

## **Boundary-spanning in practice: The emergence and development of a business region in Denmark**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines boundary-spanning practices in a regional development partnership in North Denmark, Business Region North Denmark. While boundary-spanning activities have been researched predominantly within the private sector, less research exists on the public sector. Within the existing body of research, only very little is known about how boundary-spanning activities unfold in practice and how they are influenced by local and national contexts. Based on interviews, secondary data, and minutes taken during meetings with the Business Region North Denmark<sup>1</sup> (BRN), I try to illuminate the evolutionary performance of partnership working. Thus, in contrast to existing literature, this paper does not aim to present yet another well-ordered lifecycle model, but rather it tries to capture the fluid and situated nature of boundary-spanning practices in multi-sectional environments. This research finds that boundary-spanning actors have to tackle multidimensional dilemmas by re-constructing and re-interpreting identities, differences and boundaries. In particular, BRN members are found to hold various influential positions simultaneously which clearly influence their sense-making, practices, and feelings of belonging to the various groups they identify with, including BRN. While these members are found to establish a new political field of practices (BRN), this study shows that the positions available in the new joint field are taken by the same powerful actors holding positions in other fields of local politics. In addition, the strategies, practices and modes of boundary-spanning, which BRN's leaders engage in, are found to be highly situational and do not follow a certain order as suggested in previous studies on boundary-spanning practices.

**Keywords:** regional development partnership, boundary-spanning practices, boundary-spanning leadership, multi-sectional environments, qualitative study

### **1. Introduction**

Studies on boundary-spanning are abundant. While boundary-spanning activities have been researched predominantly within the private sector, less research exists on the public sector (Williams 2012, 2013). Additionally, only few studies addressed public boundary-spanning across different layers of government, i.e. between municipal, regional and national levels (Guarneros-Meza & Martin 2016). Within the existing body of research, only very little is known about how boundary-spanning activities unfold in practice (Levina & Vaast 2005, 2008, 2013), even though Levina & Vaast (2008: 308) found that some research (Cramton & Hinds 2007; Walsham 2002; referred to in Levina & Vaast 2008) suggests that “the most salient boundaries are often situated in the practices of collaborating parties”. Hence, boundaries are experienced as differences in practices; however, if, for example, practices can be altered through the co-creation of joint practices, boundaries may be resolved and a common field of practice is created (Bourdieu 1977). In other words, only little is known about *how multiple levels and types of boundaries emerge and how they are spanned in practice*. How do individuals, such as the members of a cross-sector multilevel partnership, negotiate (talk about, co-create and challenge) perceived differences, identities and boundaries, and how are these boundaries and differences renegotiated in order to ensure effective collaboration? Drawing on Levina & Vaast's (2005, 2008, 2013) Bourdieusian inspired conceptualization of boundary-spanning, I employ a qualitative case study of BRN in order to further our understanding of boundaries and boundary-spanning as *emergent practices across diverse public and private actors*.

The following section presents background information. Next, I introduce the theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth abbreviated with BRN.

framework which is followed by the methodological account of this case study. Then the finding section identifies which differences, identities and boundaries emerged in the context of BRN, and discusses how these were talked about, worked on and diminished by certain practices that municipal and regional leaders engaged in. On the basis of this study's findings, I will subsequently expand on the theoretical ideas of boundary-spanning in practice. Finally, I present a conclusion in which I outline the theoretical and practical implications of this study on boundary-spanning practices in and across public and private fields.

## 2. Background

As with many nation states, Denmark's various regions face different challenges. Businesses, investments, as well as cultural and leisure activities and functions are often far more prominent in bigger cities and their surroundings than in more rural and/or peripheral areas. As a result, and/or as a cause for these differences, regions vary in their growth and development, and peripheral and rural areas across the EU even face depopulation. The same phenomenon is evident in Denmark, where, in comparison to national average, peripheral areas suffer from, for instance, limited employment, lower income, and ageing populations as well as populations of poor health (Madsen et al. 2010).

Since the early 1990s, regional growth and development has been characterized by centralization and metropolization (Nørgaard 2011: 83). In the case of Denmark and most western European countries, economic growth and regional development is thus concentrated in and around bigger cities whereas the more peripheral parts of Denmark face stagnation or decline of inhabitants, functions, and economic growth. These overlapping complex societal issues, EU regional policy tried to tackle through subsidized "Structural funds" and "Cohesion policies" in the years 2000 - 2016 (Nørgaard 2011: 83). Despite the existence of EU funding for regional development, Denmark did however lack national legislation and strategies for successfully addressing regional development and growth (Halkier 2010; Illeris 2010). Yet, even though no coherent national strategies existed, the Danish government appointed the five regional growth forums (Vækstforum<sup>2</sup>) as being responsible for the development of their respective regions. Although each regional growth forum was to focus on the development of the region's peripheral areas, Nørgaard (2011: 90) finds that the forums' development policies seemed rather "uncoordinated with the overall development of rural areas". Hence, the future development of rural and peripheral areas in Denmark remained quite uncertain. Perhaps as a consequence of these inabilities, on 1 January 2015, a new political actor emerged on the local political scene in Denmark: Business Region North Denmark (BRN), a collaboration of the eleven municipalities and the Region of North Jutland. According to BRN's website (BRN 2019a), its main goal is the facilitation and enactment of regional growth and development in order to handle the aforementioned challenges of North Denmark.

The challenges BRN attempts to tackle are often referred to as wicked problems (Head 2008) since they are complex, multifaceted and not easily solved as they cross administrative, professional and structural boundaries. As such, they are best addressed by partnership working and collaborations which, according to Skelcher & Sullivan (2008) and Lundberg (2013), has become the most prominent tool for implementing public policy programs. While partnerships and collaborations clearly have the potential to develop and implement solutions to tackle 'wicked problems' (Gasson 2013; Goldsmith & Eggers 2004), collaboration across multiple and diverse agencies is, however, often highly problematic. Existing research even suggests that public sector partnerships and collaborations often lead to "frustration, conflict and an ineffective use of public resources" (Williams 2012: 1). This means that collective actions across diverse actors with different interests, practices

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<sup>2</sup> On 31 December 2018, all Danish regional growth forums were abolished. Since 1 January 2019, the Danish Business Authority, located in Copenhagen, aims to "contribute to a responsible and sustainable economic development" (<https://danishbusinessauthority.dk/mission-and-vision>).

and understandings have to be maintained and supported. In other words, partnership working and/or collaboration needs facilitation in order to span boundaries, bridge differences and nurture mutual understanding and trust (Kroeger & Bachmann 2013; McGuire 2006; Williams 2012). Hence, boundary-spanning practices, including leadership practices, are crucial to the smooth and successful establishment of collaborations which are able to face and tackle the aforementioned wicked problems.

### 3. Theory

The framework for my analysis is informed by the body of literature on boundary-spanning and boundary-spanning leadership taking a practice perspective. As indicated in the introduction, social scientists and organizational scholars have been addressing the notion and importance of boundary-spanning for several decades (Merleau-Ponty & Eddie 1964; Tajfel 1978; Tushman & Scanlan 1981). Yet, boundary-spanning has become more complex as “increased globalization of organizations and markets has created a need for simultaneously spanning multiple cultural, institutional, temporal, and spatial boundaries” (Levina & Vaast 2013: 285).

These boundaries are, however, not a given; they are constructed by social actors. Drawing on practice theories, Levina & Vaast (2008) point out that “[t]hrough their practices, agents are constantly engaged in shaping *fields of practices* as well as the *boundaries* that separate these fields. Boundaries delimit fields and arise from differences in practices that are differentially recognized and rewarded across fields” (Levina & Vaast 2008: 309 [emphasis in original]). At the same time, *fields of practices* emerge when social agents engage in sharing unique practices and interests, and in this process produce forms of capital unique for the newly emerged field.

In the context of this study, the concept of *field* is understood in a less restrictive way as outlined by Bourdieu but nevertheless inspired by his conceptualization of it. In this paper, *fields* are understood as social arenas which operate according to what Thomsen calls “the logic of the field” (Thomsen 2012: 76), i.e. certain (unwritten) rules guiding the social actors’ struggles (which present the main practices in any given field) over certain forms of capital in a particular field. Social actors move across and within various fields of practice on a daily basis and thus, they are confronted with various logics and values depending on the field they find themselves in at a given moment. Each field holds a variety of forces which Bourdieu (1985: 724) describes as “a set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field”. Hence, within each field, social actors are faced with a variety of positions taken by social actors (persons or institutions) whose habitus (lived and embodied experiences), in form of e.g. their skills, education, or social upbringing, fits the fields’ ‘logic and power structure’. Thus, the way the field’s game is played (the practices used to struggle for valued forms of capital) is not arbitrary, but follows certain rules and power structures as these impose themselves on the actors and hence, enable but also limit their actions. In turn, this means that social actors are the ‘result’ of the fields they partake in. Thus, the field’s power structures and its logics become an embodied part of the social agents’ habitus, which they then tacitly draw on while manoeuvring in the field. In so doing, social actors create ‘shared meaning’ of how to act in a specific field, what kind of capital they should invest into the field, and to which extent it is worth struggling for. In other words, a shared understanding is created in terms of which forms of capital are valued in a certain field and which actions are legitimate in the struggle over these forms of capital.

The main struggle social agents are engaged in is, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), the struggle over a given field’s boundaries. But how is one to determine a given field’s boundaries? Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 100) suggest that:

We may think of a field as a space within which an effect of field is exercised, so that what happens to any object that traverses this space cannot be explained solely by the intrinsic properties of the object in question. The limits of the field are situated at the

point where the effects of the field cease.

Therefore, fields can be distinguished from each other by their different rules and logics of practice, which affect social actors in their interactions and their struggles to accumulate field-specific capital. This being said, the notion of *practice* itself ought to be understood as being embedded in a certain field and thus, in a certain power structure of positions and their distinctive valued forms of capital. In other words, *practice* is here understood as a result of a dialectic relationship between habitus, fields, and capitals which Bourdieu illustrates in the following equation: (Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice (Bourdieu 1984: 101). Thus, the notion of practice employed in this paper differs from e.g., Schatzki's conceptualization of practice. While Schatzki (1996) understands practice to construct the social order and thus, focusses primarily on the social actors' agency in social interactions, Bourdieu's conceptualization does also acknowledge the *interplay of (power)structure and agency* as influencing practices since, for Bourdieu, practices cannot exist outside a given field and its particular logics and legitimized approaches to the struggle over valued capital.

Even though social agents of a given field may engage in a set of shared practices, they differ in relation to their 'capital portfolio', i.e. the amount and composition of relevant capital (resources). Bourdieu (1986: 82 [emphasis in original]) outlines three forms of capital:

Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as **economic capital**, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as **cultural capital**, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as **social capital**, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.

These three types of capital can be transformed to symbolic capital by those actors capable of doing so, i.e. the powerful actors. Symbolic capital is thus the ability (power) of transforming economic, cultural and social capital into some other value such as honour, prestige, status or recognition. Hence, practices, boundaries and fields are mutually constructing each other. Consequently, fields and their boundaries can be changed and re-constructed through practices and new fields can emerge on the basis of newly shared practices and identification. A certain amount of joint interest, common understanding, and shared practices are prerequisites for effective collaboration (Levina & Vaast 2005).

Whereas Levina & Vaast see boundaries mainly as obstacles for collaboration, Palus et al. (2013: 206) understand boundaries also as a phenomenon which could foster collaboration.

Boundaries in the workplace are experienced in two different ways. They may be experienced as conflict-ridden barriers that limit human potential, restrict innovation, and stifle organizational and societal change. Or, boundaries may also be experienced as new frontiers at the intersection of ideas and cultures, where breakthrough possibilities reside.

Practice theory can thus help to understand why collaborations between actors from diverse fields can be problematic and how these problems could be lessened. As fields, boundaries and practices co-create each other, social agents differ in their capital portfolio, interests, practices and identities when being members of different fields. For example, mayors engage in different practices and have other interests than regional chief executives or CEOs of local businesses. In order to establish collaboration between these actors and fields, the lack of shared forms of capital, interests, practices

and identities has to be minimized, i.e. common ground has to be created and boundaries have to be crossed, transformed or even abolished via boundary-spanning practices enacted by boundary spanners.

Levina & Vaast (2005: 324) distinguish between nominated boundary spanners and boundary spanners-in-practice.

Nominated boundary spanners refers to agents who were assigned by the empowered agents in a field to perform certain roles in spanning boundaries of diverse fields”, and “Boundary Spanners-in-Practice refers to agents who, with or without nomination, engage in spanning (navigating and negotiation) boundaries separating fields.

In addition, they suggest two modes of boundary-spanning production: transactive and transformative boundary-spanning. The main differences between these modes are visualized in table 1.

Table 1: Modes of boundary-spanning production (Levina & Vaast 2013: 296).

Transactive mode	Transformative mode
Boundary-spanners act as translators	Boundary-spanners act as translators and negotiators, transforming existing and/or building new joint practices
Objects of exchange are used to transfer information or translate from one context to the other	Boundary objects are used to represent differences among groups and shared identities across groups
Transactional production of work: Reflecting on and adding to the work of others	Collaborative production of work: Reflecting on and challenging the work of others
Relational Implications: Existing relations among agents are reproduced	Relational Implications: Novel relations among agents are produced

According to Levina & Vaast (2013: 296), *transactive* boundary-spanning aims at providing translation between actors of diverse fields and enabling information transfer. Thus, boundary-spanning and exchange of information is deemed to reflect on and add to the work of others. The outcome of transactive boundary-spanning is the reproduction of existing relations among actors. In the *transformative* mode, boundary spanners take on several practices as they not only translate but also negotiate and transform existing and/or build new joint practices. In this case, boundary spanners use boundary objects<sup>3</sup> to “represent differences among groups and shared identities across groups” (Levina & Vaast 2013: 296). In so doing, transformative boundary spanners are found to challenge the work of others, which in turn alters the ways social agents cooperate and thus, transforms the shared field of practices, and unique relations between agents are created.

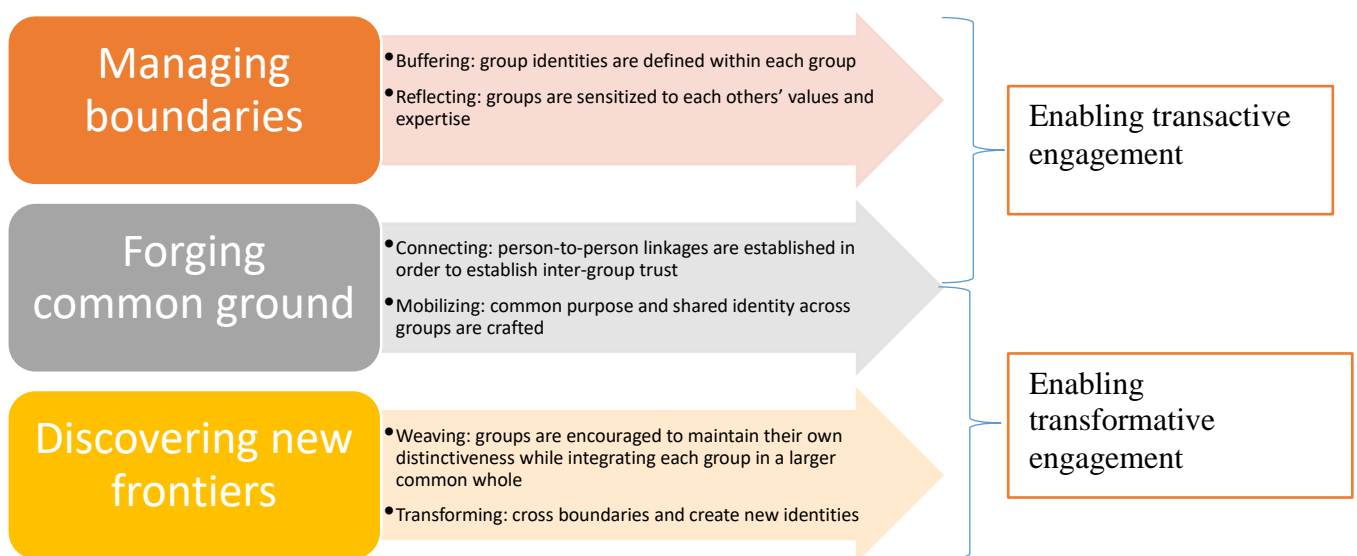
Levina & Vaast’s separation of boundary-spanning practices into transactional and transformative modes bears resemblance with leadership styles and seems to align very well with

<sup>3</sup> Boundary objects are conceptualized by Bowker & Star (2000: 393; cited in Vakkayil 2013: 30) as “objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” and they further explain that boundary objects “are weakly structured in common use and become strongly structured in individual-site use. These objects may be abstract or concrete [...]. Such objects have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation” (Bowker & Star 2000: 297, cited in Vakkayil 2013: 30).

Palus et al.’s (2013) ‘Boundary-spanning Leadership Model’. In this model, Palus et al. suggest a variety of boundary-spanning activities which can culminate in a *nexus effect* where “ideas connect in new ways at the intersection of group boundaries, creating something new, facilitating a significant change, or solving a problem that can only be realized when groups work together” (Palus et al. 2013: 211). Palus et al. (2013) identified six different boundary-spanning practices: buffering, reflecting, connecting, mobilizing, weaving and transforming. These practices are organized in the following way: three “successive strategies for boundary-spanning organize the practices: The initial strategy of managing boundaries (featuring the practices of buffering and reflecting) leads to the strategy of forging common ground (featuring the practices of connecting and mobilizing), and finally the strategy of discovering new frontiers (featuring the practices of weaving and transforming)” (Palus et al. 2013: 211).

When combining Levina & Vaast’s model on boundary-spanning modes with Palus et al.’s model on boundary-spanning leadership, the following model can be created which visualizes the relationships between strategies, practices, goal categories and modes of boundary-spanning production.

Figure 1: The relationships between strategies, practices, goal categories and modes of boundary-spanning production (Author’s own figure).



The distinction between the three strategies, six practices and two modes of boundary-spanning production depicted in Figure 1 enables us to see the interconnections between leadership practices and boundary-spanning practices. Also, it helps to distinguish between transactional and transformative boundary-spanning practices. In addition, this model aids us to understand how a new *joint* field of practices emerges and which leadership practices facilitate this process.

**4. Method**

The aim of this empirical study was to employ practice theory to investigate qualitative data from a single case study to further our understanding of boundary-spanning practices and boundary-spanning leadership practices in the context of a cross-sector collaboration. Earlier work (Levina & Vaast 2005, 2008, 2013; Palus et al. 2013; Sørderberg & Romani 2017) on boundary-spanning has demonstrated the feasibility of practice theory in qualitative data analysis. As I aimed to study social agents’

communicative construction of boundaries and the thereto associated identities and differences, this case study employed interviews with key actors within the studied field alongside observations of meetings and document analysis of websites. Inspired by Bourdieu's model of field analysis (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992), the interviews were primarily considered to gain some insight into the communicative *agency* of boundary construction, while observations and document analysis were predominantly meant to provide insight into the fields' *structures*.

This paper is based on a single case study, which, according to Yin (2009), presents a very suitable approach when the investigated phenomenon is expected to be highly influenced by its contextual settings. Drawing on practice theory, the contexts can be interpreted as particular *fields of practice* (Bourdieu 1977) and thus, as a 'naturalistic context' of the empirical world (Piekkari & Welch 2011) in light of which existing theory can be discussed and challenged and new theoretical contributions can be developed (Silverman 2010). My case is a cross-sector, multi-level political collaboration of eleven mayors and their chief municipal executives, and the regional chairman and the regional chief executive in their function as representatives of the eleven municipalities and the Region. In addition, a variety of employees from the municipalities and the Region are represented in the joint secretariat.

#### *4.1. The case of a cross-sector, multilevel collaboration: BRN*

This article focusses on boundary-spanning practices within Business Region North Denmark (BRN), a political collaboration of the eleven municipalities (represented by their mayors) and the Region of North Jutland (represented by the regional chairman). According to its website, BRN's main "purpose is to create and pursue a common agenda for growth and development, and collectively master the challenges of North Denmark" (BRN 2019a). In order for BRN to work effectively, but also to be built in the first place, it constantly focusses on "finding common ground between the municipalities, businesses, and the region" (BRN 2019a); thus, BRN's main activities could be said to be constant boundary-spanning between diverse political and private fields.

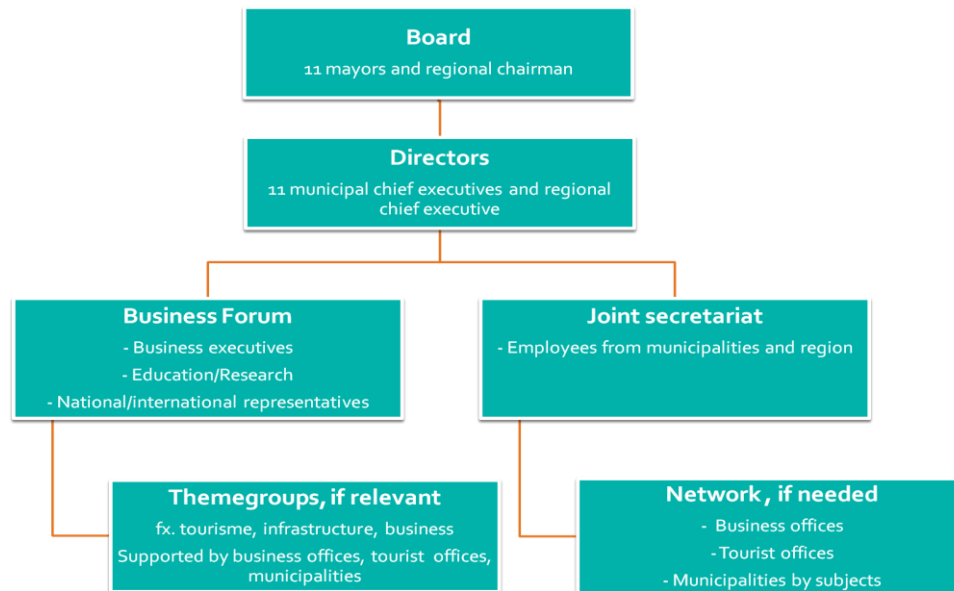
BRN officially came into being on 1 January 2015. Prior to BRN's existence, each municipality in North Jutland had more or less been tackling the challenges of local economic growth and development on their own. Before the municipal reform (Kommunalreform) on 1 January 2007, the most powerful actor was Aalborg municipality which due to its size (number of citizens, businesses and educational institutions) played the most central role in the then North-Jutland County (Nordjyllands Amt). Thus, Aalborg municipality was able to secure more funding and projects for its further growth and development than any other of North Jutland County's 26 municipalities. This was also still the case after the so-called "Municipal Reform" when North Jutland County ceased to exist and North Jutland Region was established (North Jutland Region 2016). Mayors of those municipalities geographically distant to Aalborg municipality pointed out that their region often had been identified as "Peripheral Denmark" (udkantsdanmark) which arguably signified that they were less developed, knowledgeable, attractive, and powerful than for instance Aalborg municipality or, let alone, the Greater Copenhagen Area. The most important political actor to counteract this rather negative identification of North Jutland was the Growth Forum; yet, as mentioned earlier, they seemed unable to foster sufficient growth and development in Denmark's most northern municipalities. Except for Aalborg municipality, North Jutland's remaining 10 municipalities were facing economic and developmental decline, albeit each municipality in different ways. After a rather unsuccessful meeting with the Danish EU office in Brussels in May 2014 (see analysis), a handful of North Jutland's mayors decided to work and act together; this resulted in the creation of a new political collaboration platform, BRN.

#### *4.2. The organization of BRN*

Officially, when BRN came into force on 1 January 2015, it was set up as a "networked cooperation"

which yet was meant to develop further. Thus, it was expected that BRN's organizational structure would change through time. During the time of data collection<sup>4</sup>, BRN organized itself as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The organization of BRN (BRN 2018).

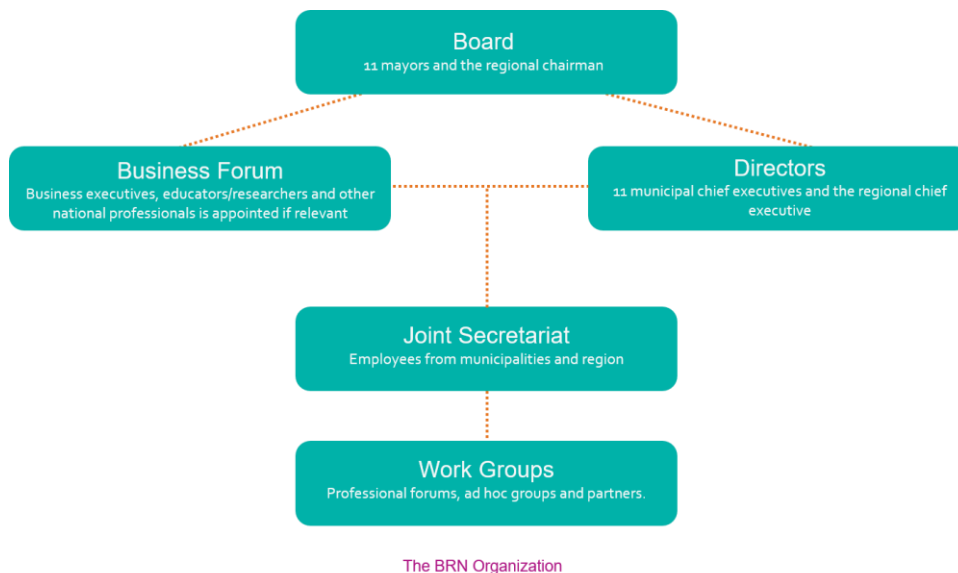


In order to address North Jutland's challenges in a flexible and inclusive way (see analysis), this set-up was slightly adjusted or at least it was visualized in a different way, where the stipulated lines may indicate the 'flexible' set-up as illustrated in Figure 3.

<sup>4</sup> See section 4.



Figure 3: Adjusted organization of BRN (BRN 2019a)



The ‘new’ organization chart seems to show that the Management Board perceives the representatives of the business sectors (Business Forum) to have the same importance as the Directors; this is also communicated on BRN’s website when pointing out that, “We propose launching notable actions for the individual parts of Region North as well as the entire North Denmark. We do this through a *close collaboration between the private and the public sector* of North Jutland” (BRN 2019b [italics added]). These ‘notable actions’ are taken within five different and jointly agreed upon focus areas: Tourism, infrastructure, international collaboration, industrial development and job creation, and qualified labour. While these areas are portrayed as well defined and separate spaces (see Figure 4 below<sup>5</sup>), they rather have to be understood as influencing and overlapping each other.

<sup>5</sup> This figure is presented on BRN’s Danish website. Instead of this model, the English version presents these areas in writing only.

Figure 4: The five focus areas (BRN 2019b).



RN identifies its role as being an ‘initiator of notable actions’, while other private and public actors are the ‘implementers’. The following screen-shot (Figure 5) from BRN’s English website (BRN 2019a) summarizes BRN’s mission and vision.

Figure 5: North Denmark unified (BRN 2019a).

### North Denmark unified in supporting growth

Business Region North Denmark is a new and unique collaboration between the 11 municipalities of North Denmark and The North Denmark Region. The collaboration officially entered into force on January 1st, 2015. The purpose is to create and pursue a common agenda for growth and development, and collectively master the challenges of North Denmark.

By finding common ground between the municipalities, businesses, and the region, we hold a unique opportunity to achieve the degree of penetrative force that is necessary to put North Denmark in the national and international spotlight. BRN is the gateway to a united North Denmark.

Business Region North Denmark is responsible for initiating projects, while the municipalities, the local business communities, and educational institutions carry out the projects individually or in collaboration.

To address development and growth within and across municipalities and the Region, BRN’s Board, its directors, the Business Forum, and the joint secretariat would discuss and create feasible agendas or “general conditions for growth” [“rammebetingelser for vækst”] in form of, for example, projects. As mentioned on BRN’s website, these projects are then to be carried out by local actors outside BRN such as the municipalities, local businesses and educational institutions. However, which of these actors then see themselves fit to turn these joint agendas into practice, depends on the

focus area and the competences and will of these actors to seize the newly created opportunities for growth and development. Thus, the *realization* of the “common agenda for growth and development” rests with actors *outside* BRN, while BRN conceptualizes itself as a “penetrative force” and “the gateway to a united North Denmark” (BRN 2019a).

#### 4.3. Data collection

This paper employed data triangulation (Yin 2009) as it drew on observations, document analysis, and interviews. First, I gathered observational data at BRN’s kick-off meeting where I also participated actively in the role of ‘an interested municipal citizen’ in order to understand BRN’s vision and anticipated strategies and organizational structure. In addition, I conducted a document study (organizational charts, information material, websites, meeting minutes, etc.) to further my understanding of BRN’s organizational structure, its role, and its political influence vis-à-vis other regional political actors in North Jutland. Additionally, together with my fellow colleagues of our former research group, we developed a comprehensive interview guide which addressed 7 information-oriented and theory-based key themes (see Appendix A). The interviews were then conducted by two of my colleagues from our joint research group due to two reasons: Firstly, both were native speakers of Danish and, secondly, one of them was very familiar with North Jutland’s local politics and its key actors due to his empirical studies on local politics in his PhD research. According to Chapman et al. (2008), such alignment of ‘culture’ facilitates trust and enhances the probability of getting relevant and authentic information; yet, I am aware that research interviews may tell us more about the power relations between the researcher and the interviewee, the context of the interview and global discourses than about the research phenomenon at hand (Alvesson 2003). All interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviewees were asked about the reason for establishing BRN, the collaboration across BRN’s members as well as BRN’s role in relation to other local political actors, lessons learnt and knowledge sharing, BRN’s strategies and structure, communication issues, involvement, sustainability, and internationalization (see Appendix A).

While interviewing is perceived as a suitable method for collecting in-depths qualitative data, it is not without its challenges (Alvesson 2003). Taking an interpretivist and reflexive approach to qualitative studies and especially qualitative interviewing, I acknowledge that interviews are “generate[d] situated accountings and possible ways of talking about research topics” (Roulston 2010: 60) and thus, are an outcome of ‘co-created meaning making’ (Holstein & Gubrium 2004). This means that answers given by interviewees are communicatively co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee. Secondly, the analysis of interview data (and actually any data) is also heavily influenced by the researcher’s preunderstandings or particular “meaning fields” which, according to Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009: 120), hold “preconceptions inherited from the past” and which best can be addressed in

a constant alternation between merging into another world and linking back into our own reference system. By means of this movement back and forth, we can successively come to an understanding of the unfamiliar reference system, something which also leads to the gradual revising and/or enriching of our own: there is a ‘fusion of horizons’.

Hence by moving back and forth between the worlds of this study’s informants and my own reference system, I continuously develop my understanding of the influence of *habitus, capital, field and leadership practices* on the process of boundary-spanning. In turn, taking a reflexive approach to this study’s data entails that the knowledge presented in this article is neither relative nor objective but rather a “provisory rational knowledge [...] which is wavering, evasive yet at the same time at least temporarily valid” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 121).

#### 4.4. Data analysis

The data was analysed via interpretative content analysis (Miles et al. 2014) following a reflexive abductive approach which is neither purely inductive nor deductive (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009); this entails that the coding and analysis followed an iterative approach in which I constantly compared the informants' narratives and findings of the document analysis with what previous research has found on boundary-spanning practices and boundary-spanning leadership. For this paper, eight interviews (four mayors; one municipal chief executive; the regional chairman; head of joint BRN secretariat; and head of the Growth Forum) were analysed. During the "First-Cycle Coding" (Miles et al. 2014: 71-86), codes were created and revised in a rather inductive approach to identify the key understandings of identity, differences, practices, roles, and boundaries within and beyond BRN. Thus, the First-Cycle Coding was primarily data-driven. During the "Second-Cycle Coding" (Miles et al. 2014: 86-93), the communicated and observed practices of boundary-spanning were categorized by using the combined theoretical framework of Levina & Vaast (2013) and Palus et al. (2013) presented in Figure 1. Thus, the findings from the First-Cycle coding were scrutinized for patterns in relation to the suggested theoretical framework, which in turn would be "analytically memoed" (Miles et al. 2014: 95-99) in order to explain emergent consistencies and discrepancies of this case study's boundary-spanning practices with those presented in earlier empirical studies.

Following a reflexive abductive methodology, I found contextual as well as person-related aspects to heavily influencing successful boundary-spanning in this cross-sector, multilevel collaboration. These are: (1) a-priori joint negative identification from actors outside the newly established collaboration; (2) pre-established joint identity and trust; (3) struggles, flexibility and accountability; and (4) personal relationships and knowledge-sharing.

### 5. Findings: boundary-spanning-in-practice

Emergent from the steps of First-Cycle coding and Second-Cycle coding during which I framed the emergent categories inspired by Levina & Vaast (2013) as well as Palus et al.'s (2013) framework of boundary-spanning (leadership) practices, I identified several contextual as well as some idiosyncratic aspects which highly influenced the evolution of BRN. In the following, the first two main sections (Becoming BRN and Readjusting and optimizing BRN), present the findings of the first round of data analysis. It presents the data without drawing directly on existing theories of boundary-spanning. In the second part of the analysis (Political leaders shaping a new collaboration platform), I present the findings in light of the suggested theoretical framework consisting of Levina & Vaast's (2013) conceptualization of boundary-spanning practices and Palus et al.'s (2013) model of boundary-spanning leadership practices which thus presents the analytical summary. As mentioned in the method section, interview data has to be understood as a result of situated communicative co-constructions of meaning. Thus, the construction and analysis of the interview data could present itself very differently from my reading and interpretation when done by another researcher. This being said, even though I am aware of my influence on the following analysis, I deem the presented data and its analysis to portray a "provisory rational knowledge [...] which is wavering, evasive yet at the same time at least temporarily valid" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 121). I argue this to be the case as many informants portray BRN's 'becoming' in similar ways, pointing to similar practices of boundary-spanning leadership, and, perhaps most importantly, acknowledge and speak about the perceived struggles and challenges they encountered between BRN's members during this process.

#### 5.1. *Becoming BRN: Forging common ground*

##### 5.1.1. "Fighting on your own, who wants to do that?"

In general, the mayors, the municipal chief executive and the head of secretariat perceive BRN as "network" or "collaboration" which enables all its various members (municipalities and the Region) to jointly enhance North Denmark's competitiveness instead of competing against each other. One of

the mayors said that if the municipalities work together as “one big infrastructure”, then North Denmark would become an interesting partner for other more powerful players such as the business region of Hamburg, Germany; Gothenburg, Sweden; or Stavanger, Norway for example - or even “be part of the global adventure”, as yet another mayor pronounced. “Plainly put; together we are much stronger than being on our own”, another mayor said, pointing out that there are several synergies which could be brought into play when cooperating across municipalities. The head of the secretariat of the Growth Forum<sup>6</sup> (Vækstforum) highlights that BRN “is a political colossus” which “monopolizes all municipal inputs” and therefore, “has much more power to influence and implement strategical decisions”. Another mayor said, “The alternative to BRN would have been to continue fighting on your own. And who wants to do that?”. All of this study’s interviewees expressed the need for BRN, seeing that it established a relevant joint political power based on an overall consensus across all municipalities; a consensus which perhaps might have been triggered by the fear of being economically left behind as pointed out in the background section. But also a consensus, which BRN has to work on at all times as suggested by the head of the Growth Forum when highlighting that “there are peripheral municipalities, there are municipalities whose membership of BRN is not as advantageous as that of others, and BRN simply must appreciate that and has to keep to initiatives that generate some spin-off for all its municipalities”. Thus, all interviewees explicitly acknowledge the value of BRN even though its creation and maintenance at times is challenging due to its diverse actors; thus, BRN’s leaders always have to leverage a multitude of internal and external interests and establish consensus before being able to compete against or collaborate with other political and economic players.

#### 5.1.2. Born out of need: “And suddenly everyone was on board”

Even though all interviewees see the necessity for BRN, many also expressed their wondering about how “very fast” and “astonishingly conflict free” BRN was established which many of BRN’s actors claimed to be “not at all possible in other Danish regions” and thus, something to “be proud of”. BRN’s head of secretariat said, BRN was established “between May and September 2014”. One mayor explained that “historically speaking there had always been collaborations across municipalities in order to get certain projects realized”, but this collaboration seemed to be something different. During a visit to Denmark’s EU office, which for whatever reasons had not planned any activities or networking for the visiting mayors from North Jutland, these mayors started discussing how to foster municipal and regional development *in practice*. Upon their return to North Jutland, they realized that “in a blink of an eye, other mayors said ‘what are you doing, why didn’t you ask us? We also want to join’. And suddenly, everyone was on board and BRN was born.” The speedy and seemingly smooth establishment of BRN seemed to be possible not only due to common developmental pressures, but most importantly perhaps because of a rather common history; all members, except for Aalborg municipality, belong to what the capital region called ‘peripheral Denmark’, most of the municipalities had a “tradition” for collaborating across municipal boundaries, and the most powerful municipality in Northern Denmark, Aalborg municipality, realized that they too “were under pressure and needed others to develop further”, as the head of the Growth Forum put it. In addition, even though the municipalities differed from each other, they also had a lot in common which the regional chairman explained as “actually having common interests, common visions, and some joint strategies. [...] We don’t have to compete on the best ideas; we find them together”.

Thus, despite their differences, almost all municipalities do also show similarities in their overall visions and how they have been identified from the outside, namely as a rather unimportant part of Denmark; but they also agree on how they would like to be identified, namely as a political power and interesting partner for other actors within and beyond Denmark. Quite a few mayors

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<sup>6</sup> All Growth Forums were abolished on 31 December 2018.

stressed that the smooth and speedy beginning of BRN is based on a shared history and mutual trust, which the head of the Growth Forum summarized as “because one believes in each other, and one understands each other as partners. It’s our history which all this is based upon; we trust that we need and want each other (“man vil hinanden”)”.

### 5.1.3. Being proud of coming from North Jutland

In general, the interviewees explained the speedy and rather smooth establishment of BRN as being a result of their North Jutlandic identity. This identity, the regional chairman explained in the following way: “We develop things from the resources available to us. And we know that we are good at it and that we can do it. This might mean that it’s frugal once in a while, but we know we can, and we are stronger and we are good collaborators, and we need to, because no one is coming to help us.” Several mayors indicated that they are “proud of coming from North Jutland”. According to one mayor, there were several reasons for being proud: BRN was the only political platform which was established within a few months. The eleven mayors and the regional head easily agreed on having to build BRN in order to pool resources and thus, becoming an interesting partner for other business regions outside of Denmark. BRN even out-trumped Copenhagen Business Region which according to one mayor is “stuck talking but is not able to gather the resources needed to establish a business region”. Turning talk and strategies into concrete *practice* is also understood as being a special North Jutlandic value. One mayor stated, “We need something North Jutlandic; we need something concrete so we establish a basis on which we can approach others and where we can say: ‘we are able to do this (initiative), we got this (initiative) put into practice; so, what is it you can offer?’”.

Arguably, the common North Jutlandic identity seems to enable smooth collaboration across municipalities and political standpoints which a number of interviewees found kind of surprising. For example, one of the eleven municipal chief executives found it “still rather astonishing that we are all playing with open cards”. He added that successful collaboration “means daring to show each other one’s weaknesses and doubts”. Being honest with each other and also showing one’s problems is seen by many interviewees to represent trust, which in turn is interpreted as an important aspect of North Jutlandic identity. When asked how this kind of trust was developed, a number of interviewees referred to the Region’s history and former structure (North Jutland County). They mentioned that trust had had time to grow since all municipalities had been working together – but also had been competitors – for a long time, because all of them - besides two - belonged to the former ‘North Jutland County’ and now belong to Region North Jutland. This region is understood as a “region of opportunity where one is close to the citizens” but where one also has to “live with unpredictability” as one of the municipal chief executives explained.

### 5.1.4. Strong interpersonal relationships

Manoeuvring through the aforementioned “unpredictability” seems to be facilitated by a common regional identity and trust across most of BRN’s members; a kind of trust and identity, which many of this study’s interviewees expressed as an outcome of long-lasting and strong interpersonal relationships across BRN’s members. These relationships were established while meeting each other during collaborations on diverse projects, and attending meetings at some of the several political bodies driving local politics and development in North Jutland. Seeing that many of BRN’s members hold several political positions simultaneously, they met each other regularly, albeit in different roles with different decision making power. Over the course of these meetings, they share not only information and knowledge about each other’s municipal challenges and strengths, but also social networks and legitimacy from their municipal contexts. Moreover, they develop political initiatives and solutions together. In line with other mayors, the regional chairman, and the head of Growth Forum, one of the municipal chief executives pointed out that due to former partnerships and collaborations on various political platforms, “we know each other well and even dare addressing our

[municipal] problems”. In addition to these personal relationships, the regional chairman explained that the different actors’ personal characteristics, and here especially their age, played a vital role for BRN’s rather smooth establishment: “BRN happened because of its personal make-up: If the mayors in Aalborg, Hjørring and Frederikshavn hadn’t changed, BRN wouldn’t exist. The shift of generations enabled new forms of collaboration where one would look beyond one’s own municipality”.

## 5.2. *Re-adjusting and optimizing roles and practices within BRN*

### 5.2.1. Standing together in flexibility

In order to handle “unpredictability” and to “turn talk and strategies into concrete initiatives”, several interviewees indicated that they lack a clear understanding of their individual roles and BRN’s overall role vis-à-vis other political bodies within the municipal landscape. “There are quite a few, for example Business Development Services (Erhvervshuse), waiting for a definition of their roles”, one of the mayors said, “and that is understandable, because we too are waiting for a more precise role definition.” The head of the secretariat of the Growth Forum mentioned that his organization and BRN in general (the secretariat and leadership) would know their roles; he was, however, in doubt how well the other political representatives of BRN’s members knew their own and the others’ roles. However, one municipal chief executive seemed to understand the roles within BRN quite differently; he pointed out: “The good thing with BRN is that we so to say don’t have any formal roles; we’ve only those roles we allocate to each other, and then we hope that these roles are accepted by the others; but this isn’t something we can demand”. This notion seemed to resonate with Growth Forum’s understanding of BRN’s structure, which the head of Growth Forum’s secretariat explained as being rather organic and ‘flexible’, as BRN constantly “needs to adjust and build new partnerships.”

This flexibility in terms of structures and roles could however be challenging as each of BRN’s actors held multiple political positions because they were represented on several municipal and local platforms. The municipal chief executive stressed that having multiple roles and being active on diverse platforms would be an advantage because it would make one “think and act across political bodies and levels”. In order to do so, one would need to be “rather reflexive”, one of the mayors said, because “you need to be aware of where [which political platform] you are and which formal role you are holding there [on said particular platform]”. Yet, in line with several other mayors, he did also stress that “we can, however, not neglect our own turf [their municipality]”. A similar notion was made by one of the other mayors who pointed out that their role as a mayor has not changed that much. He added: “We just have to remember that all the initiatives in relation to business development and growth have been bundled and are now facilitated by BRN”. None of the interviewees indicated that BRN would influence decision making in other municipal tasks than those related to economic growth and development. “BRN does not deal with those issues that each municipality is capable of dealing with on its own. BRN is meant to act when we deal with issues or ideas which are best addressed collectively, and where the output is higher if you work together compared to working on your own”, clarified the head of BRN’s secretariat.

### 5.2.2. A need for action and concrete joint initiatives

Every member municipality of BRN has to invest money and time into this partnership. This means that BRN’s economic power is based on the citizens’ tax money and that its actions need to be legitimate. Consequently, all interviewees pointed out that in comparison to other political bodies, BRN’s main objective is to *act* by demonstrating that the initiatives taking by BRN turn the citizens’ tax money into meaningful, joint, effective and concrete initiatives. The head of BRN secretariat mentioned that it had been important for all mayors to use the citizens’ tax money in a legitimate way; therefore, it was of utmost importance that all initiatives taken by BRN would “mirror its vigour” by working strategically with the pointing out of relevant initiatives. The head of the secretariat of the Growth Forum pointed out that BRN’s role “is to operationalize the strategic work done by the

Growth Forum in order to initiate concrete projects.” One of the majors put it like this: “It’s been extremely important to me to show our politicians *concrete examples* so they can see that we’re not only sitting around and having a good time”. The mayor further explained that when they use the citizens’ tax money, they also need to show that their municipality profits from these initiatives. Another mayor pointed out that even though the money should be used for concrete development and growth projects, this does not mean that they always would finance ideas coming from businesses (Business Forum / Erhvervsforum). “Businesses could say, ‘just put all these 100 million into this project’, and then economic growth is fostered. This could, however, mean that the municipalities go bankrupt”, the mayor explained. In other words, if, for whatever reason, not all of BRN’s members profit from its initiatives in one way or the other, BRN could be accused of acting illegitimately and thus, could stand to lose its justification or at least lose some of its members. Somewhat in relation to this issue, the regional chairman explained that not all municipalities are able to invest additional resources into BRN. “There is quite a big difference in relation to how much they [the different municipalities] have been involving themselves actively”, the regional chairman said.

### 5.2.3. What’s in it for me? – What’s good for all of us?

As mentioned earlier, BRN’s members, i.e. the eleven municipalities of North Jutland and the Region of North Jutland, are rather diverse in terms of size, economic power, geography, etc. In addition, their representatives – the mayors, municipal chief executives and regional chief executive - hold multiple political roles simultaneously. Thus, unsurprisingly, BRN’s actions have to accommodate and cut across these differences in such a way that *no* member feels disadvantaged and *all* members see a purpose in belonging to BRN. According to the head of Growth Forum’s secretariat, this is “a balancing act on a knife’s edge.” He said: “BRN is restricted to certain types of initiatives because all of them have to appeal to all municipalities”, which he found to be very challenging to put into practice. “In practice, you will compete on investments, employment, size and extension of educational institutions and so on. It’s difficult to propose a detailed and concrete common agenda for development, especially because the municipalities are very different and many are not as well integrated into BRN as the city regions [probably referring to Aalborg and Hjørring municipalities].” In line with the head of Growth Forum’s secretariat, all other interviewees indicated that the initiatives taken by BRN had to make sense for *all* municipalities as well as BRN, albeit some initiatives launched by BRN may not be implemented by all municipalities in equal measure but, nevertheless, almost all municipalities would profit from them as mentioned by one of the mayors and the regional chairman.

Yet, although most of the mayors were aware of this issue as indicated in former paragraphs (see for instance section 5.2.2.), they did not find this balancing act impossible. Rather, as one mayor explained, conflicts ought to be seen as possibilities for learning from each other. He saw conflicts and communication about them as a means to foster a clear positioning of BRN rather than an obstacle to its establishment and its functioning. In addition, many mayors pointed out that BRN was not meant to fully erase competition between its municipalities. One of the mayors explained: “We need competition; take for example our harbours; they compete with each other in their daily operations. But they do also cooperate. “Offshore base Scandinavia” is an example of that. So, in some instances we look at each other and say: “In this case, it would be advantageous to collaborate, and in these cases, we seem to compete with each other. Shouldn’t we just leave it like that?” When we are not big enough to attract an order on our own, then it makes sense to collaborate.”

Nevertheless, all mayors pointed out that BRN’s primary role was to identify relevant issues more or less common to all of its members. The head of the BRN secretariat stated: “If all members believe that agendas made in BRN are important to all, then it shouldn’t be necessary or important to account precisely for what and for whom this money was spent, or where the project was realized. On the other hand, there is also a real political need; it’s just like the EU, only in a small edition. We



need to tell our fellow municipal politicians, citizens, and businesses that, for instance, many businesses are part of a certain initiative and some of them are also located in our municipality. This is also something we are going to communicate in our annual reports from now on.” Thus, in order to tackle possible conflicts between BRN’s members and to establish initiatives which are deemed useful for all its members, BRN had to foster a sense of common identity across its diverse members. Hence, discussions and communication in general were deemed to be of utmost importance in order to strike a balance between common and particular interests.

As discussed earlier, all of BRN’s members felt the need for a new political network or platform that would ‘walk the talk’, which would foster economic growth and development across those municipalities that regions such as Copenhagen would pejoratively call ‘peripheral Denmark’. Thus, BRN was seemingly built on the mutual perceived *need and will to act* and thus, to change North Jutland’s position, influence, and future in and beyond Denmark. BRN could thus be perceived as an action-oriented political platform crossing both municipal and regional boundaries as both levels of local politics are represented in BRN. Hence, BRN seemed to be competing for political power with the Growth Forum, which was abolished in December 2018. Throughout the interview with the head of the Growth Forum’s secretariat, he did, however, indicate that they (the Growth Forum) were the more powerful actor in terms of setting political agendas and allocating money. He indicated that BRN would only be able to turn ideas into practice when these could be aligned to the Growth Forum’s overall agenda, a structure which he called “the regime of the Growth Forum which means that everything needs to be in order [“på plads”] before it can be realized”. Hence, they seemed to use BRN as a tool for turning their own ideas into practice. It seems fair to suggest that he understood BRN as a welcome communication and power tool or object as it is comprised by those in local power (representatives from the Region and the municipalities) whom the Growth Forum would have to deal with anyway. Thus, BRN seemed to be a practical object and, if in line with the Growth Forum’s own strategies, a strategic tool as well with which diverse levels of governance could be addressed simultaneously.

### 5.3. *Shaping a new collaboration platform and joint practice(s)*

In this section, I discuss more closely which and how boundary-spanning practices and leadership practices facilitated the emergence of BRN as a new joint *field of practices* to better understand how field-specific practices were simultaneously influenced by the actors’ *agency* as well as the *contextual aspects* of the given fields.

The analysis suggests that despite the differences in size, geography, power, and political standpoints and influence, BRN’s members successfully facilitated joint cooperation across a variety of discussed identities, differences, and boundaries. Within a rather short period of time, BRN emerges as a new *political platform or collaboration* after a number of disappointed mayors chose to become boundary spanners-in-practice which entails that they – without having been nominated to do so - engaged in spanning boundaries separating fields (municipalities; region; business regions; political, business and educational fields). By drawing on their political knowledge (cultural capital), their political status as mayors (symbolic capital), and existing networks (social capital) as well as experiences of earlier collaborations (familiarity and trust), these mayors co-created, together with the Region of North Jutland, a unique political network or partnership (BRN) which launched *concrete, joint initiatives* to further growth and development in industry, infrastructure, tourism, and international relations within and across the municipalities and the Region belonging to BRN. In order to realize BRN as a new political, or rather cross-sectorial, field, the mayors engaged in a variety of boundary-spanning leadership practices presented by Palus et al. (2013) as well as modes of boundary-spanning as conceptualized by Levina & Vaast (2013).

### 5.3.1. Boundary-spanning leadership at BRN

According to Palus et al. (2013), boundary-spanning leaders engage in different strategies and practices which seemingly follow after each other as visualized in figure 2. The data analysis revealed that all of these practices are also found in this case study, albeit at different times and not necessarily following a certain order.

When engaged in *managing boundaries*, social actors practice buffering and reflecting. In this case study, buffering takes place in different ways and at different times. On the one hand, prior to the creation of BRN, all municipalities and the Region competed for the allocation of resources such as investments, employment, size and extension of educational and health institutions and so on. Thus, allocation of resources was protected and clear boundaries were set. This is to some extent still the case since BRN has been established. Yet, allocation of resources is now profoundly facilitated by BRN and thus, according to BRN's members, is meant to profit all of its members in some way or other, even though some initiatives are pursued without all members actively participating in it (see also section 5.2.3.). For example, when new initiatives are discussed, mayors can protect their municipalities' economic capital by actively withdrawing from that particular initiative; yet, each municipality invests a certain per capita amount in BRN. Withdrawing from certain initiatives could, for instance, be necessary for municipalities with only a small number of inhabitants as they have to allocate their economic capital to local rather than trans-municipal initiatives.

Reflecting is another practice of boundary management which in the case of BRN took place prior to but also during the establishment of BRN. Seeing that all of BRN's members have been collaborating and competing with each other for many decades, they already had a general, and probably also specific knowledge about each other's strengths, values and problems. In addition, seeing that many of BRN's individual actors (mayors and regional chairman, chief executives, business representatives, etc.) had created personal relationships prior to the creation of BRN, they could base their new collaborations on trust gained from former collaborations. In addition, an assumed joint identity ("Being proud of coming from North Jutland") created the feeling of familiarity and shared trust, which was further enhanced during and after the creation of BRN when social actors engaged in practices of reflecting. This is, for instance, expressed when mayors "play with open cards" and show each other their vulnerabilities, i.e. the most pressing issues in regard to growth and development in their respective municipality.

Another strategy of boundary-spanning found in this case study is that of *forging common ground*, which can be accomplished through the leadership practices of connecting and mobilizing. Connecting can be seen in regular interactions between the different members of BRN. Since BRN's members had been collaborating on diverse projects prior to the creation of BRN, they had been interacting with each other which in turn enriched their interpersonal relationships. During the first stages of establishing BRN, interactions in form of 'informal kick-off meetings' were meant to establish a structure and develop some routines which would facilitate bridging the actors' diverse locations, histories/backgrounds, values, capital portfolio, and political assumptions. Since the emergence of BRN, the representatives of the municipalities, businesses, and the Region did, however, interact in a more institutionalized and regular way in form of, for instance, quarterly meetings facilitated by and informed about by BRN's secretariat via BRN's homepage. Hence, via connecting, structures and routines of practices were built and rebuilt which, for example, is visualized by the changes in the organization chart (see section 2. and section 4.2. Figure 3).

Closely related to and influenced by the practice of connecting is the practice of mobilizing by, for instance, including partners to build a common platform and thus, further develop a sense of community and discuss shared goals. For example, the official 'kick-off meeting' of BRN in Aalborg invited all guests to discuss the first draft of BRN's mission, vision and focus areas (see also background information). In so doing, the boundary spanners-in-practice (the mayors of some of the municipalities represented in today's BRN), not only presented their vision but also invited others,

such as interested citizens, the educational sector and representatives from other political platforms, to become involved with BRN.

A third strategy of boundary-spanning is that of *discovering new frontiers*. The practices of weaving and transforming are meant to facilitate this strategy. Weaving is practised when representatives of the municipalities, the Region, and the Business Forum (see section 4.2.) begin to work jointly and strategically together. In so doing, each member reveals relevant information to the others, including “one’s weaknesses and doubts” in regard to realizing proposed initiatives. In so doing, BRN’s members disclose parts of their capital portfolio and thus, indirectly, show their relative strength and power vis-à-vis the other political and private actors. However, the interviewed mayors and chief executives described how they in their role as boundary spanners quite often have to remind some of the peripheral and smaller municipalities of the fact that BRN’s political strength and success of proposed initiatives, which they all are a part of, depend on all members’ investment of relevant knowledge, convenient network ties, and economic capital. Yet, while some municipalities are rather engaged in BRN, others seem to be rather ‘inactive members’ which assist in financing BRN but only occasionally propose strategic initiatives. Holding on to one’s own group identity while also becoming part of a larger unity is a practice mentioned by all interviewed members of BRN when they point out that they somehow have to strike a balance between cooperation and competition between BRN’s members (see also section 5.2.1.).

Practices of transforming become prevalent when new identities are created which in case of BRN is achieved when all of its members co-develop initiatives, which further growth and development across all of BRN’s members. In order to create said initiatives, all members are required to assist with their specific resources and competencies. In addition, new practices and structures have been developed to facilitate joint decision making and implementation of co-developed initiatives. These changes of practices, structures and identities are addressed by all interviewees as necessary for tackling North Jutland’s challenges and, furthermore, enable North Jutland to become a “strong actor on the international stage as a result of the municipalities’ combined efforts” (BRN 2019c).

### 5.3.2. Modes of boundary-spanning at BRN

According to Levina & Vaast (2005, 2013), boundary-spanning practices can resemble *transactional* and *transformative* modes of collaboration as depicted in Table 1. In addition, Levina & Vaast (2013) distinguish between nominated boundary spanners and boundary spanners-in-practice, the latter referring to social agents who engage in boundary-spanning without necessarily having been chosen to do so.

The interviewed members of BRN present the creation of BRN as a reaction to political disappointment and negative identification as inferior and irrelevant political players in the national context of politics (see section 5.1.2.). The idea and the first negotiations and initiatives of creating a new political platform are taken in a somewhat ‘ad-hoc’ manner by some mayors who coincidentally found themselves engaged in the same practice, namely intended knowledge sharing with the North Denmark EU office in Brussels<sup>7</sup> which, however, turned out to be less satisfactory than anticipated. At that moment in time, these mayors decided that they needed to pool their resources and collaborate even more than they already did in order to be considered a serious political power within Denmark and at EU level. The first steps of this collaboration were facilitated by these mayors who, without having been nominated to do so, co-developed practices to span existing boundaries between the municipalities of North Jutland. Thus, these mayors took on the role of boundary spanner-in-practice. They represented different municipalities and were, therefore, familiar with the political practices preferred in their municipalities as well as being able to draw on different municipality-specific *and* individual forms of capital, such as economic strengths, political knowledge, status as politician,

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<sup>7</sup> See the following link for more information on this association: <https://eu-norddanmark.dk/about-us/>

social bonds, existing structures and political networks, etc. Despite these differences, they also had important features in common; all were used to practise within and manoeuvre across political fields and they knew each other personally from earlier and current collaborations across municipalities. Thus, they were rather familiar with each other's strengths and values - both in relation to the personal and the municipal level - which in turn influenced their chosen practices of boundary-spanning. Seeing that some sort of collaboration between the municipalities had been a usual practice in local politics within North Jutland prior to the establishment of BRN, buffering, reflecting and connecting presented relatively familiar practices of enabling transactive engagement across North Jutland's political units.

With the kick-off meeting of BRN, however, the repertoire of boundary-spanning practices was enlarged by incorporating activities of mobilizing which can be considered a transformative practice. During the kick-off meeting, local politicians from diverse municipalities shared knowledge on ongoing initiatives within the five focus areas, but they also invited all guests to contribute with their ideas on how collaboration across the diverse political bodies could be enhanced to address pressing issues within and across the five focus areas. This included ideas on possible partnerships for BRN to engage with or even suggestions as to which political and private units could be valuable as part of BRN. Follow-up meetings and negotiations with possible partners and important private and political units led to the formulation of a joint vision and common goals (see sections 2 and 4.2.). During this phase of mobilizing (but also the subsequent phases of weaving and transforming), documents, such as minutes of meetings, the meetings themselves, and the continuous refinement of BRN's homepage presented jointly produced work and thus, "boundary objects-in-practice" (Levina & Vaast 2013: 296-297). These boundary objects assist in defining the new field's identity and its boundaries as well as presenting its capital portfolio and help drawing other actors into the new field (Levina & Vaast 2013: 299).

Once a sense of community and shared goals had been co-created, and relevant political as well as private units had become part of BRN, its members engaged in discussions about a suitable structure and feasible practices to fulfil the goals they had jointly agreed upon. As indicated earlier, through the practices of weaving and finally transforming, BRN's members renegotiated old relationships and co-created new practices of joint problem solving and thus, established a new field (BRN) within the already existing field of local politics. This new field is comprised by diverse agents representing political, private and public actors, and these members engage in distinct practices by drawing on and allocating particular forms of capital while pursuing the field's distinct jointly co-created interests. In conjunction with BRN's structural refinement, the official distribution of power across BRN's members/units is changed over time as indicated in the altered organization chart (see section 4.2, Figure 3). When conceptualizing BRN's homepage, and the information communicated on it, as a boundary object, any alteration of the website and its contents can be understood as renegotiation of the shared identity and meaning of this particular boundary object. Additionally, renegotiations visualize struggles over influence and power within a given field, which in the case of BRN resulted in the Business Forum being as important and/or powerful as the Directors<sup>8</sup>. However, as mentioned in the interviews, in practice, BRN's members seem to negotiate amongst each other which role each of the members should take on in order to tackle a certain issue (see section 5.2.1.). This practice of informal power allocation seems to resonate with the notion of being a proactive boundary spanner-in-practice. Furthermore, it indicates a change in political practices as it can be assumed that in other political fields, members prefer to act according to nominated roles and institutionalized practices as also hinted at in the analysis on BRN's flexible structure.

In sum, the analysis suggests that BRN emerged as a joint field which was co-created by

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<sup>8</sup> During the course of writing this article, the organization chart was changed back to the first chart ever presented on BRN's website (see section 4.2.).

political, public and private actors through a variety of boundary-spanning practices. In the beginning, these practices were mainly pursued by political actors, namely mayors. Through time, boundary-spanning activities were also practised by BRN's other members, for example business executives, employees from the joint secretariat, and representatives of the educational field. In order to engage in boundary-spanning activities, these actors took on roles which they had not been nominated for; for instance, as nominated municipal political leaders they were to secure growth and development *within* their political and geographical boundaries, namely their municipality. As social actors within BRN, they were to think and act *across* these boundaries, negotiate new relationships, craft common purpose and new identities. These changes of collaboration modes resulted in the emergence of a new field within the existing fields of political practice. This new field (BRN) can be understood as a challenge to the existing institutionalized practices and structures which relied on clear-cut roles and thereto related practices, power structures and assumptions. With the emergence of BRN, the allocation of resources has changed and a new balance between competition and collaboration on issues of development and growth was found. It could be argued that BRN emerged as a new field because actors of the political fields (mayors, municipal and regional chief executives), private fields (business executives) and the educational field (researchers and educational representatives) could no longer fit their main concern for economic development and growth into the existing political frames, where especially the Growth Forum was perceived as being too inactive. Therefore, BRN emerged as a new 'cross-sector field' which challenged the established institutionalized practices related to fostering development and growth in North Jutland.

Throughout the analysis it was clear that the then existing historical, geographical and political contexts, including strong interpersonal relationships, influenced boundary-spanning and leadership practices of BRN's diverse social actors. The literature on boundary-spanning and boundary-spanning leadership describes the importance of structures, activities, competencies, and, more recently, of modes of boundary-spanning practices (Levina & Vaast 2013) and leadership practices (Palus et al. 2013), but rarely discusses the importance of interpersonal relationships (Barmeyer & Davoine 2018), nor the influence of broader fields on situated boundary-spanning practices. In the following section, these findings are discussed in light of related conceptual literature by focusing on boundary-spanning practices and boundary-spanning leadership practices.

## 6. Discussion

Drawing on the framework of Palus et al. (2013), numerous boundary-spanning strategies and practices could be identified in this case study of BRN. The analysis shows that mayors try to protect or at least withdraw their own municipal resources (buffering), but also that they communicate and are open about their municipal challenges, strengths and most pressing issues (reflecting). It becomes apparent that many of BRN's actors knew each other from former collaborations on diverse projects and how they use this knowledge and established trust to set up further meetings across locations and political values (connecting), and thereby foster a sense of community, shared identity and goals which attract other actors to BRN (mobilizing). In the end, the analysis shows that BRN's members create new joint boundary objects, structures and practices (weaving) and jointly agreed upon initiatives which are meant to strengthen BRN's visibility, attractiveness and power in the Danish and international fields of politics and business (transforming). When focusing primarily on the narratives of the mayors and head of the joint secretariat, the collaboration between BRN's members seems to be highly transformative. In fact, transactional modes of collaboration are mainly situated in the past and are portrayed as prerequisites or points of departure for transformative collaboration, which changes the field of local politics in North Jutland. Nevertheless, during the interviews, many incidents of buffering (see section 5.2.3.), reflecting (see section 5.2.1.) and connecting (see section 5.2.2.) are mentioned, all of which represent transactional rather than transformational modes of collaboration. In addition, practices of reflecting are also addressed as a way to tackle intrapersonal

role ambiguities, and the practices of weaving and transforming seem not to challenge the power structures within BRN to such a degree as could be anticipated in light of a practice theoretical perspective on boundary-spanning (Levina & Vaast, 2013) and as communicated by the interviewed actors of BRN.

When mayors buffer between their own and other municipalities and the Region, it seems that they try to protect their interests and resources for their own strategic use instead of providing said resources for the collaboration they are a part of, i.e. BRN (Williams 2012). These practices of withdrawal may indicate that not all of BRN's members (municipalities) either have the ability (essential resources) or see the necessity to fully identify with BRN. Therefore, it is questionable as to whether municipalities not actively partaking in BRN's work, can be perceived as belonging to the newly established field. From a practice perspective, it can be argued that not all actors in a given field have the ability to 'play the field's game' successfully; it takes a certain alignment of the actors' capital portfolio and the capital appreciated by the powerful actors in the field in order to succeed in the game. Thus, the practice of buffering seems to indicate that some municipalities may never become as fully engaged with BRN as other more powerful municipalities. Following this line of thought, some of these rather 'inactive' members may either be 'encouraged' to invest some more of their resources into BRN or they may lose their interest in BRN entirely. Either way, there seems to be a lack of 'alignment' which in the very least suggests that BRN's members are at different stages in relation to their engagement with the new field; hence, boundary-spanning practices and boundary-spanning leadership practices differ through time and in relation to the particular actor and situation, which makes it difficult to distinguish between the different modes (transformative and transactional) and stages of boundary-spanning practices. For instance, when do we consider withdrawing one's interest and resources as 'buffering', which arguably portrays a transactional mode, and when as 'weaving' which is considered to be a practice of the transformational mode?

In addition, when mayors point out that all of BRN's members 'play with open cards' and expose their doubts and weaknesses, these members engage in reflecting which fosters intergroup knowledge and understanding. However, one could ask if there is a real need to "reflect" because many members know each other from prior interactions and collaborations and they also commonly seem to identify with "being from North Jutland". At the same time, however, as also mentioned earlier, several members withdrew from proactive participation and instead settled with investing economic capital but restricted their investments of other types of capital. Hence, while the practice of "reflecting" seems partly to lie in the past, partly in the present and simultaneously is overly taken for granted as 'all identify with North Jutland', the strategy of "forging common ground" (connecting and mobilizing) seems also partly taken for granted. Connections between relevant actors have been established through former collaborations through which the participating municipalities were "sensitized to each others' values and expertise" (Palus et al. 2013: 211). On the grounds of past knowledge and perceived shared regional identity across the diverse groups belonging to BRN as well as the rather negative identification of North Jutland from those actors external to this region, the common purpose and shared identity ("mobilizing") of BRN could be crafted within a very short time-span. The question remains as to how sensitized and knowledgeable BRN's actors are about each other ("reflecting") in order to successfully engage in practices of "weaving" and lastly, "transforming" during which group distinctiveness and integration has to be balanced and new identities are created.

Furthermore, when focusing on power issues, this case shows that those mayors who initiated the creation of BRN seem to play the most important and influential roles within BRN; they represent those boundary spanners-in-practice, who are endowed with a certain level of symbolic capital which enables them to act and make decisions on behalf of others. Thus, they actively negotiate relationships between actors and practices and thereby draw on, but also create, objects that are understood as symbolically valuable across actors and contexts (Bourdieu 1998). For instance, BRN's members –

or rather those who actively engage in the creation of BRN and not only ‘join it’ - established this new political field and with it new joint practices and objects; a new website and a variety of new documents were created, which signified all municipalities as equal in power and as architects of “joint initiatives”. In addition, practices of collaboration based on co-financing and joint return on investment became symbolically more valuable than the former method of ad-hoc collaboration and hard competition (see section 5.1.1.). In order to establish newly joint practices and meaningful objects of symbolic capital, those mayors who functioned as boundary spanners-in-practice drew on various forms of capital which they had accumulated during former practices in various other political fields. The BRN initiating mayors used primarily their symbolic capital as political leaders to communicate the relevance for BRN and to obtain economic capital from the municipalities to finance BRN’s creation and its first symbolic objects (website, documents, secretariat), and joint initiatives (kick-off meeting and following meetings and concrete initiatives). They also draw on their social capital (already established networks and contacts via their multiple roles in various political bodies), and their cultural capital in various forms (knowing the language and practices of local politics; thinking and acting across political bodies and levels; knowing and having embodied political work practices; knowing the strengths and weaknesses as well as the image of one’s own municipality and the Region of North Jutland in general). By drawing on these various forms of capital embodied in what one could call the ‘political habitus’, the mayors demonstrate the need and value of BRN and motivate boundary-spanning practices such as “connecting”, “mobilizing”, and “weaving” (Palus et al. 2013). During this process, joint boundary objects such as BRN’s structure and website were created, re-negotiated, and used in practice to further indicate their position within the newly established field. They do, however, also use these joint boundary-spanning objects to position the new field (BRN) in relation to other fields (for example the Growth Forum or other Business Regions in and outside Denmark).

Despite the mayors’ accounts of being flexible in taking on different roles within BRN and the notion of BRN having a rather ‘flexible structure’, this case study shows that BRN’s members reproduce the existing power structures of the political fields that they also interact in. In other words, the collaborative partnership in which the Region and the municipalities are engaged may not have changed the “internal differences in status and power” very much: Aalborg municipality is still the strongest actor even though its mayor has “understood how to restrict his political influence in relation to BRN” as several mayors and the regional chairman pointed out. In addition, the smaller and more peripheral municipalities are still marginalized as they withdraw themselves from active participation, most probably because they lack the resources to be present in all fields of local politics. In other words, as suggested by Levina & Vaast (2013: 288) actors “who have accumulated more capital than others are able to influence others and maintain their own privileged positions”. On the other hand, in line with Bourdieu’s theory of practice, Levina & Vaast (2013) claim that power structures are changing when new fields emerge which is the case when boundary spanners engage in practices of transforming. This case study, however, shows that it is questionable if these changes occur within a new field when this field is situated within existing fields of practices (here the field of local politics) which actually facilitate the emergence of said new field in the first place. While there obviously are changes in the power structure of the field of local politics, because the Growth Forum ceased to exist and BRN emerged as new player in the field, it is questionable as to how far the power structures amongst the municipalities and their representatives have changed. Even though differences in resources and thus, power, between BRN’s members are acknowledged, they are not erased; instead, BRN’s members co-constructed and added new political practices to the existing practices of local politics which are perceived as more valuable and legitimate. For instance, collaboration seems to be higher in symbolic value than competition. This is clearly articulated by all members. But this adjusted approach also restricts the possible range of feasible actions: not all actions which potentially would enhance growth and development are perceived as legitimate, but only those that are profitable

for *all* of BRN's members. Thus, the new joint identity (belonging to BRN) and the 'new rules of the game', which encourage and value joint collaboration over competition by acting *as-if* power differences between BRN's members have been resolved, seem to further strengthen the social capital across BRN's members. Yet, the newly accrued forms of social capital come with a cost; they restrict agency and political power since all members are meant to consider each other in their political actions and thus, have to fulfil each other's legitimate expectations and obligations.

As theorized by Levina & Vaast (2005), boundary-spanning practices and the re-negotiation of new joint practices in an emergent field are not free of tensions. In relation to the study of BRN, I would like to highlight one of the four tensions pointed out by Levina & Vaast (2005), namely the tension between social actors investing in achieving legitimized capital in their local fields (municipality) versus achieving legitimized capital in the new joint field (BRN). As already mentioned, BRN is financed via a per capita pay contribution of each of its twelve members (the eleven municipalities and the Region) which amounts to about fourteen million DKK per year. Thus, each member invests economic capital proportional to their number of inhabitants through their engagement in BRN; and the proactively engaged mayors and municipal chief executives furthermore invest aforementioned forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital in order to build constructive partnerships and realize BRN's initiatives and overall goal. Firstly, when engaging fully in the joint field, BRN's members (municipal and regional representatives) need to draw on and invest some of their capital, which could, however, have been more usefully invested in their local fields. Secondly, investing one's capital in the new joint field (BRN) can be useful and legitimate if such an investment can be converted into legitimate and valued forms of capital associated with one's local field. In the case of BRN, this tension seems to be portrayed when some municipalities/mayors withdraw from actively partaking in BRN. On the other hand, BRN's members need not be fully engaged in BRN in order to be an accepted member in the joint field. BRN as a political field is comprised by a rather flexible structure (see section 5.2.1.) and legitimized practices which are co-created during regular meetings. While BRN's members need to invest some capital in encouraging others to engage in the co-creation of practices and objects, they do not invest all their time and capital to do so, and, therefore, do not risk losing their symbolic capital as local politicians in their local fields. Moreover, BRN's initiatives are meant to provide a greater return of investment for *all* its members. Hence, being engaged in the joint field of BRN seems to assist its members in advancing in their local fields as well. This way, investments in BRN and in the mayor's local fields are not in conflict with each other. In fact, being active on diverse political platforms throughout and beyond North Jutland seems to be part of the local politicians' daily routines and legitimized practices, which in turn foster their interpersonal relationships, legitimacy, status and expertise as boundary spanners in the field of local politics.

In sum, the analysis of boundary-spanning practices in this cross-sector field of BRN suggests that boundary-spanning practices and leadership seem to be non-linear situated practices and processes which are highly influenced by, on the one hand, wider contextual and historical dimensions, and individual characteristics of the boundary-spanning leaders, on the other hand. This has not been addressed as such in the existent literature on boundary-spanning practices. In this case study, boundaries are not only managed within each group through buffering and reflecting as mentioned by Palus et al. (2013), but rather from politicians and other actors *not identifying* with any of BRN's members (see section 5.1.2.). Furthermore, inter-group trust is not established during the strategy of forging common ground by which a common identity is created (as claimed by Kroeger & Bachmann 2013 and Palus et al. 2013), but instead is based on a pre-existing joint regional identity from which BRN's identity emerged. Moreover, somewhat in line with Söderberg & Romani (2017), this case suggests that differences in status and power are not diminished through transformative engagement (as suggested by Levina & Vaast 2008), but rather they seem to be 'pushed into the background' and considered to be not legitimate to articulate, as shown by restricting legitimate



practices for growth and development to those which profit *all* members while giving space to less economic powerful municipalities to withdraw from BRN's more resource-demanding initiatives. In addition, while these practices of withdrawal seem to be legitimate, they also present practices of buffering and thus, the leadership strategy of managing boundaries which according to Levina & Vaast (2013) represents transactive engagement. In other words, this cross-sector collaboration in which eleven rather different municipalities and the Region are engaged in shows features of a new political field (somewhat new practices and new positions/roles and overall new logic/rules of the game) while, at the same time, upholding and reconstructing existing power structures.

## 7. Contributions and conclusions

This case study of boundary-spanning in BRN contributes to research on boundary-spanning practices and boundary-spanning leadership practices in numerous ways. Firstly, this study adds to the few empirical studies which foster our understanding of transformative boundary-spanning practices (Levina & Vaast 2008; Barmeyer & Davoine 2018) in the under-researched context of cross-sector, multiple-level collaborations (Williams 2012; Guarneros-Meza & Martin 2016). Secondly, this study adds to our understanding of how new fields of practices emerge in practice (Levina & Vaast 2005, 2008; see also Sørderberg & Romani, 2017). The key contribution of this article, however, is in exploring how the *situativeness* of practices (Frederiksen 2014; see also Levina & Vaast 2013; Swidler 1986) influences the boundary spanners concrete intergovernmental leadership practices on the local level. Previous studies taking a practice perspective on boundary-spanning (Levina & Vaast 2005, 2008, 2013) seem to assume that once the transformational mode of engagement has been reached, a common identity and joint field has been created in which boundary-spanning activities have lessened power differences (Levina & Vaast 2005), and boundary-spanning practices culminate in a "Nexus Effect" (Palus et al., 2013: 215) in which boundary-spanning no longer seems necessary.

In this case study, BRN constitutes a new political field with new positions and thereto associated roles. Facilitated by an assumed a-priori common identity as well as long lasting interpersonal relationships characterized by mutual trust, this field, and thus its positions, have been co-created by municipal leaders which are also the actors taking on these positions. Hence, it is the powerful actors that secure their powers but relate them to other positions and practices. Whereas the creation of BRN as a whole may change the political power play on the municipal and regional level, it is still the former powerful actors/positions which re-constructed the already existing power structures on the individual level. Therefore, in this case, power differences are not lessened but rather subdued and addressed by a seemingly all-member-embracing practice and logic of the field which 'allows' members to withdraw from active participation in BRN. Consequently, this case suggests that boundary-spanning is a continuous process during which political leaders draw on a repertoire of boundary-spanning practices (see also Swidler 1986) to address the member and situation at hand. Hence, boundary spanners have to engage in a variety of boundary-spanning strategies and practices, depending on the time and context they find themselves and the other in. Thus, I suggest that neither modes nor practices of boundary-spanning and boundary-spanning leadership follow a certain pattern as claimed in the literature (see for instance Palus et al. 2013). Instead, the case of BRN suggests that these forms and modes coexist as boundary spanners have to judge which forms of capital and practices to draw on while facing the present situation and making sense of it in light of their past experiences and their anticipations of the future. Hence, this case study advocates for understanding boundary-spanning practices not only as *situated* but also as *relational* (Frederiksen 2014). Thus, one could ask if boundary-spanning leadership may show resemblances with other forms of leadership taking a practice perspective, such as "Leadership by muddling through" (Styhre 2012) or "Managerial leadership" (Sveningsson et al. 2012).

To conclude, this case study of a cross-sector and multilevel collaboration from the political field focused on boundary-spanning and boundary-spanning leadership as emergent practices

between municipal and regional political leaders. Instead of focussing on certain lifecycle models of boundary-spanning (Palus et al., 2013) or qualities (Langan-Fox & Cooper 2013) or pre-defined roles of boundary spanners (Zaheer & Bell, 2005; Wenger, 1998), this study employed a practice theoretical approach to study the *situated emergence of boundary-spanning practices* (Levina & Vaast, 2005, 2008, 2013). In this study, I analysed the processes of boundary-spanning practices via the medium of communication and thus, highlighted the influence of time and contextual dimensions on the political leaders' choice of practices. In particular, this study points to the importance of conceptualizing boundary-spanning leadership as *situated relational practices* which combine the past and the future in actual behaviour in the present (see also Tsoukas 2017) and thus, shed some light on the fluid and situated nature of boundary-spanning practices in political multi-level environments.

This research finds that boundary-spanning actors have to tackle multidimensional dilemmas by re-constructing and re-interpreting concepts such as difference, identity, boundary, and cooperation. In so doing, the social actors of BRN co-construct a new *field* (and thus, new boundaries) with new *social positions* which lastly also modify and enlarge their *political roles and symbolic capital* as well as the pre-existing *power structures* between diverse political institutions and platforms of local governance in North Jutland. The Growth Forum and other political bodies, for instance, are abolished while BRN allocates political power. These changes in North Jutland's political landscape do however not change the broader political field's distribution of power on the individual level. In the newly emerged field (BRN), the power structures of the overall political field (distribution of power), which are taken for granted, are seemingly reconstructed. Hence, when engaging in boundary-spanning, this research infers that boundary spanners have to understand and take the broader context and history of each group into account in order to lessen power differences between these actors and provide them with more resources to actively engage them in the co-creation of a 'third joint field'.

Further research could focus on how boundary spanners make sense (Weick et al. 2005) of the current situation and their choice of a certain boundary-spanning practice. In addition, a longitudinal comparative case study with ethnographic methods of BRN and other business regions in Denmark could provide more insight into the role of time and context on the emergence of boundaries and the approaches taken by local actors engaged in these cross-sector collaborations.

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**Appendix A: Interview Guide**

<b>1. BRN's etablering</b>	
1.1 Hvorfor blev BRN oprettet? (hvilke mål/ hvilke løsninger på hvilke problemer?)	
1.2 Hvorfor var det vigtigt, at BRN skulle dække hele Nordjylland (og ikke kun 'city-region Aalborg')?	
1.3 Har din organisations rolle ændret sig i kølvandet på BRN? Hvis ja, hvordan? Hvilke nye roller har BRN afstedkommet? (fx Vækstforums rolle forandret)	
<b>2. Samarbejde mellem aktører inden for og uden for BRN</b>	
2.1 Hvilke overvejelser har I gjort jer om samarbejde og koordinering i forhold til BRN's institutionelle set-up?	
2.2 Hvorfor og hvordan samarbejder BRN med andre Business Regioner (herunder city regioner)?	
<b>3. Organisationens læreproces</b>	
3.1 Nu har BRN eksisteret et års tid og I har formuleret en strategi – hvad har du lært indtil videre i BRN, med udgangspunkt i din egen organisation? (kan du give et eksempel) – skabe, fastholde og dele viden.	
<b>4. Strategi og koordinering</b>	
4.1 Hvad skal der til for at sikre BRN's handlekraft/ at BRN bliver en succes? (administrative, finansielle, politiske, legitime ressourcer)	
4.2 Hvordan skaber I ejerskab til BRN's strategi blandt alle aktørerne, uden at gå på kompromis med jeres mål?	
4.3 Hvordan passer jeres strategi og planer med BRN's strategi og planer?	
<b>5. Dialog og involvering</b>	
5.1 I hvilket omfang bliver borgere involveret i BRN's	

<p>beslutninger og aktiviteter? Kan du give et eksempel på, hvordan en sådan involvering foregår?</p>	
<p><b>6. Bæredygtig udvikling</b></p>	
<p>6.1 Hvordan forstår du bæredygtighed og hvilken rolle spiller bæredygtighed (klima) i BRN?</p> <p>6.2 Kender du til konflikter i forbindelse med bæredygtighed?</p> <p>6.3 Når der fx opstår en interessekonflikt om placering af vindmøller eller biogasanlæg - kan BRN så være med til at håndtere sådanne konflikter? Hvis ja, hvordan?</p>	
<p><b>7. Rekruttering af uddannet arbejdskraft</b></p>	
<p>7.1 Regional udvikling er også afhængig af evnen til at tiltrække en uddannet arbejdsstyrke. Hvis du var en slags 'recruitment manager' for BRN med ansvar for at fremme tiltræknings- og fastholdelsestiltag i regionen, hvad ville du så gøre og hvor ser du muligheder og problemer?</p> <p>7.2 Til slut vil vi bede dig reflektere lidt over lokal og regional identitet: – kan du sige lidt om, hvad der er unikt/specielt ved din kommune? // Er der noget, der adskiller din kommune fra andre (nordjyske?) (nabo-?)kommuner, og hvis ja, hvordan vil du beskrive det?</p> <p>Mener du, der eksisterer en fælles identitet for regionen, en nordjysk identitet? Hvis ja, hvordan ligner den (ikke) 1) din kommunes identitet /særkender 2) Danmarks identitet som helhed?</p>	