



Faculty of Social and Life Sciences
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Understanding Regional Action and the European Union

A Fusion Approach

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Foreword

This working paper represents the final stage in the first phase of an ongoing research project that compares regional actors' activities towards the European Union. The project focuses on: (i) exploring and categorising existing regional action among Nordic regional policy-makers, with an emphasis on assessing the attention given to, and the action undertaken by, these policy-makers on EU questions; (ii) evaluating the conceptions and attitudes of regional actors toward existing and future participation in EU-related frameworks in order to, (iii), facilitate the development of an empirically and theoretically informed model for comparing Nordic regional relations with the EU.

The first phase of the project concentrated on developing concepts accompanied by a preliminary empirical investigation that focused on the region of Värmland in Sweden during 2006. The empirical results and some preliminary conceptual tools were presented in a paper at the spring conference of *The Swedish Network of European Studies in Political Science* (SNES), Södertörn University College, 15-16 March 2007. The author's would like to thank Prof. Ole Elgström for valuable comments on the project.

In this working paper, the conceptual elements that will be applied to regional action are developed further. An earlier version of the text was presented at *The Nordic International Studies Association's* (NISA) conference in Odense, Denmark, 23-25 May 2007. The author's are thankful for useful comments from the discussant, Dr Ian Manners, (Danish Institute for International Studies).

The research project is funded by Nordic Council of Ministers as part of the *Internationalisation of Regional Development Policies – Needs and Demands in the Nordic Countries* research programme and the Centre for Research on Regional Development (Cerut) at Karlstad University.

Karlstad, September 2007

Sune Berger
Professor and Director, Cerut

1 Regional Action and the European Union: A Fusion Approach

1.1 Introduction

The regional dimension has clearly gained more importance as a feature of European politics since the mid-1980s. The implementation of the 1986 *Single European Act* (SEA) has been regarded as a watershed that marked the beginning of a new phase of deeper European integration with the creation of the single European market, and this also had implications for the politics of regions in the EU (Gren 2002:17, 37).

The regional dynamics that are of importance in our project are best understood as a 'bottom-up' movement rather than as a EU- or national governmental inspired 'top-down' policy process. In essence, this implies that regional actors during the last decades have changed focus from implementing governmental regional policies to formulating and implementing their own specific policies on regional development. One of the explanations for this can be taken as being the consequences of European integration.

The aim of this working paper is to develop some analytical tools that will help us to understand what regional actors do and how they act (hence the usage of the term 'regional action'), as well as the forms of regional action that they undertake in order to respond to, and influence, EU-related structures and policies. In particular, the development of our analytical model will be informed by the theoretical context offered by Fusion approaches (Wessels 1997; Rometsch & Wessels 1996; Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003; Miles 2005). However, the intention here is not to test this evolving analytical framework empirically, but rather to explore further the challenges of developing such an analytical tool that will then be applied later in the forthcoming study that evaluates and compares regional policy-makers and regional action in three specific regions in Sweden, Finland and Norway.

This text has three objectives. First, the authors reflect upon the utility of the fusion approach for the study of regional actors and action. Second, we define the concept of regional action more clearly. Third, the two concepts of the fusion approach and regional action are finally combined as an analytical model for studying regional actors and activities toward EU-related frameworks.

2 Theoretical Context: Using Fusion in Studying 'Regional Action'

The political activities at the regional level have increased generally in Europe during the last two decades. As Jeffery (2000:2) observes we have seen a process of ongoing sub-national mobilisation. Jeffery highlights, for example, that several trends are developing; namely: (a) the establishment within some member states of formal mechanisms for involving sub-national governments in EU policy-making; (b) the wider focusing of policy activity and strategy of sub-national authorities throughout the Union on to an EU-related agenda; (c) the post-1988 reforms of the structural funds have encouraged greater sub-national involvement in EU regional development policies, and; (d): there has been the establishment and activity of organisations of inter-regional co-operation and the location of an ever-growing numbers of regional information and liaison offices in Brussels.

Nevertheless, what is also clear is that there is a great variety in the level of commitment of regional policy-makers to act politically (i.e. be involved in bottom-up activities) in EU-related policies and frameworks. The picture is asymmetrical and this implies that in order to study successfully and understand 'regional action' in European Union, we need analytical tools that specifically acknowledge more general elements of European integration and, at the same time, will be sensitive enough to accommodate the nuances of the more contextual aspects. For this reason, we argue that fusion approaches represent a good point of departure.

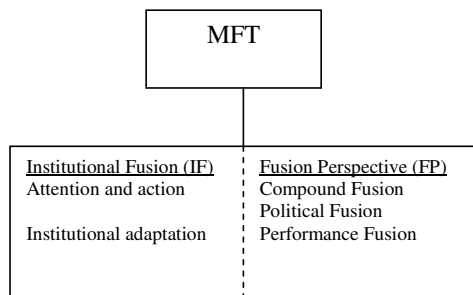
As noted in greater detail in an accompanying paper by Miles,¹ there are three different elements, or concepts, in the fusion approach, that are also of interest in this paper (see Figure 1). First, there is *Macro Fusion Thesis* (MFT), which is an overall explanation, at the macro level, of the European integration process (Wessels 1997). Second, there is the concept of *Institutional Fusion* (IF), developed most systematically by Wessels, Maurer & Mittag (2003), with the ambition to explain institutional reactions and adaptations to the challenge of the European integration. As a final element in our understanding of the fusion approach, we will also acknowledge and utilize the concept of *Fusion Perspectives* (FP)², developed by Miles (2005), that refers to the perceptions of the national policy-makers in relation to the European Union. In these works on fusion, each element has

¹ Readers are recommended to consult Miles (2007b) on 'The Nordic States and the European Union: The Conceptual Utility of Fusion' that provides a more detailed account of the general fusion literature.

² In Miles (2005), the author uses the term 'Micro Fusion Perspective' in order to thematically conceptualise the attitudes and behaviour of national policy-makers, in contrast to Wessels' focus on the European (macro) level. In this study that focuses on regional actors it seems logical to leave the level of analysis out of the concept; hence we continue to use the term *Fusion Perspective* to express the concept even when applied to the regional context.

some relevance for studying regional action, and this paper will now briefly outline their specific utility for the study of regional action. Let us consider each of these in turn.

Figure 1: Basic Conceptual Order of Fusion Approaches



2.1 The Macro Fusion Thesis (MFT) and the Regional Context

According to Wessels (1996:35f), the MFT offers a hypothetical three step-model of the *dynamics* of the evolving European polity. The first step is *Europeanization* understood as a shift in the numbers involved in the policy cycle and a shift of attention of national policy-makers on the benefits of supranational European integration. The second step is the *Fusion* of national and EU public instruments in the EU policy-cycle, where national actors increasingly have to share responsibilities and competencies with others, horizontally as well as vertically. The third step, as identified by Wessels (1997:271-275), represents the continuation of an ongoing ratcheting process of European integration with an open *finalité politique*.

Moreover, fusion offers a means of understanding the path that European integration is taking that represents a supranational, if somewhat 'sub-optimal' (Miles 2007a:37) third way between the 'federal path' of a United States of Europe that is too politically sensitive and constitutionally unacceptable for many European countries, and the 'confederal path' that is deemed as largely ineffective in delivering outcomes that are desired by national policy-makers in an interdependent world, fusion represents a sub-optimal alternative (Miles 2007a:37). The actors are, within fusion approaches, viewed as rational, basically pragmatic and utility seeking. The result of European integration is that national political structures and actors incrementally merge with the supranational political level, both vertically and horizontally. Our study of regional action then, when drawing on fusion

approaches, assumes that the EU is still integrating on a pro-supranational, but not necessarily federal pathway and has prompted differentiated *institutional adaptation* across the participating member states that do not represent a structural revolution of the national political systems.

More specifically, the MFT informs directly our discussions of regional action in the following ways. First, given that the MFT conceptualises that the supranational development of the EU is being pushed forward by the transformation of the nation state that has been largely affected by growing interdependence and the accompanying logics of EU institutions, we acknowledge that the implications of such *transformations does impact on regional actors*. Put simply, just as fusion dictates that European integration will spur on a blurring of competencies among the national and supranational levels, then regional actors will also seek greater involvement in European integration since, as fusion proposes, this may be a reflection of the growing inabilities of regional actors to deliver the welfare needs of citizens in their respective region. On this basis, the competencies of regional actors and structures are becoming blurred with that of the EU in order to access new means to deliver the welfare demands of citizens.

Second, the MFT incorporates five indicators of EU supranational development (Wessels 1997:275-284) that have specific connotations for the regional level: (a) *the growing extent of binding decisions taken by the EU* means that regional actors are responding to a growing array of EU legislation affecting them and their constituencies; (b) *EU supranational policy-making is developing a state-like agenda* that complicates relations between the national and sub-national levels of government; (c) the *EU's evolving mixed system of competencies* has limited sectoral impact on the regional level and thus EU awareness will be differentiated and 'sectorally constrained' across sub-national government and policy remits; (d) the *growth and differentiation of EU institutions and procedures* opens up new opportunities for regional actors to develop new relationships directly with the EU institutions and supranational level, independent of national government structures, leading to a more intensive and differentiated incorporation of (in this case) regional actors into the whole EU process and; (e) EU supranational policy-making provides *widening and deepening channels of access and influence for intermediary groups* and regional actors will increasingly want to maintain a presence in Brussels in order to facilitate effective lobbying, although this will be dependent upon the policy field in question (Wessels 1997:283). Thus, sub-national actors want to, and maintain, a presence in the 'diversified, atomized and complex political space' of Brussels (Wessels 1997:284).

Third, our notions of regional action acknowledge not just the participation of regional action in the formulation of EU development policies, but also extend to implementation aspects such as, the participation in, and perceptions of regional actors towards

involvement, in 'comitology'. It is recognised that EU working groups and implementation committees involving national and EU officials represents 'a specific form of administrative interaction at a crucial intersection between the national and EC administrations' (Wessels 1998:210).

2.2 Institutional Fusion (IF) and the Regional Context

This study of regional actors and action does not take place in an intellectual vacuum and the previous work by Wessels, Mittag & Maurer (2003) on institutional fusion, that principally focused on national adaptation, also included some rather brief considerations of fusion activity operating at the regional level with some evidence of a 'process of pooling and merging policy instruments' (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003:446). Hence, the 2003 study provides a foundation for our evaluations since they detected that there were growing demands from regional actors to participate in EU policy processes directly. First, national and regional actors in Finland and Sweden generally were categorised towards the lower end in terms of regional activity (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003:435) and partly the reason for this was that the regions earmarked in EU terms were not identical to the formal state districts. Hence, this study evaluating regional action takes place in the context of *rising awareness and demands from regional actors across the European Union, but using the assumption that regional actors in the Nordic states are starting from a generally low base of activity*. Second, that regional responses to European integration across the EU have been diverse, with greater, conscious development of formalised rules and structures to assure participation rights for regions in federal and semi-federal systems, and much weaker and informal adaptation in unitary ones. *Overall, it can be assumed as a starting point that there will be lower levels of adaptation among regional actors to the EU in unitary states and thus placed in the context of a slower paced trend of adaptation at the regional level.* Third, there is a sizeable interest among regional actors in maintaining *a representative presence* in Brussels close to the EU institutions that usually translates into having offices in Brussels in order to monitor the EU policy process, and ensure opportunities to lobby directly and have their own representatives there. Although activity remains low, the European Union has 'become an important point of reference for regions and municipalities and has, to a certain extent, brought a process of regionalisation in the member states' (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003:435). In the context of this study, it is therefore assumed as a starting point that *even where the general trend has been towards limited adaptation, there has been a growing awareness among regional actors of the 'importance of Europe' that continues to prompt further Europeanization of the attention of regional actors and the institutional adaptation of regional bodies*. Nevertheless, one of the deficiencies of Wessels, Maurer & Mittag (2003) is that they

remain vague on how this translates into specific forms of regional action – something that this paper seeks to consider in greater detail.

2.2.1 Relationship between Europeanization and Fusion in the Regional Context

To unpack what constitutes Institutional Fusion, it is perhaps appropriate to comment on the relationship between Europeanization discourse and fusion approaches with specific reference to the regional context. As we know, Europeanization remains a contested concept (Graziano & Vink 2007), precisely because Europeanization has been used to analyse a wide range of phenomena. Olsen (2002:923), for example, identifies as many as five different ways³ of how to make use of the term. In this context, and in line with Graziano & Vink (2007:4), our interpretation of Europeanization is closer to the ‘classical strand’ of the Europeanization literature that focuses particularly on the domestic implementation of EU policies (2007:4; see also Bulmer 2007:47) that also has strong theoretical connections with the fusion approach utilised here.

If we accept the contention of Radaelli & Pasquier (2007:36) that Europeanization can be distinguished as a background concept (that includes all sorts of things) and as a systematic concept that, in contrast, necessitates the explicit formulation and definition of the core notions, then, in the context of fusion, Europeanization, is seen principally as a facilitating systematic concept ‘dedicated to the effects of European integration on domestic polity, politics and policy’ (Radaelli & Pasquier 2007:36) and where pressures of European integration can be seen as a function of institutional and policy ‘fit’ or ‘misfit’ (congruence or incongruence) between the member states and the EU (Caporaso 2007:29).⁴ It is according to this understanding of Europeanization that fusion approaches are related. Similarly, we acknowledge that Europeanization is not a theory, *per se*, with the ambition to explain, but is better seen as a phenomenon which a range of theoretical approaches have sought to explain (Bulmer 2007:47). Therefore Europeanization is better understood as a generic term; a conceptual apparatus, which is valuable as an ‘attention-directive device’ (Olsen 2002:943). The fusion approach is to be understood as a concept *connected to* the Europeanization discourse. In this study of fusion,

³ First, it has been used in connection with ‘*changes in external boundaries*’, which refers to a territorial extension of European policies, rules and institutional set-ups, to new member states in EU. Secondly, Europeanization has been used to study the evolution of ‘*institutions at the European level*’. Thirdly, is the ‘*central penetration of national systems of governance*’, which covers adjustment processes in respect of institutional structure, policy, patterns of political behaviour etc. A fourth usage is to analyse how Europe ‘*exporting forms of political organization*’, which may contain values and institutional set-ups to countries even beyond Europe itself. The fifth usage is Europeanization as ‘*a political unification project*’, which, similar to the second definition, refers to the capacity at the EU-level (Olsen 2002:923f).

⁴ Europeanization is presented in fusion approaches in a form close to Olsen’s type three: central penetration of national systems of governance (Olsen 2002: 923).

Europeanization, as a process of national adaptation, is a necessary condition to understand how to analyse ‘regional action’, using fusion approaches.

In the works on fusion (Rometsch & Wessels 1996; Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003; Miles 2005) and as discussed in the FUSE-EUROPA paper by Miles (2007b) on a *Micro-Fusion Framework (MFF)*, Europeanization is given a very specific meaning as three types of phenomenon. Briefly, this can be summarised as follows;

- *Attention and action*: outlined *explicitly* by Miles in his MFF as referring primarily to the Europeanization of the attention of policy-makers (principally in reaction to ‘downloading’) and the corresponding action of policy-makers as they seek to mobilise and upload interest formulation, aggregation and representation and give regional ‘voice’ at the EU level; (the politics of Europeanization)
- *Adaptation of institutions and procedures*: outlined by the fusion literature and Miles *implicitly* in his MFF framework as corresponding to procedural alterations, changes in political institutions, judicial structures, administration, economic structures, divisions of powers among domestic institutions; (the polity of Europeanization)
- *Attitudes*, outlined by Miles (2005) and in his MFF, as the Europeanization of policy-makers’ attitudes towards European integration that refers to their evolving perspectives and ‘values set’ which they use to conceptualize the benefits of European integration and can be, for instance, ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ towards the EU.

2.2.2 Using Fusion Approaches in this Study of Regional Action

For conceptual clarity, it is argued by Miles in his MFF framework, that it is reasonable, at least in terms of terminology, to demarcate away the usage of the term ‘Europeanization’ within fusion frameworks so that Europeanization is explicitly and strictly referred to as the attention of policy-makers (Europeanization of politics) and thus, something *distinct* from institutional adaptation (polity). Although it is recognised that they are in fact twin processes, and as Wessels *et al* (2003:14) contend, the fusion process is described as ‘...a ‘fusion’ of public instruments from several state levels linked with the respective ‘Europeanization’ of national actors and institutions’, it is useful to differentiate as operational concepts so that the fusion of public instruments is conceptually separated from Europeanization of actors and institutions. The analysis thus seeks to be about two things that are here held apart; i.e. about institutional adaptation *and* the Europeanization

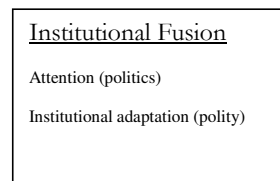
(as attention) of actors. Consequently, this study on regional action will also adopt this same line of thinking.

However, since this study is focused on regional action, there is also a need to conceptualize ‘action’ as a separate analytical element within fusion approaches. Action in fusion approaches refers to acts related to *attention* and *institutional change*. In other words, this project makes use of Institutional Fusion (IF) in the following way.

The IF has two main foci: first, the existence and extent of *attention* of regional actors towards EU-business and, second, the existence and extent of *institutional adaptation* of regional bodies. The notion of institutional adaptation is also relatively restricted. Adaptation refers in two senses to – (a) the existence and extent of *horizontal procedural adaptation* among regional institutions in order to enhance the ability of regional actors, organs and machinery within the respective region to develop coherent and common approaches and to speak with one voice on EU questions as well as, (b) the existence and extent of *vertical procedural adaptation* that enables regional actors and organs to participate and transmit regional perspectives into the EU policy-making environment.

Second, the concept of attitudes is also reserved for our latter discussion of the fusion perspectives (FP) and not for the IF side of the MFT (see below).

Figure 2: Institutional Fusion Conceptualized



2.3 Fusion Perspectives (FP) and the Regional Context

While IF alludes to ‘change in behaviour and/or organisation of ... institutions’ (Miles 2005:54), FP alludes to attitudes (motives, values set) of policy-makers. FP and the IF are then two different approaches to the understanding of, as in our case, the regional action towards the EU. One is about ‘behaviour’ and one is about ‘attitudes’. However, the two are, of course, also interlinked; they should be seen as ‘twin approaches’. If we find FP among actors, we can expect to find consequences on the IF side of the study, and vice

versa. Miles (2005:53) makes, for instance, use of the three forms of FP to derive propositions on what he expects to find among Swedish institutions.

Drawing upon the assumptions of fusion I, II and III of the MFT (Wessels 1997:285-289), Miles (2005) in turn develops these hypothetical motives. He labels them more substantially and utilises them to categorise policy actors 'attitudes' towards the EU that influence their policy priorities in the formulation and implementation of national positions and policies towards the EU (national EU policy) as well as to produce hypotheses (expectations) on how this will influence policy positions towards the EU. Miles, more or less, thereby argues in favour of the usefulness of the MFT in explaining the general direction of European integration.

Moreover, the FP is seen as a useful complement to IF approaches, since although the latter may have adequate tools in order to provide insights into the adaptation of regional institutions, the first indicator of IF, namely on Europeanization, as defined as the changing attention of regional policy-makers, may not be in itself sufficient to explain the nuances in the *attitudes* of national policy-makers towards specific aspects of the EU policy portfolio, and *to understand the attitudes and priorities of regional policy-makers in terms of policy analysis*. The FP therefore seeks to add additional conceptualisations clarifying the policy positions of regional policy-makers and thus the nuances between, in this context, the attitudes of Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian regional policy-makers towards EU issues.

More specifically, and complimenting the comparatively strict definition of Europeanization in terms of the *attention* of policy-makers as outlined earlier, the FP incorporates a central tenet of the Europeanization literature and seeks to, as Börzel (2005:62) argues, bring 'the bottom-up perspective back in'. The FP acknowledges that, accompanying this 'top-down' driven, changing focus of attention on the part of policy-makers, regional policy-makers are also acknowledging (informally if not formally) the existence of a 'bottom up' dimension in that Europeanization prompts, facilitates and accelerates changes in the *attitudes* of the regional policy-makers who then will seek to put these attitudes in practice in seeking to influence EU policies. Greater evidence should be detectable, through their greater awareness of EU business, that policy-makers also promote greater involvement in EU levels in order to pursue the enhancement of regional preferences and priorities at the supranational level. The FP contains three 'different, yet complementary forms' (Miles 2005:30). In particular, whether regional policy-makers have developed a permissive, balanced or negative 'value set' towards European integration as conceptualised as 'performance fusion', 'political fusion' and 'compound fusion', that then informs whether regional policy-makers seek the further integration of regional institutions and policies into EU policy-making. Although the term 'fusion perspective' is

used, it could be argued that this represents a collective term for a value set that constitutes three component fusion perspectives – namely performance, political and compound fusion. The term ‘fusion perspective’ (FP) is preferred largely as a collective term to signify the complete value set of national policy-makers that incorporates all three forms of fusion-inspired perspectives.

2.3.1 Performance Fusion: An Output-related Attitude to European Integration

The FP envisages that regional policy-makers advocate participation in the EU as they recognise that domestic instruments used at the regional level are no longer able to exclusively provide welfare and service provisions for citizens in an interdependent world. Hence, regional policy-makers explicitly acknowledge that EU participation is preferential, precisely because they recognise ongoing alterations in the style and emphasis of governance occurring within their nation state that also has implications for the regional level. Yet, regional policy-makers adopt a pragmatic performance-related mentality that links their conditional support for European integration processes to the effectiveness of the EU’s decision-making apparatus to deliver discernible political and economic results that they can no longer manage to produce using traditional strategies and policies. They are willing to fuse with the Union provided it delivers good and discernible performance outputs: a form of *performance fusion*.

In addition, as part of regional policy-makers being attracted to and accepting the institutional logic of supranational EU bodies to deliver their welfare and service needs, these policy-makers are also aware that, through supranational participation, regional apparatus and competencies may themselves be further transformed and even require further changes in the attention and action of regional actors and procedural and institutional adaptation of regional bodies in order to gain greater performance outputs for regions from the EU. Regional policy-makers identify themselves as fused into EU decision-making, and have a stake in political terms in ensuring that the European Union succeeds in order to satisfy domestic policy outcomes even if this affects and complicates daily regional politics.

2.3.2 Political Fusion: A Third Way Attitude

Fusion also makes assumptions on the kind of the path that policy-makers would like to see the European Union take in its future evolution. Briefly, the FP assumes that policy-

makers advocate, and are attempting to chart a path between the two disliked alternatives of: (1) the deficiencies of intergovernmental cooperation and: (2) federal solutions that may have increased effectiveness but also are perceived by regional policy-makers to threaten the existing constitutional and character of the respective region as well as the nation state. For them, European integration should represent a third way between intergovernmentalism and federalism that is pro-integration and supranational – rejecting the limited effectiveness of intergovernmentalism and the negative, and largely politically symbolic, implications of constitutional federalism. The attitude of policy-makers, that of political fusion, is one that is largely pro-supranational integration, yet federo-sceptic. Such a preference for a supranational third way enables them to pursue greater European integration, while enabling them to largely avoid public deliberations about the effects of Europeanization on regional democracy.

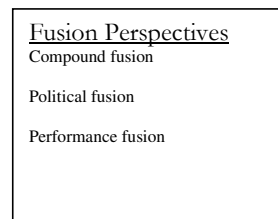
One caveat worth emphasising here is that it would be expected, in the regional context, that the influence of political fusion dynamics may be of less relevance and importance compared to the context of national policy-makers that specifically address questions directly related to the constitutional design of the evolving EU. Nevertheless, it can be argued that regional policy-makers will pursue the development of the European Union in which the role of regions is regarded as important, but would not prompt major constitutional revision of the status of the respective region under investigation. Above all, regional policy-makers may favour fusing with the EU level in order to bypass complicated relations with their respective national government that may be viewed at the regional level as inhibiting the delivery of particular regional preferences.

2.3.3 Compound Fusion: Attitudinal Preference for the Union as a Compound Polity

According to the FP, regional policy-makers adopt two attitudinal perspectives that can be labelled as *compound fusion*. First, regional policy-makers *interpret* the existing status of the European Union, up to and including the 2000 Nice Treaty operations, as representing a compound polity. The Union is interpreted as representing a complex, fused organisation of (mostly) supranational and intergovernmental features that can, in line with and linking to performance fusion, deliver policy outcomes even though its compound nature will imply that its overall structure may remain messy and sub-optimal. Compound fusion stresses that there is a shared responsibility between EU, national and regional officials over the combined use of policy instruments and a clear division of competencies is neither possible nor entirely necessary.

Second, national policy-makers *advocate* the continuation of a compound polity since they accept the fusing of competencies in such a flexible compound structure. Also according to the FP, the vast majority of (Nordic) regional policy-makers recognize the importance of pooling sovereignty in a compound structure for regions, and that the European Union's evolving compound polity structure enables an expanding array of regional actors to participate in EU decision-making (involving many elite practitioners but also lower level agencies and elite specialists) so that there is a greater propensity for intermediary regional groups to influence EU policies. This is something that is also actively preferred by regional policy-makers since they like the inclusive nature of compound fusion. Above all, a compound polity serves as a useful device to stress the benefits of a fused Europe, without requiring acceptance of a federal Europe that would be unpopular with the mass populations, particularly in the Nordic states.

Figure 3: Fusion Perspectives Conceptualized



Overall, fusion approaches offer a useful conceptual background in which to interpret regional dynamics. First, the MFT provides a means to understand the general evolution of European integration as a sub-optimal process of fusion in which there will be incentives and opportunities for regional actors and institutions to fuse competencies with the EU level. Second, the IF and FP frameworks facilitate understanding of how and why regional actors and institutions respond to the pressures of a fusing Europe. Fusion approaches provide clearer conceptualisations of the changing attention of regional actors, the adaptation of regional institutions and procedures (taken from IF) as well as the evolving attitudes and value sets of regional actors that shape regional policies and positions towards the EU (from FP).⁵ The next step is to deliberate on the implications for regional action and how these attention, adaptation and attitudinal factors influence regional action towards the EU.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of this, see Miles (2006).

3 Defining Regional Action

This paper aims to develop an analytical tool to evaluate regional action towards EU-related frameworks utilising a fusion approach. What do we then mean by ‘regional action’? What type of phenomenon are we looking for? Three concepts need to be specified: *region*, *regional actors* and *action*.

3.1 Introduction

As noted previously, the Europeanization literature has often concentrated on the central penetration of national systems of governance, i.e. a top-down policy process where EU policy cycle puts pressure on national political system. Yet, this rather ‘narrow’ way of studying Europeanization has been criticised since ‘...increasingly intertwined [i.e. *fused*, our remark] political systems make it difficult to detect what causes what’ (Graziano & Vink 2007:9). Börzel, for example, argues that it is necessary to start any analysis of Europeanization at the national level, and see how policies and institutions are developed at the EU supranational level (Börzel 2002:93); and then, subsequently, go on to study how domestic institutions are affected in a diffusion process that is similar to a dialectic relationship between national and the supra-national levels. So, according to Börzel we need more of a ‘bottom-up-down’ design to study Europeanization. In contrast to Börzel, a fusion approach, and a regional perspective, gives us a basis for our argument to design this study more as ‘top-down-up’⁶. It is this certain amount of ‘up’ that interests this enquiry and contains what we define as ‘regional action’; namely, the ‘bottom up’ actions of regional actors and institutions towards the European Union that take account of the central penetration of state systems of governance by European integration and seek to ‘upload’ regional preferences and priorities to the EU level.

Some theories label this ‘bottom-up’ behaviour as ‘new regionalism’ (as opposed to what is called ‘old regionalism’) and in general, ‘new regionalism’ is regarded as a bottom-up movement, in contrast to a governmental top-down policy process (Börzel 2002:16), that also acknowledges the growth of ‘sub-national mobilisation’ in the EU (Hooghe, 1996; Jeffery, 1997 and 2000; Keating 1998; Le Gales & Lequesne 1998). By using a fusion approach to underpin this study of regional action, it is also argued, in line with MFT assumptions, that national actors increasingly share responsibilities and mix competencies

⁶ ‘Top’ refers then to demands from EU policy-cycle and ‘down’ is how the national level is affected by, and adapt to, these demands. ‘Up’ refers in this sense to regional action as a consequence of this Europeanization process.

with others, horizontally as well as vertically, and consequently, this will also have a profound impact at the regional level and regional actors. We are thus focused on evaluating regional action through the prism of fusion, i.e. regional action as part of deeper regional involvement in European integration, rather than a comparison between ‘old’ and ‘new’ forms of regional behaviour. Hence, it is important to highlight that the emphases in this project is on concentrating on the study of *action* by regional actors, that, in accordance with Institutional Fusion (IF) also reflects changes in the *attention of regional policy-makers as well as the adaptation of institutional bodies*.

3.2 Regions

At first glance, ‘region’ seems a rather easy concept to understand, especially if we take Keating’s (1998:9) minimal definition of a region as ‘...an intermediate territorial level, between the state and the locality’. Yet, a closer look shows that a ‘region’ can be defined in many ways and is notoriously problematic to define at an advanced level. However, given that this study focuses on regional action, we are *not* primarily interested in conceptual discussions of what constitutes a region. For the most part, this study highlights the functional aspects of sub-national mobilisation and/or regional action, and therefore the intention is to adopt a similar, rather functional and pragmatic way of dealing with the concept of a ‘region’.

Nevertheless, a common way to conceptualize regions is to distinguish between three different forms of region (see for instance Gren 2002:15, or Jönsson *et al* 2007:106f); namely as a *functional*, *administrative* and/or *cultural/historical/identity region*. The *functional region* is determined by the contacts, transport, travel and related relations of dependencies that interconnect people and establishments. In this case, this implies that the region in which ‘regional action’ takes place is somewhat determined by the actual interaction between EU and the bodies in the nation-state and the locality. The concept of a functional region makes it problematic to distinguish an explicit geographic border that demarcates out the regional territory. It is somewhat obvious that the borders of a functional region adapt and change constantly as a consequence of general transformations of societies, for example, the development of new transport and communication opportunities. The *administrative region* is also often determined as part of a broader process of decentralisation, and as an instrument for the nation-state to divide up the state-territory, such as, into provinces, län, cantons or départements. An administrative region can also be classified as a territory for political-administrative decisions. There is no distinct dividing line between a functional and an administrative

region; sometimes an administrative region might be the same as a functional region (as in our three empirical cases – see below). Yet, it is also possible that other regional constellations other than administrative regions may ‘act’ towards the EU. This could, for instance, be the case with those that might be classified as *cultural/historical/identity regions*, (as a third definitional type of region). This type of region refers to an area with deeper historical roots and where the inhabitants have developed a stronger regional identity that may be built upon language, history, religion or cultural and ethnical similarities. Much of the variation in the ‘mosaic of Europe’ can be attributed to having different cultural regions. A cultural/historical/identity region might coincide with the borders of an administrative and/or functional region, but could also be a more or less distinct level *within or across* an administrative region.

This specific project is concerned with studying regional action in three different Nordic regions; one from Finland (Regional Council of Southwest Finland), one from Norway (Hedmark County) and one from Sweden (Värmland County). Each of the three cases can be, at least at the outset of this project, identified as and equivalent to *administrative regions*. Yet, studying ‘regional action’ towards the EU means that this project is fundamentally interested in regions in a *functional context*, which implies, for instance, that relevant actors, as well as their actions, are not necessarily traced back to and located within the administrative borders of these regions.

Another aspect of regions within the European Union similarly highlights that they differ in other respects. In several of EU member states, active regions are not a new phenomenon. In those states with a long history of strong regions (such as, the federal and semi-federal states of Germany, Spain and Austria), there is a longer tradition of independent political action at the regional level. Yet, in unitary states, like the Nordic countries, the regional tradition is much weaker (Jönsson *et al* 2007:113), which renders consequences when it comes to understanding regional action in the European Union.

Our three respective regions possess not just similar Nordic credentials; they also have further similarities that distinguish them from others. They are not just regions in three unitary states; they can also share common characteristics in being strong municipalities. All three regions are governed by both governmental regional administrations (top-down) and elected councils with regional representatives (bottom-up). None of the regions have any legislative powers; nor possess separatist movements demanding greater regional autonomy from their national authorities. The numbers of inhabitants in each region are rather small, with Hedmark County as the smallest (188 000), Värmland in the middle (275 000) and Southwest Finland Region as the biggest (450 000).

To summarize this discussion; in the context of this planned study, it would be unwise to determine exactly at this point what type of definition that should guide the forthcoming evaluations. Yet, it seems logical to adopt a largely functional definition of regions. Regions are a dynamic concept and cannot (and should not) be explicitly limited. Nevertheless, since our understanding of 'regional action' is a consequence of, and directed and transmitted towards, developments at the European level, it is also important to be sensitive when conceptualising administrative regions. The ongoing processes of regionalisation in Europe emanate in part from the challenges and pressures from the EU policy-cycle. And at least in unitary states with no, or weak, regional traditions, EU membership, more or less, results in debates on how to create the most efficient administrative regional structures.⁷

3.3 Regional Actors

Who are the *regional actors* that are the objects of this study? One approach to this question is to relate to the three different forms of regionalisation processes identified by Jönsson *et al* (2007:109). First, there is the process of *decentralisation (or devolution)*, which refers to how the state apparatus transfers powers and competencies down to a regional level. This process is very similar to a top-down process. The second process can be classified as *separatism*, which refers to a process where there may exist an apparent opposition to the arrangements between the state and the region and where there are regional intentions aimed at gaining political autonomy. The third regionalisation process can be denominated as *region building*, and refers to processes where local- and regional actors consciously strive to create new, or strengthen existing, often weak, regions. Regional action as conceptualised in this study refers to this third process of regionalisation; namely *region building*, and consequently, we largely exclude 'regional action' as representing forms of traditional governmental regional policy-making or separatist regionalist movements. In this study, regional action is more closely understood as a complement to state policy.

Consequently, we define 'regional action' as a phenomenon that takes place within the existing framework of the nation-state, yet, at the same time, also represents a phenomenon that is *not* in opposition to the existing state or its constitutional arrangements. The actions that underpin these processes of region building are essentially those of regional actors and for this study, this is largely taken to mean both local and

⁷ These debates have been very strong in the Nordic countries. It is not only the challenges from the EU that bring about this discussion. It is possibly more accurate to argue that the discussions emanates from the challenges to the welfare state or the 'threats' from globalization. However, we will argue that what is perceived as 'EU challenges' are most important in order to understand these debates.

regional actors. The construction of a region, from below or from the 'bottom-up', is viewed as an integral part of the blurred grey area between public- and private law; an area that contains both public and private actors including, companies, universities, chambers of commerce, trade unions, political parties and cultural and social movements (Jönsson *et al* 2007:112).

3.4 Action

How shall we define and understand the notion of *action*? To put it simply, the *action* that this study is interested in can be defined as those consciously, rationally-taken political measures that seek to transmit and promote regional interests in an EU-related framework.

3.4.1 Vertical and Horizontal Action

Institutional fusion argues that there exists an ongoing adaptation both vertically and horizontally. This distinction is again fruitful to use when it comes to regional action. There is an important linkage between horizontal and vertical action since as Schmidt (2006) argues Europeanization processes contains three dimensions. First, there is a *downloading process* by the EU, which basically explains the top-down adaptation of domestic (in our case regional) structures and processes, as a consequence of increasing demands from EU-policy-making. Secondly, there is a *horizontal 'sideways' process* where we can see co-operation among domestic (in our case regional) actors and institutions on the formulation of ideas, preferences and models that shape the notion of the national interest in relation to supranational governance. And thirdly, there is an *uploading process* in which the national (in our case also regional) positions on EU questions are transferred to the supranational level⁸. This model of how the process of European integration and Europeanization evolves is fruitful in order to understand regional action. In essence, to understand acts of vertical 'uploading', there is also a need to relate this to and take account of equivalent action the horizontal level. Regional actors are acting in a complex environment where they to interact and relate to many differing aspects if regional action towards EU is to be effective. So vertical action requires some form of horizontal action. So what do we mean with horizontal and vertical action?

⁸ It can also be argued that there is a fourth dimension, which might be of interest in further studies of regional action. As Vong (2007:325) argues, there is also a dimension of 'socialisation of interests and identities, or 'identity reconstruction''. He categorises this process as 'cross-loading'.

Horizontal action represents co-operation and co-ordination among different regional actors that aims to encourage the articulation and implementation of what they presume to be in the regional interest. Horizontal activities may not necessarily be exclusively within the (internal) confines of a specific region; regional actors might also seek contact with other regions within (i.e. inter-regional action) the respective member-state or outside (i.e. trans-border regional action) the state border, in order to strengthen common regional action towards the European Union. These are the particular form of action that we categorise as horizontal regional action. However, we do not regard regional activities towards the region's own government at the state level as horizontal. Horizontal action consists of all those activities in the horizontal dimension that is intended to strengthen the ability to promote regional interests in an EU-related framework.

Vertical action refers to the activities of regional actors and institutions upwards in terms of political levels, (i.e. from the regional to the national and supranational levels) that are intended to strengthen the ability to articulate and promote regional interests in an EU-related framework. It could be argued that it could be reasonable to analytically lift in the local level, and that regional activities that are further downward and undertaken by even more local actors should be incorporated into notions of vertical activities. However, since we argue that regional action is also accompanied by some aspirations and conceptualisations of 'region building' (see above), it seems logical to regard local- and regional actors as the 'owners' of the regional action process. Thus, the activities among local- and regional levels, while still remaining highly important, are to be seen as basically horizontal, at least in a functional understanding of Nordic regions today.

Regional actors can choose strategically two ways to act vertically towards the European Union (see Figure 4). First, regional actors may use more immediate contacts with the European Union. This could be done more *directly* through general lobbying activities, e.g. personal contacts between the commission and regional actors. Or regional actors may be involved in the comitology or the working groups that is an important feature in European Union policymaking process. In addition, regional actors can choose a strategy of *indirect* action towards EU, such as, developing activities through agents like regional offices in Brussels, or being active in multilateral regional bodies, such as, the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and make use of these bodies to influence the EU policy-cycle. Second, regional actors and bodies may utilise other national transmission channels, such as, pushing regional interests by lobbying and using national governmental representatives that may, for example, be responsible for negotiations within the Council of Ministers (see Figure 4).

3.5 Understanding Variation in Regional Action

There is, as stated above, not a single coherent response from the domestic arenas on European integration. In fact, variation is commonplace and extensive. To understand variation in regional action, we acknowledge the existence of a number of structural and contextual variables, which are influential at the national level. It is not argued that these variables completely determine regional action, but they help to understand variations. Furthermore, we will not claim that these are the only structural variables that regional actors have to account for, and there may be other structural demands, such as, globalization, that are important for and influential upon regional actors. Yet, we presume that contextual and structural factors on the state level are, on balance, the most important when it comes to shaping political action by Nordic regional actors towards the supranational level. What factors are most prominent mediating factors since it must be recognised that 'nearly every domestic structural condition that affects the impact of European integration could be conceptualized as a mediating factor' (Caporaso 2007:30).

Drawing upon previous empirical work on fusion (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003), a number of factors is important for understanding variations in regional action. There is no order of precedence between these factors.

First, drawing upon previous empirical work on fusion, we need to assess the degree of IF within national government structures. This should be done in two ways: an assessment of the extent of evidence suggesting a broad Europeanization (in terms of a changing and increased focus of attention by actors towards the EU policy-making, i.e. politics), of actors within the respective state. Then there should be an assessment of the degree of institutional adaptation, i.e. polity, of national procedures and mechanisms to handle EU business. The latter should be understood in two senses – (a) the extent of horizontal adaptation or co-ordination among government actors and organs within the member state in order to enhance the ability for government machinery to speak with one voice on EU questions as well as: (b) the degree of vertical adaptation that enables national actors and organs to participate and transmit national perspectives into the EU policy-making. Both of these aspects also need to accommodate awareness of the domestication of the EU level that enables traditionally domestic-orientated actors, such as, finance, social and regional policy actors to develop direct relations with the EU institutions. This will then enable us to make a decision as to what extent national structures are strong or weak adaptors to the EU system and to whether they are essentially national performers or multi-level players as identified by Wessels, Maurer & Mittag (2003). It will be important here to recognise that this project draws upon previous work on fusion that identified that there was a vertical asymmetry between Brussels and the member states with no

general trend of structural revolution in the member states. Growing EU obligations have been dealt with through limited constitutional revisions, minor institutional re-arrangements and much procedural and administrative adaptation. Also that there has also been non-convergence among the member states with no ideal model of adaptation of state structures to the Brussels policy-cycle and each member state pursuing a differentiated 'own' way in the Brussels space. In addition it should be recognised as a starting point that there is also a clear horizontal asymmetry among groups of actors in terms of adaptation in the member state context. Adaptation has been differentiated across actors in the member states and not equally distributed among actors in the member states. Differentiation is the key.

Second, drawing upon previous research on a fusion perspective, it is important, where possible, to do a brief assessment of the existence of, and extent of, views compatible with FP among the attitudes and policy priorities of *national policy-makers* responsible for the formulation and implementation of National EU Policy. Drawing on the work of Miles (2005) on a FP, the extent to which national policy-makers have developed a permissive, balanced or negative 'values set' towards European integration as conceptualised as 'performance fusion', 'political fusion' and 'compound fusion'. This will then inform to what extent national policy-makers desire, or are seeking, further integration of national institutions and policies into EU policy-making.

Third, we have to take account of existing constitutional arrangements within the state. This can be influential in a number of ways: (a) it can be important whether the state is a unitary or federal state and thus has differing responsibilities allocated to national structures in respect of EU policy portfolio and; (b) the extent of constitutional 'fit' and 'misfit' between member states and the and, (c) tasks and capacities given to regional bodies and the constitutional conditions they work under.

Fourth, we have to address the composition of national discourses on the EU, and in particular, the role and characteristics of identity debates. It is assumed here that national discourses may shape and/or constrain the perspectives (i.e. FP) and policy options of regional actors (and hence the composition of the fusion perspective) as well as their participation in EU policy-making (i.e. IF).

Fifth, we have to take account of more general characteristics of national-regional relations. In particular, this includes political representation issues; namely to what extent, national actors regard it as being part of their portfolios to speak and act as representatives of regional actors in EU policy-making. This also needs to take account of political power relationships existing between the state and regional level; namely to what degree relations between national and regional actors remain cordial and are not affected

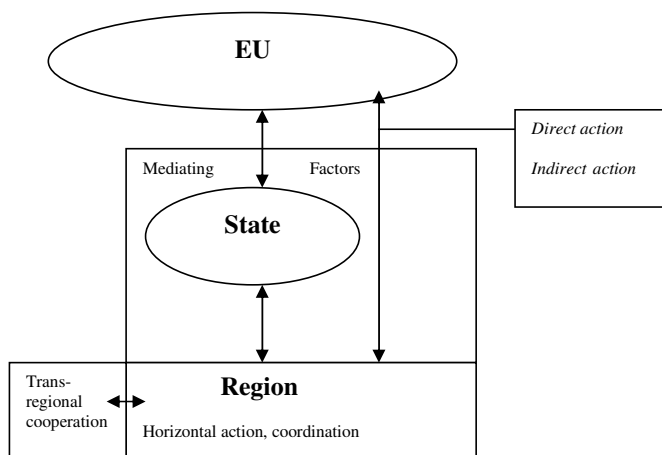
by complex political party constellations or differentiations. These indicators may help to determine the extent to which regional relations with the EU are perceived as means of facilitating or bypassing national-regional political relationships.

Sixth, we need to assess the degree of institutional learning between the national and regional levels. As regards the regional context, it is recognised that the fusion process 'has been asymmetrical' (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003:447). Change has been largely restricted to governmental machinery, interest groups and to some degree, courts among the (then) 'Fifteen'. The fusion process 'has been extended to some regions' (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003:447). It is thus important to differentiate to what extent national actors and organs are willing to, and have, passed on their experiences to regional partners and also allow them access to EU structures via national structures.

Seventh, one possible constraint for regional actors to be involved with more immediate contacts with EU policy-making might be perceptions of language barriers. Acting means communication, and to do that often requires a common language, or at the very least effective interpretation. If regional policy-makers perceive that their language competencies are insufficient, it might restrict the degree of regional action towards the EU.

With all this in mind, it is now possible to conceptualise regional action as containing several elements as modelled in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Regional Action conceptualized



As we can see in the Figure 4, 'regional action' can take place on a horizontal level both within the specific region and in interaction with other regions, as well as on the vertical level, towards the EU via the state and/or towards the EU without the state as an intermediate level.

4 Regional Action using a Fusion Approach

In this chapter we aim to combine the two concepts of a fusion approach and regional action. In particular, this regional study takes on board the assumptions of the MFT as a background interpretation of European integration. It also acknowledges the MFF distinction, as proposed by Miles in an accompanying FUSE-EUROPA paper (Miles 2006), that the fusion approach can utilise IF (the behavioural variable) and FP (the attitudinal variable) as guiding conceptual tools. This is combined in this paper with a clear view of regional action, that stresses functionality and differentiates between vertical and horizontal forms of action (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Regional Action and the Fusion Approach

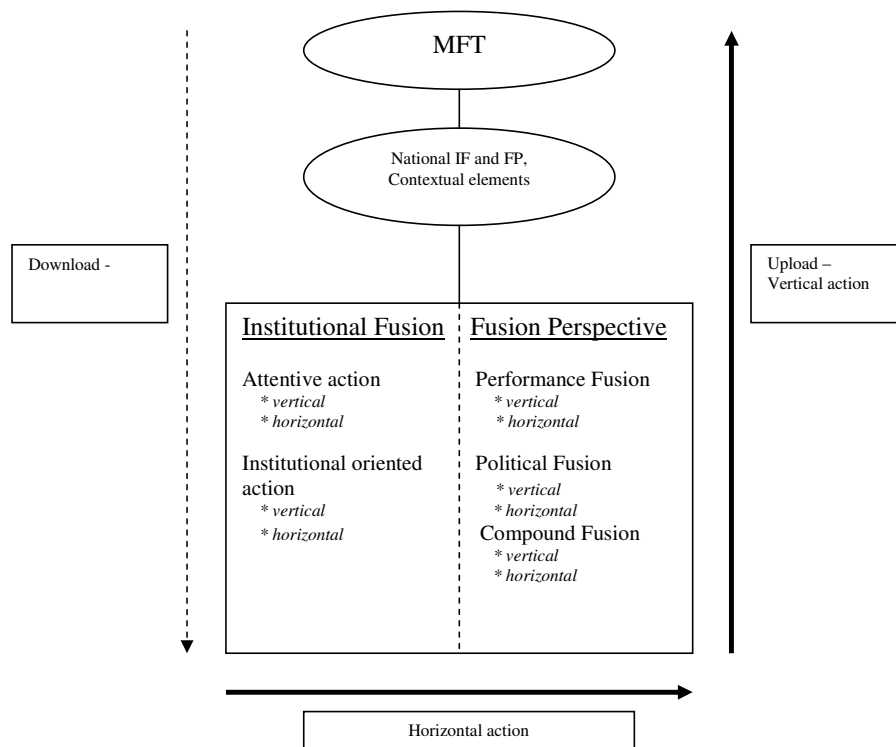


Figure 5 illustrates how regional action, horizontally and vertically, towards the European Union could be analyzed by using the concepts of IF and FP. The horizontal and upload

arrow are emphasized which illustrates what we primarily are interested in. But we need to interpret the download dimension to understand horizontal and upload activities.

4.1 Research questions

The central aim of this paper is to develop an analytical model that helps us to understand our basic question; *how can we understand 'regional action' towards the European Union, using fusion approaches?* We are interested to get a picture of 'regional action' towards the EU.

What forms of 'regional action' are we interested in to study? A fusion approach helps us to assume, or hypothesize, what actions we would expect. Our basic ontological understanding is that 'regional action' are a result and a consequence of the dialectic process between 'behaviours' and 'attitudes'. That means that we have two tasks to fulfil. First, we have to *investigate existing levels of institutional fusion (behaviour) in terms of vertical and horizontal action* – This can be termed – *exploring existing 'regional action'*. Second, we have to *evaluate the conceptions (attitudes) of regional actors towards the European Union and towards existing and future levels of participation of regional actors in EU-related frameworks*. This can be categorised as *determining existing regional pre-conceptions and conceptions in both vertical and horizontal cooperation*. This gives us the following research questions.

- To what extent is the existing region acting in an institutionally and behaviourally fused EU-related framework? How is this action performed horizontally, and vertically?
- To what extent do regional actors value existing and future levels of participation in EU-related frameworks? How do regional actors value horizontal and vertical cooperation in EU-related frameworks?

4.1.1 Applying a Fusion Approach to Regional Action

Given the discussions in previous sections that have duly defined notions of regional action largely in functional terms and highlighted the importance of differentiating regional action in terms of behaviour and attitudes and at the horizontal and vertical dimensions, then we can now move on to tentatively outlining an approach to apply fusion to actions towards the European Union at the regional level.

IF indicators. In order to do this, it is important then to unpack our outlined indicators of institutional fusion – taken to be the attention of regional policy-makers to date, and action to enhance forms of procedural and institutional adaptation – so that they also include a differentiation between the horizontal and vertical dimensions. In terms of examining the ‘politics’ dynamics, namely the attention of policy-makers, then the following may be providing a useful differentiation. In particular, we may be looking to examine evidence of the changing;

- *Horizontal Attentive Action (HA)* of regional policy-makers: taken here to mean growing or declining awareness by one set of regional actors of the impact of the EU on other regional actors (for example, in private – public, sectoral offices or in other regions within or beyond the state border) and what other regional actors are doing when it comes to an EU-related framework, (i.e. in terms of learning among regional actors in regional institutions).
- *Vertical Attentive Action (VA)* of regional policy-makers: in other words, the growing or declining awareness among regional policy-makers of: (a): the size and impact of EU business and legislation being ‘downloaded’ by the EU into the regional domain and: (b) that then requires the attention of regional-policy-makers in terms of formulating and ‘uploading’ their preferences towards these and in implementing EU decisions and action.

In addition, we can also make a similar differentiation in horizontal and vertical terms when it comes to examining institutional action (the other aspect of institutional fusion) – namely institutional oriented action for enhancing procedures and mechanisms (including procedural adaptation, changes in political institutions, judicial structures, administration, economic structures, and division of powers). Here, we will be examining the degree of procedural change in regional institutions in order to participate and influence EU-related frameworks when it comes to:

- *Horizontal Institutional Oriented Action (HI)*: taken here to mean the actions undertaken in order to, for instance, enhance horizontal co-operation and adaptation among different institutions within the region on EU issues. The aim of this action is to strengthen co-ordination and co-operation among regional institutions in developing common lines in the region on EU questions (e.g. private – public, sectoral offices or trans-border regional cooperation).
- *Vertical Institutional Oriented Action (VI)*: taken here to mean the actions undertaken in order to, for example, facilitate organisational changes and adaptation to the procedures of regional institutions that will enhance the handling of business coming vertically from the EU level (down-loading) as well as the uploading of

regional priorities and preferences ‘vertically’ to the EU level and structures, (i.e. lobbying activities or participation in EU comitology).

FP indicators. Turning to FP aspects that focus upon the attitudinal perceptions of regional policy-makers that influence their policy priorities towards the EU, then again we can make the following distinctions to accommodate vertical and horizontal dimensions. In terms of regional policy-maker’s attitudes towards *compound fusion* (their attitudes towards participation in EU-related frameworks and the promotion of merged competencies between the EU and regional level as part of compound polity) then we may be able to consider:

- *Horizontal Compound Fusion (HCF)*: taken to mean here the extent to which there are attitudes by regional policy-makers across the region/regions to develop common viewpoints on sharing competencies when developing key access channels between the region/regions and the EU (even if this also further blurs competencies among regional institutions as well).
- *Vertical Compound Fusion (VCF)*: taken to mean the extent to which there are attitudes among regional policy-makers at actively promoting, co-operating and participating in key vertical access channels that link the regional and EU levels and will enable competencies to be shared (e.g. promoting access to the comitology).

Turning to political fusion aspects, then as noted earlier, the main focus of political fusion in terms of the attitudes of regional policy-makers is taken to be to what extent region-policy-makers are duly adopting attitudes towards promoting supranationalism and the extension of EU competencies as a means of bypassing the state level and central government. If this is the case then again we can differentiate between vertical and horizontal dimensions:

- *Horizontal Political Fusion (HPoF)*: encapsulating the extent to which there are attitudes among regional policy-makers towards promoting cooperation among regional bodies horizontally across the region (i.e. between regional public institutions, between regional public and private institutions or between trans-border regional institutions) with the specific aim of promoting the common regional positions on enhancing the supranational extensions of EU policies and links with regional domains.
- *Vertical Political Fusion (VPoF)*: encompassing the extent to which there are attitudes among regional policy-makers towards the pro-active promotion vertically of regional voices that are concerned with the supranational extension of

EU powers (i.e. shared competencies and, for example, regional voices on the role and function of the Committee of Regions or extended regional power over the structural funds).

Turning to performance fusion, then the emphasis is on detecting whether regional policy-makers' attitudes largely perceive their support for further European integration and the closer involvement of regions on the basis of the Union delivering performance outcomes that are easily discernible at the regional level (what can the EU do for the region?). Again, this could be construed in vertical and horizontal dimensions:

- *Horizontal Performance Fusion (HPF)*; taken to mean the degree to which there are (positive) attitudes among regional policy-makers towards promoting cooperation and developing common viewpoints among regional institutions at the regional level on the perceived benefits of key EU policies for the region.
- *Vertical Performance Fusion (VPF)*: taken to mean the extent to which there are (positive) attitudes among regional policy-makers towards enhancing the downloading of key EU policies that have relevance to the regional level, (e.g. Lisbon-strategy, ESF or structural fund programme) as well as the promotion and uploading of regional priorities on key EU policies vertically into the EU policy-making system.

In conclusion, it can be argued that these conceptual variables should enable the planned study to move forward and complete four objectives in relation to the study of Nordic regions. First, to make an informed judgement of the existing degree of *horizontal* coordination and fusion among regional actors and institutions in terms of EU-related activity as well as the strengths and weaknesses of existing arrangements and provision. Second, to also attempt an informed judgement about the existing degree of *vertical* coordination and fusion between regional actors and institutions, and national and EU actors and institutions in terms of EU-related activity, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of existing arrangements and provision. Third, given that this project is funded by Nordregio, the intention is to use these preliminary conceptual tools to help formulate possible *recommendations for improving horizontal and vertical co-ordination* and fusion that will facilitate the region getting the best out of the European Union. Finally, the researchers will undertake a broad assessment as to the degree of 'regional action' (IF) and the attitudinal configuration of the pre-conceptions and conceptions (FP) of policy makers in the respective regions. If this is successfully completed and these conceptual tools hold true, the researchers in this project will have gone some way not just in further verifying the degree of regional action on EU questions taking place in regions in countries both inside and outside the European Union. They will also have gone a little

further in exploring the utility of fusion approaches through a systematic application to the comparatively unexplored realms of regional policy-makers.

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