

2nd Joint meeting of transport coordinators of the EU macro-regional strategies

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Report

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Introduction

EU macro-regional strategies aim to address challenges shared within a functional area. They also aim at better implementation of the EU policies and more coordination of existing institutions and financial resources. Macro-regional strategies address broad scope of priorities, making an effort for cooperation and coordination across the territory.

1st Joint meeting of EU macro-regional coordinators dealing with transport issues was held on 14-15 March in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The meeting invited coordinators from four existing EU macro-regional strategies to address successes, failures and lessons learnt in the implementation of the transport area in particular macro-regional strategy, identify and share good practices as well as engage in dialogue with other transport coordinators.

In conclusion of that event and among other issues, coordinators expressed their interest to continue discussion and exchanges regarding macro-regional projects. Although approaches differ, all coordinators admit this work very important. During the discussion, it was clear that coordinators differently see their role and involvement in project development, labelling of macro-regional projects, coordination, monitoring and promotion of project achievements. Access to funding (alignment of funding) is another issue coordinators wanted to address. Macro-regional added value, project and policy interconnection as well as developing macro-regional processes were issues to be further addressed.

Following on the conclusions from the 1st meeting, the 2nd Joint meeting of EU macro-regional transport coordinators focused on macro-regional projects: development, labelling, coordination, monitoring and promotion. Role of transport coordinators, macro-regional added value of projects, links between projects and policy developments as well as funding of macro-regional processes were main topics for the meeting. The meeting ensured open

and informal discussion and exchanges of experiences among participants. Interreg programmes took active part in the discussion.

Event content

A food for thought for the conducted sessions was delivered by a presentation of input paper prepared by Interact in cooperation with Horizontal Action Coordinator 'Capacity' of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) on ['what is a macro-regional project'](#).

First session aimed to collect and compare individual views among the transport coordinators, the programmes and the other participants (representing project owners, supporters and affiliated networks) on the understanding of a 'macro-regional project'. The purpose was to discuss how such projects are worked with in the respective macro-regions and if a harmonised approach to nourishing such projects might be viable. In the discussion, the role and the involvement of transport coordinators and their Steering Committees/Coordination Groups in defining, labelling, implementing and monitoring of the macro-regional projects was also tackled.

Second session was dedicated to sharing experiences and lessons learnt on tangible benefits when implementing macro-regional projects. The purpose was to enrich the discussion with the project/user perspective in the process towards achieving the impact/change envisaged in the macro-regional strategy. Also, this session addressed the ways to embed outcomes of a macro-regional project in the policy-making domain.

Third session was designed to exchange views on experiences and approaches to link projects implemented under the same or across different priorities, actions, policy areas or pillars and how to measure the change.

Final session for the event presented the complementary organisational structures to facilitate know-how exchange among the macro-regional coordinators. The discussion addressed the question on how closer coordination and cooperation can be established between Interreg programmes, thematic networks, established project platforms and macro-regional transport coordinators in the current programming period and in post-2020; what is mutual benefit for aligning resources and efforts.

For the discussion at the event a guideline document was prepared and sent to all the participants prior to the event.

Main conclusions

- There has been a uniform understanding (irrespective of the position in the macro-regional strategies implementation) that the 'macro-regional project' is in fact a 'macro-regional process'. It is claimed that the 'macro-regional project' is rather a limited and short-term tool, with defined donor, budget and timeframe. The 'macro-

regional process', in turn, is an organised long-term cooperation, with blended activities based on identified gaps and needs of the macro-region. It has a larger impact on cohesion, is linked to various policies and pushes stakeholders for joint action (single or complex, depending on the topic). Through a strong stakeholder involvement, it helps interlink various single projects and activities, take up their results and develop new joint initiatives for macro-regional benefit. 'Thus, it ensures continuation and transferability of actions at macro-regional level. 'Macro-regional process' is aiming to achieve objectives (targets and indicators, where defined) of a priority within macro-regional strategy.

- The 'macro-regional process' is built on a few pillars:
 - a) The strategy – dedicated to 'breaking silos' through transnational and cross-sectoral cooperation;
 - b) The platform – established by the group of committed stakeholders (representing relevant multi-level governance levels) for the purpose of interacting on the macro-regional issues;
 - c) The work plan (or road map) – in a form of agreed way to cooperate and reach the set objectives, targets and indicators.
- When building a 'macro-regional process' several instruments for cooperation are available and could be considered. These are:
 - Labelled EU-funded projects.
 - Thematic networks, working groups, task forces etc. working across the sectors.
 - Exchange seminars.
 - Single projects (not labelled) – addressing a smaller geographical area than macro-region but with replication potential high enough to be promoted for the use elsewhere in and beyond the macro-region.
 - Project clusters/platforms arranged by the funding programmes.
 - Thematic calls organised by the funding programmes.
 - Programme arranged and provided tools, like workshops, partner search forums and events delivered by the programmes in an effort to reach an adequate portfolio of projects.
 - Macro-regional strategies' annual forums, sessions during forums.

- Programme support structures with open access to the coordinators (e.g. Interact capitalisation networks, in this case Sustainable Transport (T07) network, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platforms, capacity support projects under the macro-regional strategies, project platforms under the programmes, etc.)
- Ideally, ‘macro-regional processes’ should lead to the development of new policy recommendations and planning methods. Attention to the latter marks a gradual interest shift in macro-regional strategies’ implementation – from the output level (e.g. number of labelled projects approved, number of thematic events organised) to the result/impact level where a policy change is expected.
- Still, the understanding of a ‘policy change’ differs among the stakeholders. In some opinion, it means that the macro-regional strategies should strive to deliver policy recommendations. Some other stakeholders claim that the macro-regional strategies should bring a concerted way to implement policies (as their influencing should not be possible/easy e.g. in case of transport where the TEN-T policy is a firm fundament of action in Europe) and, perhaps, to add new aspects to the policy implementation (e.g. how to utilise it/capitalise on it in a wider territory). Some others say that the macro-regional strategies ought to influence policy instruments and/or help to change the policy planning approaches in the member countries.
- Overall, as evidenced in the study ‘Macro-regional strategies and their links to Cohesion Policy’ conducted by COWI in 2017, the macro-regional strategies grow from gathering individual capacities through a collective institutional capacity into a governance system. This enables performance based on the agreed work programme, which is demonstrated through various actions (e.g. projects). The ultimate stage features the response by stakeholders (e.g. regions perform to influence policies, find new ideas etc.).
- The study [‘Added value of macro-regional strategies: project and programme perspective’](#), conducted by Spatial Foresight GmbH in 2016-2017, concludes that the macro-regional strategies often provide results that are regarded ‘invisible’ and ‘intangible’ in comparison with results of funding programmes (especially EU programmes implemented at national and regional levels). This evokes an idea for a workshop on how to communicate the added value of macro-regional strategies as they are capable of reaching cross-sectoral, cross-level and cross-territorial objectives.
- There appear several aspects that could be a subject of synergies between the coordinators and the programmes. The programmes may request project owners/promoters to contact the coordinators for advice on whether they projects are found contributing to the macro-regional strategy’s implementation. Further, in the assessment, the coordinators may be involved in decision-making, e.g. by judging on the project’s potential to contribute to the implementation of the macro-regional strategy. The coordinators may also suggest topics to the programmes that may become covered under thematic (focused) calls for proposals.

- Labelling of projects under the macro-regional strategies has become questionable to some of the transport coordinators. As presented in the example on bottom-up driven (local/regional) cooperation in the Swedish region of Blekinge, a good project does not necessarily need a label to deliver valuable results and change at macro-level as it is driven by optimised relations between stakeholders and shared responsibilities across levels and sectors. In the cooperation process (evolving from conversation through consensus and collaboration up to collective actions), the stakeholders can see a broader picture, go over their formal routines and constantly identify and exploit individual energies and strengths.
- Although a macro-regional strategy is deemed to offer manifold benefits to the projects (in the project development stage, the implementation stage and after the completion), an open question is - why the projects would need a label, as well as what kind of added value and, on the other hand, responsibility, this could exert on their performance.
- 'Project chains' are an interesting concept that could be utilised to strengthen the macro-regional strategies' implementation. 'Project chain' could be seen as another way of developing and implementing 'macro-regional projects/processes'.

The coordinators have several options of designing and nourishing such 'project chains' in their policy areas to help the projects achieve more durable results. Examples are: linking the ongoing projects through dedicated events organised by the coordinators, helping the new generation of projects build on the outcomes of the completed ones, allowing any programme and project, despite of its scope (in terms of territory, partnership, funding amount, etc.) to contribute to a macro-regional strategy. However, it would require that thematic coordinators would be building, implementing, monitoring - developing these 'project chains' (being architects of the macro-regional development processes).

- However, invigorating the 'project chains' and labelling the projects presents the two different approaches. According to the top-down approach, the Steering Committee/ Coordination Group initiates and steers the process based on shared priorities. This was illustrated by PA 'Education' in the EUSBSR, which engages in building so called flagships as packaged 'macro-regional processes' to achieve the change, with individual projects forming so called parts of flagships. In the bottom-up approach the Steering Committee/ Coordination Group collects existing projects and recommends/expresses support to them for implementation. This option is being practiced e.g. under EU Strategy for the Danube Region where a label is given to those projects that are assessed to have a transnational value. Whichever approach would be taken by the coordinators, it would need to support in addressing macro-regional challenges. Certainly, it would require appropriate time for embedding new ways of working and approaches.

- The meeting confirmed that close dialogue between macro-regional coordinators and programmes is needed to better understand each other's routines, how the macro-regional strategies work, or how to focus and streamline individual efforts of macro-regional coordinators and funding programmes. Engagement of relevant funding programmes in the work of Steering Committees/ Coordination Groups of macro-regional priorities (policy areas, priorities, action groups, pillars (thematic steering groups)) would contribute to the process.
- Last but not least, all participants agreed that single and simple communication would help in telling about macro-regional strategies and their work. The invitation was already expressed during [the first Joint meeting of transport coordinators of the EU macro-regional strategies](#), held in March 2017.