

**SUSTAINABILITY, MUTUAL COOPERATION AND NETWORKING OF
BRATISLAVA SELF-GOVERNING REGION UNDER THE CENTROPE INITIATIVE**



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Abstract

Processes of decentralisation in the environment of Slovak Republic gave rise to the second level of local government, so called higher territorial units, with a certain degree of autonomy and specific competencies and duties. Positions of higher territorial units got strengthen by the Slovak Republic's accession to the European Union and moreover considering its cohesion policy. In regard of this, the Slovak Republic allows and European Union stimulates international and interregional partnerships among regions to develop their territories. One form of such international cooperation represents in the environment of Bratislava region is the initiative of Centrope bringing together four border regions of neighbouring countries in order to create a competitive central European region. The aim of this work will therefore assess the importance of transnational initiative Centrope for the Bratislava region and assess the position and interest of the Bratislava region in this initiative, as well as the future orientation of the region in the area of regional development. For those purposes networking of Bratislava region in the structures of Centrope will be analysed and through content analysis of strategic development documents evaluate implementation of Centrope agenda to the agenda and priorities of Bratislava region. This diploma thesis argues that due to the participation of head representatives of Bratislava region in decision-making structures of Centrope and also with respect to the penetration of agendas among Centrope and Bratislava region is the importance and significance of the transnational initiative Centrope remarkable.

Keywords: European Union, Centrope, Bratislava Region, multi-level governance, regional policy

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1. Introduction and Problem Formulation

Territorial self-government in the conditions of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter SR) has undergone fundamental changes in a relatively short period of time. Until 1989, at the time of a strict hierarchy and concentration of central government power in a totalitarian state, only central state administration existed at the level of territorial self-government. After the overthrow, the transformation of the governmental structure of the government was considered a key role in the process of restructuring the political and administrative system not only in the SR. The introduction of territorial self-government without direct subordination to the state administration was a priority of new political elites which resulted in the adoption of the Act on General Establishment in 1990. This Act conferred on municipalities self-governing status, which enabled them to exercise public administration of their jurisdiction without subordinating the state administration, an existing hierarchical model of local government.

During the 1990s, successive steps strengthened local government competencies to the detriment of the central government, with the most significant changes related to the status of territorial self-government being adopted in the 1998-2002 reforming period, when the public administration was completely reformed and, among other things, created the second level of territorial self - higher territorial units. As a result of this reform of the public administration, a large amount of powers have been transferred from the state to the territorial self-government units, while a new mechanism of financing the territorial self-government has been created through fiscal decentralization, thus weakening the dependency of the territorial units from the central government, the hierarchy of public administration has been relaxed and the principle of subsidiarity has been strengthened.

These measures have also been implemented in view of the EU's interest in joining the European Union (EU), which since the adoption of the Single European Act has guided its policy towards deepening integration and democratization and narrowing the gap between EU regions and crossing national borders. In addition, the EU advocates the principles of governance and multi-level governance, which see policymaking not through the rigidity and hierarchy of a political system dependent on central government interests but, on the contrary, encourages the pooling of different equal partners from different levels of government and the private sector interest in meeting the real interests and needs of the territory and the population, including cross-border areas. In other words, the system of governance places emphasis on the horizontal dimension to the detriment of the vertical and promotes the association of actors more on a functional basis than on the territorial one, while leaning towards a consensual decision-making principle, which should outweigh the cooperation between public and private actors at the expense of the struggle of power structures.

1.1 Problem Formulation

In Bratislava Self-Governing Region (BSGR), the Centrope initiative is a typical example of the Multi-Level Governance concept (MLG). Centrope is a transnational initiative bringing together cross-border regions of four neighboring countries that, by means of non-binding multilateral co-ordination and networking of political, administrative and private public policy actors, strive to achieve a common goal of creating a strong competitive Central European region. The Centrope initiative does not replace any existing institutional structure or create any new institutionalized territory. The Centrope initiative operates on the basis of the processes of the participating partners in order to meet European regional development goals. With this in mind, the Centrope initiative is linked to the European Territorial Cooperation Program, which draws its funds from the European Regional Development Fund, which is the primary motivation of the partners of this community. To examine the complex relationship between BSGR and Centrope, the main objective of the thesis stands as following:

How is the mutual cooperation and networking of Bratislava Self-Governing Region sustainable under the CENTROPE initiative?

The aim of this thesis will therefore be to find out how much the BSGR thinks of the transnational initiative of Centrope as important in terms of developing its territory and meeting the needs of its citizens, and at the same time what the interests of the BSGR are motivating to be a partner of this initiative. Centrope is the only transnational initiative aimed at general development in the territory of the BSGR, so it will be interesting to see how BSGR reflects the Centrope initiative and how it implements the agendas of this initiative in its own conceptual and strategic documents. This finding will be important for the subsequent assessment of whether the Centrope activities and processes have a future in the BSGR conditions, and whether BSGR is interested in working transnationally by engaging with other Centrope partners to develop a common region or, on the contrary, to become more conventional forms of cooperation at national level.

2. Methodology

In order to achieve the goal of this thesis, it will be built on:

1. The theoretical origins of the concepts of governance and multi-level governance that will be explained in the theoretical part. In this section focus will be on the basic characteristics and definitions of these concepts, their implications, strengths and weaknesses, applicability as well as possible criticism.
2. In the analytical part, focus will be on the development of decentralization in Slovak Republic (SR) conditions and the legislative framework concerning the definition of higher territorial units and support for regional development.
3. In the next part, analysis of the BSGR networking within the Centrope initiative in its structures will take place and look at how the initiative itself works, taking into account specific projects.
4. Then the key strategic documents related to the development of the regions both at the national level and at the BSGR level will be analyzed from the time before the establishment of Centrope to the present.
5. At the end of the thesis interpretations of the collected and analyzed information will be presented and conclusions will be drawn from them in relation to the defined goal of the thesis and research question.

2.1 Main Objective and Research Question

The Bratislava Self-Governing Region has several attributes due to its specific location. First, it is the region around the capital of the Slovak Republic of Bratislava, which is also the result of BSGR's richest Slovak region. Secondly, the territory of BSGR is characterized by the fact that it borders up to three different states, respectively with the regions of three different states. Due to these two aspects, BSGR has been taken as the object of research in this thesis. Because of the fact that BSGR is a region around Bratislava, the center of the Slovak economy, BSGR has some limitations to draw EU funds to the extent and in areas like other regions within Slovakia. Based on this state of affairs and awareness of its proximity to cross-border regions, BSGR has become a partner of the Centrope transnational initiative to create a strong competitive region of European significance, bringing together regions from four neighboring countries. To achieve this goal - the development of the Centrope Joint Region - the partner of the initiative is enabled to draw EU funds from the European Territorial Cooperation Program through cross-border and transnational cooperation projects. For the BSGR, this is an opportunity to obtain alternative funding opportunities for development projects in its territory, thereby enforcing and implementing EU policies. However, in addition to the instrumental motivations leading to this cooperation, normative motivations based on the building of one's identity can also be identified.

The aim of the work will therefore be to analyze the importance of the BSGR partnership within the Centrope transnational initiative, thereby assessing the position and interests of the BSGR in this

initiative as well as the future orientation of the BSGR in the area of regional development. In order to find out how important BSGR plays for Centrope's development of its territory, it is needed to be found out how BSGR is involved in this multinational community and whether these networks are sustainable. Furthermore, analysis will take place whether the BSGR reflects Centrope's agendas as well as the potential of the whole initiative in its strategic and conceptual materials related to the development of the region. At the same time, focus will be also on analyzing the objectives and priority areas of Centrope and BSGR, and comparison how the goals and priority areas of the BSGR development agendas in the strategy papers have changed or adapted from the launch of the Centrope initiative. It will also be important to see how BSGR participates in Centrope projects and whether BSGR is interested in itself as the initiator and lead partner of individual projects. Last but not least, it will be necessary to analyze BSGR's relationship with the transnational initiative to find out whether the Centrope initiative is institutionally embedded within the BSGR office and whether this initiative is devoted to a specific team of people or, on the contrary, is a free ad hoc initiative without institutional security within the BSGR. If it is able to answer these questions in this thesis, it will be able to say how much BSGR considers the partnership in the trans-national initiative Centrope to be important for the development of its territory, and whether the partnership in this transnational free community represents value added for BSGR in the area of regional development.

2.2 Sources of information and methodological tools for their acquisition

This work is a case study of the BSGR in relation to the Centrope transnational initiative. Due to the objective of this thesis, methodological tool to obtain data through a qualitative content analysis of specific selected documents and materials will be used. The data source for the needs of research will be particularly regional, but also national, strategic and development documents, project documentation, BSGR program priorities, as well as texts of selected relevant laws related to thesis topic. In particular, national documents such as the National Strategic Reference Framework, the National Strategy for Regional Development and Regional Documents, chronologically, the BSGR Development Strategy, the Economic and Social Development Program 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, the priority plan and priority BSGR projects as well as other documents BSGR for cooperation in the Centrope initiative will be analysed. The selection of these documents is due to the fact that these materials are key starting points for policy-makers in the area of development of the region and that their elaboration is based on the law. These documents also contain an analysis of the current situation, the potential of the territory and the programmatic priorities of the social, economic and cultural development of the region with a medium-term focus on a specific programming period.

For the purpose of evaluating the quality of networks and their commitment, analysis of Centrope documents on the organizational structure and institutional security of management and cooperation relations between the partners of the initiative will be necessary. At the same time, analysis of the documentation of specific projects to evaluate the participation of the BSGR will take place, in particular

in what position it represents for individual BSGR projects (the main partner - initiator, partner) as well as the impact of this project on the development of the region. All the documents required for this work are available on the government's website, on the BSGR website and on the Centrope website.

2.3 Delimitations

For the greatest possible limitation of research, the interconnection of individual BSGR structures within the Centrope institutions is considered. Through the formal analysis of these networks, when it is found out who is a member of the network, what functions it has, it was still unable to conclude whether these BSGR activities are proactive and engaging, or vice versa, that the partnership in this transnational initiative only uses passive approach to achieve certain benefits without self-realization.

3. Theoretical part

3.1 Governance

The term of governance has been in use in the literature since the early 1990s, especially since the publication of the *Modern Government-Society Interactions* (Koyiman, 1993), which addressed the crisis of modern society. Consequently, over the years, the concept of governance has gained popularity among socio-scientific experts, but this term does not refer to just one specific concept, instead it includes several different concepts and meanings that help explain the different phenomena in today's society.

From the etymological point of view comes the word *governance* of the Latin *gubernanre*, which in translation means driving, directing, leading and from Greek *kybernan* with the importance of steering / steering / steering the ship. In view of this excursion, it can be concluded that the term *governance* is the old notion of management of a society that has long since faded out, but its reluctance and popularity has returned to social discourse recently (Torfing et al., 2012: 12). As part of the academic discourse in Slovakia, the term management was used to manage, occasionally to govern, primarily related to the activities of various governmental and self-governmental actors, non-governmental actors, private and public actors, transnational, national, or sub-national dimension of their activities aimed at achieving common goals (Staroňová & Malíková, 2009: 29).

The term *governance* emerged in the political discourse at the beginning of the nineties, when it was shown that the traditional model of a nation state is no longer suitable for describing the reality or management and performance of future reform policies (such as decentralization, deconcentration and contracting of public services to a third party). The role and position of the nation state has begun to be undermined by the increasing complexity of social problems, the fragmentation of society, and the consequent increase in new organized interests, the overload and rigidity of hierarchical government structures, increasing international interdependence and competition, and last but not least the rapid expansion of new theories of corporate governance and public policy making (Benz & Papadopoulos, 2006: 2).

Other authors (Torfing et al., 2012: 9; Peters, 2002: 12-13; Peters & Pierre, 2006: 31-36; Gunsteren: 2006: 81-95) also contributed to the fact that national states were not able to mediate and secure the needs and requirements of the public, which, as the authors assert, stemmed above all from the traditionally hierarchical arrangement of the governmental components, which in many cases are characterized by their closeness, formality, limitation, conservatism, rigidity, and inability to coordinate the action, reducing the confidence of citizens in their government. At the same time, as a consequence of such failure, the authors argue that society as such has greater preconditions to better understand the problems in society and to find more adequate and effective solutions for them. The scant limits of the central government and public discontent over their demands have led central decision makers to seek

solutions to this dilemma, ultimately resulting in the adoption of a new management concept characterized by increased dependence on competitive market regulators. And it is just that government has fulfilled these demands when "in contrast to the government, it operates through organized networks of public and private actors that govern public policy towards common goals" (Rhodes, 1996: 660).

3.2 Defining the concept of governance

In the current academic discourse, there is no single correct definition of the term governance, because it is used to describe many different contexts - many times depending on its prefix (e.g. global governance, corporate governance, good governance, multi-level governance, project governance). Consequently, current political science characterizes governance in several dimensions. Firstly, as a grouping of collective will in the context of politics, secondly, a system of rules and norms that shape the behavior of social and political actors (political bodies) or, thirdly, the political management of social and economic relations based on soft, cooperative policy instruments, such as best practice, standards, certificates and benchmarking (Torfing et al., 2012: 13).

Concerning the issue of the diverse use of governance, Hirst (2000: 13-35) is also involved in the discourse, which defines up to five basic areas that have adopted the notion of governance. Firstly, the public sector, in which the way in which the society is governed (especially with regard to the provision of public services), which is defined and opposed to the prevailing approach of new public management. The basic contrast can be perceived through the expression "steering, not rowing," i.e. to steer, while just governance comes with the approach to driving the society through steering. Secondly, governance is related to a new way of coordinating the actors' activities within a policy area through networks and partnerships. Thirdly, the term governance is used in development economics, covering in particular the description of the institutional framework between state, civil society and the private sector (good governance). Fourthly, in the field of international relations, the concept of governance is characterized by relations between actors at three levels of government - transnational, national and sub-national (so-called multi-level governance). Finally, in the private sector, the governance concept is used to characterize the mechanisms of accountability, accountability and transparency in the private sector - the state.

However, as stated by Staroňová & Malíková (2009: 29), despite the diversity of understanding and the importance of the concept of governance within individual areas, all aspects are based on a common basic view on governance and decision-making in governance and the overall public policy trajectory.

The following points for Benz & Papadopoulos (2006: 2-3), including structures, actors and policymaking methods representing a basic systematic view of the main features of governance:

- The concept of governance implies a plurality of decision centers. Structures are designed to control conflicts between social groups, organizations and individuals without the intervention of a sovereign

and monocentric government. There is no clear hierarchy between these different centers, but governance structures can be embedded in a formal hierarchy. The core of decision-making structures thus consists of networks that can be characterized as relatively stable relationships between formal autonomous organizations or individual actors.

- The boundaries of decision-making structures are defined earlier in a functional dimension than in the territorial one. In addition, these structures are unstable, changing in terms of the inclusion of actors and the impact of decisions.

- The governance structure is composed of experts and public actors (government and government officials and executives) who can simultaneously represent different territorial units and representatives of private interests (representatives of business entities and various socio-cultural / lifestyle communities that are dependent from the politics arena). Elected politicians play only a secondary role in governance structures.

- Settlement of topics and agendas in governance, as well as real power, have collective actors in hand, even though individuals have an important role to play in networking and decision-making. Because of this, stakeholder engagement in processes is a key feature of governance, which also makes an increase in the incidence and influence of corporate actors.

- The concept of governance includes a mix of different ways of controlling and coordinating processes. Although unilateral decision-making is not totally excluded, it usually prevails over the mutual agreement achieved through negotiation. Within the networks, attending actors are expected to have accommodative behavior, i.e. a tendency to compromise and, at the same time, mutual will and interest in learning from one another to achieve better results. However, organizations and collective actors in public policy work together through co-operation and competition. This method of mutual relations is commonly referred to as "antagonistic cooperation".

- Governance is usually directed towards a less formal decision-making process, in addition to structures that are less visible to the wider public and are not congruent with the official institutions of representative democracy. Within the governance structures, parliament's initiation and control function is considered to be weak, with the role of parliament being reduced to the role of the ratification body in particular.

- In addition, the aim of the government is to seek to increase public resources in the area of knowledge (exploring complex and uncertain causal relationships), organizations (ensuring adequate expertise and capacity to implement agreed policies) and authorities (avoiding extortion by certain groups having the right of veto in the legislative process) processes of public policy making.

Governance, according to Schmitter (2006: 161), is a method or a mechanism that serves to solve a wide range of problems or conflicts within which they regularly take mutually beneficial but binding decisions

through negotiation and consideration among the actors involved, while co-operating in the implementation of these decisions.

At this point, however, it must be stressed that absolute anarchy is not one of the actors within the governance. Therefore, in order to avoid an inability to govern, opposing views, interests and preferences must be organized at the horizontal level of public policy cooperation across formal institutions, sectors and territorial units, and these institutions and procedures can be set up at different levels (such as policy networks, round tables, intergovernmental conferences, expert committees, etc.).

However, despite the fact that governance is typical of flexibility, a departure from hierarchy towards equal networks of actors, and at the same time the ability to transcend the boundaries of territorial units (regions and states), and thus linking entities, it can not be said with absolutes that policies in government structures are outside institutions - so to designate it as governance without government. The institutions are still, given the greater informality of processes and actors, very relevant to understanding the functioning of governance, especially for the following reasons:

- Mostly, there is a certain institutional framework that defines who is involved in procedures and who is not, and in addition, who forms the power relations and regulates the relationships of the actors
- Individual actors typically represent collective interests through collective entities and are therefore subject to institutional rules that define the internal organizational structure and processes of that collective entity
- It is the interaction between formal and informal elements that creates the dynamic nature of governance.

Governance institutions can support the emergence and stability of networks, but at the same time it is possible that existing networks will create tension within a specific institutional framework or even create a opposition to the existing institutional framework. In addition, the internal organizational rules of collective actors may be incompatible with the rules governing the relationship between the actors of different collective entities.

In view of the above, it is important that, in the case of governance, in view of informality and non-hierarchy, it is important not to consider political institutions. These, among other things, ensure the legality of this concept and the processes and activities carried out within it. It is the institutions that define who is authorized to act and make collective and overwhelming decisions to ensure that actors' behavior is predictable and visible and, last but not least, create a bond between those who rule and make decisions with those who are subject to these decisions.

However, it should be emphasized at this point that the principles of governance are applicable only to the exercise of policy beyond the national state. On the contrary, the principles of governance are

connected in a way with the institutions of the nation state, namely the state provides an institutional framework for governance, both nationally and sub-nationally. Consequently, the specific national institutional framework affects relations and links between actors from different Member States of the European Union as well as other private and transnational actors.

In short, under the notion of governance, reference is to the process of defining common (collective) goals, creating policy priorities and allocating resources from a large number of different actors that are necessary to achieve the respective goals (Peters & Pierre, 2006: 29). The United Nation Development Program (2002), which defines this approach as the process through which a society adopts and implements decisions about the redistribution of resources in society in such a way as to address social problems and needs. In view of this, it can be said that it governs an approach in which the state is given the primary management and coordination role, without a priori assuming that the state itself has absolute government power over society. Conversely, as a result of the above, the state (government) has a de jure or de facto responsibility for the management of society and the economy, adding that no other institution has the capacity to define general objectives or to resolve fundamental differences in preferences among relevant actors. The government, as a collegiate executive body, has a legitimate legitimacy, not only in the name of society but also in order to order companies.

On the other hand, new public policy actors who do not come and are not part of the governmental or self-governing hierarchy also play a key role in the governance system. In addition to traditional political and administrative actors, actors from the private and intergovernmental sectors, whether national or local, who are involved in public policy making with the aim of achieving their specific objectives, as well as actors at supranational level such as the European Union institutions or the World Central Bank.

Nevertheless, we can not assess the concepts of government and governance as contradictory as concepts that can not act simultaneously within a single political entity. The central government, while slowly losing its influence and key position in the design and implementation of public policy, is still an important participant in political processes. With the words of Pierre and Peters (2000: 1), "governance is a concept that is narrowly understood, while governance involves a number of institutions and relationships." Consequently, the concepts of government and governance should be seen through cooperation and complementarity in order to achieve the most effective achievement of both individual and community goals.

3.3 Success and transposition of governance

With the transition from an existing and established political system to the governance system, some aspects of democracy need to be reconsidered to better understand and grasp the new way of creating public policy. The success of the governance governed by the political system has enabled several factors, such as the emphasis on the horizontal dimension of relations, unlike vertical (hierarchical), the involvement of actors more on a functional basis than territorial, decision making is based primarily on consensus rather than on the principle of the cooperation between public and private sector actors should prevail at the expense of strange competition and antagonistic power structures (Benz & Papadopoulos, 2006: 274).

The principles of governance, but in particular its "governance without government" aspect (Rosenau, 1992: 4), respectively "governance among governments" (Wolf, 2002: 37) have also taken on international relations studies academics who claim that international affairs can be managed by a number of different types of networks, including transgovernmental networks of regional and local governments (not central) or judicial actors operating across borders with their foreign counterparts, as well as transnational networks of private actors who would then form a global civil society. Such an approach to governance emphasizes the role of networks of public and private actors in the management of public policies of the European Union, which was then transferred to a separate study called " multi-level governance (Pollack, 2005: 22).

In the following section, with regard to the topic, focus will be on the concept of multi-level governance, on the basis of its origins, the causes that started this process / approach and characterize its basic features primarily in the context of public policy-making processes and the nature of the MLG institutions.

3.4 Multi-level Governance

The restructuring of political authority in the institutional and political context of Western Europe, driven by the ever-increasing importance and strength of the European Union, has enabled the emergence of a new intergovernmental think-tank, called multi-level governance. The creation of a new alternative approach to analyzing intergovernmental relations has also contributed to the process of decentralizing regions, particularly in the Scandinavian countries, in southern Europe (especially in Spain) and in the UK.

These new relationships - relationships between institutions at different levels of government, are considered fluid by negotiation and contextually defined through the MLG approach. Unlike the previous hierarchical model of institutional layering (such as federal formalism), the MLG brings a more comprehensive picture of intergovernmental relationships, in which subnational authorities directly engage in negotiations with transnational and global institutions and vice versa (Peters & Pierre, 2004: 75).

However, the concept of MLG can not be confused with the traditional approach to intergovernmental relationships. Their differences can be seen in four main aspects, namely: 1) within the MLG, transnational, national and sub-national actors are included in the governance system; 2) highlights the negotiation and networking and rejects the creation of the constitutions and legal frameworks as the determining feature of institutional relations; 3) highlights the role of satellite organizations, such as non-governmental organizations and civic associations, which do not formally fall under the government apparatus; 4) does not make normative premature judgments on logical order between different institutional levels (Peters & Pierre, 2004: 76).

The beginnings of the MLG term are used by most authors (eg, Bache & Flinders, 2004: 3) to date in 1992-1993 when Gary Marks introduced his work on EU policy-making and implementation of structural funds. Marks, in his original articles on this issue, defined the MLG as "a system of continuous bargaining between nested governments in different territorial units" (1993: 392). Later in the development of this definition he drew from the analysis of domestic policies, namely from the approach to political networks, to describe how within the MLG "are transnational, national, regional and local governments interwoven in networks covered by individual territories" (Marks 1993: 4023). In this case, the MLG concept includes both a vertical and a horizontal dimension, with multi-levels referring to the increasing interdependence of governments operating at different territorial levels, while governance refers to the growing interdependence between governmental and non-governmental actors at different levels of government.

In addition, unlike the adherents of the intergovernmental approach, Marks states that the Structural Funds policy in the 1980s and 1990s provides clear evidence of a considerably different image of the EU, in that the central government is gradually losing its position in the Commission (which plays a key role in design and implementation of funds) as well as losing control over regional and local governments across Member States (which have been guaranteed partnerships in the planning and implementation of funds). With this in mind, Marks emphasized at the same time the multilevel interdependence of territorial governments at European, national and sub-national levels, as well as the development of new public-private policy networks that go beyond all three territorial levels (Bache & Flinders 2004: 3).

However, later studies on the EU Structural Funds challenged Marks (1993) with arguments that the EU Member States' governments still play a central role in the progressive reform policies on the Funds, leaving the EU Member States to remain effective as gatekeepers, but the Commission also subnational governments are gradually undermining the traditional prerogative of the state in relation to its own sovereignty (Pollock, 2005: 23). In connection with these challenges for national states, the MLG approach theorists recognize the more diverse impact of EU policies on territorial governance, in light of the documented cases in which some national governments managed to maintain the position of the

"gatekeeper" within their own countries (as in the case of Great Britain and Greece), while on the other hand, other countries have experienced a significant transition from the national governments to the European level, while at sub-national and regional governments (such as France, Spain and Belgium) (Hooghe, 1996; Bache & Flinders, 2004).

Another MLG approach focuses primarily on the horizontal or cross-cutting aspect of European integration. This approach explains the processes of transnational and supranational networks that can vary from a relatively closed political community of public and private actors in areas such as science and technology development to more open and accessible issue networks that predominantly dominate areas of environmental regulation (Wallace, 2005).

3.5 Beginnings of MLG

The MLG symbolizes the approach that refers to a policy modus within the EU in which the state loses its dominant role and thus loses its monopoly position in EU policymaking. The Commission itself supports this gradual process of weakening state authority by proposing programs in cooperation with local and regional authorities. Individual executive actors of Member States are missing a significant degree of control when it comes to law enforcement, while on the other hand sub-national governments are not restricted to act strictly within the national state. In addition, the regions set up their own offices in Brussels and through their immediate proximity and activity, put pressure on the Commission through the European Parliament, increasing their participation and increasing their own impact at EU level (Marks, Hooghe & Blank, 1996; Wallace and Wallace , 2000: 32).

The MLG study includes, as it has been suggested earlier, an examination of relations between supranational, national and subnational actors, without the presumption that, within these relations, the state or the central government holds a dominant position, many authors seeing the concept of network policy is best suited to exploring these relations as well as for describing policymaking at EU level. Network policies, with Kjaer (2004: 6), are "a set of resources for dependent organizations, with a small and large number of members, interdependence between members may be regular or intermittent, and the distribution of forces evenly and unequally."

Interest in MLG, and thus multi-level political networks, has grown as a response to the development of EU policies aimed at regulating the involvement of distribution policy (Wallace, 2005: 3132). After the final launch of the Common European Market in the 1980s, European economic inequalities began to be debated very quickly across the European Union. Indeed, the concept of cohesion has referred to the commitment among EU policymakers to address and address the issue of economic and social divergences in the various regions and, through this concept, have introduced a more deliberate and planned redistribution of European resources.

EU cohesion policy has thus become the most characteristic area for the implementation and functioning of multilevel policy networks. The aim of cohesion policy is to reduce regional and social disparities in a particular region through the Structural Funds, and in 1988 cohesion policy has been a major reform. Before 1988, there was no comprehensive program, strategy, or plan for this policy - it was a rather simple Commission instrument to financially support a particular region but operated on a check-out basis addressed to a single state, but it itself decided how it would process and exploit the finances. But after the 1988 reform, there was a significant change in the Structural Fund allocation approach. Instead of duplicating budget allocations, a single regulatory framework has been introduced for different national environments, stressing that the design and implementation of EU-funded programs should be carried out in cooperation between EU regions, states and institutions (Kjar 2004: 7). In this way, through cohesion policy, the Commission directly influenced the power distribution of forces within national states - as claimed by Hooghe (1996: 5) "(cohesion policy) has forcefully affected territorial relations in the Member States by strengthening sub-national authorities." The EU has introduced new legal standards that have been made by regional actors at regional level for the new institutional partners for the Commission, thereby giving sub-national entities direct access to EU decision-making. Moreover, the reform has also had a significant impact on the change of boundary rules by extending the circle of policy participants, as well as decision-making rules, by introducing horizontal co-decision (Hooghe, 1996: 12), in addition to influencing the content of cohesion policy. The result of these processes was to increase the importance of networks and networking, with the hierarchy of relationships becoming unwanted and rejected.

3.6 MLG: Four basic types of concept

For a better and more detailed understanding of the MLG concept, it is useful to elaborate in more detail its four basic aspects, namely 1) the concept of governance; 2) access to governance, which includes different levels of government; 3) a negotiation order that characterizes relations between several and many times at least partially autonomous levels and finally 4) the MLG concept as a sort of political game (Peters & Pierre, 2004: 77).

The first and also the most obvious defining feature of the MLG is that it is part of the concept of governance. The concept of governance has been defined in the previous chapter, so in this section this term will be examined only briefly, in particular in order to overcome a more comprehensive picture of governance and more understandable introduction.

However, in MLG, it is interesting to note that, as stated by Smith (1997: 725), "most of the approaches to the MLG paradoxically focus on government rather than on governance", which should rather refer to wider, more inclusive and encompassing the coordination process that is common to conventional government. In short, Rhodes (1996: 652-653) defines governance as a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new governance process or a new method under which a society is governed.

In addition, innovation in connection with the concept of governance is just emphasizing processes at the expense of institutions. At the same time, Jessop (1995: 317) argues that governance theory is primarily concerned with a broad range of social modes of social coordination, as with a narrow political (sovereign, legal, political, bureaucratic, or at least hierarchical) mode of social organization. However, if we consider the concept of governance a process through which collective interests are defined and enforced, we must expect a certain degree of interaction between the state and society. Governance thus serves as effective bridging the public and private borders to meet collective goals.

More specifically, the significance of this explained feature of governance in the current context is that, unlike traditional models of intergovernmental relations, the MLG points to the interconnected governance processes that integrate both public and private actors into contextually defined forms of mediation and collaboration. MLG management has thus become a matter of integration processes at various institutional levels, ensuring the achievement of goals that are beneficial to the functioning of the whole system. However, although the MLG is more about processes than institutions, the institutional dimension of the MLG remains essential, partly because the institutions define relationships and links between different levels of government, and partly because institutions are multi-level actors, helping to coordinate MLG processes and, last but not least, because MLG is embedded in the institutional networks that shape and limit political action (Peters & Pierre, 2004:78-79).

Secondly, the MLG concept is characterized by its specific arrangement of relationships, both at the vertical and at the horizontal level, between the different institutional levels. The main idea of this concept is that actors, arenas and institutions are not hierarchically arranged, but rather have more complex and contextually defined relationships (political networks are issue oriented). By Marks, Hoogh and Blanka (1996: 346-7):

(...) the political arenas are more or less interconnected with each other as the unnatural (...) subnational actors are active both at national and transnational levels, creating transnational associations that are part of the processes. The state no longer monopolizes relations and links between domestic and European actors but is one of a number of actors influencing decisions that are made at different levels. The State-Centric Model (EU Policies Management) of the Department of Home and International Policy is rejected by the MLG concept.

At the same time, competencies and jurisdictions are defined in an increasing number, determined only at one institutional level and not as in the past often in cases where the central, regional and local governments have clearly defined relationships and tasks among themselves. Therefore, we can claim that the hierarchical model has been replaced by the so-called "stratarchy" - an organizational model where each level of organization operates largely independently of other organizational levels (Peters & Pierre, 2004: 79). An example of this may be the effect of decentralization when local and regional authorities have begun to be less monitored by the central government compared to not a long past.

Instead, central government agencies focus on central level mediation, whereby local and regional authorities receive "flat-rate grants" from the state, the focus of which is primarily on the discretion of the sub-national authority.

However, the question remains what creates links between different actors at different institutional levels. Although in some cases the individual actors have these connecting functions, they are the institutions that are the most important link connecting different levels of the governance system. These institutions may play a direct or indirect role in the process of associating actors. First, they can act on their own, in the position of a specific, independent actor, at several levels in the form of political authority or, secondly, form the arenas for political actors by mediating specific connecting links. Apart from the way, in any case, institutions alone provide stable and long-lasting links between governance at different levels of the political system, and the jurisdictions of these institutions may, in many situations, be more or less intertwined with each other.

However, it is important to note at this point that the institutional arrangements and relationships that are typical of the MLG differ in several instances from those typical of the traditional intergovernmental approach. Although the central governments of European countries have, for example, relieved financial control of their own sub-national authorities through decentralization, this process has not led to the emergence of MLGs. Moreover, since countries have made certain financial responsibilities to sub-national governments, it has become evident that these entities will be dependent on the mobilization of financial resources not only for the central government but also for other alternative sources (Harding & Le Galés, 1998). This explains why international initiatives and projects have become so popular with regional authorities in many EU countries (eg, Beauregard & Pierre, 2000).

Last but not least, the MLG supports and deepens the professionalism of actors at regional and local level. Due to the decentralization process, sub-national authorities have become self-dependent in many aspects, which has led to an increase in their assertiveness to central government and, through their high administrative and organizational capabilities, they are capable and willing to make autonomous decisions about their own strategies for mobilizing resources, to rely exclusively on and subordinate central government.

The third aspect of the MLG, within the framework of the discussed issue, is to highlight the negotiated order that has been negotiated between the relevant actors in contrast to the rigid anchoring of relations in the formalized legal framework (Kohler-Koch 1996). To a certain extent, the narrative nature of the MLG is a reflection on the innate nature of the institutional arrangement, and the typical patterns of governance and control (and Pierre & Stoker, 2000: 31) also fell apart. However, more importantly, relationships and mediation within the MLG for multinational institutions, such as the EU, whose jurisdiction is not yet firmly defined, or continues to evolve, are formed and shaped by negotiation. In other words, the process of institutionalization involves the process of negotiation, and therefore the

evolving nature of the EU is inevitably relying on bargaining, in contrast with the promotion and promotion of the creation of a formal or even a constitutive enshrinement of power in a legally binding document.

Therefore, to a certain extent, the substance of the MLG represents a transnational version of domestic governance, especially in the area of networking. Similarities can be observed, firstly, in the fact that many actors are involved in the processes of public policy making, with no strict hierarchical links between these actors. The arrangement of relations between these actors is based on bargaining, which however leads to low or no ability to predict the outcome of the negotiations in advance. Second, in some cases, some structures in the networks of actors may be self-referential and refuse attempts to establish the order (Peters & Pierre, 2004: 81).

The fourth aspect of the MLG is an approach that considers this concept as a political game. This argument does not refer to the MLG approach based on the theory of rational choice but rather on the idea that the relaxation of the regulatory framework opens up space for more strategic and more autonomous behavior among actors. However, unlike traditional intergovernmental relationships, within the MLG there is no clear definition of who is or may be a policymaker. Therefore, this issue remains an empirical question. In addition, playing alone can be as important as winning alone, and therefore MLG can be coupled with attempts to mitigate the demands of players to maintain their own positions (player positions) in the system (Peters & Pierre, 2004: 81).

Another key aspect of each game is that the game must have its players. And the concept of MLG is characterized by the fact that it is a "game" involving many actors who can play this game simultaneously with other players. This means that in a specific MLG game, institutions from different levels of government can engage in political bargaining, with each institution delivering and advocating its own set of goals that may or may not be consistent with other players' goals on a specific issue. These goals may be institutional but also independent of the government, which may result in sub-national governments being able to use processes and arenas of governance as a means of freeing themselves from government control, and the EU institutions can also take these practices to increase their influence and power in relation to national governments.

However, the concept of MLG as a political game is primarily a type of game at the governmental or institutional level, meaning that the main players and the main goals of the game are political entities, with private sector actors primarily interested in participating in substantive policies. Alliances between actors may be more or less predictable, but the MLG as a real political game can be considered when relations and alliances are less expected. Alliances themselves can be of a different nature. Either these bundles are based on the institutional level within the political system, or on the other hand, they emerge as a unilateral type of government control, possibly as alliances based on functional or regional interests (Peters & Pierre, 2004: 81-2).

At the end of this section, it must be emphasized once again that the common consequences of globalization, decentralization and deconcentration, as well as agency, have been the breakdown of the traditional foundations of political authority. However, despite the fact that democratic governments continue to rely on the traditional institutional set-up of relations and processes, the current system of governance appears to circumvent or even ignore these traditional attributes of political authority. By Marcha & Olsena (1995: 123):

(...) it seems that the reality of governance is trying to escape the borders of the nation state. The modern nation state is neither omnipotent nor externally autonomous. The areas of administration, politics, and international relations are intertwined in a way that greatly complicates their description and effective management among them (ibid.).

Finally, after introducing the reasons for the creation and the background of creating the MLG concept under the terms of the European Community and later the EU, and following the characterization of the main aspects of the MLG, specific types of MLG, their definition and localization will be examined.

3.7 MLG and EU regional policy

As has already been highlighted several times in the previous sections of the thesis, the MLG concept has been developed as a consequence of the study of EU regional policy or the European Community, and this concept has been applied to this policy area more than any other European policy area. Specifically, the breakthrough work of Marks (1992-93) and its followers regarding MLG focused primarily on the relationship between MLG and structural funds.

The Structural Funds were the main EU regional policy financial instrument, namely the European Regional Development Fund. More specifically, structural funds, together with regional policy, are commonly referred to as cohesion policy, and later as EU structural policy. In connection with this policy, the Special Cohesion Fund was also introduced in 1993 as an additional compensatory measure for the less developed EU Member States at the time of introduction, in particular Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland, but it should be emphasized that they did not fall under the EU's structural policy (Bache, 2004:165).

In the context of the enlargement of the European Community and the gradual completion of the common market, the amount of funding earmarked for the development of the poorer regions of the European Community has doubled and the reorganization of the regional programs started based on four principles: additionality, concentration, partnership, and programming. The consequence of this reform was to limit the competences of national states, while reinforcing and enforcing the Commission's preferences. More specifically, the principles of complementarity and partnership have invoked the policy of controlling central governments in the implementation phase. This reform and its subsequent implementation were key to the development of MLG in Europe (Bache, 2004: 165).

In the following, only one of the principles will be examined, namely the partnership principle, because the partnership has increased the formal status of sub-national governments in the EU by allowing these sub-national entities to act directly in the Commission as separate entities, while at the same time allowing regional and local authorities to participate more heavily in public policy making and implementation. From the perspective of the goals of this thesis, this is the very key principle and therefore it is considered important to define at least briefly.

3.8 Partnership and MLG

The partnership principle was first officially introduced in 1988 as part of the structural funds reform. The aim of this reform was to maximize the effectiveness of the Commission's interventions in regional policy matters, in particular by giving the sub-national actors a formal position in the implementation process. However, unofficially, the partnership principle also supported the specific social and political model of a future Europe-supported European Commission, and thus became the subject of an ideological dispute over the further direction of Europe. This ideological controversy took place between competing models of capitalism defined by the different ways, which Hooghe (1998) divided into two main streams for neoliberalism and regulated capitalism, neoliberalism, at a glance, emphasized a minimal state and a free market, while regulated capitalism has sought to promote social interests in addition to promoting an efficient market mechanism.

The cohesion policy was a flagship of regulated capitalism for the Commission (Hooghe, 1998: 3), with the partnership principle becoming a crucial component of this policy. Under the Structural Funds regulation of the European Commission, the partnership principle was defined as "close cooperation between the Commission, the Member State concerned and the competent authority designated by the central government of a particular Member State at national, regional, local or other level, the role of acting as a partner in achieving the common goals (Regulation (EEC) 2052/88). Consequently, since the beginning of 1989, the partnership principle has been incorporated into each participating region, in connection with the design, implementation and monitoring of the Structural Funds programs. Over the years and in connection with further structural fund reforms, the partnership principle has expanded with new objectives, namely the involvement of social and economic partners in 1993 and the inclusion of environmental agencies and other NGOs in 1999.

3.9 Partnership and MLG across EU Member States

Prior to 1989, the implementation of structural policy was determined by national governments in view of their national priorities. However, following the reform of the Structural Funds policy and the subsequent introduction of the four principles of managing regional policy programs, two related issues were inevitable. In particular, whether the partnership has led to a different evolution of domestic territorial relations, or vice versa, whether partnerships have maintained the actual state of existing territorial relations within national states (Hooghe, 1996: 2). In other words, did it support the principle of partnerships in setting up and developing MLGs in individual national systems?

A study conducted by Hoogh (1996) found that there are significant differences in the level of MLG achieved through the principle of partnership across different Member States, which are markedly shaped by the already existing territorial distribution of power. Consequently, where a strong central government retains the power to control the domestic influence of structural policy, it still retains considerable power after applying the partnership principle. However, in a less centralized state, the partnership principle has been proven to develop and establish MLG. Based on Hoogh's (1996) research, Kelleher et al. (1999) corroborate the conclusions and add that "the degree of decentralization and the type of deconcentration occurring in particular Member States necessarily form the relationship between key actors within the partnership and determine the competencies and composition of these partnerships" (ibid. Viii). They further argue that central governments remain key players in partnering: Member States dominate and define the functioning of partnerships through their role in negotiating program content and selecting horizontal partners as well as through the setting up of governing bodies and secretariats (ibid. Vi).

In short, in those countries where the partnership principle fits suitably with domestic institutions and preferences, there is support for MLG development. In these countries, national governments have discovered the benefits of partnership in achieving their own policy objectives and, therefore, have voluntarily extended the participation of social partners and NGOs. However, where this model is not in line with domestic institutions and preferences, there, on the contrary, the partnership principle has almost no effect on territorial relations. In this case, central governments are still trying to control the inputs of sub-national authorities, with the role of social partners often limited and, moreover, non-governmental organizations are largely out of these partnerships (Bache, 2004: 167).

4. Analytical part

4.1 Position of Regions in the Institutional and Legislative Framework of the Slovak Republic

Following the introduction of MLG at the European level and the related decentralization of the regions under the central power of the state in the western countries, it is necessary to look at the situation in the Slovak Republic in the context of this thesis. Thus, at the beginning of the creation of the MLG concept and the subsequent strengthening of the regions of the European Community, the SR was only slowly coming from a totalitarian state where the central government, the political party had total government over the whole territory. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the process by which the Slovak Republic has undergone a process of strengthening the powers of the regions and, at the same time, at what stage it is at present, what will be achieved through an analysis of the SR legislation on territorial self-government. At the same time, in addition to analyzing relations between the government and sub-national units, it is also important to analyze the Central Government's approach to regional development and the opportunities and opportunities it accords to sub-national actors to ensure the development of their own territory through their own initiatives and alliances. Only when the position of the regions in SR is assessed, analysis of its motivation to participate in projects of transnational and cross-border cooperation will be possible, and thus evaluation of the importance of this cooperation.

Until 1989, during the totalitarian regime, only state (central) administration existed at the level of territorial self-government. Despite the fact that the lower levels of state administration dealt with all administrative and political matters and even had the right to set up various commissions within which citizens could be involved, it was not really possible at that time to talk about local self-government just because the Communist regime ruled in the state administration strict subordination and hierarchy (Klimovský, 2008: 5-6).

However, after the overthrow, it was necessary to undertake major changes in the state administrative, and thus to transfer some powers from the center to the territorial units. According to Illner (1999: 7), "the transformation of the territorial structure of the government - decentralization, namely the introduction of territorial self-government, was considered as a fundamental role in the process of the restructuring of the political and administrative system in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989.". 369/1990 Coll. on the general establishment which granted municipalities autonomous status and thus could exercise public administration in their jurisdiction outside the direct subordination of the state administration, thereby becoming new public policy actors at the local level.

In the field of public administration and territorial division, the Slovak Republic has undergone, in a relatively short period of time, a very dynamic development accompanied by key reforms. In this context, Nižňanský (2002) argues that this specific process can be linked to three main areas. First, the

changes stemmed from political will for democratic consolidation, in particular through the implementation of democratic elements, horizontal and vertical divisions of power, etc. Secondly, the reforms were economic in nature, with individual measures striving to eliminate market economy constraints, to expand private ownership, as well as implementing a new tax policy. Finally, the changes were related to the change in the organization of the state and its bodies and, therefore, a new structure of the public administration system was adopted, new principles of public administration were adopted and measures were taken to improve the provision of public services.

The most significant milestone in the relationship between the central government and the units of territorial self-government was Act no. 396/1990 Coll. on a general establishment which has established and defined a system of territorial self-government as such that has supplemented the already existing hierarchical system of local government, which was controlled and managed by the state authorities, namely through relevant ministries and regional, district and local national committees. Subsequently, powers of territorial self-government were gradually strengthened over the 1990s at the expense of the central government's power position, with the most important changes being made during the first Dzurinda's government in 1998-2002, when a second level of territorial self-government was created by implementing a comprehensive reform of public administration - higher territorial units (HTU)¹. As part of this reform, a number of competences and powers have been transferred from the state to the territorial units, while a new mechanism of territorial self-financing has been created, which strengthens the principle of subsidiarity in the political system of the Slovak Republic.

On the basis of individual laws, especially laws no. 396/1990 Coll. about the general establishment and no. 302/2001 Coll. on self-government of higher territorial units and amendments thereto, municipalities and higher territorial units guarantee autonomy, which in practice means that municipalities and HTU become legal entities, and therefore individual entities of territorial self-government are legal in nature. This legal status allows them to dispose of their own cadastral territory, within which they can issue binding laws, may own property and at the same time manage such property. In addition, the aforementioned autonomy allows the inhabitants of particular municipalities and the HTU to exercise active and passive electoral rights in the bodies of territorial self-government.

¹ in Slovak – „vyššie územné celky“ (HTU)

4.2 Centrope - Central European Region

The accession of the Slovak Republic to the EU with the self-governing regions in Slovakia opened new opportunities in the area of territorial cooperation with the cross-border regions. However, what does the BSGR lead to this type of cooperation and how does it relate to the MLG? The primary reason is that, after the decentralization process, self-governing regions have become decentralized and financially apart from formal autonomy. Therefore, in order to secure their roles and goals, they could no longer rely on the central government, but had to look for other forms of financial security. Due to the specific location of BSGR in the border area and EU membership, the cross-border or cross-transnational level of cooperation has been offered as an effective way of ensuring the basic instrumental interests of the BSGR. The Centrope initiative has arisen precisely in the light of the objectives of European Territorial Cooperation, which, through bilateral, multilateral projects were drawn by EU funds for the development of the common territory. Not only is the financial side of the initiative important, but membership in this initiative effectively helps to fill the policy gaps, i.e. politics - projects that require a two-party co-operation (such as bridge construction across the border). Reflecting these circumstances, BSGR has become a partner of this transnational grouping.

Thus, the Centrope initiative has been created through the creation of governmental networks of regional and local governments that cooperate cross-border with their counterparts and, occasionally, with private sector actors to ensure co-development and integration. These relationships are based more on horizontal than on vertical dimension, engaging actors more on functional than on a territorial basis. The decision and management of this initiative is based on negotiation, with consensus being preferred to the detriment of majority decision-making. At the same time, the initiative represents the free cooperation of partners involved in joint institutions, but without the need to establish a common legal framework for cooperation.

Centrope is a cross-border initiative of four neighboring countries - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Slovakia. More specifically, Centrope is an association of the cross-border regions of the mentioned countries and their lying places declaring cooperation, but specifically from the Austrian Federal District of Niederösterreich and Burgenland with the cities of Vienna, Poelten and Eisenstadt, from the Czech Republic, South Moravia with the city of Brno, from the Hungarian territory is part of the Centrope County of Győr-Moson-Sopron and Vas together with the towns of Győr, Sopron and Szombathely and, finally, the Slovakian side of self-governing regions of Bratislava and Trnava and cities of Bratislava and Trnava.

Centrope is also a brand. A mark that highlights the cross-border and transnational significance of this project and which allows the Structural Funds to draw on the partners of this group in support of their projects and originated primarily from the Austrian initiative. However, it is important to emphasize that Centrope is a brand, in other words a platform that is meaningful, but it is not a legal entity, or the

official name of a particular territory or region. It follows that Centrope as an entity can not itself be the recipient of the Structural Funds and, at the same time, its final recipients. Moreover, the Centrope initiative is not among potential applicants for support from the EU Structural Funds in any operational program.

The Centrope initiative is based on the BAER I (Building a European Region) project, which was in place before the accession of the Slovak Republic to the EU and which was funded by the European Territorial Cooperation Structural Funds known as Interreg. Centrope, at the time of its creation, drew funds from Interreg IIIA, which followed and ultimately replaced the pre-accession PHARE CBC territorial cooperation program, which ensured the conditions for convergence of border regions through joint projects (MVRR SR, 2005). The central objective of the Centrope initiative is to create an attractive and competitive region in the middle of Europe by institutionalizing and deepening multilateral, binding and lasting cooperation of politicians at regional and local level, public administration, private enterprises, universities and state and public organizations, through the creation of a platform to improve coordination, integration and stimulation of cross-border activities and co-operation (Bratislava, 2009).

At the end of the Centrope initiative, however, it should be emphasized that Centrope does not replace any of the existing regional or local institutions, but serves politically and professionally - as a consultative, coordinating and umbrella network in the identified areas, as well as in the future development of cooperative development policies (Centrope, 2005: 46). This implies that Centrope is the "only" platform for coordinating goals and positions, working well and dynamically without the need to create a single political unit or new territorial unit that would officially cover Centrope activities.

4.3 Centrope Capacity

Centrope Capacity is a core project of the Centrope Initiative, which covers various smaller projects at the local level. Analyzing a particular Centrope project is important for the purposes of this thesis, in particular, to find out who is the project's partners - whether they are only public or private actors, whether it can be one of the Centrope structures or just one of the partners, and to look at the way of financing and the participation of the BSGR in these projects as well as the responsible authority for these projects by the BSGR.

The main objective of the Centrope Capacity project is to form a prosperous Central European region by exploiting common opportunities and opportunities for greater economic, social and cultural development, thus presenting a competitive and sustainable region in international competition. The Centrope Capacity project was approved by the Commission under the Central Europe Program under the full title "Sustainable Urban and Regional Co-operation for Polycentric Territorial Development in the Competitive Region of Centrope", with the focus of the project being on competitiveness. The project scope was set between January 2009 and December 2012 with a total budget of EUR 4,515,462, of which the ERDF contributes EUR 3,628,358.30 (Central Europe, 2009b), which shows that the redistribution was set at 85:15. The project partners are all regions and cities participating in the Centrope project with the leading position of the city of Vienna. However, it is important to add that within the organizational structure of the project Centrope Capacity is an implementation component of both private and private associations and organizations co-operating at ARGE Centrope Agency. Specifically, Europaforum Wien - Center for Urban Dialogue and European Policy, c / o HOP-E.S. v.o.s., Slovenský dom Centrope, Ceurina NKft - Central European Nonprofit Association for Town Research and Innovation, Regional Management Niederoesterreich, RMB Burgenland Regional Management and at the end of the VBA Vienna Business Agency (BSGR, 2013b).

Bratislava, as one of the partners of the project, received a budget for the implementation of the project in the amount of EUR 202,536 (BSGR, 2010), which shows that BSGR's co-financing was in the amount of EUR 30,380. The source of support for this project was therefore based on the structural funds of the European Regional Development Fund and also on the budget of the BSGR. With regard to the BSGR's participation in the Centrope Capacity project, this project also had an institutional foundation in BSGR's structures. Responsible for the coordination of the project is the Department of Strategy, Territorial Development and Project Management BSGR (BSGR, 2013b).

The priority of the Centrope Capacity project was to ensure a lasting cooperation between the Centrope partners by creating a polycentric cooperation framework that will provide all partners with the necessary capacity to fully exploit their potential for profiling the common region while providing innovative tools for transnational governance. To achieve this goal, it will be necessary to establish a stable institutional base for the Centrope initiative, which will provide a solid basis for the cooperation

and activities of Centrope partners. At the same time, it is necessary to develop action plans and strategies for meaningful project management. Last but not least, the purpose of the Centrope Capacity project was to develop pilot projects that represent, for example, Centrope Regional Development Reports, Centrope - Evaluation of Infrastructure Needs, Centrope - Marketing Tool for Culture and Tourism (Central Europe, 2009b).

The implementation of the Centrope Capacity project should result in strengthening territorial cohesion between partner regions and cities by eliminating the internal disparities that still exist in the Centrope region. At the same time, referring to Central Europe OP objectives, the Centrope Capacity project understands that balanced development for the benefit of the whole region can be achieved by supporting a cross-border approach to regional development by seeking and stimulating cohesion in policy areas, such as the economy, tourism and transport. As a consequence, while achieving all of the program's objectives, a competitive Centrope region was created, not only through good access to the strong economic centers of the Western countries or the rapid development of the former Eastern Bloc countries but rather through the effective development of tools and principles of governance through project implementation Centrope Capacity, which aimed to provide territorial capital for the entire Central European region, and thus enhance the region's ability to benefit from existing territorial benefits through joint policy-making, systematic co-operation and marketing activities (Central Europe, 2009b).

4.4 INTERREG V 2014-2020

Interreg Central Europe 2014-2020 is the financial instrument of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), which is one of the objectives of the European Union's cohesion policy. The central objective of the Central Europe (CE) Program is through cooperation across the borders of Central Europe to make cities and regions better places to live and work.

The nine Member States of the European Union (EU), including all regions of Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, eight German republics (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia) and nine Italian regions (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardia, Piemonte, Autonomous Province of Bolzano, Autonomous Province of Trento, Valle d'Aosta and Veneto).

The provision of support from CE funds takes place under the four priority axes (the fifth is technical assistance), which are divided into several specific objectives:

1. Innovation cooperation to increase the competitiveness of Central Europe
 - Improve sustainable links between actors in innovation systems to strengthen regional innovation capacity in Central Europe
 - Improve skills and entrepreneurial skills for progress in economic and social innovation in Central European regions
2. Collaboration on low carbon strategies in Central Europe
 - Develop and implement solutions to increase energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources in public infrastructure
 - Improve territorial low carbon energy planning strategies and climate change mitigation policies
 - Improve capacity for planning mobility in functional urban areas to reduce CO2 emissions
3. Collaboration on natural and cultural resources for sustainable growth in Central Europe
 - Improve the capacities of integrated environmental management for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources
 - Improve capacity for sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources
 - Improve environmental management in functional urban areas to improve the quality of life in them
4. Transport cooperation for better interconnection of Central Europe
 - Improve the planning and coordination of regional passenger transport systems to better link them to national and European transport networks
 - Improve coordination between freight operators in order to increase the use of multimodal ecological solutions in freight transport

5. Technical assistance

The total budget for the program is EUR 298.987.025 (EUR 246.581.112 is EU support and EUR 52.405.913 represents national co-financing). The eligible beneficiaries of program funding are local, regional and national public authorities, public law organizations, international organizations and private organizations, including private entities with legal personality.

Following the introduction of the core priorities of the Interreg Central Europe 2014-2020 a closer look will be presented at the strategic document called Program of Economic and Social Development of BSGR 2014-2020.

4.5 Program of Economic and Social Development BSGR 2014-2020

The conclusion of Centrope penetration evaluation with BSGR priorities is to analyze the current Program of Economic and Social Development (PESD) of BSGR. The current PESD is a medium-term development document of the region that is in line with and is based on the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), especially in the area of objectives and priorities. In general, the PESD of the self-governing region represents a basic strategic document, which in the exercise of its function and activities is managed by the representatives of the region in meeting the needs of the inhabitants of the region and in ensuring the comprehensive development of the territory.

For the purposes of this work, it is necessary to focus on this point primarily on the area of strategic objectives and priority areas of BSGR's development. As a preliminary point, it should be emphasized that the individual objectives and priorities of the PESD are in line with those set out in the National Strategy, their shared task being to achieve the overall global objective of this document. Specifically, the strategic objectives of the PESD are defined in four areas: 1) Development of knowledge-based economy; 2) development of services and tourism; 3) integrated and environmentally friendly transport and reducing energy intensity; 4) improving the quality of the environment (BSGR, 2013a: 222). These four strategic goals are followed by five priority goals to further characterize and specify these objectives. As well as defining the strategic objectives and defining the priority goals, it was based on top-level documentation and concepts (strategies) at European, national and regional level as well as the results of the SWOT analysis, which is also an integral part of the PESD BSGR. In view of all the above-mentioned impacts, the BSGR has developed the following priority goals for the development of the region: 1) science, research and innovation; 2) human resources; 3) competitiveness, growth and the business environment; 4) employment and 5) the environment, climate change and renewable energy sources (BSGR, 2013a: 223).

However, what is important for the purpose of this thesis, the PESD BSGR, unlike the NSRR², of the previous strategic documents of the BSGR recognizes, recalls and incorporates into the analysis and

² Národný Strategický Referenčný Rámeč – in english: National Strategic Reference Framework

development strategy of the BSGR initiative (or the brand) Centrope, and in several places of different character. First of all, the strong relevance of the project in the BSGR environment is the fact that, amongst other materials, the Strategic and other documents based on the Centrope initiative were based on the elaboration of the analytical part of the PESD BSGR. In particular, CENTROPE - Regional Development Report (2012), CENTROPE - Infrastructure Assessment Tool - Promoting Competitive Regional Assessment, CENTROPE - Human Capital Strategy, CENTROPE - Knowledge Area Strategy, CENTROPE - Spatial Integration Strategy and Action Plan 2013+ and finally CENTROPE - Culture and Tourism Strategy 2013+. From this it can be seen that the Centrope project is a major contributor to regional development and its outputs are relevant and worthwhile in the strategic area as well.

The importance of the Centrope project can also be observed when characterizing the geographical area of BSGR. Right from the beginning of the analytical part regarding the spatial structure of the region, the authors of the PESD locate the larger transnational agglomeration, which was formed in close concentrations of the Bratislava-Vienna capitals and the major regional districts of Brno, Győr and Trnava, which are part of the Centrope region, while this specific region describe as a unique transnational economic area (BSGR, 2013a: 22). It is interesting that in the following paragraphs the PESD mentions the eccentricity of Bratislava's location as part of this region in the spatial conditions of Slovakia, on the character and type of BSGR from the perspective of territorial-statistical as well as from the point of view of territorial division of the SR. Determining the geographic location of the region in this order implies the great importance of Centrope for the development of BSGR.

At the same time, the importance of the Centrope project is seen by the PESD's creators in the areas of infrastructure and tourism. In the transport sector, the role of Centrope is important in the construction of transnational transport corridors and cross-border road networks as well as the cyclist network, which is also linked to the development of tourism in the Centrope region. In the field of tourism, the PESD also mentions the importance of BSGR's location in direct contact with three other states, creating many opportunities for wider territorial and functional-spatial relationships between cross-border regions in promoting and promoting tourism.

In addition, the Centrope initiative was also taken into account in the BSGR's SWOT analysis, analyzing its strengths and weaknesses as well as potential opportunities and threats in various aspects such as human resources, spatial structure, infrastructure and economic structure (BSGR, 2013a: 212-125). For this reason, it can be assumed that Centrope is considered an integral and important part of the BSGR, which, moreover, represents a significant player in the regional development of the Bratislava region. At the same time, it is very important that no other development project or initiation is found in the SWOT analysis, which suggests that the Centrope initiative is considered by the BSGR to be the most significant initiative to be taken into account in regional development policy. Moreover, the crucial fact of the relationship between BSGR and Centrope is the fact that at the final stage of the PESD called

Global Program Objective, in the first paragraph, the document describes the character of the present time with application to the BSGR as part of Slovakia but to the BSGR as part of the Central Region.

Europe embedded in the Centrope project (BSGR, 2013a: 219). At the same time, the PESD summarizes the results of the SWOT analysis and assesses the greatest potential and opportunity for further development of the BSGR in the development of the quarterly sector, the science, research, education and innovation sectors, highlighting the potential to exploit this potential within Centrope, which has 25 public universities and art academies and ten universities for applied sciences as well as hundreds of research institutes (BSGR, 2013a: 23).

As can be seen from the above, the Centrope project is a key player in the development of a region centered around the capital of Bratislava. On the following lines, the Innovation Strategy of BSGR and the impact of Centrope on it.

4.6 Innovation Strategy of BSGR

The development of the BSGR's Innovation Strategy does not, unlike the PESD, derive directly from the law. However, the Regional Development Act emphasizes that in promoting regional development, particular attention should be paid to stimulating the region's internal potential while focusing on supporting the development of innovation and research. Moreover, given the BSGR's high innovation potential, even with regard to the Centrope initiative, it is also necessary to analyze this document as it reflects the opportunities of the Centrope partnership in this area as well.

The BSGR's Innovation Strategy, with the subtitle "Development of the BSGR Research and Development Base in 2014-2020", was developed on the basis of the "Smart Specialization Strategy" methodology as an ex-ante condition in order to obtain structural funds for science and research for the next planning period. The proposal of the BSGR Regional Innovation Strategy has been consulted with experts from the European Commission, which will then be incorporated into the national strategy of the Slovak Republic (BSGR, 2013b: 5).

The BSGR innovation strategy refers to the Centrope project in terms of the significant potential offered by the BSGR to its borderline location linked to the Vienna metropolitan agglomeration as well as to important research locations such as Brno and Győr, and considers Centrope as a region with high economic growth (BSGR, 2013b: 112). At the same time, the document sees the opportunity to advance at the European level in science, research and innovation through the nearby Vienna, linking to international research and innovation networks. Therefore, the strategy recommends that priority be given to integrating BSGR into the "dynamically developing Centrope region" (BSGR, 2013b: 163). Later on, the document focuses extensively on the nature of the planned Centrope 2013+ project, which it describes, points to its strengths and at the same time represents the objectives of the Centrope Strategy

2013+ as part of the development of a knowledge-based society as well as strategies and measures to achieve these goals most effectively.

Apart from science and research, the document highlights another strategic advantage for the Centrope region. It specifically defines the automotive and mechanical engineering as a sector of international importance, arguing that with 13 production plants within a mere 300km, the Centrope countries can boast the highest density of automakers in the world (BSGR, 2013b). As a result, the automotive industry is a key and prosperous segment of the region's economy, which needs to be focused on in the upcoming planning period in cooperation with Centrope partners.

From the foregoing, it is clear that in the area of innovation, the BSGR initiative is a particularly important position for the Centrope initiative. The proximity of internationally recognized science and research centers in Vienna and Brno is the natural inclination of BSGR in this area of development to the Centrope partners.

5. Discussion

For its unique cross-border location, BSGR has the enviable potential to connect with border regions in a multinational community to achieve common goals. The Centrope Initiative is the first and only association in the BSGR that, through the establishment of a multinational multilateral coordination and management structure at the horizontal level, develops and implements projects to bring together the partner regions and the cities of Centrope as well as to develop a common Central European region.

The first finding of this thesis is the fact that the importance of the BSGR partnership in the Centrope initiative is significant in relation to the way in which BSGR participates in the management and coordination of joint activities. The management and coordination of Centrope takes place through common institutions that have a specific focus, function and membership structure. In particular, the management of the initiative as well as the definition of Centrope objectives and strategies lies within the competence of the Political Council composed of the highest representatives of partner counties and regions. In addition, the Steering Committee, with the participation of the senior administrative representatives of each of Centrope's partners, will coordinate activities and individual projects as well as control these activities within the Centrope initiative. Another Centrope institution, which provides expert counseling, work and development support for key areas of the initiative, is the Thematic Working Group. Working groups are ad hoc groups focused on specific areas of development of the Centrope region. The last important institution to ensure the coordination of local partners in the Centrope initiative as well as the articulation of their interests externally are decentralized local coordination offices.

At the same time, the important finding of analysis is the fact that these relations in Centrope, as well as the competences and responsibilities of these institutions, do not have anchoring in a specific legal

framework. The Centrope initiative is a free cluster of partners who, through cooperative networks on a functional basis, deal with common themes, these dealings being negotiated and mutually consensual, and they have no legal support. In view of this, it can be assumed that the sustainability of these networks is labile. However, considering the MLG theory, it is believed that the sustainability of these networks is not dependent on the legal framework, but on the contrary, on the focus and nature of the processes themselves. The partners work together on a horizontal dimension through functional networks in order to meet common objectives in view of their shared priorities. Therefore, the sustainability of this network, if the negotiated order is respected in order to build a strong competitive region, can be high.

Another important finding which was not explicitly described in the analysis part in the effort to assess the interest and importance of the BSGR partnership in the Centrope initiative is that within the management and coordination networks, the top leaders of the BSGR, namely the BSGR chairman or vice-chairmen, are directly involved. Consequently, it is concluding that for the BSGR the partnership in this initiative is so important and significant that only the administrative staff of the Office are not involved in its processes, but the key areas of cooperation are within the competence of the region's top top political representatives.

Here, however, it is necessary to admit that the interpretation of the results is based only on an analysis of formal relationships, not realistic. This is due to the fact that, despite the formally high importance of the Centrope BSGR initiative with regard to the mode of interconnection, its real status is not appreciated from the documents analyzed.

Further findings on the assessment of the importance of the Centrope partnership for the BSGR were made by analyzing strategic and conceptual documents, namely two ways, firstly analyzing these documents and looking for a reference to the Centrope initiative or the region, and second, by analyzing the priority objectives of the individual planning periods with Centrope's key priorities.

From the content analysis of the documents it was found that until the adoption of the current PESD 2014-2020 there was no mention of this initiative and even almost no potential of this territory. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of the BSGR 2007-2013 PESD, which was developed at the time of the BSGR partnership in Centrope. This would suggest that the BSGR did not count with Centrope's projects in the context of the development of its territory, but this claim can not be assumed as true, since BSGR has been partnering in Centrope projects since 2008 and, moreover, BSGR's priority projects under the Centrope initiative - and in many cases also held the position of initiator and lead partner of the project. However, awareness of the importance and importance of partnership in this multinational community was fully reflected in the BSGR 2014-2020, which defines the Centrope region as a unique multinational economic area. In addition, in many cases, it preferred to focus on the Centrope region at the expense of Slovakia. In the current PESD, it clearly mentions the BSGR priority areas in relation to Centrope, particularly in the field of infrastructure and tourism. At the same time, it considers

the BSGR's greatest potential in the quaternary sector to be the largest potential in the future, by linking it to the Centrope region.

Consequently, researcher had tried to find out how the goals and priorities of Centrope were implemented into BSGR's priorities and objectives by analyzing key strategic documents. However, in an effort to find out how far the Centrope agenda has been translated into BSGR's agendas, researcher have not come to any clear conclusion. Thus, from the chronologically first strategic document surveyed from 2003 to the last of 2020, there was only a slight change in BSGR's priority areas and objectives in terms of regional development. The reason is that the individual documents are based on the Lisbon Strategy adopted in 2000 and are thus based on the priority areas of development defined by the EU. Likewise, Centrope's priority areas are based on specific EU programs that deliver the objectives of European Territorial Cooperation, which also ultimately stem from the Lisbon Strategy. This implies that Centrope's priority objectives and BSGR's priority objectives have broadly matched since the start of the partnership, even in the pre-partnership phase.

However, despite the failure to demonstrate the importance of the BSGR partnership in the Centrope initiative through the comparison of objectives and priority areas, it can be assessed, given the current BSGR PHSR, that there are specific BSGR priority development areas that result from membership in the Centrope region. In view of the proximity of the Austrian Research Center in Vienna as well as the important science and research center in Brno, BSGR is oriented towards the development of innovation just at the partners in Centrope. Similarly, the proximity of attractive cross-border sites has resulted in the BSGR's turning into tourism in the Centrope region by creating cross-border cycling, building the Freedom cycle bridge and participating in the establishment of internet tourism portals under the Centrope brand.

Last but not least, in order to assess the importance and importance of the Centrope partnership, it was important to see whether the BSGR participated in specific projects under the Centrope brand and whether it was dedicated to a specific department within the BSGR. The creation of a separate department with a team of people dedicated to project writing and implementation would be of great importance by the BSGR in the Centrope initiative, especially in terms of raising EU funds through successful development projects. Even though BSGR did not create a separate department dedicated to the Centrope initiative, it has introduced Centrope to the Department of Strategy, Territorial Development and Project Writing (by 2011 the Regional Development Department) where it devotes itself to project needs as well as the Centrope Initiative team of BSGR employees. However, such an expression of institutionalization can be seen as an expression of the importance of the Centrope initiative for BSGR.

Finally, what is implicit in analysis is that BSGR partnership in the Centrope initiative brings the region beyond the instrumental benefits in the form of fundraising to implement development activities within

the Centrope Common Area, as well as other added value resulting from this membership. As it can be seen from the MLG concept itself, the decentralization of the regions has meant that the regions have an obligation to take care of the development of their territory and the needs of their citizens independently without the patronage of the central government and to find ways to achieve these objectives. Against this background, the Centrope partnership has several side benefits for the BSGR, such as the development of human resource professionalisation, thus improving the administrative and organizational capabilities of staff in formulating strategies, mobilizing resources without relying on central government. At the same time, the BSGR, through its partnership in this transnational initiative, is building its new identity in the Central European region, actively using the Centrope brand to support tourism in its territory, through portals such as mycentrope.com and tourcentrope.eu.

In brief, at the end of this work, summary of the results can be divided into two. Firstly, it is clear from the findings that the importance of partnership in the Centrope transnational initiative for the development of its territory was realized only after ten years of membership in the group. However, the realization of this significance was not gradual, but rather, suddenly, in the absence of a reference to Centrope in previous planning documents, the BSGR PESD 2014-2020 shows a strong lean towards the Centrope region in relation to the achievement of the priority objectives of territorial development, namely also with respect to the almost identical key areas of the development of a common region between BSGR and Centrope. However, it is interesting to note that this was not the case, especially in view of the interconnection of BSGR's top political representatives in Centrope structures. The BSGR actively participated in the political councils, chaired the circulating presidencies, sent its experts to the steering committees and working groups, and placed a local coordinating BSGR for Slovak partners - the Slovak House Centrope, headed by the deputy BSGR p. Mikušová. At the same time, BSGR actively participated in projects under the Centrope brand name, while initiating some projects itself. It is clear from this that BSGR is aware of the importance of this community, in particular as an instrument for obtaining EU funds for the development of its territory. At the same time, also in view of the NSRF, BSGR does not use this potential adequately. However, given the current strategic development documents, it can be expected that this potential resulting from membership of the transnational initiative will be used more fully in the upcoming planning period to better meet the objectives of the region as well as the needs of the citizen. It would also make it possible for the principle of partnership based on the MLG concept to be applied in the conditions of the SR fully. This in short means that the BSGR should have direct access to request and receive EU funds without the central government playing the role of a "gatekeeper" in this process. In the real application of the partnership principle, it may be argued that BSGR would be much more motivated to engage in cross-border and transnational activities in order to get the most out of individual projects.

6. Conclusion

The process of decentralization and the subsequent entry of the Slovak Republic into the EU enabled the regions to create cooperative ties at the international level. This opportunity was also used by BSGR, which became a partner of the Centrope transnational initiative in 2003, which covers the border regions of four neighboring countries in the Central European region. The aim of this thesis was to evaluate the importance of the partnership in Centrope for the BSGR and thus to evaluate the interests of the BSGR in this initiative as well as the future orientation of BSGR in the area of regional development.

The importance of the Centrope initiative has evolved over the years for the BSGR, which is moving in a positive direction, in other words BSGR's interest in Centrope activities is increasing, at least resulting from the content analysis of key strategic development BSGR regions. An interesting finding, however, is the fact that in the relevant documents the Centrope initiative is up to the current version, neither the potential of this region is mentioned. The sudden change in BSGR's approach to the importance of partnership took place in 2014 when it identified this region as a unique transnational economic area, while focusing many development activities on this region, primarily in the area of infrastructure, innovation and tourism.

Interestingly, despite the fact that, since the establishment of the initiative in 2003, the top political leaders of the Centrope were attended by the BSGR leaders, within the coordination BSGR the representatives of the BSGR were from the ranks of senior officials and at the same time BSGR had a large representation in the thematic groups, and thus, despite the strong interconnection of the BSGR with Centrope partners, it took BSGR more than ten years at a high political level to recognize the potential of the Centrope for the development of its own region.

Ultimately, the BSGR's main motivation to take part in the cooperation with Centrope partners is an instrumental factor, the opportunity to obtain alternative means to develop its territory from EU funds. At the same time, given the initially declared declarations of the initiative, the BSGR leader's motivation for active cooperation within the Centrope region can also be identified. In particular, it is a desire to create a common identity of this space in terms of shared values and visions, and through joint activities to create a strong competitive region at European level.

However, it is now only a question and scope for further research on how BSGR can achieve its objectives by engaging in Centrope activities and projects in the next planning period. Due to the strategic documents, the tendency to focus on some key areas of the Centrope region at the expense of Slovakia can be observed. It is important, however, to find equally engaged partners who, through multilateral coordination, are able to willingly prepare mutually beneficial projects for coordinated development of the common region. This fact also depends on the future of the Centrope initiative as well as the BSGR's participation in it.

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