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# **Explaining Transborder Cooperation in Water Governance: Theoretical Frameworks**

Presentation within the series  
Changing Borders: From Separation to Interface?  
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# Overview

## 1. Introduction and Goals

## 2. Regime Theory – A sophisticated and differentiated set of theory-based approaches for explaining international and cross-border cooperation

## 3. Rationalist Approaches

- Functionalist basis
- Interest Constellations
- Multi-Level Games
- Hegemonic Power

## 4. Social Constructivist Approaches

- Information/Knowledge
- Norms
- Epistemic communities
- Advocacy coalitions

## 5. Beyond Policy-Centered Regime Theory

- Polity-Building (Euroregion Lake Constance/ Euregio Bodensee)
- Performance/Symbolic Policy Making
- Generalization and Scope Conditions

## 6. Conclusions

# Introduction and Goals

## 1. Research Fields

### 1.1 Water Politics and Political Institution Building in European and North American Border Regions (1990s)

- Macro/Continental- and Micro/Borderland-Integration
- Functional and Territorial Integration/Cooperation

### 1.2 Metropolitan Governance

### 1.3 Transnational/Dual Citizenship and Cosmopolitan Democracy

## 2. Goals

### 2.1 Theory

- Plurality of Competing/Complementary Approaches
- Clarity/Parsimony in Each Approach

### 2.2 Case-Study Methodology

- Plurality of Theoretical Lenses
- Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

Source: Blatter, J. (2009): Performing Symbolic Politics and International Environmental Regulation: Tracing and Theorizing a Causal Mechanism beyond Regime Theory. *Global Environmental Politics*, 9, 4, 81-110.

# Regime Theory

## **Builds on and Includes all Major Theories of International Relations**

- (Neo)-Realism (Power)
- (Neo)-Liberalism (Interests)
- Social Constructivism (Information, Norms, Beliefs)

⇒ **Applies these Comprehensive Theories to the Question  
“When is international/cross-border cooperation/regulation  
possible/probable?”**

⇒ **No integrated theory but comprehensive set of specified explanatory  
approaches**

⇒ **Existing explanatory approaches have to be tested and falsified  
before new/own approaches should be developed/applied**

⇒ **Example of Motorboat Regulation at Lake Constance**

# Rationalist Approaches

## 1. Functional need

- “Problem pressure” = objective need for political intervention/regulation
- “Problematic situation” = objective interdependence = need to coordinate/cooperate

=> both are necessary but not sufficient conditions in a rationalist approach

## 2. Interest Constellations (Game Theory)

- Coordination Games with or without Distributional Conflicts
- Mixed-Motive Games (Dilemma Situations)
- Rambo Games (Asymmetric Interest Constellations)

## 3. Multi-Level (Two-Level) Games

- Strategic Use of Gate-keeper Positions

## 4. Hegemonic Power

- Leading Player (Interest and Capabilities)
- General asymmetric relationship

# Social Constructivist Approaches

## 1. Information/Knowledge

- Knowledge about the extent and the causes of a problem
- Knowledge about the socio-economic consequences of a problem

## 2. Shared/Accepted Norms and Conventions

- International Law
- Existing Treaties

## 3. “Epistemic Communities”

- = “networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge in that domain” (Haas 1992)
- Agenda Setting <-> Implementation

## 4. “Advocacy Coalitions” (Sabatier)

- Competing Transnational Advocacy Coalitions (Belief Systems)
- Policy Broker

**=> At Lake Constance still missing: The motivation of the Policy Broker**

# Beyond Policy-Centered Regime Theory

- 1. Politics/Institution Building/Transnational Cooperation is not just Problem-solving/Policy-making**
- 2. Community-/Polity-Building (Euroregion Lake Constance/Bodensee)**
  - Spill-over from the continental level
  - Institutional competition in the emerging new political space
- 3. Symbolic Policy Making – Water as Unifying Symbol of Lake Constance**
  - > Gaining attention for cross-border networks/institutions (cognitive)
  - > Legitimizing cross-border institution-building (normative)
- 4. Cultural Performance as Theoretical Foundation**
- 5. Scope Conditions for making Symbolic Performances productive for Cross-border Cooperation**
- 6. Empirical Generalizations**
  - general success in cross-border water governance at Lake Constance
  - Elbe water regime
  - Example from the Pacific Northwest
  - Baltic Sea water regime in the 1970s

# Conclusions

## **Theoretical Generalizations:**

1. Performance/Symbolic Politics as a Complementing Causal Mechanism
2. Performance as a theoretical challenge to the functionalist and instrumentalist assumptions of Regime Theory

## **The Broader Meaning of Transboundary Water (Cooperation):**

1. Transboundary water (politics) “reflects” general relationships of political entities rather than “generates” this relationship
2. Less a trigger of war and much more a symbol of cooperation (until now)