

**Beyond the Symbolic Function: Policy Learning within the European Committee of the
Regions**

A Study on the Contribution of the European Committee of the Regions

by

Maaïke Ouwejan

2745232

m.m.ouwejan@student.utwente.nl

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, program
European Studies, University of Twente

2023

Supervisors:

Dr. Veronica Junjan

Dr. Igor Tempels Moreno Pessoa

Abstract

This thesis examined the European Committee of the Regions which was created by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. The granted advisory role is needed to enhance the implementation process and increases the region's role within the EU decision-making process. Still, the Committee faced criticism regarding their effectiveness. By using cases and secondary data, this study demonstrates that the Committee influences the Commission's legislative proposals. Where the amendments relate to policy learning focusing on regional information, needs, knowledge and experiences. Yet, the Committee's contribution is limited to highlighting the role of the regions and establishing new policy instruments due to the Commission's responsiveness. This contradicts the presumption that the Committee acts as a symbolic body.

Preface and Acknowledgements

Waddinxveen, 16th June 2023

Before you lies the master thesis 'Beyond the Symbolic Function: Policy learning within the European Committee of the Regions'. The study focuses on the contribution of three Dutch provinces namely Drenthe, Overijssel and Zuid-Holland within the ECoR and the Commission's response towards these contributions. With this thesis, I complete my master's program European Studies at the University of Twente. From February 2023 to July 2023, I completed this research.

The choice of topic relates to my previous experiences at the municipality of Leiden. Here, I was part of the Public Affairs team where I worked on EU affairs. Therefore, I wondered if local and regional authorities were formally represented within the EU decision-making process. This led to the European Committee of the Regions where regional and local interests are protected and the choice to examine the participation of Dutch provinces to limit the scope of the research.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Veronica Junjan, for her guidance and support throughout the process. I deliberately chose you to be my supervisor due to your knowledge of local governance. I also want to thank Dr Igor Tempels Moreno Pessoa for his valuable feedback and guidance. Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their support during this process.

Maaïke Ouwejan

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Preface and Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Abbreviations	7
1. Introduction	8
2. Theory	11
2.1 Literature Review	11
2.1.1 Multilevel governance	11
2.1.2 Governance instead of government	13
2.1.3 Different types of multilevel governance	14
2.1.4 Regions and multilevel governance	15
2.2 Conceptual Framework.....	16
2.2.1 Regions.....	18
2.3 Institutional Reasons and the Participation of SNAs	19
3. Methodology.....	21
3.1 Strategy and Design	21
3.2 Sample and Sampling.....	22
3.3 Conceptualization and Operationalization	23
3.4 Data Collection Methods	24
3.4 Data Analysis.....	27
3.5 Limits of the Research and Ethical Issues	28
4. Results	29
4.1 The Position of the Selected Provinces in Europe	29
4.1.1 Identification of keywords	29
4.1.2 Data extraction.....	29
4.1.3 The position of Drenthe, Overijssel and Zuid-Holland.....	30
4.1.3.1 Drenthe	31
4.1.3.2 Overijssel.....	32
4.1.3.3 Zuid-Holland.....	32
4.1.4 Discussion on the position of the provinces within the EU	33
4.2 Policy learning within ECON and ENVE	36
4.2.1 Data extraction.....	36

4.2.2 Presence of policy learning within ENVE VII and ECON VII.....	37
4.2.2.1 New Industrial Strategy.....	38
4.2.2.1.2 Policy learning.....	39
4.2.2.2 SME Strategy.....	41
4.2.2.2.1 Policy Learning.....	41
4.2.2.3 New Circular Economy Action Plan.....	42
4.2.2.3.1 Policy Learning.....	42
4.2.3 Discussion on policy learning.....	44
4.3 Visibility of subnational preferences.....	45
4.3.1 New industrial strategy.....	45
4.3.1.1 Help of the commission.....	46
4.3.1.2 Content of New Industrial Strategy.....	47
4.3.1.3 Role of stakeholders and SNAs.....	47
4.3.2 SME Strategy.....	48
4.3.2.1 Help of Commission.....	49
4.3.2.2 Content of SME Strategy.....	50
4.3.2.3 Role of stakeholders.....	50
4.3.3 New Circular Economy Action Plan.....	51
4.3.3.1 Help of the commission.....	52
4.3.3.2 Content of NCEAP.....	52
4.3.3.3 Role of stakeholders.....	52
4.3.4 Discussion on visibility of SNAs preferences.....	53
5. Conclusion.....	54
6. Discussion.....	57
6.1 Limitations of the Research.....	57
6.2 Recommendations.....	58
References.....	59
Appendices.....	66
Appendix I : Operationalization table.....	66
Appendix II: List of policy or strategy papers.....	67
Appendix III: Coding scheme for content analysis.....	68
Appendix IV: Data extraction tables of second sub-question.....	69
Appendix V: Coding scheme for third sub-question.....	71

Annex VI: Data extraction tables related to third sub-question..... 73
Annex VII: Themes for thematic analysis..... 75

List of Abbreviations

CIVEX	Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs.
COTER	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget
ECoR	European Committee of the Regions
EC	European Commission
ECON	Commission for Economic Policy
EP	European Parliament
ENVE	Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy
NAT	Commission for Natural Resources
NCEAP	New Circular Economy Action Plan
NIS	New Industrial Strategy
SEA	Single European Act
SEDEC	Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture
SNA	Subnational Authorities
SME	Small and Medium enterprises

1. Introduction

'*Bringing Europe closer to the people*' is one of the main priorities of the European Committee of the Regions (hereafter ECoR). The increased power of the EU institutions arranges a greater gap between the EU citizens and the institutions which is labelled as a democratic deficit (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Yet, the ECoR represents the level of government closest to EU citizens and is therefore the solution to the democratic deficit. The ECoR's objective is to strengthen the role of subnational authorities (hereafter SNAs) in the EU decision-making process and advocate for the territorial dimension of EU policies. Moreover, the European Parliament identified that around 70% of the EU legislation is implemented by SNAs (European Parliament, 2021). Therefore, the role of SNAs is legitimate within the EU arena.

Nevertheless, the founding Treaty of Rome solely granted a role to national governments and neglected the role of SNAs within the EU arena (Mazey & Mitchell, 1993). Yet, the Single European Act (SEA) and the creation of the ECoR enhanced their role (McCarthy, 1997). Consequently, the Treaty of Maastricht recognized the gap between the EU and its citizens. By extending the institutional structure, SNAs took their place within the EU arena to bring Europe closer to home. Moreover, their advisory role granted them mandatory consultation of EU policies when the territorial dimension was affected. Additionally, the ECoR protects the principle of subsidiarity and therefore acts as a watchdog (Nicolosi & Mustert, 2020). Next, the ECoR is responsible for drafting opinions to forward regional insights and identify legislative gaps. Yet, this feature of the ECoR is highly discussed in scholarly literature along with its output.

Much of the international discussion revolves around the powers and responsibilities of the ECoR. The imposed treaties grant an advisory role to the SNAs, yet the regions' contribution to legislative proposals is limited (Christiansen, 1996; Warleigh, 1999; Hooghe & Marks, 1996). Yet, scholars also view the ECoR as a body to enhance EU legitimacy and to include citizens and regional preferences (Nicolosi & Mustert, 2020). However, the symbolic nature of the ECoR assures that internal processes and the content of the drafted opinions are neglected. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the Committee's White Paper on multilevel governance, the Committee fulfils its rightful role within the European landscape since more responsibilities are transferred to SNAs (European Committee of the Regions, 2012). Besides, other scholars encourage the creation of ECoR due to its multilevel character (Hooghe & Marks, 1996). Where regions are becoming important to implement EU legislation, their insights are also valuable to draft legislative proposals. Moreover, the Commission also values the contribution of the ECoR due to the remoteness of the Commission towards the EU citizens (European Committee of Regions, 2020).

Besides the influence of SNAs regarding legislation, their advisory role also grants them possibilities to facilitate policy learning. Policy learning is concerned with the acquisition of new policy-relevant information (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). This political process uses knowledge to inform policymaking (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013; Witting & Moyson, 2015). Politically engaged officials interact to influence policy on a specific topic. These policy actors consist of politicians or elected officials who form coalitions to forward their policy preferences (Sabatier, 1988). With the ECoR, all members are democratically elected and form coalitions based on their political groups. Moreover, present-day challenges require an intense collaboration with SNAs, where the Commission could use the Committee's know-how. Therefore, information-seeking is considered a fundamental part of policy learning, where the Commission uses the ECoR to identify and access information from regions (Johnson & Lundvall, 2001). Therefore, this research examines the subnational legislative preferences along with the Commission's responsiveness to SNAs preferences. Nevertheless, policy learning does not mean that the increased knowledge of policy actors leads to greater effectiveness (Etheredge & Short, 1983).

As for the Committees' opinions, six thematic commissions produce opinions for the Commission's legislative proposals. For the scope of this research, two commissions are selected, Commission for Economic Policy (ECON) and Commission for Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE), since both commissions contain Dutch rapporteurs. Moreover, the selection of Dutch rapporteurs contains Jeannette Baljeu (Zuid-Holland), Tjisse Stelpstra (Drenthe) and Eddy van Hijum (Overijssel). This limits the scope of the research to the Dutch context due to the availability of internal documents of the selected provinces. Therefore, this research aims to evaluate the presence of policy learning within the selected sub-commissions and to what extent the Commission adopts the SNAs preferences in their proposals. To achieve this, the following main research question and sub-questions are formulated:

Main research question

To what extent did the participation of the selected Dutch provinces in ECON VII and ENVE VII contribute to policy learning between the European Commission and SNAs from 2020 to 2023?

Sub-question 1	<i>What are institutional reasons for Dutch provinces to participate in the ECoR?</i>
Sub-question 2	<i>How did the selected Dutch provinces position themselves in the EU arena?</i>

Sub-question 3	<i>To what extent did policy learning, within the selected commissions, contribute to the drafted opinions?</i>
Sub-question 4	<i>To what extent were subnational preferences, within selected cases, visible within the adopted legislative proposals?</i>

To answer the research questions, the thesis is structured as a multiple case study, using secondary qualitative data such as policy documents and strategies. The multiple case study design allows for an evaluation of the output of the different sub-commissions and the analysis of the data from each opinion regarding policy learning. Therefore, similarities and differences are more easily identified across the different cases (Gerring, 2004). Besides, evidence gathered using this approach is considered reliable and generates a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Moreover, the choice to use secondary data is based on the time limitation of the research. The units of analysis are Dutch subnational governments participating in the ECoR, with Zuid-Holland, Overijssel and Drenthe serving as units of observation. Moreover, two variables are identified for the proposed research question, participation (independent variable) and policy learning (dependent variable). For the setting, the research uses drafted opinions and legislative proposals presented in the 7th mandate of the ECoR which ranges from 2020-2023. The methodology section explains the selection of cases. Moreover, Subchapter 2.2 explains the concepts used in the research.

Lastly, the sub-questions are answered using different methods. Sub-question one deals with the practical factors of participating within the ECoR and is based on literature. These factors are important to explain the position of the ECoR. The second sub-question explains the incentives of the selected cases to participate within the ECoR using policy documents and strategy papers. The third sub-question examines whether policy learning was present within the selected commissions and its visibility within the drafted opinions. Therefore, content analysis is conducted using proposed amendments for each opinion. Lastly, sub-question four examines the visibility of SNAs policy preferences in the Commission's legislative proposals using thematic analysis.

As for scientific relevance, this research adds to the current scientific literature with a focus on policy learning. Scholars consider the ECoR as a minor part of the EU decision-making process. The majority agreed upon the symbolic nature of the ECoR where no real powers are present except the power to protect the principle of subsidiarity (Christiansen, 1996; McCarthy, 1997; Warleigh, 1999). With this

conclusion, the scholarly literature neglects the ECoR. Yet, this research provides an exploratory stance where the use of secondary qualitative sources provides insight into the drafted opinions. This approach abandons the argument of the ECoR acting as a symbolic body but focuses on the input of SNAs and the visibility of the regional preferences within the proposals. Lastly, regarding the Commission's concerns about the remoteness of the EU institutions, the ECoR provides a solution where their policy choices consider the citizen's preferences (European Committee of the Regions, 2020).

The societal relevance is concerned with bringing Europe closer to its citizens, which is also one of the political priorities of the ECoR (European Committee of the Regions, 2020). Moreover, the Commission acknowledges that the EU institutions struggle to be responsive to the needs and preferences of EU citizens (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). For instance, Dutch citizens have a negative attitude towards the EU where their trust in EU politics is lower than their trust in domestic politics (Djundeva & den Ridder, 2021). Nevertheless, the principle of subsidiarity which is safeguarded by the ECoR provides a solution to close the gap between the EU institutions and its citizens (Lopatka, 2019). By improving the processes within the EU and the increased role of regions, the needs of citizens are met.

The thesis is structured as follows, Chapter two presents the literature review where the concept of multilevel governance is explained along with the conceptual framework. Moreover, the first sub-question is answered using relevant literature. Next, chapter three deals with the research methods, including the research design, chosen cases, data collection methods and threats to validity and reliability. Chapter four describes the data analysis using policy documents and the drafted opinions of the selected commissions. Lastly, Chapter five deals with the conclusion and discussion by answering the research question and forwarding recommendations for further research.

2. Theory

This chapter examines the theory of multilevel governance to explain the enhanced role of subnational governments over the years within the EU. Next, the conceptual framework explains the main concepts used for the research question. Lastly, the first sub-question is answered using literature to explain which institutional factors determine the participation of Dutch provinces within the ECoR.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Multilevel governance

With the introduction of the Structural Funds, the role of the SNAs expanded within the EU arena. These funds aim to improve the relationship between the different levels of government by establishing

partnerships (Bachtler & Gorzelak, 2007). Therefore, the multilevel governance model focuses on the examination of the Structural funds regarding the increased role of regions. Yet, the model explains the entire EU decision-making process where the former theories of neo-functionalism (Haas, 1958; Lindberg, 1963) and intergovernmentalism (Hoffman, 1964) neglected the role of regions. The influence of political decentralization within the EU context is studied by Hooghe and Marks (1996).

Marks described multilevel governance as '*..the result of a broad process of institutional creation and decision reallocation that has pulled some previously centralized functions of the state up to the supranational level and some down to the local/regional level*' (Marks 1992, p. 392).

Yet, multilevel governance is a new way of thinking where the EU acts as a political system (Marks, 1992). The European Single Act (1987) ensured the integration of member states and the acknowledgement of the single market by national governments. Besides, the inclusion of the qualified majority voting system and the unanimity requirement indicated features of a domestic political system (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Therefore, multilevel governance focuses on EU governance instead of regarding the EU as a form of international cooperation.

Additionally, the new structures imposed by the Maastricht Treaty enabled SNAs to access new territorial levels (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). The multilevel governance theory proposes that the dispersion of authority over multiple jurisdictions tends to be more efficient and decreases the states' monopoly (Hooghe & Marks, 2002). Marks (1992) argued that within the multilevel system, supranational actors, interest groups and SNAs are highly involved in the decision-making process. Thus, the EU decision-making process is labelled as multilevel since the structure no longer consists of solely national and supranational actors. Therefore, Hooghe and Marks (2001) define multilevel governance as '*the dispersion of authority within and beyond national states*'. The main assumption is that governance should operate at multiple levels to acquire variations in territorial jurisdictions. These externalities stemming from the provision of public goods may differentiate in local settings and so should governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). This research is relevant, as it indicates that the Structural Funds and EU integration are the primary reasons for the increased role of SNAs.

Besides the Structural Funds and EU integration, the role of SNAs enhanced due to the interconnectedness of political arenas. Yet, the national setting remains important to formulate national preferences, but the model assumes that SNAs act outside their national arena. Therefore, SNAs create links within the national or supranational arena to escape the control of national actors (Bauer & Börzel,

2010). Consequently, the assumed separation between domestic and international politics is rejected since national governments no longer provide the only link for SNAs to enter the EU arena (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Thus, new structures within the EU landscape grant SNAs a greater role in the decision-making process. The domination of the EU arena by national and supranational actors is abandoned to catch potential externalities in different territorial jurisdictions.

Still, more theories are concerned with the changing structure of Europe where the notion of governance is central. For instance, Mark Bevir (2002) developed the theory of decentered governance where EU governance is not regarded as a particular state formation but relates to a set of practices, beliefs, traditions and desires. Like Hooghe & Marks (2001), decentered governance also believes that regulatory provision has become central in the EU; networks of private and public actors actively contribute to policy; and different levels of government are combined. Yet, the explanations for these changes differ. MLG uses social factors related to social logic which produces certain patterns of behavior to explain the change to EU governance. This mid-range theory uses a fixed number of social factors that illustrate social logic. Therefore, factors such as interdependence are used to explain other social factors, namely European governance. Though, Bevir (2002) argues that social factors cannot explain European governance because political activity is limited to humans who act on beliefs and traditions. Agents are seen as the driving forces of European governance and can therefore only rely on their beliefs, experiences and traditions. Thus, beliefs about interdependence drive the forces of EU governance instead of social factors. The next section explains the concept of governance to understand the model of multilevel governance.

2.1.2 Governance instead of government

Multilevel governance highlights the new dynamics between the different actors in the EU arena where the focus is on governance rather than on government. Governance relates to the sum of regulations initiated by actors, processes, and structures and is justified by a public problem (Benz, 2010). These regulations including policies and programs are designed to solve a public problem with collective action. Smith (1997) argues that the term multilevel governance should refer to coordination processes instead of the traditional view of government. The common feature in the different definitions relates to the incorporation of both public and private actors in the coordination process and the combination of resources and beliefs (Stoker, 1998; Kooiman, 1993). Moreover, the concept proposes that actors, arenas and institutions aren't ordered hierarchically but gain more complex relationships.

As Marks puts it, *'Political arenas are interconnected rather than nested. Sub-national actors operate in both national and supranational arenas, creating transnational associations in the process. States do not monopolize links between domestic and European actors but are one among a variety of actors contesting decisions that are made at a variety of levels. The separation between domestic and international politics, which lies at the heart of the state-centric model [of EU governance], is rejected by the multi-level governance model'* (Marks, 1992, p. 332).

Therefore, the theory of multilevel governance proposes that SNAs are situated in regional and national arenas and can easily enter global arenas to pursue their interests. SNAs use the created arenas to escape the control of central governments and allow them to communicate directly with supranational organizations (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Enderlein et al., 2012). Consequently, the EU institutions use this new framework to enhance their powers (Peters & Pierre, 2011). Yet, these interactions may vary per policy domain since some issues require more regional collaboration than others. Nevertheless, central institutions still play a significant role within the governing process where the principles of democracy and accountability are important. Therefore, autonomy beyond the nation-state needs protection by using conventions or oversight bodies (Enderlein et al., 2012). The next section discusses different types of multilevel governance to provide an understanding of the increased role of SNAs within the EU.

2.1.3 Different types of multilevel governance

As mentioned before, Hooghe and Marks (2001) established a new theory where the increased role of SNAs is central. The dispersion of authority relates to two types, type 1 governance relates to the dispersion of authority to a set number of non-overlapping jurisdictions at a limited number of levels. Within this system, jurisdictions combine their authority in large packages and are considered relatively stable. Next, type 2 governance also relates to the dispersion of authority but considers governance to consist of complex, fluid, and overlapping jurisdictions. These jurisdictions overlap and are distinguished into functional and specific jurisdictions. Moreover, they are flexible and follow the governance demands (Hooghe & Marks, 2002).

For the proposed research question, type 1 governance is the most appropriate. Type 1 governance relates to the share of power among general-purpose governments operating in a set number of levels. The functions are bundled, and membership is non-intersecting (Hooghe & Marks, 2002). The increased power of regions connects to type 1 governance where the EU structure is based on a few tiers, as demonstrated by the NUTS classification. This classification demonstrates three hierarchical categories

to conduct socio-economic analyses of the regions. According to Hooghe & Marks (2001), these categories are complemented by a maximum of three additional government levels. This indicates that the territorial scales vary between the three and six which eliminates the assumption that the EU structure is based on type 2 governance. Moreover, the powers of the ECoR are limited to certain policy areas due to the strict distinction forwarded by the Maastricht Treaty (Enderlein et al., 2012). Lastly, the arrangements of the different EU institutions with constitutionally granted powers and a defined territory demonstrate elements of type 1 governance but also reflect in specific policy areas type 2 governance with the inclusion of fluid policy networks. Nevertheless, since the role of the ECoR is constitutionally laid down in the Maastricht Treaty, type 1 governance is the most applicable.

2.1.4 Regions and multilevel governance

The multilevel governance model emerged within the context of EU studies as an alternative way to explain the increasing role of SNAs within the EU arena (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Bache & Flinders, 2004). Nevertheless, a commonly accepted definition of regions seems absent where concepts such as subnational governments or third tier of government are widely used (Jeffrey, 1997). Still, there is consensus about which features regions appear to have. The presence of a public entity with a defined territory which is situated between the national and local governments, and which consists of legislative and executive authorities is considered a region (Bauer & Borzel, 2010). Besides, the ECoR also recognizes the importance of the multilevel framework. The Committee *'considers multilevel governance to mean coordinated action by the European Union, the Member States and local and regional authorities, based on partnership and aimed at drawing up and implementing EU policies'* (European Committee of Regions, 2009).

In other words, the ECoR views that the responsibility is shared between the different levels of government and respects the democratic legitimacy and representative character of different actors. Moreover, governance is the success factor for EU integration where cooperation between the different governmental actors is important for implementation. The ECoR believes that multilevel governance serves the fundamental political priorities of the EU and protects the democratic dimension and boosts efficiency (European Committee of Regions, 2009). Yet, the SNAs are unable to form an independent level of government in the multilevel governance model (Christiansen, 1996; Hooghe & Marks, 2002). Although, both the Commission and SNAs have many reasons for smooth implementation. Besides, regions with large portfolios have more incentives to participate within the EU arena (Donas & Beyers, 2012).

One of the limitations of the proposed model is the undefined distinction between domestic and international politics. Nevertheless, the EU does not resemble either domestic or international politics. Yet, these disciplines interact and are needed to understand new phenomena such as non-state governance (Hix, 1998). Nevertheless, the theory proposed by Hooghe & Marks (1996) solely explains the shift in governance where the EU is regarded as one actor within a given context. Moreover, the tension between type 1 and type 2 governance is contradictory. Where type 1 governance solely consists of interactions between different levels of government. Type 2 governance also includes non-governmental actors who operate in specialized jurisdictions. Yet, many policy areas require collaboration with non-state actors which is neglected in type 1 governance. Nevertheless, the scope of the research is limited to governmental actors which fits the type 1 governance logic.

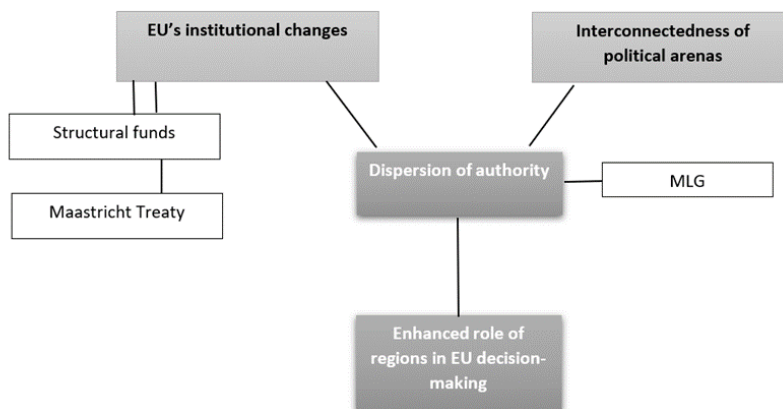
Moreover, the participation of regions within the multilevel governance model requires the mobilization of resources and sufficient motivation to enter the EU arena. Regions play an important role within the EU arena but to what extent remains vague (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Consequently, the proposed theory is mostly focused on structure and agency and therefore neglects the nature of the policy problems. Nevertheless, the model by Hooghe and Marks (2001) focuses on the increasing role of SNAs within the EU arena and its implications on the existing structure. Therefore, the research examines to what extent the selected SNAs participate within the ECoR and their effect on the legislative proposals.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

This subchapter discusses the main concepts of the research question and the accompanying sub-questions along with its dimensions. For this thesis, the concept of participation is defined as forwarding regional preferences in the context of the proposed legislation initiated by EU institutions by consequently sharing regional beliefs, experiences and needs. Moreover, policy learning is conceptualized as the increased understanding of the subnational context where the Commission taps into the know-how of SNAs to determine potential gaps in their legislative proposals. Therefore, the expected relationship is marked as positive where the participation of the Dutch provinces has a potential positive effect on the level of policy learning between the SNAs and the Commission. Moreover, concepts used in the research question need further clarification. Therefore, 'Contribution' is defined to what extent the SNAs actively forward written amendments with regional preferences in the scope of the opinion. Lastly, 'visibility' is defined as the degree to which the submitted regional preferences are present within the Commission's legislative proposals.

The theoretical framework reveals the factors influencing the increased role of regions within the EU arena. As discussed, the EU institutional changes related to the introduction of the Structural funds and the Maastricht Treaty granted a more prominent role for SNAs within the EU arena (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Bachtler & Gorzelak, 2007). Moreover, the interconnectedness of the arenas allowed SNAs to enter global arenas. As a result, the control slipped away from national governments and facilitated the rise of the SNAs within the EU arena (Hooghe & Marks, 1996; 2001). The loss of power of national governments was partly granted to SNAs, supranational actors and interest groups (Hooghe & Marks, 2002). Thus, institutional change along with the structure of the political arenas ensured that control was taken away from national governments to SNAs. This allowed SNAs to actively contribute to the EU-decision making process in the form of the ECoR.

Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework

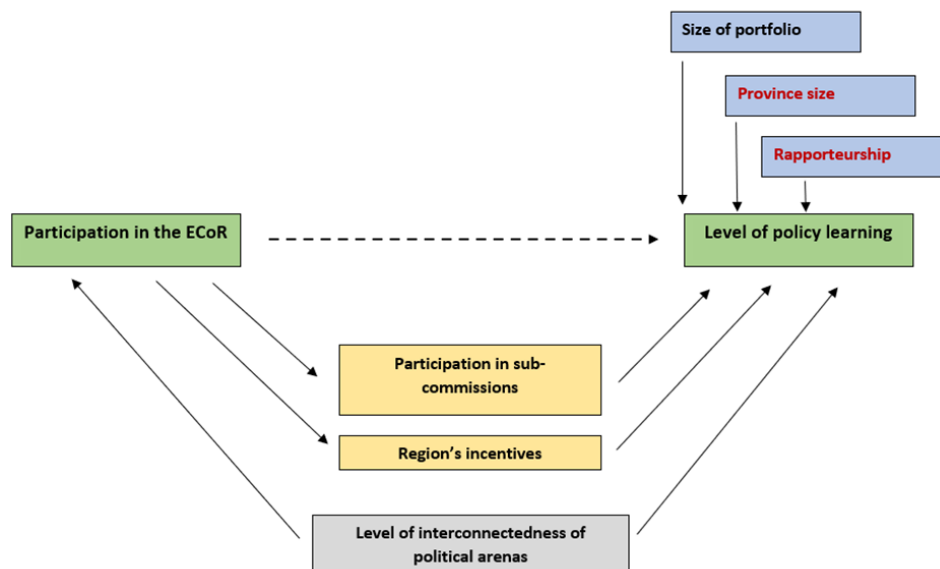


Yet, the literature review also reveals that the expected relationship is much broader. Therefore, Figure 2.2 illustrates all possible variables. The suggested relationship uses a dashed line to indicate a possible spurious relationship due to the presence of third variables. The 'Participation in sub-commissions' and 'Region's incentives' are considered intervening variables possibly explaining the proposed relationship between x and y. The level of interconnectedness of political arenas acts possibly as a confounding variable which could potentially explain both the cause and effect. The inclusion of the third level of government has allowed the political arenas to become interconnected, abandoning strict boundaries. The greater the interconnectedness of the arenas, the more easily SNAs can enter arenas and forward their preferences and beliefs. Moreover, the willingness of SNAs to forward their policy preferences

might be influenced by a set of moderating variables, 'Size of portfolio', 'Province size' and 'Rapporteurship'.

Additionally, 'Province size' and 'Rapporteurship' act as control variables to examine the proposed relationship. Both variables are measured easily, where the variable of 'Rapporteurship' acts as a dichotomy. As for the 'Province size', the available resources along with the size of the organization are reviewed. The selected cases have different sizes of organizations which could affect the availability of resources and organizational capacity. Which may in turn affect the level of policy learning. Yet, their policy priorities could differ due to their regional structures.

Figure 2.2 Conceptual Model



2.2.1 Regions

The multilevel governance model is based on the increasing role of SNAs. The term SNA relates to the level of governments below the central government which could include second-level government (province) and third-level government (municipalities). Moreover, the term region is widely used as an alternative for SNA in the MLG model which possesses great variations in definition. The concept can relate to an area of land without exact limits, geographically defined states, and an area which possesses common features such as language or is divided by physical characteristics (Van Langenhoeve, 2013). Yet, within the European context, the NUTS classification is used to refer to regions. The NUTS

classification refers to the nomenclature of territorial units for statistics dividing the EU's economic territory into three sublevels. According to Eurostat, Europe consists of 242 regions where regions operate in NUTS level 2 (Eurostat, 2022). Level two relates to regions which have on average 800,000 to 3 million inhabitants and can impose regional policies. In the context of this research, regions are defined as provinces which represent the second level of government between the central government and local municipalities and carry out regional policies.

2.3 Institutional Reasons and the Participation of SNAs

This subchapter discusses the first sub-question based on the literature provided in Subchapter 2.1. The sub-question deals with the following: *What are institutional reasons for Dutch provinces to participate in the EU arena?* The relevance of the sub-question is discussed in the introduction. Yet, it is impossible to mention all the possible factors for SNAs to participate in the ECoR. However, this research aims to discuss the most relevant factors presented in the relevant literature. The criteria are based on the frequency of proposed factors in the literature.

First, by actively participating within the ECoR the SNAs are becoming familiar with the EU policy domains, directives, and mechanisms (Borghetto & Franchino, 2009). Their presence creates awareness of the possible networks and funds to help realize EU objectives in the regional context. Moreover, using the ECoR to influence upstream policy processes, namely policy formulation and decision, is relevant. By projecting its regional policy preferences, the regional context along with the needs and challenges are presented (Tatham, 2008). Besides forwarding regional preferences, the implementation of EU legislation is also important. Where almost 70% of the proposed legislation is implemented by SNAs (European Committee of the Regions, 2009), both the Commission and the ECoR have great incentives to establish a partnership.

In addition, SNAs with large portfolios have more incentives to monitor EU affairs and raise awareness of their regional preferences (Donas & Beyers, 2012; Hooghe & Marks, 1996). For the representative of Overijssel, Eddy van Hijum, proposed legislation from the EU institutions has a strong influence on provinces and municipalities (Ebbens, 2021). While the EU is gaining more influence in the arena of the SNAs, the availability of EU funds also has increased. From 2014 until 2020, the province of Overijssel received €520 million from the EU while the central government has recently provided the province with €25 million. Moreover, Van Huijm argues that active participation within the EU arena also grants the province opportunities to share knowledge and experiences with other regions (Lacroix, 2023). Moreover, the representative of Zuid-Holland argues that the drafted opinions are also used to connect

relevant stakeholders to the European Commission or Parliament (Wondergem, 2019). Furthermore, the acquisition of rapporteurship allows subnational governments to take a leading role in forwarding regional preferences to the Commission (Provincie Drenthe, 2021). Therefore, the EU arena is used as a network platform where the acquisition of knowledge, partnerships and funding is central.

Aside from networking, the composition and powers of the ECoR are also valid reasons for participation. The Committee is composed of 329 regional and local representatives stationed in 27 member states, which ensures political accountability as laid down in the Treaty of Nice (Hooghe & Marks, 2002). Besides, accountability is enhanced by the political affiliation of members (Christiansen & Lintner, 2005). Moreover, the reinforcement of the Lisbon Treaty strengthened the powers of the ECoR where the Committee became the watchdog for the principle of subsidiarity (Jeffery & Ziller, 2006). The principle of subsidiarity is one of the important pillars of the EU and limits the Commission's interference (Treaty on the European Union, 1992). Moreover, the principle ensures that the decisions are taken closest to the EU citizens. Still, the growing gap between the EU institutions and the EU citizens indicates the failure of the principle (Lopatka, 2019). Therefore, EU legislation fails to consider the needs and preferences of citizens.

The latter is also one of the major challenges facing the EU, a democratic deficit. The term refers to the lack of democracy and accountability within the EU institutions and their decision-making processes. In the EU context, it relates to the lack of accessibility and representation of EU citizens in the decision-making process (Neuhold, 2020). Only the European Parliament is directly elected, yet it still lacks real accountability powers (Crum & Fossum, 2009). Yet, the Committee possess the ability to forward the citizen's preferences in the EU arena (Jimenez, 2013). Besides, the members of the ECoR are democratically elected which ensures the principle of accountability. Moreover, the increased role of SNAs within the EU arena closes the democratic deficit due to the inclusion of the regional context (Jimenez, 2013). Also, the visibility of the EU is enhanced along with the citizens' preferences. Therefore, the ECoR is responsive to the citizens' preferences and brings Europe closer to its citizens.

Whether the output of the ECoR seems questionable in the eyes of scholars, incentives to participate within the Committee seem clear. Due to the increased implementation responsibilities, SNAs are eager to participate. Moreover, the democratic deficit within the EU remains a relevant topic when discussing the ECoR. By bringing the EU closer to SNAs, the preferences of citizens are respected along with the function of the ECoR to protect the principle of subsidiarity. Still, the involvement of SNAs also generate negative effects due to conflicting interests. Yet, the familiarization with EU instruments and the

increased task of SNAs in the implementation process are important reasons to include SNAs within the decision-making process. The following chapter addresses the methodology used for this research.

3. Methodology

The following chapter discusses the methodology used for this study, introducing the strategy and research design. Then, the case selection is discussed along with the conceptualization and operationalization of the variables. Lastly, the data collection methods and the data analyses are mentioned to answer the research questions. Consequently, some remarks are made regarding the reliability and validity of the study.

3.1 Strategy and Design

The research question examines whether there is a relationship between the participation of SNAs within the ECoR and policy learning. The design is exploratory due to scholarly negligence regarding the ECoR. Previously conducted research focused on the effectiveness of the ECoR and its influence on EU legislation (Christiansen, 1996; Loughlin, 1996; Warleigh, 1999). Nevertheless, this design focuses more on the role of the SNAs and the possibility of policy learning between the SNAs and the Commission. A qualitative study needs to determine whether policy learning occurs in the selected commissions of the ECoR. The first and second sub-questions are descriptive whereas the third and fourth sub-questions are explanatory. The focus of this research is on the role of SNAs within the ECoR where Dutch provinces are the units of observation since they are the primary actors of the Committee. These Dutch provinces operate in different sub-commissions of the ECoR to draft opinions for the Commission. Both the commissions of ECON and ENVE were chosen since those commissions are led by Dutch rapporteurs. The setting of the research is limited to the selected commissions, ECON VII and ENVE VII, operating in the 7th mandate of the ECoR in the period of 2020 – 2023.

The research question was answered by a multiple case study since this approach generates an in-depth and multi-dimension understanding of the ECoR. Consequently, case studies are used in the exploratory phase of the research and use qualitative data (Crowe et al., 2011). As discussed by Johnson & Stake (1996) a collective case study is used to study multiple cases simultaneously to understand a particular phenomenon and consider the 'real life contexts' of organizations. Moreover, the Most Similar System Design is conducted since the selected cases demonstrate similar background variables and possible differences in the (in)dependent variables. The elimination of irrelevant variables and the use of control variables strengthens the design (Bartolini, 1993). Moreover, the approach is applicable since the units of analysis are limited to the Dutch context ensuring administrative similarities. Furthermore, the MSSD

is applied in a looser application where the control variables are similar. Nevertheless, the research design does not systematically examine the cases and all control variables (Anckar, 2008). This form is suitable for regional comparative studies and is therefore applied in this research. A limitation of this type of research is insufficient generalization to other settings. Yet, the results are also based on theory which ensures application to other settings and contexts (Bartolini, 1993). Moreover, case studies use different sets of data which can generate too much data. Yet, by developing selection criteria, the scope of relevant documents is limited. The next section discusses the sampling method and proposed sampling.

3.2 Sample and Sampling

The composition of the national delegation of the Netherlands within the ECoR consists of Dutch provinces and municipalities. The members hold electoral mandates or are politically accountable. Moreover, the ECoR holds six thematic commissions which carry out the legislative work of the Committee namely: CIVEX, COTER, ECON, ENVE, NAT and SEDEC. These commissions discuss the legislative proposals of other EU institutions, produce opinions and discuss other relevant work for SNAs. The national delegation of the Netherlands consists of 10 members and 11 alternates, where the members of the delegation actively participate within one commission. Moreover, the Netherlands also grants a full role to alternates within the ECoR. This means that the appointed alternates actively participate and can become a rapporteur. Therefore, alternates along with members are potential cases for this research. The created selection criteria limit the number of cases. The units of observation of this study are Dutch provinces, which is further specified to the province of Drenthe, Overijssel and Zuid-Holland. Table 3.1 demonstrates the selected cases and their role within the ECoR.

Table 3.1 Role of the Selected Cases within the Committee

	<i>Produced opinion</i>
Jeannette Baljeu (Zuid-Holland) - Rapporteur ECON	<i>'The New Industrial Strategy'</i>
Eddy van Hijum (Overijssel) - Rapporteur ECON	<i>'The SME Strategy'</i>
Tjisse Stelpstra (Drenthe) - Rapporteur ENVE	<i>'The New Circular Economy Action Plan'</i>

Table 3.2 demonstrates the selection criteria used for the sample selection. The researcher used purposive case selection to identify cases which are likely to possess certain features and fit the study. As Seawright & Gerring (2008) noted when using a small sample, the researcher is mostly fit to select suitable cases. The selection criteria relate to active members of the delegation in the 7th mandate of the ECoR. Furthermore, the case selection was limited to provinces due to the presence of an EU strategy which provides insight into their role within the commissions. Active participation is important since relevant policy issues require immense transitions of societies where the input and implementation of SNAs is needed (European Committee of Regions, 2020). Therefore, it is expected that local and regional input is adequately measured within the selected commissions. In addition, the acquisition of the position of rapporteur within the selected commissions is an important criterion. The rapporteur analyzes the selected projects, consults with relevant stakeholders, and discusses the political line before finalizing the drafted opinion. This position is important to forward regional preferences. Therefore, the selected cases are Zuid-Holland, Drenthe and Overijssel. Table 3.2 demonstrates the selection criteria to limit the sample selection.

Table 3.2 Selection Criteria Sample Selection

	Number of cases which met the criteria
Starting point: List of the Dutch national delegation of the ECoR as of April 2023.	21
Step 1: Exclude members of the national delegation who are not active in the 7 th mandate of the ECoR.	17
Step 2: Exclude members of the national delegation who are not a member of the provincial executives.	10
Step 3: Exclude members of the national delegation who are not part of ECON VII or ENVE VII.	4
Step 4: Excluded members of the national delegation that did not act as a rapporteur within ECON VII or ENVE VII	3

3.3 Conceptualization and Operationalization

The previous chapters explain several theoretical constructs. Nevertheless, these constructs are only relevant when operationalized. Therefore, this chapter explains the operationalization of the selected constructs. Appendix I provides an overview of the operationalization of all theoretical constructs.

Participation of the province

Participation is defined as forwarding regional interests in the context of the proposed legislation initiated by EU institutions by consequently demonstrating incentives to participate within the EU arena. Participation is operationalized as the extent to which a province actively forwards regional preferences in the scope of the drafted opinions. The active contribution relates to the frequency of highlighted regional preferences within the written amendments. Moreover, the incentives to participate within the ECoR are also examined. The EU strategies, the available resources and organizational capacity measure their political priorities within the EU arena.

Policy learning

As mentioned before, policy learning is defined as the increased understanding of the subnational context where the Commission taps into the know-how of SNAs to determine potential gaps in their legislative proposal. The increased understanding relates to beliefs, experiences and information provided by the SNAs to increase the Commission's knowledge. By comparing the Commission's preferences and the 'real life' experiences of the SNAs, different policy options are explored or even adjusted. Therefore, the input and output of the sub-commissions are examined. The contributions are examined by analyzing the proposed written amendments. Moreover, the output of the commissions is analyzed using the drafted opinions and impact reports initiated by the Commission to examine the impact of the drafted opinions.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

For this research, the qualitative research approach provides insight into 'real-life contexts'. The collection of qualitative data examines experiences, perceptions and behaviors of organizations which are difficult to quantify (Foley & Timonen, 2015). By examining the internal processes and the position of the provinces within the ECoR, these experiences are measured. Secondary data such as policy and strategy papers provide a comprehensive framework and the opportunity to analyze potential differences and similarities. Besides, written amendments forward the SNAs policy preferences so qualitative methods are the most adequate. Moreover, the database of the ECoR consists of many policy documents used for the drafted opinions which also enhances the availability. Furthermore, EU strategies and annual reports of the provinces examine their incentives. The selected secondary data is analyzed using content and thematic analysis to test the frequency of certain concepts and identify relevant themes. These insights determine the position of the SNAs within the sub-commissions, incentives to participate and the Commission's adherence to the policy preferences.

All collected secondary data is based on desk research and consists of policy and strategy papers of the selected provinces related to Europe and the ECoR. These papers are derived from provincial websites and Notubiz, a database where all policy papers and annual reports of the province Overijssel are stored. This data set examines the incentives of the selected provinces to participate in the EU arena. Yet, a second data set examines the drafted opinions managed by the Dutch rapporteurs. This set includes written amendments, voting lists and meeting minutes to examine the proposed subnational preferences related to policy learning. Appendix II provides an overview of the selected policy and strategy papers.

Content and thematic analysis analyze the selected policy papers. Content analysis determines the presence of certain words such as the ECoR and themes related to the EU. The analysis describes the intentions of the units of analysis and the language used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To determine the incentives for participation in the ECoR, the communication is evaluated by using EU strategy papers. This approach is useful since direct information is gained from the units of analysis leaving out theoretical perspectives (Hopkins & King, 2010). Moreover, the same approach is used to identify the contributions of SNAs in the selected commissions and the presentation of the drafted opinion by the rapporteur. Nevertheless, the approach uses pre-defined codes which strengthens the existing theory in that particular field. These codes are discussed in sub-chapter 4.1 and 4.2.

For the last sub-question, the thematic analysis identifies themes present in the drafted opinions and their translations within the Commission's policy proposals. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research for analyzing, describing and reporting themes in data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A relevant thematic analysis provides useful findings due to its flexible nature. Besides, the approach is easily incorporated since the method is easy to learn which is most beneficial when researchers have limited time (Hopkins & King, 2010). Moreover, the analysis possesses different perspectives which leads to similarities and differences. The inclusion and exclusion criteria ensure the limitation of the scope of the analysis. Nevertheless, the inclusion and exclusion criteria need two different sets due to the presence of different data sets to answer different sub-questions.

Table 3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Provincial Policy and Strategy Papers

<u>Inclusion Criteria</u>	<u>Exclusion Criteria</u>
1. Policy papers, strategy papers and annual reports.	Scientific articles, joint policy papers.
2. The above-mentioned documents are from the selected provinces.	Papers from other provinces.
3. Papers are written in Dutch.	Papers are written in any other language.
4. The above-mentioned documents mention Europe or the European Committee of the Regions.	The above-mentioned documents do not mention Europe or the European Committee of the Regions.
5. Papers need to be written after 2020.	Papers are written before 2020.

For the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the provincial papers, the above-mentioned criteria ensure a close examination of the incentives of the province towards the EU. After the criteria, the selection consists of twelve policy papers, each case consisting of four documents. These papers consist of EU strategies, annual reports regarding EU programs or funds and annual budgets. Moreover, the data sets are similar for each case which limits possible differences. Yet, the selected documents need to be written after 2020. Because the enforcement of the EU program has started in 2021 and the provinces develop their strategy based on this program. For the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the ECoR documents, the documents provide SNAs preferences or demonstrate the rapporteurs' ability to forward the preferences into the drafted opinion. Moreover, the establishment of documents by other Committee members or rapporteurs is essential along with the content being Dutch or English. Annex II presents the list of the chosen policy papers and ECoR-related documents.

Table 3.4: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for ECoR Documents

<u>Inclusion Criteria</u>	<u>Exclusion Criteria</u>
1. ECoR related documents such as meeting minutes, work programmes etc.	Scientific articles, declarations by EU institutions, text of law etc.
2. The above-mentioned documents relate to the selected commissions.	Documents stemming from other commissions.

3. Papers are written in Dutch or English.
4. The above-mentioned documents address the selected opinions.

Papers that are written in any other language.
ECoR documents are not addressing the selected opinions

3.4 Data Analysis

To answer the sub-questions, the software Atlas.ti analyzes the collected data. The program allows for the analysis of qualitative data and requires coding and analyzing to build literature reviews. For the second sub-question, content analysis determines the motivation of the selected provinces to participate within the EU arena. With this approach, the existence of political priorities and resources are identified. Moreover, it determines the intentions of the selected provinces towards the EU and the ECoR. Therefore, the selected policy papers require the development of keywords for the analysis. As for the EU strategies and the annual reports regarding EU funds and programs, the researcher aims to read the whole document using the identified codes. The codes analyze relevant parts of the selected policy papers which provide insight into the incentives of the provinces. Later, the Text search uses the same codes to check whether the researcher has coded all the relevant parts. As for the annual budgets, the keyword '*Europa*' allows the researcher to filter out irrelevant information due to the size of the documents. The keyword provides relevant paragraphs which can be further coded. Moreover, the researcher repeats this process to limit research bias.

For the third sub-question, the content analysis identifies themes in the amendments proposed by Committee members and information provided by the rapporteur. By analyzing the proposed codes, similarities and differences between the different opinions and their effect are explained. Moreover, the amendments provide insight into the presence of policy learning which relates to the beliefs, experiences and knowledge of SNAs. Therefore, codes are first developed to analyze relevant documents. Then the documents are analyzed using the Text Search function and input of the researcher. Lastly, data extraction tables are created to identify potential similarities and differences.

Lastly, the fourth sub-question is analyzed based on thematic analysis to identify the impact of the subnational preferences in the adopted legislative proposals. Therefore, the drafted opinions along with the impact reports are used to provide an overview of the relevant themes. The drafted opinions are examined to develop key themes and the impact reports are used to examine the re-occurrence of the

themes. Therefore, the researcher familiarizes itself with the content of the opinions to formulate themes. Then, this process is repeated to sharpen the first set of developed themes. Lastly, the impact reports are analyzed using pre-defined themes.

3.5 Limits of the Research and Ethical Issues

In the proposed research design, several threats and limitations are involved. One of the limitations is that the proposed design includes a case study which limits the ability to generalize the findings of the research. Nevertheless, Seawright & Gerring (2008) argue that case studies are useful to provide a detailed explanation of the relationship between the cases and the 'real-life' context. Moreover, they argue that the MSSD possesses a solid basis for generalization due to the similar background variables (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Besides, the cases do not depend entirely on the results but also rely on the theory which allows for generalization to other settings (Gerring, 2004). By conducting content and thematic analysis, researcher bias is a relevant threat regarding the validity and reliability of the developed codes. Nevertheless, by introducing an intra-coder reliability test, the researcher coded the same texts twice leaving a minimum of five days between the coding. This approach strengthens the consistency and validity of the codebook. Moreover, the intercoder reliability test is not doable due to the limited period of the research.

As for thematic analysis, the limited data interpretation is also seen as a limitation. By only evaluating themes that are explicitly present in the data, relationships between the different themes are neglected. Yet, the purpose of the thematic analysis is to identify the themes in the policy proposals of the Commission and is not focused on the relationships between the different themes. The chosen research design is the most appropriate since the multiple case study illustrates the internal processes of the Committee and the role of the provinces. Moreover, the choice to use secondary data is strengthened by the easy accessibility of the policy documents. Also, the focus of the research is on forwarding written policy adjustments. Therefore, policy in practice is neglected and therefore limits the focus on the research. Yet, this limitation also leaves out the practical implications of the legislative proposals. By conducting content and thematic analysis, the absence of respondents strengthens the unobtrusive data collection. Moreover, the research approach is highly flexible since all documents are accessible through several databases. As for the ethical issues, no approval from the ethics committee is required since the research does not require direct involvement with individuals.

4. Results

The first part of the analysis discusses the content analysis to identify the provinces' commitment towards the ECoR and their political priorities towards the EU. Based on the results, the second sub-question is addressed. The second part of the analysis examines the contribution of the sub-commissions to the opinions. Lastly, the selected drafted opinions analyze whether the region's contributions are visible in the Commission's final legislative proposals.

4.1 The Position of the Selected Provinces in Europe

To answer the second sub-question, the content analysis identifies the presence of certain words and themes such as the ECoR and political priorities towards the EU. The analysis provides insight into the province's stance towards the ECoR and its priorities in the EU arena. Therefore, the policy papers and annual reports are selected based on the selection criteria. Second, keywords are formulated along with categories and decision rules. Lastly, data is extracted from the relevant policy papers.

4.1.1 Identification of keywords

As for the composition, the keyword 'ECoR' identifies if the selected province highlights the role of the ECoR in their internal documents. Moreover, the keyword also analyzes whether the province acknowledges their role within the ECoR and mentions the positive effects of participation. Second, the political priorities of the provinces towards the EU analyze the potential overlap between the province and the ECoR. Yet, the discussion section elaborates more on this notion. Moreover, the means to reach the political priorities is how the provinces realize their political priorities. Lastly, resources evaluate the scope of acquired EU funds and the internal investment of the province related to co-financing. Appendix III presents a detailed version of the coding scheme.

Table 4.1: Summary of Keywords

Units of meanings	Categories
ECoR	Numbers
Political priorities towards the EU	Energy, Climate adaptation, Agriculture, Mobility & Infrastructure, Economy, Transition of Industry.
Resources	Co-financing or acquisition of EU funds.
Means towards the EU (defined according to political priorities)	Policy, Funds, Knowledge and Networks.

4.1.2 Data extraction

The analysis examines twelve policy papers. The selected papers consider the selection criteria described in Subchapter 3.4 of this paper. In total, four papers were analyzed for all selected cases with

similar compositions. The data set included an EU strategy, annual reports discussing the progress of EU strategies or EU programs and annual budgets relating to EU funds or co-financing. The extraction of the data ensures the sorting of the papers into three different categories namely Drenthe, Overijssel and Zuid-Holland. First, Atlas.ti analyzes all documents to find the keyword 'ECoR' using the search function. Later, the analysis repeated for the EU strategies and annual reports to diminish the error. Next, the classification of the political priorities identified the keywords: 'Energy', 'Climate adaptation', 'Agriculture', 'Mobility & Infrastructure', 'Economy', and 'Transition of Industry'. Moreover, the keywords relating to the means towards the EU are classified as 'Policy', 'Funds', 'Knowledge' and 'Networks'. Appendix IV presents the data extraction Table 5a, an overview of present keywords in the selected papers.

Moreover, data extraction table 5b provides a comprehensive overview of the political priorities with the accompanying means. The left column lists the name of the EU strategies and annual reports related to EU programs, and keywords such as the ECoR, political priorities and means towards the EU (policy, knowledge, funds and networks) each have their column. Data extraction table 5a provides a general overview of the analyzed keywords. Table 5b illustrates a more detailed version where the means towards the EU are illustrated per policy paper. Moreover, Table 5c provides an overview of the presence of co-financing and acquisition of EU funds in the policy papers.

4.1.3 The position of Drenthe, Overijssel and Zuid-Holland

This section discusses the second sub-question based on the content analysis discussed in Subchapter 4.1. The descriptive question focuses on the position of the provinces in Europe using their EU strategies. The content analysis provides insight into their position towards the ECoR and their political priorities accompanied by their means. Moreover, the available resources of the province regarding the EU determine the internal investments and acquisition of EU funds. The data extraction tables demonstrate that all selected provinces mentioned the ECoR in their policy papers. Moreover, the political priorities overlap between the different provinces because the work program of the Commission and its priorities are similar for all regions. Yet, some papers explicitly mention the role of the ECoR whereas others remain vague. Moreover, the available resources differ between the provinces due to their administrative and financial capacities. The position of the selected provinces towards Europe is discussed in more detail below.

4.1.3.1 Drenthe

In 2021, the province of Drenthe established their first 'Europa Agenda' where the role of Brussels regarding knowledge and resources was illustrated. Their EU strategy explicitly mentions the role of the ECoR within the EU arena and Drenthe's position within the Committee. Moreover, the strategy highlights their position of rapporteur within the ENVE VII and emphasizes their ability to influence EU policy and profile the province. This illustrates that Drenthe values the participation of the province within the ECoR and acknowledges its role within ENVE VII. Moreover, Drenthe views the ECoR mainly as a platform to influence EU policy, which is also one of the main features of the Committee.

*'In het huidige collegeperiode is de Provincie Drenthe aangewezen als vast lid van het **Comité van de Regio's** en heeft zitting in de Commissie ECON (Commissie economische en monetaire zaken) en de Commissie ENVE (Commissie Milieu, Klimaatverandering en Energie) die zich onder andere richt op energie en klimaat. In het Comité heeft Drenthe een actieve rol. Zo is zij fractiecoördinator Green Deal going local voor de ECR en **rapporteur** inzake het Actieplan Circulaire Economie' (Provincie Drenthe, 2021, p. 5).*

*'In the current college period, the Province of Drenthe has been designated as a permanent member of the **Committee of the Regions** and sits on the ECON Committee (Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs) and the ENVE Committee (Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Energy), which focuses on energy and climate. Drenthe plays an active role in the Committee, serving as the fraction coordinator for the ECR's Green Deal Going Local and as the **rapporteur** on the Circular Economy Action Plan' (Province Drenthe, 2021, p. 5).*

*'Door het lidmaatschap van Drenthe is de provincie verder op de Europese kaart gezet. Als **rapporteur** op het Actieplan Circulaire Economie voor de Commissie Milieu, Klimaatverandering en Energie (ENVE) hebben wij bovendien een belangrijke sleutelpositie in handen' (Provincie Drenthe, 2021, p. 5).*

*Through the membership of Drenthe, the province has profiled the region in the EU arena. As **rapporteur** on the Action Plan for Circular Economy for the Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE), we also have an important key position in hand.' (Province Drenthe, 2021, p. 5).*

Next to Drenthe's relation towards the ECoR, the political priorities of Drenthe focus on Agriculture, Climate adaptation, Energy, and Mobility & Infrastructure where the means to realize the priorities are limited to knowledge, funds, networks and policy. Nevertheless, Drenthe utilizes knowledge and networks the most to reach its political priorities. The frequently mentioned networks are regional networks such as the SNN or active membership in INTERREG programs. Moreover, knowledge is gained

through regional or European contacts and focuses on active lobbying towards Brussels. Lastly, Drenthe positions itself as the hydrogen region where EU subsidy facilitates the first Hydrogen Valley.

4.1.3.2 Overijssel

For the province of Overijssel, Europe is an important theme but limits itself to the acquisition of EU funds instead of the ECoR. Overijssel has an important role within the ECoR, but its strategy neglects the ECoR and their role within the EU. In 'Overijssel en Europa – evaluatie van fondsen 2016-2020', the province mentions the ECoR and their position as rapporteur. Yet, the document only explains the ECoR and its advisory role globally. Therefore, it neglects its role within the ECoR and the opportunity to profile Overijssel within the EU arena.

*'(..) en nemen zitting in het **Comité van de Regio's**. Hierdoor hebben we een adviserende en **rapporterende rol** op EU-beleid, dat maakt dat we een stevige positie hebben in Brussel. We geven adviezen op wetgevende voorstellen van de Europese Commissie en hebben daarmee invloed op de teksten' (Provincie Overijssel, 2021, p. 2).*

*'(..) take seats in the **Committee of the Regions**. This gives us an advisory and **reporting role** on EU policies, which means we have a strong position in Brussels. We provide advice on legislative proposals of the European Commission and thus have an influence on the texts (Provincie Overijssel, 2021, p. 2).*

As for the political priorities, Overijssel focuses on Agriculture, Economy, and Mobility & Infrastructure. To achieve this, Overijssel utilizes EU funds and participates in relevant EU networks. Moreover, Overijssel wants to profile the province as a strong economic region where industrial modernization is central. To reach the set priorities, Overijssel focuses on the acquisition of EU funds and has received €516,7 million from 2014 to 2020.

4.1.3.3 Zuid-Holland

Zuid-Holland has along with the EU strategy also an international strategy which also encompasses relations with China. Where the other provinces have difficulties in reaching the EU, Zuid-Holland has found ways to influence policy and acquire EU funds. The province views the ECoR as a platform to influence EU policy. Moreover, the strategy highlights the role of the rapporteur and uses the position to profile the province.

*'Daarbij leveren wij input, bijvoorbeeld via het Europese **Comité van de Regio's**, waarin 300 Europese regio's vertegenwoordigd zijn. Wij gelden aldaar als gespreks- en sparringpartner van de EU instituties.'(Provincie Zuid-Holland, 2020, p. 5).*

*'In addition, we provide input, for example through the **European Committee of the Regions**, which represents 300 European regions. We act as a conversation and sparring partner of the EU institutions there.'(Provincie Zuid-Holland, 2020, p. 5).*

Where influencing EU policy via the ECoR is one of the objectives, the province also acquires a large amount of EU funding, namely over €2 billion. Horizon 2020 which is an EU research and Innovation program provides the most funding. This relates to the presence of many knowledge institutions such as UMCs in Zuid-Holland (ERAC, 2022a). Nevertheless, the allocation of the budget for co-financing is dismissed due to the delay in the availability of EU programs. As for political priorities; Economy, Energy & Climate, and Mobility & Infrastructure are the most relevant themes. The province positions itself as a strong industrial region where energy transition is central. Therefore, networks and policy influence are used as means to reach the priorities.

4.1.4 Discussion on the position of the provinces within the EU

The previous Subchapter 4.1.3 discusses the results of the analysis. This section focuses on the similarities and differences between the different cases. A general observation, all EU strategies or annual reports mention the ECoR at least once. Table 4.2 illustrates that the province of Drenthe mentions the ECoR the most in their internal documents. Especially, their EU strategy highlights their role within the ECoR by mentioning their position as rapporteur and their contribution to the *New Circular Economy Action Plan*. Moreover, the strategy explains the ECoR and its role within the EU arena. Lastly, Drenthe views the ECoR as a network platform where influencing policy, sharing knowledge and relations are central. Consequently, the annual budget also highlights the importance of the ECoR and the benefits of acting as a rapporteur to profile the province.

In comparison, the province of Overijssel and Zuid-Holland do not frequently mention the ECoR in their documents. In the EU strategy of Overijssel, the Committee is not even mentioned. Only the document '*Evaluatie van EU fondsen*' mentions the ECoR and highlights the position of rapporteur which is used as network contact and to influence EU policy. They aim to utilize their position to profile the province as a strong industrial economy and utilize the ECoR to influence EU policy. Yet, their position as rapporteur expects that the provinces highlight their role and purpose of the ECoR in their internal documents.

Table 4.2: Frequency of ECoR in the Internal Documents

	<u>Drenthe</u>	<u>Overijssel</u>	<u>Zuid-Holland</u>
ECoR is mentioned in the internal documents.	32	5	5

The differences between the provinces also apply to the availability of resources. As illustrated Zuid-Holland acquires the most EU funds, leaving Drenthe and Overijssel behind. Different factors explain these differences. First, the regional economic differences demonstrate that the regions have different structures. As illustrated by the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2022), the gross domestic product (GDP) within the provinces differs extensively. Where the GDP of Zuid-Holland is €180 million, the GDP of Drenthe is limited to €16 million and Overijssel to €47 million. Moreover, the total full-time equivalent (FTE) also demonstrates regional differences. Zuid-Holland has a total of 1.655 million FTE whereas Overijssel is limited to 508.500 FTE and Drenthe to 189.500 FTE (CBS, 2022). This demonstrates that the economies of the selected provinces all have different structures regarding business climates and sector structures. Table 4.3 illustrates the level of GDP and FTE for all Dutch provinces.

Table 4.3: GDP and FTE of all Dutch Provinces

<i>Provinces</i>	GDP (million euros)	Full Time Equivalent (FTE) X 1000
<i>Noord-Holland</i>	183.079	1.481,7
<u>Zuid-Holland</u>	<u>180.471</u>	<u>1.655,0</u>
<i>Noord-Brabant</i>	129.513	1.216,9
<i>Gelderland</i>	86.735	903,4
<i>Utrecht</i>	81.305	702,1
<i>Limburg</i>	49.119	482,6
<u>Overijssel</u>	<u>47.980</u>	<u>508,5</u>
<i>Groningen</i>	25.635	242,7
<i>Friesland</i>	22.633	258,4
<u>Drenthe</u>	<u>16.388</u>	<u>189,2</u>
<i>Zeeland</i>	15.874	153,1
<i>Flevoland</i>	15.476	154,9

Source: CBS (2022)

Second, as mentioned by ERAC (2022b) the acquisition of EU funds also highly depends on the presence of knowledge and research institutes such as universities, academic hospitals and research facilities within the provinces. Where Zuid-Holland facilitates the basis for many knowledge institutes such as ESA/ESTEC, LeidenBioSciencePark and Erasmus MC (Provincie Zuid-Holland, 2020). The scale of Drenthe and Overijssel is smaller leading to a limited number of universities, universities of applied science and knowledge institutes present in the provinces. Yet, the acquisition of EU funds also relates to the administrative and financial capacity of the provinces. The examination of the total budget illustrates the number of employees and provincial executives which significantly differ. Table 4.4 demonstrates a

significant difference between the annual budgets of the provinces. The budget of Zuid-Holland is substantial whereas Drenthe and Overijssel have limited resources (Provincie Zuid-Holland, 2021; Provincie Drenthe, 2022; Provincie Overijssel, 2022). Moreover, differences in administrative capacity are present where Drenthe consists of 600 employees and Zuid-Holland of 1.600 employees. Therefore, these administrative structures explain the differences in the acquisition of EU funds.

Table 4.4 Indication of Financial and Administrative Capacity

	<u>Drenthe</u>	<u>Overijssel</u>	<u>Zuid-Holland</u>
Total annual budget	€350.791	€477.500	€892.522
Total of employees	600 employees	750 employees	1.600 employees
Total of provincial executives (PS)	41 PS	47 PS	55 PS

As discussed, both the internal investments and acquisition of EU funds differ between the provinces. Table 4.4 demonstrates the differences between both internal investments and the acquisition of funds. An important observation is the differences between the internal investments. Drenthe and Overijssel have allocated a budget to co-finance EU projects. Yet, the budget of Zuid-Holland is missing due to the delay of the new call for EU programs. The latest annual budget demonstrates that the province participates in several EU programs but the budget for co-financing is lacking (Provincie Zuid-Holland, 2023). To conclude, the administrative differences related to the size of the organization along with the financial differences related to availability of resources and acquisition of EU funds explain the differences between the provinces. Moreover, the work climate of the different provinces and their sector structures partly explain the differences.

Table 4.4 Internal Investments and Acquisition of Funds

	<u>Drenthe</u>	<u>Overijssel</u>	<u>Zuid-Holland</u>
Internal investment (2022)	€10,9 mil.	€14,6 mil	€2,8
Acquisition of funds (2014-2020)	€71 mil.	€516.7 mil.	€2.527 bil.

4.2 Policy Learning within ECON and ENVE

This sub-chapter discusses the results produced by the content analysis which provides insight into whether the selected commissions facilitate policy learning. Therefore, proposed amendments initiated by both the rapporteurs and commission members are examined. Different from the other analysis, the researcher used a deductive approach where the development of codes occurred during the analysis of the text. The developed codes relate to the structure of the written amendments where the outcome, topic, type and content are important. Moreover, the contribution of commission members or rapporteur is analyzed along with whether the content relates to policy learning. Appendix V provides a detailed description of the codes along with the categories and decision rules.

4.2.1 Data extraction

The analysis examines twelve internal documents relating to the proposed written amendments. Moreover, the selection uses no selection criteria because of the limited scope of the internal documents. The data set consists of proposed written amendments and voting lists since those documents illustrate potential policy learning within the commissions. The researcher analyzed all written amendments by using codes such as 'Type of amendment', 'Outcome of amendment', and 'Contribution'. Later the researcher analyzed the content of the amendments using a different set of codes such as 'Policy learning', 'Related to other EU priorities' and 'Need for regulatory framework'. These codes examine whether the amendments relate to policy learning. Lastly, the code 'policy learning' is further specified to gain insights into the different components of policy learning such as beliefs, information or experiences.

In Appendix V, data extraction table 7a demonstrates the code 'Topic of the proposed amendments'. Amendments related to 'Content' and 'Wording' are often proposed. The amendments relating to the code 'Wording' encompass grammar mistakes or the use of different words to ensure effective messaging. As demonstrated by Table 7a, these amendments are the most visible in the New Circular Economy Action Plan (NCEAP) and SME Strategy. Yet, amendments relating to 'Content' are of interest for the proposed research question. Most amendments of the New Industrial Strategy (NIS) relate to the content. Moreover, the amendments of NCEAP and SME strategy also involve amendments relating to the content. Moreover, the content of the proposed amendments is specified using a different set of codes. Appendix V provides table 7b which illustrates the content of the amendments. The table illustrates that for all opinions, content amendments relating to policy learning are often proposed. Next to policy learning, amendments relating to the need to develop a regulatory framework are often proposed.

4.2.2 Presence of policy learning within ENVE VII and ECON VII

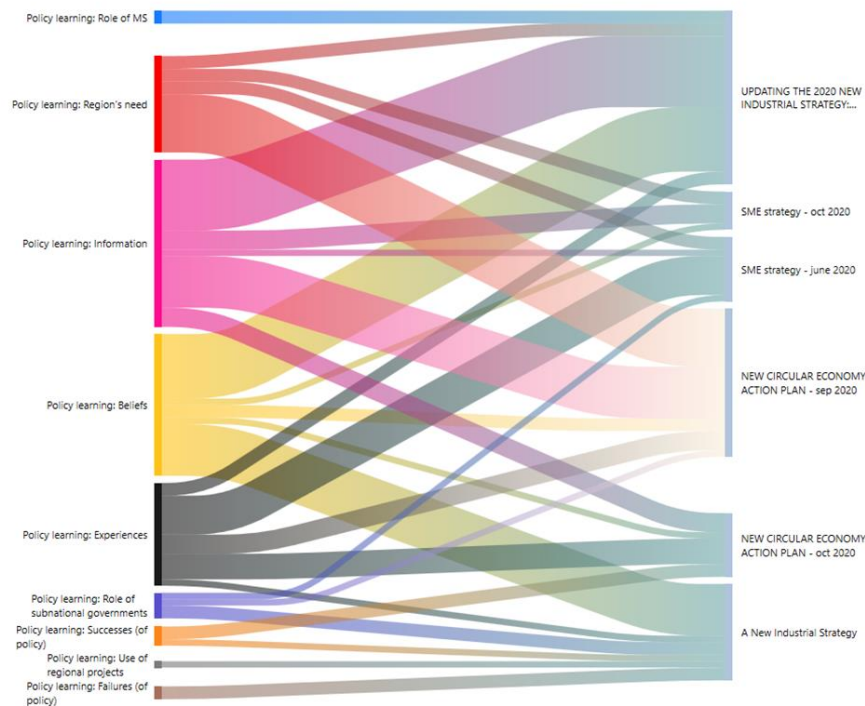
As mentioned before, most amendments proposed by both the rapporteur and commission members relate to the content of the opinions with the primary focus on policy learning. The code 'policy learning' consists of the beliefs, experiences, failures (of policy), information, region's needs, role of member states, role of subnational governments, successes (of policy) and regional projects. This subchapter demonstrates the visibility of the components of policy learning in each opinion by using quotations. Figure 4.5 illustrates all the amendments relating to policy learning presented in the drafted opinions. The amendments mention the region's needs, information, beliefs and experiences the most. Moreover, there is a difference in the density of the amendments relating to policy learning. Nevertheless, the number of proposed amendments explains the difference. For instance, the *Update on the New Industrial Strategy* consists of 30 amendments. Yet, the *SME Strategy* consists of only 20 amendments. Consequently, some amendments relate to several codes such as Amendment 12 of the NCEAP 2020.

Amendment 12 of NCEAP 2020

'On climate ambition, the Green Deal and SDGs calls on the European Commission, the Member states and LRAs to ensure a timely implementation of the European Green Deal, ensuring that it serves as solid basis to relaunch the EU economy in a way compatible with meeting EU's energy, climate and environmental objectives' (New Circular Economy Action Plan, 2020).

This amendment relates to policy learning with a focus on the region's needs and the call for needed action by the Commission. Therefore, the density of some opinions is significantly higher. Next, Figure 4.5 shows all the developed codes relating to policy learning along with the names of the drafted opinions. The density of the lines indicates the presence of certain codes within the drafted opinions. For instance, the code 'Information' is significantly present within the *Update on the New Industrial Strategy*. Yet, the amendments relating to the code 'Experiences' are not frequently presented. Moreover, the figure also demonstrates that 'Region's needs', 'Information', 'Beliefs' and 'Experiences' are mostly present within the opinions. Therefore, the codes relating to 'Role of subnational governments', 'Successes and failures of policy' and 'Use of regional projects' are unimportant. The next section provides a deeper understanding of policy learning related to opinions.

Figure 4.5: Policy Learning and the Opinions



4.2.2.1 New Industrial Strategy

The New Industrial Strategy encompasses the draft opinion of October 2020 and an update of the opinion discussed in September 2021. The strategy focuses on the Commission's proposal to limit foreign dependency and emphasizes the need to rebuild the EU's key technology with a focus on climate change (European Commission, 2020). The opinion emphasizes the territorial dimension of the proposal, granting regions a more prominent role in the industrial transition. The so-called place-based approach ensures the increased involvement of regions within the implementation process (European Committee of the Regions, 2020b). Moreover, the update focuses on rebuilding the EU industry along with the leading twin green and digital transitions. Nevertheless, this opinion also highlights the effects of COVID-19 where great adaptation from industry is required (European Committee of the Regions, 2021).

For both opinions, the contribution of the commission members is significant. In total, the rapporteur proposed nine amendments and the commission members proposed 47 amendments. The commission members from Germany and the Netherlands proposed most of the amendments. Yet, 40 amendments were accepted, and 16 amendments were rejected. Consequently, the tone of most amendments is neutral, where a negative tone is not present. As for the topic of amendments, most amendments relate

to content and the rapporteur's amendments relate to wording. Moreover, the content of the amendments relates often to policy learning, which the next section examines.

4.2.2.1.2 Policy learning

Most amendments relating to policy learning contain region's beliefs and information. Figure 4.6 illustrates the different components of policy learning along with examples. The data shows that amendments containing beliefs and information are often proposed. This illustrates that commission members forward their regional beliefs and knowledge ensuring incorporation of their policy preferences within the opinions. Moreover, the amendments of the *New Industrial Strategy of 2020* (hereafter NIS 2020) emphasize the region's beliefs, the role of SNAs and the successes and failures of policy. Besides, *the Update of the New Industrial Strategy* (hereafter Update NIS) also demonstrates amendments relating to beliefs. In comparison, the *NIS 2020* possesses more amendments relating to beliefs. The region's beliefs involve the support of several initiatives, regretting policy failures and underlining the role of industry towards the Green Deal. The density of the amendments demonstrates the eagerness of the commission members to forward their expectations towards the Commission along with examples of where the Commission has failed to fulfil its tasks. To illustrate, the quotation below illustrates the disappointment of the commission regarding the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal and urges the Commission to act. Moreover, the other quotation illustrates the sub-commission's conclusion that effective contributions of industry are needed to enforce the Green Deal. This is essential since most of the proposed amendments were accepted, indicating the importance of the region's beliefs and the demand for adjustment within the Commission's proposal.

'..regrets that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 9 on building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation has only produced moderate progress' (ECON VII, 2020, p. 8).

'..believes that it is only with a strong, effective contribution from industry that the Green Deal can really develop its full strength as a European growth strategy' (ECON VII, 2020, p. 1).

As for the *Update of the NIS*, policy learning relates mostly to information provided by the SNAs. Information contains advice given by the regions and the share of knowledge connected to the policy proposals or the regional industries. Most amendments contain recommendations regarding the Commission, highlighting needed policy instruments along with features of the regional industries and structures. To demonstrate, the quotation below highlights certain features of the regional industry, namely cross-border regions. Moreover, the other quotation demands a regulatory adjustment to facilitate industrial change. Besides, the committee members value these recommendations since most

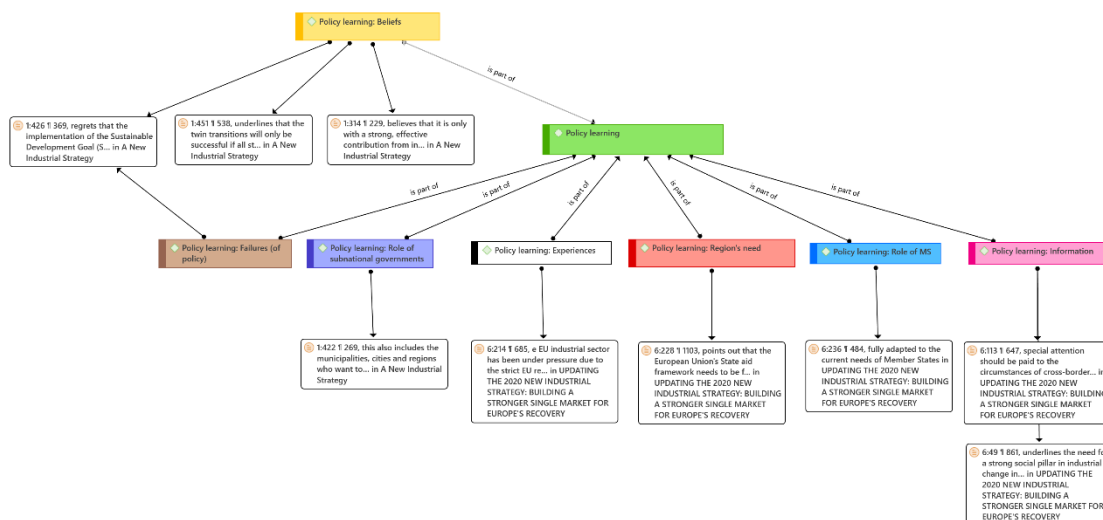
proposed amendments were accepted. This illustrates the incorporation of regional knowledge of policy areas within the opinions. Which paves the way for the Commission to use regional knowledge to update its legislative proposals.

'..special attention should be paid to the circumstances of cross-border regions and the specific requirements of these regions, particularly in the provision of cross-border services;..' (ECON VII, 2021, p. 9).

'..underlines the need for a strong social pillar in industrial change in order to adequately address the social consequences of structural change and enable regions that have been particularly badly affected by the pandemic to recover in economic and social terms;..' (ECON VII, 2021, p. 6).

The difference between the two opinions is the role of the regions and the effectiveness of certain policies. The Committee believes that their role was neglected in the Commission's proposal and is thus strongly highlighted within the NIS 2020. However, the update emphasizes the effects of COVID-19 on the industry and the need to incorporate the Green Deal objectives within the EU industry. The amendments relating to the region's role highlight the role of the SNAs within the implementation process and the cooperation between the private and public sector. This demonstrates that the Commission, in the eyes of the Committee, still neglects the role of the regions in the implementation process. An important observation since the Commission's aim was to include the SNAs and bring Europe closer to its citizens.

Figure 4.6 Policy Learning within the New Industrial Strategy



4.2.2.2 SME Strategy

The SME Strategy encompasses the draft opinion of June 2020 and October 2020. The final opinion was adopted on 12th October 2020. The strategy focuses on actively supporting SMEs to grant innovative start-ups a start in building a sustainable and digital Europe. The Committee's opinion highlights the recovery plan established due to COVID-19 and the limitation of the legislative and regulatory burden for SMEs (European Committee of the Regions, 2020c). For both drafted opinions, the commission members contributed more often than the rapporteur. Members from Germany and Spain proposed the most amendments. Besides, 30 amendments were accepted, and ten amendments failed. Consequently, the tone of most amendments is either neutral or positive. Nevertheless, the tone of some amendments is also negative. Also, the content of the opinion is mostly discussed where policy learning is central. The next section explores the features of policy learning present in the opinions.

4.2.2.2.1 Policy Learning

The region's experiences, needs and information are mostly mentioned in the proposed amendments. Figure 4.7 presents the different components of policy learning present within the proposed amendments. The data illustrates that not all pre-defined components were present. The number of the proposed amendments along with the topic of the amendments explain the differences. Moreover, the drafted opinions solely relate to five components of policy learning which is lower than other opinions. Besides, the amendments of the drafted opinion of October 2020 only emphasize two components of policy learning namely information and region's need. Yet, the drafted opinion of June 2020 relates to five components namely beliefs, experiences, information, region's needs and role of SNAs. Nevertheless, the small number of proposed amendments explains the differences. Still, most amendments illustrate the region's experiences. The Commission should use the regional experiences to determine the effectiveness of their proposals. The quotations below demonstrate amendments which forward the region's experiences.

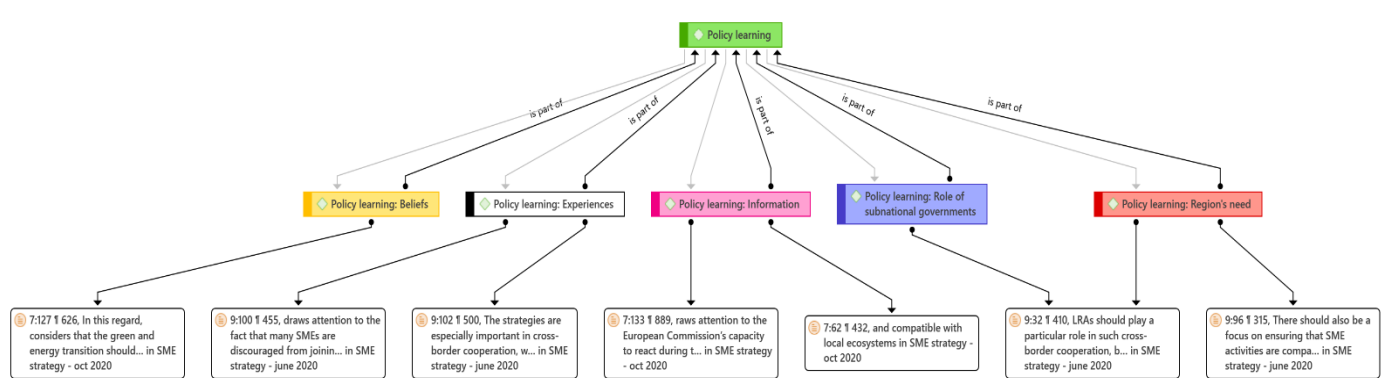
'..draws attention to the fact that many SMEs are discouraged from joining public tenders due to high costs related to the preparation of a competitive offer and complying with complex regulations' (ECON VII, 2020b, p.10).

'The strategies are especially important in cross-border cooperation, where there needs to be a particular focus on removing red tape such as the A1 certificate; ..' (ECON VII, 2020c, p. 10).

Most amendments of the drafted opinion in October 2020 consists of regional information. Where the territorial dimension, local dimension and COVID-19 are central. The Committee accepted all amendments which demonstrates the willingness of the Committee to forward their knowledge to the

Commission. Moreover, the amendments also illustrate the region's needs where the collaboration between government levels and private sector is highlighted. Nevertheless, amendments relating to beliefs play a small role where only the twin transitions were mentioned in relation to policy mechanisms. Figure 4.7 illustrates the different components of policy learning related to the SME strategy.

Figure 4.7 Policy Learning within SME strategy



4.2.2.3 New Circular Economy Action Plan

The New Circular Economy Action Plan consists of the draft opinions of September and October 2020. The opinion focuses on incorporating a circular economy model to reduce the EU's footprint. Therefore, the regions are important players since the region's activities also consist of resource management. Consequently, the reliance on virgin resources and third parties must be reduced (European Committee of the regions, 2020d). As for the proposed amendments, the number of amendments is significantly higher in relation to the other opinions. Therefore, the amendments relating to policy learning are more visible. In total, the members proposed 59 amendments for the opinion of September 2020 and later proposed 24 amendments. Nevertheless, the members rejected 21 amendments out of 59. Moreover, the latest opinion rejected 11 out of 24 amendments. The commission members of Finland, Germany and Luxembourg proposed the most amendments. Besides, the tone of the amendments is either neutral or negative, leaving a small number of amendments positively framed. Similar to the other opinions, most amendments relate to content and wording. Where policy learning is related to information, experiences and the region's needs.

4.2.2.3.1 Policy Learning

Most of the proposed amendments consist of information and regional needs. Figure 4.8 demonstrates an overview of amendments relating to policy learning. As for the NCEAP of September 2020, most amendments point out the region's needs. These amendments illustrate the need for research and

regulation along with the inclusion of stakeholders. This demonstrates unclarity of the NCEAP where further specification is needed. Moreover, specific programmes such as waste collection systems should incorporate regions to ensure the needed transitions. The quotations below emphasize the inclusion of stakeholders to share knowledge and experiences and highlight the need for additional programmes. In addition, the Committee indicates that further research and regulatory instruments are needed to accomplish the set objectives.

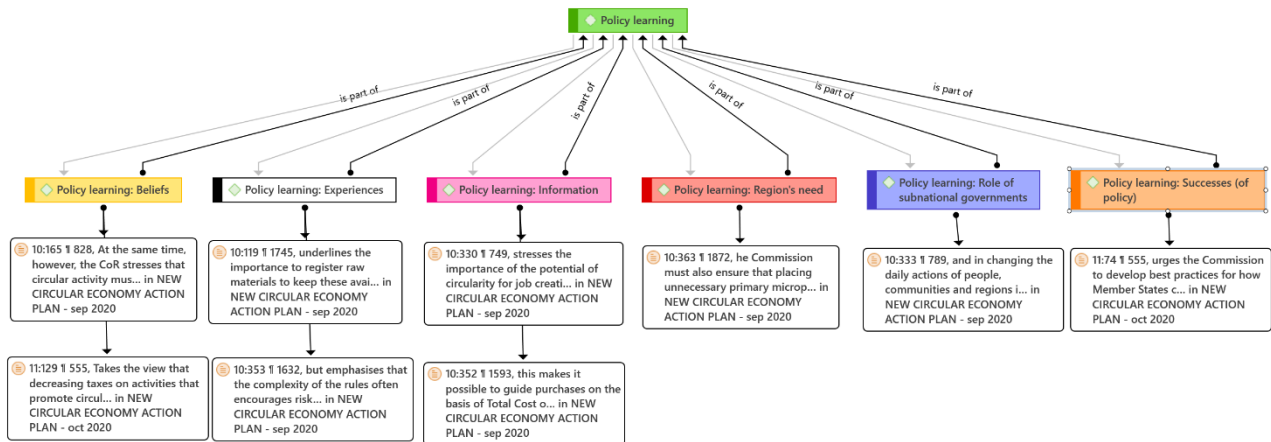
'..and which stakeholders at local and regional level can use to learn about the situation and activities of other regions. The programme must be a transparent digital system and should analyse the situation at regional, national and European level. In addition, the programme should offer resources to develop such activities at all levels' (ENVE VII, 2020, p. 10).

'..notes that further research and regulation on sustainable and recyclable material is needed. Especially if recycling does not mean downcycling to lower value products, the requirements for material separation and reuse become more ambitious in order to allow materials to be used in as many cycles as possible. Therefore the "cradle to cradle" approach gives a hint on how this principle of recycling before downcycling can be realised and depends on thorough product design' (ENVE VII, 2020, p. 49).

Yet, the amendments of October presents regional experiences and information. Still, these amendments also relate to the insufficient frameworks and instruments. Moreover the provided information illustrates the importance of aligning the content of the opinion to other EU priorities such as climate protection, industry and administrative burdens. Moreover, the region's experiences relate to the effects of COVID-19 and strict EU regulation regarding the Single Market. Therefore, policy learning consists mostly of information relating to the adjustment of policy instruments to build a circular economy. Yet, one amendment illustrates regional beliefs emphasizing the importance of tax systems to boost circularity. Nevertheless, most amendments demonstrate the regional experiences about waste management in all regions. Moreover, the legislative proposal seems to fail to incorporate the cross-border nature of waste management and neglects the role of the EU's outmost regions.

'draws attention to the fact that waste management in the outermost regions is particularly problematic due to the limitations of the waste treatment infrastructure and the lack of economies of scale for the collection, processing and recycling of waste;' (ENVE VII, 2020b, p. 47).

Figure 4.8 Policy Learning within NCEAP



4.2.3 Discussion on policy learning

The outcome of the content analysis indicates that all opinions consist of amendments relating to policy learning. Yet, the number of the amendments provides an implication of the results. Where the NCEAP contains 83 amendments, NIS contains 56 amendments and SME contains 40 amendments. Still, this also indicates that the content of the NCEAP is highly discussed and under much review. While the content of the SME strategy is more harmonious. Moreover, the tone of the amendments indicates that NIS and SME are framed neutral where some amendments also contain words such as 'welcomes' and 'support'. However, most NCEAP amendments are negatively framed. These amendments possess words such as 'regrets' and 'stresses'. This indicates that the Committee has more positive attitudes towards the NIS and SME strategy and the NCEAP is under more review.

Yet, policy learning is present in all drafted opinions where the NCEAP contains the most policy learning amendments. Still, the number of proposed amendments could explain the differences. Moreover, the policy learning amendments do differ between the opinions. The NIS contains amendments relating to beliefs and information where the role of industry and the support of policy initiatives is highlighted. Policy learning within SME strategy encompasses experiences, needs and information. Where experiences and information reveals the importance of the territorial dimension. Lastly, the NCEAP contains information, experiences and needs where the establishment of instruments and the inclusion of stakeholders is important. This indicates that in general, the regions are eager to share their needs with the Commission accompanied by their beliefs and experiences to form an argumentation.

Still, amendments of all opinions contain regional information and experiences where previously imposed instruments and legislations are reviewed. This provides a solid basis for SNAs to inform the

Commission about which policy instruments are effective in practice. Moreover, regional needs are often mentioned in relation to the inclusion of stakeholders or adequate funding or instruments. This relates more to the regional call upon the Commission to provide adequate assistance. Nevertheless, both components are easily incorporated within the legislative proposals and provide the Commission with alternative policy options. Overall, by actively discussing alternative policy options, the Commission could enhance their proposal and secure implementation. Besides, the regions are experts of their own territorial dimension and therefore know the implications of the proposed legislation. The Commission could therefore easily use the regional knowledge to update their proposals.

4.3 Visibility of Subnational Preferences

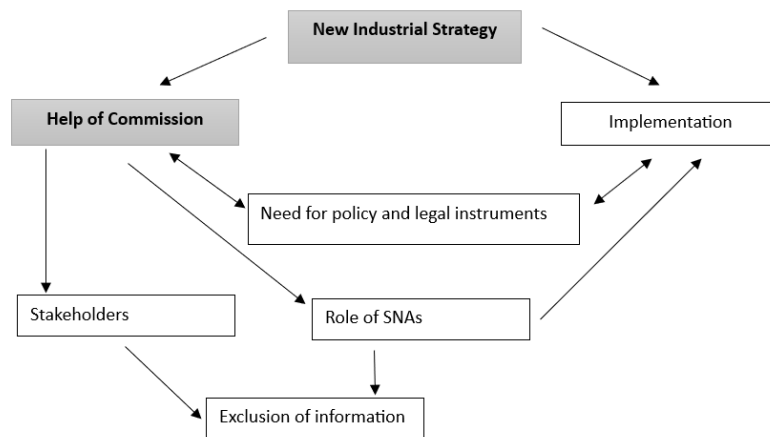
This subchapter examines the visibility of the subnational preferences within the final legislative proposals. Using the impact reports of the ECoR and the follow-up document provided by the Commission, the visibility of the opinions is identified. The follow-up documents encompasses points drafted by the Committee and the Commission's reaction. Yet, the Commission's reaction is limited and chooses on which points the Commission reacts. The thematic analysis determines similar themes between the different opinions and detect possible patterns. By reading the impact reports along with the Commission's reaction on the Committee's points the first set of codes are developed using an inductive approach. Moreover, this process is repeated to diminish error. Later, the themes and sub-themes are grouped per opinion to identify similarities and differences. Yet, some themes differ due to the content of the Commission's reaction. The subchapter is structured based on the opinions and the relevant themes.

4.3.1 New industrial strategy

The Commission's reaction consists of 24 points drafted by the Committee. These points relate to the inclusion of stakeholders or SNAs, the need for policy or legal instruments, the need for resources and the content of the legislative proposal. The Commission accepted most of these points by acknowledging legislative gaps or the exclusion of certain stakeholders. Still, most acknowledged points highlight the need for more assistance. Therefore, the themes of the NIS contain 'Help of the Commission', 'New Industrial Strategy', 'Role of SNA's and Stakeholders'. These themes are further specified into different sub-themes for example 'Help of the Commission' contains the codes 'Inclusion of stakeholders', 'Network platform', 'Policy and Legal instruments' and 'Resources'. Appendix VII presents a detailed overview. Besides, Figure 4.9 presents a thematic map for the NIS where 'Help of the Commission' along with 'Implementation' are important due to their frequency. The help of the Commission relates to the need for policy and legal instruments and the inclusion of stakeholders.

Where the role of SNAs and stakeholder are important because of the exclusion of relevant information. Lastly, implementation relates to need for policy and legal instruments due to insufficient means to implement the proposal. This subchapter examines the impact of the opinions using the defined themes.

Figure 4.9 Thematic Map NIS



4.3.1.1 Help of the commission

As mentioned before, most of the acknowledge points relate to the 'Help of the Commission' which consists of the inclusion of stakeholders, establishing a network platform, developing policy and legal instruments and resources. Yet, the need for policy and legal instruments is the most important due to the facilitation of instruments to achieve the set goals, connecting the instruments to other priorities and objectives, and providing guidance for regions. For instance,

'..develop tools which can provide a clear roadmap for regions with a tailor-made approach to secure industrial leadership..' (European Commission, 2021, p. 113)

'..suggests that the Commission include this in the European Semester and link it to the National Reform Plans for Member State level' (European Commission, 2021, p. 111).

This indicates that the regions require more guidance to implement the proposed legislation and are therefore in need of more policy and legal instruments. Moreover, where the Commission recognizes some limitations regarding the instruments. They also often refer to existing instruments which offers a solution to the concerns of the Committee.

'The Commission has also proposed a Just Transition Mechanism including a Just Transition Fund under cohesion policy to support those areas most affected by a transition to a carbon neutral economy' (European Commission, 2021, p. 112)

Therefore, the Committee's points regarding the need for policy and legal instruments are effective in the sense that for some part the Commission considers the development of new instruments and refers to existing instruments to implement the proposed legislation. Next, the Committee believes that the establishment of network platforms are essential. These network platforms facilitate knowledge sharing, cooperation, sharing of best practices and experiences. This indicates that where the Committee could act as a network platform, the members encourage the Commission to establish other networks relating to the specific policy domain to ensure cooperation and implementation.

'..asks the Commission to provide assistance for innovation uptakes and to provide a framework in which clusters of firms can learn from each other, with or without assistance from entrepreneurship consultants, intermediaries or regional development agencies' (European Commission, 2021, p. 109).

4.3.1.2 Content of New Industrial Strategy

By examining the drafted opinion and follow-up document of the Commission it becomes clear that some themes are more important than others. Therefore, the sub-themes of 'COVID-19', 'Green and Digital transition' and 'Place-based' were created. Both the points of the Committee and Commission reveal the integration of the twin transition within the NIS. Both agree that the industry needs to transform into a green, digitised and sustainable industry and are therefore keen to involve the twin transition into the strategy. Moreover, COVID-19 also relates to the twin transitions since the industry was coping with the effects of COVID-19. Besides, the Commission acknowledges that rebuilding the industry needs the incorporation of sustainability and digitalisation. Lastly, the opinion frequently mentions the place-based approach due to effectively implementation. By granting regions the authority to determine which approach is the most appropriate, the wishes of citizens are respected.

4.3.1.3 Role of stakeholders and SNAs

The follow-up report also discusses the role of stakeholders and SNAs. Yet, where Appendix VII illustrates the role of stakeholders and SNAs as two different themes. This section discusses both themes since they are highly relatable. The role of the SNAs relates solely to the role of regions regarding the proposal. The theme is divided into two sub-themes were 'Assistance' and 'Implementation'. Assistance relates to the Commission helping regions, for instance to establish partnerships. Implementation relates to the Committee highlighting the role of the regions within the implementation process. The results indicate that the Committee still highlights their role within the

implementation process and their ability to forward the legislation to the regional scale. Consequently, the Commission agrees with the unrepresented role of the regions.

Committee's point:

'Underlines that regional and local authorities have important competences in policy areas that impact on industrial developments and can mobilize a wide range of instruments to enable the implementation ...'
(European Commission, 2021, p. 107).

Commission's reaction:

'Only a shared commitment from the EU, its Member States, regions and cities, industry, SMEs and all other relevant stakeholders in a renewed partnership will allow Europe to make the most of the industrial transformation. In this context, the Commission has set up an inclusive and open Industrial Forum involving all relevant stakeholders...' (European Commission, 2021, p. 107).

Moreover, the theme is also concerned with including the industry (SME's), consumers and researchers to rebuild the industry. Yet, a renewed partnership between EU bodies, Member States and SNAs is considered important. Where the inclusion of industry is significant to share relevant experiences and implications of earlier proposals. Moreover, networks will bring these stakeholders together along with knowledge and experiences. Both the Commission and Committee agree on this proposal.

Committee's point:

'...underlines that the new EU Industrial Strategy should be an inclusive strategy; advocates including the group of innovation followers that struggle to keep up with the changes and bringing them along'
(European Commission, 2021, p. 108).

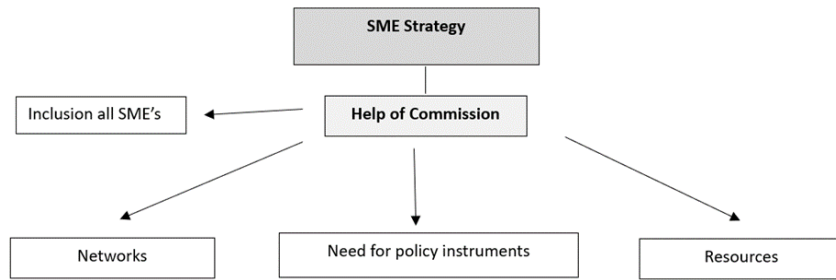
Commission's reaction:

'It will encourage cooperation, networking, and the exchange of ideas and knowledge, developing open innovation processes in organisations, funding and skills among national, regional and local innovation ecosystems.' (European Commission, 2021, p. 108).

4.3.2 SME Strategy

The reaction of the Commission consists of seven points drafted by the Committee. The scope of the points is limited and the Commission's reaction is rather short. These points reveal the inclusion of all SME's, the need of policy instruments and the need for funding. All points were accepted by the Commission, where the acknowledgement to include all SMEs was the most relevant. Figure 4.10 illustrates the thematic map for the SME Strategy where mostly the 'Help of the Commission' is required. This further relates to the inclusion of all SME's, establishment of networks, the need of policy instruments and the need for resources. The next section explains the themes further.

Figure 4.10: Thematic Map for SME Strategy



4.3.2.1 Help of Commission

The Committee's points identified the need for specific policy instruments to ensure the inclusion of all stakeholders and to monitor the implementation. This indicates that the proposal of the Commission neglects some segments of the SMEs and thereby also the role of the SNAs along with the territorial dimension. With the results of COVID-19 pandemic, the EU industry needed to be rebuilt based on the green and digital transition. The SME strategy actively contributes to the transition and considers the territorial dimension since SNAs understand their local challenges.

'..COVID-19 pandemic, the SME strategy addresses the priorities of the recovery period, which needs to be green and digital, and make Europe's economy resilient' (European Commission, 2021, p. 124).

'Regional and local authorities will have an important role to play in the Fit for Future Platform (F4F)' (European Commission, 2021, p.124).

Moreover, the Committee believes that some policy instruments need further specification to support SME's. Consequently, the call for adequate funding is essential to rebuild the EU's industry. Yet, the Commission promised an initiative to identify gaps within the Commission's agenda. Moreover, the InvestEU programme strengthens the availability of financial instruments. This indicates that the Commission seriously considers the points of the Committee and refers to either existing initiatives or makes a commitment to further develop instruments.

Committee's point:

'..improve SME test during the impact assessment of proposed regulations..' (European Commission, 2021, p. 126).

Commission's reaction:

'The EU SME Envoy will raise awareness on SME-related aspects in the Commission's Better Regulation Agenda.' (European Commission, 2021, p. 126).

'..SME accessibility to financing should not be limited to the special window for SMEs but should also be a major priority in the other three windows (of InvestEU).' (European Commission, 2021, p. 127).

'The InvestEU programme aims at streamlining the existing range of financial instruments by integrating them into a single one..' (European Commission, 2021, p. 127).

4.3.2.2 Content of SME Strategy

The content of the follow-up document reveals the themes 'COVID-19', 'Green and Digital transition' and 'Inclusion of all SMEs'. Similar to the NIS, the proposal highlights the transformation of the EU industry, and the role of SMEs. Yet, COVID-19 assured that the EU industry must also include sustainability. Therefore, the Green and Digital transformation is an important measure to rebuild the economy. Besides, both the Commission and Committee emphasize the notion of resilience to rebuild the economy. Moreover, the Committee believes that the Commission has neglected the role of all SMEs and highlights this part in their opinion. They argue that the Commission is too focused on the large industrial interests and neglects the SMEs. Consequently, the Commission also neglects the territorial dimensions where the effects for regional SMEs are not examined. Besides, the Committee argues that the proposals are too focused on the high-tech innovations such as AI and therefore neglects small and medium enterprises. The impact report of the ECoR reveals that the Committee has forwarded an important milestone regarding the territorial dimension of the SMEs policies (European Committee of the Regions, 2021b). By actively forwarding the role of SNAs regarding SME policies, the Commission recognized the importance of the territorial dimension and launched a project local eco-systems are central.

4.3.2.3 Role of stakeholders

The SME strategy highlights mostly the role of SNAs and small and medium enterprises. The Committee believes that both groups are underrepresented within the proposal and illustrates their role within the policy domain. The Commission also recognizes the role of SNAs due to the territorial dimension. Yet, the inclusion of SMEs is not recognized since the Commission argued that the strategy highlights the diversity of the SMEs. This indicates that the Commission believes that all SMEs are included in the strategy. Therefore, not all preferences are included in the legislative proposal.

Committee's point:

'..SME's diversity is insufficiently operationalised in the proposed measures.

The strategy primarily focuses on start-ups, scale-ups and high-tech SMEs.. ' (European Commission, 2021, p. 125).

Commission's reaction:

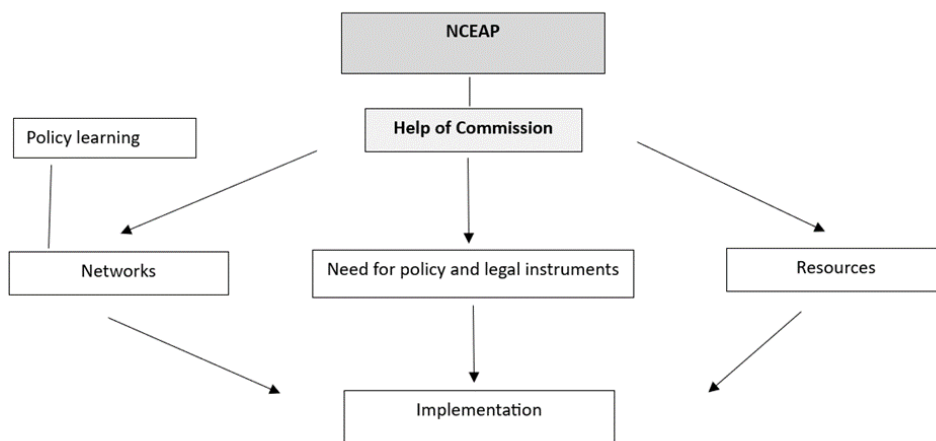
'The SME strategy requires the diversity of SMEs and proposes a comprehensive and cross-cutting approach taking into account their different needs.

The horizontal measures address the needs of all SMEs from individuals and micro-companies to family businesses and high-tech companies.' (European Commission, 2021, p. 125).

4.3.3 New Circular Economy Action Plan

The reaction of the Commission consists of 17 points where the need for policy and legal instruments are central. Moreover, the need for adequate funding and networks are relevant. Besides, some points drafted by the Committee relate to policy learning where knowledge sharing, and experiences are important to developing best practices. The reaction of the Commission focuses on referring the Committee to existing instruments or committing to develop instruments. Nevertheless, the Commission mostly referred the Committee to existing instruments. Still, the reaction is limited to the need for instruments instead of the recognition of the role of the SNAs or other stakeholders. The Committee strongly believes that the Commission should facilitate network platforms where different stakeholders are included. Figure 4.10 presents a thematic map for NCEAP and Appendix VII presents a more detailed version. Figure 4.10 demonstrates that 'Help of the Commission' is relevant to establish networks, policy and legal instrument and funding. Besides, policy learning within networks is highlighted since this relates to the research question.

Figure 4.10 Thematic Map for NCEAP



4.3.3.1 Help of the commission

The Committee referred frequently to the need for policy and legal instruments followed by the need for resources and networks. The call for more instruments relates to the further specification of instruments or the need for new instruments. In most cases, the Commission refers to existing instruments or acknowledges the need for a new instrument. This indicates that the Committee is unsure about several components of the Commission's proposal and asks the Commission to either specify or establish new instruments. Therefore, the reaction of the Commission is helpful since further explanation of their intentions is required. Nevertheless, the number of points relating to the need for instruments also indicates that the Commission is unclear in their previous proposals. Therefore, the Committee needs more specification.

Committee's point:

'..calls on the European Commission to propose a target on absolute waste generation per capita and for waste prevention targets for businesses and industries.' (European Commission, 2021, p. 95).

Commission's reaction:

'..Packing and Packaging Waste Directive with a view to decrease the generation of packaging waste, the Commission will put forward waste reduction targets for specific streams as part of a broader set of measures on waste prevention in the context of a review of Directive 2008/98/EC.' (European Commission, 2021, p. 95).

4.3.3.2 Content of NCEAP

The content of the drafted points and the Commission's reaction indicate that updating instruments and the role of SNAs are the most important. The proposal examines ways to create a cleaner and competitive Europe. Therefore, one of the main building blocks is ensuring sustainable growth throughout Europe. The limitation of dependency on natural resources and job circularity are therefore important. To achieve this, the Committee believes that the Commission should develop adequate instruments and funding. Besides, network platforms are important to share best practices and learn from other regions. Hence, policy learning is therefore present in the opinion. For instance, the Committee urges that the Commission should develop best practices for Member states to achieve circularity and develop cross-border solutions. Besides, the Committee calls for developing a programme where stakeholders can learn about the activities and experiences elsewhere.

4.3.3.3 Role of stakeholders

Similar to the other opinions, the Committee believes that the Commission neglects the role of SNAs within the implementation process. Especially, the Green Deal implementation needs cooperation and insights of territorial dimensions. Besides facilitating stakeholders with knowledge, programmes and

funding are also essential. Therefore, the Commission forwards existing programmes where cooperation between different stakeholders is central.

Committee's point:

'..regrets the very short chapter in the NCEAP on the role of Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) given that LRAs have an important role in the transition to the circular economy as a crucial player in initiating and scaling up much required innovation.' (European Commission, 2021, p. 95).

Commission's point:

'The Commission would also like to mention that the recent Green Deal Call demonstration of systematic solutions for the territorial deployment of the circular economy intends to involve Local and Regional Authorities in the implementation of circular solutions at local and regional scale.' (European Commission, 2021, p. 95).

4.3.4 Discussion on visibility of SNAs preferences

The outcome of the thematic analysis indicates that the Committee's legislative preferences do influence the legislative proposals of the Commission. Yet not all preferences are accepted by the Commission due to existing instruments or programmes. Still, the implementation is strengthened and knowledge increases due to the referral towards existing information and funding. Nevertheless, all the selected points also focus on the underrepresented role of the regions. However, the density of the points relating to the role of SNAs is worrying as it indicates that the Commission oversees the role of the SNAs within the implementation process. In most cases, the response of the Commission focuses on the acknowledgement of the role of the regions and therefore indicates the underrepresentation of regions within the EU arena.

Besides, the response of the Commission varies between the opinions. Where the Commission reacted on 24 points of the NIS and 17 points of the NCEAP, the SME strategy was limited to only seven points. This indicates that the NIS and NCEAP are higher on the Commission's agenda or that both strategies need more clarification. Moreover, the points of the SME strategy are rather short in comparison to the other reactions. The points consist of two to three sentences where the other reactions use multiple paragraphs. Therefore, the SME strategy does not require much clarification and the points delivered by the Committee are rather clear.

Yet, all points also relate to the region's need to clarify available instruments, funding and strengthening the position of stakeholders. This indicates that the Commission is rather vague in their communication of how to achieve certain objectives since all opinions were concerned with this topic. In most cases, the Commission either acknowledges the legislative gap or refers to existing instruments. This strengthens the position of regions since they acquire knowledge regarding existing instruments to implement the

proposal and obtain the recognition that more effort is needed of the Commission. To achieve objectives, funding is also essential. This notion is also visible in all the opinions and recognized by the Commission. Nevertheless, without adequate funding and instruments the regions cannot fulfil their implementation tasks and are therefore considered essential.

Lastly, network platforms are frequently mentioned in all opinions to assist stakeholders and share knowledge and experiences. The Committee believes that by establishing network platforms stakeholders can easily learn from other experiences and determine best practices. Yet, the Commission referred to several programmes relating to networking. But the suggestion of sharing best practices is neglected. Moreover, the NCEAP did explicitly mention the need to share experiences and learn from policy options in different countries which relates to policy learning. Yet, the Commission referred to monitoring possibilities which assists the region's ability to determine best policy practices. Therefore, the Commission does not value the possibility of policy learning. Overall, most of the drafted points are considered by the Commission. Yet, where the Commission is eager to adjust some policy instruments and include regions more often. Policy learning is neglected since the Commission forwards the task to the regions and does not facilitate a network platform or funding to realize this.

5. Conclusion

The previous chapters discussed the results of the sub-questions. This chapter answers the central research question using the answers to the previous sub-questions. The main research question is *'To what extent did the participation of the selected Dutch provinces in ECON VII and ENVE VII contribute to policy learning between the European Commission and SNAs from 2020 to 2023?'* Based on the qualitative analysis, the role of SNAs and the Commission's responsiveness was examined. To conclude, the regions have an influence on determining the next steps of the Commission. Moreover, their motivations are expressed within their EU strategies. Still, the influence varies between the selected cases based on the different components of policy learning.

The chosen method of case studies indicates that the selected commissions all demonstrate components of policy learning and can forward subnational preferences towards the Commission. The output generated by the commissions demonstrates the eagerness to forward regional experiences and knowledge. Besides, the results indicate that the region's information, experiences, needs and beliefs are often illustrated. Still, the influence of the selected sub-commissions is limited to the increased role of SNAs and urging the Commission to create new policy instruments. Where the proposed amendments relate to many components of policy learning, the Commission's reaction is limited to the

role and instruments. Therefore, the Commission acknowledges the underrepresentation of the regions and the insufficient policy instruments. Yet, the region's needs regarding for instance funding or network platforms are disregarded by the Commission. Yet, this contradicts the presumption that the ECoR functions as a symbolic body. Still, generalization to other settings is difficult due to the use of case studies. Though, this research indicates more nuances limited to the selected cases which are discussed below.

1. SNAs with large portfolios have more incentives to participate (Donas & Beyers, 2012).

Both authors argue that regions with extensive portfolios have greater incentives to actively engage in monitoring EU affairs. However, the findings suggest that even regions with comparatively smaller portfolios also exhibit motivations to participate in the EU arena. In addition, they manage to secure important positions, such as the role of rapporteur. The study reveals that Drenthe is considered the smallest region, as evidenced by its limited organizational capacity and resources. Nonetheless, their EU strategy places significant emphasis on the ECoR. They enlighten the ECoR's function and highlight their rapporteur position to influence EU policies. Moreover, Drenthe views the ECoR as a way to engage in relevant networks. Conversely, the EU strategies of the other cases overlook the significance of the ECoR within the EU arena and only name their role as rapporteur without providing a comprehensive understanding of this responsibility.

Furthermore, the other two cases possess greater organizational capacity and resources. Nevertheless, the assumption that regions with more resources tend to invest more in the EU arena proves invalid. As mentioned, both cases fail to demonstrate a commitment to the ECoR. In contrast, Drenthe and Overijssel have allocated a budget to co-finance EU projects, whereas Zuid-Holland neglects the new EU program by not establishing a budget. Additionally, organizational capacity enables these regions to establish a distinctive presence within the EU arena. However, although Zuid-Holland possesses significantly greater capacity compared to the other cases, their lack of commitment towards the ECoR undermines the potential of their capabilities.

In conclusion, the notion that regions with extensive portfolios have stronger motives to participate in the EU arena is inaccurate. In contrast, Drenthe, with its smaller portfolio determined by organizational capacity and resources, demonstrates a firm commitment to the EU and an interest in profiling the province within the EU arena. Conversely, Overijssel and Zuid-Holland neglect the ECoR and fail to recognize the opportunities it offers in their respective EU strategies.

2. Limited contribution of SNAs (Warleigh, 1999; Christiansen, 1996)

The contribution of the ECoR is often regarded as limited. Yet, the analysis of the number of the proposed amendments demonstrates the eagerness of the ECoR to forward their policy preferences. These amendments predominantly address regional information, beliefs, experiences, and needs, effectively forwarding the ECoR's position on existing policy instruments. These amendments hold relevance as they highlight deficiencies in policy instruments, regional structures, stakeholder inclusion, funding, and networking opportunities. By addressing these shortcomings, the ECoR guides the Commission to update their proposals and explore alternative policy options. The ECoR actively contributes by offering the Commission viable alternatives, facilitating adjustments to the proposed policies. Additionally, the regions emphasize the importance of regional context by discussing the structures of regional industries, thereby evaluating the effectiveness of established policy instruments. Furthermore, they advocate for the inclusion of stakeholders to ensure smooth implementation. Finally, the regions favour the establishment of funding instruments and network platforms to achieve their objectives.

The Commission acknowledges most of the points put forth by the ECoR, limited to creating policy instruments and incorporating stakeholders. The Commission either recognizes the legislative gaps within the proposals or refers to existing instruments. Thus, the contribution of the SNAs is substantial, as the Commission acknowledges the insufficiency of existing instruments. Additionally, the reference to existing instruments enhances the SNAs' contribution by providing them with valuable knowledge about established frameworks that can help achieve their objectives. Despite this, the Commission often overlooks the importance of stakeholder inclusion. Nevertheless, when stakeholder involvement is deemed necessary for implementation, the Commission accepts the ECoR's points. Yet, the Commission's reaction limits the SNAs contribution partly because the reaction focuses on policy instruments and inclusion of stakeholders. Therefore, the contribution of SNAs is bounded to updating the policy instruments and incorporating stakeholders but is not considered limited.

3. Role of regions increased (Hooghe & Marks, 1996).

Both authors argue that the role of regions has expanded within the multilevel governance model, primarily due to the absence of strong central governments. The findings indicate that regions now have an increased capacity to provide advice to the Commission. This advice is based on their regional experiences, knowledge, and needs. However, the Commission's response suggests that the ECoR still

needs to actively persuade the Commission of their role in the implementation process. Therefore, the amendments relating to information, needs and experiences are disregarded by the Commission. As a result, the Commission's reaction is selective and only indicates willingness to adjust their proposals when the role of SNAs is discussed. Despite the ECoR and the multilevel governance model, SNAs must constantly remind the Commission of their role within the EU decision-making process. Therefore, the influence of the commissions is partly limited to highlighting the role of SNAs.

Nevertheless, the region's role within the EU arena has expanded. The ECoR serves as a formal platform to formulate subnational preferences where the regions utilize the ECoR as a network platform to acquire knowledge about EU funds and networks. Therefore, the EU strategies of the selected cases demonstrate their successful integration within the arena, as they receive EU funds and participate in various networks. However, the Commission's response is somewhat curious, as the majority of proposed amendments do not specifically address the role of SNAs. Still, the reaction is limited to the region's role and therefore neglects other points put forth by the sub-commissions.

6. Discussion

6.1 Limitations of the Research

One of the most important threats to this research is researcher bias, as the researcher is involved in collecting and analysing data to support the hypothesis. The previously obtained knowledge, experiences and assumptions could influence the gathered data. Yet, by introducing an intra-coder reliability test, the gathered data is analysed twice by the same researcher to reduce error. Moreover, accuracy and consistency of the codebook is therefore strengthened. Besides, the amount of data is considered time-consuming. Yet, the sample selection criteria limit the scope of the documents and make the examination easier.

The last limitation of this research is the use of a small number of cases along with the method to use case studies. The limited scope hinders the ability to generalize the research findings to other settings and contexts. As stated, the ECoR consists of 329 members stationed in 27 member states. Yet, this limited scope allows the researcher to examine in-depth the position of the selected cases within the ECoR and their contribution to the legislative proposals. Moreover, the Commission's responsiveness is measured towards the selected proposals. These results are valuable since they reject the assumption that the ECoR functions as a symbolic body and urge to examine the positions of other members in different contexts to define similarities and differences.

6.2 Recommendations

As discussed in the conclusion section, the results present some nuances that are not aligned with the literature examined. This demonstrates opportunities for further research within other settings and contexts. First, future research might include different ECoR opinions and other commission members stationed in different member states. By examining different opinions and members, similarities and differences could be detected. Moreover, the research should also focus on the Commission's reaction and whether this also relates to the role of SNAs and policy instruments or includes other components. Besides, future research should focus on the Commission's stance towards ECoR opinions and whether they value the subnational preferences. Moreover, the adjustments made by the Commission must be evaluated to determine whether their focus only relates to the role of SNAs and policy instruments or extents within other opinions.

Moreover, the results indicate that the ECoR is an effective body and does influence legislative proposals. The results demonstrate that the SNAs can influence EU legislation and could therefore motivate SNAs to actively participate in the ECoR. With this knowledge, it would be interesting to conduct the research again after 2027 when the Commission announces a new set of priority areas and specific objectives. To determine whether the EU strategies of the selected cases still highlight the ECoR and specify its function. Moreover, the internal documents should be examined to determine whether the attitudes towards the ECoR have changed.

References

- Anckar, C. (2008). On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(5), 389–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401552>
- Bache, I., & Flinders, M. (2004). Multi-Level Governance and the Study of the British State. *Public Policy and Administration*, 19(1), 31–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095207670401900103>
- Bachtler, J., & Gorzelak, G. (2007). REFORMING EU COHESION POLICY. *Policy Studies*, 28(4), 309–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442870701640682>
- Bartolini, S. (1993) 'On Time and Comparative Research. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 5, 131–167.
- Bauer, M., & Börzel, T. (2010). Regions and the European Union. In *Handbook on Multi-level Governance*, 253–261. Edward Elgar. <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/53786/1/3.Henrik%20Enderlein.pdf>
- Bennett, C., & Howlett, M. (1992). The lessons of learning: Reconciling theories of policy learning and policy change. *Policy Sciences*, 25, 275-94. <https://www.sfu.ca/~howlett/documents/16845049.pdf>
- Benz, A. (2010). *Governance - Regieren in komplexen Regelsystemen: Eine Einführung*. Berlin: Springer.
- Bevir, M. (2002). A Decentered Theory Of Governance. *The International Journal of Ethics*, 6. <https://escholarship.org/content/qt0679z8mf/qt0679z8mf.pdf?t=lms9ve>
- Borghetto, E. & Franchino, F. (2009). The Role of Subnational Authorities in the Implementation of EU Directives. *Journal of European Public Policy* 17(6), 759-780.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. (2022). *Regionale kerncijfers; nationale rekeningen*. Centraal Bureau Voor De Statistiek. <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/84432NED>
- Christiansen, T. & Lintner, P. (2005). The Committee of the Regions after 10 Years: Lessons from the Past and Challenges for the Future. *EIPASCOPE 1*.
- Christiansen, T. (1996). Second Thoughts on Europe's "Third Level": The European Union's Committee of the Regions. Publius: *The Journal of Federalism*, 26(1), 93–116. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pubjof.a029842>
- Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A. J., & Sheikh, A. (2011). The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100>

- Crum B. & Fossum, J. (2009). The Multilevel Parliamentary Field: a framework for theorizing representative democracy in EU. *European political Science Review*, 249 – 271.
- Djundeva, M. & Den Ridder, J. (2021). *Dutch citizens' expectations and perceptions of the European Union*. Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.
<https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2021/10/08/verwachtingen-en-beeld-van-de-europese-unie-het-nederlandse-burgerperspectief>
- Dolowitz, D., & Marsh, D. (2000). Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-making. *Governance*, 13, 5-23. <https://doi-org.ezproxy2.utwente.nl/10.1111/0952-1895.00121>
- Donas, T., & Beyers, J. (2012). How Regions Assemble in Brussels: The Organizational Form of Territorial Representation in the European Union. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 43(4), 527–550.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjs042>
- Dunlop, C., & Radaelli, C. (2013). Systematising Policy Learning: From Monolith to Dimensions. *Political Studies*, 61(3), 599-619. <https://doi-org.ezproxy2.utwente.nl/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00982.x>
- Ebbers, R. (2021, January 22). Eddy van Hijum: “EU kan meer doen voor het mkb in de regio.” VNO-NCW. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.vno-ncw.nl/forum/eddy-van-hijum-eu-kan-meer-doen-voor-het-mkb-de-regio>
- ECON VII. (2020). *Merged amendments (AMP & AMRP): A New Industrial Strategy for Europe*. Cor-2020-01374-00-00-amp-ref-en 2020.
- ECON VII. (2020b). *Merged amendments (AMP & AMRP): SME Strategy*. Cor-2020-01373-00-00-amc-ref-en
- ECON VII. (2020c). *Merged amendments (AMP & AMRP): SME Strategy*. Cor-2020-01373-00-00-amp-ref-en
- ECON VII. (2021). *Merged amendments (AMP & AMRP): Update on New Industrial Strategy for Europe*. Cor-2021-01380-00-00-amp-ref-en
- Enderlein, H., Wälti, S., & Zürn, M. (2012). *Handbook on Multi-level Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- ENVE VII. (2020). *Merged amendments (AMP & AMRP): New Circular Economy Action Plan*. Cor-2020-01265-00-00-amc-ref-en.
- ENVE VII (2020b). *Merged amendments (AMP & AMRP): New Circular Economy Action Plan*. Cor-2020-01265-00-00-amp-ref-en

- ERAC. (2022a). *Monitoringsrapportage Provincie Zuid-Holland 2022*. <https://www.zuid-holland.nl/algemeen/zoeken/?query=monitoringsrapportage%20zuid-holland%20erac&selectedFacets=>
- ERAC. (2022b). *Analyse van EU-middelen brengt Zuid-Holland verder*. Retrieved May 10, 2023, from <https://www.erac.nl/case/analyse-van-eu-middelen-brengt-zuid-holland-verder/>
- Etheredge, L., & Short, J. (1983). Thinking about Government Learning. *Journal of Management Studies*, 20, 41-58.
- European Committee of the Regions. (2009). THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS' WHITE PAPER ON MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE. (2009/C 211/01).
- European Committee of the Regions. (2012). Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'building a European culture of multilevel governance: follow-up to the Committee of the Regions' White Paper'. (2012). *Official Journal*, C 113, 62-72. CELEX: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011IR0273\[legislation\]](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011IR0273[legislation])
- European Committee of the Regions. (2020). *Bringing Europe closer to people: The political priorities of the European Committee of the Regions 2020-2025*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/210360/CoR%20Political%20Priorities%20Brochure%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/210360/CoR%20Political%20Priorities%20Brochure%20(1).pdf)
- European Committee of the regions. (2020b). *A New Industrial Strategy for Europe*. ECON-VII/007.
- European Committee of the regions. (2020c). *SME Strategy*. ECON-VII/008.
- European Committee of the regions. (2020d). *New Circular Economy Action Plan*. ENVE-VII/006
- European Committee of the regions. (2021). *Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe's recovery*. ECON-VII/017
- European Committee of the Regions. (2021b). *Report of the Impact of COR opinions*. COR-2021-02293-10-00-NB-REF (EN) 1/38.
- European Commission. (2020). *Communication for the Commission: A New Industrial Strategy for Europe*. COM (2020) 102 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0102>
- European Commission. (2021). *92-nd Report CoR Follow-up Opinions October 2020*. Ref.Ares(2021)2073180.
- European Parliament. (2021). *Regulatory fitness, subsidiarity and proportionality — report on Better Law Making 2017, 2018 and 2019* (2022/C 81/06). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu.ezproxy2.utwente.nl/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52021IP0316>

- European Parliament. (2022, May). *The Treaty of Lisbon | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament*. Retrieved March 6, 2023, from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/5/the-treaty-of-lisbon>
- Eurostat. (2022). Eurostat: Regions in Europe. Retrieved April 3, 2023, from <https://ec.europa.eu.ezproxy2.utwente.nl/eurostat/cache/digpub/regions/#total-population>
- Foley, G. & Timonen, T. (2015). Using Grounded Theory Method to Capture and Analyze Health Care Experiences. *Health Serv Res, 50*(4).
- Follesdal, A., & Hix, S. (2006). Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A response to Majone and Moravcsik. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 44*(3), 533-562.
- Gerring, J. (2004). What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? *American Political Science Review, 98*(2), 341–354. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055404001182>
- Haas, E. B. (1958). *The Uniting of Europe*. https://openlibrary.org/books/OL24222807M/The_uniting_of_Europe
- Hix, S. (1998). The study of the European Union II: the ‘new governance’ agenda and its rival. *Journal of European Public Policy 5*(1).
- Hoffmann, S. (1964). De Gaulle, Europe and the Atlantic Alliance. *International Organization, 18*(1), 1–28.
- Hopkins, D. J., & King, G. (2010). A Method of Automated Nonparametric Content Analysis for Social Science. *American Journal of Political Science, 54*(1), 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00428.x>
- Hooghe, L. & Marks, G. (1996). “Europe with the Regions”: Channels of Regional Representation in the European Union. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism, 26*(1), 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pubjof.a029841>
- Hooghe, L. & Marks, G. (2001). Types of Multi-Level Governance. *European Integration online Papers, 5*. <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2001-011a.htm>
- Hooghe, L. & Marks, G. (2002). *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Jeffery, C. & Ziller, J. (2006). *The Committee of the Regions and the implementation and monitoring of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the light of the Constitution for Europe*. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

- Jeffrey, C. (1997). *Sub-national authorities and European integration: Moving beyond the nation-state*. <http://aei.pitt.edu/2635/>
- Jimenz, J. M. (2013). The Committee of the Regions: A Springboard for the Citizens. *Baltic Journal of European Studies* 3(2), p. 38-49.
- Johnson, B., & Lundvall, B.-Å. (2001). *Why all this fuss about codified and tacit knowledge?* Paper presented at the DRUID Winter Conference January 18-20 2001
- Johnson, K. E., & Stake, R. E. (1996). The Art of Case Study Research. *The Modern Language Journal*, 80(4), 556. <https://doi.org/10.2307/329758>
- Kooiman, J. (1993). *Modern Governance: New Government-Society Interactions*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA20024956>
- Lacroix, Y. (2023, March 9). "Europa heeft steeds meer invloed in Overijssel, maar levert ook veel op" - Brusselse Nieuwe. *Brusselse Nieuwe*. <https://brusselsenieuwe.nl/europa-heeft-steeds-meer-invloed-in-overijssel-maar-levert-ook-veel-op/>
- Lindberg, L. N. (1963). *The Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lopatka, R. (2019, April). Subsidiarity: Bridging the gap between the ideal and reality. *European View*, 18(1), 26–36. <https://doi-org.ezproxy2.utwente.nl/10.1177/178168581983844>
- Loughlin, J. (1996). Representing regions in Europe: The committee of the regions. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 6(2), 147–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597569608420973>
- Marks, G. (1992). Structural Policy in the European Community. *Euro-politics*, 191–224. The Brookings Institution. <https://garymarks.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13018/2016/09/marks-Structural-Policy-in-the-European-Community.pdf>
- Mazey, S. & Mitchell, J. (1993). 'Europe of the Regions, territorial interests and European integration: the Scottish experience', in S. Mazey and J.J. Richardson (eds), *Lobbying in the European Community*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 95-121.
- McCarthy, R. E. (1997). The Committee of the Regions: an advisory body's tortuous path to influence. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 4(3), 439–454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501769780000091>
- Neuhold, C. (2020). Democratic Deficit in the European Union. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*. <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1141;jsessionid=51445DD1A7E749B158CFE82C4F1ACB19>

- Nicolosi, S., & Mustert, L. (2020). The European Committee of the Regions as a watchdog of the principle of subsidiarity. *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law*, 27(3), 284–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1023263x20906737>
- Peters, B. & Pierre, J. (2011). *MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE: A VIEW FROM THE GARBAGE CAN*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237282673_MULTILEVEL_GOVERNANCE_A_VIEW_FROM_THE_GARBAGE_CAN
- Provincie Drenthe. (2021). *Europa Agenda. Kansen voor Drenthe in Europa*. <https://www.provincie.drenthe.nl/onderwerpen/overheid-en-bestuur/drenthe-europa/>
- Provincie Drenthe (2022). *Drenthe, mooi voor elkaar! Jaarstukken 2022*. <https://www.provincie.drenthe.nl/actueel/nieuwsberichten/2023/april/jaarstukken-2022/>
- Provincie Overijssel (2021). *Statenvoorstel nr. PS/2021/1103304*. <https://overijssel.notubiz.nl/document/10183340/1#search=%22cofinanciering%20europese%22>
- Provincie Overijssel. (2022). *Samenvatting Financiën Provincie Overijssel*. Provincie Overijssel. Retrieved May 10, 2023, from <https://www.overijssel.nl/media/13ennxkz/3-samenvatting-financi%C3%ABn.pdf>
- Provincie Zuid-Holland. (2020). *Internationale strategie Zuid-Holland 2020 -2023*. Retrieved May 10, 2023, from <https://www.zuid-holland.nl/@26495/internationale-strategie-zuid-holland-2020-2023/>
- Provincie Zuid-Holland. (2021). *Begroting 2022*. In *Provincie Zuid-Holland*. Retrieved May 10, 2023, from <https://www.zuid-holland.nl/politiek-bestuur/feiten-cijfers/>
- Provincie Zuid-Holland (2023). *Begroting 2023*. <https://zuidholland.begroting-2023.nl/>
- Sabatier, P. (1988). An advocacy coalition framework of policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein. *Policy Sciences*, 21(12), 129-168. <https://doi-org.ezproxy2.utwente.nl/10.1007/BF00136406>
- Schakel, A. H. (2020). Multi-level governance in a 'Europe with the regions.' *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 22(4), 767- 775. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148120937982>
- Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2), 294–308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077>
- Smith, A. (1997). *Studying Multi-level Governance. Examples from French Translations of the Structural Funds*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00083>
- Stoker, G. (1998). *Governance as theory: five propositions*. Blackwell Publishers.

- Tatham, M. (2008) 'Going Solo: Direct Regional Representation in the European Union'. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 18(5), 493-515.
- Treaty on European Union (1992). Official Journal of the European Communities C 325/5; 24 December 2002, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b39218.html> [accessed 23 March 2023]
- Van Langenhoeve, L. (2013). What is a region? Towards a statehood theory of regions. *Contemporary Politics* 19(4), 474-490
- Warleigh, A. (1999). *The Committee of the Regions: Institutionalising Multi-Level Governance*, London: Kogan Page. The Committee of the Regions: Institutionalising Multi-level Governance? - Alex Warleigh - Google Books
- Witting, A., & Moyson, S. (2015). *Learning in post-recession framing contests: Changing UK road policy*. In Schiffino, N., Taskin, L., Donis, C., & Raone, J. (Eds.), *Organising after crisis: The challenge of learning* (pp. 107-130). Pieterlen, Switzerland: Peter Lang.
- Wongergem, F. (2019, October 15). In gesprek met gedeputeerde Jeannette Baljeu - Europa decentraal. Europa Decentraal. Retrieved April 11, 2023, from <https://europadecentraal.nl/in-gesprek-met-gedeputeerde-jeannette-baljeu/>

Appendices

Appendix I : Operationalization table

Theoretical Concepts	Variables	Definition (context related)	Measurement	Data collection
<u>Participation of the province within the ECoR</u>	Incentives	‘The extent to which a province is motivated to participate in the ECoR’	<p><i>What are the priorities of the provinces towards the EU?</i></p> <p><i>What are the goals, means and resource choices of the provinces towards the ECoR and EU?</i></p> <p><i>Does the province mention the ECoR in their policy papers?</i></p>	<p>EU strategy</p> <p>Annual reports and EU strategy.</p> <p>EU strategy and annual reports</p>
<u>Policy learning</u>	Input	‘To what extent members of the commission have influenced the drafted opinion.’	<p><i>How did the rapporteur incorporate preferences of subnational governments in the opinion?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent are the submitted amendments proposed by other members visible in the final opinion?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent did regions forward their preferences towards the opinion?</i></p>	<p>Amendments to drafted opinion.</p> <p>Voting list on opinions.</p> <p>Contribution documents and stakeholder consultation. Meetings?</p>
	Output	‘To what extent are subnational preferences visible within the adopted legislative proposals’	<p><i>To what extent are subnational preferences visible in the adopted legislation?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent does the ECoR agree that their preferences have been taken into account in the legislative proposals?</i></p>	<p>Impact report of Commission.</p> <p>ECoR impact assessment.</p>

Appendix II: List of policy or strategy papers

Table 2: List of policy and strategy papers of the provinces

Paper	Publisher	Publication year
1. Europa Agenda: Kansen voor Drenthe in Europa	Provincie Drenthe	2021
2. Drenthe, mooi voor elkaar! Jaarstukken 2021	Provincie Drenthe	2021
3. Voortgangsrapportage Europa 2020	Provincie Drenthe	2020
4. Voortgangsrapportage Europa 2021	Provincie Drenthe	2021
5. Evaluatie Overijssel en Europa 2014-2020	Provincie Overijssel	2020
6. Integrale Public Affairs Agenda	Provincie Overijssel	2021
7. Jaarverslag 2021	Provincie Overijssel	2022
8. Statenvoorstel nr. PS/ 2021/1103304	Provincie Overijssel	2021
9. Internationale strategie Zuid-Holland 2020-2023	Provincie Zuid-Holland	2020
10. Internationale voortuitblik 2022	Provincie Zuid-Holland	2022
11. Monitoringsrapportage 2014 – 2020 Europese euro's in Zuid-Holland	Provincie Zuid-Holland	2022
12. Begroting 2023	Provincie Zuid-Holland	2023

Table 3: List of relevant ECoR documents.

ECoR document	Publisher	Publication year
1. A New Industrial Strategy – merged amendments	Jeanette Baljeu	2020
2. Voting Results on Amendments – A New Industrial Strategy	Jeanette Baljeu	2020
3. Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building A Stronger Single Amrket for Europe’s Recovery – merged amendments	Jeanette Baljeu	2021

4. Voting Results on Amendments – Update New Industrial Strategy	Jeanette Baljeu	2021
5. New Circular Economy Action Plan – merged amendments September	Tjisse Stelpstra	2020
6. Voting Results on Amendments September	Tjisse Stelpstra	2021
7. New Circular Economy Action Plan – merged amendments October	Tjisse Stelpstra	2020
8. Voting Results on Amendments October	Tjisse Stelpstra	2020
9. SME Strategy – merged amendments June	Eddy van Hijum	2020
10. Voting Results on Amendments June	Eddy van Hijum	2020
11. SME Strategy – merged amendments October	Eddy van Hijum	2020
12. Voting Results on Amendments October	Eddy van Hijum	2020

Appendix III: Coding scheme for content analysis

Codes	Categories	Description	Decision Rules
ECoR	Frequency of the word.	This code encompasses the frequency of the word ECoR or Committee of the Regions.	The text needs to explicitly mention ECoR or Committee of the Regions.
Political priorities towards the EU	Energy; Climate adaptation; Agriculture; Mobility & Infrastructure; Economy; Transition of Industry.	This code includes all political priorities which are based on EU related policy themes.	If the text refers to EU related policy themes.
Resources indication	Co-financing or acquisition of EU funds.	This code includes internal investments	The text mentions a budget which is related

		towards EU affairs and the acquisition of EU funds.	to an investment in EU affairs or acquired EU funds.
Means towards EU	Policy, Funds, Knowledge and Networks.	This code includes what the provinces will use towards the EU.	The text needs to mention one of the categories which is related to political priorities.

Decision Rules:

1. When the text explicitly mentions ECoR or Committee of the Regions.
2. The text mentions EU related themes such as Digitalization or the Green deal.
3. The text mentions a budget which is related to EU affairs such as the acquisition of funds or co-financing.
4. The EU related means are categorized according to the EU political priorities. The text needs to mention means related to Policy, Funds, Knowledge and Networks.

Appendix IV: Data extraction tables of second sub-question

Table 5a: Data extraction results

<i>Policy or strategy papers</i>	ECoR	Means towards the EU	Political priorities
<i>Europa Agenda: Kansen voor Drenthe 2021-2024</i>	19 times	Present	Agriculture; Climate adaptation; Energy; Mobility & Infrastructure.
<i>Integrale Public Affairs Agenda Provincie Overijssel</i>	0 times	Present	Agriculture; Economy; Mobility & Infrastructure
<i>Voortgangsrapportage Europa 2021 Provincie Drenthe</i>	3 times	Present	---
<i>Internationale Strategie Zuid-Holland 2020-2023</i>	3 times	Present	Economy; Energy; Mobility & Infrastructure

<i>Internationale Vooruitblik 2022 Provincie Zuid-Holland</i>	2 time	Present Mobility; Energy & Climate; Transition of Industry

Table 5b: Data extracted from keywords

Policy or strategy papers	ECoR	Political priorities	Funds	Policy	Knowledge	Networks
<i>Europa Agenda: Kansen voor Drenthe 2021-2024</i>	19 times	Agriculture; Climate adaptation; Energy; Mobility & Infrastructure	11 times	9 times	12 times	13 times
<i>Integrale Public Affairs Agenda Provincie Overijssel</i>	0 times	Agriculture; Economy; Mobility & Infrastructure	9 times	7 times	8 times	11 times
<i>Voortgangsrapportage Europa 2021 Provincie Drenthe</i>	3 times	---	2 times	---	---	2 times
<i>Internationale Strategie Zuid-Holland 2020-2023</i>	3 times	Economy; Energy; Mobility & Infrastructure	6 times	13 times	6 times	9 times
<i>Internationale Vooruitblik 2022 Provincie Zuid-Holland</i>	2 times	Mobility; Energy & Climate; Transition of Industry	11 times	7 times	3 times	15 times

Table 5c: Data extraction results related to resources

<i>Policy or strategy papers</i>	ECOR	Co-financing	Acquisition of EU funds
<i>Voortgangsrapportage Europese programma's 2020</i>	---	Present	Present
<i>Jaarstukken 2022 Provincie Drenthe</i>	---	Present	---
<i>Overijssel en Europa – evaluatie fondsen 2016-2020</i>	5 times	---	Present
<i>Jaarverslag 2021 Provincie Overijssel</i>	---	Present	Present
<i>Statenvoorstel nr. PS/2021/1103304</i>	---	Present	---
<i>Monitoringsrapportage 2014-2020 Provincie Zuid-Holland</i>	---	---	Present
<i>Begroting 2023 Provincie Zuid-Holland</i>	---	Present	Present

Appendix V: Coding scheme for third sub-question

Table 6: coding scheme for content analysis

Codes	Categories	Description	Decision Rules
Commission Members	Present countries in the commission.	This code encompasses the commission member who proposed an amendment.	The text needs to mention the name of the commission member.
Outcome amendments	Accepted and rejected.	This code includes all the accepted and failed amendments of the drafted opinion.	The amendment must be accepted or rejected by the relevant commission.

Topic of amendment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content • Exclusion of information Reference to other ECoR opinions • Role of stakeholders • Structure • Wording. 	This code includes what the amendments entails.	The amendment mentions one of the pre-defined categories.
Type of amendment	Add or modify	This code includes whether the amendment modifies the text or introduces a new point.	The amendment mentions whether the text is modified or adds a new point.
Contribution	Commission members or Rapporteur	This code includes whether the amendments were proposed by commission member or the rapporteur.	The amendment mentions the initiator.
Content of the amendment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need action by the EC • Need for EU funds • Need for legal framework • Need for regulatory framework • Policy learning • Regional perspective • Related to other EU priorities. 	This code includes a further specification of the topic of the amendments related to content.	The amendment needs to refer to one of the categories.
Policy learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beliefs • Experiences • Failures (of policy) • Information • Region's need • Role of Member states • Role of subnational governments • Successes (of policy) 	This code includes a further specification of the content of the amendments related to policy learning.	When an amendment is classified as content amendment, the categories can provide further specification.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of regional projects 		
--	--	--	--

Annex VI: Data extraction tables related to third sub-question

Table 7a: Topic of amendments in relation to the drafted opinions

<i>Topic of amendments</i>	NID 2020	NID 2021	SME june 2020	SME oct 2020	NCEAP sep 2020	NCEAP oct 2020
<u>Content</u>	11	31	13	12	39	20
<u>Exclusion information</u>	2	0	0	0	1	0
<u>Reference to other CoR opinion</u>	1	2	0	0	0	0
<u>Role of stakeholders</u>	4	4	2	4	8	1
<u>Structure</u>	0	0	0	0	3	1
<u>Wording</u>	4	10	35	37	117	49

Table 7b: Content of the proposed amendments related to drafted opinions

<i>Content amendment</i>	NID 2020	NID 2021	SME june 2020	SME oct 2020	NCEAP sep 2020	NCEAP oct 2020
<u>Need action by EC</u>	0	7	4	2	6	2
<u>Need for EU funds</u>	0	2	0	1	3	3
<u>Need for legal framework</u>	1	2	0	0	1	1

<u>Need for regulatory framework</u>	4	1	1	0	8	4
<u>Policy learning</u>	10	23	6	9	23	10
<u>Related to other EU priorities</u>	2	2	1	4	3	1

Table 7c: Amendments related to policy learning

<i>Policy learning</i>	NID 2020	NID 2021	SME june 2020	SME oct 2020	NCEAP sep 2020	NCEAP oct 2020
Beliefs	8	10	1	0	2	1
Experiences	1	2	6	0	3	4
Failures (of policy)	2	0	0	0	0	0
Information	0	11	1	3	8	3
Region's need	0	2	2	2	9	0
Role of MS	0	2	0	0	0	0
Role of subnational governments	2	0	1	0	1	0
Successes (of policy)	1	0	0	0	0	2
Use of regional projects	1	0	0	0	0	0

Annex VII: Themes for thematic analysis

Table 8a: Themes for New Industrial Strategy

Theme: Help of Commission	Theme: New Industrial Strategy	Theme: Role of LRA's	Theme: Stakeholders
Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion of stakeholders - Network platform - Policy and Legal instruments - Resources 	Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - COVID-19 - Green and Digital transition - Place-based - Single Market 	Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assistance - Implementation 	Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assistance - Knowledge sharing - Networks - Partnership

Table 8b: Themes for SME strategy

Theme: Help of Commission	Theme: SME Strategy	Theme: Stakeholders
Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion of stakeholders - Network platform - Policy instruments - Resources 	Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - COVID-19 - Diversity - Green and Digital transition - Needs - Policy instruments 	Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LRA's - SME's

Table 8c: Themes for NCEAP

Theme: Help of Commission	Theme: NCEAP	Theme: Stakeholders
Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Network platform - Policy and legal instruments - Resources 	Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Circular job creation - Territorial solutions 	Sub-themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LRA's - Assistance - Knowledge - Networks