Inter-subnational Networks for Sustainable Development

State-of-the-art and the Experiences of Flanders and Wallonia

Sander Happaerts
Institute for International and European Policy (K.U.Leuven)

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Content

Executive Summary (in Dutch)

Deze paper handelt over inter-subnationale netwerken voor duurzame ontwikkeling (DO) en over de ervaringen van Vlaanderen en Wallonië in twee ervan. Wij verstaan 'inter-subnationale netwerken' als associaties opgericht door subnationale overheden met als doel te wegen op multilaterale besluitvorming en de onderlinge samenwerking tussen hun leden te versterken. Inter-subnationale netwerken bestaan sinds de jaren '70 en werden vooral opgericht in de context van de EU. Inhoudelijk kunnen ze verschillende thema's beslaan. Op het vlak van DO kunnen ze nuttige organisaties zijn. DO is immers een beleidsdomein dat grotendeels vorm krijgt in multilaterale instellingen waar subnationale entiteiten vaak niet rechtstreeks vertegenwoordigd zijn en dus andere manieren moeten zoeken om hun stem te laten horen. Bovendien wordt DO gekenmerkt door onzekerheid en complexiteit, waardoor beleidsmakers geïnteresseerd zijn in de beleidspraktijken van andere overheden, om te leren uit eventuele *best practices*.

Een studie van de wetenschappelijke literatuur toont aan dat inter-subnationale netwerken twee dimensies hebben, nl. een interne en een externe dimensie. De **interne dimensie** is erop gericht contacten tussen hun leden te stimuleren en in stand te houden. De activiteiten van de netwerken zijn een goede gelegenheid voor informele samenwerking tussen subnationale overheden, en ze worden vaak gebruikt als springplank voor concrete bilaterale samenwerking of voor *policy learning*. In de **externe dimensie** willen inter-subnationale netwerken hun leden een stem geven in multilaterale besluitvorming. Ze vormen een van de vele mechanismen van het externe beleid van subnationale overheden en kunnen in die zin ook gebruikt worden voor *identity politics*, vb. door hen zichtbaarheid te geven op het internationale toneel.

Een niet-exhaustief overzicht van bestaande inter-subnationale netwerken en hun betrokkenheid voor DO toont aan dat ENCORE (*Environmental Conference of the European Regions*) en nrg4SD (*Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development*) momenteel de twee belangrijkste netwerken voor DO zijn. De rest van de paper legt de nadruk op deze twee netwerken, door een vergelijkende analyse te maken van de deelname van Vlaanderen en Wallonië in ENCORE en nrg4SD.

De **participatie** van Vlaanderen en Wallonië in beide netwerken is verschillend. Terwijl Vlaanderen tot 2007 vrij actief geweest is in nrg4SD (een netwerk waar het in 2002 mede-oprichter van was) en altijd een *low profile* heeft gehouden in ENCORE (een Waals initiatief), is Wallonië actiever in ENCORE en volgt het de activiteiten van nrg4SD slechts zeer sporadisch op.

De **impact** van de netwerken op het Vlaamse beleid is gering, hoewel ze veelvuldig vermeld worden in beleidsdocumenten (vooral nrg4SD). Voor wat de interne dimensie betreft, heeft Vlaanderen in de marges van de activiteiten van de netwerken een aantal bilaterale partner-schappen met andere regeringen afgesloten, maar daarnaast gebruikt het de netwerken vooral voor informele samenwerking. Ook Wallonië doet aan informele samenwerking, en is daarnaast geïnteresseerd in *policy learning*. De externe dimensie van de netwerken heeft weinig impact op de deelname van Vlaanderen en Wallonië, enerzijds omdat zij via België veel meer kunnen wegen op het multilaterale beleid, anderzijds omdat de netwerken tot nu toe geen invloed hebben kunnen uitoefenen op internationale besluitvorming. Toch is de externe dimensie van de netwerken van belang voor Vlaanderen, omdat ze subnationale entiteiten zichtbaarheid geven op het internationale toneel.

Een grotendeels negatieve **evaluatie** van nrg4SD door Vlaanderen maakt dat het zijn **toekomstige betrokkenheid** in dat netwerk zal herevalueren op de driejaarlijkse top van

oktober 2008. De aanwezigheid van Minister Crevits op de conferentie van ENCORE in juni zou kunnen wijzen op een groeiende activiteit in dat netwerk, dat omwille van zijn EU-focus nuttiger geacht wordt voor samenwerking met prioritaire partners. Ook Wallonië geeft aan zijn rol in nrg4SD te willen herevalueren, afhankelijk van de politieke interesse. De Waalse betrokkenheid in ENCORE blijft hoog, vooral door de continuïteit op ambtelijk niveau.

De paper komt tot een aantal interessante **conclusies**. Zo kunnen we aantonen dat inter-subnationale netwerken op het vlak van DO vooral succes boeken in de interne dimensie, hoewel invloed uitoefenen op multilaterale besluitvorming ook steeds hun doelstelling is. Het lijkt erop dat dat gebrek aan invloed deels te wijten is aan het onderwerp DO zelf, dat nog steeds als *soft politics* beschouwd wordt. Daarnaast is gebleken dat een zekere mate van investering van politiek kapitaal noodzakelijk is om een zinvolle invulling te geven aan het lidmaatschap van een netwerk.

Recente ontwikkelingen

Het onderzoek voor deze paper werd afgesloten in oktober 2008. Omdat het landschap van inter-subnationale netwerken voortdurend verandert, kunnen ook de gegevens in deze paper snel verouderen. Toch willen we even stilstaan bij enkele recente ontwikkelingen in nrg4SD, met name op de Top van 2008 in Saint-Malo (Bretagne). Zowel Vlaanderen als Wallonië waren (op ambtelijk niveau) op de Top vertegenwoordigd. Op beslissing van het kabinet heeft Vlaanderen zich in Saint-Malo teruggetrokken uit de Stuurgroep. Dat bevestigt de groeiende sceptische houding van Vlaanderen in nrg4SD die in de paper wordt beschreven. Wallonië is daarentegen lid geworden van de Stuurgroep en zou dus in de toekomst een actievere rol kunnen opnemen in nrg4SD.

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1. Introduction: subnational entities and sustainable development

Sustainable development (SD) has been the object of many debates since the publication of the Brundtland report in 1987. The policy content of the concept was developed above all at the Summits of Rio (1992) and Johannesburg (2002). It is now agreed that governments all over the world and at different levels share responsibility and should work together and in partnership with non-governmental actors towards the achievement of a sustainable society (Bomberg, 2004, p. 5; Lafferty, 2004a, p. 348; Morata, 2002, p. 43-44; OECD, 2001b, p. 27; Shaw and Kidd, 2001, p. 115). For the purpose of this paper, a distinction is made between the global, the regional, the national, the subnational and the local level of governance. We are especially interested in strategies of subnational entities.[1] Although their efforts have rarely been studied, they have a large role to play in the SD agenda. Indeed, subnational entities are often responsible for the implementation of national or international policies, especially in an EU context (Jeffery, 2005, p. 33; Morata, 2002, p. 51; OECD, 2001a, p. 49; Tei, 2006). Moreover, some of them dispose of far-reaching competences in domains related to SD (Jörgensen, 2002, p. 4). Finally, they are said to be in proximity to citizens and stakeholders, which is deemed vital for the effective implementation of any sustainability process (Berger and Pohoryles, 2004, p. 1; Bomberg, 2004, p. 8; Catenacci, 2007, p. 5; Jörgensen, 2002, p. 1-2).

As a policy domain, SD is relatively new on the agenda of policy-makers (Dovers, 1997, p. 312; Meadowcroft, 2000). It poses particular challenges, due to its conceptual vagueness (Baker and McCormick, 2004, p. 278; Bomberg, 2004, p. 4; Bruyninckx, 2006, p. 270-271; Karlsson et al., 2007, p. 27; Spangenberg, 2004, p. 6) and the uncertainty related to policy choices and their outcome (Bomberg, 2004, p. 15; Dovers, 1997, p. 312; Lafferty, 2004b, p. 20; Meadowcroft, 1997, p. 184; 2008: 113; O'Riordan, 2004, p. 22; O'Toole, 2004, p. 46). In addition, it is a complex policy area, because its principles (e.g. the integration of different sectors or the necessity of a long-term perspective) are often directly opposite to traditional policy-making. Because of these characteristics, SD gives rise to policy learning:[2] it pushes policy-makers to look beyond their borders to see how others are coping, and to learn about their strategic choices and about the outcome of their efforts.

Despite their important responsibilities, subnational entities are often not recognized as actors in the decision-making processes of multilateral bodies, where important decisions regarding SD are made (e.g. UN, EU, OECD). For that reason, and motivated by a desire for policy learning, subnational entities join together in associations which we will call inter-subnational networks. These networks form the research interest of this paper. In a first section, we will give an overview of the relevant literature that exists on this type of networks. Secondly, we will try to create order in chaos by showing which networks exist and to what extent they are committed to SD. Thirdly, the focus will be shifted towards the networks' members, and the experiences of two Belgian entities will be compared and discussed.

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[1] We define a *subnational entity* as "a coherent territorial entity situated between local and national levels with a capacity for authoritative decision-making" (Marks et al., 2008, p. 113). In contrast, the term 'region(al)' will be used to denote the level of governance above the nation-state, e.g. the EU (except in the official names of certain networks).

[2] *Policy learning* is defined as "the redefinition of one's interest and behaviour on the basis of newly acquired knowledge, after watching the *actions* of others and the *outcomes* of these actions" (Levi-Faur and Vigoda-Gadot, 2004, p. 7).

2. Inter-subnational networks: definition and state-of-the-art

Given the importance of the subnational level of governance in policy-making for SD, subnational entities are increasingly trying to gain influence in multilateral decision-making. Van den Brande et al. (2008) analyze the different routes in which they can do so, by making a distinction between intra-state and extra-state routes.[3] *Intra-state* indicates an indirect way to influence decision-making ('through' the nation-state), while *extra-state* refers to a direct way of influence (the subnational entities thus 'bypassing' the national level). Influence through extra-state routes can be achieved, e.g., by appointing subnational representatives to multilateral institutions, or by participating in inter-subnational networks (Van den Brande et al., 2008, p. 33-37). We define these as "associations formed between subnational entities of different states whose ultimate purpose is to act as pressure groups in multilateral institutions, and foster cooperation based upon common interests, needs and aspirations" (adapted from Sodupe, 1999, p. 62).

The influence of subnational entities in multilateral decision-making has been studied first and foremost at the level of the EU. Since the late 1980s, authors have witnessed a wave of subnational mobilization in Europe, spurred by political and economic effects of globalization and by enhanced European integration. This wave has been denominated New Regionalism and is characterized by a changed way in which subnational entities relate to the state, the market and the EU (Balme, 1996; Gren, 1999; Keating, 1998). The framework of multi-level governance is often used to describe a decentralization of functions and resources towards subnational entities, which goes together with an upward transfer of competences to supranational institutions (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Marks, 1993, p. 392) Subnational entities enjoy both formal and informal ways of access to EU decision-making. The *formal* mechanisms include, inter alia, participation in the Committee of the Regions, an advisory body which needs to be consulted on issues regarding subnational interests (such as SD), but the impact of such mechanisms has been disappointing (Bomberg, 2004, p. 9-11; Jeffery, 2005, p. 36; Keating, 2004, p. 377).[4] Participation in inter-subnational networks is an example of an *informal* way of access (Bomberg, 2004, p. 13).[5] The main advantage of this mechanism is the fact that the voice of subnational entities will be much more powerful if they combine their resources and present themselves as a collective actor (Bomberg, 2004, p. 13-14; Bomberg and Peterson, 1998). The EU Commission actively promotes such inter-subnational cooperation, notably

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[3] This distinction is based on Geeraerts et al. (2004).

[4] Certain intra-state formal mechanisms, e.g. the right for subnational ministers to represent Member States in the Council of Ministers, have far more impact than extra-state formal mechanisms such as the Committee of the Regions, but they can only be applied by certain states such as Austria, Belgium, Germany and the UK (Jeffery, 2005, p. 36-37; Keating, 2004, p. 377).

[5] Bomberg refers to inter-subnational networks as *coalition-building*. She opposes it to *policy networks*, clusters of policy-concerned actors, both public and private, across all levels of governance, in which representatives of subnational entities can engage in bargaining with other stakeholders outside formal institutional structures (Bomberg, 2004, p. 12-13; see also Kern and Löffelsend, 2004, p. 458-459). The term 'network' is indeed used to refer to very different kinds of governance arrangements. In contrast to policy networks, inter-subnational networks might be nearer to 'governance networks' as defined by Sørensen and Torfing (2005), although they would have to be considered as a very specific type of governance network.

with regard to the Structural Funds (Baker and Eckerberg, 2008, p. 218; Catenacci, 2007, p. 24; Weyand, 1997, p. 169)[6].

Although the array of inter-subnational networks that exist in Europe is said to be one of the most striking aspects of New Regionalism, the first networks already emerged in the 1970s (Balme, 1996; Gren, 1999, p. 84-85; Sodupe, 1999, p. 58). They brought together subnational entities from different countries who shared a border, and they were aimed at cross-border cooperation and at solving common problems. Later on subnational entities without a common border but who shared economic or political interests started to form networks as well in order to jointly express their interests to European institutions (Balme, 1996, p. 24-27; Kukawka, 1996, p. 93; Palermo and Santini, 2004, p. 21-22; Sodupe, 1999; Weyand, 1997). A whole range of networks now exists, a non-exhaustive overview of which will be given in the next section.

These inter-subnational networks do not only fulfil a representative function. Besides providing subnational entities with an informal, extra-state route to EU decision-making, they have important other functions as well. Subnational entities invest in such networks because they realize that a joint or coordinated approach is needed to address certain problems (Weyand, 1997, p. 167). Participation in networks leads to a vast network of relations between subnational entities, which can eventually lead to concrete bilateral cooperation (Sodupe, 1999, p. 67). In that regard, inter-subnational networks can give rise to policy learning, which is especially relevant in the context of SD (cf supra). These networks provide governments with easy mechanisms to learn about the successes or failures of the policy choices of their peers, and to copy eventual 'best practices' (Baker and Eckerberg, 2008, p. 208; Bomberg, 2004, p. 15, 18-19; Catenacci and Sgobbi, 2007, p. 10). Furthermore, the cooperation of subnational entities in inter-subnational networks for SD can stimulate the incorporation and promotion of key norms and principles, such as environmental policy integration (Bomberg, 2004, p. 19; Catenacci, 2007, p. 34). We argue that these functions (joint approach to problem-solving, bilateral cooperation and policy learning) can be conceptualized as the *internal* dimension of inter-subnational networks, while the aim of representing subnational entities and influencing multilateral decision-making is to be understood as their *external* dimension.

Important to mention as well is the emergence of subnational offices in Brussels since the 1980s. When the role of subnational entities in EU decision-making started to be recognized and when funding opportunities became clear, subnational entities wanted to be physically present in Brussels. 226 subnational offices have now been established (Huysseune and Jans, 2008, p. 1-4). They play a significant role in sustaining existing inter-subnational networks. Furthermore, they fulfil a liaison function between their governments and the EU institutions (mostly the Commission) and they play a large role in the gathering and diffusion of information. They have become part of the policy community in Brussels and try to influence EU policy-making through lobbying and participating in policy networks (Huysseune and Jans, 2008, p. 5-7; Jeffery, 1997, p. 192, 195; Keating, 2004, p. 278; MacNeill et al., 2007; Marks et al., 2002, p. 4-6; Mazey, 1995; Moore, 2008).

As has been noted, for a long time inter-subnational networks have exclusively been created—and consequently studied—in a regional-European context. Recently, however, a new network with a global scope emerged, and it precisely adopted SD as its focus (nrg4SD, cf

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[6] Besides encouraging inter-subnational networks, the Commission also sets up other projects aimed at inter-subnational and cross-border cooperation, e.g. the INTERREG programmes (Balme, 1996, p. 25-26; Gren, 1999, p. 86-87; Palermo and Santini, 2004, p. 16; Sodupe, 1999, p. 67-73).

infra). This suggests that the applicability of existing literature is limited, seeing that it only seeks to explain European dynamics. For policy areas with a manifestly global character, such as SD, subnational entities nowadays seek access to multilateral decision-making at the global level as well.

In the remainder of this paper we want to investigate to what extent inter-subnational networks are active in the field of SD. In that context, it might be insightful to refer to the concept of 'institutions for SD' as described by Spangenberg (2002). According to him, institutions are characterized by the specific functions and tasks they should fulfil. Institutions for SD have two specific functions. On the one hand they facilitate decision-making directed towards the objectives of SD, and on the other hand they facilitate the implementation of decisions directed towards the objectives of SD (Spangenberg, 2002, p. 140, 142). These functions correspond with the external and internal dimensions we identified as characteristic to inter-subnational networks. If the networks are successful in participating in multilateral decision-making for SD (by representing the voice of subnational entities) and if they help their members in implementing SD (through cooperation and policy learning), they could be considered institutions for SD.

3. Mapping the landscape

In this section we want to give an overview of the existing inter-subnational networks and of their commitment to SD. We only consider networks that fall within our definition (cf supra)[7]. Still, it is a non-exhaustive overview, mentioning only those networks that are known to us and which seem relevant in the context of this paper. In order to create order in chaos, we discuss the networks according to their commitment to SD. A four-part distinction is made. First, there are those networks that do not pay any specific attention to SD, neither in their objectives nor in their activities. Second, we consider all networks that do pay some attention to SD or have organized specific activities on SD. Third, some networks go as far as creating a specific component on SD (e.g. a working group or committee) within their structure. Fourth, there are those networks of which the entire functioning is focused on SD. To divide the networks in these four categories, we have looked at their objectives and at their basic activities, as can be found on their websites or in their official documents. An overview of the networks we discuss in this section can be found in table 1, which also makes a distinction between networks with a regional scope and those with a global scope. Given the topic of this paper, we will focus mostly on the last three categories.

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[7] For this reason, networks which do not have subnational entities as their members (e.g. AEBR, Association of European Border Regions, which consists of cross-border regions) or mixed networks that bring together subnational entities and other actors like cities (e.g. CEMR, Council of European Municipalities and Regions), national governments or agencies (e.g. the Alps-Adriatic Working Community or LRN, Lisbon Regions Network), cross-border regions (e.g. PURPLE, Peri Urban Regions Platform Europe) or European institutions (e.g. EPRO, Environmental Platform of Regional Offices) are not mentioned in this paper.

Table 1 Inter-subnational networks and their commitment to SD

	Regional scope	**Global scope**
No specific SD attention	ECREINetwork, IRE, REGLEG, …	AIRF
SD attention or activities	AER CPMR Four Motors	
SD component	ENCORE	
Exclusive SD focus	RES SER	nrg4SD

In the following analysis, we discuss the origin of the networks, their scope, goals and membership, the way in which they are organized and the activities that they conduct. Our special attention goes out to their commitment to SD. Our study is based on an analysis of policy documents, including internet research. For those networks which have been mentioned in the literature, that information is used as well. The study is further complemented by interviews with policy officials (see overview at the end of this paper). It is not an in-depth analysis, but rather an overview of the most important data of each network. It is concluded by a discussion of observed patterns and trends.

3.1 Networks with no specific attention to sustainable development

A lot of networks exist that pay no specific attention to SD. Because of the focus of this paper, we will not describe them in detail. The most important network in this category is probably REGLEG, an association of European subnational entities with legislative powers. It brings together the entities of Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, the constituent countries of the UK and the island entities of Portugal and Finland. It is aimed at gaining a more prominent role for subnational entities in EU decision-making and it played a role during the drafting phase of the European Convention (Jeffery, 2005; REGLEG, 2002).[8] Other networks in this category include the ECREINetwork (European Clusters and Regions for Eco-innovation and Eco-investments Network), IRE (Innovating Regions in Europe) and AIRF (Association Internationale des Régions Francophones). AIRF is one of the rare inter-subnational networks with a global scope, although its membership is limited to subnational entities of the Francophone world.

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[8] A related network is CALRE (Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies), an association of the chairmen of the parliaments of REGLEG's members.

3.2 Networks with attention or activities directed towards sustainable development

In this category we find several networks that have a broad range of activities and interests, including environmental policy and SD.

AER (Assembly of European Regions)

origin: 1985 (until 1987 it was known as the Council of European Regions)

scope: regional (pan-European)

goals: AER was established to enhance the voice and the position of subnational entities in Europe. It aims at strengthening and institutionalizing the subnational entities' participation in EU politics. It presents itself as a key partner to subnational entities as well as to EU and global institutions. Furthermore, AER wants to develop excellence in subnational government, help subnational entities with the implementation of policies and support them in working closer together.

membership: AER brings together 260 subnational entities from 33 European countries (member states of the Council of Europe), as well as 13 associations.

organization: AER is represented by a president (currently from Île-de-France) and a few vice-presidents. Political decisions are adopted by the General Assembly, made up of the representatives of all members. Technical decisions are made by the Bureau, whose members are elected for a two-year term. The Bureau houses two standing committees, one that is responsible for monitoring the implementation of AER's Strategic Plan, and one that focuses upon the core principles of AER: subsidiarity, good governance and subnational democracy. In 2007 AER also set up three thematic working groups, focusing on economy and development, social policy and public health, and culture and education respectively.

activities: AER played a role in the recognition of subnational entities in EU decision-making, e.g. through the establishment of the Committee of the Regions in the Treaty of Maastricht. In recent years, however, the focus of AER seems to be on inter-subnational cooperation more than on influencing European decision-making.[9] Activities are plentiful, and it is impossible to mention them all here. For the period between 2007 and 2012 four programmes have priority: a summer school designed to assist members of Central and Eastern European countries in their preparations for future EU membership, a youth summer school, an exchange programme for young professionals (Eurodyssey) and the Centurio programme for exchange of experiences and best practices. Several other projects help promote excellence in subnational governance. AER also organizes regular events and publishes positions on a range of topics, including environmental policy.

SD attention: "Ensuring SD and combating environmental degradation" is set out as one of the priorities for the period 2007-2012. In that area, attention seems to be focused on climate change and energy. AER was also represented at the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002. However, attention to SD still seems rather marginal in the vast array of activities carried out by AER.

(sources: AER, 2004; 2007; Balme, 1996, p. 27, 33; Christiansen, 1996, p. 97; Keating, 1999, p. 8; Mazey, 1995, p. 94)

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[9] Weyand (1997, p. 178) argues that since the role of subnational entities has been institutionally reflected in the structures of the EU, the main mission of AER is fulfilled.

CPMR (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions in Europe)

origin: 1973

scope: regional (pan-European and neighbouring countries)

goals: CPMR was created to unite the subnational entities of Europe's periphery and to tackle their problems on a common basis. It wants to exploit the coastal character of these entities and promote Europe's maritime dimension. More generally, CPMR aims at making the voice of subnational entities heard in a global world.

membership: All subnational entities that consider themselves to be at Europe's periphery or that have a coastline can be members of CPMR. More than 150 have joined, including entities from Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon. The strongest representation comes from entities of Mediterranean and of Northern European countries.

organization: A Political Bureau that consists of one subnational entity of each country meets twice a year and proposes new policy guidelines, which are adopted by the annual General Assembly. CPMR is represented by a president (currently Tuscany) and a few vice-presidents, and supported by a general secretariat led by a Secretary-General. What makes CPMR's organization unique is its subdivision into six geographical commissions (the Atlantic Arc Commission, the Balkan/Black Sea Commission, the Baltic Sea Commission, the Inter-Mediterranean Commission, the Islands Commission and the North Sea Commission). These commissions meet separately, have their own structure and can be considered as separate inter-subnational networks in their own right. When subnational entities join one of the geographical commissions they become, in consequence, members of CPMR. Besides the geographical commissions, CPMR establishes working groups on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with international political developments (e.g. the Energy Group, the Transport Group, the Fisheries Group).

activities: CPMR has been cited one of the most important inter-subnational networks, due to its extensive membership and the high quality of its work. CPMR has had some influence on EU policy-making, above all in maritime policy. Several of its recommendations have been incorporated into official EU documents, and its European Coastal Charter was adopted by the European Parliament and conferred official status by the Council of Ministers.

SD attention: CPMR's commitment to SD is expressed by the fact that SD is one of the six main themes in which it organizes its activities, and by the fact that CPMR itself (in the person of its Secretary-General) is an active member of nrg4SD. Furthermore, many of its geographical commissions are active on sub-issues of SD. The North Sea Commission, for instance, focuses on themes such as the sustainable use of resources and sustainable shipping.

(sources: Balme, 1996, p. 27-28; Balme et al., 1996; Brouard, 1996; CPMR, 2005; 2006; Happaerts et al., 2008, p. 5; North Sea Commission, 2008; Sodupe, 1999, p. 65-66)

Four Motors for Europe

origin: In 1988, four subnational entities that consider themselves as the economically strongest entities of their countries signed a cooperation agreement, thus creating the Four Motors for Europe. The agreement followed a series of bilateral partnerships.

scope: regional (EU)

goals: The association wants to contribute to the internationalization of the subnational entities and their citizens, and to promote to role of subnational entities in the construction of Europe. Moreover, it is aimed at strengthening cooperation between the four members.

membership: Baden-Württemberg, Catalonia, Lombardy and Rhône-Alpes. Associated members are Wales, Flanders and Malopolska. A cooperation agreement with the Canadian province of Ontario has been signed in 1990.

organization: Although the Four Motors wanted to be an informal group without institutional character, some permanent structures have been set up. The presidency is performed by one of the members and rotates annually. The political representatives of the member governments meet at least once a year to determine the network's priorities. Thematic working groups are set up accordingly, and common projects are developed within these groups. The activities are followed-up by a coordination committee that meets about three times a year.

activities: Besides concrete cooperation in the thematic working groups, the Four Motors association has also given rise to other cooperation agreements between its members. While the original focus of the Four Motors was on infrastructure, research and technology, activities have subsequently been undertaken in many other areas, ranging from environment to sports. The Four Motors also collaborate with the European Commission, notably on environmental innovation. Furthermore, they undertake joint missions abroad with the aim of promoting economic cooperation with countries outside of the EU (e.g. China, India and Russia in recent years).

SD attention: The reach of activities of the Four Motors has extended a lot, notably in the domain of environmental policy. A few documents mention SD as well. Most emphasis, however, is given to cooperation in the areas of economy, education and culture. Attention to SD is certainly not a priority for this network.

(sources: Four Motors for Europe, 2005; 2006; 2007; Kukawka, 1996; Palermo and Santini, 2004, p. 17)

3.3 Networks with an institutionalized sustainable development component

Only one network falls in this third category. It is a network with a focus on environmental policy, but which has established a formal working group dedicated to SD. It thus goes further than the networks mentioned in the previous category that only organize some of their activities around SD. The Committee of the Regions (which also has a commission on SD) is not analyzed here, because it is not an inter-subnational network, but an EU institution in which local authorities have an important place as well.

ENCORE (Environmental Conference of the European Regions)

origin: ENCORE was established on the initiative of Wallonia in 1993, during the Belgian presidency of the EU.

scope: regional (EU)

goals: ENCORE was set up to provide subnational Environment ministers a platform to discuss issues related to the implementation of European environmental policies. It is aimed at better inter-subnational cooperation and at obtaining a bigger role for subnational entities in EU policies, both in the formulation and in the implementation phases.

membership: ENCORE does not have a formalized membership. Unlike other networks, all European subnational entities can join in ENCORE's activities without assuming any financial or legal obligation.

organization: ENCORE started as a biennial conference of the European subnational Environment ministers. The subnational entity that hosts the conference takes up the presidency and the secretariat for two years (e.g. Aragon in 2008). ENCORE is further

supported by a Steering Group which meets twice a year and is composed by one subnational entity of each country. In 2004 ENCORE decided that activities should be undertaken in the periods between the ministerial conferences as well. Since then, working groups on different themes have been established, each directed by a different member. These working groups convene a few times a year, sometimes virtually, using the ENCORE website as a communication tool.

activities: The heart of ENCORE is its biennial ministerial conference. It brings together large subnational delegations, including political leaders. The entities of Central and Eastern Europe attend the conferences since 2001. Officials from the European Commission are represented as well. Until 2001, resolutions were adopted at each conference. In these resolutions, which were sent to the European institutions, the subnational entities emphasized their important role in European environmental policies. ENCORE has also drawn up a constitutional document, the Valencia Charter, which all European subnational entities are invited to endorse. Gaining actual influence in EU decision-making, however, appeared very difficult. Since 2004 no more resolutions have been adopted. Instead, two-yearly action plans are developed that report on the activities during the two previous years and set out the priorities for the period to come.

SD attention: Since 1997, ENCORE's explicit attention for SD is mentioned in all issued documents. In the 2006 action plan it is identified as one of the key priorities. A working group on SD was established accordingly, focusing on sustainable tourism, education for sustainability and tools for SD. It is expected that the attention for SD will remain high in ENCORE, making it an important network for the issue.

(sources: Aragón, 2008; ENCORE, 1995; 1997; 2001; 2004; 2006a; 2006b)

3.4   Networks with an exclusive focus on sustainable development

nrg4SD (Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development)

origin: nrg4SD was formed in the margins of the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, out of the impression that subnational entities were largely absent in the SD debate.

scope: global

goals: nrg4SD wants to promote SD at the subnational level around the world and exchange information and experiences regarding SD governance among its members, giving specific attention to the subnational entities coming from developing countries. It also wants to be a voice for subnational entities at the global level and contribute to the international debate on SD by providing the viewpoint of subnational entities. Furthermore, it seeks international recognition of the important role of the subnational level in governance for SD.

membership: The network currently counts 33 members (including 4 other inter-subnational networks such as CPMR), from all continents, with a strong representation from Western European and Latin American subnational entities.

organization: Two co-chairs, one coming from an industrialized country and one coming from a developing country, formally represent nrg4SD (currently the Basque Country and Western Cape). A Steering Committee which brings together the network's most active members and which meets twice a year, acts as the executive body, while all formal decisions are ratified by the annual General Assembly. Every three years, the General Assembly goes hand in hand with a high-level Summit, to which other stakeholders are invited. Day-to-day follow-up happens through a secretariat, which is provided by the Basque Country.

activities: The network tries to be present at multilateral decision-making by organising side-events at the sessions of the CSD and at the CoPs of the UNFCCC. It has also obtained accreditation at some UN bodies. To express the viewpoint of the subnational entities it develops position papers on some specific issues. The sharing of best practices can happen through the website, but also on an informal basis during nrg4SD's meetings. The network also encourages its members to conclude formal partnership agreements among each other, for concrete bilateral cooperation.

SD attention: nrg4SD's objectives and activities are exclusively oriented towards sub-issues of SD, such as SD strategies, renewable energy or sustainable forestry. In recent years, most attention has been given to climate change.

(sources: Happaerts et al., 2008; Loperena Rota and Ezeizabarrena Sáenz, 2004; nrg4SD, 2005; nrg4SD Secretariat, 2008)

RES (Network of European Regions on Education for Sustainability)

origin: RES was set up in 2005, the year that marks the start of the UN Decade on Education for SD.

scope: regional (EU)

goals: RES was meant to create awareness for the issue of education for SD at the European level and to share best practices between its members.

membership: 19 subnational entities support RES, among which many Italian *regioni*.

organization: RES has no formal structures and should rather be seen as a series of events.

activities: Between 2005 and 2007 RES has convened a series of meetings in Brussels, aimed at sharing best practices between its members. After May 2007, the network seems to have become silent.

SD attention: All activities of RES were focused on education for SD, a very specific sub-issue of SD.

(sources: Regione Umbria, s.d.; RES, 2006)

SER (Sustainable European Regions Network)

origin: SER was established in 2002 with funding and support of the EU Commission.

scope: regional (EU)

goals: SER was meant to form a platform of information-sharing between policymakers, organizations and individuals interested in SD. Through the investigation and discussion of best practices, it wanted to generate solutions for SD at the subnational level. Moreover, SER was said to help provide a clear voice for European subnational entities on the SD agenda.

membership: SER was an association of about thirty subnational entities coming from different countries, with a strong representation of British and Nordic entities.

organization: The lead partner of this project was Wales, which provided the secretariat and was responsible for coordination. A few members also seated in a steering committee.

activities: In 2003 and 2004 SER organized a series of events aimed at sharing best practices and at developing expertise in several themes related to SD (e.g. governance, spatial planning, indicators). A strong focus was on the role Structural Funds can play in promoting SD at the subnational level. After 2004, SER became silent and has now ceased being operational.

SD attention: All events organized by SER were focused on developing good practices in the area of SD policy.

(sources: Bomberg, 2004: 18; Sustainable European Regions Network, 2004; Welsh Assembly Government, 2006)

3.5 Patterns

Out of the previous overview some patterns can be discerned. Firstly, when looking at the *origin* of the networks we discussed, it appears that the networks which focus exclusively on SD emerged in recent years. But many inter-subnational networks that existed before SD came on the international agenda have also incorporated it into their activities. It suggests that SD is a policy domain in which subnational entities feel they have an important role to play, but for which they sense the need to cooperate and the desire to defend their interests before multilateral institutions. Another obvious trend is that almost all networks discussed have a regional *focus*, as the literature suggested. One network has a global scope, nrg4SD, which has implications on its activities. Unlike the other networks, it focuses on the UN system, in stead of on the EU institutions. It also has a strong emphasis on North-South relations. The *membership* of the networks discussed in this paper varies greatly, from four to a few hundreds. As far as their *goals* are concerned, all networks mentioned have both internal and external objectives. On the internal side, they want to provide a platform for cooperation among subnational entities to solve problems on a common basis. They also want to develop excellence in subnational governance for SD through the exchange of experiences and best practices. These networks are thus intended as tools for policy learning. On the external side, the networks want to make the voice of subnational entities heard on the regional or global level and emphasize their role in policy-making for SD. Furthermore, they seek to influence multilateral decision-making and work towards a more active participation of subnational entities in the process. Many similarities can also be found in the *organization* of the networks. Most work with a tripartite structure: one or more members with a representative function (the presidents or chairs), an executive body which gathers some of the most active members (mostly a steering group) and a general assembly in which all members seat. Some networks have a more informal way of functioning, but those have either gone silent (RES and SER) or started to formalize their organization (Four Motors for Europe).[10] If we look at the networks' actual *activities*, these seem to slightly deviate from their goals. A lot of emphasis is put on inter-subnational cooperation, and few activities are directly aimed at influencing multilateral decision-making. Though a few examples (of AER and CPMR) point towards some influence on decision-making on other issues, in the area of SD the networks do not seem to have gained any influence so far. Finally, when looking at the networks' *attention for SD*, we can conclude that the most important inter-subnational networks for SD are ENCORE and nrg4SD, since they are still very active and display a significant commitment to the policy domain.

Our analysis displays a certain overlap in the objectives and activities of inter-subnational networks, some of which even have the same members. This raises the question of the utility of these coexisting structures. Another phenomenon, that has not been mentioned yet, is the growing cooperation between the networks themselves (e.g. between ENCORE and AER, ENCORE and RES, ENCORE and nrg4SD, nrg4SD and CPMR). Recently, a few of these networks have created a common umbrella: FOGAR (Forum of Global Associations of Regions).[11] With this forum, the networks want to join forces and express their common voice

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[10] The formalization of structures is also a discussion taking place within ENCORE (cf infra).

[11] Members include AIRF, CPMR and nrg4SD. Although the secretariats of these networks are often ambitious with regard to forming contacts between networks, interviews show that members of CPMR and nrg4SD were reluctant towards the establishment of FOGAR. They felt that both networks should focus on their own members and on their internal problems and issues.

at the global level. On the issue of SD, FOGAR has assigned nrg4SD as its only representative (Happaerts et al., 2008, p. 9).

4. The experiences of Flanders and Wallonia

In this final section we investigate the experiences of the two biggest subnational entities of Belgium in inter-subnational networks for SD. Flanders and Wallonia have been selected because they are both engaged in several networks and have often displayed an active involvement.[12] Before presenting the results of our analysis, two remarks are deemed necessary. First, the Belgian subnational entities have the particularity to be entirely (Flanders) or partly (Wallonia) based in Brussels, close to the European institutions and the seats of many other governmental and non-governmental organizations. As a consequence, they do not need to establish information offices like many other entities have done in Brussels. Second, the Belgian subnational entities enjoy a very high degree of autonomy, arguably the highest in Europe. They dispose of several exclusive competences in many areas important to SD, such as environment, spatial planning, economic development, natural resources, transport, etc., and they have considerable financial autonomy (De Rynck, 2005, p. 485; Hendriks, 2001, p. 290, 297; Hooghe et al., 2008, p. 185-186; Maarten and Tombeur, 2000, p. 143; Swenden et al., 2006, p. 864). Especially in external relations their autonomy is exceptional (Massart-Piérard, 1999, p. 712-714; Paquin, 2003, p. 624). As a consequence, Flanders and Wallonia have a considerable amount of access to multilateral decision-making through intra-state routes, which will probably influence their participation in inter-subnational networks.

On the following pages, we will discuss the participation of Flanders and Wallonia in the networks, the impact that their participation has on their own SD policies, and their evaluation and future involvement in the networks. This comparative analysis is based on interviews with policy officials (see overview at the end of this paper), complemented by an analysis of policy documents and previous research with regard to nrg4SD (Happaerts et al., 2008).

4.1   Participation

As we already indicated, Flanders and Wallonia are members of many inter-subnational networks. In the area of SD, Flanders is a member of ENCORE, nrg4SD and RES and an associated member of the Four Motors for Europe. Besides that, it also participates in IRE and REGLEG (of which it assumes the 2008 presidency). Wallonia is a member of ENCORE, nrg4SD and AER, and outside of the domain of SD it also participates in AIRF, IRE and REGLEG. In the following analysis, we will focus our attention on ENCORE and nrg4SD, the two most relevant networks in the area of SD that are still active and in which Flanders and Wallonia both participate.

The active involvement of Flanders and Wallonia in these networks can partly be explained by a strategy aimed at identity or image building. The Belgian subnational entities regularly use

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[12]   We will not consider Brussels-Capital Region in this analysis. Although it participates in REGLEG and AER, it is much more oriented towards city networks (e.g. Eurocities or Metropolis) than towards inter-subnational networks.

the opportunities offered by the international arena for 'identity politics'.[13] International activities, such as participating in inter-subnational networks, can stimulate identity or nation-building at home, e.g. by showing domestic leaders in international contexts (Keating, 1999, p. 5; Keating et al., 2003, p. 92-94, 179; Lecours, 2002, p. 97-100,104; Massart-Piérard, 1999; Paquin, 2003, p. 622, 632).

Flanders has never been very active in ENCORE. It does not take part in the activities of the thematic working groups and its participation has always been limited to the attendance of administrative officials at the biennial conferences. In 2008, however, the Minister of the Environment has decided to attend the conference. It was the first ministerial involvement of Flanders in ENCORE, and the highest degree of participation so far.

The Flemish government has always been much more active in nrg4SD, which it co-founded in 2002. Since then, Flanders has seated in the Steering Committee and it has been present at almost all of the network's activities and events, giving presentations at many of them. Flanders has also hosted the General Assembly in 2006. Due to the fact that Flanders was one of the founders, and because of its activeness and its strategic location in Brussels, it has been approached by other members to assume a more official function within nrg4SD, such as co-chair or host of the Secretariat. Although Flemish ministers have attended nrg4SD's activities in a few occasions, it seems that the political engagement has never been big enough to make a more substantial commitment, in contrast to its high engagement at administrative level. Due to this lack of interest at the political level and because of some internal developments in nrg4SD, the participation of Flanders has significantly decreased since 2007 and will be re-evaluated after nrg4SD's Summit in October 2008 (cf infra).

The Walloon government created ENCORE in 1993. It hosted the first meeting and has always followed ENCORE's activities. It is also a member of the Steering Group since its establishment in 1997. However, with the exception of a few presentations, Wallonia does not actively participate in the thematic working groups. This is largely due to the lack of political interest as from 2004. The Walloon Minister was absent at the 2008 conference as well. At administrative level, the involvement in ENCORE is high, but a scarcity of resources makes that not all activities can be followed-up.

A similar evolution is noticeable in the Walloon participation in nrg4SD, although it has never been as active there as in ENCORE. The Minister of the Environment was present at nrg4SD's creation in Johannesburg, but has not attended since. The presence at administrative level remained relatively high until 2006, although no active involvement (e.g. in the form of a presentation) has been noted. During the last two years nrg4SD's activities have not been followed-up. This is due to the absence of political support and a lack of resources. Wallonia will be present again at nrg4SD's Summit of 2008, possibly even at ministerial level, and its involvement in the network might be re-evaluated afterwards.

Looking at the Flemish and Walloon participation in these networks, it seems that a silent agreement exists between the two subnational entities. Flanders, one of the co-founders of nrg4SD, has actively followed-up its activities and is a member of its Steering Committee,

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[13] According to Hill and Wilson, *identity politics* refer to processes, actions or discourses whereby various entities (political, economic or social) attempt to mould collective identities into fixed frames for understanding political action (Hill and Wilson, 2003, p. 2). In the context of the international activities of subnational entities, Paquin talks of *identity paradiplomacy*, "a paradiplomacy or a subnational foreign policy whose fundamental objective is the reinforcement or the construction of the nation in the framework of a multinational country" (Paquin, 2003, p. 622, personal translation).

while it remained relatively quiet in ENCORE. Wallonia, founder of ENCORE, seats in the Steering Group of the latter and has kept a low profile in nrg4SD. However, some evolution is noticeable since 2007. But before looking at the future involvement of the two entities, we will first discuss the impact that their participation in the networks has.

4.2 Impact

The Flemish participation in nrg4SD is mentioned in several policy documents (e.g. Bourgeois, 2004, p. 16; Leterme, 2004, p. 6; Vlaamse Overheid, 2008, p. 151; Vlaamse Regering, 2006, p. 14). Nevertheless, interviews have pointed out that Flanders's participation in nrg4SD or ENCORE does not have any concrete influence on its SD policy. The networks are not used as a tool for policy learning. However, the Flemish Environment minister is interested in bilateral cooperation with other subnational entities in the area of SD or the environment. Some of the privileged partners for such a cooperation are North Rhine-Westphalia, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Wales, all members of ENCORE and/or nrg4SD (Leterme, 2004, p. 17; Vlaamse Overheid, 2007, p. 131, 133; 2008, p. 151). Those networks can thus be used to develop and maintain contacts with these partners, which can evolve into formal cooperation agreements. This happened last at ENCORE's 2008 conference, where the Flemish minister signed a cooperation agreement with North Rhine-Westphalia.[14] Besides bilateral partnerships, the Flemish participation is sometimes used for more informal cooperation as well. Inter-subnational networks can be used to approach other subnational governments in a more direct way when cooperation is desired. In addition, the networks' events are good occasions, e.g., to align positions for the EU Councils of Ministers with German and Austrian partners.

Wallonia also uses its participation in inter-subnational networks for this form of informal cooperation. In contrast to the Flemish case, the Walloon participation rarely leads to the conclusion of bilateral cooperation agreements in the area of SD or the environment. The Walloon government prefers general agreements embracing a broad range of topics, which diminishes the importance of inter-subnational networks specific for SD. The preferred partners for Wallonia exceed the EU scope, but will typically concern French-speaking countries or entities. Wallonia also engages in policy learning, both as 'learner' and as 'teacher' (e.g. by giving presentations or by inviting foreign officials for internships). So far, only ENCORE has served for these purposes in the area of SD or the environment, not nrg4SD.

What is common to both Flanders and Wallonia, is the fact that any impact they might experience from their participation in ENCORE or nrg4SD is to be situated in the internal dimension of the networks' functions. In contrast, the external dimension (i.e. influencing multilateral decision-making) has no impact on the Belgian entities whatsoever. This is not only due to the fact that they have influence through intra-state routes (cf supra). Our respondents point out that both networks are simply not able to exert any influence at the regional (EU) nor the global level.

4.3 Evaluation and future involvement

The previous paragraph shows that Flanders is mainly attracted by the cooperation possibilities of inter-subnational networks. Furthermore, although it does not expect any impact on multi-lateral policy and decision-making, interviews have pointed out that its participation is also

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[14] This bilateral agreement grew out of the contact between the two entities in the context of nrg4SD, but was materialized at the ENCORE conference due to North Rhine-Westphalia's pull-out of nrg4SD (see Happaerts et al., 2008, p. 18).

motivated by 'identity politics', because such networks give visibility to subnational entities at the international level. One of the priorities of the Flemish foreign policy is to put Flanders on the international map and to gain a political voice in the international arena. It focuses mainly on the EU, but multilateral forums such as UN bodies are considered important as well (Bourgeois, 2004, p. 10-11, 16; Dewael, 1999, p. 29; Keating et al., 2003, p. 92-93; Massart-Piérard, 1999, p. 713-714, 718; Paquin, 2003, p. 632-634; Peeters, 2008, p. 7; Van den Brande, 1995, p. 17). With regard to nrg4SD, the unique global focus of that network is not really seen as an opportunity, since Flanders focuses its cooperation in the area of SD on European partners. ENCORE, in that regard, would seem more useful, considering its EU focus and its extensive membership. Since 2007, Flanders has become increasingly sceptical towards nrg4SD. This is a consequence of some internal developments of nrg4SD (such as a setback in output and a deficit of concrete realizations, an observed lack of transparency, and the withdrawal of some important members such as North Rhine-Westphalia) and of the establishment of FOGAR (cf supra). Flanders was initially not in favour of FOGAR and was sceptical towards the true political motivations of some of the actors within it. Due to the fact that other members shared the Flemish discontent, an internal review process was set up which is expected to lead to the adoption of a new strategy for nrg4SD at the Summit in October 2008 (Happaerts et al., 2008, p. 13-14). Dependent on the outcome of that review process, Flanders will re-evaluate its commitment to nrg4SD (Deketelaere, 2008). If Flanders would not agree with the evaluation's conclusions, our hypothesis is that it will not renew its mandate as Steering Committee member and adopt a low profile in nrg4SD in the future. A total pull-out, as in the North Rhine-Westphalian case, seems unlikely due to the fact that Flanders was one of the co-founders of the network. Seeing that the political interest in Flanders is oriented towards bilateral cooperation, we expect that Flanders will remain a member of both nrg4SD and ENCORE, but will limit its attendance to the high-level summits and conferences.[15]

Also for Wallonia 2008 will be a decisive year. After two years of inactivity in nrg4SD, it will attend the 2008 Summit and re-evaluate its commitment at that point. The options are a higher degree of participation (with support from the political level) or a complete withdrawal. Also for ENCORE things might change. For a few years now, the question of the formalization of ENCORE has been on the table. According to that scenario ENCORE would adopt a formal statute with a legal registration and create a more permanent secretariat, which might require the installation of a membership fee. Wallonia is not a supporter of such a formalization. It is rather attracted by the informal character of ENCORE, which also explains why Wallonia is less active in nrg4SD. However, many other subnational entities are in favour of the formalization, with the argument that ENCORE could then be integrated in the institutional structure of the EU and gain more influence.[16] Whether this scenario would materialize in the future will possibly influence the participation of Wallonia in ENCORE. A pull-out, however, seems very unlikely due to the fact that ENCORE remains a Walloon initiative.

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[15] The fact that financial obligations are very low for nrg4SD (€ 5 000 a year for Flanders) and nonexistent for ENCORE is also important to mention here.

[16] This argument is not supported by our analysis. Although the formalization of inter-subnational networks seems to guard smaller networks from fading away (as the cases of RES and SER suggest), it does not seem to affect their ability to influence multilateral decision-making.

4.4   Final observations

This exploratory comparative analysis has shown that the Belgian subnational entities which participate in inter-subnational networks are in essence not interested in their external dimension. Although Flanders finds it important that those networks give visibility to subnational entities in the international arena, both Flanders and Wallonia are attracted more by the internal dimension. Flanders is interested in concrete bilateral cooperation with fellow members, while Wallonia focuses on informal cooperation opportunities as well as policy learning. ENCORE has been used much more than nrg4SD for cooperation purposes. An important additional remark to make is that participation in either network is considered rather useless if no support is given at the political level.

5. Conclusion

Our paper has shown that inter-subnational networks are multiple and display a considerable amount of overlap. SD is an important theme in many of them, especially the most recent ones. Although every single network is created with a double function (both internal and external) most successes are booked within the internal dimension of the networks. As our overview and the conducted interviews have shown, influencing multilateral decision-making for SD seems very hard, if not impossible. Of course, gaining access to decision-making is always difficult for actors who are not officially recognized and, consequently, not directly represented in multilateral decision-making bodies, such as subnational entities. Especially at the UN bodies, who have no experience with subnational entities, the global network nrg4SD appears to have difficulties to make its voice heard. However, the examples of REGLEG, AER and CPMR show that inter-subnational networks can indeed influence multilateral decision-making. It seems, therefore, that the lack of influence is in part explained by the topic of SD itself, which is arguably still considered as 'soft politics' and in which governments invest less political capital. It also raises the question about the relevance of such networks as extra-state routes to multilateral decision-making.

Our comparative analysis has shown that, although some networks (or their members) attach much importance to their formal organization, a large part of their cooperation takes place in the informal sphere. Our study also puts forward that subnational entities can only benefit from their participation in inter-subnational networks when there is enough high level political support and thus political capital invested.

To conclude, we can ask ourselves whether these networks pass for institutions for SD as defined by Spangenberg (cf supra). When looking at his two criteria, only one seems to be fulfilled. The networks facilitate the implementation of SD, since they foster cooperation between their members and can be used for policy learning. However, they do not facilitate decision-making for SD, since they have not been able to exert any influence on multilateral bodies. In the area of SD, therefore, inter-subnational network can be most useful when focusing on their internal dimension and giving emphasis to the question of how they can help their members in the achievement of SD.

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Interviews

Bas, Luc
    Policy adviser (2001-2006)
    Flemish Government; Department of the Environment, Nature and Energy; Division of International Environmental Policy
    26 July 2007

de Kerckhove, Bruno
    First attaché
    Ministry of the Walloon Region; Directorate General for Natural Resources and Environment; Environmental Coordination Department
    9 June 2008

Donker, Hilde (on CPMR)
    Policy adviser European Affairs
    Noord-Holland province; Direction Policy; Sector Administrative Development, Strategy and Europe
    29 July 2008

Merckx, Remy
    Head of division
    Flemish Government; Department of the Environment, Nature and Energy; Division of International Environmental Policy
    31 July 2007

Slater, Simon (on SER)
    Head of Sustainable Development
    Advantage West Midlands
    21 July 2008

Van Mierloo, Joris
    Policy adviser
    Flemish Government; Department of the Environment, Nature and Energy; Division of International Environmental Policy
    4 June 2008

Verbeke, Griet
    Policy adviser
    Flemish Government; Department of the Environment, Nature and Energy; Division of International Environmental Policy
    31 July 2007

Wauthier, Jean-Marie
    Director
    Ministry of the Walloon Region; Directorate General for External Relations; Environment Desk
    11 June 2008