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## The development of cross-border cooperation in an EU macroregion – a case study of the Baltic Sea Region

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### Abstract

The Baltic Sea Region became an EU testing ground for international cooperation. This article presents the origin and the typologies of this cooperation. Macroregional, territorial and cross-border cooperation was discussed. The main aim of this article was to analyse the key determinants of the development of cross-border cooperation in the BSR, an EU macroregion. Based on literature studies, the BSR was delimited, proposing a definition of this area that is the most beneficial from economic point of view. Having performed an analysis of documents and economic data, it was proven that macroregional cooperation supports territorial cooperation in the BSR in a significant way. For this purpose, the financing devices of territorial cooperation, i.e. cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation programmes, were analysed. It was proven that the priorities of these programmes comply with the priorities of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Furthermore, an attempt was made to analyse the organisational resources of cross-border cooperation, with particular focus on Euroregions and European groupings of territorial cooperation. A diagnosis of the state was made based on secondary and primary data obtained from interviews. It was shown that the organisational structure is not fully efficient, which is a barrier to the development of cross-border cooperation

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## 1. Introduction

The Baltic Sea Region is particularly suitable for developing cross-border cooperation. This area is the first macroregion of the European Union for whom a transnational strategy was developed and implemented.

An important fact is that the Baltic Sea has been integrating people and countries for centuries.

The cooperation was interwoven with competition and the fight for independence (Kurjata, 2004). The political division of Europe that lasted by the end of the 20th century prevented from coordinating joint actions in the Baltic Sea Region (Palmowski, 2011). A turning point was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the accession of the former countries of the Warsaw Pact to the European Union (Korneevets, 2010). The Baltic Sea became an internal sea of the European Union. Despite the misalignment of interests in the Baltic Sea Region, a plane of dialogue between the European Union and the Russian Federation was established, which was unique in Europe (Ryngaert, 2012). A strong commitment to regional cooperation at national, regional and local levels – in both the public and private sectors – has evolved all around the Baltic Sea. A transnational tourist destination (Kizielewicz 2012) and a transnational brand called Baltictness emerged (Ellefors, 2009). Positioning the Baltic Sea Region as “the smartest region in the world” began (Andersson, 2010).

## 2. Definition and delimitation of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR)

The definition and delimitation of the BSR has always been conventional. Such a region can be defined best as an area covering countries of the Baltic Sea or countries in the water catchment of the Baltic Sea. However, such delimitation is not justified on economic grounds, that is why it is assumed (Bohme et al 2015) that the Baltic Sea Region covers eight EU states: Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), Germany (DE), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Poland (PL), Sweden (SE) and three non-EU states: Norway (NO), Russia (RU) and Belarus (BY). The region defined in this way, consisting of 11 states, has three types of borders: internal EU borders, external EU borders and non-EU borders.

Norway is part of the European Economic Area and the Schengen area. Therefore, the borders of Norway with EU states can be regarded as internal borders and the borders of Norway with states outside the EU as external borders (fig. 1).

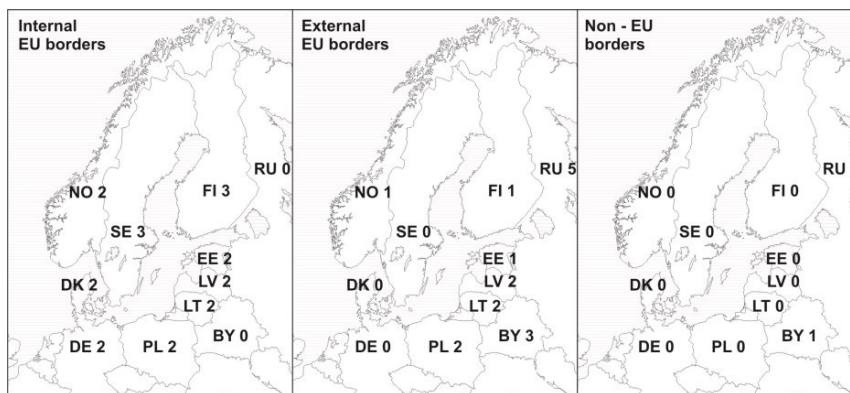


Fig. 1. Internal, external and non-EU borders of the Baltic Sea Region.

## 3. Macroregional cooperation

The Baltic Sea Region is a unique EU macroregion. The concept of macroregion historically precedes its relatively recent emergence as a notion and an instrument of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC). These concepts can be traced back to the inception of the INTERREG programming period at the end of the 1990s, and, as an object of scientific inquiry, have featured widely in academic papers and studies related to the study

of regionalization (Bohme et al., 2015). A macroregion may be understood as “*an area including a territory from a number of different Member States or regions associated with one or more common features and challenges*” (Dubois 2009). Two existing macroregional strategies are in an implementation phase: the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). Another two strategies are in a preparation phase: the European strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). Five strategies are under consideration: for the Atlantic Arc, for the Carpathian Region, for the Mediterranean Region, for the North Sea area and for the Black Sea Region.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) entered into force in 2009. The strategy became a document setting out the directions of territorial cooperation, including cross-border cooperation in the BSR. It also became “a milestone within a wider process towards Baltic Sea regionalization” (Metzger & Schmitt, 2012). The strategy encouraged to more intense cooperation between countries and created a model for the whole of Europe (Hogeforster, 2012). Priority actions were pointed out in that document:

- PA 1: To reduce nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels;
- PA 2: To preserve natural zones and biodiversity, including fisheries;
- PA 3: To reduce the use and impact of hazardous substances;
- PA 4: To become a model region for clean shipping;
- PA 5: To mitigate and adapt to climate change;
- PA 6: To remove hindrances to the internal market in the Baltic Sea Region including to improve cooperation in the customs and tax area;
- PA 7: To exploit the full potential of the region in research and innovation;
- PA 8: To implement the Small Business Act: to promote entrepreneurship, strengthen SMEs;
- PA 9: To reinforce sustainability of agriculture, forestry and fisheries;
- PA 10: To improve the access to, and the efficiency and security of the energy markets;
- PA 11: To improve internal and external transport links;
- PA 12: To maintain and reinforce attractiveness of the Baltic Sea Region in particular through education and youth, tourism, culture and health;
- PA 13: To become a leading region in maritime safety and in security;
- PA 14: To reinforce maritime accident response capacity protection from major emergencies;
- PA 15: To decrease the volume of and harm done by cross-border crime.

In 2013 two new Areas, including Priority Area Culture, were introduced. In 2015 the Priority Areas were renamed Thematic Areas. Their number was reduced from 17 to 13. This change was related to the high number of areas being the objects of the strategy, enabling the actual prioritising of actions. In 2015 the Strategy was defined by three overarching objectives, i.e.:

- protect the sea,
- connect the region,
- increase prosperity.

For the purposes of this article, 15 original priority areas were chosen which allowed to compare these priorities with the priorities of territorial cooperation programmes.

#### **4. Territorial cooperation**

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) is one of the two goals of cohesion policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States (<http://ec.europa.eu>). The main objective of ETC was to promote a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Union as a whole. Interreg is built around three strands of cooperation: cross-border (Interreg A), transnational (Interreg B) and interregional (Interreg C).

Fourteen out of the sixty cross-border cooperation programmes operated in the BSR (Interreg IVA). The amount of EUR 5.6 billion was budgeted for all programmes. The EU contribution to the BSR was nearly EUR 1 billion. The eligible area included 130 units of NUTS 3 located in nine countries (table 1).

Table 1. Cross-border cooperation programmes in the BSR

Programme (P)	Contribution [Million EUR]	Area [NUTS]	PL	DE	DK	SE	NO	FI	EE	LV	LT	TOTAL
Central Baltic (P1)	136	18				X		X	X	X		4
Mecklenburg–Vorpommern Brandenburg -Poland (P2)	156.3	10	X	X								2
Saxony-Poland (P3)	123.6	5	X	X								2
Fehmarnbelt (P4)	31.5	5		X	X							2
Syddanmark-Schleswig K.E.R.N. (P5)	68.9	8		X	X							2
Estonia-Latvia (P6)	51.1	6							X	X		2
Lithuania-Poland (P7)	84.3	4	X								X	2
Latvia-Lithuania (P8)	75.6	8								X	X	2
Lubuskie-Brandenburg (P9)	145.3	7	X	X								2
South Baltic (P10)	75.3	20	X	X	X	X					X	5
Oresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak (P11)	223.2	20			X	X	X					3
Botnia-Atlantica (P12)	60.9	6				X	X	X				3
Nord (P13)	56.7	5				X	X	X				3
Sweden-Norway (P14)	68.1	8				X	X					2
TOTAL	976.5	130	5	6	4	6	4	2	2	2	3	-

The majority of programmes funded bilateral cooperation. Each country managed at least two programmes. Each programme included maximally four priorities. The environment and economic development were the most frequent priorities (table 2).

Table 2. Priorities of cross-border cooperation programmes in the BSR.

Priority	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Environment	X	X			X			X			X	X		X	7
Innovations	X													X	2
Competitiveness	X	X	X	X	X										5
Community/people	X	X	X									X			4
Economic development		X		X		X		X	X	X				X	7
Cohesion			X	X											2
Common identity					X	X									2
Research/education						X					X	X	X		4
Collaboration/cooperation							X				X	X		X	4
Integration/consolidation									X	X			X		3
TOTAL	4	4	3	3	3	3	1	2	2	2	3	4	2	4	

The programme priorities were compliant with the Priority Actions of the EUSBSR to a great extent. It must be pointed out that the Central Baltic Programme was compliant with fourteen out of the fifteen priorities. On the other hand, the priority included in all the programmes was PA 12 “to maintain and reinforce attractiveness of the Baltic

Sea Region, in particular through education and youth, tourism, culture and health” (table 3).

Table 3. Priorities of cross-border cooperation programmes and EUSBSR.

Priority (PA)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	TOTAL
Programme (P)																
P1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	14
P2		X					X	X			X	X				5
P3		X					X				X	X				4
P4		X					X	X			X	X				5
P5		X					X	X		X	X	X				6
P6							X	X	X		X	X				5
P7								X			X	X				3
P8				X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	10
P9		X					X	X				X		X		5
P10	X		X		X		X	X			X	X		X		8
P11							X	X				X		X		4
P12		X					X	X				X				4
P13							X	X				X				3
P14		X						X				X				3
TOTAL	2	8	2	2	3	2	11	13	2	2	9	14	2	4	2	

Thirteen transnational programmes (Interreg IVB) with EU contribution of 1.8 billion Euro covered larger areas of cooperation such as the Baltic Sea, Alpine and Mediterranean regions. Four transnational cooperation programmes operated in the BSR. It is notable that the Baltic Sea Region programme covered all the states in the region (table 4).

Table 4. Transnational cooperation programmes in the BSR.

Programme	PL	DE	DK	SE	NO	FI	EE	LV	LT	RU	BY	Total
North Sea Region		X	X	X	X							4
Northern Periphery				X	X	X						3
Baltic Sea Region	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
Central Europe	X	X										2
Total	2	3	2	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	-

The interregional cooperation programme (INTERREG IVC) and 3 networking programmes (Urbact II, Interact II and ESPON) cover all 28 Member States of the EU. They provide a framework for exchanging experience between regional and local bodies in different countries. The ERDF contribution was 445 million Euros.

## 5. Cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation covers entities at regional and local level. It is coordinated mostly by Euroregions. At first, Euroregions operated in the north part of the BSR. In 1991 the Nysa Euroregion was established in the borderlands of Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic. Over time another Euroregions were established. There are countries such as Poland where the number of Euroregions is easy to determine. Unfortunately, in other

countries the identification of the number of Euroregions is debatable. Some of these entities have gradually started to call themselves Euroregions, based on non-rigid criteria, even though, in some cases, they lack legal personality and operate on an informal basis (Medeiros 2011). The analysis of cross-border cooperation in the BSR requires to identify the number of Euroregions. The number of Euroregions may be determined by using the information obtained from the following three institutions:

- Association of the European Border Regions (AEBR),
- The Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI),
- Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT).

Since there were mistakes in all the three cases, the author consulted with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and drew up a list of thirty-seven Euroregions. Table 5 presents the number of countries in Euroregions.

Table 5. Euroregions in Baltic Sea Region

Number of countries	Euroregions
2 countries	Arko (SE/NO), Bug (PL/BY), Granskommitten Ostfold - Bohuslan/Dalsland (SE/NO), Kvarken Council (SE/FI), Luna – Lawa (RU/PL), Mittnorden (SE/NO), MittSkandia (SE/NO), Nysa (PL/DE), Oresund (SE/DK), Pro Europa Viadrina (PL/DE), Puszcza Bialowieska (PL/BY), Fehmarnbelt Region (DE/DK), Skargårdssamarbete (SE/FI), Sonderjylland – Schleswig (DK/DE), Szpewra Nysa Bobr (PL/DE), TRUST Hedmark-Dalarna (SE/NO), Varmland - Hedmark - Akershus – Ostfold (SE/NO), 3 X 3 - Estonian – Finnish Regional Cooperation (EE/FI), Helsinki – Tallinn (EE/FI), Karjala – Karelia (FI/RU), South-east Finland – Russia (FI/RU), Peipsi (RU/EE), Bartuva (LT/LV), Dniepr (RU/BY)
3 countries	Nordkalotten (SE/NO/FI), Pomerania (PL/SE/DE), Skagerrak-Kattegat (DK/SE/NO), Szeszupa (RU/SE/LT), Tornedalsraadet (SE/NO/FI), Pskov-Livonia (RU,EE/LV), Country of Lakes (LT/LV/BY), Saule (RU/LT/LV)
4 countries	BEAC- Barents Euro-Arctic Council ( SE/NO/FI/RU), Kolarctic (SE/NO/FI/RU), Niemen (PL/LT/RU/BY), Nordisk Ministerraad (DK/SE/NO/FI),
5 countries	Baltic (PL/RU/LT/DK/SE)

The vast majority of Euroregions consisted of two countries. The Euroregion Baltic which includes entities from five countries was the most numerous. Previously, this Euroregion included entities from as many as six countries. Some countries (Germany) established Euroregions consisting of two members. Other countries (Russia) preferred multilateral cooperation. Even if it is assumed that the main ground for cross-border cooperation is an opportunity to obtain EU funds (Svensson, 2013), then it must be pointed out that Baltic Euroregions use this opportunity in different ways. Most of all, few Euroregions ensured to be leaders in the cross-border cooperation programmes. This results from many difficulties which the Euroregions in the BSR struggle with. The most severe problems pertain to the lack and stability of financial resources, which leads to understaffing, insufficient capacity and the inability to participate effectively in cooperative problem solving (Lepik, 2009). Lack of constructive dialogue with national institutions militates against effectiveness. However, there are Euroregions that coordinated their objectives with the objectives of cross-border cooperation programmes.

In these programmes only the activities of Euroregions in the Polish-German, Polish-Lithuanian and Lithuanian-Latvian borderlands were positively assessed. The EGTC, a new legal instrument, is an unused tool for cross-border cooperation. The EGTC is a unique institution which has European legal personality and the most extensive legal capacity under EU and national law. As many as fifty-four EGTCs operate in Europe, only one of them in the BSR. It can be assumed that a new period of territorial cooperation has begun in which the key players are EGTCs (Studzieniecki, 2015). If Euroregions were the symbol of the previous period, then EGTCs are the symbol of the next period.

## 6. Conclusions

The Baltic Sea Region covering 11 states and 20 borders is a macroregion of the European Union whose development is determined by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Cross-border cooperation supported by territorial cooperation programmes became part of the priorities of the strategy. A weakness of this strategy is the lack of its own budget. Thus, the success of strategic actions depends on good coordination of actions. The

organisational system of cross-border cooperation in the BSR may be regarded as moderately efficient. It has many entities whose formula, activities and efficiency are diverse. Thirty-seven Euroregions and only one EGTC are the basis of this system. The BSR lacks a system of supervision over territorial cooperation, in particular in the cross-border cooperation. The majority of Euroregions have not obtained the leader status in the cross-border cooperation programmes. Their role is systematically decreasing. The number of communes that belong to Euroregions is decreasing. Taking into account the fact that territorial cooperation became one of the two objectives of cohesion policy, the reorganisation and activation of cross-border cooperation are recommended. State authorities and intergovernmental organisations should show more initiative. The effective use of ETC funds combined with political stabilisation should result in transforming the Baltic Sea Region into a new European economic and cultural centre.

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