given case of multi-level governance, as distinct interested party groups can be identified, they should differ in the forms of participation and activity specialisation they adhere to in the frames of transboundary cooperation, which, at the aggregate level, generates certain region-wide patterns of institution and individual interaction around environmental problems.

## 3.1. Public Authorities and Supranational Actors

### 3.1.1. Central Governments

There are a few cardinal elements in the engagement of states in the transboundary activities in the region. Specifically, they create and maintain the general cooperation framework, facilitate large research efforts and the channeling of resources; but first and foremost, these are national governments that vest the cooperation with its regional format. The initiatives, such as the Danube Strategy and the Carpathian Convention, are introduced, along with other their functions, as platforms for the political empowerment of their participants. For the states of the region, those are thus part of a quest for gaining "subjectivity", meeting their desire of 'emerging strong and respected nation', as a Hungarian prime minister formulated it (Melegh, 2006, p.121). Thus, the formats that to a large extent develop as environmental cooperation, are also a means for the countries to assert their place in international politics and, in particular, within the European Union.

Clearly, states are responsible for setting initial expectations from major regional initiatives. Especially when it comes to legal and programmatic document elaboration, states for the time being represent an irreplaceable link. International multilateral environmental agreements (such as UNFCCC) require national programmes[73] and concrete steps for the implementation of collectively agreed actions. Channeling the EU's directives into national legislation, state governments often spur or support local solutions, be it in conservation or in hazard prevention. Despite of the EU-sponsored internal and cross-border regionalisation processes, central governments remain systemic policy brokerage nodes and keep the keys for the unwieldy internal administrative mechanisms.

Governments are champions of the most visible cooperation programmes which may originate within different agencies, but at the country level in the majority of cases are steered by a national ministry of environment (this is the approach to the Carpathian Convention in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine).

[73] Serbia, Hungary, and Ukraine have adopted national strategies and programmes which deal with cross-cutting issues to cover several articles of the Convention. The latter has triggered dozens of regulatory documents at the national level (Weiß and Streifeneder, 2011, p.18).

Specific problems are then tackled by competent ministries responsible for regional and rural development, forest and water policies, biodiversity (for example, the Hungarian Ministry for Rural Development and the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism). Then, along with being coordinated and reviewed at international ministerial meetings, the actions trickle down to respective agencies (for example, in the Czech Republic the Carpathian Convention's protocols are in the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry for Regional Development, and the Nature Conservation Agency).

The lower-level institutions involved are of varied formats (for example, the Slovak State Nature Conservancy and the Slovak Environmental Agency). Topologically, several bodies have territorial authorities across the respective country: e.g. the State Agencies for Forest Resources and for Water Resources of Ukraine, the Polish National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management or the Czech State Fund for the Environment that – with 13 offices throughout the country – calls itself a "project factory". There are then a number of those entrusted with geographically punctual accountability, such as the Danube Delta Reserve Administration in Romania or the directorates of the national parks Duna-Ipoly, Bükk, and Aggtelek in Hungary. Governments mandate the creation of inter-ministerial committees on transborder cooperation, environment, and other problems (Werners et al., 2010) as well as of national focal points or totally new bodies facilitating the implementation of international cooperation programmes (e.g. the National Steering Committee for the Carpathian Convention activities in Poland). Membership in such organisations as the national network of IUCN Eastern Europe and Central Asia is held by governmental agencies (in Serbia, for instance, exclusively), along with NGOs and INGOs.

Environmental cooperation agendas of central authorities are supported by national academies of sciences and other research organizations, e.g. the Polish Institute of Nature Conservation, the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, the Slovak Institute of Landscape Ecology, the Ukrainian Research Institute for Mountain Forestry and the Institute of Ecology of the Carpathians in Lviv City.

Central, regional and local authorities also significantly define the action space for other, non-governmental stakeholders. Elements of this process are national spatial

development approaches and policies in different domains. As states ensure most of the infrastructural support for the cooperation, they agree on infrastructure development policies for mountainous and riparian areas, development of infrastructure in the region, cooperation in tourism and energy (Weiß and Streifeneder, 2011). Bilateral ecological programs are a solid stratum of cooperation. Böhm (2014, p.48) concluded that states are formative actors of cross-border cooperation as the creators of framework conditions or as direct CBC actors. States' role of a driving force includes the setting-up of cooperation financing mechanisms, centralised management system for the European Structural Funds. Moreover, cross-institutional activities of governments, as in the case of the Carpathian Convention, apart from the internationalisation of the cooperation, are beneficial for public awareness-raising (Ukraine), galvanising of non-state actor participation (Slovakia), and funding opportunity NGO network support (the Czech Republic) (Weiß and Streifeneder, 2011).

Intergovernmental consultations at times take stable institutionalised forms. For example, according to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the "Forest Europe" Ministerial Conference (based on the Helsinki Process) is one of the nine regional processes in the world aimed at sustainable forest management, determining the key sustainability elements and mechanisms (Olden, 2016, p.8). Such a prominent Central European formation as the Visegrad Group is active in directing regional environmental policies, unless there are burning political priority issues. Through emitting joint statements V4 declare their matters of interest. The Common Spatial Development Strategy of the V4+2 Countries (Visegrad Group, 2014, p.114)[74] reads: 'The main natural potentials and current barriers of spatial development of the V4+2 countries are formed by the Carpathian Mountains and the river Danube.' In the same document the challenges listed in the EU Territorial Agenda 2020 such as loss of biodiversity as well as vulnerable natural, landscape and cultural heritage were acknowledged to stress that

[74] The Strategy reiterates that the largest mountain system of Europe has overall small disturbances in nature and landscape as well as a transport infrastructure allowing a relatively undisturbed migration of large mammals, which is an important regional development factor (Ibidem, p.79). Attention is drawn to the areas along external borders of the EU and the Danube and the Baltic Sea macro-region formats; transnational cooperation is advised to strengthen the Group members' position and the many demographical, ecological and economic problems are to be solved through common tools (strategies, programmes etc.)(Ibidem, p.114).

'[t]he Carpathian Mountains are a common area of interest to the V4+2 countries' (Idem). The environmental agencies of the four countries have been discussing circular economy, biodiversity protection, drought problems; sectoral experts have been holding knowledge-sharing events. All those neatly fit in the concept of the Group as an attempt at political actorness of the so-called Central Europe. The ministerial meetings addressed the following problems: waste management focused on reuse and recycling; prevention of illegal waste traffic and cooperation on transboundary enforcement of the EU waste shipment legislation; Natura 2000 experience exchange facilitation and joint monitoring methods for transboundary areas (Visegrad Group, 2006). Besides, attention was paid to air quality and transboundary air pollution, soil contamination and soil revitalisation financial mechanisms coupled with the "polluter pays" principle, promotion of resource efficiency protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services, protection against flooding, droughts, and other disasters (Visegrad Group, 2011).

Another seat of collaboration, CEI, combining the functions of a multilateral diplomacy forum and a funding hub, supports adaptation to climate change, sustainable energy lifecycles, and conservation of biodiversity.[75] The Central European Initiative accounts for an example of further governmental involvement that takes the shape of fostering international parliamentary relations. The currently existing formats comprise the CEI Parliamentary Dimension, parliamentary contacts in the frames of the Visegrad Group, Conference of Parliamentarians of the Danube Region established in 2013[76]. A project that has been developing over several years under the Polish patronage is the Parliamentary Assembly of Central and Eastern Europe (or a parliamentary network described in the Carpathian Memorandum). Besides, the speaker of the Polish parliament Marek Kuchciński for years has been a main promoter of the Carpathian vector of regional communing and the initiative of the "Europe of the Carpathians".

It is important to note that here we have to look not only at the central governments of the countries in the region. These are also relatively remote

[75] CEI operates also in the areas of energy efficiency and rural development, which is closely in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy.

[76] For example, apart from the refrain of natural values, the Third Conference of the Danube Parliamentarians pronounced itself on a harmonised cross-border flood defense system and modern environmental technologies introduction (Duna Régió Stratégia, 2015).

governments that take interest in the Carpathian area. On the one hand, the so-called EEA and Norway Grants[77] (from Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) are directed at reducing socio-economic disparities in 15 newer EU countries[78] and at enhancing bilateral relations with them as a part of the "back-door diplomacy" with the EU (Haugevik, 2017). Each recipient country agrees on a set of programmes with the donor countries, based on national needs and priorities and the scope for cooperation. The funding for the 2014-2021 period was increased to promote cross-border and transnational cooperation, while in 2018 the new Fund for Regional Cooperation was launched in Norway House in Brussels with 12 Danube countries in its territorial scope (EEA Grants, n.d.).

On the other hand, Switzerland, upon the agreement with the EU Council, conducted a ten-year enlargement contribution programme for the ten CEE EU members. The funding was coordinated by the Department for Cooperation with Eastern Europe of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and came to an end on June 14, 2017, having channeled one billion Swiss francs to the implementation of 210 projects, in particular, in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (SECO, 2017). The countries concluded agreements for each of the projects bilaterally with Switzerland which would cover around 85% of the costs; of the five Switzerland's objectives, protection of the environment received 39% of the funds (Idem). In 2017 Hungary initiated a joint V4 action for the prolongation of the Swiss Contribution. Germany (including the ministries for the Environment[79] and for Economic Cooperation and Development), Austria, and Italy also watch the region closely and do their part of lobbying on the programme planning for the region, while the Dutch government, for example, funded the Carpathian JBIS under its BBI Matra programme.

Given their relationally pivotal role and infrastructural responsibilities, country governments are able to build up, accumulate, and exploit the symbolic capital of local

[77] In particular, an IUCN Member, the Slovak State Nature Conservancy received funding by the Norwegian government for CNPA and Ramsar Sites (IUCN, 2012). In 2013 the Romanian Ministry of the Environment partnered with the donor Norwegian Environment Agency to implement the Biodiversity and ecosystem services programme. Multi-million grants come from Norwegian funds as an important nutrient for the Polish civil society. Democratic Poland is expected to support democracy in Ukraine, which is a key to further spread of democracy. Norway, interestingly, has a Poland strategy adopted in 2016.

[78] Poland is the greatest beneficiary state of all, followed at a distance by Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

[79] For example, the project for the elaboration of the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians (2014) was fully funded by Germany.

and international recognition. Partaking in the international environmental governance in the area of the Carpathians is one of the ways for them to address internal political agendas, creating though 'terms of cooperation, which raise distributive issues' (Shaffer, 2012, p.681), as well as to advocate regionally shared interests, be it security or development, from a better grounded stand.

### 3.1.2. Subnational Authorities

In the outcome of his case-study on EGTC TRITIA, Böhm (2014, p.37) viewed 'public administration authorities below national level' to be the principal actors of cross-border cooperation. Across Europe, regions receive encouragement from the Council of Europe's AEBR to pursue more independent and proactive lines of action. The activity of regional and local authorities in the Carpatho-Danubian area exhibits a mixture of subsidiarity, self-organization, and contestation. Subsidiarity implies a prescribed order of decentralisation, task allocation, and tackling of a problem by the lowest competent authority (Brousseau and Raynaud, 2007; Jordan, 1999). Moreover, there is a point of view sustaining that 'subsidiarity comes much more to the fore in the environmental field than in other [EU] policies' (De Sadeleer, 2012, p.64).

Territorial planning and regional development competences reside with the subnational authority level. Specific ecological problems and concrete projects addressing them are being articulated predominantly at the level of municipalities, counties, and regions. These give shape to development perspective documents that contain environmental provisions (e.g. the Plan of regional development for the period of 2014-2020 of the North-Western region in Romania and the respective Strategy for the sustainable development of Bihor county for the period of 2014-2020, the Strategy for the development of the Subcarpathian voivodship 2020 and the Program of development of Krosno powiat for the years 2016-2020) and create necessary specialized units (e.g. the Division "Environment" in the County Council of Bihor or the Regional Directorate of State Forests in Silesia). With the Operational Programs approved by the European Commission (in particular, the Infrastructure and Environment type programmes) subnational governmental bodies use cohesion and development funds, but also create funding opportunities for agencies and organisations "downstream".

Considering self-organization, formats of decision-making and programme implementation in regional constellations vary impressively. The Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CoDCR) is one of the largest international platforms for municipalities and regional governments in the area. Kluvankova-Oravska and her colleagues (2009, p.192) described the example of associations of municipalities operating in some Slovak national parks as novel multi-level institutions where decisions made are based on the consensus among all the members.[80] Through a Euroregional move, the area is covered with the Carpathian Region Development Strategy "Carpathian Horizon 2020". Regional initiatives reflect the capacity of the authorities to reach out, foster trust, and broker partnerships. In that sense, the Carpathian Parks Days (in the frames of BioREGIO) saw protected areas administrations as protagonists: the opportunity to promote their work was part of the project 'aimed at recreating and reinforcing the bond' between the people of the region and the nature preserved in the protected areas (Weiß and Streifeneder, 2011, p.32).

Another argument of Böhm (2014, p.37) that appears to be valid in the region is that 'EU funding has a substantial influence on the shape of CBC governance'. And there is space for contestation, as tensions happen to arise between the centrally appointed and the locally elected officials. To a large extent 'responsible for creating and shaping CBC governance structures' (Ibidem, p.38), subnational authroities thereby come into a direct engagement with international governance institutions, private multinationals, and INGOs, engendering thus the problem of scalar policy coherence. The capacity for transfer of knowledge and institutions across the scales in the countries of the area is known to have much room for improvement (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009, p.192). Moreover, the possibility for interfacing with such counterparts, as national governments, EU institutions, multiple NGOs, and business, creates the knowledge hub management advantage for the regional agencies (especially, as regards the non-state actors).

[80] The Association of Municipalities operating in the Slovensky Raj Park is called the "Microregion" and entertains voluntary membership of municipalities neighbouring the park. The Association supports nature conservation, cultural activities, and traditional crafts. It is also involved in the provision of tourist services (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009, p.192).

Cooperative actions are taken by the authorities at several levels and in different social fields. Palne Kovacs and Grunhut (2015, p.87) laid out 'a typical Hungarian political constellation', that resounds however other observations on the area at large: an official is able to act as 'spider in the web', whereas 'his power was based not only on his democratically gained mandate, but also on informal, personal networks built upon two other positions as a party leader and a member of parliament'.

### 3.1.3. Supranational Institutions

There are global and European supranational institutions that galvanise environmental cooperation in the region. What comes from them, in the first place, is the overall direction, the already discussed international legal framework (Chapter 2), target formulation, and conceptual guidance. Shaping good (environmental) governance is the golden thread that runs through the activity of public agencies and international organizations orchestrated by supranational institutions.

Cooperation bodies such as the Danube Commission and ICPDR address specific issues. In particular, ICPDR played the role of a discussion platform for the development of the Danube River Basin Management Plan (2009, then 2015). NATO[81] as the key organization concentrated on security questions (de Wilde and Wiberg, 1996) is concerned with disaster management in the area. The World Meteorological Organization and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), with the analytical support from the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), were the sponsors of a 2009-2012 project in the outcome of which the Drought Management Center for Southeastern Europe (DMCSEE) was created (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia are among the 13 founding countries). In 2013 WMO and GWP initiated the Integrated Drought Management Programme for Central and Eastern Europe. On the basis of the Programme, the work done by DMCSEE has been extended to 2017-2019 under the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme (DPT) project "DriDanube – Drought Risk in the Danube Region" aimed at increasing the drought-related risk

[81] The long-discussed project of an international Ukrainian-Romanian biosphere reserve in the Maramures Mountains attracted not only the attention of the EU, but also funds for natural hazard forecasting and response capabilities development.

management capacity. UNEP coordinates one of the two main EG mechanisms in the area, and through it partakes in the elaboration of such basic documents as the Strategic Action Plan for the Carpathian Area (UNEP-ISCC, 2011).[82] The Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention works on building symbioses among the stakeholders (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.39).

The EU currently functions and sets its priorities under especially complicated circumstances: it has repeatedly failed to respond to multiple challenges, which can be taken as a premonition of an end to its soft power (for example, Kugiel, 2017). This creates a risk for the EU's position of a global actor with niche values, including sustainability, climate change action, regional development, and pan-continental ties strengthening.[83] The EU macro-regional perspective (Kocsis-Kupper, 2018) instated a basis for a new global approach to cooperation, important in the light of SDGs achievement obligations. The latter came into the focus of attention also on the occasion of the EU taking the ICPDR Presidency in 2017. Conceived to rain 'security, stability, and prosperity' over the region, the EUSDR busbar brings together high-level priorities, detailed agendas, and local initiative. It has the capacity of deploying transversal task forces.[84] Besides, the Danube Strategy is an internal EU spatial development tool which in a quite particular way is meant simultaneously for a number of non-member states (to a limited extent, though).

In terms of funding coordination, under PA10 the Danube Strategic Project Fund is aimed at supporting transnational strategic and innovative projects, interfacing between the Strategy, cohesion and neighbourhood policies. In May 2016 the Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN) was established; and in June 2018 EuroAccess for

[82] It must be noted, that global international organisations do not uphold a continuous particular regional vision with regard to the Danube and the Carpathians, therefore including the area in different discussion formats (e.g. the UNEP Forum on Forests in a Green Economy for countries in Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia in Lviv, 2012).

[83] An example of inter-organisation EU leadership is the EU4Environment Action Programme (n.d.), having as implementing partners OECD, UNECE, UNEP, UNIDO, and the World Bank. Designed for the EaP countries, it comprises EIA and SEA awareness raising events in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine.

[84] In 2012 existing competent organisations were united into the Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF, n.d.) for preserving and restoring sturgeon populations; since 2013 it has worked on promoting the "Sturgeon 2020" programme: lobbying for political support, raising awareness, and encouraging the implementation of the pertinent legislation. It also incentivises local communities to introduce "community control" to combat poaching.

consulting financing possibilities was extended to all MRS. A feasibility study for the Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund (DRRIF) was done by the tender-winning EY Slovakia in cooperation with the Slovak Ministry of Education (MESR) and PA7. As to the scientific underpinning, the EC Joint Research Center (JRC) works with the EUSDR through the implementation support and through empowering cooperation in the regional scientific community.[85] The IAD supports certain ICPDR and EUSDR projects (DREAM, DanubeFuture, Danubius). Other EU-funded research brings in synergetic inputs, such as the PEGASUS ("Public Ecosystem Goods and Services from land management – Unlocking the Synergies") research project that, while looking for innovative approaches to farmland and forest management, enriched its collection with the analysis of a grassland biodiversity improvement effort in the White Carpathians.

As far as multiple-actor EG efforts generally prove challenging coordination enterprises, the EU's ability to instate and conduct monitoring of compliance with the regulations not only has a systemic value itself, but also stimulates 'the evolution of internal monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms' (reference to the case of forest management in the Slovak High Tatras National Park in Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009, p.191).

## 3.2. Local Societies and Transnational Actors

### 3.2.1. NGOs and Civil Society

NGO work was granted with high profile by the "Local Agenda 21" process, launched at the 1992 Earth Summit. There have been multiple attempts at drawing a classification of NGOs: e.g. in the work of Salamon and Anheier (1996) the group "Environment" is subdivided into "Environment Protection" and "Animal Protection". Environmental NGOs (ENGOs) have been studied in the context of global politics (Finger and Princen, 1994), and the *World Directory of Environmental Organizations* is periodically reissued. Functioning of NGOs is associated with the "humanitarian dimension" of cooperation projects, as far as it often implies involvement of local communities,

[85] Its work is subdivided into four thematic clusters (water, land and soils, air, bioenergy) and three horizontal activities, including the Danube Reference Data and Services Infrastructure (DRDSI).

activists, volunteers, and donors. The complex nature of the goal achievement process, intrinsic in the richly diverse and disunited domain of environmentalism, was aptly underscored by Heinelt (2002, p.18): 'Because the sustainability ideal is seen to be inclusive, empowering and transparent, it is closely linked to participation.' Participation, in its turn, is deemed to be a feature of the civil society.[86]

Through participation NGOs become concentrators and accelerators in the accumulation of relational capital. Relational Sociology (Donati, 1983; 2011) is ontologically very close to the constructivist spirit (e.g. positing no single actor-external or internal determinism). According to Donati (2013, p.2), the globalized society is still created by human beings, 'but increasingly *it does not consist of them*, since it is made up more and more of social relations'. Or, to phrase it in a condensed manner, 'social structures, societies, or institutions are relations between social actors' (Dépelteau and Powell, 2013, p.ix). As an analytical framework this is rather unidimensional, but serves well to fathom the intersubjective space in the relationally defined emplacements of Foucault (1984).

Recently, the situation in the CEE countries was still impacted by the socialist legacy: as the functions of civil society were incrusted into public administration institutions, exclusion of non-state actors from decision-making continued to take place (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009, p.191). The NGO sector in the area is relatively young, low-budgeted and largely relies on the EU financial (the European Social Fund, ESF, in particular) support (Churski, 2008). The Union, for its part, accompanies the funds with the insistence on the "soft" dimension, dovetailed with infrastructural projects.[87] Border regions in the Carpathian basin provoke optimism with regard to social capital expansion and transnational civil society fostering, if one expects the proximity of a border to reorient local interests toward the outer world (Fabian, 2013, p.47).

In theory, NGOs should answer to lacunae in public governance (Finger and Princen, 1994; Anhelm, 2002). The NGO world in the Carpatho-Danubian area is not only multi-level in itself, but also much less stable as compared to the governmental

[86] For a recent in-depth review of the meanings and uses of the term "civil society" see Dalton (2014).
[87] The characteristic emphasis of the EU on the social dimension of integration was noticed, for instance, by Rumford (2006, p.129).

organisation architecture, and shows fluctuating participation in the regional matters over time. Separate NGOs as such are structurally weak and do not create alternative formats of cooperation – they only complement the existing ones.[88]

Global NGOs can afford the luxury of mapping conceptually new visions for the region. In the early 2000s WWF presented a long-term biodiversity "vision" stemming from a detailed biodiversity and socio-economic assessment and spilling into ecoregional conservation plans and action programmes (Turnock, 2001, pp.19-20). Then, Protected Areas for a Living Planet (PA4LP) grew from a project helping governments to fulfill their commitments under CBD into a full-fledged conservation approach.[89] IUCN has developed and defined six main categories of protected sites, and that classfication was shared with the Carpathian area as well. Important Bird Areas of BirdLife International are used for the purposes of Natura 2000. The Global Water Partnership (GWP) defined the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach which is at the basis of the Water Directive, and since 2015 it has worked on an innovative approach to wastewater management in the rural areas of CEE.

Strategic frameworks are the necessary foundation for a centralized orchestration of heterogeneous projects, so large authoritative NGOs naturally draw smaller ones into their orbit. Moreover, they launch initiatives that not only reaffirm the strategic vision, but also, so as to streamline their work toward a common vision for conservation or sustainable development in the Carpathians, pull together multiple actors in the form of an international partnership (e.g. WWF's CERI). In that part of their effort, well-established NGOs are known for their "pragmatism" in discussing with "traditional" economic interest groups (Breitmeier and Rittberger, 1997, p.28). The larger NGOs thus sculpt a clearly delineated mainstream in the ecological project activity.

There are NGOs bringing together the stakeholders in order to nurture dialogue and exchange. It is the main tactics of "aggregator" NGOs, such as the Global Water

[88] Breitmeier and Rittberger (1997, p.11) drew the customary, though questionable, line of separation between the state and civil society and placed environmental NGOs in the role of maintaining the balance of power through their international activities.

[89] This WWF initiative (supported by the Swiss-based MAVA Foundation) is bound to strengthen partnerships between stakeholders, to produce economic valuation studies, to contribute to local capacity building. Its Carpathian Protected Areas Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (CPAMETT) is used by circa a half of the protected areas in the Carpathians.

Partnership, the Forest Stewardship Council, the Central and Eastern European Web for Biodiversity, and CERI, a rather loose international network of NGOs and research institutes. With the seat in Ljubljana, the Pan-European ECO Forum is a wide and diverse coalition of sustainable development NGOs (environmental citizens organisations as well as NGOs with related scopes like human rights advocacies, health organisations etc.). The Forum facilitates their participation in the official pan-European environment-related processes and supports the NGO community in growing more influential. The Danube Environmental Forum (DEF), having an observer status with ICPDR, was created in 1999 as a basin-wide platform for politically independent non-profit ENGOs that would seek a common approach to environmental protection. At a smaller scale one finds the Regional Center for Ecological Surveillance of the Apuseni Mountains (CRSE), an NGO network for nature conservation in Romania. Such organisations play the role of expert fora and wardens of the environmental regime, in concomitance providing fundamental subject matter guidance. Eventually, they strengthen the overall governance, as far as their partners acquire a deeper understanding of the institutional landscape and can therefore take more informed management steps (Guerry et al., 2015, p.7349).

Several NGOs in each country carry out research to support policy elaboration and project activities of other non-governmental and governmental organisations. The CEE Bankwatch Network[90] and Friends of the Earth Europe groups were significantly involved in the EU funds planning for 2014-2020 and have participated in 11 different monitoring committees as elected or delegated environmental partners. The REC institution, founded in 1990, has field offices in 16 countries and enjoys the status of observer in many regional fora, including the Visegrad environmental ministers' meeting. With the primary goal of strengthening environmental governance, it publishes books (e.g. *Transforming Risks into Cooperation* of 2013), reports (including those on international agreements implementation in the region), papers (also background papers for ministerial conferences), guideline documents (e.g. *Guidance on the Process of Environmental Assessment for Natura 2000 Sites*), training materials (e.g. on Natura 2000 for local administrations). CEEweb (n.d.b), on one occasion, worked to disprove that

[90] It is a global network of multiple regional organizations (including the Friends of the Earth) playing the watchdog role with regard to public investments financed by the EU, the REC, the Visegrad Fund as well as the German, Swiss, British and Dutch governments and private funds.

nature conservation is a factor that prevents economic growth, showing that the environmental protection is an integral part of sustainable development (in support of the Birds and Habitats directives).[91] In one row with a more academic International Association for Danube Research (IAD), the Danube Area Research Center is a non-profit organization operating in the field of scientific research, inter-regional cooperation, and education of young people in the Danube region (DAREC, n.d.). In 2016 EEB launched *The Laws of Nature* publication with policy recommendation contributions to the EU from the BirdLife Europe, WWF, and the Friends of the Earth on better nature protection in Europe (European Committee…, 2016, p.17). Globally rooted NGOs serve as outlets of lessons from international experience and good practices, contributing to institutional capacity building in the region.

The function can be extended to infrastructural information management enablement. For instance, the Institute for Environmental Policy (IEP) in the Czech Republic[92] provides a database of information regarding the Carpathian Convention implementation in the country. WWF disposed the original CCPACHM online platform. The Fund has also played an active role in supporting the development and implementation of the Protocol on Forest Protection and Sustainable Management (WWF, 2017), which is an example of the *ad hoc* consultative role of non-profit experts. WWF and the REC are often the ones to provide leadership, guidance, communications management, and coordination in multi-partner projects and programmes.

Ecological education projects which primarily are addressed to regional institutional stakeholders have also been developed by NGOs (e.g. PRO CARPATHIA, CRSE) in the frames of capacity building activities. In 2009 the Czech Republic proposed a joint project for V4 environment protection agencies, which by 2011 resulted in the creation of the Methodology Center for Environment Assessment (METCENAS) (Visegrad Group, 2009) that has the capacity to train civil servants. Yet, general public also fall

[91] Monetary appraisal of biodiversity-related benefits is believed to be a possible factor encouraging 'people to support nature conservation, as they increasingly relate these benefits to their individual well-being' (Primmer et al., 2015, p.160).

[92] In 2006 IEP steered the project "Public Participation towards the Implementation of Carpathian Convention". It was meant to raise awareness, to spark off communication between the interest groups and the representatives of the Ministry of Environment, to support cooperation between sectors. It ran in the Beskids and White Carpathians regions. The results were presented at the first COP in November 2006 in Kiev.

within the scope of education: in that area, the Bílé Karpaty Education and Information Center completed a project on educating youth and adults in the South-Eastern Moravia about the environment of the White Carpathians in 2017 as well as environmental learning programmes (including classes and excursions) in 2016 and 2017. In Romania, the Carpathian Wildlife Foundation from Brasov developed ecological education initiatives in the framework of the Carpathian Large Carnivores Project. Some projects have in view wider international audiences; some are aimed at skill sharpening, such as the REC's Seminar on Communication in Relation to Nature Protection. Daphne, in the meantime, ambitiously published *World of the Carpathians – Handbook for Environmental Education* (2009).

Closely related to the above discussed is the function of promoting environmental values and initiatives. As a rule, that implies multi-channel campaigning and raising the awareness of a target group. As practitioners put it in their talks, they aim at conducting a "win-win discussion", that is, at giving people an 'environmental alternative opportunity'. The Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development in Miskolc promotes activities and policies that support sustainable development, directly and indirectly developing ecological culture. Specifically, the Institute carries out environmental assessments, develops sustainable resource use plans, engages in environmental education efforts, and raises awareness about ecological consumer protection. Through campaigning and negotiation the Workshop for All Beings (Bystra) achieved a legal protection of the Wapienica valley. In Ukraine CEEweb for Biodiversity, WWF, the REC promote the Carpathian Convention (promoters of the Convention analyzed in Weiß and Streifeneder, 2011) at the national level, and circa two dozens of NGOs do that at the local level, helped by 182 recreational and awareness raising centers.

Another core function residing with NGOs is fund-raising and funding distribution. While all to a certain extent have to perform that function, some NGOs specialize in it. The International Carpathian Foundation Network is oriented toward the Carpathian Euroregion[93] and is composed of four independent foundations in Poland, Slovakia,

[93] It was initially called the Fund for the Development of the Carpathian Euroregion, established in 1994 by the East-West Institute supported by the Charles Mott Foundation. Its goal was to help NGOs amidst the transition challenge 'by encouraging sustainable democratic, human and economic development' with

Ukraine, Hungary and Romania. These entities specialize in cross-border support for development, providing grants and technical assistance to projects of regional NGOs and local governments. Smaller ogranisations – like Aevis Foundation (Presov) and FCC (Brasov) – actively seek for private donations. To preserve their independence, NGOs uphold the principle of diversification between different country donors, but also corporate donors and private foundations (REC, 2005, p.19).

For the performance of all the above-mentioned functions, partnership and strategic alliance building is decisive. NGOs are in constant dialogue with peer organizations (WWF, IUCN), donors (most of which come from outside of the region), stakeholders, international organizations, such as UNDP, UNEP, UNECE, WHO, OSCE, ICPDR, the Danube Commission. Their strength is in the ease at scale manipulation and flexible reaching out to supranational bodies and local public simultaneously. They take part in regional and global discussion formats: the European Environmental Bureau, the Brussels-based European Partners for Environment, the Bellagio Forum; and they avowedly bring about 'more ecologically rational decisions than top-down modes of governance' (Newig and Fritsch, 2009, p.206).

Together with other NGOs around the world, those in the Carpatho-Danubian area went through a "normalisation phase" to become regular "service organizations"[94] that exist 'to provide services to other organizations or groups and to contribute to implementing public policies' (Breitmeier and Rittberger, 1997, p.14). Therefore, the activity of most organizations takes the form of para-outsourcing, and instead of consolidating into a civil society, NGOs often line up into a contractor market. Due to the project intertwinings, it can be hard to draw a watershed between transnational NGOs, companies, and governmental agencies. The *Anthropology of Conservation NGOs* engaged with three master narratives – doing good, turning ugly, and acting pragmatically – to

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the primary focus on 'trans-frontier activities <...> fostering regional and community development in the bordering regions' (Niewiadomski, 2004, p.170). In 1995 it awarded the first grants to non-governmental, non-profit organizations, and local governments in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, and Romania. In 2006 its international network loosened, and the country foundations started to work on their own, though remaining strategic programmatic partners. In 2010 the Network was given the European Borders Dialogue Award.

[94] Mackerron from the German Marshall Fund believed that some of the institutions that the CEE Trust had supported could 'become service providers or government contractors' while others had 'developed a broad funding base' (Milner, 2012).

remind the reader that NGOs had become part of a 'transnational capitalist class' (Larsen, 2017, p.26). They are, hence, veiled with depoliticisation like transnational businesses: within the capitalist regime the separation between the political and the economic permitted to exclude the "private" sphere of economics from the state sovereignty (Anderson, 2001, p.5). In an interview to the *Wyborcza* newspaper, Piotr Choros from the Union of Polish Metropolises formulated the 'systemic outsourcing' niche as a prognosis for the future of NGOs in Poland: they are usually founded in a romantic civic elan and not by those willing to address a local issue, respond to bids and "follow the money" of local administrations that "place orders" (Dabrowska and Choros, 2016). Thus, many NGOs are in the reactive mode, whereas iclusion in environmental governance institutions is 'based on the confluence of governmental incentives and NGO comparative advantages and resources' (Raustiala, 1997, p.720). In that way, at present the interpretation of governance in the vein of the one suggested, for example, by Kluvankova-Oravska et al. (2009, p.187) can be judged utopian, as it 'implies involvement of various actors who are independent from central power and operating at different levels of decision-making'.

The thematic areas in which environmental NGOs are active in the region form a wide array. Biodiversity conservation is a major challenge. The European Wilderness Society, presided by Max Rossberg, an American who made a solid career in business operations management, saw it as a complex of goals: from lobbying in the EC to educating children and holding a conference on carnivores. On its advisory board the Society has representatives from WWF and the Wild Europe initiative uniting numerous organisations. The Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation, *VLK* in Slovakia, the Czech *Hnuti Duha*, the International Association for the Conservation of Animal Breeds in the Danubian Region (DAGENE), WOLF in Poland, and the Frankfurt Zoological Society[95] also operate in the same domain. Cross-border protected area management, waste problems prevention, and habitat restoration are other important topics. As, for example, to aquatic habitats, along with other Ramsar partners (BirdLife, IUCN, Water Institute etc.), WWF supports floodplain and wetland restoration projects on the Danube; campaigns

[95] Notwithstanding its being a German NGO, the Society, as part of a consortium, has projects in the Romanian, Slovakian and Ukrainian Carpathians, The needed investments in infrastructure, equipment and training have been attracted also from the German government.

were launched against the Gabcikovo Dam and the Iron Gate I and II complexes, because hydropower plants on Danube not only interfere with ecological connectivity, but also hamper navigation (e.g. on a part of the Rein-Danube corridor)[96]. In Poland, the Ab Ovo Association obtained Swiss support for the protection of the Raba River and its valley (Tarliska…, 2015). Contributing to environmental democracy is another key area of activity for the organisations on the ground, like the REC.[97]

### 3.2.2. Business Sector

Business entities are, probably, the most diverse category of stakeholders. Larger companies and non-for-profit business associations (from forest owner to chemical industry associations) have a seat at the negotiation table both in Brussels and in the regional formats. Among the numerous constrains imposed on them, there are the requirement of the growing economy, the legal provisions restricting possible environmental harm from that growth, strategies of the regional authorities, and pressures from the local communities.

The approach chosen, in some cases, turns private companies into the biggest villains of the environmental story. In that way, the Holzindustrie Schweighofer firm reportedly was for a decade the single major driver of illegal logging in Romania and became the first big corporate case of a cap being put on tree-cutting offenses (Neslen, 2018), while other Austrian companies have played their part in the deforestation of Romanian and Ukrainian slopes of the Carpathians (Viering, n.d.). Activities of the kind have effects on the affordances and incentives structures in the region, impel social change on the ground.

In other cases, private-public partnerships are being built to become a foundation for sustainable regional development (support is being given by the European Investment Bank, the World Bank etc.) along with other environmentally responsible

[96] It was opined that in terms of international governance 'the focus on the river <…> led to an increased agreement and prominence of objectives to increase the shipping on the Danube' (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p.2713).

[97] In its Strategy for 2016–2020, the REC intended to support the transformation in the Eastern Partnership countries, including democratisation processes and local and participatory governance (REC, 2015, p.5).

practices (manufacturing standards, modification of industrial facilities etc.). Moreover, private investments are needed in infrastructural and research projects, whereby the EU and national funds are insufficient. At the same time, "clean" or "green" technology businesses directly capitalize on the environmentalism and construe the much awaited "green economy" in the region. Transborder ecological cooperation then is an important element of solidifying internal and international positions of "greener" enterprises.

In the most immediate way, private companies are involved in environmental projects as contractors or partners. For instance, geosensing monitoring technologies (Gale et al., 2017) brought together a consortium for a European Space Agency Earth observation data platform project that drew the attention of the Carpathian Convention. The latter could be a good testing ground for the thematic exploitation platforms of the EO4SEE pathfinder (for Southern- and Central-Eastern Europe). In Romania, the Water Management Integrated System (WATMAN) developed by a private company is used to prevent and reduce flood consequences in 11 river basins, including transnational ones. The problem of birds getting electrocuted with power lines when crossing the Danube – through the mediation of awareness-raising NGOs – encountered a business-technical solution.[98]

### 3.3. Stakeholder Interaction and Communication Patterns

Ecoregion is one of the ways to see, in particular, the transboundary space. (And such approach spells multifaceted applications of the former concept, beyond the dialectics of management and cooperation.) When used by policy practitioners, the ensuing perspective is consequently able to define the framework for a regional agenda. The manner in which the attitudes to environmental cooperation currently co-evolve in the Carpatho-Danubian area, put the ecoregional approach into a position when, after a period of subsiding popularity, it has the potential for hitting the uphill trend.

[98] For example, in Hungary the "Accessible Sky" agreement on bird flyways was signed in 2008. Power distribution companies, governmental and non-governmental conservation organisations convened to minimise bird mortality and to undertake and to co-finance to that end a number of large-scale projects (under the national Environment and Energy Operational Programme). BirdLife produced a conflict map for power lines in Hungary: the top priority power lines accounted for 21,700 km. Wire burial and insulation, bird diverters, the best available technologies in line production, and nesting location intervention methods were used.

So as to draw a bottom line, it is indispensable to reflect on actor interrelations, for which a source inspiration may be found in the method of mapping of institutions which 'refers to a methodological approach attempting to conceptualize institutions related to a problematic of concerns in a particular place, at a particular time, and with a particular goal' (Fréguin-Gresh et al., 2014, p.8). Among other things, the present section is intended to continue the analysis of the functioning of governance institutions, of the interaction of the key stakeholders engaged as well as of the content of their undertakings.

Shall one look into the relational essence of governance, Brousseau and Raynaud (2007, p.12) noted that '[a]ny governance mechanism plays two main roles: creating rules and providing enforcement capabilities'. Both products are usually building blocks, at least in part, of the system of governance relations itself. Cooperation at the high level helps to define formats, perspectives as well as modalities of stakeholder interactions. On the ground, specific problems are better thought and felt through, bending the policy articulation. Besides, in the medium of the region, held together by a construct of legal provisions and transboundary ties, there is a place for systemic conflicts: with regard to solutions to challenges, choices and approaches, perceptions of problems.

The multiple actors discussed in previous sections contribute to shaping the way in which what is happening around the environment of the Carpathians is ordered process-wise. One can discern a set of patterns which characterise that organisation of communication and decision-making across stakeholder groups and institutions. De Búrca et al. (2013, p.2) described the following governance picture in the absence of a single hierarchical mechanism:

> 'As no formal hierarchy or other constitutional ordering binds states and non-state actors, they freely engage with one another across national lines, often disregarding the jurisdiction of existing international regimes, to cooperate on matters of common or overlapping interest. The result is deep pluralism…'

In the area of the Carpathians, virtually the opposite can be observed, as the EU has been enjoying ever more control over environmental cooperation there, due to the spreading of centripetal financing and policy arrangements. Yet, interestingly, there are

scholars that insist on viewing such phenomena as the EUSDR as local policy (Ágh et al., 2011), and the European Commissioner for Regional Policy Cretu (2017) underscored at the Danube Forum in 2017 that the Strategy 'belongs to the countries of the region', the EU apparatus being 'only facilitators' (via steering cooperation across administrations, alignment of funding, communication of achievements).

The basic model that transpires through the organizational entanglements in the area is that of hierarchical collaborative governance, wherein effects are generated not only through scientific and technical measures but also through adaptive–collaborative governance as well as strategic behaviour direction (Primmer et al., 2015, p.160)[99]. The consultations on regional environmental policies involve a global range of actors, so that the higher-scale good practices and globally agreed targets find a 'conduit of regional institutions' (or the 'vehicle for stepwise domestication of international community desires and agreements') (UNFF, n.d.) to stream down to the local level. The smooth cooperation within that system is substantially dependent, first, on the negotiation and interaction at its inner 'venues for socialisation' (Rosamond, 2005, p.470), that is the above discussed institutions that bring together similar actors or bridge stakeholders from different domains and governance levels[100], and, second, on the formation of a shared mental map which informs the perceptions of centrality and peripherality of actors and problems. Besides, the trope of 'multivocality' (Padgett and Ansell, 1993, p.1263) utmostly suitable for describing environmental governance actors' strategic engaging with the "portfolio" of interests across multiple domains. That phenomenon is one of the factors behind the "programmatic swaddling" of the area, that can be observed in the policy realm.

[99] In the words of Primmer et al. (2015, p.163), '[a]daptive–collaborative governance joins actors who use science-based knowledge and arguments about ecosystem functions and actors who understand and argument for the different benefits that humans derive from ecosystems'. In such a system, agents have to simultaneously play at different governance levels to solve complex coordination problems, which 'suggests complementarity among levels' as "subsidiarity" is secured by "checks and balances" (Brousseau and Raynaud, 2007, p.4).

[100] Ferraro et al. (2015) reviewed the conceptual vocabulary for such venues ('characterized by distributed authority, lateral accountability, mutual monitoring and multiple justifications' (Ibidem, p.374)): e.g. "hybrid forums" of Callon and colleagues, "trading zones" of Galison, and "boundary organizations" of Guston. In the language of Castells (2011), one would be speaking of "switches" between different networks.

The hierarchical character of the governance structure brings out the element of power, which in a constructivist interpretation is even more pronounced appearing the hard 'social frame of power relations' that the 'superficial links' of media, religion, and politics are spooled onto (Latour, 2003, p.29). Moreover, following the precept of Castells (2011, p.776), one may be tempted to look for 'the logic of network-making power' in the existing arrangements. Even for the same actor, at different levels and scales the affordances for and gains from building, programming and connecting networks, respectively differ. Besides, there are systemic obstacles to power network development. To give an example, most of the concrete ecological problems are being currently resolved as national ones alone, so, as discussed above, transborder problems at best create partially overlapping zones of responsibility, but *per se* do not produce a governance extension effect.

In the networked representation of the governance scheme, attention should be paid not only to the composition of assemblages, but equally to the topology. Nodal functions are performed here by a variety of formats. The golden thread of environmental cooperation passes through Brussels: this is not only because international partnerships for EU-funded projects are a habitual form of collaboration, but also in a less metaphorical sense, because of the physical location of some key coordination hubs. The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) established in 2015 by DG REGIO to improve the implementation process of the EUSDR through facilitating the cooperation and interaction between various stakeholders and organisations in the Danube Region[101]. An essential role in the decision-making mechanisms is reserved for experts, often from a wide range of knowledge domains. Some of them are affiliated with such important nodes as environmental umbrella INGOs and BINGOs that normally maintain a star-shaped model of communication for their international office and partner network[102].

[101] DSP is co-financed and hosted by the Representation of Baden-Württemberg to the EU. It supports the Commission in identifying strategic value projects, facilitating the exchange among PA coordinators and national coordinators, and promoting the Strategy at the European level. The DSP also was tasked with administering funds originating from the EU institutions in the framework of Technical Assistance for the PAs. Overall, according to a discussion remark of Raul Mälk, Chair of the Baltic Strategy National Coordinators group, the Danube Strategy 'seems to have a more high-level political decision-making' whereby National Coordinators are isolated in the negotiation process of the Strategy.

[102] To cite an example, Friends of the Earth Europe steers the cooperation of the national offices of *Za Zemiata, Hnuti Duha, Magyar Természetvédok Szövetsége, Polski Klub Ekologiczny*: while there may be

Noteworthy, as Wölfer and colleagues (2015, p.45) explained, the structure of a network 'is assumed to determine' systemic characteristics of the network members and 'in combination with their individual characteristics – explains the behaviors of the network members to some extent'. In the case in question, the rules of this "behavior" are mostly explicitly set out in the programmatic documents.

James Anderson (2001, p.7) wondered whether a transnational civil society at borders would be possible in principle. In the given area, civil activity brews in a mixed formative process of transborder and spoke-long brokerages. So should the answer to the enquiry be positive, a necessary element would be a mediatory third-party presence. Peculiarly, for the EU is it habitual, in its cohesion and integration practice, to engage into a direct dialog with regional and local civil society organisations. This possibility of a close exchange is crucial for governance, which to render metaphorically was Anhelm (2002, p.192) who looked at organizations fostering civil society (however tendential his piece may be): civil society is a phenomenon that follows the dynamics of communication.

Moreover, miscoordinations in information flows in the area happen. While the Group on Sustainable Forest Management of the Carpathian Convention was making its way toward a common concept of "primeval forest", IUCN expanded the World Heritage category of "Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe" to 9 countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Romania (importantly, in some cases that happened with reservations demanding a 'series of improvements') (IUCN, 2017). Some challenges and gaps are connected to the policy divulgation. At the beginning of the century Turnock (2001, p.22) noted poor understanding of the "sustainability" concept among the Carpathian population and exhorted for environmental education for the sake of nature degradation prevention. Years after, a journalist from the Danube Delta area confessed to the author about the difficulties in explaining in plain language ecological policy to province dwellers.

Overall, no resistance is being put up against the "dominant" regional environmental governance development format. However, numerous conflicts around related matters have taken place in the area over the past years. At the root of the most

locally specific priorities (e.g. the democratic political profile of Friends of the Earth Slovakia) on most points the organisations are aligned (e.g. the relatively unified programmes against GMOs).

clamorous of such conflicts one finds alternative perspectives on engaging with natural objects, which inflamed ecological concern. The conflictual pattern would hence include a larger entity pursuing economic interest to a potential detriment of the state of the environment as well as to local inhabitants' discontent. Let us cite some examples. This was the case of Rosia Montana in the Romanian Apuseni: in order to prevent cyanide pollution that could come from a new open cast gold mine, in 2000 the Alburnus Maior association was formed by civil society forces. By means of international activism it achieved the definitive rejection of the project in 2014, and also launched a vibrant social movement in the country that served as the basis for the "Rezist" movement. Another dispute was that over a resort project in the Serbian Stara Planina Mountains, a Nature park since 1997. As the construction of ski tracks and lifts started in 2006 near Babin zub, its opponents constituted the Association for the Preservation and Sustainable Development of Stara Planina. The latter filed a case to the Constitutional Court; the European Commission also became interested in the situation. In 2011, at the local level an order was issued for the demolition of the already constructed facilities, but at the national level a legal reform was aimed at protecting those. Since 2013 the touristic spot has been operative. Recently, civil society was more successful in hindering hazardous and polluting industries in Czeczott (Poland) and Presov (Slovakia). Thus, the commonly used strategy consists in enlarging the circle of influential stakeholders at the international level and in shaping an environmentalist vision of the area in question, including alternative territorial development programmes.

To conclude, the ecology sphere stakeholders' interaction and communication pattern in the area is well structured, relatively rigid, and allows for shifting between levels and domains. One must also notice its complexity, which includes consultation formats, bridging and balancing between different mechanisms. Given the co-dependencies between policy areas, there is limited space in the system for contention with regard to the ecoregional project.

### 3.4. Structural Incentives and Impediments

The environmental governance in the Carpatho-Danubian area evolves at fluctuating speed along multiple tracks, is fostered at several poles, and follows diverse

organisational logics at different levels. Moreover, the idea of "ecoregion" is only one piece in the large policy toolkit. Rarely a grounding principle, it is not always rendered explicit or referred to as part of a project framework. Nevertheless, it is an idea that not only does not come into collision with the present governance system, but is also conceptually affine to most of the developments therein. Let us now summarise the key structural conditions that serve as incentives and impediments for ecoregional governance maturing in the area. This will permit, in particular, to reach a clearer understanding of the effect of non-coinciding natural and political boundaries in governance formation.

The following major obstacles to ecoregional governance can be identified. First of all, it is the lack of a defined region to be covered by the governance. This means different separate parts of the Carpatho-Danubian area are subsumed by certain cooperation programmes, no singular governance scheme encompassing the whole area. Additionally, the geographical region for each large programme is not strictly delimited (unlike in the case of administrative borders), and no legal framework exists to specify ecological subdivision of the area. Moreover, in the eight countries local regulations of resource ownership and management, especially in natural and protected areas, are diverse, tangled and often incompatible with each other. There are also higher-level competing power arrangements: no international organisation takes the full lead, no single management structure is available to enact the ecoregional approach; stakeholder institutions differ in their understandings of problems, project choice criteria, and overall focus. Not to disregard is the fact that environmentalism as a rule is not the primordial axis of cooperation, so the ecological profile of governance formation lacks consistency, project-based activities preponderate over long-term comprehensive plans, and finding substantial funding to restructure that might prove challenging. There is a felt insufficiency of environmental erudition among the local population and wide-spread conservatism in ecological understandings (e.g. related to profession or religion)[103] as well as the lack of a regional vision and continued perception of the area

[103] That environmental skepticism is a challenge not only to practitioners, but to theoreticians as well. Post-socialist transformation experts noticed that, irrespective of national transition experiences, 'post-Communist citizens not only are less supportive of environmentalism', but also "process' environmental issues into the rest of their political attitudes' in a distinct way, even after 'a number of years of

through a number of discrete places and landmarks. The ecological interest of local inhabitants is usually coupled with "adjacent" topics, such as local culture preservation, improved living conditions, or lucrative sustainable economy.

The same as impediments, principal incentives for the development of ecoregional governance are of variegated origin. One can observe a lot of political will (though, as already noted, dispersed) on tap for the environmental governance in the area. What is more, regional and local ecologic organisations are endowed with initiative as well as expert support. Most large stakeholders share a similar concept of man-nature relations. Authoritative environmental NGOs uphold the ecoregional approach and are skilled in lobbying, while functional regionalism as such is deeply rooted in the EU. Cross-border environmental challenges offer a practical opportunity for thorough collective spatial planning, and, at the same time, the tendency to centralise environmental governance can be observed in ongoing institutionalisation and transitioning from priority-setting and roadmaps to detailed plans. Besides, the ecoregional management scheme is capable of catering the economic interests of several actors in the area.

In the case of international cooperation, it is indispensable to have a closer look at the influence of political and natural boundaries on governance formation. The category of political boundaries extends beyond administrative ones to comprise all conventionally institutionalised divides. Having postulated the multi-layer outlook on a borer (Chapter 1.3), one can logically infer that for the role of each of the layers 'it would be a mistake to necessarily assume an unchanging effect along the full length of a political boundary' (Rumley and Minghi, 2015, p.4). The latter is one of the primary things to give form to the cooperation: it provides for ascriptions of responsibility, rules of engagement, bureaucracy channels, and material resource disposition. National administrative systems are especially important in steering and controlling concrete activities. However, even "open" borders still hamper less formalised and unmediated interaction of communities in transboudary zones.

Regions, alternative to those drawn by state administrative delineation, also rely on lines: for example, the way in which rebordering in the forms of cross-border regions

'Europeanisation' of environmental issues in law and institutions', which led to an expert conclusion on 'the stickiness of political culture at the mass level'. (Hanley et al., 2015)

(Schmitt-Egner, 1998) uses existing subnational boundaries. Similarly, isoline curves are drawn such a way as if ecoregions 'and their relationships were seamless and continuous in space' (Gao et al., 2011, p.4371). Imaginary contours are supposed to focus and consolidate governance development. Vast and prolonged physical geographic objects, '*boundaries marked in nature*', in the words of Hartshorne (1933, p.198), cluster the space, in particular, into ecosystems of interest, but also add difficulty to the realisation of landscape-wide collaboration. Apart from natural lines themselves, such factors as unfavourable climate conditions, looming ecological risks, and dangerous natural phenomena disunite the actors of cooperation on the ground.

Through the governance establishment natural boundaries are worked upon creatively and political ones are multiplied. Borders become articulated in their divisive and unifying functions though the critical points of tying (loci where the cross-border cooperation is aimed at). At the same time, the ability of borders to allow for and to support transboundary forms of governance has a decisive weight: then "soft spaces" become institutionalised "spaces of exception" (Rifkin, 2014) on the basis of their association with nature or wilderness. Interestingly, this "hardening" – in the sense of stipulating divisions orchestrated "from above" (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2007) – is the outcome of the efforts in identifying and "carving out" interstice zone in the frames of at least one of the existing international regimes. Environmental regionalisation comes close to altering the paradigm of border management: e.g. sustainability in the zone beyond the state border acquires more importance in government's outlook and the problem of resource partition boundaries not matching ecosystems (Kluvankova and Gezik, 2016, p.181) is being solved.

The nature of the Carpatho-Danubian area presents a matter of concern and an object of interpretation for various stakeholders. Each of them is focused on a distinct range of activities, has a certain manner of engaging with environmental problems. Although the stakeholders may have divergent priorities (development of specific localities, specific uses of natural resources etc.), most of them share the interest in the competitiveness of the area in the long-term perspective. Additionally, the interconnectedness and/ or exchanges between these actors contribute to the

circulation of the up-to-date information and knowledge, including good practices, across sectors and regions as well as to the formation of durable personal and institutional ties. As a result, in the Carpatho-Danubian area different operational levels of organizations form intersections: local projects coexist with parts of global programmes – and combine with multiple formats of intervention. This brings about the variety in border-crossing environmental activities across the Carpathian Basin.

## CHAPTER 4. Practices of Transboundary Environmental Cooperation

The ensemble of the actors and their dynamic interrelations form an environmental governance regime complex in the Carpatho-Danubian area. According to Grossetti and Godart (2007), a regime has an important characteristic of offering a solid and long-lasting, contextually specific framework for human activities' development and coordination. It combines different social formations and dispositifs and serves as an element for integration within larger systems. A regime complex is then composed of such frameworks, 'partially overlapping and non-hierarchical institutions' (de Búrca et al., 2013, p.13), superposed or collated, but nonetheless, in their totality governing a particular matter. The zones of "overlapping" can produce new institutional forms resembling at times a mixture of "hard" and "soft" spaces[104]. It is deemed instructive to look more closely at a series of practices, habitual forms of interaction, characteristic for the regime complex in question.

In this Chapter the examples of cooperative practices are presented in two categories, depending on the actors with which they originate: those resolving problems through their centralised responsibility function ("from above") and those facing and challenging problems on the ground ("from below"). These examples are heterogeneous, pervasive and provide insights into the vernacular definitions and practical distinctions that shape the understandings of management, governance, and cooperation. Three case studies are then examined for the sake of illustration. It is also imperative to enquire into the environment-related factors that are perceived as creating the sense of belonging and unifying by the inhabitants of the area. Ultimately, the Chapter draws conclusions on the phenomena observed within the examined cooperation landscape from the perspective of Europeanisation. According to the hypothesis, the practices of cooperation in the region are a reflection of global trends in environmental governance, and, while a distinct identification with the ecoregion is not a

[104] Within a stream of transnational functional regionalism development, "hard spaces" are conceptualized as 'the formal, visible arenas and processes, often statutory and open to democratic processes and local political influence' and 'are characterized by complexity and delays' due to coordination problems (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2007, p.306).

mainstream tendency, the transformation of international environmental cooperation and management systems increase the conformity of the area with the benchmark of the rest of the single EU space.

### 4.1. Cooperation Initiated "From Above"

To begin with, a type of "overlappings" especially interesting to follow is the phenomenon of working groups. The latter are formed under the auspices and for the needs of groups of states or large organizations, such as the Danube Commission and the Carpathian Convention[105]. They are, as a rule, theme-based and devised to concentrate expertise, to deliver innovative knowledge products, and to formulate advice. Consequently, they often include representatives from competent partner institutions, academics, and other consultants.[106] Working groups as an object of study have been all but shunned by the organisational scholarship, in the ambients from business[107] to bureaucracy (Fouilleux et al., 2005; in particular, as EU expert groups in: Metz, 2013; Seabrooke and Tsingou, 2014). Regrettably, '[r]elatively little attention has been given to member differences in organizational affiliations, roles, or positions' (Cummings, 2004, p.353). Yet, looking into such 'structural diversity' (Idem) is indispensable in the study of a group's deliberation (functions, work, and authority distribution[108], internal negotiation) as well as in the constitutive interpretation of its goals and mandate. Importantly, its loose internal structure "weights" can be attributed (and auto-attributed) to different members in informal ways, while their intended impact can

[105] Conceptual and expert work for the Convention is conducted within eight WGs on: Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity, Spatial Development, Agriculture and Rural Development, Sustainable Forest Management, Sustainable Industry, Energy, Transport and Infrastructure, Sustainable Tourism, Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge, Adaptation to Climate Change.

[106] The 'externalisation' denoting 'increased use of external advice' (Metz, 2013, p.267) is an ambivalent process implying also resource pooling, greater participation, and stakeholder access to impact-making.

[107] The policy-focused working groups are substantially distinct from those studied as parts of business organisations: the latter are presented as rather loose units with low member interdependence and stark leadership (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). The research is then mainly focused on performance (Pelled et al., 1999), optimal composition, employee interrelations and socialisation (Moreland and Levine, 2006).

[108] The influence of the facilitating party should not be ignored: for instance, the Work Commissions of the Carpathian Euroregion are presided by the responsible country (such as Poland for Tourism and Environment or Slovakia for Prevention of Natural Disasters).

depend on the stakes that their home institutions take in the matter.[109] Additionally, concerned like most with the outcomes of the groups' work, Seabrooke and Tsingou (2014, p.404) analyzed such artifacts to conclude 'the distinctions made among the reports are political' – and can be so, even if produced by those not directly involved in any sort of political contention.

More than just 'sites for <…> mediation' (Fouilleux et al., 2005, p.610) and for fine-tuning of inter-institutional relations, working groups under the EU roof are a format that can give access to the pooled resources.[110] In this regard it is needed to note that even if that format means less than frequent periodic gatherings, the remote collaboration is normally continuous and well-orchestrated. Stable WG exchanges can lead to large-scale undertakings, like the JOINTISZA project conveying knowledge from experts to the policy level. That instance of the Danube sub-river basin cooperation was launched in January 2017 and takes origin in the long history of collaboration in the ICPDR Tisza Group (which became one of the 17 project partners and thus a means of coherent application of the core ICPDR templates) and the Tisza Basin Initiative.[111] The main expected output of the 30 months dedicated to the river facing super-exploitation, pollution, water regime change and other challenges, is an updated final draft of the Integrated Tisza River Basin Management Plan (RBMP).

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[109] Gathered to make progress in the definition of pristine forests in the Carpathians, the Forests Working Group allowed representatives to take the floor for an account or a set of propositions and recommendations, demonstrating that a lot of work is done by individual ogranisations or experts separately, and that each expertise input has a decisive weight. Also, debate and suggestions showed the overall interest in the problem and engagement of specific group members. Over coffee and *pogácsák*, the meeting participants would discuss joint side-projects and plans, extending the effect of the WG.

[110] In that way, the EUSDR is supported by a WG composed of experts from the Baltic Strategy Horizontal Action coordination team, CEI, and EESC.

[111] The project is co-financed under Interreg B DTP (priority axis Environment and Culture) and is close to the scope of the EUSDR's PA4 and PA5. The kick-off meeting took place in March 2017 in Szentendre, where the REC, one of the partners, has the seat. The partners from five countries (Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine) include WWF Hungary, Apele Romane, GWP CEE based in Slovakia, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, and the Public Water Management Company "Vode Vojvodine". The project keeps in touch with the Danube Commission and national NGOs, as Imola Koszta from the REC put it, so as to empower national stakeholders to act in the interest of the local people, contributing to the regional cohesion. The Hungarian Ministerial Commissioner for Water Diplomacy Istvan Joo (2017) expected the project to endure due to three aspects: regular update of the RBMP under the EUSDR obligation, revisions of the water status under the Water Directive, and the Tisza Group as a format for further cooperation. JOINTISZA was preceded by the project "Establishment of Mechanisms for Integrated Land and Water Management in the Tisza River Basin" (2006-2008) and the 2010 RBMP addressing significant water management issues as well the work of WWF on national roadmaps, including basin-wide consultations with stakeholders and specific data collection.

Working groups make part of a much wider tendency of fostering participation and building partnerships across the policy spectrum. Participation yields inclusion of relevant stakeholders' viewpoints in decision-making and their availability for resource provisioning. Thus, many EG organisations try to play this card. If in 2002 the EU still could be called 'a polity without a civil society' (Kauppi, 2002, p.20), now it undertakes efforts in breeding its own civil society, especially in the member states of recent accession. An influential argument in favour of it comes from the reasoning that 'the inclusion of stakeholders increases the acceptance of decisions and thus improves compliance and implementation on the ground' (Newig and Fritsch, 2009, p.198).[112] Interestingly, macro-regional strategies are taken as apt 'testing grounds' for 'promoting democratisation and participative approaches' (Urschitz et al., 2017, p.4). Hence, a bright outcome is the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF)[113], a 'self-organized and independent NGO structure' (DCSF, n.d.), integrated nevertheless in the Danube Region Strategy (Priority Area 10, Institutional Capacity and Cooperation) and holding Participation Days on the margins of the EUSDR meetings.

Such events serve not only to help NGOs exchange their experience – this format presents an efficient awareness raising instrument for the general public as well. Apart from the Macro-regional Participation Days, the area has seen the Carpathian Biodiversity Days, the Carpathian Park Day, the Danube Day, along with various open-door events for local stakeholders (e.g. in the frames of JOINTISZA). All those are the most visible elements of the respective engagement strategies. The development of the latter involves analytical work, consultations, establishment of the terms of cooperation in the region and bringing together isolated interested parties, taking into account their topics of interest and possible ways of contributing. After the ICPDR workshop in Bratislava in 2003, the first Danube River Basin Public Participation Strategy was prepared. The "Agenda for Participation" in the EU MRS was developed by an international group of

[112] Participation is claimed to be 'at the core of European democratic values and good governance' (PA 10, n.d.).

[113] The organisational chores on the behalf of DCSF are handled by the Foster Europe (Foundation for strong European Regions). The NGO was founded in Austrian Eisenstadt in 2009 (coincidentally, the year of the appearance of the Danube Strategy concept). It was also in the capital of Burgenland, at the Esterházy Castle, that the Civil Society Forum held its first General Assembly on the 30th of June-1st of July 2011.

stakeholders and key actors 'to tackle Euroscepticism, Eurosclerosis and nationalism' by widening the basis of MRS 'through structured and transparent participation of local actors and civil society' (Idem).[114]

Partnerships are what gives a stronger skeleton to participation. Under the conditions that favour various assemblages cultivation, project and institutional partners can be found at different governance levels, have various activity scopes and values; their contributions can be complementary or they can have difficulties in finding a common language. Instead of being autonomous, cooperation practitioners opt for cross-sectoral mutual support and for decision-making together with experts of different backgrounds, ensuring what they call 'a meaningful discussion'. In multiple partnership-building formats, significant attention is paid to the engagement of organisations from the EU neighbourhood countries. It was pointed out that 'the logic of partnership in European regionalism has been used as a tool' (Palne Kovacs, 2009, p.54). This tool has been plied for spreading policy benchmarks, governance centralisation as well as creating relatively narrow circles of those competent to deal with a particular kind of problems. The EUSDR PA10 pays great attention to fostering networks and partnership development; and in 2017 together with DCSF, PA9 People and Skills, PA 7 Knowledge Society, and other partners it initiated the so-called Participation Partnerships. Those are meant to enable participatory governance in the Danube Region through supporting thematic expertise and activity hubs uniting representatives from civil society, public administration, research and international organisations. Earlier they received assistance from PA10 in the form of the Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP). Ágh et al. (2011) reflected on a "new localism" as an emergent phenomenon in the Danube Region, due to the increasing activities decentralisation. However, the mechanism of partnerships induces higher structural embeddedness of partners, including ties with institutions from higher governance orders.

Digitisation is another governance feature and practice that modifies the cooperation routine and makes new technological stakeholders part of the latter. First,

[114] Good coordination of strategy implementation is no less important to avoid such problems as, for instance, "overusing" stakeholders that occurs when joint events are held – instead of separate ones – for different purposes and organisations.

digitisation makes information about the area and project opportunities more equally and easily accessible to those interested. A case in point, EuroAccess has been a main EU funding information hub (open calls of circa 200 programmes) for the Danube Region since 2016. Differing in purpose, DANUBIS is a platform for sharing information on water and utilities in riparian countries. Second, the organizational resource allows to create dedicated online platforms to underpin the formation of communities facilitating ideas exchange and partner search. The same as other kinds of gatherings, they enable the sharing of local opportunities, experiences, and efficient methodologies. Third, interactive and close to real-time systems influence data gathering and sharing routines: for example, DriDanube put at the disposal of the participating countries the Drought User Service for proactive drought management. It is based on the analysis of field data and remote sensing maps of drought impact. Similarly, map crowdsourcing is possible with the JRC "Invasive Alien Species Europe" online application wherein common people can identify and share information about 37 such animal and plant species. Finally, voluminous databases offer significant analytical and operational opportunities, but also eventually create a critical dependency. The EU coordination of information on the environment, CORINE Land Cover (CLC), inventory programme was initiated in 1985 (with the latest update in 2018) and is now steered by EEA, pulling together data underlying many environmental indicators. Hence, it is faced with robustness, reliability, and accessibility risks typical for the centrally managed electronic systems.

The flesh of the environmental cooperation in the Carpatho-Danubian area is made of fund allotment. 'You need to see where to find funding,' – was the way in which a Danube Transnational Programme[115] capitalisation workshop was introduced. And then, with the EU funding share and winning rate figures, it was explained how to make real difference using that primordial ability, as the saught money is hidden in different opportunities. Moreover, the funding ecosystem in the region can be described as 'significantly and constantly changing' (REC, 2015, p.11). The financing gap becoming more and more tangible, environmental project coordinators themselves recognised that to achieve capitalisation they need to 'speak with a single voice', to have a coherent idea

[115] At the Budapest Forum, the DTP Chair Roland Arbter underlined the role of the Programme as a policy driver due to the realisation of projects with multiplying and sustaining effects. Importantly, through funding calls DTP is able to integrate Moldavia, Ukraine, Serbia, and Montenegro.

behind their varied bids. Moreover, for organisations from non-EU countries the access to funds cannot be gained but through partnering with an EU-based project leading entity. Apart from the European Commission funding architecture (CBC, transnational DTP and Central Europe, national and local OPs, and thematic funds)[116], there are structures channeling the funds, like the Danube Implementation Facility[117] (a PA10 flagship project outcome), and private donors[118]. On the whole, funding programmes are not specifically targeted – they create a generic framework of beacons and priorities (e.g. water, risks, biodiversity) and give room for different approaches in project content definition (e.g. project envisioning 'not the Danube, but the Danube area'), leaving much freedom to the authors of proposals.[119]

In terms of the territorial conceptualisation of the area, nominating cross-border regions and funding are part of the factors that solidify a certain geographic delineation. Strategic documents and international projects are another factor of territorial assembling. The network vision and stitching mechanism are encompassed by several large- and medium-scale initiatives. These include two types: those implying exchange of information (networks of people, institutions) and those ensuring physical connectedness. Through due networking orchestration national parks and similarly institutionalised natural sites, cause-based organisations, knowledge hubs, and other

[116] According to the workshop, the following financing programmes are open for the region: LIFE's environment subprogram for applied innovation (Priority Areas: environment and resource efficiency, nature and biodiversity, governance and information); Horizon 2020 for research (thematic objectives include low-carbon climate-resilient future, Paris agreement support, SDGs – with the average project duration of 3 years and an 11.6% proposal success rate); Interreg DTP and Central Europe for territorial cooperation (areas of transport, science, environment, governance). Funding under ERDF thematic objectives, IPA, and ENI has a 10% proposal success and an 85% EU contribution rate. As to the total volume of financial instruments for 2014-2020, ESIF has had 454 billion euros, Horizon 2020 – 77 billions, LIFE – 3.2 billions, DTP – 250 millions, and CE - 231 million euros.

[117] The Facility worked on creating the Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region projects (TAF-DRP), Seed Money Facility (START I and II), Danube Financing Dialogue, but also was entrusted to set up EuroAccess.

[118] Analysing funding of civil society development in post-socialist Europe, Fagan (2006) discussed the possibility of 'a new imperialism' under the guise of foreign NGO aid interventions. Importantly, many donors, e.g. the Open Society Foundation, establish national-level organisations to support local community initiatives. For instance, the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation is a member of the Environmental Partnership Association and sees as its major goal assisting the development of a democratic and equitable society grounded in citizen participation. Having published *The Good Grantmaking Guide*, it issues small grants to civil society and community organizations.

[119] Under the influence of the partnership and grant logic, organisations can also transform their mode of operation: the REC not only conceives of work in terms of projects like many other organisations, but it also became fully project-financed (REC, 2015, p.11).

geographically dispersed entities establish thematic exchange channels or unified standards of nature treatment (the European Emerald Network, Natura 2000).[120] The very National Focal Point (NFP) institutions of the Carpathian Convention have the function of nodes.

A transitory networking form, regular dynamic occurrences, such as transhumant herding, seam together eco-corridors as well as mountain communities, making transboundary space a processual phenomenon. Importantly, those take origin rather at the local level. Then, there are relatively stable material arrangements. Ecological networks[121], for instance, are a recognised tool in planning and managing the impact of infrastructure (in tourism, agriculture, forestry, housing, and industry) (Simeonova et al., 2009). Biological corridors are a fundamental part of those (e.g. the European Wilderness Society has advocated for a pan-European green corridor), since such networks are meant to counteract habitat fragmentation which originates with the humans' interrupting of a "natural" ecological system (Więckowski, 2013). The Carpathian Convention, hence, pursues the goal of creating a part of the Pan-European Ecological Network in the Carpathians (CNPA since 2006, with circa 300 protected areas included).[122] It cooperates closely on this with WWF DCP through steering bodies (Kadlecik, 2007, p.6) and projects (e.g. the PA4LP project supported by MAVA)[123], while

[120] Kozak et al. (2013, p.7) pointed out that because of geographical obstacles to cooperation in the Carpathians, such as not being neighbouring countries, integrative institutions are needed. The protection of the Carpathian wetlands in 2003 took the form of the Norwegian-Slovak project "Network of Carpathian Protected Areas and Ramsar Sites", also contributing to a better representation of those wetlands in the Ramsar sites database. The European Wilderness Network register includes such wilderness areas as Zacharovanyi Kray, Maramarosh, and Retezat.

[121] The concept 'integrating biodiversity conservation with the exploitation of natural resources' has been useful 'in preventing the extinction of habitats and species caused by their isolation, fragmentation and the loss of living space' (Zingstra et al., 2009, p.2). A project designed to marry development and conservation, the SEE River engaged with planning integrated river corridor management for six pilot rivers (among them the Bodrog, Prut, and Drava). The multi-stakeholder consultations in the countries of the region, including Austria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, were helpful in reaching an agreement among different groups on an action plan and future implementation of local projects in the financing period 2014-2020. Then, the effort is being undertaken also at the single NGO level: WWF takes care of key montane movement corridors for large carnivores, especially European brown bears, 41% of which allegedly live in the Carpathians.

[122] A specific example of a new format of institution, the Carpathian Wetlands Initiative (CWI) is a part of the CNPA. It was launched on the Wetlands Day in 2004 at the Slovakian initiative and is based on the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ramsar and the Carpathian Conventions: the two secretariats work on an array of joint activities.

[123] WWF sees the mission of PA4LP in weaving an ecological network of large protected areas into a Carpathian Space following the model of the Alpine Space.

such knowledge centers as CEEweb provide consultation support on the ground. The Alparc collaboration (Alps-Carpathian and Econnect) takes place along with the Alpine-Carpathian Corridor (AKK) development.[124] Less extensive joint projects see pieces of the regional network come into the focus, such as Poland, Romania, and Ukraine working on the transboundary ecological connectivity in the Ukrainian Carpathians or Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine on the Western Carpathian Ecological Network. Transversal infrastructural undertakings are bound to integrate ecological considerations into the expansion of built environment: the TRANSGREEN project (DTP-Interreg, 2017-2019) which had WWF DCP as its leading partner, placed around the region – with a special focus on the Carpathian Mountains – 'elements of Green Infrastructure, in particular ecological corridors' (Interreg DTP, n.d.). [125]

It is worth noting that, as state borders in the Carpatho-Danubian area often pass along relief marks and natural "obstacles", landscape parks and other protected areas in border or cross-border spaces (e.g. for Romania-Ukraine, Poland-Ukraine, Slovakia-Czechia, Slovakia-Hungary, Romania-Serbia or the first five-country biosphere park, the Mura-Drava-Danube Reserve) span across the relief and create new legitimised transboundary areas (discursive construction of transboundary protected areas tackled in Więckowski, 2013). All these alternative delineations, from geographical financial frameworks to environmental regimes, as Sassen (2009, p.567) observed, produce 'novel borderings' that 'cut across traditional borders and become evident both globally and inside national territory', thus, furnishing new matrices for territorial control (Balibar, 2004, p.3). There is defined a very pragmatic necessity for a scaled planning and control in the region where the Danube is 'a major international hydrological basin and ecological corridor' requiring 'a regional approach' (European Commission, 2010, p.4) and where 'challenges need to be managed in transboundary and integrated way', advocated by Joo

[124] The format exists in two clusters: AKK Basic and AKK Centrope. At the same time, the Access2Mountain project is meant to foster sustainable accessibility and connectivity for mountain regions. Several institutions from the Carpathians and the Alps participate in it to elaborate complex solutions to common challenges.

[125] The TRANSGREEN project is at the core of the sustainable transportation planning in the Carpathians, pursuing 'safer and environmentally-friendly road and rail networks in mountainous regions' (Idem): one of the project assessment workshops was conducted by the Carpathian Covention Secretariat and DTP in September 2018.

(2017) in an interview on the Tisza basin. Moreover, environmental strategies avowedly cannot be implemented without neighboring non-EU countries.

There are various practices shaping peculiar representations of the environmental regime and its remit. First, it is important to understand how the academic research and knowledge creation on the area are organized. There is no pan-regional research programme, neither one that would cover the Danube and Carpathians in an ecoregional, systemic key. Yet, such 'interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research' has been advocated for (Bjornsen Gurung etc., 2009, p.287). Science for the Carpathians (S4C) works as a networked platform with the Forum Carpaticum for regular meetings. First discussed at a follow-up meeting at EURAC in Bolzano, it was formally launched in 2008 during a workshop at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management of Jagiellonian University (Ibidem, p.282). Involvement of universities from the region (e.g. the University of Silesia, the University of Sopron) is possible based on their local expertise. Often there have been research, knowledge sharing or other international cooperation activities conducted by institutions from non-Carpathian countries, such as Switzerland (e.g. the enlargement contribution), Sweden, and the Netherlands (e.g. in Transcarpathia), rather than transboundary cooperation among adjoining countries within the region (Bihun et al., 2008, p.6). As an outcome, much alike what was happening in a business setting described by Dunn (2004), extra-regional forces come as well to educate the locals, to teach them "alien" good practices. Sourced from top universities and research centers, environmental policy ideas freely come from outside of the region (involved, among others, are the German Centre for Econics and Ecosystem Management at Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development and Writtle College) and are put in place through international cooperative efforts. Popular scientific initiatives comprise the founding of a "Carpathian University" (for upskilling local government employees) and the developing of a "Carpathian Encyclopedia", coordinated by the Carpathian Agreement "The Carpathians Are Our Home" ("*Karpaty Naszym Domem*"), signed in 2010 by six organisations[126].

[126] The Carpathian Agreement (n.d.) is based in Poland and is active across the whole spectrum of themes related to the Carpathians.

Second, codification and classification, including the practices of mapping and listing (Witkowski et al., 2003), are used pervasively. A lot of work is done with lists (of sites, species, indicators etc.), such as the CERI Carpathian List of Endangered Species[127], the List of Invasive Alien Species of Union Concern, the IUCN Red List[128], and many others that can grow into the above-discussed databases.[129] Interestingly, there have been many attempts at compiling public rosters of non-profit institutions concerned with environmental matters in the area (for CERI, over 40 participating NGOs are enlisted). Keeping them up-to-date is a challenge: if one goes on-line to check, many sites of such NGOs do not exist or are not being updated anymore, but a digital trace of their past can be recovered. This is illustrative of how the composition of actors changes over time, solidifying the position of the remaining "core" organisations. Then, drawing maps sets the focus and formalises a common perspective amidst the diversity of the region. In discussing Gunnar Olsson, Pickles (2004, p.3) pointed out to how that process results in 'inscribing identities' and boundary objects on the earth surface (Ibidem, p.5). Bringing about elements of play with the scale, maps and lists remain powerful instruments in legitimising governance systems, articulating threats, and establishing the (ecological) value[130]. On the other hand, they are themselves guarded by the repute of the authoring experts. Recently, from the standpoint of heritage oversight under the Carpathian Convention, Głowacki et al. (2018) took up a critical comparison of inventories and spatial planning.

Third, representations are woven through association with non-environmental, but essentially no less sensitive topics. This is a wide-spread policy approach, but in the Carpatho-Danubian area it inevitably acquires its own peculiar traits. In particular,

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[127] At the turn of the century, the WWF CERI compiled the first comprehensive assessment of the region's biodiversity, endangered species, and their conservation situation (Witkowski et al., 2003).

[128] These 'international knowledge and tools' are seen as helpful in Natura 2000 sites management (European Committee…, 2016, p.7).

[129] For example, *A Starter's Guide* (European Commission, 2016a) reviews key EU environmental policy documents and reports specific subsets of species of higher conservation concern, as is usually done in publication annexes or appendices.

[130] Expository of the importance of the Carpathian pristine forests is the very title of "Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe". At a UNESCO meeting in Krakow in July 2017, primeval beech forests of the Carpathians were put on the World Heritage List. According to Vlad (2017), a transnational partnership of 12 countries was behind the nomination for this extension, while WWF had been significantly involved in the process along with promoting responsible forest management in the Carpathian region. At the same time, the FSC certification emerged as a tool for standard observation control in forest operations.

multiple ecological threats mature in the urban setting (e.g. in Hardoy et al., 2013), yet, through bureaucratic divisions environmental policies are firmly tied to those of rural development and agriculture. Besides, similarly to many examples from around the world, environment in the region is imagined as connected to sacredness or shrines. Such ideas appear in accounts on the protected status of lands in state or private property, that are at the same time revealing of the basic opposition of the modern and the sacred (Grygar, 2016, p.20; Nash, 2002, p.225). By way of inertia, the problem of the environment is also often grouped with matters that once drifted to sidelines of the mainstream interest and – with the change of the course – are now being articulated as a potential consolidated foundation for sustainable development. For instance, in the case of DTP 2014-2020, the one axis of Environment and Culture merges these two themes into several specific objectives: to strengthen transnational water management and flood risk prevention, to foster sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources[131] etc. Concomitantly, single ecological initiatives diversify their conservation activities: e.g. CWI pursues cultural valorisation of the Ramsar wetlands. From this slant, the complex of problems related to the environment remains self-standing when contained within ecological policies; and spilling beyond, it looks oxymoronically divided into a part that goes together with the values of culture and the one that is ingested into technological solutions. Both discursively and organizationally, these aspects exist separated: e.g. promotion of "clean technology" and of environmentally considerate everyday urban living, on the one hand, and management of natural heritage sites, on the other, hardly intersect (though may have arguments in common). Thus the "comfortable living" (well-being) and the "curiosity" (tourism) dimensions also stay apart (Benč et al., 2015). Competitiveness propped by eco-technologies appears to come first, while the remainder of the concept of "nature" is placed in a withdrawn box of "heritage".[132]

Fourth, particular positioning of questions of environment takes place in relation to the public opinion, be it in news releases or region-wide touristic advertisements. For

[131] Seated in a compact and cheerful group, with a determination of 'making natural values more visible', in October 2017 EUSDR PA6 collaborators discussed capitalisation of projects and the choice of a picture of a natural park that would render the idea of uniting nature and culture. The year after, during its presidency of the EUSDR, Bulgaria set a novel priority: tourism and culture.

[132] Heritagisation of nature is a global phenomenon, as exemplified by the natural heritage sites and the MaB programme overseen by UNESCO.

example, there is a tendency toward metaphorical presentation or "queering" of regional specificity, which, consequently, results in a voluminous tranche of extra-regionally-oriented narratives based on exoticisation. To lend an illustration, one of the highest-profile species in the region, sturgeon is referred to as 'dinosaur' under threat by the EUSDR (n.d.) or 'living fossil' in *Sturgeon 2020* (ICPDR, 2013). DSTF (enjoying NGO and public support) was formed in 2012 to take care of the six sturgeon species through legal, environmental and infrastructural action.

### 4.2. Cooperation Initiated "From Below"

Where to draw the horizontal division to segment the actors starting up ecological cooperation? Usually the level of heterogeneous subnational actors, their groupings and communities is deemed to represent the initiative coming "from below", as this level is associated with local participation, which, once again, comes in no contradiction with their eventual vertical ties to BINGOs (big international non-governmental organisations). The actors in question are not vested with formal powers, with the exception of subnational governments (when introducing novelties as compared to the central governments' approach). Nevertheless, bottom-up vision enthusiasts endow subnational, local initiatives with substantial credit. According to Kiefer (2014, p.71) '[c]ross-border co-operation often is the first step' to interregional, transnational, or thematic cooperation.

Transnationalisation at large is a forceful vector of organisational development as such when it comes to subnational initiatives (explored with regard to the White Carpathian Euroregion in Carmin et al., 2003; the Western Beskids area in Makovicky, 2016). That direction nurtures '*private authority*' (Zurn, 2013, p.410) formation and is fraught with the risk of challenges to the state authority. Regardless, funding organisations are inclined to prioritise 'transnational' projects promoting 'transboundary' cooperation (as for instance, the CEE Trust did), given that such initiatives have vaster effects and contribute to building transnational spaces of action.

The core interest and activity common for most actors at that level is to seek a support base that may take various forms. Many of opportunities for organization and

project support are created in the upper segment governance mechanisms (fund provision, political backing-up, higher profile acquisition), other ones – like financial means from donors – can be available locally, and some have to be arranged by the subnational actors themselves (e.g. education or training for the general public). Thus, even though environmental matters constitute their primary object of concern, those actors cannot afford to neglect general "methodological" aspects of activism (e.g. the Carpathian University of Participation (KUP) organized by the *Ekopsychologia* Association from Poland). As a matter of example, most of those changing thematic circles during the funding workshop at the Danube Forum would represent smaller-size organiations and would be avid to learn about their eligibility under specific financing schemes. The fundamental approach of such actors is to have established collaboration with several key stakeholders in the area, from local communities and parishes to transport and forestry companies, as well as a few major donors. For instance, an important component of the Ramsar Convention project was financed by the Danone Group, while support from the Toyota Foundation was received, among others, by the REC, BirdLife (globally supported also by such giants as RioTinto and Cemex), and WWF. Financial liaisons notably make NGOs easy objects of criticism. A case in point, in the *Environmentalism of the Rich* Peter Dauvergne (2016) debunked the Coca-Cola and WWF partnership.[133]

The beverage company constitutes an example of a different kind and, in the attempt of projecting a virescent image, has been quite visible across the Danube region, including the launch in 2008 of the Business Friends of the Danube Partnership aimed at protecting the water resources and ecosystems, and the preceding Green Danube Partnership with ICPDR, whereby 'an extensive range of activities has been initiated to

[133] WWF famously builds partnerships with Toyota, Miller, Coca-Cola, and other transnationals, which serves, in the words of Kakabadse, 'to demonstrate that you can have a healthy relationship with business sector' (Paddison and Kakabadse, 2013). Moreover, such cases are positioned as 'a model of civil society groups and business sector collaboration' (Idem). "The Living Danube" partnership brought together WWF and Coca-Cola contributing to galvanizing local communities with regard to fresh water challenges and 'good water stewardship'. The Danube River basin is in the scope, while financial support comes from the Coca-Cola Foundation, local and European funds (WWF and the Coca-Cola Company, 2013). For criticism see also Glusing and Klawitter (2012).

promote public awareness (Danube Day Celebrations) and support conservation projects' (ICPDR, 2012).[134]

Making use of the resources at hand, subnational level actors engage with local identities and global imaginaries. In their immediate remit, so as to improve the collaboration climate and to foster synergies, they raise popular awareness of various problems and influence the general level of consciousness of being-in-the-region (e.g. the Carpathian Agreement) and being-in-the-ecosystem (e.g. the Foundation for Circular Economy in Hungary). It is noteworthy that there is a bevy of ongoing para-environmental activities: the objective of raising ecological awareness is approached creatively, but is also inextricably linked with other objectives, so that protection, conservation and restoration efforts are combined with actions in support of the local economy and culture and aligned with the trend of nature heritagisation. For example, such multi-purspose programme approach is reflected in the work of CERI, whereas five forest museums are being created in Ukraine; the Czech Bílé Karpaty tried gamification of tourist experience through putting up an ecological quest; and the Cultural center in Ochotnica Górna developed a trail of the Walachian culture (*kultura wołoska*) in the Gorce Mountains[135]. Looking at projects realized in the area mainly within the ETC framework, Dolzblasz (2011, p.163) underlined how significant the number of those with

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[134] According to the ICPDR site (Idem):

> 'In June 2005, the ICPDR signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Coca-Cola Company and its largest European bottler Coca-Cola Hellenic, for the joint protection and preservation of the Danube River.'

The respective activities have continuously targeted the countries where the companies have substantial presence (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine etc.).

[135] Cases that are offspring of a shepherd tradition are curious to examine, for they show how the original relation between geospatial and social elements of pasture is reworked through a touristic exaggeration to permit an eventual rediscovery of the natural regularities behind the ritual. A variety of motives mixes in such perimeter-boxed scripted frolics: "people on the move", borderlessness and unity of mountain people, Christian devotion, but also traditional knowledge and even paganism as well (e.g. *dziewiecsil* (*carlina acaulis*) is argued by the transhumance movement *Redyk Karpacki* to represent the identity of the highlanders).

In the introduction to an edited volume, Makovicky (2016) summarized her perspective on partnerships and sustainability as an underpinning of entrepreneurship, citing such phenomena as commercialization of the Gorale minority culture and undervaluing of the pre-existing social capital, "paleoterritorialism" (in the account on Cieszyn Silesia) and transhumant tradition revival as well as funding that had knocked together private-public partnerships and local action groups and had driven them to take up business schemes – and then grow international. She characterized *Redyk Karpacki* – endowed with ritualistic features of reconstruction and reenactment – as a spectacular transnational performance, noticing behind it technocratic governance, funds appropriation by specific groups (highlanders and respective ethnic groups), and discrepancy between on-line-reported and practical outcomes.

'non-material' deliverables was (especially, cultural and other sorts of events).[136] This is akin a stricter Parkin's statement (2013, p.48) that 'there is a distinct tendency to promote a generally made-up cross-border 'culture' as an alternative, through festivals and the like'. As to a materialised expression of local ecological identities shaping, the regional narrative adds value to environmentally friendly or bio-branded products.[137] Along with questions of ecology, a transversal matter on the agenda is the consciousness of living in a border area[138]: indeed, apart from experiencing the impact of several other divides that condition the liminality of actors in environmental cooperation and being at times intrinsic parts of geoecotones (areas of transition between different ecosystems, eventually, a kind of boundary regions), some human individuals, groups, and communities are integrated into border zone complexes in the Carpathians.

In the global imaginary realm, NGOs often – willingly or unintentionally (for it even suffices to use English in the outbound communication) – play a part in the discursive creation and reproduction of the image of the region, which, along with collective activities, is the one to glue the crests and valleys together (Parkin, 2013, p.47). When pursuing their own gains – big and small – non-profit organizations interpret their engagement with the Carpathians and the Danube and eventually share their idea of the region. Such references to the mountain range as 'the Yellowstone Of Europe' (TENT, n.d.) through which 'the Amazon of Europe' (MDDP, n.d.)[139] flows, not only put to the forefront the question to whom that kind of message is addressed, but also highlight the problem that the Carpathians might not have been promoted in Europe as good as the spectacular nature of the Americas. The practice of discursive exoticisation continues at the subnational actor level as well, and interestingly, the romantic discourse is mixed into the presentation of the rather scientific management tool of ecoregion.

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[136] Among relevant events Lewkowicz (2011, p.175) listed the Slovakian and the Polish Culture Days, the Highlanders' Festival (the Euroregion without borders, a 'big, cultural venture') taking place since 2006.
[137] Local businesses are thus helped by NGOs with funding and advertising their contribution to a more sustainable local economy.
[138] Interestingly, this sort of social engineering applied to border area inhabitants is sometimes perceived in the literature as an unequivocally positive phenomenon (Markus et al., 2008, p.45).
[139] The eponymous website of the Mura-Drava-Danube Programme presents the cooperation for transboundary management of a four-country biosphere reserve, whereby DANUBEPARKS is an associated partner, in the adventurousness spirit might remind of the stereotypical Jurassic Park.

To look at an example, the Foundation Aevis which is based in Slovakia and partook in a Rewilding Europe project, in its communication output adheres to the romantic vision of virgin nature. Its case shows how from commodification (e.g. in Kopnina, 2016) a step is made through marketing to merchandising and selling under the guise of environmental ideas. Significantly, untouched nature is used in the projected representation of wilderness. The Arolla Film documentary film producing company, associated to Aevis, strives to enlarge its audience and to introduce it to the wildlife protection (its mission is 'to disseminate enthusiasm of wilderness and to promote ideas of its protection', as explained to the author). The money collected from supporters and sponsors in the Arolla Fund (Aevis, n.d.a) is intended for expanding wild protected areas, that is to financially support interest groups of citizens, NGOs, civic initiatives, self-governments or individuals who are actively engaged in the protection of wilderness. Moreover, the Aevis Foundation offers cooperation in the form of cause-related marketing to companies 'directly or indirectly connected to nature conservation or ecotourism' which makes more intuitively understandable how '[w]ith the support for the return of wild nature you can help out yourself too' (Ibidem, n.d.b). The Foundation showcases this marketing approach in its own projects: support is given to CARPATICA that offers 'wilderness adventure travel' and an experience of 'pure nature', positing that 'nature oriented tourism in the wilderness areas helps creating their better protection and sustainable development' (Carpatica, n.d.).

Wilderness has been the object of what one can call a big discussion across the Carpathian space. It has been more than aligned with the overall attention to preserving wilderness in Europe[140], and one is even inclined to regard wilderness and virgin forest as a pan-regional brand. '[T]he Eastern Carpathians are one of the wildest corners in all of Europe' are the words with which in 2016 Rewilding Europe, after almost six years of

[140] The Agenda for Europe's Wilderness and Wild Areas ("Message from Prague") outlined 24 tangible recommendations. Solid effort has been spent on forging definitions. The one developed by Wild Europe's Wilderness Working Group is based on the existing IUCN Category 1B classification and reads:

> 'Wild areas have a high level of predominance of natural process and natural habitat. They tend to be individually smaller and more fragmented than wilderness areas, although they often cover extensive tracts. <…> often partially or substantially modified by human activities <…> or general imprint of human artifacts.' (Wild Europe, 2013, p.3).

The organization grounds its choice of the term in that IUCN-conform wilderness is rare ("untouched" lands in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Ukraine and Western Russia with elements found in Central and Southern Europe), while the notion "wild areas" helps to cover a wider part of Europe.

efforts, withdrew from that area in Poland due to seeing little promise in further engagement (Rewilding Europe, 2016).[141]

In Romania, in an effective effort to preserve wilderness, Greenpeace threw its map of virgin forests as a 'challenge' to the government. According to Eurostat, 67% of Romanian forests were available for wood supply in 2015 (Eurostat, 2015), while illegal practices would bring thousands of people in the country to protest against 'the destruction of their forests' (Olden, 2016, p.11). In 2016 Greenpeace blocked forest exploitation in the Ciucas Mountains; relying mainly on volunteering activists[142], the NGO assessed within a year almost 6,000,000 hectares of woodland (Greenpeace, 2016).[143] The highest density of potential virgin forests was discovered in the Natura 2000 site of the Fagaras Mountains (in the so-called Transylvanian Alps).

More literally than Cronon (1996, p.7) probably meant it, wilderness results 'quite profoundly a human creation'. Rewilding Europe together with WWF Romania conducted successful work on the South Western Carpathians Wilderness Area project, establishing a contiguous wild area of about 3 million hectares to connect protected areas (6 different Natura 2000 sites), core wilderness areas, and rewilding zones (the principal species for reintroduction is the European bison) (Rewilding Europe, 2015).[144] The efforts were supported by a Swiss Contribution grant and co-financing under the LIFE Programme, but also depended on negotiations with local authorities. Such reintroduction of species as part of area restoration means pioneering proactive conservation rather than mere preserving. However, according to a WWF DCP Project Coordinator at WWF Romania, ecological and social contexts constrain possibilities of species reintroducing and require acceptance studies.

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[141] Nine years before that, in July 2007 UNESCO declared over 29,000 hectares of virgin beech forest in the neighbouring Slovakia and Ukraine a World Natural Heritage Site.

[142] Volunteering-based nature protection programmes are a universal phenomenon and do reach out not only to local communities; they are complementary or alternative to fund-raising (as crowd-funding by time dedication). In the region, volunteers help to collect environmental data, to organize events, and even to maintain tourist infrastructure (hiking paths etc.).

[143] Although the NGO shares the idea of ensuring forest protection through database introduction, in the area that formerly hosted 2,575 hectares of ancient forests only in 2 valleys, over the last ten years 38.3% of those were destroyed, regardless of the national inventory. The remaining ancient forests are still reported to be under threat (e.g. logging). (Idem)

[144] The first bison release took place in 2014 in the Slovak-Polish borderland.

A number of other organizations have been working on wild area preservation and restoration initiatives: e.g. FORZA promotes sustainable forest management, the initiatives accumulated in the Romanian association AMZA are dedicated to bison-focused ecotourism, the European Nature Trust raises awareness of 'the outstanding value of the Carpathian wilderness' (TENT, n.d.)[145], while the "Wolf Mountains" film project drew attention to aquatic and montane ecosystems in the zone lying across political borders[146]. Creating a specific image of the area around the wilderness, the wildness archetype – with many regional actors exploiting it – is not only about generating positive connotations for the nature wild. It has some less thought-of consequences, namely the affirmation of the region's status of one of Europe's "wild backyards" (Lekan, 2007) and the imposing on the area of the role of an amusement park (contrasting with the "real world" of civilization) as well as the reinforcement of the discourse buttressing a patronising attitude towards the nature and people of the Carpathians.

Moreover, the 'economics of wilderness' (Kun and Houdet, 2012) matches well the transforming image of the regional economy: actors, like FCC, champion a new economy which is based on conservation and protection instead of exploitation and extraction of resources. The introduction of wilderness-focused approaches has been simultaneous with the pro-ecological application of new technology. Concerned with benefits and costs of ecosystem services[147], both lines of action subscribe to seeing units of natural capital, but endow them with different value. Their key source of revenue lying in tourism, several organisation build projects around a resource, keeping it from physical depletion. That can be seen at the example of the so-called Wolf Mountains – the tourist attraction in the Eastern Carpathians arose to give better prospects to the forests in the triple border area of Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine, with six interconnected conservation areas, including three national parks (Viering, n.d.).

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[145] Along with Wild Europe, TENT supports the expansion of protected natural zones (aiming to reach at least 100,000 hectares of wilderness areas) and conservation work improvement in national parks.
[146] The Aevis Foundation counts among the project partners.
[147] According to WWF (n.d.b), one of the objectives is '[t]o secure Europe's greatest natural treasures in the Danube-Carpathian region'. Working with local inhabitants, organisations need to translate abstract definitions of biodiversity conservation or management measures into tangible facts, such as fresh drinkable water, clean air, healthy environment etc. (Weiß and Streifeneder, 2011, p.32). See also Arany et al. (2017) on demographic problems of rural areas through the prism of ecosystem services.

The gap existing between the reconciled policy and infrastructure implementation practice (Natura 2000 sites in European Committee…, 2016) in the Carpatho-Danubian area is being bridged by varied local and regional grant-winning initiatives.[148] Such are: DARLINGe (under Interreg Danube) dedicated to geothermal energy, "Green-Go! Carpathians" (LIFE)[149] working with green infrastructure[150], or even the DANUBEPARKS Association (a "flagship project" of the EUSDR and an observer to ICPDR). The latter has the aim of bringing together all protected area administrations (many of the partner parks are cross-border) along the Danube and its bigger tributaries (e.g. Sava, Tisza, Morava), so that common problems can be solved more efficiently in close cooperation.[151]

Overall, the region makes part of a much broader tendency, attested by Igoe and Brockington (2007, p.433): 'In the context of 'hybrid' governance, <…> conservation-business partnerships are becoming increasingly common, if not the norm.' This includes corporate donorship, private management of protected areas, and 'emphasis on ecotourism as a means of achieving economic growth, community prosperity and biodiversity conservation' (Idem). Besides, he scholars cited one case of the contemporary set-ups where 'increased dependence on external funding, technology, and expertise also make them easier to penetrate by external actors and institutions' (Ibidem, p.438).

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[148] In their article, Igoe and Brockington (2007, p.434) mentioned a global trend 'to promote environmental consciousness for western consumers by encouraging them to fall in love with the environment through direct connections to it'. In the area, this is reflected in the high involvement of tourism organisations in ecological initiatives. The Danube Competence Center (DCC) in Belgrade brings together tourism stakeholders willing to make Danube "a sustainable and competitive destination" and supports cooperative networks in the public, private, and non-governmental sectors of 10 Danube related countries (including Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine). Among them are DANUBEPARKS, WWF DCP, several national parks administrations. (DCC, n.d.) The coordination council of "The Carpathians Are Our Home" includes associations of mountain agro-tourism. *Ekopsychologia* aims at refocusing spatial policies on biodiversity preservation and sustainable development: tourism and clean-tech are key aspects.

[149] Through the project the organisation "*Karpaty Lacza*" expects to increase awareness among local communities about the need to protect biodiversity and the importance of ecosystem services.

[150] Considered an essential element of sustainable local development, green infrastructure has a significant mapping effort projected on it and is the subject of instructive workshops (e.g. organized by REC in Hungary).

[151] The Association arose in 2014 (the Declaration of Vienna) from the Danube River Network of Protected Areas (the Declaration of Tulcea (DRNPA, 2007), referring to the Ramsar and the Sofia Conventions).

At the subnational level, one can find the development of higher-level trends in, to use the term of Shields (1991, p.16), social spatialisation (e.g. transnationalisation, exoticization of the region, capitalization of management of natural assets) as well as multiple arrangements that serve to promote the ecoregional approach, but also an arena for contestation of environmental policies. It is here that concession requests are formulated (e.g. WWF's convincing the transport sector to give in for the sake of sturgeon) and tactical problems of sustainability approach radication are solved. In this process local and regional identities oftentimes become stepping stones.

### 4.3. Three Case-Studies

The present section examines the landscape of environmental governance in three cases: Serbo-Romano-Bulgarian and Polish-Slovakian border areas as well as the nascent Carpathian Macro-region. In tackling ecoregional questions, it is convenient to use border as a starting point for the analysis. Recognising it as such would inevitably bring about a logical superstructure: Pierre Vilar suggested observing the world history from the frontier (Sahlins, 2010, p.27) and Bossong et al. (2017, p.66) advocated the 'methodological principle of *thinking from the border*' whereby 'orders move to the center of attention'. Importantly, that would entail as well looking at how border intercedes between quantitative and qualitative characteristics of adjacent border areas, influencing the respective relative differences. All the three case-studies are illustrative of a transformation (change in regularised social and spatial practices): once the maximum rigour of the state border used to cut into the "*monde à l'envers*" (Bourdieu, 1980) of the border area, while today the understanding of interconnectedness and interdependency is widespread.[152]

The case-studies have the following basic structure: 1) outline of the conditions and problems that can be examined within the transboundary area framework; 2) summary of the respective elements of environmental cooperation already in place; 3) critique from the point of view of ecoregional governance. The choice of the cases is bound to demonstrate that in the Carpatho-Danubian area, in addition to the overall

[152] Therefore, we might be looking at three instances of a "heterotopia in crisis" (Foucault, 1984).

governance setting, there is a substantial diversity in environmental and organisational challenges faced by governance stakeholders, cooperation arrangements vary, and the role of borders in them, to a certain degree, reflects local experiences and development objectives.

### 4.3.1. Spatial Case: Environmental Regime Elements in the Triple Cross-Border Area

The neighbouring border areas of Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria extend on the foothills of the Carpathians. The biggest towns here are Serbian Zaječar and Negotin, Romanian Calafat, Bulgarian Vidin and Kula. The valley-forming Timok River, a tributary of the Danube, is the largest river in East Serbia (202 km).[153] Overall, the area has an exceptional hydrological potential (Ilić et al., 2011, p.84): there is additionally the Pek River in the west and a few lakes in the Borski district. The Iron Gates and Djerdap National Parks, to the north of the area, and Stara Planina, to the south, guard the treasures of both the Danube and Carpathians. The landscape is dominated by types of land use other than forests (agriculture, residential areas, infrastructure etc.) which are 'still vital, with many virgin stands that are rich in species and are of high social, environmental and economic value for local people' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.113). The wider surrounding area is rich in cultural heritage, including shrines, monuments, and archaeological sites (e.g. Trajan's Table). In 2001 the mayors of Calafat, Vidin, and Zaječar met to inaugurate the Euroregion Danube 21; in 2002 the Middle Danube Euroregion was registered; and the Stara Planina one followed in 2006.

Yet, on the whole, the larger three-border zone displays an example of imbalanced development, or rather of uneven territorial attention. Currently, the area faces a number of discernable problems. One of these is related to the accumulated pollution. The Timok suffers from the discharges of mining, municipal and industrial wastewater through its tributaries (the Pek, Kriveljska, Borska). The ensuing Danube

[153] Its river basin surface is 4,547 km$^2$, implying a very branchy system of many shorter streams and water that can belong to all classes of quality. Starting at the joining of the White (49 km) and the Black Timok (82.5 km) near Zaječar, the (Great) Timok flows through the municipalities of Zaječar, Bor and Negotin and marks 15 km of the border between Serbia and Bulgaria. Its tributary the Borska River (47 km) has the basin area of circa 364 km$^2$, including the Kriveljska (Brankov et al., 2012, p.51).

contamination presents an international environmental problem. The concentration of hydrological contaminants was reported to exceed permissible limits, the biggest polluters being water utilities in Bor, Knjaževac, Minićevo, Spa in Gamzigrad and Zaječar (Ilić et al., 2011, p.85). Specifically, the Borska River is one of the most polluted watercourses in Europe: 'its water is unclassifiable in terms of quality classes and without any trace of life' (Brankov et al., 2012, p.51). The complex contamination in the Borski district[154] to a large extent is due to the state-owned Mining and Smelting Complex in Bor ("RTB Bor") with two active copper mines and ore processing plants.[155] That largest copper mine in Europe (exploitation since 1903, foundry since 1935) recently underwent restructuring[156] and tried to attract Chinese investors[157]. The pollutants in Bor were recognised as 'adversely affecting the food chain and therefore the entire living world' (Petrović et al., 2013, p.279), including 'the coast and water users' of the Timok and its tributaries (Ilić et al., 2011, p.84), and consequently presenting a limiting factor for 'economic activities and livelihoods of villages on riverside' (Bogdanović et al., 2014, p.282). The EU invested in the industrial and municipal wastewater treatment plant. The World Bank provided a credit for a restoration project to lower emissions, but the project was canceled in 2015 due to the unsatisfactory results. At the same time, in Serbia new mines come into development (Lakicevic, 2017). Besides, Bor hosts other environmentally risky manufacturing enterprises from the same industrial chain (batteries, copper wire etc.). Five kilometers away from Bor towards Zaječar, Serbian

[154] Petrović et al. (2013) classified and discussed sources and composition of air, water, soil pollution in Borski: mining, heavy industry, and urban waste are its main causes. The notorious Robule accumulation has a greatest impact on pollution. The industrial wastewater is generated during such processes as production of sulfuric acid and copper sulfate, copper electrolytic refining, processing of anode slime, inactive mine overburden dumps etc. A metal processing factory, heating plant, and transportation impact the air; high concentration of heavy metals and metalloids is found in the soil (Ibidem, p.279). Moreover, low water levels and reduced flow in the summer mean insufficient water to dilute the municipal and industrial waste waters, so that water quality drops significantly (Ilić et al., 2011, p.84).

[155] It is one of the largest companies in Serbia, a leader in copper and precious metals (gold, silver) production and, thus, a leader in corporate social responsibility (RTB, 2017). It operates in the open pit mining scheme; its mine water contains copper, iron, zinc, lead, manganese, nickel, cadmium.

[156] The deputy managing director Mirjana Antic said the company since December 2016 (adoption of the corporate restructuring plan) had repaid a debt of 15 million euro owed to the public power utility *Elektroprivreda Srbije* and 490 million of liabilities to the government, also paying a fee for the use of state-owned natural resources as well as to the municipalities of Bor and Majdanpek, where the production facilities are located (Ralev, 2017).

[157] According to the Economy Ministry secretary Dragan Stevanovic, the government tried to strike a deal that would allow a big Chinese company to enter RTB Bor, as was the case of steel group Zelezara Smederevo (Idem).

Slatina competes with Copsa Mica[158]: because of its zinc furnaces, the town is called the most polluted in Europe, as inhabitants feel to live in a 'gas chamber' (Vasiljevic, 2013).

In the past, some of the chemical and metallurgy plants 'were located in narrow, poorly ventilated Carpathian mountain valleys' (UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2007, p.37), causing thus non-negligible ecological damage. The chemical factory of Prahovo (since 1960), on the contrast, was placed on the right bank of Danube, close to Prahovo and Negotin.[159] As a by-product, it engendered uncontrolled waste dumps containing millions of tonnes of toxic pyrite cinders and potentially radioactive phosphogypsum. In 2012 Elixir Group started the revitalisation of its factory: waste removal caused pyrite dust pollution to spread, so the local inhabitants and NGOs recurred to the Ministry of Environment, Environmental Inspectorate, and police.[160] In response Elexir announced in February 2015 plans to build a new dump site, compliant with the EU standards. Regardless of an EIA study for this project, the conflict is kept warm.

Heavy air pollution in the town of Vidin is a bequest of the socialist times, which makes it the second town with the most polluted air in Bulgaria. Among the sources of contamination are residual effects of the abandoned chemical factory, pulp mill, and incinerator as well as the use of coal stoves by households and additional air pollution from a shoe factory across the border in Romania (EJAtlas, 2014). Notwithstanding the mushrooming solar power plants, a number of coal power plants remain active in the three countries, the ones in Halanga and Craiova being the closest to the triple border zone.

Secondly, navigation and hydroelectric power production have major effects on the ecosystems of the area. On the Bulgarian side, the hydropower plant in Vidin supplies local chemical, textile, and food industries. The half-a-century-old Iron Gate dam and

[158] Close to Romanian Sibiu, Copsa Mica is the location of the UPSOM plant for sodium products, built in the XIX$^{th}$ century by Solvay and currently owned by Holcim.

[159] The factory ("IHP Prahovo") specialises in phosphorus fertilizers, acids, detergents etc. In 1978-1992 the manufacturing capacity peaked. It was privatized in 2007, since 2012 is owned by the Elixir Group and renamed to Elixir Prahovo. The dust from dump sites was dispersed, polluting fertile agricultural land and drinking water sources, while phosphogypsum was gradually washed down into the Danube (massive deposits along the coast). The local community and NGOs have been pressing for a solution to the situation.

[160] Hence, the Serbian nuclear security agency monitored the radioactivity level in the Danube water (Jurasovic, 2011).

Djerdap power plant[161] upstream on the Serbo-Romanian border provide energy for a wide industrial area. But by modifying watercourse they also cause changes in the Danube basin ecosystems and threaten habitats survival (including blocked upstream migratory route for sturgeon[162]), for which a catchment area planning approach is seen to be mitigative. The zone is affected by droughts, so during the summer season losses soar for private and public companies from Germany to Bulgaria.[163] EU-funded navigation infrastructure improvement projects are not deprived of environmental complications.

Thirdly, it is land degradation resulting from decades-long intensive use, contamination, waste depositing, and similar factors. For instance, development of pan-European transport corridors, including the opening of the second bridge ("New Europe") between Romania and Bulgaria in 2013, has added new transport pressure, in particular, in the Calafat-Vidin area. Consequent land resource withdrawal from the pool leads to changes in local agriculture and overall economy structures.

In sum, the structural problems of each border area are combined with the problem of transboundary, as if to confirm that '[g]ood fences do not automatically create good neighbours' (Newman, 2006, p.150). The causes have partly perpetuated from the socialist times and in part have developed recently, shaping an area of industrial depression. After the regime change, many of the mining, chemical and other industry facilities that used to be sources of environmental pollution became redundant. That would rarely imply an ecologically proper dismantling, which would leave them a latent threat to the environment. Mono-industrial and rural settlements would grow depopulated faster than the rest of localities. Besides, illegal practices of natural resources usage would hardly subside.

Generally, in CEE '[b]efore 1989, this same combination of the barrier effect and the isolation of the borderlands contributed to the quality of the natural environment, which was quite often higher along the border than elsewhere' (Więckowski, 2013). In

[161] As it often happens in case of dam construction, Djerdap caused flooding of local settlements with negative social and economic consequences for the local population, while being beneficial for large industry.
[162] The endemic species is endangered by dams and extraction of gravel and sand at sites where it lays eggs, specifically by riverbank reinforcement along the Romanian-Bulgarian border under an ISPA II project.
[163] The water mark near Vidin was reported to be 'below low-navigation level' (TerraDaily, 2011).

the area in question, the problem apparently developed due to the presence in the same time of the border (that is characterized by the ability to directs flows) and of natural (geo- and hydrological) resource endowment. Several key strategic considerations of those in power could have led to the problem of transboundary: a) border area was enacted by the centers as a buffer and exclusion zone, also a wasteland; b) the undesired was tendentially rejected toward the rim[164]; c) a (subconscious) belief in the physical solidity of a primarily formal border (expected protection from externalia) was more common before the regime change; d) perceived sharp limitedness of own spatial responsibility still resonates with local authorities. Thus, "border effects" (Raffestin, 1974) have accumulated in a single zone, neglected by the centers on both sides and suffering negative impacts from inner state regions and from across-the-border.[165] Given that the industrial spatial planning in the three countries was executed by a centralised function, the problem finds itself among the ossified crises of authority (in the Gramscian sense).

Under such circumstance, there are several ways in which transboundary environmental cooperation develops around the area in question. Since it is not densely populated and hosts no key institutions, a most straightforward way for environmental activities to be prompted are specific ecological problems important for the communities. Or, as Adrian Hagatis from WWF Romania explained during the interview, local NGOs exhibit much sensitivity toward local problems. In Bor local NGOs accumulate expertise when taking a stance in public debates, submitting petitions, protesting, interacting with environmental authorities and the government. Among the involved is the Association of Young Researchers of Bor: its specialisation and expertise were shaped by the local ecological situation. Supporting the Carpathian Convention, it realised projects in cooperation with various partners (e.g. central and local authorities and business, the REC, UNDP, World Bank, Trag Foundation). But more importantly, it

[164] The rejective movement towards the Hercules' columns of the state territory does not necessarily require a negative bias regarding the neighbour. In the case, coupled with economic geography factors (location of primary resources, sources of energy etc.), it conditioned the concentration of polluting industries.

[165] The formation of such a deserted "zone of impurity", excused as marginal for the country society, is stimulated by natural conditions: mountains, the divisive river flow. In that situation borders are not challenged in their function of separation.

was able to contribute to region-scale environmental plans development, law-making, and campaigning (e.g. promotion of new technologies application in the mines in the Danube basin) leveraging its local expertise.

The triple border zone is part of the CBC-eligible area (though the Secretariat head offices are located elsewhere – in Timisoara and Sofia), so at the background of a large stratum of bi-national cultural-cohesion-oriented ("ice-breaking") projects, there is a certain number of those dealing with the environment. Such Romanian-Bulgarian projects have pursued complex environmental improvements (e.g. "A Green Region" in 2014-2020 with a budget of 63.5 million euro); Romanian-Serbian ones have prioritized strengthening connectivity, natural and man-caused disaster prevention and emergency preparedness, economic development as well as sustainable tourism and use of natural resources (e.g. plant genetic resources in border areas in view of climate change). Bulgarian-Serbian projects similarly have addressed connectivity and ecological tourism (e.g. "Mount a bike" for sustainable mobility in 2011-2013, "Youths Teach Adults" and "CLICK – Climate Change Kick-Off" in 2013-2014), sustainable agri-business ("Organic Farming" in 2011-2012), green infrastructure and waste management ("Clean and Green Life" in 2016-2018, Stara Planina biodiversity protection in 2017-2019). Intended to mobilize local communities, the projects present a perspective of cross-border ecosystems. Improvement of planning and governance across the border constitutes a separate field of activity (for example, civil society and local public administration of Calafat and Vidin in 2013-2014). Besides, decentralisation of environmental management and dependence on external funding (the Environment Operational Programme, grants, private donors) mean strong participation of non-local institutions as well.[166]

An advisory and benchmark-setting role is played by extraregional national institutions (such as the Romanian Institute for Wildlife Research or the Responsible Business Forum in Serbia[167]), as well as foreign actors. Environmental Partnership Foundations are active in Bulgaria and Romania; the REC not only monitors the Timok

[166] An element of exterritorialisation of decision-making of business stakeholders, a main office of the Petroleum Industry of Serbia (NIS) is located in Brussels.

[167] Founded in 2008, the Forum is a network of Serbian public companies and country offices of largest multinationals that want to promote social responsibility of business, environment being one of the four its pillars. It facilitates the dialog of business with representatives of other parts of the society.

River basin (REC, n.d.), but implements specific programmes (with international donorship) and overall assists Serbia in the EU accession process (the negotiations started in 2014) by sharing its experience and facilitating dialog with Serbian institutions. As early as in 2006, WWF (2006) upheld the position that '[t]hese lands represent a single ecological unit and there should be a unified ecosystem management'. Over the past years WWF Romania has been steering efforts of Rewilding Europe and engaging with local communities (in particular, to the north-east of the area in question). Apart from the coordination of freshwater sites at the Danube level, the Fund also applied to manage Natura 2000 sites in Mehedinti (agreeing the plans with the local and country authorities). Still, regardless of the serious ecological problems, the area as whole has not been put into the focus of attention of international environmental governance institutions.

It can be concluded that the actors in the region have the possibility to contribute in different ways to the development of the given problem complex. On each of the three border sides, it is private business that owns the assets which are the main sources of the pollution, though at the same time undertakes attempts at modernising the capabilities and mitigating the ecological impact in line with the prescribed standards (if not out of genuine concern). Public authorities in area and the competent EU agencies have to take on the role of an intermediary, along with focusing on balancing economic growth capable of adding more anthropogenic pressure on the landscapes with the environmental aspects of regional sustainability. They also support diverse pro-environmental initiatives not directly aimed at resolving the problems damaging the local nature the most. Civil society organisations are active on the ground and the local ones are the most vocal about the ecological problems, serving as a bridge to the governmental bodies as well as knowledge hubs.

The whole triple transboundary area generally belongs to the same Balkan mixed forests ecoregion, according to DMEER. The interplay of conditions in it which the was put, from the ecological governance point of view, resulted in the following: 1) the persistence and aggravation of environmental issues due to the imbalance of economic and ecological interests of the actors in the area; 2) the accumulation of environmental matters expertise that takes place locally and is substantial enough for further regional-

scale application; 3) the use of a supra-national framework to address similar problems on the adjacent sides of the border; 4) the structuring of the cooperation through the EU regional programmes; 5) distributed (as opposed to centralised) environmental management of the transboundary area.

### 4.3.2. Connectedness Case: Borderlands of Poland and Slovakia

Also in the Danube catchment area, the Tatra and Sub-Tatra Mountains, shared by Slovakia and Poland, are covered by beech and fir forests as well as high-land meadows, home to lynx, hog, fox, and smaller animal species. The boundary of the Polish Podhale and the Tatras actually marks the border, as nature evidently takes its toll by dividing the two countries: e.g. road connection is especially difficult during wintertime and extreme weather events. Yet, paradoxically, the mountain area has rather kept together the multicultural communities living there. Even without counting the Lemki population domiciled across several polities, cultural and language vicinity and common historical heritage have brought together the borderland inhabitants (the first transborder territorial units here date back to the 1920s) (Lewkowicz, 2011, p.169). The area nurtured places of cross-national symbolic significance: the Trilateral biosphere reserve as a product of steady Polish-Slovak cooperation, *Droga pod Reglami* in the Tatras that previously connected two iron factories and during the transformation years morphed into a trekking road, or Siwa Polana visited by John Paul II in 1983.

These mountain borderlands are characterised by high afforestation (including European primary beech forests) and lower degree of hemeroby, low population density and lower level of urbanisation, fewer industrial facilities along with predominating private and subsistence agriculture. Close to historical mining regions, it sees now coal phase out in public and household economies. According to Więckowski (2004, p.227), '[a]s much as 90% of the border's length is constituted by biocentres, nodal areas and ecological corridors of international significance'. This prompted the scholar to posit that '[t]he Polish-Slovak borderland is functioning as an eco-frontier <…> it forms an archipelago of smaller islands of National Parks and other protected areas' (Więckowski,

2013): in particular, '[w]ithin 50 km of the border on both sides there are 13 National Parks (6 in Poland and 7 in Slovakia)' (Idem).

The area has been drawing strategic interest of several stakeholders (as a transport corridor, a cradle of popular identity, a recreation industry platform etc.). This made it a long-term "construction site" of international cooperation, since the way institutions are geared up for and conceive of governance is a main factor defining the content of environmental cooperation. National institutions have specific structural constraints in the two countries: e.g. the 'competencies and funds' challenges faced by Polish regions (Palne Kovacs, 2009, p.46) or imbalances in the conservation approach in Slovakia that 'led to <…> overrepresentation of forest and mountain ecosystems' (Meessen et al., 2015). Ecological thought over the mountain range has been consolidated by high-level coordination of goals within international organizations, regional fora, bilateral interministerial consultations as well as the Inter-Governmental Commission on transborder cooperation (run by the Polish Ministry of Interior).

The format of the Carpathian Euroregion provides for the Commission for Tourism and Environment which has to be located in Poland and the Commission for Prevention of Natural Disasters – in Slovakia. In 2014-2020, one of the priorities of the bilateral Interreg programme has been to expand the sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage. The mountain range is bridged by green corridors: the Southern one (from the Bieszczady through the Przemyskie plateau to the Rudzkie forest) and the Carpathian one (from the Bieszczady through the Pieniny to the Tatras) (Kurek, 2008). The Polish and Slovakian administrations of the parks making part of the Trilareral reserve support scientific activities, such as compiling inventories of animals and plants, studying effects of pollutants, and detailed mapping of different zones of the reserve. However, in the case of public protected areas that were established in a top-down fashion, local people's support for conservation remains low (Meessen et al., 2015).

On the other hand, a massive education campaign on valorisation of the Carpathians has been going on in the past decade. It has been *prima facie* a cultural project, the environment of the mountains being seen as one of the assets on the list. So, essentially, this is the case when '[e]nvironmental protection is also warranted because of the importance of natural systems for social cohesion, cultural traditions and spiritual

life' (Lowe and Paavola, 2005, p.4). Still, other way round, socio-cultural attractiveness of nature also has been used as a tool in promoting eco-friendly behaviours. Endorsed by UNEP/GRID Center in Warsaw, the *Strategy of sustainable development of tourism of the Magical Land of Lemki and Pogorzanie* for 2015-2020 (Zawilinska et al., 2016) stated a distinct objective of shaping the respective image of that area so as to foster the living in harmony with nature and the respect for cultural heritage (among the locals and tourists). This creative interpretation of the Carpathian Convention belongs with a number of initiatives, including transhumance and local crafts revival, that discursively equalise traditional living with manifestations of nature.

For the UNEP/GRID Center, the area is in the focus of its attention, and it has supported several related projects, including the build-up of the "*Karpaty lacza*" format and its three offspring projects, tailoring its own priority scale of environmental challenges and advising on responses (UNEP/GRID, n.d.). Under its auspices, the *Ekopsychologia* Association gathered a working group on spatial development, establishing collaboration of local experts with the Carpathian Convention mechanism. Other work on the ground is conducted by a miscellany of organization: e.g. the public Center of the Upper Silesia Nature Heritage (for studying, documenting, and protecting nature), the Silesian Workshop for All Beings of deep ecology extraction and pronounced independence (cooperating with VLK and Greenpeace, it follows especially closely the complex of environmental problems regarding road modernisation in Poland), the Partnership for the Environment (a CERI member from Lesser Poland), the Ekopolis Foundation in Slovakia having Deutschen Bundesstiftung Umwelt as a partner, the local offices of the Environmental Partnership Foundation, the Foundation Bieszczadzka, the Carpathian Foundation in Slovakia (mainly active in the Eastern Slovakia) and the Natural Heritage Foundation (its two key activity areas are nature protection and region development: from touristic spot and consumer product promotion to pro-environmental investments benefiting local inhabitants (Fundacja…, n.d.)).

National NGOs participate in transborder cooperation in the Carpathians even without implementing international projects. To give an example, at the backdrop of the Polish-Slovak cooperation on protection of endangered bird species in the West Carpathians, the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP/ BirdLife in Poland) ran

in 2011-2015 the Swiss Contribution project "Birds of the Carpathians" (making an inventory as well as setting up a monitoring and protection system for key bird species through cooperation with target groups, authorities, and forest rangers). A kind of regional coordination was happening at a higher level: in 2014-2018 BirdLife International (a member, along with 21 other oganizations, of the Slovakian Ecoforum) realised a project to compile the *Atlas of Birds Dynamics of Slovakia.* The underlying database of the Slovak ornithological society ("Aves-Symfonia") was created in 2009; and in 2007-2013 the interface for it was buit in the frames of the cross-border cooperation with Poland and Hungary. Though a lot of conservation work is being performed locally, in the view of an OTOP Project Coordinator, environmental matters remain unpopular among national policy-makers, since the former 'do not bring much attention [of potential voters]', nor 'money, at least in the short term', and some problems might be overlooked due to personal involvement and ties.

Given the generally high bearing of the Catholic church on political and social matters in Poland, its influence penetrates also the sphere of pro-environmental activities. Accoding to the "Visions of Nature in Eastern Europe" (Hunka et al., 2009, p.431), perceived value of nature and images of man-nature relationships in Poland are shaped by Catholicism, while in terms of social organisation, noteworthy is the structuring role of diocese and parish (Knerr, 2016). Besides, in the light of the 'renewed prestige of religion in post-Communist Europe' (Kratochvil, 2009, p.120)[168], the encyclical *Laudato si'* (Francis I, 2015) can be interpreted as a step to 'integrate an ethical commitment to sustainability into their theology' (Reuter, 2015, p.1219).[169] The former had a mixed reception in Poland (including being framed as "anti-Polish" and threatening the national carbon mining industry).[170] So pulping to what extent religion had effect on the idea that in the region 'humans need to find ways to live *with* nature, rather than

[168] In 2009, Vol. 17 (2) of *Perspectives* was dedicated to religion in IR, and Catholic church thereby was portrayed as an influential social force the 'post-secular society' of Habermas (Kratochvil, 2009, p.120). The so-called green revolution has allegedly prompted a need for "cosmological correction" so that nature gained an intrinsic value (Reuter, 2015, p.1218), and green Christianity made an 'important shift from periphery to the center' (Nita, 2016, p.5). By invoking 'our Sister Earth' of St. Francis of Assisi (along with certain Southern American inspirations), the encyclical rejected allowdness of domination over the rest of creatures and gave the greens 'a sense of ecumenical belonging'(Ibidem, p.4).

[169] Differences between social change in Slovak montane communities of catholics and protestants was studied, for example, by Lompech (2016).

[170] See, for example, a dedicated volume edited by Borda and Ceglarek (2016).

'over' it' (Jordan, 1999, p.19), led us to the conclusion that parishes chose not to put the new ecological vision on the top of the agenda and the idea of Man's stewardship remains largely unchallenged.[171]

In sum, both Polish and Slovakian authorities seize the opportunities to develop cultural interaction and pro-environmental awareness among the local populations, benefiting from supportive position of the EU institutions. In the absence of acute environmental conflicts, this leads to the "drowsing" of the full potential of non-governmental parties to international cooperation in the area. For the natural park administrations and mountain-focused research institutions the maintenance of the collaboration channels remains essential for a considerable part of their day-to-day work.

Slovakia and Poland share a portion of the Carpathian montane corniferous forests ecoregion, under DMEER's classification. While it is generally true that 'borders are major disrupters of 'embeddedness' and 'trust'' (Anderson, 2001, p.9), thanks to many channels of dialog maintained, communities in the Polish-Slovak borderlands often do not lack 'a sense of collective purpose based on mutual interests and understandings' (Shaffer, 2012, p.674) required for the production of common goods, such as ecological regimes. The Slovak-Polish case confirms that the image of the area in the eyes of the key decision-makers is a primary factor of cooperation development. It also illustrates the region-wide phenomenon of orchestration through the supranational level, described by Kluvankova and Gezik (2016, p.183) as 'institutional robustness via supranational intervention'. This implies not only non-profit sector entities collaboration, but also the possibility to connect local systems via the EU institutional framework, whereby the scopes of European funding instruments present a most effective aspect of the European policy guidance.[172] Thus, while some NGOs focus on obtaining means to realise their initiatives, other organisations, like OTOP, admit that 'ideas for projects are half-based on real environmental needs in [a] particular place and in the other half are fund-driven'.

[171] A number of catholic organisations act in support of the new approach. Among them is the Ecological Movement of St. Francis of Assisi (REFA), focusing on ecology of the city (Czaki, 2016).
[172] The phenomenon is also connected to the seed money activities effect that consists in local economies' being stimulated by smaller projects (Meessen et al., 2015).

### 4.3.3. Institutional Case: Carpathian Macro-Region

Most of the environmental cooperation practices characteristic of the Carpatho-Danubian area are reflected in the so far long-germinating project of the Carpathian Macro-region: from the use of fora and regionalising narrative to moving toward comprehensive spatial planning. Historically, the mountain range has proved pivotal for a number of cooperation formats, including the *Międzymorze* concept or the respective parts of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania being encompassed by the Carpathian Euroregion that came into existence in 1993. It is important to note that, the same as in the Danubian format, all notwithstanding, there has been no territorial funding programme covering the entire Carpathian area.

In concurrence with the forming of the Danube Macro-region and in addition to the heavily politicised but functional Convention arrangement, there was a Carpathian Strategy envisioned as an instrument of the EU macro-regional policy (Paruch, 2016, p.6). The Carpathian Memorandum adopted in 2011 stressed the need to develop such a strategy to conceive of the local, interstate, and Union's levels simultaneously. The visions of the territorial scope for the future macro-region ranged from limiting it to Hungary and Slovakia (Kovács, 2006) to one of the currently discussed models comprising five EU member states along with Moldavia, Serbia, and Ukraine (Ministry of Development of Poland, 2018). For the first time the strategy was debated in the European Parliament in October 2013, but since the area had already been covered by the EUSDR (Moran Vidal, 2014), not to mention the Carpathian Convention and Euroregion, the idea was judged superfluous by DG REGIO.

However, the charm of such "territory pooling" (Allmendinger et al., 2014) under the aegis of the EU proved recurrent[173], and the year of the Hungarian presidency in the Visegrad Four a macro-region was put in a strategic document (Benč et al., 2015) as one of the alternatives for the development of the eponymous Euroregion. In February 2016,

[173] It may be interpreted as a move toward merging the UNEP and EU formats that in 2010 the Interim Secretariat of the Convention submitted considerations to the discussion of the EUSDR putting forward the idea that the Carpathian as a whole are a macro-region withing 'the Danube region [which] encompasses also the hinterland of the river and its basin' (Carpathian Convention, 2010, p.3). In the same vein, advocates of non-duplication of strategies suggest that the EUSDR area be enlarged, including Commissioner Cretu's support of extending it to the Polish Carpathians (Jourde and van Lierop, 2019, p.7).

the Carpathians interregional group was set up in Brussels at the Committee of the Regions to investigate in depth the feasibility of the strategy and its complementarity with other macro-regional programmes as well as to promote a multi-level and decentalised governance approach for sustainable development. While liaising with local authorities of the prospected non-EU countries, the group sprearheading the Carpathian lobby planned to concentrate on such topics as landscape preservation and environmental risk management, but also renewable energy and boosting tourism. A few days after the COP of the Convention deliberated to monitor the work on the Strategy (Carpathian Convention, 2017, p.6) the latter was invoked in October 2017 during the EUSDR Forum marking the eighth anniversary of the Danube macro-region.

The outline of the Carpathian Strategy authored by Poland has been presented on several occasions. For instance, at the Convention meeting in Modra one argued for including seven countries and against seaming the Danube and Carpathians into one strategy referring, in particular, to the 'lack of common geographical identity', 'different needs and priorities' of mountains and valleys, 'too broad scope', and 'risk of further consolidation of peripheral character [of the area]' (Szuba, 2017). In September 2018, representatives of Hungarian, Slovakian, Polish and Ukrainian governments signed the Declaration of Intent to create the strategy. And exactly one year after, the Committee of the Regions listened to a rapporteur and generally supported the strategy proposal, while the positive Draft Opinion prepared by the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (Commission for Territorial..., 2019) focused its line of argument on potentially higher competitiveness of the area. In preparation for the debate in December, in October an overview briefing was released by the European Parliamentary Research Service. On the 4$^{th}$ of December the Committee of the Regions adopted the final Opinion in support of the strategy (European Committee…, 2019).

If one looks at the strategic document prepared by the Polish government (Ministry of Development of Poland, 2018), the suggested four priority areas, namely "Competitiveness", "Green Carpathians", "Cohesion" and the "horizontal area" of "Institutional Cooperation and Spatial Development", can all have a bearing in terms of environmental governance. The array of specific objectives covers protection of ecosystems, biodiversity, and transborder ecological corridors, tackling of the problems

of natural disasters and climate change, sustainable use of natural resources along with enhancement of energy efficiency and security, including the focus on indigenous energy sources. There is a clear reference to a 'macro-regional collaboration' format dedicated to 'the protection and preservation of natural environment' (Ibidem, p.22). Besides, the comprehensive territorial development is understood as dependent on 'common functional connections in the region' (Ibidem, p.23), whereas the goal of rural-urban and cross-border collaboration increase would take into account the specificity of montane infrastructures. The document provides for the promotion of ecological attitudes contributing to the improvement of quality of the environment in the region, and, not surprisingly, resorts to the instrumental role of regional identity and, hence, to grouping together what has an aesthetic and recreational value in the area: '[t]he environmental-cultural values of the Carpathians are the integral element of the development of the macro-region' (Ibidem, p.22).

The Polish government relying on the support of regional stakeholders inside the country stands out as a key actor in the process of the fostering of a new strategic unit. The engagement of the European Union by other interested parties narrows its key contribution to the conducting of an assessment and taking of a decision by its competent institutions. The role reserved therein for the civil society is that of voluntary "auditors" of the new format and students of new project opportunities and partnership configurations.

In the light of the above, the possible governance impact of the Strategy's being adopted can be summarised as follows: 1) improved multi-sectoral coordination with regard to the environmental agenda, especially within EU mechanisms, and new lobbying possibilities; 2) the strategy coverage of the whole area would allow for complex, integrated planning of the Carpathian-specific policy development; 3) the inevitable process of administrative and programmatic differentiation from the Danubian and Alpine Strategies would sharpen the understanding of concrete macro-regional problems, criteria for future projects and relevant stakeholders; 4) a green approach would be firmly integrated into the work pursuing social and economic goals on the ground; 5) cooperative spatial planning would be translated into a new round of programmatic work on cross-border areas; 6) problems related to mountain ecosystems

at large would receive primary attention (e.g. it suffices to compare water management challenges of the strategy in question and the EUSDR), which would also lead to the gathering of distinct expertise; 7) jointly increased competitiveness and accumulated ecological policy experience would consolidate an influential pole in the EU; 8) the EU spatial governance system would be reinforced, while the international positions of some states would be strengthened (presently, Poland is in the vanguard). Thus, this primarily politically motivated Strategy project is interesting as an international governance initiative originating from the meso-level and sponsored by a specific [region of a] country – and in that way marking a confluence 'where regionalization meets regionalism', to use the expression of Fabian (2013, p.47).

It was by design that this section reviewed some of not the most eye-catching examples of cooperation in the area. The three case-studies above show how across the range, the Carpathians are organised as a factory backyard, a fantasy, a transcultural space or a political grouping. What is not to be dismissed from the analysis is that to complement the factor of nature itself in serving as a unifying base is the orientation of individuals towards cherishing one's immediate milieu (more than sharing universalistic preoccupations) as well as political ambition. Therefore, locally focused communal activism of ecologistic, entrepreneurial or spiritual extraction constitutes only one of the moving forces of this regional environmentalism, major stimuli coming from larger actors. Another unsurprising conclusion to surface is that in transborder areas continuous interaction and cooperation across domains, other than ecology, sets a better grounding for ecoregional management. Besides, as the implementation of value-based projects transcends natural and political boundaries, they preserve the ideational thrust, and consequently, diverse values of different stakeholders come to underpin a single ecoregional governance construct. The closer one observes the Carpatho-Danubian area at different scales, the better one can grasp how confronting ecological problems spins off into international cooperation challenges to evolve into regional "identicisation" and orchestration conundrums.

### 4.4. Question of Ecoregional Identity in the Area

In principle, ecoregions have a lot in common with other regionalisation formats. Yet, in comparison to several other kinds of region-making, "ecoregionalism" was not presented as a rebellious response to regimes being imposed from above or from the center, but it was rather born out of the necessity to respond to specific gaps in national and global environmental problem-solving mechanisms. Ecoregional perspective is very close to the Euroregional approach (as in Kiefer, 2014) of looking at pan-regional problems and developing synergies based on the social, economic and natural characteristics of a territory. Theoreticians grant a lot of credit to ecoregionalism: for instance, they notice the efficiency of local networked governance and advocate a regional ecology approach (Bailey, 2007). However, one of the challenges therein is that at a scale similar to that of a Euroregion it is 'difficult to develop cross-border governance', while it is easier to do so at lower or higher scales (Terlouw, 2012, p.363).

Fostering ecoregional governance and management structures employs considerable symbolic, social, and political capital that, first, is often in deficit on the ground (especially, in the region in question), and second, cannot usually be substituted by monetary allocations from budgets of various levels. Therefore, the questions of ecoregional identity, capable of consolidating all the non-material capital, and thus, of potentiality for regional-scale self-organisation (similar concepts advocated in: McCloskey, 1989; Kozak et al., 2013), concerns the whole area of the Carpathians.[174] This can be regarded as one of the facets of the co-constructive nexus between regionalisation and identity (being heavily dependent on "virtual" spatial representations, the former relies on the latter, but also helps to solidify it with time). Identity can be part of the mechanisms that translate such a scientific conceptualisation of space as "ecoregion" into routine practices in a place. Different aspect of (auto-) identification process and outcomes are interesting from the point of view of a

[174] According to the conclusions of Böhm (2014, p.48), 'the best conditions for the conduct of CBC exist in regions where there is a broad engagement of the vertical levels of public administration, of civic society, the business sector, of universities and of R&D actors'. In terms of ecological behaviour, certain identity can be one of significant factors that make individuals include collective interests in their personal decision-making (Kramer and Brewer, 2006, p.120). There is some evidence that acting as such a constraint, 'level of group identity affects individual decision making in response to depletion of a shared resource' (Ibidem, p.131).

functional region: identity construction in a bi-national space (Cold-Rauvkilde et al., 2004), leadership impact on cross-borderisation and the formation of political cross-border communities (Böhm, 2014, p.47), instrumentalism and manipulation of identity (Sahlins, 2010; Lompech, 2016; Makovicky, 2016).

When seeking to define identity, Harrison White (1992) disaggregated the notion into five aspects, the basic driver of identity being the quest for societal pivots amidst the uncertainty of the world. It also hardly can be contested that 'the spatial has an epistemic and ontological importance – it is part and parcel of our notions of reality, truth, and causality' (Shields, 1991, p.7). Hence Cultural Geography and congenial disciplines evolved to include the analysis of space- and place-relations of individuals and groups into the study of such unstable forms as identities (Berndt and Putz, 2007)[175]. Those relations are dynamic and intertwined, and the spatial dimension itself is 'an area of intense cultural activity' (Shields, 1991, p.30): e.g. mountain associations working on local identities of uniqueness and thus revitalising frontier spaces (Stumpp and Fuchs, 2013). In this, both the rugged terrain of the region and the symbolic work undertaken by people play a major role, while the aspect of division and bordering is essential for identity building: metaphorically speaking, 'consciousness of community is, then, encapsulated in perception of its boundaries' (Cohen, 1985, p.13). And since such boundaries do not always coincide with the political ones, identity is leveraged and strengthened in border areas by network development, unifying discourses, and new shared representation formation. As to another factor, existing local cultures and mountain and nature conceptualisations (from folklore to distinct imaginary-prompting geocultural concepts, e.g. *Podhale* in Poland), along with the officially promoted image of the region, are part of the new "identicisation". In particular, perceived connection to concrete places and landmarks defines the pattern of the grains of crystallisation for local and regional identities, since to enable identification at the meso- and micro-level, a spatial phenomenon needs to be turned into a "place": according to Pott (2007, p.30), places

[175] That would be a basic attribute, since it is argued that 'every social and regional group has an image of its own territory and boundaries' (Kolossov and Scott, 2013, p.3). Furthermore, it is with representations of space that 'substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space' belong (Lefebvre, 1974, p.42).

can function as individual or collective identity anchors.[176] In the downstream, identity determines actions and eventually conforms the behavior of individuals and groups, through this most often becoming manifest.[177]

The composition of the group of actors in the area, their systemic interrelations and power as well as the programmes they deploy cannot be disregarded. The hypothesised type of ecoregional identity would be akin territorial identity. It is centered around: physical objects subject to certain classification, perception of one's place in the grid of ecological relations, and stimulation by environmentally disruptive events. Underscoring the role of territorial identity, Manuel Castells (2010, p.xxiii) noticed that people identify themselves primarily with their locality and familiar surroundings. However, dimensions of a territory and a region of belonging must be explored cautiously: a region possesses much more specific characteristics than a simple portion of a territory. Distinctions between regions are as well actively built for various purposes, presenting acts of power performed to delimit and mark with symbols space and respective groups of people. To quote a Paasi and Zimmerbauer's article (2011, p.168): 'The regional identity of people, or regional consciousness, refers to the identification of people with 'regions', which is just one element of complex socio-spatial identifications.'[178] This is yet noteworthy, that when we consider an ecological region, this "element" might prove to be a most solid one, as far as it is based on the understanding of reciprocal interdependence, perceived dissimilarity to the rest of the regions within a political entity, and assumed responsibility for reacting to looming environmental threats. Natural givens, unless degraded, remain relatively stable, while politics and technology bring about constant change in the conceptualisation of the "local". In part, ecoregion overcomes the conflict resulting from the territorial logic.

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[176] It should be noted that if places are to be seen as 'at once seen as ecological, social, and cosmological terrains' (Appadurai, 1996, p.183), natural environment is one of the inherent components of spatial identity and 'informs human values through feedback processes' (Bridgewater and Bridgewater, 2005, p.207). Also, from the viewpoint of territorial development ministers in the EU, '[n]atural and cultural heritage are parts of territorial capital and identity' (Territorial Agenda, 2011, p.5).

[177] Grossetti and Godart (2007) offered to look at identity as '*toute source d'action qui n'est pas explicable par des régularités biophysiques, et à laquelle les observateurs peuvent attribuer du sens*'.

[178] Paasi and Zimmerbauer (Ibidem, p.167) emphasised the distinction between 'identity of a region' (as elements of nature, culture and citizens that are exploited in the discourses and classifications) and 'regional identity' ('regional consciousness of the people' as a type of spatio-social self-identification of people).

Whereas borders continue to be vital for states and undermine international unity and integration (like in Popescu, 2008), border areas are in a historically new situation: still marginal for states, they are central for the EU.[179] The acceptability of the para-territorial redivision is based on the depoliticised dimension of ecology (Malikova et al. (2015) introduced the former as a source of incontestable power, whereby nature appears still alien, but not unowned[180]).

It might be then of interest to look for evidence of the so-called project identity (Castells, 1997), implying active work with shared imaginaries, communitising discourses, and signification in the regional space (e.g. the Black Sea identity in Giordano, 2010). It was reiterated in *Playful Identities* (Frissen et al., 2015, p.11) that '[p]hrases like "self-construction" and "construction of cultural identity" might suggest that this process is fully controlled by an autonomous subject. Evidently, this is not the case.'[181] Factors, external to individuals, intervene all along the way, as spatial identities are formed contingent on power relations, through the weaving of complex narratives combining 'fact and fiction', the real and the ideal (to follow Ricoeur's narrative identity concept (Laitinen, 2002)). In fashioning conglomerate myths of protean personalities, this practice is a means of self-interpretation, placement in the context of the world, but also of grounding change. Thereby ecoregion as a non-usual spatial format creates a window of opportunity for reaccentuating local identities and redefining socio-political relations, which may pave the way to a 'transformation of overall social structure' (Castells, 1997, p.8) and rechartering of local development paths.

A conspicuous institutional effort can be noticed when it comes to shaping identity of and with the region; and ecology is all but marginal to it. The Carpathian Convention explicitly set the goal of promoting a Carpathian identity (SARD-M, 2006, p.3)

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[179] In a case-study in the sociality of borders opening, Bioteau (2007, p.12) observed ethno-cultural mobilisation of 'cross-border social entities' for development and referring to the discursive framework of *Lebensraum*, formulated one of the main functions of borders: '[c]losed border lines used to limit the development of life spaces,' – to conclude that '[t]heir progressive opening increases spatial competition'. The latter is indicative of changes in mental life-worlds resulting from the alteration of the affordance structure.

[180] WWF positioned the "Living Carpathians" as region where natural and socio-economic processes flow harmonically, while society takes into account not only economic profit, but also 'interests of wild nature' (its relation to the 'ecological dimension of human interest' could be further explored) (CERI, 2007, p.1).

[181] In ecological policy development and implementation, cooperation formats, information outlets, and even work facilitation instruments, as a rule, themselves project their creators' standpoint.

and the Secretariat goes on pursuing it through its communication output and dialog facilitation. At the same time, the reference to 'the entire Carpathian society' among the political elite of the region is indicative of where the latter is being steered to.[182] Ecological segments of transversal Europeanisation formats, including regional and macro-regional strategies, keep these elites abreast with the supranational currents as well as administer new quanta of nature-related commonality consciousness to the region inhabitants. Complementary discursive output comes from a variety of stakeholders: from academia to tourism industry. The quest continues in the work of expert groups on definitions of notions important for the regional identity, whereby co-participation is also being opened for larger public, e.g. during the eponymous contest ("*Tożsamość Karpacka*") in 2015. Institution-building, but also single fora and pan-regional events, re-framing of old representations and "new traditions" (e.g. cross-Carpathian transhumance) are effective in fashioning the collective environmental imaginary. Due to a high degree of centralisation of collaboration programme management, there are projects that, even without crossing state borders in their realisation (for example, in education[183]), are able to contribute to creating a single ecoregional outlook or popular understandings shared across the region. Such has been one of the effects of the DANUBEPARKS/ Danube Geotour project (promoting innovative sustainable tourism and natural reserve visibility).

Given that functional regionalisation presents a cornerstone of the environmental management practice in the Carpatho-Danubian area, the "identicisation" effort has been continuous and has left behind a trace of concluded or discontinued initiatives, like the "World of Carpathians" publication project (2007-2009) or the Carpathian Sustainable Education Network (CASALEN, 2007-2011). In the same manner as many ongoing initiatives, those managed to make similarities and co-dependencies in environmental challenges across the region widely known. Yet, it is not easy to say,

[182] Marek Kuchciński (Sejm, 2018), president of the *Sejm*, mentions the trope in his addresses. Looking more broadly, according to Viktor Orban (2017), Central Europe is the home where countries enjoy not only economic, but also cultural unity; in additon, in Tibor Navracsics's (2017) view, EUSDR can be a bridge between East and West.

[183] A typical example, the "Move4Nature Teacher Training Project" (2008-2011) in the frames of the education for sustainable development portfolio conceived by ESDI was directed at introducing the concept of the "Carpathian Ecoregion" to the rural mountainous schools.

whether the former specifically have made "ecoregion" a more popular idea. As in most cases they would not even pose it as an objective, the potential locus of belonging has not enjoyed any significant "advertising" beyond the narrow practitioners' circle. The concept therefore remains confined to specialists' vocabulary.

### 4.5. Ecoregional Governance from the Europeanisation Perspective

An image for Valery and a schema for Guenoun, a concept for Husserl and a category for Badiou, Europe has received a peculiar interpretation from the institutions of the European Union. What Handl (2015, p.1) portrayed as the hegemonic EU thriving on asymmetries in Central Europe and thus 'a paradox of history', is rather a simple outcome of the purposeful political construction of Europe (Sahlins, 2010, p.25) stemming from the Husserlian idea of a community of nations bound together by an external objective principle (Gasche, 2008). The dynamics of the adoption of the EU material and ideological standards referred to as "Europeanisation" in the IR vernacular is most commonly deemed to impact both member states and accession candidates (Ladrech, 1994; Howell, 2002; Yakusheva, 2019), though some understand its scope as narrowly reduced to 'societies outside the EU' (Fabian, 2013, p.45). The process is braided together with the evolving of the environmental governance in the area of the Danube and Carpathians, beyond the channels of the EU apparatus, expert advice, and financial allotments.

Firstly, coordinated ecologic plans and measures lead to increased unification of norms and practices across the area. Environmental policy convergence centered around discourse acceptance (Jasanoff, 2004, pp.33-34) is the primary type observed in the regional practice and the benchmark for the convergence is set by the global and EU agendas. This means there is discursive work on the actor identity (calling it a fully voluntary self-construction as in Haselsberger (2014, p.514) would be erroneous), multi-actor efforts of policy localisation, and EU-conform social spatialisation engendering such projections as "species of community interest", but also the overall approach to positioning environmental activities as often epiphenomenal to other policies. Recently, it became possible to investigate 'EU territoriality' (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p.2708),

environmental political mandates providing for the advanced pooled territoriality and supra-territoriality stages.

Secondly, there are noticeable spatial governance reverberations. With or without formally 'transposed mandates' (Ibidem, p.2707), international environmental policies in the area are part and parcel of the 'current mechanisms of territorial reconstitutions' (Bioteau, 2007, p.14), or spatial reorganisations. They not only increase people exchanges, cross-border and wider-area coherence, but also aid 'place-making projects' (Agnew, 2011, p.328) and alleviate the transfer to a single, comprehensive spatial planning as well as the ensuing management: from environmental data collection to physical changes of the landscape, such as special status areas and green infrastructure.

Thirdly, additional political capital directly berths with the EU institutions. For example, Europeanisation, in a certain sense, capitalises on the striving for regional leadership of single states. This happens though a mergers and acquisitions process, to put it metaphorically (like in the case of the Macro-region initiatives). Besides, several regional mechanisms seek for joining efforts with those affiliated with the EU, e.g. closer work with the EUSDR was a priority of the Czech presidency of the Carpathian Convention in 2014-2017. The current level of engagement of NGOs and public participation help to foster trust and legitimacy around the governance arrangement. In parallel, there occurs also certain relative strengthening of the supranational bodies, since some of 'those diverse emergent regimes' (Sassen, 2009, p.568) in the domain of ecology spell challenge to the member states. In particular, 'regulatory regionalism is manifested in clashes over the control of the state's spatial organization', to quote Hameiri and Jayasuriya (2011, p.21) (though the authors lack an explanatory model of the europeanising influence on the regulatory regional processes between state-centric and supranational).

Fourthly, the process brings some relief to the painpoint of the EU energy security. In the pursuit of energy-neutral futures for the member-states, the Union can witness in the region a change in the attitudes to energy production and consumption mediated by environmental values. The infrastructural transformation revolves around resource efficiency, low-carbon power, clean technology, and circular economy, to jot down a few EU buzz-words.

Fifthly, environmental governance supports the spread and improvement of the EU sustainability model whereby '[d]evelopment can be balanced with protection of the environment' (European Commission, 2010, p.3). In the area, economy-driven priorities for environmental policies are coupled with the emphasis on better surveillance and technical management. For instance, the agenda of the 6th EUSDR forum reflected the mainstream direction: in all points one could see a mixture of elements from economy, ecology, and regionalism. Noteworthily, a balanced pacekeeping with other EU policy dimensions is crucial, for according to the findings of Newig and Fritsch (2009, p.207), local inhabitants' preference for either natural resource economic use or its conservation is 'to a considerable extent dependent on general economic trends in the local community and the broader region'.

Sixthly, the experience of the Carpathians and Danube is a powerful leverage in the rippling of new circles of the "circular Europe". While 'the former buffer zone' now is found in the ENP area (Bufon, 2011, p.36), in its function of a testing ground, the Carpatho-Danubian area has accumulated a wealth of lessons learned on the ecologic governance transformation applicable to the geopolitical neighbourhood. Thus, the knowledge transfer from the Natura 2000 to Emerald Network is well established. Among the specific initiatives, on the 11th of November 2015 a joint article of the Visegrad Group Foreign Ministers titled "We Offer You Our Helping Hand on the EU Path" was published in the main dailies in the Western Balkans (Visegrad Group, 2015). Prime minister Orban (2017), against the backdrop of the enlargement fatigue of the most prosperous EU members, at the Danube Forum backed the accession plans: 'We would like every single country in the region to become an EU member as soon as possible'. In its function of a corridor, the region offers an opportunity for an unprecedentedly detailed and integrated strategy as well as engagement with both officials and civil society. The Danube hence has a history of cooperation with the Black Sea region, such as in the format of the Danube-Black Sea Task Force (DABLAS)[184] formed in 2001. And to

[184] The DABLAS platform includes representatives of the countries in the region, ICPDR, the Black Sea Commission, the EC, and other international organisations. Working to ensure the protection of ecosystems in the Danube and the Black Sea, they develop financing mechanisms for the implementation of investment projects for pollution reduction and the rehabilitation of ecosystems. The ICPDR-DABLAS database contains over 350 investment projects and was linked with the ICPDR Emission inventories database. (ICPDR, n.d.)

put it more ambitiously, the Danubian region links 'the EU to its near neighbours, the Black Sea region, the South Caucasus and Central Asia' (European Commission, 2010, p.3). [185] Further examples of initiatives with cross-cutting character are the Blue Ribbon Project of the EU for keeping the West Balkans engaged (Ágh et al., 2011) and the project developed by the REC to enhance transboundary conservation along the so-called South Eastern European Green Belt.

The interested parties contribute to the developments of the above-outlined types in differing manners. As the European Union steers the coordination of the environmental plans with a broader set of the polity's priorities and programmes, by shaping a functional region of environmental policy application it creates a hotspot of change maturation and cohesion increase facilitation. The public authorities in the countries ensure normative unification, along with supporting cross-border and multilateral initiatives; they also benefit from occasions of enlarged action space for advancing their agenda. Among the governmental actors, the propensity to collaborate on ecological matters depends on the volatile incentive structures, including the extent of political and economic interests' involvement. While the business's adaptation mirrors the normative change, non-governmental organisations serve as critics of policy designs and implementers (along with local authorities) of EU-funded programmes.

As of today, it seems to be an understatement that regions 'are an important spatial category in Europe' (Markus et al., 2008, p.3). Moreover, it was precisely noted by Allmendinger and colleagues (2014, p.2713) that different stakeholder groups realise to be 'able to address their needs through a gradual reterritorialization process'. Besides, substantial part of systemic pressure is distributed along the regional boundaries (actor interests, engagements, channels of extraregional influence etc.). Hence unsurprisingly, fueled by regionalising and boundary-making, the custom of pressing moulds on the

[185] In a joint statement Visegrad Foreign Ministers addressed the theme of the Eastern Partnership countries (Visegrad Group, 2017): in the light of the Riga Declaration of 2015 underlining the priority of connectivity, energy efficiency, environment, and climate change for urban matters, they stressed the importance of pursuing the implementation of such in the partner countries and of ensuring benign infrastructure for economic development. Besides, for V4 cross-border cooperation programmes preserve high significance; yet, an increased EU funding is seen as 'a key element in the fulfillment of strategic objectives of the Eastern Partnership' (Idem).

Carpatho-Danubian area persists: from discursive images to strategic guidance, to "best practices" from outside of the region (mainly, from Western Europe). At a regional scale, one of the most obvious governance challenges is related to transborder programme management and, primarily, orchestration. On the one hand, in the given conditions, EU funding programmes are the most effective instrument for bringing cooperating parties together. Therefore, they dominate among the vascular conduits for area-wide environmental policies, and it is worth to quote a conclusion that was reached from a bird's-eye view: 'processes of reregulation and territorialisation are frequently driven by multilateral funding imperatives' (Igoe and Brockington, 2007, p.438). On the other hand, one can recognise that the state-sponsored protected areas management and environmental policy measures are a most robust backbone specifically for environmental protection and for multinational "common good" mega-projects.

Changing the angle of sight, one can speak of another interpretation of reterritorialisation stemming then from 'subnational scalings of global processes and institutions' (Sassen, 2009, p.573). Globalized neolibralisation ensures that also the neoliberal conservation model is scalable, in the given case, to the area of the mountain basin. In the period when allegedly 'the opening of traditional national borders may, in fact, strengthen a range of transversal bordering capabilities' (Ibidem, p.596), the existing format of cooperation and its trends firmly screw the bolts of the neoliberal model. At the backdrop of ecologic political economy being marketed as post-politics, local practices and actions are mostly harmonised with the global agenda. A large part of actors involved in the environmental activities in the region is framed as civil society and therefore tends to have significant normative and strategic leverage (e.g. in terms of reterritorialisation) through BINGOs (an element of neoliberalisation pointed to in Igoe and Brockington, 2007). One of the open questions regarding the smoothening of divides (political borders) between national and international governance systems or regimes in the EU is about the model that is to prevail: complete "supranationalisation" or proactive "intergovernmental super-regions". The former has a more solid and a stably expanding institutional and discursive base, including in the case of the developing governance in the Carpathians.

In the outcome of an examination of 'the ideas, dynamics and means that contribute to changing a geographical area into a politically-constructed community' (Hettne, 2005, p.131) in the basins of the Carpathians and of the Danube one can see these two spaces become a distinct object of environmental governance. That region does not, however, aim at political actorness. And most obstacles for governance formation in such a functional region are of technical nature, including some lack of preciseness in delimiting the area. The governance interaction and stimulus structures to a large extent rely on the existing capabilities of the European Union. The governance model components are also either scalable or transposable to other geographical areas – and thus compatible with the processes of environmental policy clusterisation, spatial governance standardisation, and Europeanisation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapters spotlighted the center of the European periphery to investigate another occasion when 'the state borders of Central Europe' turned into 'test spaces for a developing European geography' (Bioteau, 2007, p.5). That consolidation of a new governance system in the environmental dimension has seen policy instruments, private and public actor approaches, and people attitudes change. Moreover, the regional environmental governance thrives on an interplay of static and dynamic characteristics of its biogeographic and organizational elements. Most of the governance development tendencies outlined in the present work have been already captured, in one way or another, by multiple separate specialised studies of various authors. The pan-regional overview study has yielded a number of conclusions:

I. The factors driving and governing transboundary environmental cooperation in the Carpatho-Danubian region are as follows: 1. First and foremost, economic thinking that finds expression in such concepts as sustainability and regional competitiveness permeates the agenda at all levels. Fund availability is crucial for the shaping of the cooperation. Unlike depoliticisation, its hypothetical analog "de-economisation", in the Capitalocene is hardly plausible. 2. The political will directed at tying together the mosaic and multilayered landscape with intermittent places of memory is of great importance. The self-identified Central Europe strives to form a pole of influence in the EU; the Visegrad Four advance the thesis of a 'strong Europe of strong nations' and stand for environmental justice with regard to themselves. The phenomenon can be metaphorically described as a 'sub-coalition' (Brousseau and Raynaud, 2007, p.27) or a Community of Destiny, a term coined by the Chinese government and suggested to the author by Professor Ellen Hertz. 3. Almost a "habit" of political and social change and orientation toward an extra-regional paragon prepared the area for 'a conscious effort to make the systems of governmentality' fit the international good practice by making 'steering mechanism the same' (Dunn, 2004, p.6). 4. Comprehensive international research and planning efforts permitted to develop environmentalist and spatial organisation visions of the area. In the given case, it is a promising perspective to imagine ecology as a movement 'from the present to the future' (Johal, 2015, p.53), since it was

incorporated in a number of geoconcepts, key to the governance programmes. These, together with the international legal framework and shared environmentalist vocabulary, inform the awareness-shaping spectacle of ecology, as well as the creation and maintenance of new regional regimes. Ecoregions are also somewhat present in the imaginary of the public and epistemic communities. Although in the absence of a political driver, purely environmental regionalism presents a desiccated managerial instrument. Bearing in mind Zurn's (2013, p.402) consideration that the arrival of globalization does not necessary lead to global governance, ecoregion as a global unit is entitled for regional interpretation specifics. 5. State borders and arrangements in cross-border regions condition the realisation of environmental cooperation projects. 6. The Carpathians and Danube River are still trapped in the 'imaginative geographies of colonialism' (Nash, 2002, p.220). The so-called colonial strategies of governmentality deployed over that mystic "amusement park" include exoticisation, marginalisation, "commonisation" as a form of governance, and "Orientalist" presentations of nature. 7. Yet, the firm natural embeddedness of the regional governance endows it with a stability potential.

II. The natural framework of ecoregion influences the structure of environmental cooperation, including stakeholder exchanges, in the following way: 1. Within the natural capital paradigm, the Carpathian nature renders the area a valuable resource in the eyes of the international community, which strongly incentivises environmental cooperation with a touch of postinternationalness. 2. The cooperation structure is significantly determined by preexisting international environmental regimes and thematic regulations. Ecoregions are not the main format of governance conceptualisation and enjoy moderate support in that capacity. 3. The variability of landscapes in the area provides for a wide range of ecological problems and challenges, and hence response formats. 4. Discrete relief forms are fraught with certain difficulties in immediate contacts and cross-border activities at the local level. 5. Currently the governance is thematically split between the Danube and the Carpathian Mountains, the "lifeline" and, respectively, the "backbone" of the region. The Danube's governance has a tilt toward competitiveness, the Carpathians' – toward political initiative. 6. Landmarks and the local culture of nature are important for policy-making and actor engagement, creating the

local *Lebenswelt* and a sense of place as a prerequisite for collective action. 7. The admirable landscapes of the area also dictate the policy direction of pairing environmentalism with tourism. The eight countries opt for developing various forms of leisure-oriented business as a means of transitioning to sustainable economies. Such newly single-purpose commercial exploitation of natural environment brings about a change to the traditional characteristics of montane zones (Perlik, 2015). 8. The intersection of administrative borders and landscape boundaries moves the usually marginal border and mountainous areas to the focus of international attention and also creates a need for multiple international consultation formats.

III. The relation between ecoregional approach and governance effectiveness has the following characteristics: 1. Ecoregions offer a neat spatial categorisation and thus another version of "dissemblage" of the Carpathians, unified and disunified at the same time. 2. Ecoregion, though taking a lot from ecology, is a composit element of the complex sustainability approach. It facilitates "plan ecology", functional regions being fundamental in the EU spatial planning and thus in the global standardisation of sustainable development. This form of regionalisation coexists and interacts with other regionalisms in Europe. 3. Ecoregion purports a clear focus on science-based management and fits with 'distinctly different economic and political attitudes to borders' (Anderson, 2001, p.5) and reconceptualisation of border areas. 4. Ecoregional framework mediates the creation of governance conglomerates engaging stakeholders across governance levels. The holistic approach favours geography-based cooperation, so an institutional complex support is the necessary component connecting the problem-based format projects to the strategic regional goals.

IV. In *Marcher avec les dragons* Tim Ingold (2013, p.7) compared the study of Anthropology to a homecoming experience. The present work set off from the locus of a region to pause looking at the specificity of borders, to then arrive to conclusions on European space. The research could have a closer look at only one of the elements of the ongoing spatialisation processes in Europe, namely the ecological regionalisation in a specific area. Nevertheless, the systemic consideration of that part of the territorial project has done its bit. And more than thirty years after the World Commission on Environment and Development released "Our Common Future Report" (United Nations,

1987, point 1), its famous phrase '[t]he Earth is one, but the world is not' might require a correction in the sense of reflecting the virtual multiplicity of "worlds" today (rather than just a split).

Even if the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD, n.d.) already operates with the slippery notions of social and ecological justice, the current environmental governance paradigm seems to be less anthropocentric as such (unlike some "deep green" would argue) than rather oligocentric and supporting the well-being of specific groups of humans. Ecology discourse has created a parallel scientific plane encompassing the whole of the Planet, or to use Latour's words (2005, p.30) 'ushered us into the time of Space'. In its turn, space is so vast and fluid, that according to Low (2016, p.119), '[d]etrminable are at best local phenomena'. Therefore, spatial conceptualisation and governance depend on place-making environmental practices with which nature is tied to culture and weaved into identities ensuring 'a manageable situation' (Newman, 2006, p. 150); and, on the other hand, they preserve space from becoming fully 'desacralised' (Foucault, 1984, p.46).

The fact that numerous authors speak of various forms of reterritorialisation (e.g. Igoe and Brockington, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Allmendinger et al., 2014; Luukonen, 2014), that is political re-framing of a region, first, shows how fundamental the administrative framework is for the analyses of processes in Europe. Second, it makes one enquire in what way environmental spatialisation by shaping 'a new collective set of priorities, norms and interests at regional level' (Warleigh-Lack, 2006, p.758) comes to affect territorial sustainability of states. The environmental governance in the Carpathians and Danube area is gradually nearing to a centralised management model. Such integration of activity control hubs – though at risk of weakening local stakeholders' engagement – helps to remove programmatic duplication and project redundancy, which moves to the foreground those actors that are capable of running coordination across scales and jurisdictions.

V. There are some generic remarks that can be made on the policy implications. Given the high number of cooperation mechanisms already in place in the area and the well-developed knowledge and infrastructure base behind the ecoregional approach, the latter could continue to serve as a policy support tool. It can be used for effective

presentation of initiatives and better definition of the problems the area faces. It can as well be leveraged in an axial capacity by the existing governance formats. However, that would require strategic choices on narrower definitions of several concepts. More effort invested in ecoregion research at the local and national levels would strengthen the analytical foundation of priorities definition at the regional level. Education programmes, relying on ever more detailed mapping and emphasis on practice, can shape a coherent scientifically grounded outlook on the whole area, which could facilitate cross-local experience exchange and re-articulation of local and regional branding. To the benefit of ecoregional approach, state borders can be rethought as a means to attract attention and resources from more than one country, when environmental issues are set out in terms of transboundary areas and there is an overarching regional governance framework.

VI. As to a potential agenda for further research, several directions can be chosen. The governance complex described in this dissertation can become a starting point for looking at the environmental governance effects in specific zones of the region, relying on social space 'as a tool for the analysis of society' (Lefebvre, 1974, p.34). Future research may equally concentrate on critically reflecting on single programme or project history, following the process of collaboration development between private and public stakeholders and mapping funding architectures. It might be of practical use as well to investigate in depth the governance arrangements existing around specific environmental problems in the Carpatho-Danubian area. Interdisciplinary research assessing the effectiveness of the many governance formats and their interoperation can be particularly valuable, as well as interinstitutional network research. Comparative studies may prove one of the most instructive options: while matching the Carpathian and Danubian area's experience with the developments in the EU neighbourhood and beyond in the key of Mallard's (2018) 'forward analogies', one may nonetheless capitalise on the region's often being used as a 'laboratory for studying phenomena that are also affecting older democracies' (Hanley et al., 2015).

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AEBR** | Association of European Border Regions |
| **AEWA** | Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds |
| **AKK** | Alpine-Carpathian Corridor |
| **BBI** | Internationale Beleidsprogramma Biodiversiteit |
| **BDIA** | Biodiversity Important Areas |
| **BINGO** | Big International Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **BS** | Border Studies |
| **CADSES** | Central Adriatic Danubian South-Eastern European Space |
| **CAFE** | Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe |
| **CBC** | Cross-Border Cooperation |
| **CBD** | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| **CCPACHM** | Carpathian Countries Protected Areas Clearing House Mechanism |
| **CEE** | Central and Eastern Europe |
| **CEEC** | Central and Eastern European Country |
| **CEE Trust** | Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe |
| **CEI** | Central European Initiative; see CERI |
| **CERI** | Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative |
| **CESCI** | Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives |
| **CIC** | International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation |
| **CIMM** | Common Integrated Management Measures |
| **CITES** | Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora |
| **CJBIS** | Carpathian Joint Biodiversity Information System |
| **CLC** | CORINE Land Cover |
| **CLICK** | Climate Change Kick-Off |
| **CLLD** | Community-Led Local Development |
| **CMS** | Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals |
| **CNPA** | Carpathian Network of Protected Areas |
| **CoDCR** | Council of Danube Cities and Regions |
| **COP** | Conference of Parties |
| **CORINE** | Coordination of Information on the Environment |
| **COSME** | Competitiveness of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises |
| **CPAMETT** | Carpathian Protected Areas Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool |
| **CRSE** | Centrul Regional de Supraveghere Ecologică „Munţii Apuseni” |
| **CWI** | Carpathian Wetlands Initiative |
| **DABLAS** | Danube-Black Sea Task Force |
| **DAGENE** | Dunamenti Állatfajták Génmegõrzõ Nemzetközi Egyesülete |
| **DAREC** | Danube Area Research Center |
| **DCC** | Danube Competence Center |

| | |
|---|---|
| **DCP** | Danube-Carpathians Programme; Danube Cooperation Process |
| **DCSF** | Danube Civil Society Forum |
| **DEF** | Danube Environmental Forum |
| **DFCN** | Danube Funding Coordination Network |
| **DG REGIO** | Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy |
| **D-LAP** | Danube Local Actors Platform |
| **DMCSEE** | Drought Management Center for Southeastern Europe |
| **DMEER** | Digital Map of European Ecological Regions |
| **DRDSI** | Danube Reference Data and Services Infrastructure |
| **DRRIF** | Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund |
| **DSP** | Danube Strategy Point |
| **DSTF** | Danube Sturgeon Task Force |
| **EAFRD** | European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development |
| **EaP** | Eastern Partnership |
| **EBRD** | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| **EC** | European Commission |
| **ECBC** | Eastern Carpathians Biodiversity Conservation |
| **ECBR** | East Carpathians Mountain Biosphere Reserve |
| **ECCP** | European Code of Conduct on Partnership |
| **EEB** | European Environmental Bureau |
| **EESC** | European Economic and Social Committee |
| **EG** | Environmental Governance |
| **EGTC** | European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation |
| **EIA** | Environmental Impact Assessment |
| **EIR** | Environmental Implementation Review |
| **EMAS** | Eco-Management and Audit Scheme |
| **EMFF** | European Maritime and Fisheries Fund |
| **ENGO** | Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **ENP** | European Neighbourhood Policy |
| **ENPI** | European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument |
| **EO4SEE** | Earth Observation for Southern- and Central-Eastern Europe |
| **ERBC** | Ecoregion-Based Conservation |
| **ERDF** | European Regional Development Fund |
| **ESDP** | European Spatial Development Perspective |
| **ESF** | European Social Fund |
| **ESIF** | European Structural and Investment Funds |
| **ESPON** | European Spatial Planning Observation Network |
| **ETC** | European Territorial Cooperation |
| **EU** | European Union |
| **EUSDR** | European Union Strategy for the Danube Region |
| **FAO** | Food and Agriculture Organization |
| **FCC** | Foundation Conservation Carpathia |
| **FSC** | Forest Stewardship Council |

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|---|---|
| **GEF** | Global Environment Facility |
| **GEG** | Global Environmental Governance |
| **GEP** | Global Environmental Politics |
| **GG** | Global Governance |
| **GPP** | Green Public Procurement |
| **GRID** | Global Resource Information Database |
| **GWP** | Global Water Partnership |
| **IAD** | International Association for Danube Research |
| **IBRD** | International Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| **ICID** | International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage |
| **ICPDR** | International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River |
| **IEP** | Institute for Environmental Policy |
| **INGO** | International Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **IR** | International Relations |
| **ISPA** | Structural Pre-Accession Instrument |
| **IUCN** | International Union for the Conservation of Nature |
| **IWRM** | Integrated Water Resources Management |
| **JRC** | Joint Research Center |
| **KUP** | Karpacki Uniwersytet Partycypacji |
| **LIFE** | L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement |
| **MaB** | Man and the Biosphere |
| **MDG** | Millennium Development Goal |
| **MESR** | Slovak Ministry of Education |
| **METCENAS** | Methodology Center for Environment Assessment |
| **MOT** | Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière |
| **MRS** | Macro-Regional Strategy |
| **NATO** | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| **NBP** | New Biogeographic Process |
| **NCFF** | Natural Capital Financing Facility |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **NIS** | Naftna Industrija Srbije |
| **OEF** | Organisation Environmental Footprint |
| **OSCE** | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| **OTOP** | Ogólnopolskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Ptaków |
| **PA** | Priority Area |
| **PA4LP** | Protected Areas for a Living Planet |
| **PEBLDS** | Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy |
| **PEEN** | Pan-European Ecological Network |
| **PEF** | Product Environmental Footprint |
| **PEGASUS** | Public Ecosystem Goods and Services from land management – Unlocking the Synergies |
| **PPP** | Public-Private Partnership |
| **RBMP** | River Basin Management Plan |

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|---|---|
| **RDP** | Rural Development Programme |
| **REC** | Regional Environmental Center |
| **REDD+** | Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation |
| **REFA** | Ruch Ekologiczny św. Franciszka z Asyżu |
| **S4C** | Science for the Carpathians |
| **SAC** | Special Area of Conservation |
| **SAPARD** | Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development |
| **SARD-M** | Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions |
| **SDG** | Sustainable Development Goal |
| **SEA** | Strategic Environmental Assessment |
| **SEE** | South-East Europe |
| **SES** | Social-Ecological System |
| **TAF-DRP** | Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects |
| **TBPA** | Transboundary Protected Area |
| **TEN-T** | Trans-European Transport Network |
| **TNMN** | Transnational Monitoring Network |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNCCD** | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification |
| **UNDP** | United Nations Development Programme |
| **UNEA2** | Second Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP |
| **UNECE** | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe |
| **UNEP** | United Nations Environmental Programme |
| **UNESCO** | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| **UNRISD** | United Nations Research Institute for Social Development |
| **V4** | Visegrad Group |
| **WATMAN** | Water Management Integrated System |
| **WEO** | World Environmental Organization |
| **WHO** | World Health Organization |
| **WMO** | World Meteorological Organization |
| **WWF** | World Wide Fund for Nature |

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