

Making the most of macro-regions

Trends. Analysis. Recommendations

“A ‘Macroregional strategy’ is an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion.”

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/



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As the EU macro-regional strategies continue to grow, new multi-government practices, evaluation and research weigh in to support their development.

A multi-level governance endeavour

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Introduction

With the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region endorsed by the EU Member States in 2009, the concept of macro-regional strategies has started and spread to three other regions: the Danube Region, the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the Alpine Region. Other macro-regional strategies are under discussion.

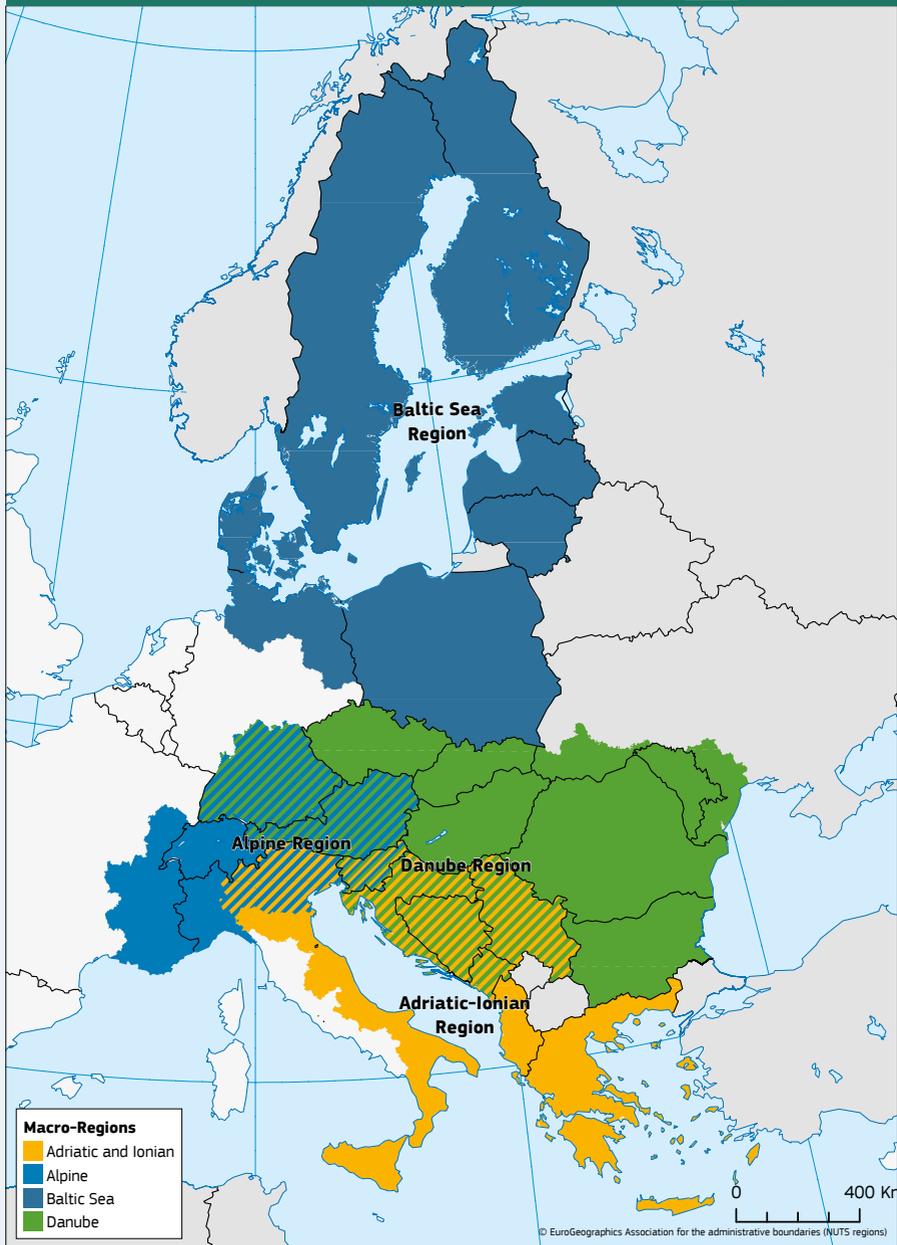
The booklet “Making the Most of Macro-regional Strategies” intends to take stock of this development and its multifaceted aspects. Interact has the task to establish a learning process among the four strategies. This booklet has been planned, designed and conceived in the spirit of promoting and spreading the macro-regional idea.

In this context, experts from academia and think tanks were addressed to propose contributions. Since the start of the macro-regional endeavour, research has played a crucial role in shaping a discourse and a practice that can be considered as a completely new feature of EU integration and provides an innovative approach towards cooperation and territorial cohesion. The contribution of academia in this has many aspects. First, it has helped to establish the macro-regions by providing relevant data and developing indicators. Second, academia has increasingly dealt with macro-regional strategies as objects of research, be it in terms of multi-level governance, with regards to the place-based

**Macro-Regions:
Adriatic and Ionian, Alpine, Baltic, Danube**



European
Commission



approach or as new forms of participation of citizens on the European level. More importantly, a scientific community has emerged that shows a true interest in macro-regional strategies.

A wide range of topics is covered in this publication, such as the involvement of regional parliaments in macro-regional strategies, general aspects of governance, policy integration, cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as monitoring and evaluation of macro-regional strategies. In addition to these horizontal aspects, a specific project example in the Baltic Sea Region illustrates how to overcome challenges in governance and stakeholder engagement. Furthermore,

the concept of a macro-regional strategy is also proposed for the North Sea region in order to enhance regional cooperation and thereby share ideas and experiences more effectively. Moreover, the booklet deals with issues such as participation and effects of inter-organisational networks in the framework of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, capacity building at both the individual and institutional level, as well as the involvement of non-EU Member States. ■

A multi-level governance endeavour



Macro-regional strategies and regional parliamentary involvement

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Over the last decade, and especially in post-2013 EU cohesion policy, macro-regions have evolved into a strategic and conceptual instrument that shall complement the Member State-driven process of European integration (see Gänzle and Kern 2016a). Macro-regional strategies (MRS) highlight the role of regions in the implementation of EU legislation as well as the need for cross-border cooperation to achieve stronger territorial cohesion. Their governance architecture is contested; MRS involve, in general, a plurality of non-state and public actors. However, by and large parliaments are not present in this discussion. Policy implementation and cross-national cooperation is almost naturally dominated by the executive branch of government, i.e., by public administrations. Nevertheless, there is not only the complexity of the EU multi-level system, but also the widespread call for a more democratic Union and

the respective changes in the Lisbon Treaty, which bring about a stronger role for regions and for parliaments. In this context the question arises if and how parliaments are or should be involved in MRS.

In the EU multi-level parliamentary system, we need to take different kinds of parliaments into account. This applies also to MRS: At supranational EU level the European Parliament (EP) has formally a very limited legislative role (it is the Council which adopts MRS). Nevertheless, the EP has adopted a more active role; it strongly supports the development of MRS (it has, for example, set up MRS specific MEP groups) to create territorial synergies and reduce regional disparities (European Parliament/ DG for Internal Policies 2015). As regards national parliaments (NPs), they have to give consent to the adoption of MRS in their own territory; furthermore, the Council of the EU calls for their enhanced

role in implementation. But what about regional parliaments (RPs) – given that MRS are, by definition, a regional strategy? This contribution focuses on RPs and their MRS participation.

The paper proceeds as follows: I briefly address different kinds of RPs and their functions in Section 1. Section 2 then outlines their participation in MRS. In Section 3 I discuss the potential benefits of stronger RP involvement against the background of MRS deficits.

RPs in the EU: their position and functions

Many EU Member States have RPs, which can come ‘in different shapes’ and with different functions. According to established ‘catalogues’ of basic parliamentary functions (for a detailed discussion see Abels 2015), we can distinguish between, on the one hand, functions that focus on executive-legislative relations. In this group legislation clearly dom-

inates; in addition, parliaments can be involved in the creation of the executive branch and they control the executive via various means. On the other hand, parliaments fulfil representative functions in relation to the electorate/citizens. Communication with the people is the core; parliaments have to be responsive and to articulate the interests of the people. In addition, in the context of EU integration, parliaments have to adopt a networking function, horizontal as well as vertical inter-parliamentary cooperation become very important.

The legislative function is considered to be paramount. Hence, there is a widespread and influential distinction between ‘real’, i.e., legislative parliaments and parliamentary assemblies. The first group of RPs with legislative powers can be found in eight EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom as well as in Fin-

land and Portugal).¹ The areas in which these RPs enjoy the right to legislate, however, differs according to domestic constitutional provisions. This group of 73 RPs was even directly strengthened by the Lisbon Treaty and can be directly involved – under certain conditions – in the new system of subsidiarity control.²

A second group of non-legislative parliamentary assemblies is less well researched. This latter group includes, for example, the *Conseils Régionaux* in the 18 French administrative regions, the *Sejmiki* in 16 voivodeships in Poland, the assemblies of the 12 provinces in The Netherlands or of the 5 regions in Denmark, the 13 regional assemblies in the Czech Republic or the 21 county assemblies in Croatia. Thus, we find RPs not only in federal or strongly regionalized states, but also unitary states have introduced assemblies at subnational level as part of decentralization of powers. These assemblies come under different names and also their degree of autonomy and their portfolios differ; policy responsibilities often include, for

example, tourism, transport, culture, regional development.

Given that existing MRS incorporate regions with and those without legislative powers, it is important to consider both. Furthermore, MRS are not legislative in nature, but they focus on the implementation of regional programmes. Therefore, the non-/legislative distinction is somewhat obsolete in the study of MRS. Moreover, all RP share a vital feature: they are directly elected by the citizens in their region. It is this accountability relation, which feeds into the representative function of RPs and their communicative role, and which I consider to be most important with regards to MRS.

¹ In Finland this is restricted to the Åland Island, and Portugal to the Azores and Madeira.

² Article 6 of Protocol No. 2 on Subsidiarity and Proportionality of the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that, "it is for each national Parliament or each chamber of a national parliament to consult, where appropriate, regional parliaments with legislative powers". For a detailed discussion of the development in six out of the eight EU member states Abels and Eppler 2015; Högenauer and Abels 2017.

Regional parliamentary involvement in MRS

There is no comprehensive study on the involvement of RPs in MRS. Thus, in what follows the empirical evidence is varying. It is limited to the two oldest MRS, i.e., the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and for the Danube Region (EUSDR). However, these are considered pilot regions. Overall, there is evidence of some parliamentary involvement in the EUSBSR and the EUSDR. There are two possible levels of involvement: (1) at the cross-border level via inter-parliamentary cooperation; e.g., the MRS' annual fora provide an opportunity for RPs to meet and discuss, (2) in addition, there can be domestic involvement; e.g. RPs may discuss the MRS with the public and they can scrutinize regional administrations' performance in MRS implementation.

The EUSBSR was the first MRS (see Gänzle and Kern 2016b). Started in 2009 it involves eight EU Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden), several of which have RPs, plus three third countries (Belarus, Norway, Russia). In the region, strong parliamentary cross-border cooperation existed for many decades. Therefore, some observers consider the Baltic Sea Region “as a laboratory or inter-parliamentary ‘dialogue’” (Fasone 2013).

The Nordic Council was founded in 1952 to promote inter-parliamentary co-operation among the Nordic countries in a number of policy areas.³ In 1991 the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was set up as a “forum for political dialogue”, which provides a “unique parliamentary bridge between all the EU- and non-EU countries” (BSPC 2016, p. 2). It “promotes and drives various initiatives and efforts to support a sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the Baltic Sea Region” (ibid.). The BSPC organises annual conferences and gathers national parliamentarians from 11 countries, but also from 11 regional parliaments (from Germany: Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein; from the Finnish Åland Island, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, from Russia: Leningrad, St Petersburg, Kaliningrad; and from the Republic of Karelia), in addition to five Baltic Sea parliamentary organizations. Thus, there was already a strong cross-border parliamentary cooperation before the EUSBSR was established.

Given the large number of EU Member States (8) in the BSPC and given that all of them participate in the EUSBSR, it is not surprising that the EU has an effect on this parliamentary coop-

³ <http://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council>

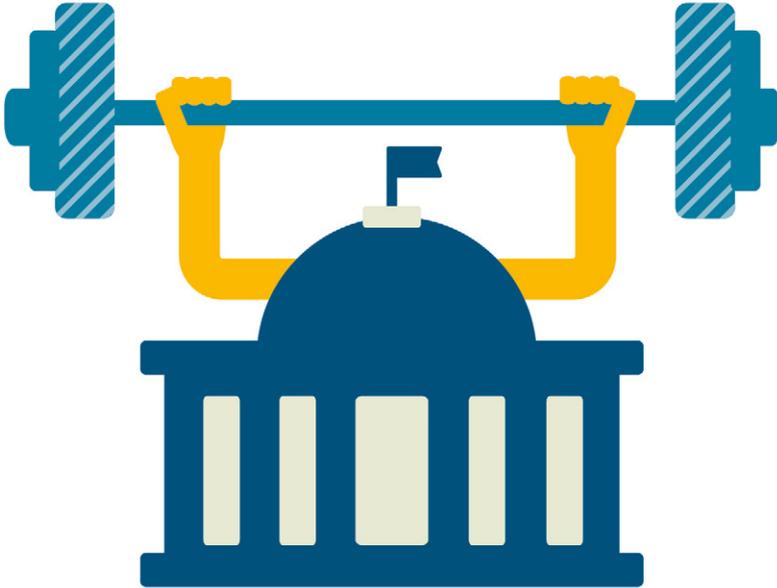
eration and that the EUSBSR, its development and progress is frequently discussed by the BSPC standing groups and at the annual conferences. Thus, there is some degree not only of national but also of regional parliamentary involvement in this MRS. In this case, there were very supportive conditions that already existed previously and outside the EU structure. This finding, however, does not tell us anything about if and how strongly the involved RPs communicate the MRS with the regional public and if such communication could effect civil society participation and ownership.

The EUSDR is the second MRS (for a detailed account see Ágh 2016). It involves 14 countries, nine of which are EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) plus three Western Balkan countries (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Again, several of these participating countries have RPs endowed with different competences. Unlike the EUSBSR, the EUSDR, however, could not build on pre-existing inter-parliamentary cooperation, while some administrative cooperation was already strengthened with the establish-

ment of the Council of Danube cities and regions in 2009. To fill the parliamentary gap, a first Danube Parliamentary Conference took place in July 2013, initiated by the state of Baden-Württemberg, with more than 100 parliamentarians from national and regional assemblies from 10 different countries.⁴ At this meeting, the parliamentarians emphasised the need for a strong political backing by NP and by RP to make the EUSDR a long-term success (Landtag von Baden-Württemberg 2013, p. 12).

Ever since then annual parliamentary conferences have taken place. Yet, again, the existence of inter-parliamentary exchange does not give us information on the communication about and control over the EUSDR implementation at the regional level. The state parliament (Landtag) of Baden-Württemberg, for example, discussed different EUSDR aspects several times; in addition, information on the implementation of the strategy is part of the state governments' report on EU affairs (Europabericht der Landesregierung) to the state parliament. The fact that – according to a recent Flash Eurobarometer – even in the EUSDR

⁴ <https://www.donaubuero.de/donauparlamentarierkonferenz>



countries only a minority (less than 20%) are aware of the strategy, hints at some communicative shortcomings.

In its report on the governance of MRS, the Commission (2014, p. 5) concludes that while meetings of national and regional parliamentarians of both MRS do take place, there is still need for improvement. Hence, she recommends that for more effective coordination and implementation, “innovative approaches of net-

working and discussion” (ibid., p. 9) should be exploited, including a “platform for the involvement of ... regional and multi-governance levels, and parliamentary debate” (ibid.). These experiences should be considered in the design of the two recent MRS: the EUSAIR (Adriatic and Ionian Region) and EUSALP (Alpine Region) – or of the pending MRS. Both strategies face a situation similar to the EU-SDR with regards to the lack of pre-existing inter-parliamentary

cooperation. Thus, the EUSDR should be closely studied with regards to its embryonic parliamentary involvement to draw lessons for new and pending MRS.

The potential benefits of a stronger role of regional parliamentary involvement

A discussion of the potential benefits of RP involvement has to be linked to debates on the deficits and problems of MRS. Problems arising from the complex governance structure, from a lack of civil society involvement and lack of ownership among public and private actors dominate. Stronger parliamentary involvement could improve the situation and balance at least some of these deficits because of the complex functions of parliaments, especially due to their communicative, control and networking function (see section 2).

This brief assessment is supported, for example, by the European Commission (2014, p. 5);

in a report she demands a better involvement of stakeholders, “including parliaments at different levels” to improve ownership. Similarly, the European Parliament calls for a stronger role of regional (and local) actors “to avoid ‘the trap of intergovernmental governance’” (European Parliament 2015, p. 27) and for instruments “to encourage improved commitment of relevant bodies in each Member State” (*ibid.*, p. 11) – however, the EP study does not even mention RPs.

RPs have to control the performance of public administrations in MRS; this is part of their government scrutiny function. They can use various control tools, such as reporting etc., to put pressure on regional governments. This could improve the widely recognised lack of ownership in MRS.

The lack of ownership and – linked to this – of civil society participation is reflected in the low level of knowledge among

“Successful MRS implementation also requires communication at regional level – and this is the potential stronghold of Regional Parliaments who are closer to the citizens”

citizens about MRS. According to the recent Flash Eurobarometer 452 only 14% of EU citizens know about EUSBSR, only 8% about the EUSDR; about 60% of EU citizens are not aware that EU strategies for cross-border regional cooperation exist at all; 86% of respondents have never heard about Interreg, which is a strand of programmes established already for some years (European Commission 2017, p. 72, 78-81). Awareness is sometimes higher in those Member States who participate in the strategies, e.g., 60% of citizens in Finland know about the EUSBSR, yet only 25% in Denmark, and the EUSDR numbers are as low as 12 to 17%. Stronger RP participation could be remedied because have to be accountable to citizens; they have to communicate their policies and activities to the electorate.

Parliaments are, however, not homogenous actors. While we see in some of the report that

parliaments claim a stronger role for themselves (and the subsidiarity system hints at the fact that also RP can play a stronger role in EU affairs), parliaments are in fact internally divided along party lines. This is by and large also true for RPs. Political parties operate as intermediate actors. This means that they mediate between public actors such as parliaments and governments on the one hand and citizens – including organised civil society – on the other hand. Thus, stronger parliamentary involvement can – via the partisan route – also promote the interest of civil society actors in MRS and support – via party-stakeholder ties – their capacities for participation.

Nevertheless, we need to be realistic about parliamentary engagement. MRS are described in the literature as “soft spaces”. This soft and transborder nature creates restrictions as well as possibilities for RPs. Involvement in transnational politics is diffi-

cult for parliaments, which are, by nature, primarily contained to the nation states – not least because of their specific incentive structure (winning votes). Hence, horizontal cross-border inter-parliamentary activities are difficult to build up and to sustain. This is even more so the case for RPs, which are less resourceful than their national counterparts. However, successful MRS implementation also requires communication at regional level – and this is the potential stronghold of RPs who are ‘closer to the citizens’. This said, turning MRS into a “laboratory of parliamentary dialogue” – in the region and beyond – is simultaneously a necessity as well as a major challenge. ■

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The macro-regional strategies of the European Union: experimentalist governance in times of crisis

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Introduction

The macro-regional strategies (MRS) of the European Union (EU) are a relatively recent phenomenon of EU governance. Located at the intersection of transnational territorial policy and inter-governmental regional cooperation, the Strategies for the Baltic Sea (2009), Danube (2011), Ionian-Adriatic (2014) and Alpine (2015) regions, have set out to develop new innovative frameworks for policy reference, orientation and coordination – inviting and involving stakeholders and actors from subnational, national and European levels of governance. Its National Coordinators, Policy and Horizontal Action Coordinators, who pursue various jointly defined objectives to tackle common concerns and challenges at macro-regional scale, often refer to the strategies and their implementation in terms of

an “experiment” of policy-making and fostering multi-level governance. This is an adequate description for capturing the very essence of macro-regional strategies as, in a nutshell, experiments that allow to chart hitherto unknown territories. However, according to a standard definition of the term, an experiment also needs to be replicable – at least as long as they are conducted under similar conditions.

Clearly, a macro-regional strategy is not an experiment in the sense of natural sciences. Still, it is worthwhile to consider it as an instance of experimentalist governance as the contextual conditions in which macro-regional strategies operate these days are quite comparable: Whether the Baltic Sea, the Danube or other regions alike – Europe and the European Union is in the abyss of a fundamental crisis. It started

as a financial and economic crisis almost ten years ago and has subsequently become superseded by a crisis of confidence and legitimacy. Sure, macro-regional strategies have not been devised as means to cope with the ongoing EU crisis, but still citizens and politicians alike are likely to judge the macro-regional added-value according to the success they deliver – or fail to do so. This is not an easy task. Macro-regional strategies operate in a highly complex multi-level environment and are permanently confronted with high levels of uncertainty which they address in an experimental way of ‘trial and error’.

As a concept ‘experimentalist governance’ – authored by Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin – can be conceived as a variation of the open method of coordination that has come to become central in EU policy-making

after the 2000s, primarily in areas where the EU did not have core competence, such as employment, economic policy and the European Semester. An experimentalist governance cycle is based on framework rulemaking and the continuous elaboration and revision through a recursive review of implementation experience in different local contexts. The experimentalist governance approach propels a governance architecture that resides on four constitutive elements. First, framework goals (such as ‘good water status’ or ‘good environmental status’, GES) and measures for gauging their achievement established by joint action of the member states, EU institutions and other actors of the EU multilevel governance system. Second, national ministries or regulatory authorities as so-called lower-level units are provid-

ed with sufficient autonomy in implementing framework rules or to propose changes to them. Third, regularly reporting on performance, especially as measured by the agreed indicators, and participation in a peer review in which their own results are compared with those pursuing other means to the same general ends. Thereafter, there is regular periodic revision of framework goals, metrics and procedures by the actors who initially established them possibly enriched by such new participants whose views come to be seen as indispensable to full and fair deliberation.

Defining framework goals

Framework goals have been established through efforts of EU member and partner states as well as public consultation and are linked to the objectives of Europe 2020. In addition to the macro-regional strategies themselves, individual Action Plans inform and detail the priorities and objectives of the overall macro-regional framework. Yet, the Action Plans only provide a rough sketch on how to reach rather broadly defined goals, thus allowing strategy-relevant, lower-level unit participants significant leeway in terms of realising the objectives. Similar to the EU2020 Strategy for example, the Action Plans identify the main societal and environmental concerns in

the respective macro-region and thereby break down the EU2020 headline targets into a specific territorial framework. The Action Plans have been conceived as 'rolling' and follow a recursive pattern allowing for regular revisions. Whereas in the case of the EUSBSR the Action Plan was already revised in 2015, the EUSDR priority co-ordinators have been asked by the Commission to develop roadmaps including targets and milestones which need to be achieved to complete an action. When considering the more recent Action Plans of the EUSAIR and EUSALP, it is noticeable that in comparison to the first EUSBSR, as well as the EUSDR Action Plans, there is a tendency towards defining baseline indicators and enhancing result-orientation.

Entrust local units

In the participating countries, national co-ordinators (NCs) – mostly in foreign ministries and (less so) in prime ministers' offices or ministries responsible for regional development – together with the high-level group assume a key role in terms of overseeing the strategy implementation. It is crucial that, especially in the framework of the EUSDR and the EUSAIR, NCs from neighbourhood and (potential) candidate countries operate on a level-playing field with those from EU mem-



ber states. In addition, thematic co-ordinators were appointed by the EU member and partner states, and eventually confirmed by the Commission's DG Regio with the task of, among other things, establishing a group of respective counterparts in the participating states; i.e., mostly public officers from line ministries adjacent to the priority themes, e.g., infrastructure and transport. In most cases, thematic co-ordinators represent (sub-) national government agencies and ministries, with only a few appointments from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As one of them notes with regards to uncertainty and experimentalism in transnational co-operation with

regards to the work ethos of ministerial officials:

“... [in] that it is easier for PAC/HAL coming from international organisations to grasp and understand how to fulfil the duties as PAC/HAL.” The fact that a PAC/HAL represents the interest of eight member states (EUSBSR) makes it complicated for a person working in a ministry used to a more a reactive behaviour in regards to EU instead of the proactive one needed as PAC/HAL.”

Local units such as the thematic co-ordinators are responsible for the co-ordination of priorities within MRS. In the case of the EUSDR, the Priority Area dealing with ‘Institutional Capacity and Co-operation’ assumes

“Shaping the future of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region”, 18 November 2014, Brussels, Belgium



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comparable tasks and has included the Central European Initiative and the Regional Co-operation Council in its Steering Group. In both the EUSDR and the EUSBSR, subnational entities work as PACs/HACs on level-playing fields with ministries, e.g., the cities of Hamburg and Turku for the topics of education and co-operation with neighbouring countries, as well as in the city of Vienna for the EUSDR with regard to capacity building – a collaborative framework that is now becoming more important in the frame of the Urban Agenda. Especially in the EUSALP, cities and, above all, regions can be considered the

backbone of the macro-regional governance. The co-ordinators lead the respective thematic group alongside one or two, or even more, institutions from another country/other countries participating in the MRS, thereby underwriting a format of bi- or trilateral co-operation within the co-ordination tasks in a multilateral macro-regional environment.

Regular reports

Both types of local units – thematic co-ordinators and NCs – are responsible to their respective home institutions, but nevertheless have acquired some autonomy over time, a specific

feature of experimentalist governance. The Council requests thematic co-ordinators to annually report their performance to the Commission, paving the way for a regular revision of framework goals. Moreover, NCs were asked by the Commission to provide reports on their countries' experience with regard to the implementation of MRS. The EP has also recently highlighted the 'positive role' of MRS in a report on the ETC and called for a better exchange between managing authorities and MRS.

Framework goals and indicators for self-assessment may vary among thematic co-ordinators, not only because of the variety of policies, but also because of the different understanding of these actors regarding definition and application. Moreover, jointly with the public consultations at the beginning of the Strategies, a very diverse inclusive picture of the respective macro-regions has emerged, sometimes at the cost of consistency of the Action Plans. It can be observed that from the EUSBSR towards the EUSALP, Action Plans have become more result-oriented, suggesting that there is an experimentalist learning process from one Strategy to another, with the result of an accelerated implementation process and more 'streamlined' strategies with fewer priorities.

Revision of framework

The Action Plans provide some entry-points for a recursive process of target-setting and revision. In the framework of the Action Plan, actions are established in policy areas which should be completed with corresponding projects, some of which are 'flagships' as in the case of the EUSBSR or 'strategic projects' as in the EUSDR, thus showing a specific macro-regional added-value. In addition to this, the Commission asked PACs to define targets and the subsequent steps required ('milestones') in order to reach them. This becomes clear in view of the new reporting method introduced by the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), established in 2014 as a co-ordination body and a 'one-stop-shop' for matters related to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The process of macro-regional 'policy-making' has clearly shown patterns of experimentalist governance. The shift of focus from macro-regional governance towards the governance of MRS has been accompanied by an enhanced role for NCs in comparison to the thematic co-ordinators. The European institutions have different attitudes towards MRS, and some consultative bodies, such as the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), have even called for the refrainment of the 'Three No's'; an atti-

tude that is shared by stakeholders who think that MRS require dedicated instruments in order to be successful. The informal setting of EU MRS provides smaller states and regions in bigger states with the opportunity to benefit from economies of scale, which is of particular relevance in the Balkans.

Conclusion

EU macro-regional strategies and their added value have increasingly been discussed and there are tendencies to strengthen their impact through a result-oriented approach, similar to ESIF programmes. This approach has also recently been advocated and brought forward by the Commission in its now bi-annual report on all four MRS. Moreover, the two 'new' macro-regional strategies – the EUSAIR and the EU-SALP – include to a far lesser degree 'soft' Priority Areas dealing with social policies or capacity building than the EUSDR and EU-

SBSR did – which again reflects the focused approach also included in the thematic concentration for ESIF. This evidence supports the view that macro-regional strategies are a case of experimentalist governance, and that the macro-regional approach is also used in order to provide feedback from one Strategy to another, a feedback and learning process that is currently supported by the Interact programme. There is also a need to ensure the mutual support of macro-regional strategies and ESIF, but the ongoing relations with policy areas other than regional policy must also be ensured, especially when it comes to the external dimensions of EU Policies, as well as EU Neighborhood and enlargement policies. In this regard, it will be also essential for the ESIF and IPAll programmes to apply innovative methods and tools regarding spending outside the programme area, transnational action or innovative approaches

“The macro-regional approach is also used in order to provide feedback from one Strategy to another, a learning process that is currently supported by the Interact programme.”

such as community-led development or integrated territorial investment. Experimentalist governance directs our attention to several critical issues. In particular, it signals an important flaw from an experimentalist perspective which is ‘diagnostic monitoring’, or put alternatively, reporting against agreed indicators, peer review, evaluation and revision of local plans which remain underdeveloped to date. Without ‘ongoing supervision by stakeholders of their projects to detect and correct problems of design or execution as they are encountered’ (ibid.), the two-way recursive feedback between conception and execution at central and local levels cannot fully occur.

Several reforms need to be enacted in order to enhance the performance of macro-regional strategies:

First, there is a need for clarification of the concept of what macro-regional strategy really means. Research can contribute

to a clarification of the concept, e.g., through the experimentalist governance or the multi-level governance approaches. Additionally, in order to understand how macro-regional strategies contribute to the institutional ‘thickness’ of regional policy, it may be worthwhile considering them in relation to trends in regional development, e.g., the place-based approach that would avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach for macro-regional strategies. This approach would highlight the relevance of well-functioning institutions for regional development.

Table 1: EU macro-regional Strategies and experimentalist governance (EG)

| EG element | EUSBSR | EUSDR | EUSAIR | EUSALP |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| Framework goals | Strategy & (rev.) Action Plan SEC(2009) 712, | Strategy & Action Plan SEC (2010)1489 | Strategy & Action Plan SWD(2014) 190 final | Strategy & Action Plan with result/policy indicators & examples for indicators/ units SWD(2015) 147 final |
| Delegating to local units | Nomination of PACs/ HACs/NCs/SG Members | Nomination of PACs/NCs/SG Members | NCs, Pillar Coordinators, Governing Board, involvement of EP and EESC | Thematic Action Groups and their Leaders, NCs; Executive Board & General Assembly |
| Local units regularly reporting on their performance with agreed indicators/ framework goals | Report to the Commission | Report to Danube Strategy Point/ Monitoring | Reporting to Governing Board | Reporting to Executive Board |
| Revision of framework goals | New Action Plan updated in 2013 and 2015, defining targets and indicators SEC(2009) 712/2 SWD(2015) 177 SWD(2017) 118 final | New Action Plan under discussion | N/A | N/A |

← RECURSIVE PROCESS →
(Commission Communications, Council Conclusions)

Second, a clarification of responsibilities and tasks is needed in order to make the Strategies successful, as their experimentalist character has created a significant extent of 'disorder' in the implementation. In this regard, the experimentalist approach can help raise awareness about a responsive system with mutual information flows between a Strategy's formal and informal patterns, with the latter being crucial especially in view of the absence of macro-regional legislation, institutions and funding.

Third, the concept of macro-regional strategies needs to be embedded in all of the sectoral policies for every participating country in order to strengthen not only the bottom-up process, but also the top-down capacity of the macro-regional strategies. This means that they need to be considered in national ministries once governmental programmes have been negotiated and they should also play a stronger role in the future European legislation, especially in the European Structural and Investment Funds regulations and other legal bases for European investment. Macro-regional strategies provide a new order in so far as they trigger the cooperation between the admin-

istration of regional policy and political initiatives and also contribute to the coherence of different funds and policies, with the potential of breaking the organisational 'silos' that have emerged after several decades of implementation of the regional policy of the EU.

Fourth, a common understanding needs to be established that the Strategies are long-term endeavors aimed at incremental change and not a mere duplication of existing programmes and related project activities. As macro-regional strategies are long-term and have no end, they bear the capacity to contribute to the capitalisation of EU programmes and projects, thereby feeding back into the policy level. A comparison between the four strategies shows that those more recently endorsed have been tied closer and closer to the transnational Interreg programmes in the respective geographic area.

Fifth, macro-regional strategies might become a forum that provides room for criticism referring to the shortcomings of the existing regional and urban policy of the EU, as well as insight into the real needs on the ground. ■

Policy integration and cross-sectoral integration of macro-regional strategies

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Introduction

Policy integration and cross-sectional coordination of macro-regional strategies is crucial since all of the macro-regional strategies address a diverse range of policy areas. Two basic dimensions of policy integration can be distinguished. The first refers to horizontal integration between policy sectors (e.g., different departments and/or professions in public authorities) while the second refers to vertical inter-governmental integration in policy-making (i.e., between different tiers of government). In the context of macro-regional strategies, cross-sectoral policy integration is primarily related to the first of these two dimensions: horizontal integration between policy sectors although the second dimension can also be of importance, particularly when responsibilities for specific tasks or sectors are not held at the same level in all participating countries or regions.

In this contribution, the term policy integration implies going beyond the mere coordination of policies and encompasses joint work among sectors, creating synergies between policies, sharing goals for their formulation and responsibility for their implementation. Various degrees of integration can be distinguished, ranging from policy cooperation to policy coordination through to policy integration (Stead et al, 2004; Stead & Meijers, 2009).⁵

This paper considers how policy integration, particularly horizontal integration between policy sectors, can be promoted and achieved in the inception, preparation and implementation of EU macro-regional strategies based on a range of experiences to date.

⁵ While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably by some authors, others do not and consider them to be different. For example, the OECD considers policy integration to be quite distinct and more sophisticated than policy coordination: the main differences concern two aspects: (i) the level of interaction; and (ii) the type of output (OECD, 1996). In general, policy integration is considered here to be more far-reaching than policy coordination, which in turn is more sophisticated than cooperation.

“What is essential is that plans and policies result in practical (and integrated) action on the ground.”

This contribution is based on the author’s involvement in a study into the relationships between macro-regions and European Territorial Cooperation⁶, commissioned by the European Parliament (Schuh et al, 2015). The paper is divided into two main parts. First, it discusses the main types of facilitators of policy integration in general and, second, it highlights the main lessons and recommendations for promoting policy integration in the context of EU macro-regional strategies. As will be seen, most of these lessons and recommendations are closely conditioned by the main facilitators of policy integration.

Main facilitators of policy integration

Based on a review of key literature on policy integration, cooperation and coordination it is possible to categorise five main types of facilitators of policy integration (Stead et al, 2004; Stead & Meijers, 2009): (i) political factors; (ii) institutional/organisational factors; (iii) economic/financial factors; (iv) process, management and instrumental factors; and (v) behavioural, cultural and personal factors.⁷ These five types are outlined in turn below.⁸ There is clearly a certain amount of overlap between these headings, and this classification system represents just one of a number of ways of clustering facilitators of policy integration. Because of the range of literature reviewed, some of the facilitators

⁶ European Territorial Cooperation is a central goal of EU regional policy (Cohesion Policy) and provides a framework for joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different EU Member States.

⁷ This classification was derived by combining and adapting various classification systems, notably those of Challis et al (1988), Halpert (1982) and OECD (1996).

⁸ See Stead & Meijers (2009) for a more detailed overview.

refer more to cooperation and co-ordination than to integration.

Political factors

In terms of political factors affecting policy integration, it is important to begin by noting that the similarities between the different agencies involved in policy making have an important influence on the integration of policies. These similarities cover a variety of dimensions, ranging from organisational structure, power, status, professional ethics and ideologies to resources that are invested in the policy-making process. Similarities in terms of a shared understanding of the policy issues and objectives, and agreement on the right approach to address them, are important starting points (Halpert, 1982; Challis et al., 1988; Kickert & Koppenjan, 1997). Policy integration is very much dependent on political commitment and leaders who are able to convey the bigger picture and are able to look for the right partners with compatible needs to pursue cross-cutting objectives (Halpert, 1982; Challis et al., 1988; OECD, 1996; Kickert & Koppenjan, 1997). Developing links with such partners can provide more influence but this seldom comes without the loss of some autonomy and/or the ability to unilaterally control outcomes (Challis et al., 1988; Alter & Hage, 1993).

Institutional and organisational factors

A central overview capacity that is responsible for achieving cross-cutting objectives can help to facilitate policy integration (OECD, 1996). Similarities, in terms of organisational structure and goals, can be important facilitators of policy integration (Halpert, 1982). Meanwhile, bureaucratisation and fragmentation of government are not conducive to policy integration (Halpert, 1982). The first hampers communication and innovation and the latter may result in contradictory mandates and regulations. However, it is inevitable that some degree of fragmentation in government will exist as a consequence of the need for specialisation amongst others.

Economic and financial factors

Clearly, there are time and resource costs involved in the process of policy integration. These often include considerable investment in time and energy to establish and sustain cross-cutting working arrangements (Huxham, 1996). Complicating the process is the fact that resources are often not allocated to cross-cutting objectives but to sectoral priorities, so that there is little or no reward for helping to achieve objectives in other sectors or cross-cutting objectives. As a result, incentive structures and appraisal systems may be useful

Figure 1. Eight tools of policy coherence

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Commitment by the political leadership is a necessary precondition to coherence, and a tool to enhance it |
| 2. | Establishing a strategic policy framework helps ensure that individual policies are consistent with the government's goals and priorities |
| 3. | Decision makers need advice based on a clear definition and good analysis of issues, with explicit indications of possible inconsistencies |
| 4. | The existence of a central overview and co-ordination capacity is essential to ensure horizontal consistency among policies |
| 5. | Mechanisms to anticipate, detect and resolve policy conflicts early in the process help identify inconsistencies and reduce incoherence |
| 6. | The decision-making process must be organised to achieve an effective reconciliation between policy priorities and budgetary imperatives |
| 7. | Implementation procedures and monitoring mechanisms must be designed to ensure that policies can be adjusted in the light of progress, new information, and changing circumstances |
| 8. | An administrative culture that promotes cross-sector co-operation and a systematic dialogue between different policy communities contributes to the strengthening of policy coherence |

Source: OECD (1996).

in promoting and rewarding policy integration. Imbalances in resources between actors may lead to the loss of authority and influence, and possibly the withdrawal of actors from the policy process (Halpert, 1982).

Process, management and instrumental factors

Communication can be a major facilitator (or inhibitor) of policy integration (Halpert, 1982; OECD, 1996). The process of policy integration can benefit from systematic dialogue between sectors and agreements to share costs and benefits between actors (OECD, 1996). Procedures for

promoting dialogue and achieving consensus in decision-making processes are also key for policy integration (OECD, 1996).

Behavioural, cultural and personal factors

Various facilitators of policy integration centre around the relationship between agencies and individuals (e.g., previous co-operation, existing levels of trust, openness to co-operation). Difficulties often arise when there is insufficient shared understanding of policy issues, something that can result from non-convergent, specialist approaches and language (Halpert, 1982; OECD,

1996; Huxham, 1996). The closeness of organisational cultures is also a major facilitator of policy integration. In addition, the presence of persons able to see the common interests of actors involved in joined-up working (Challis et al., 1988) and a general culture of trust can also contribute to the policy integration process.

In summary, many institutional conditions can help to promote policy integration but there is no single solution that can deliver policy integration alone. The 1996 OECD report on policy coherence provides a useful and detailed starting point for considering policy integration in practice (Figure 1) by identifying eight basic ‘tools of policy coherence’, each of which is closely linked to one (or more) of the five basic types of facilitators of policy integration outlined above. All of these tools of coherence have proved themselves to be conducive to greater policy coherence in governments from different political and administrative traditions. While they may at first glance seem simple and obvious, experience shows that successfully putting them into practice is more than a simple matter.

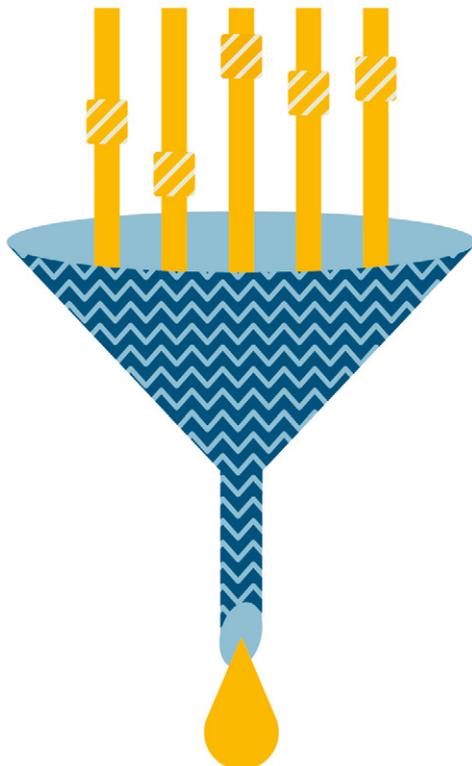
Promoting policy integration in macro-regional strategies

Having considered some of the essential conditions for policy integration, attention is now turned to putting these into practice in the context of EU macro-regional strategies. In this part of the chapter, recommendations for promoting policy integration are formulated based on the findings of research commissioned by the European Parliament (Schuh et al, 2015). These recommendations are derived from case study analysis of all macro-regional strategies. Three different phases are distinguished in formulating the recommendations: the conceptualisation, preparation and implementation phases. More attention is devoted to the latter two. The recommendations are primarily addressed to policy officials at the European, national and/or regional levels.

Conceptualization

The conceptualization stage is the period preceding the call for the elaboration of a macro-regional strategy. The main aim of this phase is to establish the need, feasibility of and major aim in applying a macro-regional strategy to a problem within a given territory.

In order to improve the financial viability of potential strategy implementation it is important to link potential actions, thematic



priorities and division of tasks to a clear assessment of financial needs. The assessment can take different forms and derivatives depending on the class of macro-regional cooperation. Proposals should be closely analysed in terms of different socio-economic disparities and the ability to be able to address these through European Territorial Cooperation

and other forms of financing. Proposals for new macro-regional strategies need to assess political stability, especially in macro-regions involving states outside the European Union.

Four main recommendations are made for promoting policy integration in the conceptualisation phase:

1. The conceptualisation of macro-regional strategies should give priority to the involvement of a wide set of actors
2. Evaluation of political stability should precede strategy formulation
3. Evaluation of growth and synergy potentials should precede strategy formulation
4. Assessment of financial means and needs should precede the development of an action plan and the division of tasks

Preparation

The main aim of the preparation phase is to create the foundation for establishing a macro-regional strategy, its main pillars and the key objectives in a vertically and horizontally coordinated process. The recommendations identified below are specifically addressed to the consultation phase and the choice of overall objectives of the macro-regional strategy.

Eight main recommendations are made for promoting policy integration in the preparation phase:

1. Initial consultations should have a sufficient capacity in order to achieve coverage of interests
2. Formulation of national proposals should be aligned to the strategic EU context (e.g., EU2020)
3. Actors from civil society should be encouraged to participate in the consultation phase via national and/or regional activities (see below)
4. National consultation conferences should be organised prior to the EU consultation period
5. Social and economic disparities should be considered as a key objective
6. Promoting territorial synergies should be considered as a key objective
7. The development of cooperation structures and the greater coordination of existing ones should be considered a key objective
8. The formulation of proposals should focus on a small number of detailed objectives

Implementation

The implementation phase starts after the proposal for a macro-regional strategy by the Commission and is formally accepted by the European Parliament and endorsed by the European Council. The main aim of this phase is the execution of

the objectives set out in the macro-regional strategy's action plan.

Several measures may be useful for increasing the effectiveness of implementation structures at the national and regional levels. Based on experiences in Austria and Sweden it may be useful to coordinate activities within government through a national actor platform, including relevant ministries, regional actors and civil society. National authorities should inform NGOs about the decisions of the steering groups and give them opportunities to comment on them. Meanwhile, regional actors should foster the creation of representation structures.

The coordination of European Territorial Cooperation programmes and macro-regional strategies should build on existing expertise and experience from the Interact programme, which provides practical support, training and advice to European Territorial Cooperation Programmes on management techniques, financial issues, European regulations, communication, strategic orientation and policy development. It also offers a unique forum for European Territorial Cooperation stakeholders by supporting institutional and thematic networks on topics of common interest.

While older EU member states often tend to have separate ad-

ministrative structures for European Territorial Cooperation and macro-regional strategies, structures are often more integrated in newer member states. Political changes in new Member States have shown to have a significant effect on the administration of macro-regional strategies and the composition of the steering groups.

Better coordination of different EU Structural Funds cooperation needs to start in the European Commission. An inter-service group on macro-regions between different directorates in the European Commission could be set up to ensure alignment of funding streams.

Eight main recommendations are made for promoting policy integration in the implementation phase:

1. Foster the creation of regional and local representation structures, as well as support for existing ones.
2. Activities within national governments should be coordinated through a national actor platform, involving relevant ministries, regional stakeholders and civil society, which already exists in some countries involved in macro-regional strategies (although consultation often only takes place in relation to specific proposals only).

3. Regional and civil society activities should be included on the programme of the annual forum for each of the macro-regional strategies.
4. NGOs should be kept informed about the decisions of the steering groups and have the opportunity to comment on them.⁹
5. Mechanisms should be enhanced to ensure better alignment of funding between different directorates in the European Commission .
6. The way in which funding from different sources can be used should be clarified which may require more thorough consideration of macro-regional strategies in EU regulations.
7. Technical assistance to promote the implementation process should be supported and should be tailored to administrative capacity of different member states.
8. The priorities of the European Neighbourhood Instrument need to be aligned with those of the macro-regional strategy.

Conclusions

All recommendations for promoting greater policy integration presented above (and originally elaborated by Schuh et al 2015) are closely related to one or more of the five main types of facilitators of policy integration discussed in the first part of the paper (i.e., political factors; institutional/organisational factors; economic/financial factors; process, management and instrumental factors; and behavioural, cultural and personal factors). As such, these provide a useful starting point for considering how to improve policy integration in the case of macro-regional strategies.

It should be noted that sectoral policy integration must not be seen as an end in itself but as a way of achieving practical outcomes that simultaneously fulfil the goals of more than one sector or tier of government. What is essential is that plans and policies result in practical (and integrated) action on the ground. Whilst a range of factors can help to promote policy integration, there is of course no single solution. Political will and the allocation of resources can be just as important to policy integration as mechanisms, institutional conditions or practices. ■

⁹ Although some steering groups involve NGOs and make their minutes publicly available, active public dissemination (and consultation) beyond the members of the steering groups is currently limited.

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Overcoming fragmented transboundary MSP governance and weak stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the EUSBSR

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Introduction

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) has been embraced by policy and decision-makers across different levels of governance as a mechanism for the coherent management of shared sea space to promote socio-economic and environmental sustainability goals. The 2014 European Union (EU) Directive on Maritime Spatial Planning¹⁰ advocates greater cross-border coordination of MSP activities within European sea basins, by introducing frameworks that support transboundary collaboration between neighbouring countries. MSP has, therefore, become a priority objective in the European Union's Macro-Region-

al Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

Macro-regional strategies can be viewed as an attempt to deal with spatial planning issues at the EU level. One of the strategic targets of the EUSBSR's Horizontal Action "Spatial Planning" is to draw up and apply transboundary, ecosystem-based maritime spatial plans throughout the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) until 2020/2021. Furthermore, 'Saving the Sea' is one of the three main objectives of the EUSBSR, outlining the need to protect the environmental status and biological diversity of the BSR.¹¹ Indeed, the EUSBSR's 'save the sea' objective supports the implementation of the EU's MSP Directive by

¹⁰ European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. (2014). Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (Maritime Spatial Planning Directive). Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32014L0089&from=EN>.

¹¹ Transboundary MSP also contribute to the objective 'Connecting the Region', including sub-objectives good transport conditions, reliable energy markets and connecting people. MSP also fosters 'Increased Prosperity' including sub-objectives climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management, and improved global competitiveness of the BSR.

“The Baltic SCOPE project has shown that finding solutions is possible where there is good will between fully engaged participants.”

promoting collaboration between key stakeholders in transboundary MSP activities. However, MSP is a complex process and there are a number of governance and stakeholder engagement challenges that need to be overcome to make transboundary MSP collaboration a smoother process; including: competing national MSP interests, different national MSP regulations and planning approaches, fragmented data and the underrepresentation of certain key stakeholders in the planning process.

The Baltic Sea Region has been a trail blazer in the promotion and development of pioneering transboundary MSP projects that have helped contribute to the implementation of the EUSBSR ‘save the sea’ objective. The Baltic SCOPE Project was a unique first attempt to bring together national planning authorities, and other key MSP stakeholders, in a macro-regional sea basin to work together on identi-

fying solutions to common transboundary issues. This chapter examines transboundary MSP challenges in the BSR and outlines some best practices from the Baltic SCOPE project for overcoming MSP governance and stakeholder engagement problems. The chapter finds that the Baltic SCOPE project has contributed directly to the implementation of the EUSBSR objectives by creating a framework in which key MSP stakeholders can identify synergies and conflicts, exchange experiences, knowledge and data, and find solutions to transboundary challenges; however, the level of interest and involvement of decision-makers and other key stakeholders needs to be increased to better balance the EUSBSR objectives across the region and construct a more robust and inclusive MSP governance framework. Finally, the chapter outlines recommendations for future transnational MSP governance and stakehold-

er engagement processes to emerge from the Baltic SCOPE project, which can be used by policymakers and practitioners in the implementation of the EUSBSR and other EU macro-regional strategies with an MSP focus.¹²

Problems and Challenges in Transnational MSP Governance and Stakeholder Engagement in the Baltic Sea Region

The promotion and development of effective transnational MSP processes lies at the heart of the EUSBSR's core objectives. MSP is, however, a complex process involving multiple stakeholders, across several levels of governance, which creates potential problems in the effective implementation of the EUSBSR. The main challenges for MSP governance and stakeholder engagement in the BSR include:

- **Overlapping MSP Governance and Regulatory Systems:** Baltic Sea countries have their own unique governance structures, regulations and institutional

infrastructure responsible for MSP. While different governance systems are partially nested and overlapping, there may be gaps in regulation and responsibilities, and the most important sectoral actors are not necessarily placed at the same level of governance and geographic scale.

- **Competing national and sectoral MSP interests:** Transboundary collaboration in MSP takes place in the context of a common marine space and divided into different national jurisdictions. Each sovereign state and sectoral stakeholder has its own priorities and interests, which may be competing or conflicting with one another.
- **Fragmented Data Collection and Management:** The development and sharing of planning evidence is a central part of transboundary MSP, but there is a lack of reliable national level data and strict regulations regarding information sharing.
- **Sectoral Influence and Engagement:** MSP has the aim and potential to balance sectoral interests, however, there are considerable differences be-

¹² MSP is a key objective in the Adriatic and Ionian Macro-Regional Strategy, and would also be an important issue if other potential Macro Regional Strategies are developed for the North Sea, Arctic, Mediterranean, and Atlantic.

tween sectors and their level of influence over the MSP process. This is both related to national and international political priorities and economic drivers, but also to how sector management is institutionalised. International laws and agreements, EU legislation, and national regulations result in a hierarchical structure and relationship between sectors. A recurring theme is that the shipping sector has a greater influence over the sea, with other sectors having to develop their plans around well-established and clearly outlined shipping routes.

- **Underrepresentation of Key Stakeholders:** Some specific sectors are underrepresented in MSP activities, including the defense sector, tourism, cultural heritage and the oil industry. The views and interests of these sectors need to be taken into account in the development of effective transboundary MSPs.
- **Different Stages of the Planning Process:** Countries in the BSR are at different stages in the design and implementation of their national plans, which can negatively affect collaborative efforts

and stakeholder engagement as timings do not overlap.

The EUSBSR has contributed to overcoming these challenges. The strategy has supported greater collaboration between different actors from governance levels through the Horizontal Action 'Spatial Planning'.¹³ Jointly, HELCOM and VASAB are the coordinators of the Horizontal Action's thematic part on MSP. The two organisations established the HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group, actively bringing stakeholders together to develop objectives and milestones for the sustainable development of the BSR within the Regional Baltic MSP Roadmap 2013-2020.

Improving Governance and Stakeholder Engagement in Transboundary MSP in the Baltic Sea Region: Best Practices from the Baltic Scope Project

The DG Mare funded Baltic SCOPE Project has contributed directly to the implementation of the EUSBSR and helped overcome some of the challenges

¹³ See <http://www.helcom.fi/action-areas/maritime-spatial-planning/horizontal-action-spatial-planning>

"Multifunctional ship cleaning pollution in the Baltic Sea."



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of transboundary MSP outlined above. The project brought together national MSP authorities, macro-regional sea organisations (namely HELCOM and VASAB), research institutes and key stakeholders from the energy, environment, fisheries and shipping sectors to collaborate in developing solutions to common transboundary MSP issues and enhance the alignment of national MSPs. The project involved engaging key MSP stakeholders in the BSR in informal meetings, which created a platform to exchange experiences, information and data, identify conflict and synergies areas across sec-

tors and find common solutions to shared transboundary MSP problems. Five best practices emerged from the project that can help improve MSP governance and stakeholder engagement and subsequently aid the implementation of the EUSBSR's main objectives, including 'save the sea':

- Create an informal platform for stakeholder discussions: Establishing an informal framework that promotes interaction and discussion amongst key stakeholders is essential for effective transboundary MSP processes. The Baltic SCOPE process highlights that regular face-to-face

- interaction with other planners and stakeholders helped to facilitate learning, particularly for gaining a better understanding of different national planning systems and interests, but also for network building and reducing communication barriers.
- **Early Stakeholder Involvement:** The knowledge and information provided by stakeholders is crucial to the process of identifying transboundary MSP conflict and synergy areas and, therefore, careful consideration needs to be taken at the earliest stages of the MSP process when it comes to stakeholder involvement.
 - **Identify MSP Conflict and Synergy Areas:** A central task in transboundary MSP is to identify where current and potential conflicts and synergies exist between both countries and sea use sectors.
 - **Develop and harmonise transboundary MSP evidence and data:** Reliable, comparable and up-to-date knowledge on marine uses, values, and future trends is vital for effective transboundary MSP processes. The Baltic SCOPE project has shown that a willingness to openly share national level information is an essential part of the process, so information can be merged and amalgamated to produce transboundary data sets that can be transformed into proper planning evidence to guide cross-border discussions.
 - **Identify Transboundary conflicts and find solutions:** Identifying existing and potential conflict areas and finding solutions that meet the needs and expectations of a broad range of stakeholders with competing interests can be challenging. The Baltic SCOPE project has shown that finding solutions is possible where there is good will between fully engaged participants. Contextual factors proved to be important in determining which methods were most appropriate for finding solutions; particularly when working with conflicts in specific focus-areas and identifying which countries to involve in the solutions process. Planners agreed that focused bi-lateral and tri-lateral discussions between affected countries, rather than all-inclusive forums, were highly effective in finding solutions, as knowledgeable and mandated participants could focus in on a problem area and discuss detailed information and examples.

Recommendations for Future Transnational MSP Governance and Stakeholder Engagement in the Baltic Sea Region

The Baltic SCOPE Project has contributed directly to the implementation of the save the sea objective of the EUSBSR. This has been achieved by forging stronger links between national planning authorities and sectoral actors, and enhancing stakeholder knowledge and understanding of important sectoral interests and national approaches to MSP. Furthermore, new tools have been developed to identify potential conflicts and synergies in shared marine spaces, and facilitate the exchange of information and data necessary to identify important cross-border issues.

During the Baltic SCOPE project a seminar was held at the 2016 Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea in Stockholm to discuss governance and stakeholder engagement in MSP. There was strong agreement that the Baltic Sea Region is relatively advanced in the development of transnational MSP processes; however, stakeholders involved in the discussion focused on three main recommendations in relation to governance and stakeholder engagement that could improve the implementation of the core objectives of the EUSBSR, including:

Involve Political Decision-Makers and Increase Political Ownership: There was widespread agreement that MSP remains low on the political agenda and that an increased role for politicians is required if the EUSBSR is to be effectively implemented, as national planners and sectoral stakeholders lack the mandate to implement change. This is especially the case in sensitive national MSP conflict areas (e.g., un-resolved border conflicts, accessibility to ports, and several environmental concerns of shipping activities, material extraction and construction of fixed infrastructures), where long-term agreements need to be reached across boundaries, and if substantial changes in policy towards sea use are required.

1. Improve Vertical Participation by Engaging Regional and Local Levels of Governance: A more robust bottom-up framework of multilevel governance is needed for MSP in the BSR. This could be fostered through strengthened dialogue between the different levels, particularly local and regional level stakeholders.
2. More Widespread Mobilisation of Marine Use Sectors: Several sectors are not actively involved in transboundary MSP activities, including defence, tourism and recreation, aqua-

culture and cultural heritage. These sectors need to be engaged if all sea users are to be represented in discussions. Educating experts and representatives from different sectors about MSP and the status and needs of other sectors is important both for the planning process itself and the mobilisation of these stakeholders. Sector experts and other representatives of sector interests need a clear conception of how they can contribute to the planning process and profit from MSP.

3. Broaden Participation by Fostering Citizen Involvement in MSP: MSP can impact on the lives and interests of individual citizens, which raises the issue of an active and productive role for citizens in the process.

These recommendations are important for effective transboundary MSP, in particular, the better integration of multilevel governance and stakeholder engagement in the design and implementation of EUSBSR objectives relating to the sea. The Baltic SCOPE project is only the first step in the development of transboundary collaboration in MSP processes in the BSR. BSR countries and authorities in charge of MSP must collaborate across boundaries to achieve

good environmental status and maintenance of biological diversity. Furthermore, transport systems and energy markets need to be developed in a collaborative and sustainable manner. Because it is a cross-cutting mechanism aiming at fostering cooperation between actors of all governance levels, MSP is a unique opportunity to achieve and balance the three main objectives of the EUSBSR. The experiences and lessons learned from Baltic Scope are also relevant for other macro-regional strategies with an MSP focus in Europe and across the world.¹⁴ Each macro-regional sea basin will have its own unique history, context, and national sector interests, informing and guiding the approach to transnational MSP that should be adopted. However, the tools and best practices identified during the Baltic SCOPE project are transferable to other areas and can be applied and developed further to form a basis for more effective transboundary MSP processes across EU macro-regions. ■

¹⁴ As the EU put it, each sea region is unique and merits a tailor-made strategy. Consequently, 8 different Sea Basin Strategies and Action Plans were developed. See https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/sea_basins_en.

EUSALP and its interconnectedness with the Alpine Space

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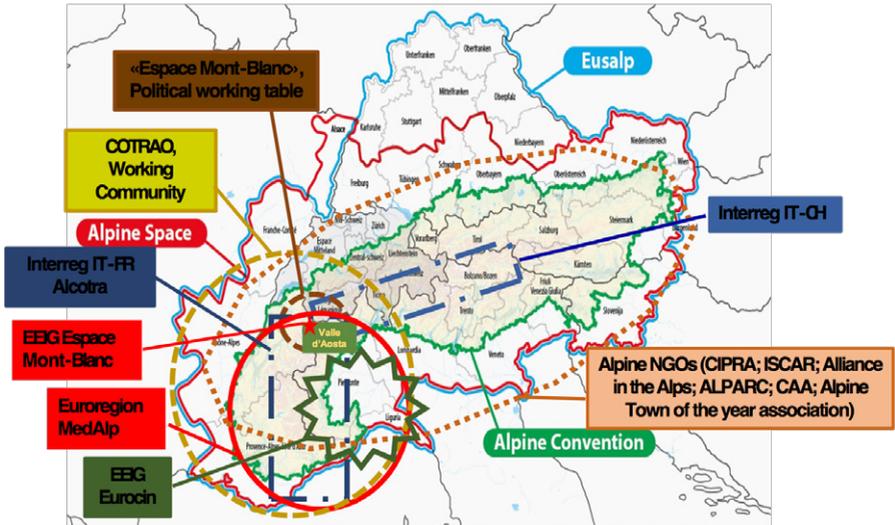
The Macro Regional Strategy (MRS) for the Alps, known as EUSALP, recently became reality. Like the other MRSs in the EU, EUSALP's rationales lie in the perceived need for a collective response to shared challenges in the Alpine macro area and the need for better coordination of existing policies. Vision and action, strategy and implementation are therefore the two main pillars for the success of EUSALP.

In the last decades, the region of the Alps has undergone a dramatic change from a more backward, closed, domestic orientation towards a more forward, open, international (or cross-border), multi-sector orientation. At the same time, the number of actors involved (see Figure 1) has increased significantly (Debarbieux et al., 2015; Bramanti and Ratti, 2016). This shift has brought the introduction of a new

form of territorial cooperation known as 'wide area cooperation' (Bramanti and Rosso, 2013), which might be the ultimate challenge within transnational cooperation processes. These changes raise the question concerning the role that EUSALP could play as the coordinator of the region's numerous networks.

The map reported in **Figure 1** offers a (partial) picture of a patchwork of territories in the Alpine region with changing boundaries (Deas and Lord, 2006). This kind of 'project region' (Debarbieux et al., 2015) may represent a new, functional space legitimised by policy making. Moreover, a lengthy process of cooperation based on networks of policy actors has already started, showing that some resources and power have begun to assemble around

Figure 1 – Emerging map of ‘project regions’ in the Alps



Source: Bramanti and Teston, 2017.

regions configured in non-standard ways.

It is therefore interesting to recognise that the pre-existing, intricate and overlapping frame of a dozen or more networking organisations, institutions and communities has been positively affected by the birth of the MRS.

A qualitative SWOT analysis of the emerging cooperation framework in the Alpine region

EUSALP – as a project, and a governance system – represents a lengthy brownfield investment that began at the end of a bottom-up, inclusive process, which took place in a densely ‘crowded’ context. It is, therefore, useful to offer a very short and qualitative evaluation of the existing governance frame found in the Alpine region (European Commission, 2014). This SWOT evaluation covers the opportunities and threats that characterise the present situation (European Commission, 2016), as well as some future perspectives.

Strengths

Three strengths should at least be mentioned.

- i. The co-existence of two fundamental levels: policy and management; strategy and implementation; and general rules and specific incentives. The presence of a well-defined strategy that is aligned with the broader European development goals adds value to the pre-existing implementation work (European Commission, 2015; Bramanti and Ratti, 2016). A successful strategy must encompass a compromise between a forward-looking vision and a robust, practical implementation. Therefore, bottom-up inputs must be taken into consideration. In addition, a high degree of coherence among the nine points in EUSALP's Action Plan and the contents of the Interreg Alpine Space Programme 2014-2020 is present, without crowding-out effects of the former on the latter (Interact, 2016; Interreg-Interact, 2017).
- ii. The history of successful cooperation among different actors and territories, which encompasses a significant number of cooperation structures that have been operating in the Alps for many years. Nevertheless, the expected benefits of the enhanced integration that

should be provided by EUSALP have the task to counterbalance a certain degree of fragmentation (Bauer, 2014; Roggeri, 2015).

- iii. The third element of strength is the ability to govern the provision and exploitation of collective goods (e.g., water, public transport, environmental protection, etc.) in which actions within the MRS do not necessarily need to focus on the implementation of specific projects. Instead, it may focus on coordinating national policies and decisions, and on promoting regulatory intervention.

Emerging weaknesses

Among the weaknesses emerging from the present situation, the four below are the main points:

- i. Unresolved frictions, which sometimes are present between strategic planning and implementation. All of the initiatives and actions in the pipeline, including the projects descending from EUSALP's Action Plan, would benefit from clearer coordination within and between actors (European Commission, 2016).
- ii. A certain degree of malfunctioning cooperation, especially among actors on different hierarchical levels (e.g., municipalities with ministerial departments). Peer-to-peer

“It is neither useful nor wise for EUSALP to override strategic actions grounded in the territorial cooperation frame. This also means that EUSALP should not use a large share of the Interreg funds. On the contrary, EUSALP might act as a funding source for operating networks in the Alpine region.”

collaborations are more easily managed, even across borders.

- iii. Difficulties with the consolidation of a homogeneous degree of involvement on the national level, especially in the Italian case. The degree of national participation always varies depending on sectors and timing.
- iv. A lack of accountability, transparency and updated information on projects. It is difficult for stakeholders not involved in specific projects to know the current status of a project or to quickly gain access to relevant information. This raises a question about the effectiveness of project capitalisation and information dissemination, which remains an unsolved issue in the final phases of the life cycle of any project. Therefore, a sound monitoring system is key for ensuring an informed decision-making process grounded in results-ori-

ented actions (European Commission, 2015; Bramanti, 2016).

Future perspectives: opportunities and threats

With regard to the future of the Alpine region, it is fundamental to distinguish some opportunities as well as threats. In terms of opportunities, one aspect that is widely appreciated by numerous stakeholders is the degree of inclusiveness in the decision process. Projects are proposed by specific actors operating in the different territories. This important feature needs to be preserved, as it represents a concrete opportunity to motivate actors involved in the projects and to deliver results.

A second opportunity is found in the political commitment of territorial governments. EUSALP is a subject of interest in the European Parliament, where an informal group – ‘friends of EUSALP’ – has

been created. A high degree of political ownership seems necessary for ensuring the success of the MRS, but the process will only prove useful if key stakeholders participate and take full ownership of the process.

Moreover, the MRS could provide more sustainable support by enabling the mobilisation of financial resources for the achievement of the goals, and by bridging the gap between strategies and funding opportunities, which is still a challenge (Wishlade, 2014).

The threats are mainly linked to the need to overcome short-termism and develop a capability to ensure the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of implemented projects. This may involve phasing out certain initiatives, as well as greater involvement of private partners, NGOs and citizens.

Discussion and concluding remarks

The aim of this short paper is to discuss the role of EUSALP in light of the beneficial and widespread history of territorial cooperation within dense networks of actors operating in the Alpine region (Debarbieux et al., 2015; Bramanti and Ratti, 2016; Sielker, 2016). The first thematic policy area within the EUSALP Action Plan (EAP) focuses on improving the competitiveness, prosperity and cohesion of the Alpine Re-

gion. The strategy, which aims to support innovative economic development, is built on the complementary assets of the regions sub-territories.

The economic potential of strategic sectors in the Alpine region – such as Bioeconomy, Timber, and Health tourism¹⁵ – is a central issue. These sectors, when addressed in a more integrated manner, may offer significant potential for growth and innovation, and they may have a positive impact on the labour market.

Moreover, strong interdependencies are evident among the aforementioned sectors (Bramanti and Teston, 2017) while they all highlight the need for strong macro-regional coordination (European Commission, 2016; Interact, 2016).

The second thematic policy area is sustainability, a label that is widely interpreted and frequently all inclusive (Balsiger, 2012; Stead, 2014). The paper offers some insights into a workable division of tasks between territorial actors and EUSALP and the SWOT analysis provides advice on how to cooperate within and among the different networks operating in the Alpine region.

¹⁵ Action Group 2 (June 2017), which is responsible for the strategy's implementation, has chosen these three specific fields of action (EUSALP-Interreg, 2017).

Implications for practitioners

The implications for practitioners are far reaching and here are only some hints offered. A major objective of the MRS is to enhance sustainable development in terms of supporting the implementation and coordination of an increasing number of good projects in order to exploit all possible synergies (Roggeri, 2015; European Commission, 2016). In addition, practitioners are mainly interested in promoting concrete actions that respond to the needs of their citizens or stakeholders. So, a major question arising is: what type of governance seems to be the most conducive of true sustainability?

An analysis carried out by the European Commission (2014) on the existing governance structures in the four macro-regions was introductory to suggestions regarding possible revisions and improvements.

The two main points made by the European Commission remain: a strong political commitment and a robust organization. Incidentally, such an organization may be costly given the EC's statement that it will not provide more funds for MRSs. While the absence of new money is a powerful incentive for efficiency and effectiveness within the MRS – operational management and coordination tasks are not free and the cost-effectiveness of coordi-

nation activities must be therefore ensured.

In this regard, it is worthwhile to mention the four main features previously developed:

- Vision with implementation;
- A top-down/bottom-up approach;
- Territorial inclusiveness and involvement of the key actors;
- Strong dimensions of financial sustainability with access to different and complementary financial instruments.

The governance of the macro region should not serve as a substitute for top-down, detailed planning of the bottom-up projects coming from the territories. It is neither useful nor wise for EUSALP to override strategic actions grounded in the territorial cooperation frame. This also means that EUSALP should not use a large share of the Interreg funds. On the contrary, EUSALP might act as a funding source for operating networks in the Alpine region, and enable them and their projects to gain access to various European funds.¹⁶

In a clear and robust division of tasks and complementarities among territorial networks

¹⁶ These include: COSME (on the competitiveness of SME); ERASMUS+ (on skills exchange and the circulation of human capital); Europe Creative (on the creative and cultural sectors); Horizon 2020 (on research and innovation); Connecting Europe Facility (on European transport, energy and digital networks); LIFE (on environment and climate issues); and ISA2 (on innovation in public administration and the supply of digital services).

and MRS, EUSALP should mainly address:

- Projects with a clear trans-regional dimension in which the direct component of infra-structural investments is large enough to require a macro-area response.
- Horizontal projects focused on servicing territorial stakeholders and their networks.
- Possible implications in terms of rules of governance in this regard should include:
- Strengthening the role of regions as strategic links between fine-grained territorial actors and the macro region.
- Launching peer-to-peer project evaluations, which should allow for wider circulation of information and more transparent results.

Unfortunately, the whole picture will not be the end point of an automatic and spontaneous path. If good governance structures are to work properly, they need policy endowments, leadership, human skills, persistence and stubbornness, as well as an engaging attitude. It will be fundamental that the 'strong character' of the people in the region will support the policy design. ■

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EU's macro-regional strategies new innovative laboratories for participation approaches

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This policy paper argues that EU's macro-regional strategies (MRS) are innovative laboratories for integrated participation approaches. This means that MRS set up new and diverse participative structures beyond the existing traditional (national) ones and they promote in-depth integration and democratisation processes by thematic policies. MRS not only apply existing partnership approaches, they also use them in larger variation and extension than any other transnational collaborative forms. Especially two aspects - their cross-cutting nature and the fact that they act beyond the national scope - make them to innovative laboratories for participatory approaches.

At the same time, MRS have their limitations as well. Firstly, they are too functional oriented, overlappings between thematic networks often do not properly support the synergies for further cooperation. Secondly, MRS have too slow and organic development dynamics which also means that existing approaches (top-down governance coordination and sectorial thematic cooperation models) very much determine their way of operation. These features rely too much on national cooperation structures and they limit the mobilisation potential and new learning effects of MRS.

The article first introduces the importance of participative approaches which Europeanisation has brought (1). It then gives a brief overview of how these approaches are used in MRS (2). In part (3) it analyses shortcomings/

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limitations and in part (4) new developments and initiatives. Finally it ends up in a brief summary (5) with some operational suggestions.

The successful implementation of policies are strongly dependent on the involvement of stakeholders. A further important aspect is if there are proper capacities for mobilising these stakeholders. Participative approaches are to promote the larger involvement of stakeholders and to ensure a broader coercion process and exchange of expertise. As a result of participation approaches, a growing number of groups of the European society are involved in the policy making, policy implementation and monitoring/evaluation processes at different levels (EU, transnational, national and local/regional). One common feature of these groups is that they all are interested in

the advocacy building processes, with their actions they would like to influence the making of politics.

However, participating groups have very diverged profiles, scope and different capacities in terms of personal and financial resources. Most of them are active at the local and regional level, and they appear in different forms in national and EU politics. As an aggregated term I call these groups of actors bottom-up stakeholders that consist of representatives of local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, research and educational organisations, local entrepreneurs, chambers, employer organisations, trade unions and representatives of the media.

1.) Europeanisation has undoubtedly paved the way for participation processes.

The key EU document, the Treaty of Lisbon, named participation as a core value of EU democratisation, and coupled it together with social, economic and territorial cohesion initiatives. EU regional policy has brought several approaches and toolkits for the practical implementation of participation, the most important ones are the place-based approach and the European Code of Conduct of Partnership (ECCP) in this respect. Partnership principles have been strengthened in all stages of (the planning, implementation and monitoring) ESIF by making it compulsory to all member states to adopt and implement them in their national and regional programmes. Furthermore, it has introduced more transparent processes for involving partners.

Participative approaches are closely linked with government approaches e.g., the open coordination mechanism, the subsidiarity and the multi-level governance perspective. Furthermore, if we analyse recently developed thematic partnerships we will experience that these collaborative structures attempt to deal with participation in a more complex manner. Charters, (e.g., Charter for Multi-level Governance and agendas, e.g., Urban Agenda (both introduced by European advisory bodies to support the participation process) combine regulative initiatives with broadened networking opportunities and demand for integrated funding in a more systematic way than ever.

However, most of the actual implementation of the above mentioned approaches are connected to the national or to the local/regional level. With the elaboration of MRS a new level, beyond the national and between the supranational has appeared.

“There is a great need to make a strategic shift from the project generation perspective towards policy- and platform formulation.”

2.) “Baseline formats” and existing networks have still the leading impacts on governance and participation approaches in MRS.

MRS are elaborated by the thematic cooperation fields such as saving the environment, promoting better connection and accessibility, and increasing the prosperity and living standards of the respective macroregion. The nature of MRS structures is systematised by the 3 Nos principles (no new institutions, no new regulations and no new funding). As a consequence to that these strategies are voluntary-based, purpose driven forms of cooperation. Neither of the MRS have binding formats or protocols for participative processes, they are operated by existing structures. However, these collaborations have often different profiles and organisational culture which require common and joint learning processes.

Challenges:

- MRS have often operational challenges when they are focusing on the better interaction between existing institutions. Existing organisational differences are still an unsolved challenge.
- The ECCP could introduce a minimum standard of participation approaches in the MRS implementation. However, as ECCP is implemented by member states, there are still differences in country approaches. The European Territorial Cooperation programmes could provide some good practices for transnational partnership approaches, however, there are no standard procedures.
- The project based approach strongly determines the operation of MRS. As there is no additional or specially for MRS earmarked financial support, the most visible result of these strategies are the project implementation. MRS have to better exploit the synergies between

funding programmes and first of all develop platforms and concepts for transnational cooperation. Some innovative ideas have been already elaborated, for example the combination of cross-financing in case of ENPI and ETC projects or joint methods between private and state investments.

- Mainstream EU-programmes are still not a systematic part of MRS in the current programming period and existing funds/calls often exclude groups, especially small NGOs with limited capacities from transnational cooperation. MRS are too exclusive at this moment and they rely still too much on the project-based perspective rather than the establishment of sustainable new platforms and networks. Often large projects are implemented in MRS (EUSDR is a good example of that) which excludes many smaller stakeholders from the implementation process. This makes a clear division between stakeholders who can participate and between those who cannot in MRS. This gap is however decreasing, as almost all stakeholder groups have some kind of international project cooperation experience and they attend transnational networks.

3.) MRS participative approaches are strongly influenced by the scope and depth of participating countries' willingness and procedures for the implementation of MRS

Although MRS consist of broad stakeholder networks, their operation and coordination are primarily led by member states and intergovernmental institutions which bring limitations to the participation approaches.

- None of MRS have a common procedure for involving bottom-up stakeholders. Participation is organised in an ad-hoc manner which depends heavily on the quality and capacity of the public administration system of the participating states, and the respective coordinators of Policy/Priority Areas and Horizontal Actions. In this respect, MRS still very much count on the existing structures of member states.
- Since the early planning process of MRS, the European Commission had applied socio-economic analysis for mapping the potentials of actors. Stakeholder analyses were conducted to get a general overview on existing structures and to identify key stakeholders and thematic cooperation areas. As the outcome of these assessments, countries and their areas of interests were requested and existing intergovernmental struc-



tures, platforms and networks mapped. As a result of the mapping, interaction potential and capacities of such platforms are strongly dependent on the capacities of participating organisations. In the EUSBSR for example the HELCOM network, the Nordic Cooperation and CBSS have played an important role from the beginning by providing frames and solid transnational networks for intergovernmental cooperation. Further networks and platforms of different stakeholder groups e.g., the Baltic Development Forum, the Union

of the Baltic Cities, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation could bring networks and collaborations into the implementation of the strategy.

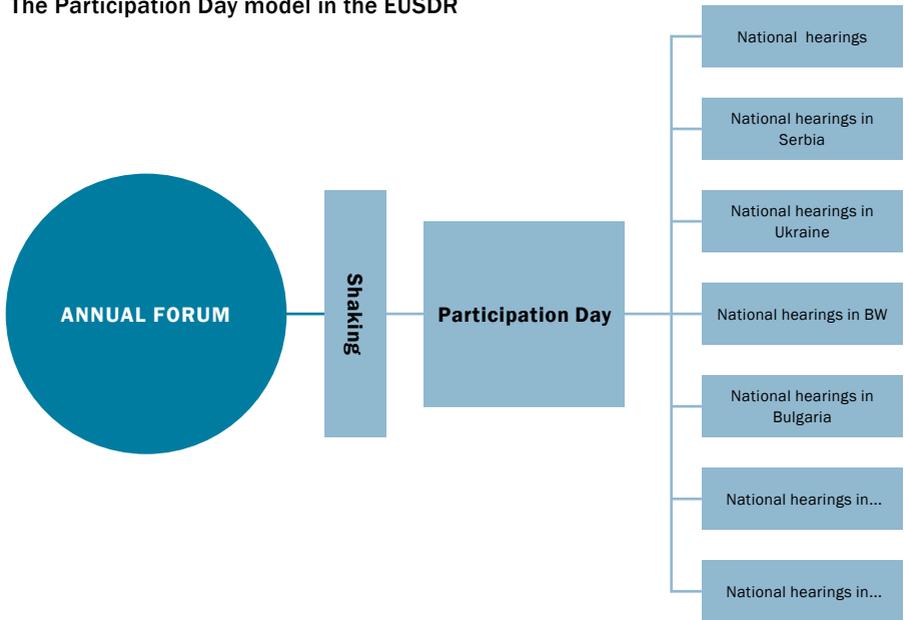
- In the Danube area intergovernmental structures are considerably looser and less overarching than in the EUSBSR. The thematic structures are mainly operating by environmental issues connected to water and transport. Therefore countries play an even more important role here. Intergovernmental organisations such as the Danube

Commission, the ICPDR have been involved as steering group members into the work of respective thematic priority areas, whereas platforms with broader thematic portfolios such as the Central European Initiative or the Regional Cooperation Council have had more of an indirect role in the operation of the strategy by promoting networking and project preparation opportunities.

- Analysing participation from a governance perspective, MRS follow a top-down co-ordination mechanism. The main motivation behind this is to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the territorial co-operations. These phenomena are especially interesting after the broad interests in the stakeholder dialogues of MRS. In the consultation procedures of all four MRS over hundred inputs and suggestions had arrived from bottom-up stakeholders. Despite the broad interest in MRS, existing capacities and resources were the building fundamentals of MRS structures. The decision-making (policy-formulation) and the implementation process are mainly driven by the European Commission, participating states and inter-governmental organisations. The European Commission has a facilitation role in the policy planning process of MRS, while

the actual implementation of MRS is supervised by member states and their state administration. National coordinators (NCs) are appointed from representatives of state administration and in most of the cases the policy/priority area coordinators and steering group members are also delegates of the state administration. PACs coordinate the transnational cooperation and build up thematic platforms, while NCs are expected to facilitate and coordinate the national implementation of MRS and communicate with stakeholders. Both positions PACs and NCs comply with some kind of service/coordination function primarily between public administration entities, but also to promote the involvement of other actors to the MRS. Their capacities and knowledge on participation are decisive, currently more determined by personal skills than standardised approaches. Some interregional organizations operate as policy area coordinator or flagship leaders in EUSBSR and they operate special thematic based platforms with a broader participation of stakeholders. At the same time, this does not mean that other actors, such as bottom-up stakeholders, are excluded from the strategy, but these stakeholders do not have institutionalised structures for

The Participation Day model in the EUSDR



participation. Furthermore, the existing operational experiences show shortcomings in how these actors are involved within the individual policy areas (vertical) and within the general cooperation processes (horizontal structures) such as revision of the strategy, alignment of funding, future plans after the post2020 period.

- Bottom up actors' scope and functions may strongly differ from country to country. As a simplification we can say: the more advanced institutionalised network a country has (based on its cultural and administrative operation for participation), the broader is the involvement of bottom-up actors in the implementation process of MRS.

- Communications, opinions of the Commission, consultative bodies and other stakeholder groups are not systematically channelled into the operation of MRS. The European Commission and European advisory bodies are aware of the shortcomings of participatory approaches, and they are trying to promote the participation of bottom-up actors in certain thematic policy areas such as research, innovation through funding and collaborative platforms, however, formalised structures and concrete commitments for PACs, HACs, NCs do not exist.
- There are no consistent monitoring and evaluation processes in MRS. Instead of that, the action plan is revised and activities are reported. Although these activities cannot be considered as systemic approaches for the promotion of participation procedures, but they have helped to get a rough overview on stakeholder networks. The revision of activities have helped in EUSBSR to better adjust the needs and available resources to the implementation of the strategy. In the EUSDR there has not been a comprehensive review yet. Here the regular reports of PACs have introduced feedbacks on the implementation of the strategy and network building activities. Although these reports follow similar

structures, it is hardly impossible to make a general synthesis and comparison of existing platforms and structures.

4.) New developments and initiatives

Currently existing structures are results of the economic climate. Significant changes in governance and participation can only happen in long-term and via an organic development process.

As key accelerators I see the platforms of intergovernmental organisations. They have broadened participative approaches, and they build up new networks of MRS as being PACs, HACs or members of steering groups of priority areas. Their role and importance is constantly growing.

Recently umbrella organisations of the civil society have extended their roles in the implementation of MRS as well. In the EUSDR civil society has launched a new format of consultation (see the participation day and national hearings in EUSDR), while this approach was first applied at the Annual Forum of EUSBSR in 2017. EUSAIR and EUSALP have a kind of joint discussion forums, called Stakeholder Forums where in-line ministries/country representatives meet bottom-up actors and representatives of youth.

The Participation day (PD) concept in the EUSDR is an innovative initiative which tries to build

up structures for regular discussions in a two tier system. The first level is the strengthening of national structures, channels for regular exchange and communication in respective countries. The second tier is the MRS level to articulate the needs of bottom-up stakeholders to the key stakeholders of MRS. The first tier matters in countries which lack structures and capacities for regular participation dialogues, while the second tier's goal is the establishment of regular dialogues between the bottom-up actors and key stakeholders of the MRS. In this model the form of interaction and communication between key stakeholders and bottom-up actors reveals a key question: What kind of forum can be used for interest representation and how can bottom-up stakeholders' requests best channelled to the key implementers of MRS? Fabricio Barca calls this interaction a "shaking process".

The future outcomes and effects of PD are not known at this moment. Nevertheless, PDs are building up new advocacy networks in the MRS and they can mobilise new actors as well.

5.) Conclusion: scenarios for MRS participation:

MRS as comprehensive inter-linkages between policies and stakeholders need to be better

harmonised with the actual implementation process. The better alignment of MRS to existing development programmes ERDF, ESF, EMFF, EAFDR and to other EU funded programmes (e.g., Horizon 2020) would not just promote the actual implementation of these strategies, but this would foster a new set-up of stakeholder networks with broader inclusion and mobilisation capacity for new participants for MRS. However, there is a great need to make a strategic shift from the project generation perspective towards policy- and platform formulation.

Nowadays, different forms of thematic transnational partnerships are in the making but their exact roles and operation in MRS have not been properly discussed. It is necessary to find suitable coordination mechanisms for the better usage of these networks. I see two different possible outcomes: the functional network building (scenario 1) and institutionalisation which would require more resources and comprehensive solutions (scenario 2).

These days MRS follow the first scenario as this does not require certain resources and institutional building. This model promotes network building via special topics and funding, but in general the policy making

and implementation and monitoring functions of the MRS are operated by a limited number of stakeholders.

The second scenario, which would require more institutionalised formats and regular dialogues not just by functional topics but in a cross-cutting aspect would require considerably more personal and financial resources than MRS have now. Standardised models for participation, communication protocols for MRS, which would be adopted for the entire MRS. This scenario would require long term planning with joint targets and strengthened institutionalisation of MRS, e.g., the set-up of autonomous technical secretaries for facilitation of regular dialogues.

Especially in the case of EU-SBSR, I expect in the mid-term perspective that concrete needs come up for stronger institutionalisation and more standardised processes. The enhanced planning of the monitoring and evaluation processes could be the first step to that.

Recommendations:

- Continue with the extension of MRS to new stakeholders through regular dialogues.
- Extend the funding opportunities and enhance further thematic cooperation platforms (ERDF, ESF, Agriculture and Fishery Funds) in MRS. Micro-funding and seed support for bottom-up actors should also be continued and strengthened.
- Stronger media coverage of MRS. Besides the regular social media channels, webinars, podcasts and animations could also be used to mobilise new group of stakeholders. ■

Monitoring and evaluation





Monitoring and evaluation of territorial development and macro-regional strategies related to the Baltic Sea Region

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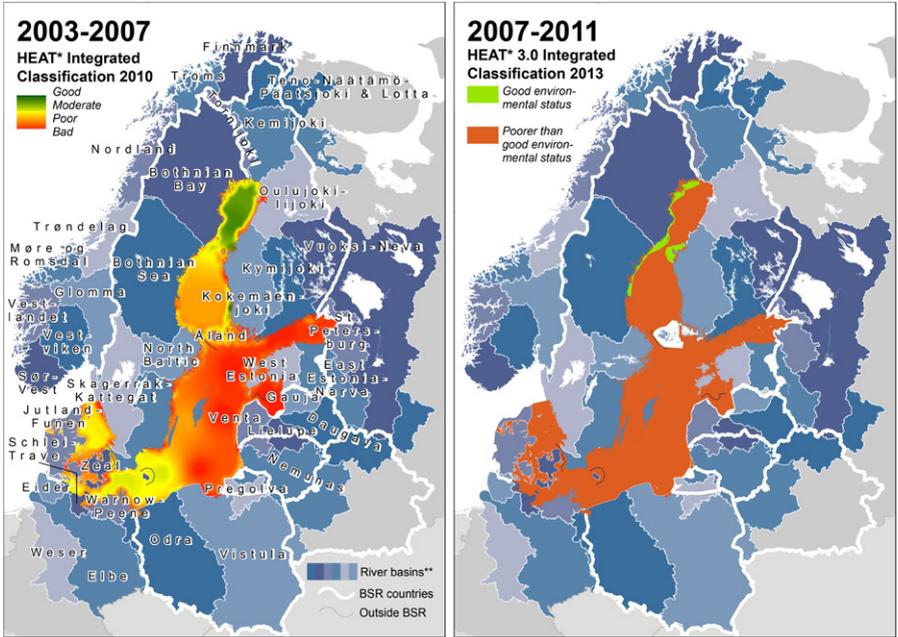
The concept of monitoring macro-regional development

For a long time, the monitoring of territorial trends and structures has been a preoccupation of economists, engineers, geographers and social scientists in general. Monitoring has both an academic and political outreach. While developing extensive datasets take time and resources, there has been an increasing need to keep such statistical evidence policy relevant, timely and accessible to the widest spectrum of policymaking in Europe. A challenge for monitoring and evaluation is to combine the inherent complexities of understanding territorial dynamics with the need for simple messages.

Several projects have focused explicitly on developing territorial monitoring systems, including

ESPON projects such as INTERCO, BSR-TeMo and ETMS, which were specifically designed to produce tailor-made monitoring reports about territorial development and cohesion. Other institutions like HELCOM and EEA have developed monitoring data for specific aspects of monitoring, e.g., environmental qualities.

A territorial monitoring system is much more than just a statistical database. A key parameter of a territorial monitoring system is its ability to provide relevant information to inform the policy process by providing territorial and topical evidence and analyses for policymakers across levels of government. Monitoring systems have flourished in recent years, especially because of the increased need for efficient implementation of public policies in a



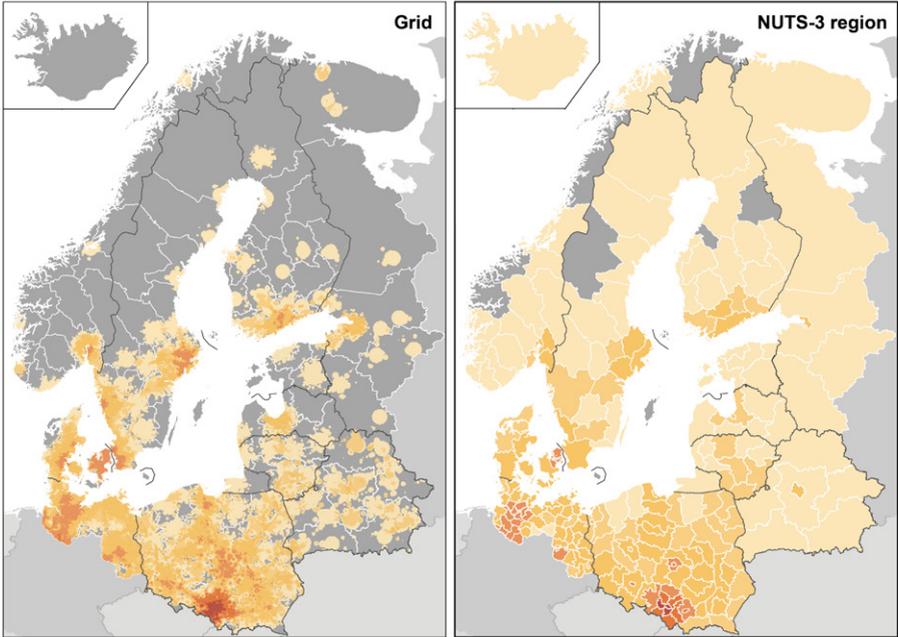
Eutrophication in the Baltic Sea with river basins



NR022336 © Nordregio & NLS Finland for administrative boundaries

Data source: *HEAT: HELCOM Eutrophication Assessment Tool. A total of 189 stations, sites and basins have been classified as either affected by eutrophication (moderate, poor or bad status), or not affected by eutrophication (high or good status). © HELCOM. **River Basin Districts: EU & NO: European Commission, DG JRC (WISE system, November 2006). BY & RU: Joint Research Centre (Catchment and Modelling (CCM)). © European Commission 2006. © European Commission - JRC 2003. Based on Nordregio map No. 0824.





Functional areas 2014

Indicator defined as the number of cities > 50,000 inhabitants that can be reached within 60 min car travel time

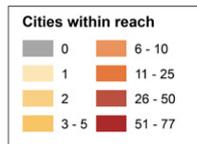


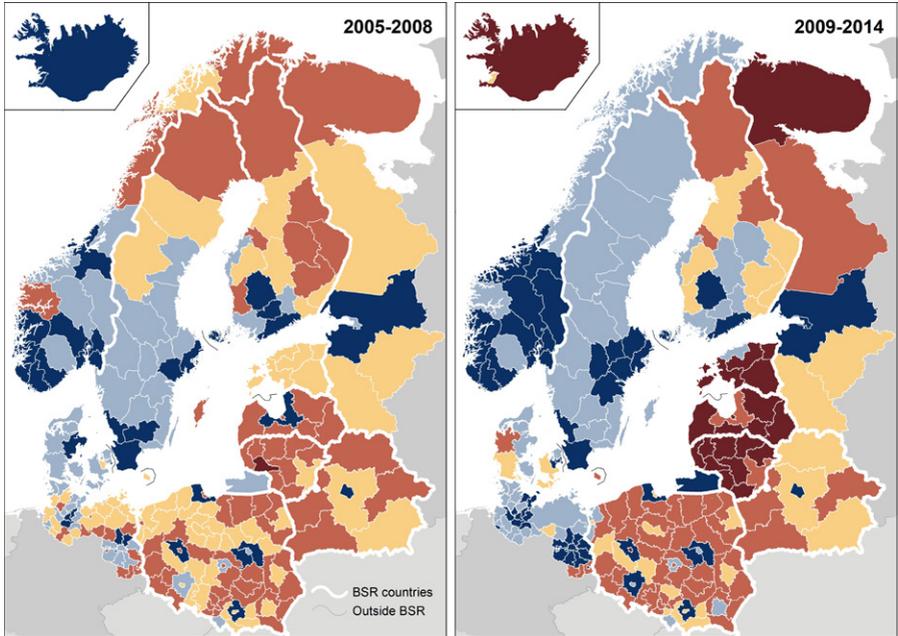
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BSR countries
 Outside BSR

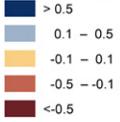
Data source:
 ESPON Up-TaMo 2014.
 RRG, 2014.
 Origin of data:
 RRG Accessibility Model,
 RRG GIS Database, 2014.





Net migration

Average change (%)



NUTS 2013/SNUTS 1.0 regional division except: PL: NUTS 2010. Left map: DK: 2007-2008. Right map: PL: 2009-2013. NUTS 3/SNUTS 2 regions except: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in DE: NUTS 2.

Data source: Eurostat, NSI's



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drive to “do more with less”. Such systems may be conceived in many ways depending on the territorial and political settings with which they are associated. Hence, monitoring may be conceived:

- as a way of following and analysing the development path of territories according to specific policy story-lines;
- as a bank of comparable data that can be used for multiple thematic or geographical analyses;
- as a warning system, used for systematically monitoring key trends;
- as an evaluation tool with the capacity to monitor policies and programmes, assessing their impact in various places;
- as a common basis for sharing comparative information and as a basis for a benchmarking tool supporting transnational or cross-border decision-making and negotiation.

The development of a monitoring system entails collecting a set of statistical indicators deemed most appropriate for revealing territorial trends and ensuring that the information for these indicators is well documented and traceable. It concerns ensuring the reproducibility and consistency of the statistical and analytical work over a period of years, and this process requires ensuring the comparability of data across

space and time. In practical terms, it is the craft of offering this statistical information in a way that corresponds to – and answers towards – the monitoring and evaluation needs of strategies and policies; such as for instance the EUSBSR.

The choice of indicators is arguably the critical moment in developing a territorial monitoring system, because the capacity of the system to support evidence-based policymaking effectively is related to its ability to illustrate meaningful trends that support analysing the impacts of past interventions and potential future policy interventions. Furthermore, it is important both to identify indicators that measure the most appropriate policy objectives and issues, and to connect these with more specific types of territories, whether these are cities, sparsely populated areas, mountainous regions or rural regions. In this respect, the territorial nature of such a monitoring system relates to the measurement of policy objectives and issues critical to territorial cohesion, and acknowledging the necessity to assess a territory’s development path in relation to its specific geographical preconditions.

There are many ways in which monitoring as a concept can be put into practice and be relevant

“The question of governance of macro-regional strategies is a difficult one for monitoring and evaluation and needs more qualitative analysis.”

for pursuing territorial cohesion, for example, by:

- adding to the informed discussion between actors concerned with place-based development activities;
- improving policies by providing evidence about local circumstances and conditions;
- improving the integrated delivery of policies;
- improving the use of territorial assets/capital in the implementation of EU2020 priorities, and facilitating implementation of the priorities of TA2020;
- strengthening the decision-making process at the macro-regional level, resulting in more accurate formulation of macro-regional strategies (priorities and projects).

To meet these expectations, it becomes especially important to ensure that the policy dimensions and story-lines investigated are strongly connected to the territorial development trends that are

central to the respective territory. In the example of the Baltic Sea Region, the challenges are identified by the EU BSR Strategy and the VASAB Long-term Perspective (LTP), for instance.

Another benefit of a monitoring framework which is based on indicators is its power to provide visualisation. Visualisation is believed to be a key feature supporting spatial visioning and the co-production of a shared transnational understanding of spatial planning in Europe, not least when this process engages both researchers and policymakers (see for instance the discussion in Dühr, 2007). Hence, a factor in the success of a monitoring system is how the information is visually presented. Presentation and visualisation can include displaying static maps, trend analyses based on maps and charts. Recently, the fashion has been to create user-driven interactive map tools.

Figure 1. Relationship between TeMo and EUSBSR objectives.

| SPON BSR-TEMO | EUSBSR OBJECTIVES AND SUB-OBJECTIVES | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| | SAVE THE SEA | | | | | |
| ESPOB BSR-TeMo domains and indicators | Ensuring clear water in the sea | Having a rich and healthy wildlife | Clean and safe shipping | Better coop- eration | Improving the transport conditions | |
| 1. Economic performance & competitiveness | | | | | | |
| 2. Access to services, markets and jobs | | | | | | |
| 3. Innovative territories | | | | | | |
| 4. Social inclusion and quality of life | | | | | | |
| 5. Environmental qualities | | | | | | |
| Supporting evidence for EUSBSR | Gross nutri- ent balance | | Shipping lanes OPS ports | | Cargo turno- ver at Baltic ports | |

 Explicit linkage

 Implicit linkage

It is important that those in the institutional structure around a monitoring system understand that the framing and construction of the system are only a first step in providing appropriate policy support. The relevance of the system depends on many factors; the most important may be:

- the understanding among policymakers of the role and opportunities provided by the monitoring system and their ability to use them;
- the permanent updating of the information at the core of the monitoring system;
- a critical examination of the system's ability to meet the needs of policy-making, and monitoring of strategies and policies.

Territorial monitoring in relation to the EU Baltic Sea Region Strategy

The Territorial Monitoring (TeMo) system is a monitoring system that measures progress towards economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). At the core of the TeMo system is a set of quantified indicators at different scales. Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development in the BSR expressed a demand for such a system at the VASAB Ministerial Conference in 2009. They requested monitoring of and periodical reporting on the territorial development of the BSR.

The ESPON programme financed the work and the current monitoring system was developed by a team of researchers under the leadership of Nordregio between 2012 and 2014 under the name ESPON BSR-TeMo. The system was developed in close collaboration with the end users, specifically, national policy makers who form the Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB) Committee on Spatial Planning and Development in the BSR.

Since its development in 2014, the TeMo system has been used regularly as a public policy tool. ESPON has periodically updated the quantitative information and based on this VASAB has identified some key links between spatial policy and other fields of public intervention and responsibility. These include labour market policy, regional policy, education policy and transport policy among others.

The TeMo approach also has value beyond the monitoring of spatial processes. Its key strength is the way that it combines conventional indicators with proper territorial typologies. Indicators have already been defined and time series have been collected, tested and made compatible for all BSR countries including the EU neighbours. There is substantial expertise in the field when it comes to developing

policy relevant knowledge based on this information. This is particularly useful in the context of the EU Strategy for the BSR (EUSBSR).¹⁸ Of the Strategy's three objectives, two, "Connect the region" and "Increase prosperity", are partially covered by the existing TeMo system (see figure 1). There are however, some missing linkages between the EUSBSR and the TeMo system when it comes to the objective "Save the sea" which would greatly benefit from the collection of new data.

Save the Sea

Achieving good environmental status by 2020 is one of the key objectives of policy actions in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and one of the main reasons for the existence of the EUSBSR. In recent years, the preservation of natural resources through clean technology, alternative energies and other green growth initiatives has once again been in the spotlight. Although many action programmes have been initiated over the last decade addressing the environment, environmental and climate change pressures continue to be addressed. Two major areas of environmental ac-

tion in the BSR are the air quality in cities and eutrophication levels of the Baltic Sea.

When it comes to air quality, PM₁₀ pollution is a common indicator of air quality. The main causes of PM₁₀ pollutions are industries, transport, households, and agriculture. The latest figures for BSR cities show, that PM₁₀ is no longer a concern for Scandinavian cities, but still is for Polish ones.

Another sensitive environmental issue in the Baltic Sea Region is the quality of the Baltic Sea water. There are currently problems of eutrophication, mainly caused by agricultural phosphate entries. The increasing shipping transport across the Baltic Sea also causes negative environmental and climate impacts through ballast waters, dumping of used oil and diesel, as well as exhaust gas pollutions, along the shipping routes as well as within the ports. Map 1 is an example of how HELCOME data has been integrated in the BSR-TeMo monitoring system for the EUSBSR.

Connect the Region

For an international macro-region like the BSR, good internal and external transport connections are vital for the exchange of goods, people and knowledge. The BSR is deeply embedded in

¹⁸ The following section discussing territorial monitoring in relation to the EUSBSR builds on the report Trends, challenges and potentials in the Baltic Sea Region (Swedish National Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2016), with contributions by Linus Rispling (Ed.), Julien Grunfelder (Ed.), Gustaf Noriën, Shinan Wang, Linda Randall, Gunnar Lindberg, Tomas Hanell, Carsten Schürmann and Jacek Zaucha.

the global economy, and competes with other macro-regions in Europe and in the world. In a European context, most of the regions within the BSR suffer from relative low accessibility potentials, putting them at a relative disadvantage when it comes to increasing their economic activities. Only few BSR areas can compete with their European and global competitors. Still, there are several growth poles within the BSR, mostly areas with high population potentials. Over the last decades, the potential for prosperity within these growth poles has increased.

Besides the growth poles, there are many first, second and third tier gateway cities, connecting the BSR with Europe and the world. Along with their gateway function, these cities and towns are also drivers of regional growth and hotspots for social activities. To fulfil their functions, cities need to be well connected to each other. Good connectivity to emerging vibrant cities inside and outside Europe is vital for the BSR. Map 2 shows an analysis of functional areas in the BSR made within the monitoring system.

Increase prosperity

Promoting the competitiveness and attractiveness of the BSR is one of the principal objectives of the EUSBSR macro-regional strategy. It consists of five sub-objectives that seek to reinforce the cohesiveness of the macro-region through tourism, strengthening culture and creative industries, exploiting the full potential of the region in research, innovation and SME, utilising the digital internal market as a means of attracting talents and investments, improving and promoting people's health as well as social aspects; and enhancing education, research and general employability.

The connection between the EUSBSR objective of prosperity and the two EU 2020 Strategy priorities of smart growth and inclusive growth are substantial, not least concerning R&D, education, skills, and poverty and social exclusion. One key underlying aspect in understanding the economic development of the BSR is migration – Map 3 displays one visualisation of migration trends in the region from 2005 to 2014.

To conclude

In summary, effective linking of the BSR-TeMo system to the objectives of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region would make it a useful tool for assessing whether we are moving in the right direction, and locating key risks and challenges. There is also a need for continued discussion of conceptual issues and practicalities related to how monitoring and evaluation are utilised in the policy development (cycle) and in implementation and evaluation of the policies and strategies for macro-regions. Obviously, it is rather difficult to assess the linkages between governance at the macro-regional level (e.g., implementation of the EUSBSR) and any tangible outcomes being captured by the quantitative data and analysis of such a monitoring system described above. This is a difficult aspect of analysing the actual impact of the strategy – in the light of all other processes taking place in the region and elsewhere. The question of governance of macro-regional strategies is a difficult one for monitoring and evaluation and needs more qualitative analysis. Hence, one aspect of evaluating the progress of the EUSBSR is surely to evaluate projects and actions at the lower level, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and linking this to the governance at the macro-scale as well. Another

important aspect, however, is to follow the large scale – yet territorially diverse – development at the macro level. Even though it is difficult to evaluate any counterfactual results of a strategy in such a way, due to many other global and local processes having an impact on the macro-regional development, a monitoring system following the appropriate domains and indicators at the macro level gives an indication of what work needs to be intensified and what aspects are moving in the right direction. This is what we have exemplified in this article, and we hope that it will stimulate further discussions and developments in the field of macro regional monitoring and evaluation systems. ■



Evaluating and monitoring macro-regional strategies

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Introduction

More than a decade ago the idea of macro-regional cooperation came up, followed by the development of by now four macro-regional strategies. As it is often the case, stakeholders involved in funding cooperation initiatives come to ask whether their engagement is justified by the results. In particular, in the case of macro-regional strategies with their broad scope, the impact, output or results are not obvious. This is partly due to their reliance on existing funding opportunities, institutions and cooperation within the diversity of the EU's multi-level governance structure. For this reason, and in view of the preparation of the new multi-annual framework 2020-2027, calls from a wide range of stakeholders for evaluating and monitoring macro-regional cooperation have

become vigorous. In response to this growing demand the European Commission and the different macro-regions have increased their efforts by providing reports, launching studies and projects as well as by organising participatory workshops.

The aim of this contribution is to identify potential ways forward to develop strategies for evaluating and monitoring MRS. In order to do so, we first differentiate between the concepts of evaluation and monitoring. Second, we introduce the challenges in evaluating and monitoring macro-regional strategies. Third, we give an overview on different attempts undertaken in the direction of measuring the added value of MRS. Fourth, we present open questions and identify potential ways forward.

Defining Evaluation and Monitoring

The terms evaluation and monitoring are often used jointly, sometimes even as synonyms. There are, however, important distinctions to these two concepts. In short, evaluation analyses to what extent a certain goal was achieved, whereas monitoring analyses how certain indicators change. In other words: Evaluation is a systematic assessment of the use and value of a concept according to its potential impact or in relation to targets set. Evaluation can be conducted either ex-ante, accompanying or ex-post. Monitoring by contrast is the continuous observation of changes of a range of indicators over an undefined or defined period of time. A difference is that the process of evaluation on the one hand subsumes to come to

a judgement on the results, impacts or outcomes. The changes observed in a monitoring process on the other hand are not necessarily weighted against a predefined set of targets or goals.

The objects of monitoring or evaluation can be among other projects, programmes, measures, policies, technologies or organisations. The functions are either to better understand processes, to control a development, to create a dialogue or to provide legitimacy to measures. An important differentiation is to be made between internal and external evaluations and monitoring processes, meaning whether an evaluation is conducted by external contractors or by the respective organisation itself. A main challenge in providing results is the scope of analysis of the evaluation or

monitoring process, which again relates to the object itself. Macro-regional strategies are unique in this respect.

Challenges for Evaluating and Monitoring MRS

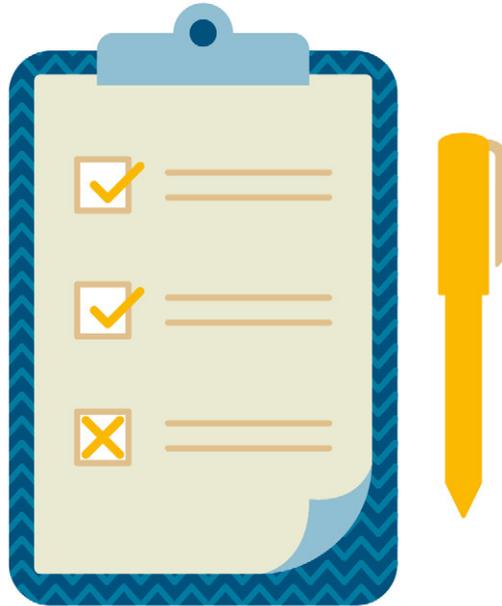
We contend here that evaluating and monitoring of macro-regional cooperation is a complex endeavour facing a number of challenges. We come to this conclusion for the following reasons.

Macro-regional cooperation is implemented under the premises of the three Nos, to not imply new funds, institutions and regulations. Despite the fact that these three Nos have partly been overcome, as money was allocated to MRS, new positions have been developed and macro-regions are notably included in different operational frameworks, they remain a fuzzy cooperation framework. Their broad ambition is to support better implementation of existing policies and legislation as well as to support the better alignment and targeted use of existing funds.

One consideration to keep in mind is the relation between ambition and implementation: Macro-regional cooperation has a strong strategic dimension, notably through cooperation developing under the head of a joint strategy document. The involved

stakeholder networks intend to support coordination across multiple levels as well as cross-sectoral. Macro-regions are not implemented following a one-size-fits-all approach. On the contrary, all the four macro-regions differ with regard to content, governance and ambition. Therefore, at the European level, macro-regional strategies are understood to be laboratories of a place-based approach. This also implies that throughout the process and the cooperation joint targets are set and projects developed. This in itself is one of the goals of macro-regional cooperation to identify common ground and then develop ideas for implementation to achieve the joint targets. The projects that then shall help to reach goals are not necessarily carried out under the 'macro-regional flag'. The fact that concrete activities are often carried out in other contexts, and are not often mono-causal relatable to the strategy makes monitoring and evaluation of the concrete contribution of the strategy difficult. For example, in some contexts the macro-region might have provided the administrative-political setting to identify the cooperation needs and allow for gathering of political support. This is, however, difficult to measure.

Another consideration is the long-term goal that macro-regional cooperation can contribute to



further integration in political, institutional and territorial terms. This, however, is a long-term development. It may as well differ from one macro-region to another as well as within the different policy fields and networks involved. In order to measure these developments, one would need to know about the current situation. Monitoring the changes then would imply the identification of indicators, which is not a straightforward task.

All in all, the complexity of measuring the contributions derives from the fuzzy nature of

MRS, the intangible effects of e.g., increased cooperation, its facilitating role, the causality and the identification of the effects itself. For this reason, scholars have described macro-regions as examples of evolutionary or experimentalist governance (Gänzle & Mirtl 2016, Chilla et al. 2017).

Taking stock: Activities and Data Sources

In general, three different types of parallel developments within macro-regions can be differentiated. These include studies, workshops and the dis-

cussions around the post-2020 cohesion and regional policy by regional stakeholders as well as from the European level.

Following the report on the added-value of macro-regional strategies in 2013, and the 2016 report on the implementation of MRS, the European Commission has increased its efforts in responding to the growing demand for monitoring and evaluating MRS. One of the main activities by the European Commission with respect to the concept of MRS was to launch different studies on the added-value of MRS and their contribution to Cohesion Policy. The Interact programme in addition commissioned studies on best-practices of macro-regional implementation processes and on the embedding of MRS activities in ETC activities and programmes. Moreover, the European Commission supported four participatory workshops to be carried out in each region to address explicitly a potential development of evaluation and monitoring system regarding the added value of MRS. The first workshop took place in the EU Baltic Sea Region in Summer 2016 followed by a workshop in the Danube and Alpine Region in Autumn 2016 (for example, see the follow-up paper Chilla & Sielker 2016). The topic was then as well addressed in the Adriatic-Ionian Region as part of the

Annual Forum in Spring 2017. Another series of events that broadly relates to these questions are the post-2020 discussions. There are several activities launched from regional and national representations aiming to support the future integration of MRS in the Cohesion policy framework. These include numerous position papers, as well as conferences and workshops on the future of MRS. For example, the events by the Bavarian Presidency of the EUSALP in March 2017 and by the Hungarian Presidency of the EUSDR in May 2017.

The discussions around the future of MRS are somewhat fuelled by a request for their legitimisation as a tool to being able to show results, which processes of monitoring and evaluation are supposed to show. A number of activities and data sources can provide input to such processes.

In parallel to these discussions, the ESPON Programme has launched calls for proposal on the future development and scenarios within macro-regions in the format of Targeted Analysis. In addition, the Baltic Sea Region in cooperation with ESPON has developed the BSR TeMo project, aiming to develop a territorial monitoring system for the region. The ESPON programme foresees as well to support other mac-

Table 1. Data sources

| Layers | General data sources |
|---|---|
| European | Eurostat Joint Research Council Inspire, Directive Implementation European Environmental Agency ESPON TransEuropean Network Corridor - Reports Maritime Atlas |
| MRS specific | KEEP ESPON European Structural and Investment Fund – reports, evaluations, national Institutions, e.g. statistical centres European territorial cooperation programmes – e.g. evaluation reports |
| Priority Area, Action Group specific | Progress reports |
| Layers | Regional data sources |
| EUSBSR | Nordregio ESPON Vasab Helcom |
| EUSDR | JRC Danube Reference Data Service Infrastructure (DSRDI) International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River |
| EUSAIR | Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale |
| EUSALP | Alpine Convention (SOIA) EURAC - European Academy Bozen |

Source: own summary

ro-regions through similar projects, with the next project being launched for the Danube Region.

The question of monitoring and evaluation is not new, and has played a considerable role in observing spatial development on the regional as well as on the EU level. This led to a number of existing EU and regional sources and resources, which would be useful to draw on. The following table gives an overview on potential quantitative data and regional statistics as well as qualitative insights to be included into a monitoring system.

All these existing attempts and data resources can provide a basis for the development of future evaluation and monitoring procedures. Bringing these sources together would in itself be an added-value. However, at the moment the main question remains whether the regions and the EU level intend to focus on processes of evaluation and/or monitoring, and what the next steps could be. Despite a general positive estimation of moving towards such procedures, the workshops and regional discussion have revealed a huge diversity in expectations towards such a system and its approach. Whereas on a broader political level the question of result evaluation dominates, within the macro-regions a monitoring and an evaluation

of the activities and their priority areas is discussed. This immense diversity on expectation creates a difficult background to identify further concrete steps.

Open Questions and Ways forward

Drawing on the difference of the concepts introduced above, systems of evaluation could in the macro-regional context analyse the achievement of objectives. Monitoring systems can help to answer the contribution to change. However, given the challenges of the MRS concept as such, the difficulty will remain to claim causality due to changes often resulting from a combination of factors and activities outside MRS, e.g. more global developments such as economic crises.

Given the ongoing discussions and the diverging goals of the different actors with regard to monitoring and evaluation there are from our perspective three more likely systems that could be developed:

- Monitoring of socio-economic and environmental indicators of a region: selecting most meaningful indicators with regard to the strategy's objectives.
- Monitoring of implementation activities and added-value: governance changes, networks, workshop assessments etc.

“On the basis of a dialogue between the key contributors and stakeholders a political discourse on the purpose is needed.”

- Evaluation of achievements and added-value: added-value to ETC, added-value to the Cohesion goal, achievements of targets set in MRS and their thematic areas.

Addressing such approaches would in a first step need to answer numerous questions, not least the ambition and the resources provided. These are at the same time political decisions.

Open Questions

When building a monitoring system, many questions may arise, e.g.:

1. What shall be measured and with which indicators?
2. How to operationalise the objects of monitoring and evaluation?
3. Which level of concretisation?
4. How to consider political dynamics and changing priorities?
5. How to assess causal relations between implementation activities and changes in socio-economic values?
6. Who (self-evaluation vs. external evaluation)?
7. How to deal with complexity?
8. What timeframe?
9. What approach (quantitative vs. qualitative)?
10. What resources are provided?
11. What type of policy decisions should the system support and prepare?

Once the general idea of what shall be measured is defined, a crucial step is the identification of indicators. Systems to monitor the socio-economic development of macro-regions can draw on a significant number of resources as outlined above. Despite all the pitfalls in the concrete implementation and operationalisation of indicators, observing territorial developments is not new, first attempts are on the way to designing tailor-made monitoring systems and to align the diversity of data, e.g., through ESPON. A system to monitor the implementation of the activities in the framework of MRS would need to be tailored to the different macro-regional organisation structures and themes, and necessarily would need to involve the key stakeholders, such as National Coordinators and thematic coordinators.

However, the assessment of the added-value, which is currently a major impetus to ask for

evaluation and/or monitoring, is a more complicated endeavour. The discussions for the next multi-annual financial EU framework, which call regional policy fundamentally into question, raises the question of the contribution of this new cooperation framework to the EU's cohesion goal.

Table 2 illustrates the complexity of defining indicators. The added-value of macro-regions consists in providing a framework to allow for strategic orientation. However, identifying operationalising "strategic orientation" as the added-value to measure in indicators is another step. This goes hand in hand with the decision whether to use a qualitative or a quantitative approach.

As illustrated through the examples in Table 2 the operationalisation of indicators is difficult. Keeping in mind that any approach would most likely have a limited set of resources, the practicalities would need to be

Table 2: Measuring the added-value

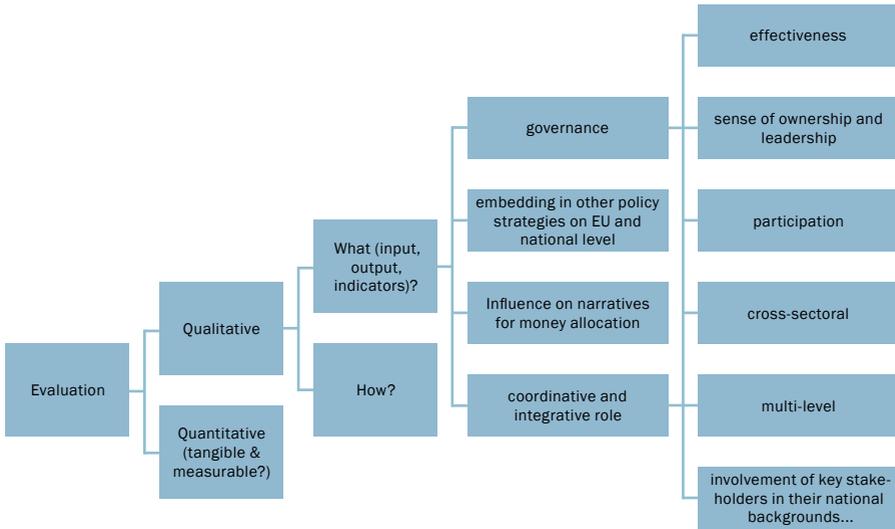
| Added value | Measurement |
|--|--|
| Strategic orientation | Qualitative shifts of the political agendas Updates of the MRS visions and targets Change of mind set of civil servants (self-assessment/questionnaires) Number of new initiatives |
| Linking the political with programmes and projects | Integration of MRS objectives in domestic and European documents/projects, in particular regarding sectoral policies Alignment of funding, e.g. by domestic and European investments with MRS agendas Number of strategic projects Alignment of regional policies and sectoral policies with the Union's goal, e.g. the contribution to the use of sustainable energy |
| Cross-sectoral coordination | Joint activities and projects Number of actors, networks, meetings, projects with reference to MRS objectives Identification of policy coherence |
| Multi-level governance | Sense of ownership and leadership at all levels Participation of all levels Involvement of upper and lower political stakeholders, e.g. the ministers meeting Citizen engagement |

Source: own summary

considered early in the process. Figure 1 shows examples for a potential tree of decision's to be taken alongside the route of setting-up a system through the example of a qualitative evaluation approach. This shows that after having decided for a qualitative or a quantitative approach one can differentiate between input and output indicators (cf. DG Regio 2011, Gaffey 2013, Chilla & Sielker 2016). The example of

governance e.g. shows that one could then analyse the effectiveness or the sense of ownership or the participation. This tree of decisions is an example displaying the first number of decisions that would need to be taken in approaching such a system.

Fig. 1: Example for a decision-making tree



Source: Own illustration

Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

This contribution put emphasis on identifying potential ways forward in setting-up systems of monitoring and evaluation. Against the background of the above identified challenges we have highlighted some practicalities and open questions that would need to be addressed. On this basis, we come to the following recommendations:

A contemporary challenge is the diversity of expectations towards such a system and an uncertainty between the different stakeholders on who is supposed to take the lead. Following the participatory workshops, we therefore recommend a continuous dialogue between Priority Area Coordinators/ Action Group Leaders with National Coordinators and the European Commission. The four presidencies to the

macro-regional strategies could potentially play a coordinating role. A major pitfall is that all levels and stakeholders need a justification for their involvement.

On the basis of a dialogue between the key contributors and stakeholders a political discourse on the purpose is needed. In the next step a clarification of the objects of such a system is needed. These necessarily need to take into account the information available and the practicalities.

On a European level, a next step could be to decide to what extent individual systems for the four MRS should be developed, or how these different regional approaches could lead to a coherent evaluation of the concept of MRS itself.

On a more general basis, we want to pinpoint the fact that independent from a chosen model,

expectations towards an evaluation and monitoring system would need be realistic. Evaluation and monitoring are complex endeavours where a transparent communication of the aims of chosen system need to be communicated openly. Introducing a monitoring system can on the one hand provide a documentation of activities undertaken in the MRS context. On the other hand it can help to provide a long-term overview of the regional developments. Given the nature of macro-regions, we, however, consider that attempts to qualitatively evaluate the more intangible effects of MRS cooperation help to identify the contribution of MRS to the overall policy and governance setting. This may in addition provide impetus to discuss adjustments to current practices.

Although all these recommendations seem to touch rather general points, we conclude that before any of the above outlined concretisations can be taken and approached, the framework conditions on the lead, purpose, ambition and resources have to be clarified before further steps can be taken. The results of the participatory workshops and the ESPON projects provide input to fuel the discussions and decisions, which now depend on political leadership. ■

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Science and research lay the ground



Macro-regional scientific clusters as a tool for capacity building

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Macro-regional Strategies (MRS) gather countries and regions in the same geographical area in order to address common challenges and to benefit from strengthened cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion. The approach encourages participating countries to mobilise new projects and initiatives, creating a sense of common responsibility. They offer a platform for multi-sectoral, multi-country and multi-level governance, and are open to neighbouring non-EU countries. They thus play a substantial role in helping these countries to strengthen their links with the EU and mitigate negative effects on the EU's external borders. A macro-region is best conceived as a complex and heterogeneous net-

work rather than as a single commanding authority. Macro-regions are not created ex nihilo; they super-impose themselves as a “soft” strategic layer upon a contrasting set of pre-existing histories of transnational cooperation and networking on the European territory.

MRS are also an endeavour to develop innovative, socially, economically and environmentally responsible regions that can then well integrate into the European framework. They are thus reinforcing the commitments of the Europe 2020 strategy towards the three dimensions of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and balancing economic and societal needs with sustainable environmental management.

Understanding and tackling such cross-sectoral challenges through policy measures and policy dialogue requires appropriate

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data and knowledge which can be provided by different expert groups and scientific research organisations and their networks. A strong human capital base is needed not only to be able to provide expert knowledge in one field but to be able to think and act across disciplines.

In this context, human and institutional capacity can be seen as a prerequisite for institutional cooperation, and hence for macro-regional cooperation with a view to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in different macro-regions. This is one of the most important reasons why the action plans of all the macro-regional strategies specifically insist on sector specific and cross-sectoral capacity building at the individual and institutional level.

Even though there is an emphasis on the clear sense of ownership and responsibilities to countries and regions within macro-regions, the initiatives and actions defined by MRS need momentum and would benefit from a stronger coordination within and between the involved countries to deliver the expected results. Such momentum needs to come from the countries and should involve partners and civil societies operating in the macro-region. Important support also comes from International and European institutions including the European Commission.

As the science and knowledge service at the heart of the European Commission, DG Joint Research Centre (JRC) is providing support to all existing macro-regional strategies.

Following the endorsement of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) by the European Council in June 2011, the JRC made contacts with a broad range of stakeholders in the Danube Region at scientific and political levels. An analysis confirmed the needs and added value for the JRC to launch and coordinate an initiative to support the strategy. At the scientific level, the JRC signed a Letter of Intent with four Science Academies of the Danube Region for cooperation on the scientific support to the Danube Strategy. This cooperation was later extended to six other Science Academies of the Region and to the Danube Rectors' Conference which is a network representing almost 70 universities in the region. In 2013, the Joint Research Centre officially launched a dedicated initiative, called Scientific Support to the Danube Strategy.

The JRC's Scientific Support to the Danube Strategy initiative is sub-divided into four flagship projects and three horizontal activities. They aim to address the scientific challenges faced by the Danube Region from an integrated and cross-cutting perspective taking into account the interdependencies between various policy priorities. The flagship projects which have been identified are the following: The Danube Water Nexus, The Danube Land and Soil Nexus, The Danube Air Nexus, The Danube Bio-energy Nexus. The four thematic projects are complemented by three horizontal activities: The Danube Reference Data and Service Infrastructure, Smart Specialisation in the Danube Region and the Danube Innovation Partnership. The projects focus on environmental protection, irrigation and agricultural development, navigability, energy production and the support to European governance through Smart Specialisation.

“Territorial management at all levels requires informed decisions based on access to authentic and timely data and information. The creation of macro-regions offers opportunities to understand the status and connect social, economic and environmental phenomena without being restricted by political boundaries. Given shared cultural traditions and development challenges, macro-regions also provide an opportunity for a broad range of stakeholders to collaborate in sharing and using their knowledge.”

Vladimir Šucha JRC Director-General

The JRC Scientific Support to the Danube Strategy follows the logic of a **nexus approach** which can be demonstrated in the Danube Water Nexus. Water issues are closely interlinked with the agriculture and energy sector. The Danube Water Nexus tackles the interdependencies in these sectors. It aims at addressing the water challenges identified by the EU Blueprint to Safeguard Europe’s Water Resources and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Tackling the Water Nexus requires integrated solutions going beyond sectoral divides and

addressing the needs of water from the different users in the region. This cross-cutting nexus approach increased the cooperation across the different priority areas (PAs) of the Danube Strategy. The transboundary nature of the Danube river basin provides an opportunity for testing impacts of innovative policy actions.

An important part of the JRC flagship projects and horizontal activities was setting up scientific clusters – network of researchers from the JRC and from different countries in the macro-region. Working together in flagship

“Introductory plenary session
Welcome by
Vladimír Šucha,
Director-General of
the Joint Research
Centre, European
Commission”



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projects and horizontal activities has started from existing collaboration of the JRC with research bodies and international organisations in the Danube Region. Subsequently more and more additional partners were involved to fill gaps of expertise as deemed necessary. With the involvement of a growing number of experts, a solid knowledge base has been established. This contributes to harmonisation across countries and supports the implementation of EU policies in a transboundary context.

The JRC thus provides scientific support to the EUSDR in two ways. Firstly, it addresses the sci-

entific needs related to the implementation of the EUSDR through the harmonisation of datasets and filling the existing data gaps. It is thus helping decision-makers and other stakeholders to identify the policy needs and actions needed for the implementation of the Strategy. Secondly, it contributes to knowledge capacity building through sharing methods, tools and skills and to the reinforcement of ties and cooperation amongst the scientific communities. This also encourages a change of mindset stimulating a more holistic approach to innovation and taking public authorities, businesses and academia

on-board to work together to create regional innovation ecosystems through an entrepreneurial discovery process.

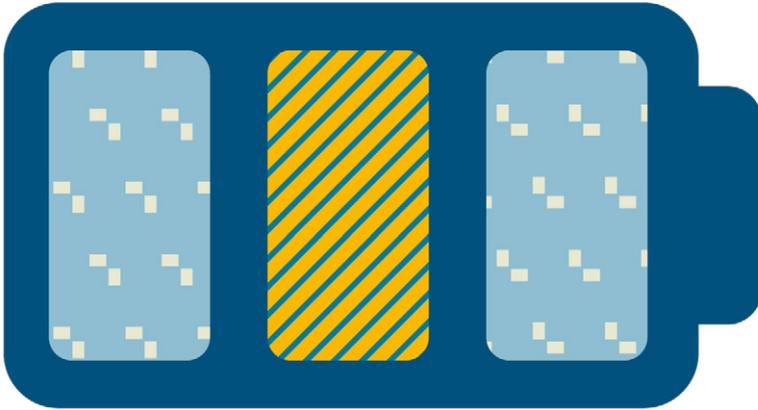
It is broadly recognised that research questions in environmental science should be driven by societal needs, and co-developed by social and biophysical scientists working closely together with those who apply scientific knowledge in decision making. The latter include, in particular, land planners and river basin managers. At the same time, scientific and technical knowledge is the seed of innovation in processes, services and products needed to reach the objectives of the EUSDR: protecting the environment, connecting the region, building prosperity and strengthening institutions, cooperation and security. So, co-development of scientific and technical knowledge, problem solving and innovation is a systemic approach to research, and requires “synthesis centres” active within the broad-

er ecosystem. Building on experience derived from national projects and working together with the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the JRC facilitates innovation transfer, for example, through the creation of Synthesis Centres on innovative wastewater treatment feasibility studies in the Lower Danube Region.

EUSDR stakeholders meet every year at the Annual Forum to discuss the progress of the Strategy’s implementation, exchange best practices and to identify further opportunities for cooperation. At these events, both the expert and political level, emphasised the importance of the JRC involvement in the Danube Strategy. They highlighted the needs of the region for capacity building through the nexus (cross-sectoral, holistic) approach and through clustering of macro-regional research potential.

Over three years, the Scientific Support to the Danube Strategy, through the activities of the seven scientific clusters, has led to over 40 scientific publications and technical reports. It involved around 4 500 stakeholders, organised 50 thematic workshops, and collected and made available more than 10 000 data sets. The initiative created durable thematic scientific networks of national experts, universities and research institutions, led and stimulated by the JRC. The JRC has carried out collaboration activities and facilitated the access to relevant data. Strategic partners strongly supporting and requesting scientific support are: the National Academies of Science and Art (Danube Academies Conference), the Danube Rectors' Conference, the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, Priority Area Coordinators and national representatives as members of different Steering Groups.

The concept of a scientific cluster proved to be successful in overcoming sectoral divides and fostered better links between priority areas. By offering strategic scientific support, scientific clusters also provide the momentum and ensure coherence with EU policies and positions. They support through capacity building while leaving the clear sense of ownership to countries and regions within the macro-regions. One should keep in mind that the four existing macro-regional strategies demonstrate how macro-regional cooperation is applied in very different historical, political and socio-economic contexts. Whilst the Alpine macro-regional strategy represents a potential instrument for the exploitation of territorial synergies, the strategies in the Danube, Baltic and Adriatic-Ionian macro-regions constitute potential instruments for tackling uneven development. Two of these three macro-regions (the Danube and the Adriatic-Ion-



ian) also include EU non-member states. The scientific communities in those countries have a relatively low participation in the EU research Framework Programme and less cooperation activities with the JRC. Working together in scientific clusters with the JRC researchers and EU Member States researchers provides the opportunity for scientific and institutional capacity building in the whole macro-region. Thus the support to existing scientific clusters and the formation of similar clusters in other macro-regions could be a way to strengthen horizontal linkages within macro-regions as well as with experts at EU level and at international institutions. The scientific clusters allow for a better and more

efficient managing the issues defined by the action plan of the strategy whilst clearly contributing to the development of cohesion policies. ■



The rationale of MRS, market failures and institutional misalignment: the case of North Sea Region

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While most economies are based on the idea of a market free from interventions by the state to guide or subvert forces of supply and demand, markets do fail and macroregions are one means for addressing such failures for the greater good. Understanding and attending to the economic problems created by market failures – many of which are due to externalities: that is, by economic and social impacts which are external to the market – is therefore key to the rationale for some macroregions, and to the proposed North Sea microregion in particular.

On the one hand, these market failures can lead to overproduction and too much exploitation of natural resources, for example through over-fishing and intensive farming. Such negative externalities are typified in activities which create pollution or in what is termed the 'tragedy of the commons' where a free-for-

all continues until productivity of the land or sea declines. On the other hand, there can be too little production when there is no way for the free market to capture the benefits of increased outputs, for example in generating energy from renewable rather than conventional sources when the former is far from the population of users. Here, the market does not recognise all the social and economic benefits of an activity and so the positive externalities are not reflected in the price and the volume of output is lower than it should be. Both market failures are considered in terms of their externalities: where they are positive there is a rationale for public interventions and investments to encourage cooperation and to overcome barriers to collaboration; where there are negative externalities – with pollution of neighbouring activities, for instance – joint efforts can regu-

late and manage activities to the benefits of societies.

There are a range of externalities where the countries and regions bordering the North Sea could benefit from an environment that facilitated such networking and partnership working. With fish that swim without restriction across international boundaries in northern seas, massive and complementary renewable energy sources in Northern Europe based on hydro-electric, tidal, wave and wind that are capable of supplying demands in the core of the continent; and potential advantages of sharing lessons from economic, social and infrastructure strategies and projects for sustainable developments. Market failures are inherent to our economies and so providing a means to reduce costs to the societies around the North Sea and to maximise benefits arising from overcoming them are worth pursuing.

Acknowledging that existing strategies and practices just within the European Union's exclusive territories may not be sufficient to overcome particular market failures, the Common Fisheries Policy has had to be extended in northern Europe to embrace wider interests and issues through the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission "to ensure the long-term conservation and optimum utilisation of the fishery resources" in the Convention Area by "providing sustainable economic, environmental and social benefits". This illustrates how nature's geographies may not be congruent with political and administrative borders and require a solution that embraces an understanding of negative externalities and the means to manage their consequences.

To an extent this development confirms how EU inter-governmental approaches to decision making have failed northern re-

“Freight transport
in the North Sea
Region.”



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gions generally and need modification to counter the negative impacts of the free market. Similarly, the North Sea Commission has criticised the tendency for many top-down sectoral policies to ignore regional challenges and opportunities, with negative impacts on their economies and contradictions with other policy objectives. More positively, a macroregional approach can build upon and improve the partnership and governance model which pervades Structural Fund delivery raised onto a transnational scale.

Macro-regional strategies therefore offer advantages by

creating fora where analyses, strategies, programmes and proposals can be discussed and generated to solve international issues where no or only limited facilities currently exist. The social, economic, environmental and political crucible that is the North Sea macro-region of innovation and smart specialisation presents an opportunity to share experiences and intelligence more effectively than within the Nordic Council, North Sea Commission, Leader and other trans-national programmes alone. As much as realising synergies of cooperation as overcoming problems, a macroregional strategy

in this specific context can be welcomed.

The establishment of a macro-regional strategy (MRS) in this region would meet the criteria of including several regions and several countries, of flexible geographies (including those beyond the borders of the European Union), and would be qualitatively different from the Baltic, Danube and Adriatic-Ionian macroregions as it would only include countries within the most prosperous nations of Europe, while the Alpine case has two non-member states with similar profiles to Norway. There is a special relevance in and around the North Sea of a MRS given this inclusion of an arc of prosperity of non-EU economies – Norway, Iceland and, with its own particular status, the Faroe Islands along with the current Member States. These nations have varying degrees of relationships with the European Union so that no single Treaty or set of rules and regulations that exist for other inter- and trans-national purposes can cover all the actions and agreements that would be offered by an MRS. Providing an envelope within which the plans and programmes proposed by these various multilateral bodies, encompassing countries within and outside the EU, could more effectively and efficiently address market failures identified for a North Sea MRS. Value would be

added, therefore, to those networks and partnerships which facilitate cooperation in the context of the North Sea: these include the Nordic Council, EU programs (e.g., Interreg or Leader), KIMO (Kommunenenes Internasjonale Miljøorganisasjon, also known as Local Authorities International Environmental Organization), policy communities with a more integrated role in the European Commission decision-making process (such as the Committee of the Regions (CoR)), the Conference for Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the North Sea Commission (NSC), and the North Sea Regional Advisory Council for Fisheries.

Sustainable development in this environment, recognising and incorporating into economic and social activities the externalities arising from market failures, is made relevant to the aspirations of the societies around the North Sea and made more possible through the establishment of an MRS. Successful macroregions are characterised by planning and delivering actions aimed at tangible achievements with demonstrable added value in geographies tolerated to have “flexible, even vague, definitions of their boundaries”. The nascent plans for the area have been constructed in terms of ‘tapping into blue’ resources, promoting a more environmentally friendly and effi-

cient transport sector, addressing energy and climate issues facing the region, and promoting local businesses and partnerships in order to help create vibrant local communities. Recent discussions and the 2017 North Sea Conference has been focused on 'Sustainable Growth Corridors'. Working within the constraints of the European Commission's MRS conditions, the North Sea Commission's plans are focused on using existing resources and funds more effectively, rather than requiring new funds, institutions and regulations.

This is consistent with the other macroregional strategies, although these have been introduced into areas struggling with transition from central planning or from significant public deficits in a period of post financial crisis, with the exception of the Alpine MRS which only includes Slovenia with this legacy. This context contrasts with the economies of the North Sea region where, apart from the implications of Brexit, they are facing opportunities to accelerate developments and innovations, to realise synergies and to promote closer cooperation to good effect under a MRS, rather than trying to catch-up the core of Europe. The challenges faced are therefore often different from those in the Baltic, Adriatic/Ionian, Danube and Alps; nevertheless, there is still the

potential to provide insights and transferable lessons on the challenges these other territorial initiatives have encountered.

The European Commission has highlighted the benefits of the first four MRSs²⁰ especially with regard to their 'contribution to territorial cohesion' but also their 'need to cooperate closely with existing multilateral institutions and under existing agreements' – these are perhaps less of a priority in the North Sea region given its existing set of institutions of multinational governance and good practice in this regard based on mutual respect, and their support for 'a more integrated implementation of the Union's sectoral policies' – which above has been identified as an issue in Northern Europe. More significantly in the post-Brexit context is the Council's requirements that agencies and governments at all levels engage fully with the MRS programmes and plans, applying Structural and complementary funds to finance and facilitate investments and networking opportunities. There is a governance failure here with the UK ignoring the potential for transnational cooperation both in the general approach to collaboration across the EU, with a threatened reori-

²⁰ Council of the European Union (2017) Council conclusions on the implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies', Brussels: CEC, 8461/17, http://ec.europa.eu/region-at_policy/sources/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/pdf/concl_implementation_macro_region_strategy_en.pdf

“Macro-regional strategies offer advantages by creating fora where analyses, strategies, programmes and proposals can be discussed and generated to solve international issues where no or only limited facilities currently exist.”

entation away from trading and other relationships with Member States, and in projects specifically around and in the North Sea. Failing to recognise and appreciate the benefits of addressing the sorts of externalities that hinder sustainable development in the region is being exacerbated by the uncertainties created by the UK vote to leave the EU. Until there is clarity over the country's support for such collaborations and financial commitment to contribute to investments, the proposals for a North Sea macro-region will be constrained.

The analyses of the Commission and Council confirm the need for processes and practices to be introduced which promote a higher degree of dynamics and transformation in the macro-region than would be delivered without an MRS. This has been achieved to a greater or lesser extent elsewhere in the initial four macroregions. For the North Sea MRS to parallel such success-

es, with its high initial levels of wealth and infra- and super-structures and so related higher capacity to deliver successful implementation, there will need to be early actions over projects such as the proposed North Sea Grid. As resources could be more easily delegated to such cooperative ventures, the obstacles to demonstrating the added value of an MRS should be less of a challenge than in the other macro-regions. Consistent and supportive of international obligations to address climate change and global warming, the '2020 Climate and Energy Package'²¹ represents a set of binding legislation to ensure the EU meets its climate and energy targets for the year 2020. Alongside key targets on improvements in energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, 20% of EU energy should be generated from renewable en-

²¹ Commission of the European Communities (2010) 2020 Climate and Energy Package, Brussels: CEC, https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020_en

ergy sources by the end of this decade. These targets are also embedded into the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and, while Norway and Iceland could be considered as supporting such an approach to sustainable development it is now perhaps debatable as to the position of the UK. As the most innovative region of the EU, and a global leader, the economies around the North Sea must be at the forefront of actions on the climate if these targets are to be achieved.

It has been estimated that Scotland has a potential of 36.5 GW of wind and 7.5 GW of tidal power, 25% of the estimated total capacity for the European Union and up to 14 GW of wave power potential, 10% of EU capacity. Similarly, Norway generates and can increase further its hydroelectric production, while geothermal energy potential in Iceland is massive. However, for each of

these territories local demand is insufficient to warrant large scale investment or, given the requirements for electricity in the major markets of England and the core of continental Europe, or for interconnectors to be laid to transmit over significant distances. With the market unable to capture the socio-economic benefits from reducing effective carbon emissions from meeting these demands of German, English, French and neighbouring consumers, the connection of e.g., Iceland's electricity grid with Scotland's, via a submarine cable would not proceed. This Ice-Link can only proceed if market failures in the project's capitalization and risk responsibilities are addressed; however, as this is on the EU list of key energy infrastructure projects the positive externalities can be realised through the promise of accelerated granting of planning and permits, and possible financial

grants. A North Sea MRS for this and complementary interconnectors from the other Northern European powerhouses would facilitate such investments much more effectively and rapidly than bilateral agreements.

The North Sea Commission's proposals for a MRS identify a series of initiatives where market failures could be overcome through a transnational programme of investments with international projects for interconnectivity and infrastructure, energy transition and renewables. The market failures in the energy market could be addressed through 'internalising the externalities' within the macro-region; a programme encouraging national energy generators to invest in large scale renewables and simultaneously progressing interconnectors between Iceland, Norway and Scotland onto England, Denmark, Germany and the Benelux countries as gateways

to mainland Europe is recommended as essential for delivering the Europe 2020 strategy and Europe's climate change obligations. Because of the leadership offered in the development and implementation of renewable energy technologies by Denmark and Germany respectively, the Danes' reluctance to participate in the Baltic Sea macroregion and Germany's partial resistance to the North Sea proposals may be challenged with this particular initiative. The economic and environmental benefits of such actions are only realisable within a few years, along with investment in skills and human capital for these sectors, through a coordinated MRS. These would be delivered most effectively, efficiently, economically and equitably through a North Sea MRS confirming the appropriateness of the macroregion concept where market failures are present. ■



The participation and effects of inter-organisational networks in the MRS framework: operational network cases in the context of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

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Introduction

Did the adoption of the EUSDR start to foster necessary but less established cooperation structures or is it rather a too heterogeneous space for such a functional collaboration? The launch and implementation of the EUSDR indeed mobilised new and existing transnational initiatives. Moreover, empirical data suggest that the EUSDR also has a positive impact on the outcome of these initiatives. But there are four major challenges: the preconditions for public institutions and private organisations from the 14 EU and non-EU states are diverse in terms of capacities and know-how, resources and priorities.

Furthermore, a significant varying involvement of the different

nation states and their stakeholders can be observed and this prevents to some extent the coherent EUSDR implementation in the whole region. There are two main reasons for this variation: one is caused by the soft law approach of macro-regional strategies (MRS), which are based on a voluntary principle with no legal obligation for implementation. Consequently, several countries focus only on certain thematic areas or some are even non-active. On the other hand, although MRS are especially an opportunity for local and regional stakeholders to take part in the European project, primarily actors from subnational areas with a direct geographic link to the river Danube seem to be active. For them, the “Danube story” has an emotional meaning.

The third great implementation obstacle results from the lack of direct financing sources for MRS measures. Since no EU funding has been allocated to implement the measures of the MRS action plans, existing EU funding instruments, national and subnational sources as well as private ones are supposed to be mobilised. Nevertheless, some new funding has been put in place such as technical assistance for the coordination of the priority areas, temporary limited seed money pools and the EU transnational programmes INTERREG B areas are congruent with the macro-regions since the new EU funding period. However, actors from non-EU countries are disadvantaged because they have only limited access to EU funding and this is mainly negotiated in the context of enlargement or neighbourhood policy. At the same time, they do have less national/subnational and private sources than EU countries. Moreover, for example, in the case of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), national/subnational authorities are responsible for the specification of the operational programs for their national/subnational purposes. The European Commission has laid down the legal foundation to align the ESIF with the goals of MRS. But the alignment process has to overcome enormous bureaucratic hur-

dles and also national stakeholders have to be convinced of the benefit to use their national EU sources for transnational cooperation. The results are disappointing so far.

The need for further improvement of the governance structures of MRS can be considered as a fourth implementation challenge. The EUSDR structural build-up was time-consuming but the pressure was/is high to deliver visible results. The Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) and their Steering Groups (SG) of the eleven thematic priority areas are to a large extent responsible to ensure the implementation of the action plan. Still, until today, these stakeholders from the national and partly regional administrations have varying understanding of their roles and tasks. The high fluctuation rates of PAC's and SG members are counterproductive to foster smooth and fast implementation. Since the whole governance structure is quite complex, it seems to be challenging for actors to be new in the position of a PAC or SG member. But also the attendance of members in SG meetings is declining as well as political support in general.

Nevertheless, MRS can be characterised as an innovative tool of EU regional policy and beyond. I would like to mention three reasons related to the EU-

SDR: (1) As described above, the adoption of the EUSDR mobilised new or existing transnational networks, the political framework enabled these initiatives to achieve positive effects and to contribute to the EUSDR implementation. (2) These networks support the efforts of the Juncker Commission to bring Europe closer to its people. (3) It offers a supplementary tool to EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy to foster a soft process of rapprochement of non-EU countries with the EU member states in terms of e.g., democratic values and EU policy alignment. However, this has not been exploited to its possible extent. In the next section I will analyse the participation and effects of four EUSDR network cases. I have chosen these cases, because they cover various policy areas, different sectors and countries but they have also successfully achieved results. Based on the insights of the empirical data²², I would like to formulate political recommendations on how such initiatives can be mobilised and are ideally involved in MRS processes.

Analysis of networks:

According to the organisational researchers Keith Provan and

Patrick Kenis, I consider networks as “groups of three or more legally autonomous organisations that work together to achieve not only their own goals but also a collective goal.”²³ The selected network cases work in different EU policy areas: Tourism (Danube Competence Centre, DCC), environment (Danube Sturgeon Task Force, DSTF), research/innovation and competitiveness (Danube Innovation and Technology Transfer Centres, DTC) as well as social affairs and youth (Social NGO Network Danube Region, SNN). The networks are described in detail in Table 1. These networks work thematically based on concrete problems and try to find appropriate solutions in the transnational Danube area. All initiatives involve public and private organisations from EU and non-EU countries. The EUSDR facilitated the development of these networks in varying intensity: Some are joint initiatives of the respective PA with external stakeholders (DSTF, DTC). These networks are fully integrated into the PA's. The chosen PA targets are congruent with the initiatives' aims. The DCC evolution coincided with the adoption of the EUSDR and is also quite integrated into the PA. It has an observer

²² I conducted the empirical data within the framework of my PhD thesis. The data includes about 50 qualitative interviews with EUSDR stakeholders from EU and Non-EU states, participatory observation of EUSDR events and document analysis.

²³ Provan, Keith G. und Kenis, Patrick N. (2008) Modes of Network Governance: Structure, Management and Effectiveness. *Journal of Public Administration and Theory* 18 (2): 231.

“There is a need for financing tools that are not project-based but enable long-term financing of the core network management of established initiatives.”

status in the SG and represents one of the main PA's implementers. The EUSDR was stimulus for the initiation of some of the partial national networks (Romania, Germany) and the transnational SNN initiative. Although, it implements relevant targets of two PA's, it is the least PA integrated compared to the other networks. The strategic framework of the EUSDR offers these initiatives political attention and visibility, access to new funding sources as well as exchanges and potential partnerships with public institutions and politicians. Especially informal minister's meetings turn out to be important instruments to reach informal agreements. For example, the DSTF forced the extension of the sturgeon fishery ban through an informal minister's meeting. Within the EUSDR framework, SNN actors were able to establish a working group with the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Moreover, these networks are connected to

further transnational cooperation formats such as mixed government commissions (DTC, SNN), Black Sea Commission (DSTF) or Europe Enterprise Network (DTC). Besides, the interconnectedness of Danube networks can be observed in many ways. The EUSDR Annual Forum used to be an important platform for cross-thematic exchanges in the past. Although, all networks have intensive working relations to PACs, there is a great variation and to some extent, coincidence in establishing further contacts to EUSDR governance actors such as NCs, national/regional EUSDR inter-ministerial working groups or the EU Commission.

Since no new EU funds have been allocated for the implementation of MRS, the financing of such transnational initiatives was broadly discussed. There are two different tools, which proved to be useful: seed funds and support/expertise in applying for EU

| | Danube Competence Centre (DCC) | Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF) | Danube Technology and Transfer Centres (DTC) | Social NGO Network Danube Region (SNN) |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Network Information | EUSDR adoption coincided with DCC development; network aim: Establish "Danube Brand" and foster co-operation of tourism organisations; about 80 members plus partners from 14 EUSDR countries | Joint initiative of PA 6, international NGOs and international organisation; main aim: protection and rehabilitation of sturgeon fish; about 80 experts through 5 partners | Joint initiative of PA 8, Baden-Württemberg Ministries, Steinbeis-Europa-Zentrum; aim: enhance innovation and technology transfer through currently 9 Danube Transfer Centres in 8 EUSDR countries | Great impact of EUSDR on partial and whole network(s) initiation; aim: implementing EUSDR social dimension; 7 networks from 7 EUSDR countries representing about 130 organisations; |
| Resources | GIZ (German Agency) funds, EUSDR seed fund (START), EU fund INTERREG DTP and sectorial EU funds, member's contribution | PA technical support, EUSDR seed funding (TAF, START), European Investment Bank Advisory Hub, EU Environment program LIFE, INTERREG DTP application | State Ministry Baden-Württemberg funds, EU funds: e.g. INTERREG DTP, EU Research and Innovation funds FP 7 and Horizon 2020 | State Ministry Baden-Württemberg funds, Baden-Württemberg Foundation, EUSDR seed funding (START), EU funding: INTERREG DTP was approved but cancelled by the lead partner, national ESF |
| Participation in EUSDR processes | Proposal EUSDR consultation phase; PA 3 "Culture and Tourism" integration (observer status) | Proposal EUSDR consultation phase; full integration in PA 6 "Bio-diversity and Landscapes" as own working group and SG observer; attempts for ex-change/cooperation PA 1 -11 | Full integration in PA 8 "Competitiveness of Enterprises" as own working group and SG observer; ex-changes with PA 7 "Know-ledge Society" SG/working group research & innovation | Integration in PA 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation" working group D-LAP and Participation Days; exchanges with PA 9 "People and Skills" |
| Network effects on EUSDR level | Contribution to implementation of five different PA 3 targets | On-going implementation of PA 6, target 4 Danube sturgeon measures | On-going implementation of PA 8, target 1 innovation and technology transfer | Contribution to implementation of PA 9 and PA 10 Institutional targets |

Table 1: Own source

funds. In particular during the initiation phase of a network such tools are essential. The four networks have received such support (e.g., for travel costs). This enabled the networks to define the needs, build trustful partnerships and to extend the network. Especially network managers or central actors have also invested great energy into the network build-up, often-unpaid work. Project-based funding is/was used for further development of the respective network. But to apply successfully for EU funds, expertise in this field is necessary. Therefore, different methods how to gain this know-how are applied: the DSTF received useful support from the PAC and a consultant from the European Investment Bank. The DTC's coordinating organisation offers trainings for the DTC network members and the DCC builds up its own internal competences. The SNN stimulates mutual learning processes through exchanging experiences. The INTERREG DTP represents the most relevant EU program, since it is the only EU fund which allows including all EUSDR countries at the same time. However, after the second phase it appears to be very challenging to find ways of institutionalising network structures on long-term basis. The DCC is the only network, which successfully implemented such

a structure with a network management team so far. Of course, it depends on the aims and activities if such a formalisation of structure is necessary. But if concrete measures have to be coordinated on the transnational level, efficiency may increase to a great extent if such a formalised structure is implemented.

The initiatives demonstrate that on the organisational level, the benefit for network actors can be manifold: organisational learning, knowledge transfer, access to new resources and stakeholders, reputation and visibility or even reduction of operative costs. On the network level, commonly defined targets can be reached more easily in a respective area (e.g., establishing a "Danube brand" in the tourism sector), transnational EU project implementation improves because mutual trust and common experiences and especially the link between the operational (often private actors) and the policy level (public actors) has been intensified through these initiatives. The networks contribute to implementation or are even the implementers of EUSDR PA targets – also outside the EU territory – and therefore support the involvement of non-EU countries.

"In the framework of the FAIRway Danube project, 7 partners from 6 countries joined their forces in order to increase quality, safety and efficiency of the navigation on the Danube."



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Political recommendations based on empirical insights:

My recommendations are based on empirical data about the EU-SDR. They will also take the four challenges mentioned in the introduction into account. Since these transnational initiatives are cooperating on a thematically driven basis, they manage to involve at least to some extent non-EU countries. In the following, I will firstly propose how such transnational initiatives might be mobilised in the MRS framework. Secondly, I will demonstrate how these operational networks will be ideally involved and supported.

(1) Mobilisation of networks in MRS contexts:

In the MRS initiation phases but also in later periods, public events on all political levels support the attention of broader target groups. Especially identified experts from thematic professional organisations or organisations that have been active in the region could be invited to foster exchange and possible cooperation with the EUSDR governance actors (PAC, NC). Furthermore, there were and still are some conceptual misunderstandings of the MRS instrument: For example, until today, a great number of local and regional actors believe

the “Danube macro-region” only targets areas of the Danube river. This crucial aspect has to be explained repetitively to the broad public. The annual meetings may include all themes of the priority areas because competition between policy areas is not conducive to the implementation of a comprehensive strategy. In fact, the forum offers an opportunity for exchanges between all MRS actors and therefore to initiate cross-PA cooperation. High-level political backing (EU, national and subnational level) is needed on a permanent basis to get the attention and support for operational initiatives. A seed money facility on the MRS level could provide the support of early stages of transnational initiatives²⁴. Co-financing by subnational and national level is desirable.

(2) Ideal involvement and support of networks in MRS processes:

SGs led by PACs define the strategic framework for transnational cooperation and operative network managers are ideally integrated in SG’s as observers. In this way, they commonly define PA realistic and measurable targets top-down (defined need from the policy-level perspective) and

bottom-up (defined need from the operative perspective based on existing initiatives). Since the high fluctuation rates of PACs and SG members are difficult to prevent, network managers may have stabilising effects on the SG groups. Because empirical data demonstrates that many of the network managers are in place since the launch of the EUSDR.

Moreover, to implement the strategic framework defined by SGs, working groups as SG sub-groups may implement the targets on the operational level, managed by the networks and accompanied by the PACs. The PACs and SGs may foster cooperation with other PAs as well as political actors on all political levels. The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) as coordinating body of the EUSDR governance proved to be an important instrument for facilitating inter-PA cooperation. Informal minister’s meetings demonstrated in the past valuable concrete support for the network initiatives – e.g., to agree on transnational problem solutions, function as “door openers”, and mobilise potential financing sources.

In the case of the financing sources, the following measures would be useful: A permanent seed money pool in every macro-region may support network formation processes. The ESIF are important potential EU sources. But a legal obligation to use

²⁴ The high application numbers for the START seed funding, designed and implemented by PA 10, demonstrated the need for such an instrument. Nevertheless, it is not installed on a permanent basis so far.

10 percent of ESIF for “transnational and macro-regional cooperation”²⁵ in the next EU funding period is probably necessary. At the same time, significant simplifications for such programming need to be arranged. This would enable learning processes especially in policy fields of national responsibility and may support absorption processes of cohesion funding in the new EU countries.

A dialogue with the sectorial EU DG's as well as EU DG NEAR may foster exchange of experiences/knowledge and solve the problem of non-EU member involvement. So far this depends on the willingness and engagement of individual actors. The INTERREG DTP proved to be an important funding scheme but administrative simplifications and improvements are necessary (e.g., reduce administrative burden, a possibility to use results for commercial purposes without reducing funding after the end of the project). Moreover, to ensure the sustainability, there is a need for financing tools that are not project-based but enable long-term financing of the core network management of established initiatives. If measures need to be coordinated on the transnational level, network efficiency

may increase after institutionalisation of the network management structure. Network membership fees could cover some of the costs but further tools for financing such a structure are necessary (e.g., public co-financing). ■

²⁵ Since only 19 EU member states participate in MRS, the „transnational“ dimension should be included to the macro-regional approach.

