The European Union’s macro-regional strategies: concept, evolution and challenges

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The EU’s macro-regional strategies – concept, evolution and challenges

• Introduction: Why bother?
• Definitions and concept
• Evolution, Impact, Challenges
• Conclusion and Recommendations
• Annex
Why bother?

“[For] most environmental problems the EU is not an optimal regulatory area, being either too large or too small. In a number of cases – for example, the Mediterranean, the Baltic Sea, or the Rhine – the scope of the problem is regional rather than EU-wide, and is best tackled through regional arrangements [...].”

*Giandomenico Majone, 2014*

“A Europe of the Regions has so far been envisaged and arranged on far too small a scale [...]. Regional associations (such as a Baltic Sea Union, an Alps-Adriatic Union) may revive the good old principle of European federalism – [...] they are also still near enough to the cultural characteristics and networks of the people of Europe.”

*Claus Leggewie, 2012*
What are *macro-regions*?

- Concept construed, contested – and widely used
  - economic and political geography and spatial planning
  - political science, international relations (IR), and comparative regionalism

- Term has been used to depict both
  - globally significant groups of nations (the EU, ASEAN etc.)
  - groupings of administrative regions within a country
  - ‘an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges’ (EU Commission, 2009)
What are EU macro-regional strategies?

- EU macro-regional strategy
  ‘(1) is an integrated framework relating to member states and third countries in the same geographical area;
  (2) addresses common challenges;
  (3) benefits from strengthened cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion’ (European Commission 2013);

- Based on **five core principles** construed around the need to:
  (1) integrate existing policy frameworks, programs, and financial instruments; (2) coordinate between sectorial policies, actors or different tiers of government; (3) cooperate between countries and sectors; (4) involve policymakers at different levels of governance; and, (5) create partnerships between EU member states and non-member countries
What are EU macro-regional **strategies**?

- Based on ‘three No’s’
- Aim to mobilize existing actors and funding schemes, tapping on the expertise of existing epistemic communities and stakeholders from all tiers of the EU’s multilevel system
- Seek to provide a strategic platform or reference framework for existing actors
- Refer to the objective of integrating different policy sectors that influence one another

- **Discursive action**: Frame ‘the bigger picture’, provide orientation for the future, ‘sense-making’ – and macro-regional identity
- **Systematic integration** into a comprehensive and evolving new governance architecture at the macro-regional level
- **Coordination** across different levels of a multi-level governance system
What are EU macro-regional strategies?
Evolution of EU macro-regional strategies

Regional cooperation

‘Outside’ EU
• e.g. Nordic cooperation
• Baltic Sea cooperation (1974 – Helcom; 1992 – Council of the Baltic Sea States)

European Union
• Union Approaches to the Baltic Sea Region (1994)
• Barcelona Process (1995) → Union for the Mediterranean
• Northern Dimension (1997/2006)

Territorial cooperation

• European Spatial Development Perspective and other European territorial cooperation activities
  • INTERREG
  • Barca Report (2009)
  • EGTC (2006/09)
  • Urban Agenda (2015)
What are EU macro-regional strategies? Experimentalist governance in a multi-level environment

- Broad framework goals defined by central and local units
- Local units given broad discretion
- Local units report on performance
- Framework revised periodically, cycle repeats

Experimentalist governance
Governance Architecture (I/II)

- High Level Group of macro-regional strategies (EU + Member States)
- National Coordinators (Foreign Ministries or other)
- Priority Areas Coordinators (Sectoral Agencies or Organisations)
- Local and Regional Authorities and Organisations
- Line Ministries (Sectoral)
- Other (NGO, civil society, social and economic)

Links:
- = strong link
- = intermediate link
- = weak link
### Governance Architecture (II/II)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROSPERITY</th>
<th>EUSBSR</th>
<th>EUSDR</th>
<th>EUSAIR</th>
<th>EUSALP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Innovation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PA Innovation</strong>: Exploiting the full potential of the region in research, innovation and SME, utilising the Digital Single Market as a source for attracting talents and investments</td>
<td><strong>PA7</strong>: To develop the knowledge society through research, education and information technologies</td>
<td><strong>PA8</strong>: Competitiveness</td>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Blue technologies</td>
<td><strong>A1</strong>: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PA Secure</strong>: Protection from land-based emergencies, accidents and</td>
<td><strong>PA11</strong>: To work together to promote security and tackle organised</td>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Maritime and marine governance and services</td>
<td><strong>7.</strong> The marine environment</td>
<td><strong>A2</strong>: To increase the economic potential of strategic sectors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of EU macro-regional strategies (I/II)

• Many effects of macro-regional strategies are the subject of conjecture
  • The European Court of Auditors’ 2016 Special Report on combating eutrophication in the Baltic Sea noted that ‘EUSBSR’s impact on Member States’ actions to reduce nutrient inputs into the Baltic Sea is difficult to assess’

• Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum has been transformed into a permanent fisheries forum
  • that ‘is embedded into the everyday cooperation work of the Ministries of the region ... thus [representing] ... a permanent change brought about by an EUSBSR Flagship’ (EUSBSR Policy Area Bioeconomy n.d.)
Impact of EU macro-regional strategies (II/II)

- Mainstreaming in other EU programmes (often only on paper so far), i.e. ESIF, IPA, ENPI
- Coordination ‘challenge’ inside the European Commission and member/partner states
- Integration of external partner into MRS governance architecture
  - Different scope of MRS with regards to partner countries
  - EUSDR Priority Area 9 ‘Investing in People and Skills’ coordinated by Austria and the Republic of Moldova; Priority Area 7 ‘To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)’ coordinated by Slovakia and Serbia
  - EUSBSR: Council of the Baltic Sea States
- Political will of participating countries decisive
Conclusion: EU macro-regional strategies

- Are experimental – can be captured as instances of experimentalist governance (‘diagnostic monitoring’ remains a challenge)
- Contribute to reframing, reinstating and harmonizing patterns of regional cooperation
- Differ from multilateral strategies of regional cooperation while drawing regional and territorial cooperation closer together
- Make regional cooperation ‘comparable’ across macro-regions to allow for mutual learning and exchange of best practice (e.g. the horizontal role of the Interact programme or ‘Participation Day’)
- Seek to support the regionalization of several EU policies via the activation and mobilization of relevant stakeholders and actors (co-optation)
- Provide a ‘script’ that allows actors to coordinate across levels
Recommendations (with regards to post-2020 Cohesion Policy)

- Avoid (re-)silo-ization of EU macro-regional strategies (in transnational programs)
- Strengthen role of policy coordinators and steering groups
- Involve and clarify role of ministries and agencies
- Discuss link between Cohesion Policy and EU macro-regional strategies
- Involve the European Parliament more (e.g. Danube Parliamentary conference, Annual Forum or Participation Days)
Thank you for your attention!

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Annex

- Table: Macro-region: ‘between’ territorial and functional regions
- Further Reading Suggestions
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Territorial</th>
<th>Functional</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Space</strong></td>
<td>• Territorial</td>
<td>• Functional</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Defined by political and administrative territories</td>
<td>• Defined by functional relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Boundaries</strong></td>
<td>• Distinct and stable</td>
<td>• Shifting and fuzzy</td>
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<td>• Shift of competencies between levels (devolution, decentralization)</td>
<td>• May differ from territorial boundaries</td>
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<td>• Intersecting memberships</td>
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<td><strong>Tasks</strong></td>
<td>• Multi-functional</td>
<td>• Task-specific</td>
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<td>• Tasks and responsibilities clearly defined</td>
<td>• Institutions may differ between policy areas</td>
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<td><strong>Institutional design</strong></td>
<td>• Traditional forms of regional governance</td>
<td>• New forms of regional governance such as public-private partnerships</td>
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<td>• Inter-municipal and interregional cooperation (within and beyond nation-</td>
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Macro-region: ‘between’ territorial and functional regions
Suggestions for further reading


