# UACES 42nd Annual Conference

## Passau, 3-5 September 2012

www.uaces.org

# EUROPEAN MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES AS PROMOTERS OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY RESCALING AND 'SOFT' POLICY SPACES

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## Abstract

The transboundary nature of environmental problems, where impacts are felt in multiple jurisdictions, mean that policies to address them often need to be transnational and multi-sectoral. Increasing emphasis on transboundary environmental problems in policy-making has been accompanied by processes of policy rescaling. These processes not only imply changes in powers across existing layers of decision-making but can also imply new scales of intervention, new actor constellations, and variable geometries of governance. The emergence of 'soft spaces' – multi-area sub-regions in which strategy is being made between or alongside formal institutions and processes – is another phenomena associated with contemporary rescaling (Haughton et al, 2010). These spaces are often overlapping, characterised by fuzzy boundaries and have a strong emphasis on pragmatism or 'getting things done' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009). This paper discusses the recent emergence of European macro-regional strategies in the light of processes of rescaling and the creation of these 'soft spaces'. Attention is primarily focused on the development of the Baltic Sea Strategy, the first European macro-regional strategy to be published, which appeared in the summer of 2009. The strategy addresses a range of issues and challenges, not just limited to environmental matters, although many of them are closely related to the environment, and environmental challenges are presented as the most important rationale for the strategy.

## Introduction – Spatial Rescaling

"*While considering the transboundary nature of environmental problems is not new, attention to the challenges of governance across borders is an emerging field of inquiry.*" (Reed & Bruyneel, 2010: 649)

European integration is creating new territorial boundaries for various policy fields of which environmental policy is just one example. As a result, nation-states are losing their old monopolies on some areas of policy-making. However, this does not mean that powers are simply shifting to the European level: Europe is not so much suppressing state borders as changing their meaning and impact for different social, economic and political systems (Bartolini, 2005; Keating, 2009). European integration brings with it changes in powers across existing layers of decision-making but also new scales of intervention, new actor constellations, and variable geometries of governance. These changes are all part of the general process of *spatial rescaling* (or *territorial rescaling*), which McCann for example defines as '*the process in which policies and politics that formerly took place at one scale are shifted to others in ways that reshape the practices themselves, redefine the scales to and from which they are shifted, and reorganise interactions between scales*' (McCann, 2003: 162).

Spatial rescaling is producing new spaces and territories which vary in their configuration according to their functional or political logic. In these new spaces, there may be little coincidence between functional, political and institutional boundaries, and there may be no strict hierarchies of collective action. The result is that these new spaces are often contested, since the level at which issues are managed can, by including certain actors and excluding others, affect policy outcomes (Keating, 2009). The contested nature of these new spaces is reflected in recent geographical studies on the politics of scale, processes of rescaling and impacts on the distribution of power (see for example Herod & Wright 2002; Keil & Mahon 2008; Sheppard & McMaster 2004). These studies illustrate how actors gain or lose influence as a result of authority being reconfigured around new spaces and territories. In the case of water management, for example, the introduction of the European Water Framework Directive is reported to have resulted in much more than the replacement of one scalar configuration by another: it is also altering established power geometries, creating winners and losers where the principal beneficiaries appear to be those who are capable of acting across new policy spaces (Moss & Newig, 2010).

The ideal construct of the nation-state with a fixed set of policy boundaries and a perfectly hierarchical structure is being eroded by processes of rescaling and the emergence of new systems above and below it, as well as transnational spaces cutting across the state system (Keating, 2009; see also Hooghe & Marks,

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2003). New spaces are taking on some of the roles or tasks of the old nation-state in regulation and policy-making, democracy-promotion and fostering social solidarity, but with different actors, agendas and resources (ibid). Spatial rescaling is arguably leading to broader and more inclusive processes but is on the other hand contributing to more fragmented and differentiated approaches as different groups participate in different contexts, according to their interests (Meadowcroft, 2002). Processes of rescaling are by no means leading to uniform changes across different territories: substantial variations in the nature of new territorial spaces are apparent across Europe but, whatever their form, these new policy spaces and territories pose significant challenges for democratic legitimacy and social equity (Keating, 2009; Moss & Newig, 2010).

The increasing transboundary nature of various environmental problems, where impacts are increasingly felt in multiple jurisdictions, has led to calls for a radical redrafting of political boundaries to coincide more closely with ecological realities (Sale, 1980; Dobson, 1995; Meadowcroft, 2002). However, administrative jurisdictions do not generally coincide with ecosystem boundaries and environmental problems do not respect political boundaries. Moreover, the extent to which environmental policy issues can be placed within a single nested framework will always be limited because different ecosystem boundaries are not coincident and administrative regions are not economically, socially or environmentally self-contained – they are strongly interrelated. This situation results in a complex mosaic of actors and institutions with different agendas and partially overlapping territorial interests and responsibilities. Policy arrangements are therefore 'untidy', 'disjointed' or 'fractured', reflecting the actual 'untidy', 'disjointed' or 'fractured' character of social-ecological systems (Meadowcroft, 2002). There is thus a 'pluralism of institutional frames', where a variety of public bodies responsible for environmental management can be found over different sorts of territories. There is also a 'pluralism of participating groups' which reflects the diversity of social organisations that represent different environmental concerns and that have an interest in different territories (ibid).

A further dimension of spatial rescaling is the emergence of 'soft spaces' – '*fluid areas… between formal processes where implementation through bargaining, flexibility, discretion and interpretation dominate*' in contrast to 'hard spaces' that are '*formal visible arenas and processes, often statutory and open to democratic processes and local political influence*' (Haughton & Allmendinger, 2007: 306). These are often associated with 'fuzzy boundaries' as a means of breaking away from '*the shackles of pre-existing working patterns which might be variously held to be slow, bureaucratic, or not reflecting the real geographies of problems and opportunities*' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009). Underlying these trends towards soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries is a strong element of pragmatism – '*getting things done and not worrying too much about tidiness around the edges or administrative clutter*' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009:619). On

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the one hand this trend can be considered to represent a more place-based approach to planning – responding to the specificities of particular places. On the other hand it can be seen as a form of neo-liberalism—trying to shortcut democratic processes that may be slow or bureaucratic (Haughton et al, 2009).

## Internationalization of environmental governance in the Baltic Sea Region

Environmental politics in the Baltic Sea region have been transformed by EU enlargement over the last two decades. Nation-states still play the most important role in environmental governance but the involvement of other levels of government and non-governmental actors has become more important (Reed & Bruyneel, 2010). The diversity of states in the region (three Nordic countries, reunited Germany and five former socialist countries, including Russia) contributes to a wide variety in environmental governance across the territory. Environmental policy in the Nordic countries and former West Germany has for example been built on long-standing experience and reputations as environmental pioneers whereas environmental policy has been developed much more quickly in the new EU member states and Russia without the same level of expertise (and against a background of some serious pollution problems, centrally planned economies, one-party systems and a lack of public debate on social and political issues). In the Nordic countries and former West Germany, environmental issues appeared on the political agenda as far back as the 1970s when social movements started to influence decision-making while the political institutionalization of environmental concerns in Poland, the Baltic States and Russia started much later (Kern, 2011). Although environmental movements have played an important role in some CEE countries, the region is still divided into two distinct clusters of countries with regard to environmental/post-material values (Hermanson, 2008; Kern, 2011).

International regimes and intergovernmental cooperation have played an important role in environmental policy in the Baltic Sea region since the 1970s (Kern & Löffelsend, 2004). Even during the Cold War period, cooperation on environmental policy between nation-states in the region was relatively close. In 1974, for example, a legal convention concerning all sources of pollution around the Baltic Sea was agreed between all seven coastal states at the time (Denmark, Finland, East Germany, West Germany, Poland, Sweden and the Soviet Union) – the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (ratified and enacted in 1980). In the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany and the independence of the three Baltic States, the convention was subsequently revised, updated (in relation to the list of harmful substances) and broadened in scope (to encompass inland waters, coastal zone management and biodiversity). It was signed in 1992 by the nine

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states that then bordered the Baltic Sea (as well as the European Community) and entered into force in January 2000.

Intergovernmental cooperation increased rapidly after the end of the Cold War. Examples include the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), which was founded in 1992 to strengthen cooperation and coordination between the countries in the region, and the Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic 2010 programme (VASAB 2010), an intergovernmental initiative in the area of spatial planning and development. A range of transnational networks in the Baltic Sea Region also emerged after the end of the Cold War, reflecting a new dynamism in governance in the region. These transnational networks included groupings of civil society organizations (e.g. the Coalition Clean Baltic, Social Hansa), economic organizations (e.g. the Baltic Sea Chamber of Commerce Association) and sub-national organizations (e.g. the Union of the Baltic Cities). Many of these networks went on to influence environmental governance arrangements in the region (Kern & Löffelsend, 2004).

More recently, the European Union has become an increasingly important actor in the Baltic Sea Region. The Europeanization of the region gained momentum soon after the end of the Cold War, with the accession of Sweden and Finland to the European Union in 1995. A further wave of enlargement in 2004 brought other states in the region politically closer (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland). One consequence of the latter wave of enlargement is that the Baltic Sea then virtually became an internal sea of the European Union, with the exception of the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad located between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea coast. The waves of European enlargement have also meant that most governmental and non-governmental actors in the Baltic Sea Region are increasingly oriented towards Brussels (Kern & Löffelsend, 2004).

Kern (2011) identifies three different forms of recent internationalization (or transnationalization) of environmental governance in the Baltic Sea region. First, decision-making processes in traditional international and intergovernmental organizations such as the Helsinki Commission, otherwise known as HELCOM (the governing body of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area – see above), have transformed access to decision-making for non-governmental and sub-national actors. Second, new types of organizations have been established (e.g. the Council of the Baltic Sea States – a political forum for regional intergovernmental cooperation that addresses issues of environment, economic development, energy, education and culture, and civil security) which aim to introduce non-governmental and sub-national actors into the policy-making process. Third, transnational networks have been actively involved in promoting sustainability and environmental issues in the region (e.g. the Coalition Clean Baltic – a non-profit organization concerned with promoting the protection and improvement of the

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environment and natural resources of the Baltic Sea Area; and the Union of the Baltic Cities – a network of over 100 member cities committed to promoting and strengthening cooperation and exchange of experience on various policy issues among cities in the Baltic Sea Region).

According to Kern & Löffelsend (2004), new governance arrangements in the Baltic Sea region have experienced rescaling of national authority in three directions: *upwards* – to the level of international and supranational institutions; *sideways* – to civil society actors; and *downwards* – to sub-national actors (see also Bulkeley, 2005 and Andonova & Mitchell, 2010 for a discussion of these trends). In the case of upward transfers of authority, it is argued that responsibilities are increasingly being reassigned to international and supranational institutions. After the end of the Cold War many new international and intergovernmental institutions such the Council of the Baltic Sea States were created, and existing institutions such as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) gained momentum. These developments in the early-1990s were superseded by comprehensive Europeanization of the Baltic Sea Region, beginning around the mid-1990s (see below). The European Union became the most important international actor in the region, primarily due to EU enlargement. A range of the processes and impacts of Europeanization are evident in the Baltic Sea Region, covering a wide spectrum of the different types of processes and impacts identified by Clark and Jones (2008) (Table 1). These are summarised below.

*Table 1. Conceptualisations, processes and impacts of Europeanization*

| Explanatory concept | Conceptualisation of Europeanisation (and processes/impacts) |
|---|---|
| Territory/ territoriality | 1. Territorial propinquity – transmission of tacit knowledge between states (e.g. 'successful' policies, processes and procedures) |
| | 2. Rescaling of national identities and interests from states to the supranational scale – projection of national interests |
| Government/ governance | 3. Strengthening of supranational governance through EU institutions – initiatives provide impetus for further EU action |
| | 4. Reconfiguration of bases of authority – resulting from top-down diffusion of policies or modes of operation from EU institutions |
| | 5. Multidirectional changes in governance – bottom-up projection of national interests and identities that shape supranational policies |
| | 6. Reorganisation of spatial frames of decision-making (e.g. networks of relations) to suit new global economic imperatives |
| Power | 7. Multidirectional processes of social transformation resulting from closer European integration (e.g. currency, labour, education) |
| | 8. Global projections (or 'export') of European norms, procedures or modes of operation |
| | 9. 'Smoke screen' for national interests – legitimising or bolstering national decisions |

Based on Clark and Jones (2008)

Different processes and directions of change are evident: upwards, downwards and sideways (or uploading, downloading and cross-loading to use terminology from Marshall, 2005). In the case of sideways transfers of authority, various tasks which previously fell under the authority of national governments were transferred from governmental to non-governmental actors. Such transfers can be observed within nation-states and at international level where transnational policy networks and public-private partnerships have emerged in recent years (Benner et al, 2003). Concerning downward transfers of authority, various government reforms have taken place in the Baltic Sea Region since the early 1990s, especially in the former socialist countries, which have transferred powers and responsibilities to lower levels of government (Lidström, 2007). Local and regional self-governance has been reinstated in Poland, the Baltic states and Russia. Processes of decentralization and devolution have strengthened the position of sub-national governments and increased local capacities in these countries, although the financial resources to fulfil new responsibilities were not always transferred.

## European policy influences on environmental governance

"*the EU offers the possibility of overcoming some of the territorial rigidities of the modern state system*" (Murphy, 2008: p.16)

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a rapid growth macro-regional initiatives in Europe. These have provided frameworks for cooperative policy arrangements in geographic settings such as the Baltic Sea region (Cottey 1999; Gänzle, 2011). According to Johansson (2002), these arrangements have been primarily geared towards the management of similar problems and challenges shared by all participating countries or communities. Interestingly, many of these initiatives have emerged in the immediate vicinity of seas (e.g. the Baltic), lakes or river systems (e.g. the Danube) and at the fringes of the European Union (Gänzle, 2011; Stead, 2011). Some of the most important European policies to have influenced this increase in European macro-regional initiatives with an environmental focus (either wholly or partially) are outlined below. These include the INTERREG programme, the 'Northern Dimension' strategy, the European Framework Directive on Marine Strategy and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The INTERREG programme, a Community Initiative Programme of the European Union, was first launched in 1990 with the aim of promoting cooperation between neighbouring regions separated by internal borders within the European Union in order to enhance the development of a unified internal market and a Europe without borders. Since then, there have been four separate programming periods, each with their own distinct priorities, funding conditions and territorial coverage. From the second INTERREG programming period (INTERREG II) onwards (1997), there has been a specific INTERREG sub-programme for

the Baltic Sea region. Within these sub-programmes, there were also differing priorities, funding conditions and even territorial coverage (Figure 1). In all three of these sub-programmes, environmental issues featured strongly although the emphasis on certain issues differed from programme to programme (see below). Shifts in the territorial coverage of these programmes and the regional sub-programmes are not just related to EU membership at the time of each programming period but also seem to reflect an aim to successively widen cooperation opportunities beyond the EU territory. For instance, the INTERREG IIIB programme for the Baltic Sea extended its geographical coverage to the whole of Denmark, Poland and Sweden (which had not been the case under the INTERREG IIC Baltic Sea Region programme) and the INTERREG IVB programme extended coverage further into north-west Russia and Belarus.

*Figure 1. The widening territorial coverage of the Baltic Sea Programme under the INTERREG II, III and IV Initiatives*



BSR INTERREG IIC (1997-1999)  BSR INTERREG IIIB (2000-2006)  BSR INTERREG IVB (2007-2013)
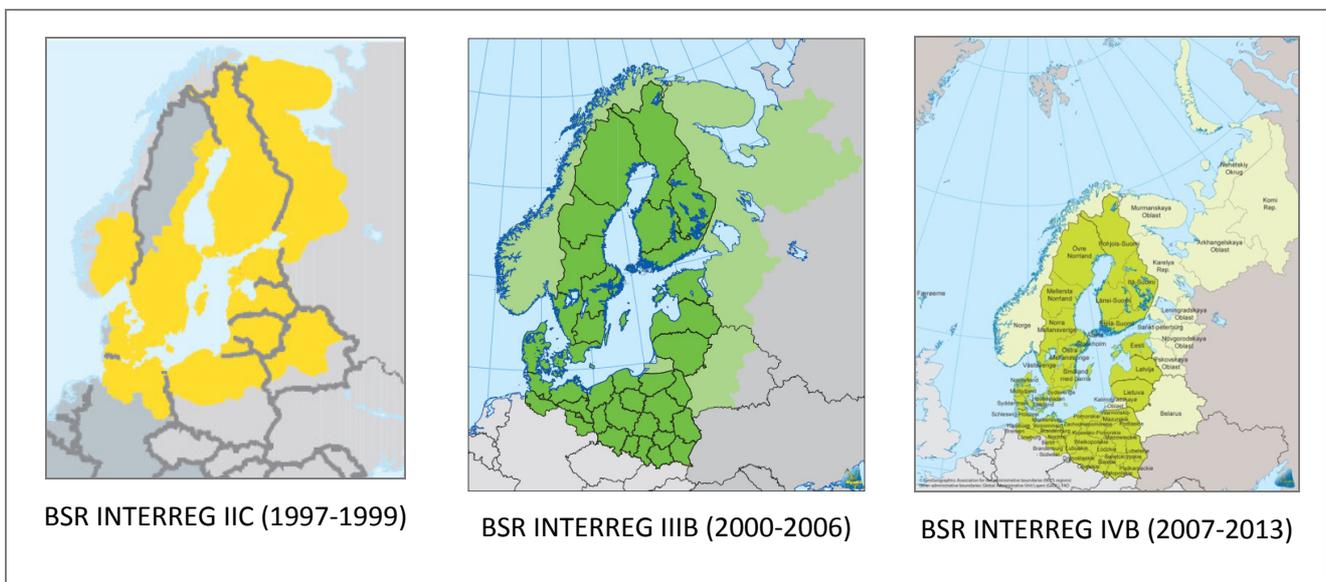
Source: CSD (1999); European Commission (2011a&b)

Soon after Finland and Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, the Finnish government initiated the 'Northern Dimension', a regional EU strategy that established a partnership between the EU, Norway, Iceland and Russia with five key themes (including environment, nuclear safety and natural resources). The main focus of the strategy was on the Baltic countries (then candidates for EU membership), Kaliningrad and north-west Russia. The first action plan was adopted in 2000 (for the period 2000-2003) and was immediately followed by a second action plan (for the period 2004-2006), adopted in 2003. From 2007, the strategy then continued as a 'partnership' that included the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia as equal

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partners. The Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document, adopted in 2006, provided the basis for the new strategy set out six priority areas including one on environment, nuclear safety and natural resources. This particular priority area was strongly shaped by organisations such as HELCOM, Baltic 21 and the regional councils (this is mentioned explicitly in the Framework Document). According to Wallis & Arnold (2011), the new partnership arrangements for the Northern Dimension strategy was in marked contrast to what had gone before, where Russia was arguably previously more of an object of EU policy rather than a full participant. It has been argued that the Northern Dimension was above all else principally designed as a policy for managing bilateral relations with Russia and as a method of targeting money into the then candidate countries around the Baltic Sea (ibid). Whatever the rationale, the Northern Dimension has supported increased activity on environmental issues at the transnational level in the Baltic Sea region.

In 2005, the European Commission published a European proposal for a Framework Directive on Marine Strategy. The Directive, which was adopted in 2008, established a framework within which Member States were required to take measures to achieve or maintain good environmental status in their marine environments. As part of the requirement, Member States were called upon to develop and implement marine strategies focusing on protecting and preserving the marine environment, and preventing and reducing pollution to the marine environment. The Directive also called on Member States to cooperate to develop marine strategies for a number of specific transnational 'marine regions' including the Baltic Sea (alongside three other marine regions – North-east Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea). The requirement of marine strategies for these transnational marine regions introduces a shift in environmental governance and brings with it an element of spatial rescaling.

Prepared by the European Parliament and the European Commission, in collaboration with eight EU Member States[1] and two non-EU states,[2] the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was launched in 2009 with the aim of contributing to more intensive cooperation between countries in the region. The strategy sought to '*provide both a co-ordinated, inclusive framework in response to the key challenges facing the Baltic Sea Region and concrete solutions to these challenges*' (CEC, 2009a: 3). The rationale for the development of European macro-regional strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is often justified in terms of achieving more efficient resource use and greater policy coordination and integration, primarily between European, national and sub-national policy (without recourse to new funds or instruments). Other examples of European macro-regional strategies to date include the Danube Basin

[1] Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

[2] Norway and the Russian Federation.

Strategy (launched in 2011) and strategies for the Alpine, Atlantic and North Sea regions (under various stages of discussion/consideration). The primary role of these macro-regional strategies is to create dialogue and action plans for areas with common features (e.g. geographical, cultural or economic), either in terms of common challenges or opportunities. The emergence of these strategies is reported to be part of a wider reflection on the future of European regional policy beyond 2013 (Dubois et al, 2009). In the case of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, an action plan accompanied the strategy which set out a range of 76 specific actions across 4 thematic 'pillars' (one of which focuses on issues of environment and sustainable development) as well as 10 additional horizontal actions. Environmental objectives are given high priority (and first place) in the strategy: the need to address the ecological and environmental decline of the Baltic Sea is considered an urgent matter according to the document. The content of the strategy and its accompanying action plan were undeniably shaped by other European initiatives such as the Northern Dimension (Kern, 2011) and the INTERREG Community Initiative (Stead, 2011).[3] It is surely little coincidence that the content and geographical space covered by the strategy share many similar features with the Baltic Sea INTERREG IVC programme since both initiatives originate from the same European Directorate (DG-REGIO), have involved a number of the same actors in their development and implementation (especially representatives of European and national governments), and both are seen by the European Commission as important instruments for promoting the same goal of territorial cohesion (see for example Piskorz, 2009).

The three European initiatives described briefly above (INTERREG, Northern Dimension and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region) are clearly closely related, and share a number of common issues. Nevertheless, there are also differences in terms of the general importance attached to environmental issues in these documents, the emphasis on certain themes and their territorial coverage. On the latter issue of territorial coverage, Larsen (2009) contends that environmental politics in the Baltic Sea region have been reframed on several occasions since the 1970s as a consequence of Cold War geopolitics and processes of Europeanization. This issue of territorial framing and reframing is examined in more detail below.

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[3] The Northern Dimension and European Territorial Cooperation programmes are also explicitly mentioned in the Action Plan accompanying the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

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## Spatial rescaling and territorial coverage

"*The territoriality of the European state system helped to produce a geographical imagination that privileges the 'nation-states' over river basins, vegetation zones, population concentrations, or other possible regionalizations.*" (Murphy, 2008: p.9)

As illustrated above, new spaces of environmental governance in the Baltic Sea region are being shaped by EU policies and initiatives such as INTERREG and the Northern Dimension. These policies and initiatives are leading to 'soft' (or softer) policy spaces in addition to the policy boundaries of formal statutory policy-making processes. These soft policy spaces often have fuzzy and overlapping boundaries that often shift over time (c.f. INTERREG programming – see Figure 1). The nature of these soft spaces is discussed below in relation to the development of the European territorial cooperation (i.e. the INTERREG Community Initiative) and the more recent emergence of the European macro-regional strategies.

The boundaries of European transnational cooperation (INTERREG) programming areas underwent various changes between each of the INTERREG II, III and IV programming periods, not just in the Baltic Sea region but also in many other programming areas (see for example Dühr & Nadin, 2007). While the boundaries of European territorial cooperation spaces (for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation) are territorially-bounded in some senses (e.g. delineated areas of cooperation), the visions and strategies developed under European territorial cooperation programmes often have fuzzier boundaries (Dühr, 2006; Zonneveld, 2005). In addition, new rules under the current European Territorial Cooperation objective (2007-2013) allow for participation beyond the boundaries of the cooperation areas[4], which means that territorial cooperation boundaries are by no means sharp or impermeable, and that these boundaries have become fuzzier since the previous programming periods. The overlapping nature of European territorial cooperation spaces is clearly illustrated by Deas & Lord (2006), who describe a '*bewildering array of collaborative initiatives that have emerged in line with the European Commission's efforts to stimulate new interregional, intercity and transnational collaborative initiatives in economic development and spatial planning*' (Figure 2). Their view is that the non-alignment of territorial cooperation boundaries with nation-state borders is a deliberate attempt to promote new institutions and policy initiatives that transcend national borders, to contribute to the 'frictionless mobility' of labour and capital across the European Union, and to promote the international competitiveness of metropolitan regions within the cooperation

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[4] Article 21-2 of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Regulation 1080/2006, allows for up to 20% of expenditure to be incurred by partners located in the European Union but outside the programme cooperation areas, and up to 10% of expenditure to be incurred by partners located outside the European Union.

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areas. This attempt to extend EU influence beyond the borders of the Union is also evident in the development of the macro-regional strategies, and is discussed below.

*Figure 2. The overlapping nature of European Territorial Cooperation activities*
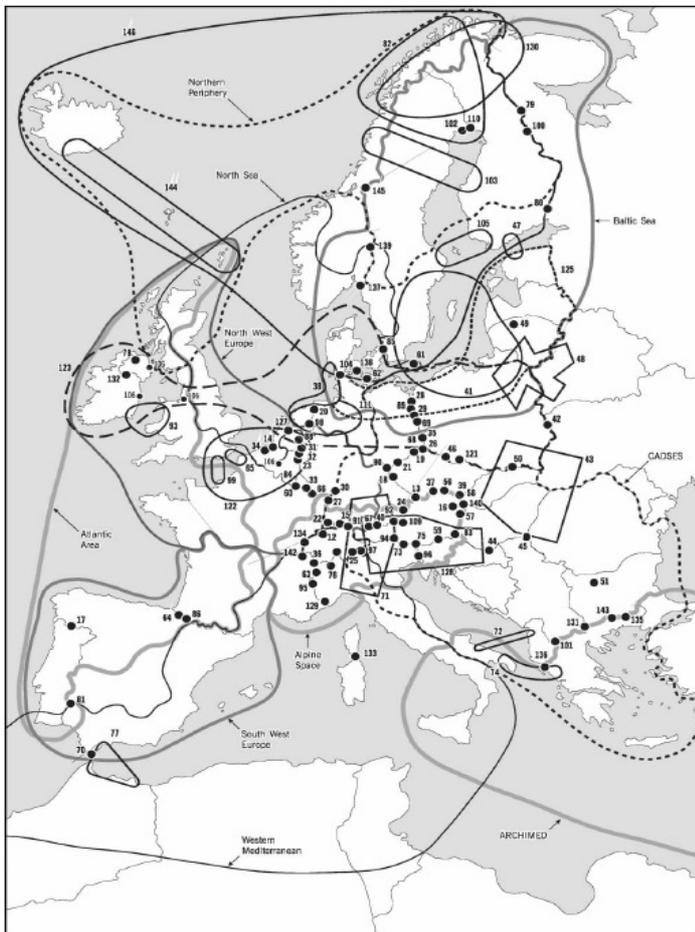


Source: Deas & Lord (2006)

While the macro-regional strategy covers the whole region around the Baltic Sea, the spatial coverage of individual actions and projects vary considerably. According to the strategy, the coverage '*depends on the topic*' (European Commission, 2009a: p.5). In addition, the responsibility for coordinating each of the actions and projects under the priority areas of each pillar is spread between different member states and each of the actions and projects involve different constellations of actors. This situation creates a complex, spatially overlapping patchwork of policy spaces, actors and actions. Evidence to date suggests that the level of ambition across national actors, both political and administrative, has been uneven. There are also considerable differences in the working arrangements for the 15 priority areas, depending on existing

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networks and the maturity of cooperation arrangements on which implementation can draw (European Commission, 2011c).

The macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea region emphasises consensus across administrations and pragmatism (common action), which closely coincides with the view of soft spaces as arenas of '*implementation through bargaining, flexibility, discretion and interpretation*' (Haughton & Allmendinger, 2007: 306). According to Metzger & Schmitt (2012), a basic general tenet of the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy appears to consist of an ambition to be as non-imposing as possible, and to try to build upon the specific conditions of the wider Baltic Sea area with the aim of coordinating and facilitating the dialogue between all the existing multilevel initiatives that were already in place in the region. A carrying principle is to supplement and coordinate previous and existing initiatives, thus introducing a dimension of `European added value' (Metzger & Schmitt, 2012). The articulations of the boundaries and interests have remained distinctly multiple and fuzzy in the numerous, sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting strategies, visions, programmes, and projects of the plethora of groupings and actors engaged in articulating a Baltic Sea Region (ibid).

Recent statements on regional policy in Europe suggest that the move towards these soft spaces with fuzzy overlapping boundaries appears to have official backing. The extent of this backing is unclear but the promotion of these spaces has certainly not gone unnoticed within the Commission and appears to be an intentional move. According to the conclusions of a recent European Commission statement on macro-regional strategies, for example, is the statement that '*regions should be defined so as to maximise the efficacy of the strategy…, [which]… may well mean flexible, even vague, definitions of the boundaries*' (European Commission, 2009a: 8). A more relational approach to governance (based on functional relations) is evident (Luukkonen & Moilanen, 2012). However, as Faludi (2009) recognises, these new spaces often lack the administrative means to exercise power over territory.

Due to the wide range of actions contained in the macro-regional strategies as well as the various constellations of stakeholders, question have been raised about the coordination of initiatives contained in the strategy (`horizontal actions') in a complex and diffuse multiscalar governance setting. According to Metzger & Schmitt (2012), the development and adoption of the strategies created a demand for the new modes of governance in order to 'fill' the organizational and institutional gap that emerged. As a partial response to this gap, the Commission has, to some degree at least, shifted from being initiator and facilitator to manager and coordinator, retreating somewhat from the distributed network implementation model that was initially envisaged for the strategy. As a consequence, the European Commission now occupies a more central role in the coordination of the strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (Box 1). More

specifically, DG-Regio has taken up the role as a clearing house for all matters relating to the strategy as well as coordinator and monitoring agency for interactions (ibid). As such, the governance arrangements for coordinating and facilitating the implementation of the strategy bear the mark of a metagovernmental approach, putting the European Commission in the driving seat as the facilitator of the 'governance of governance' of the BSR through DG Regio (ibid).

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*Box 1. The three main pillars of coordinating the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*

1. DG Regional Policy is in charge of the overall day-to-day coordination, monitoring and reporting to the European Council, in close partnership with the other Commission services on topics falling under their competence. The European Council is in charge of the broader policy development.

2. A High-Level Group of officials from the EU27 Member States and a representative from the Committee of the Regions has been set up, and consults the Commission on all major developments. The European Investment Bank (EIB) is also invited to participate in meetings.

3. National Contact Points (NCPs) have been appointed by all eight participating Member States to assist the implementation of the Strategy at the national level.

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Source: European Commission, 2010

It is apposite to note that the first two European macro-regional strategies (Baltic Sea and Danube Basin) contain both 'new' and 'old' member states and that both strategies extend beyond existing EU boundaries, corresponding with the view that macro-regions represent a political space or forum for joint political action and symbolize a trend whereby borders are increasingly being replaced by spaces encompassing areas both inside and outside the European Union (Cappellin, 1998). In common with the Baltic Sea and Danube Basin strategies, new proposals for additional macro-regional strategies also cover both EU and non-EU territories. The proposed strategy for the North Sea region (likely to be named 'North Sea Region 2020') includes Norway, while the proposed Adriatic-Ionian macro-region includes four countries that are currently outside the European Union (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR of Montenegro and Albania).

The importance of 'exporting' the ideas and initiatives contained in the macro-regional strategies beyond EU borders is highlighted in a recent commentary by Johan Friis, the Danish national contact person for the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, who states that "it is crucial to ensure the participation and involvement of third countries, in particular Russia, with regard to the work linked to the EUSBSR" as

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"many of the challenges in the Baltic Sea Region are directly related to Russia" (Friis, 2012: p.13). To date, however, Russia (the only non-EU member involved in the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy) has only been involved to a rather limited extent in the development of the strategy and in its implementation, either through specific projects or via existing regional frameworks such as the Northern Dimension. In the Danube region, on the other hand, various non-EU countries have been more fully involved in the development of the strategy and have taken on responsibility for coordinating certain actions.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Developments in the Baltic Sea Region reflect a general trend towards spatial rescaling. Despite these trends involving the diffusion of power, authority, and legitimacy to other government levels and actors, the role of the nation-state remains crucial (Kern & Löffelsend, 2004). Nonetheless, the importance of international organizations and regimes on the one hand and transnational and sub-national actors on the other have increased in the region over recent decades in relation to environmental governance. New modes of governance have emerged both above and below the nation-state. The policy spaces occupied by European macro-regional strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, while clearly not yet representing a fundamental reorganisation of environmental governance, do nevertheless indicate spatial rescaling and the creation of new policy spaces with fuzzy and overlapping boundaries. The governmental arrangements in these spaces are after all predominantly voluntary and non-binding. At present, many regional actors, both governmental and non-governmental, feel obliged to be involved in coalition-building and strategy-making in the macro-region, fearing that non-cooperation may somehow prejudice future powers or resources that they might receive. However, few (if any) of these actors are under the illusion that these spaces will provide them with a lot more powers or responsibilities in the short-term at least, or that formal administrative units are becoming much less important (Luukkonen & Moilanen, 2012). Nevertheless, these new spaces of governance do seem to be both supplementing and even supplanting formal administrative territories in certain cases (Metzger & Schmitt, 2012).

In terms of the 'texture' of cooperation over the past two decades since the end of the Cold War, there has been a remarkable shift from primarily intergovernmental to new forms of transnational cooperation (Gänzle, 2011) and 'soft planning' (Stead, 2011; Luukkonen & Moilanen, 2012). While HELCOM has very much remained an important player for intergovernmental environmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, various transnational organizations have emerged over time seeking to bring together private and public actors (Giguère, 2007; Kern & Löffelsend, 2004). The new macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea region provides new arenas for European, national and subnational actors to shape policy and action. The full implications of these new policy spaces that are emerging as a result of European macro-regional

strategies are perhaps not completely understood within the Commission (or more widely). Nevertheless, the existence of these spaces has certainly not gone unnoticed within the Commission and appears to be part of a deliberate outcome-based approach to achieve practical results.

As well as contributing to spatial rescaling, the various European initiatives in the Baltic Sea Region described above (i.e. the INTERREG programme, the 'Northern Dimension' strategy, the European Framework Directive on Marine Strategy and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region) have also had a range of tangible impacts associated with Europeanization processes. In terms of Clark & Jones' typology, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region alone has affected (or aimed to affect) most of their nine main categories of Europeanization (Table 1 above). Of these categories, impacts are most evident in terms of: territorial propinquity, or the transmission of tacit knowledge between states; the rescaling of national identities and interests from states to the supranational scale; the strengthening of supranational governance through EU institutions; the reconfiguration of bases of authority (resulting from top-down diffusion of policies or modes of operation from EU institutions); the reorganisation of spatial frames of decision-making (e.g. networks of relations) to suit new global economic imperatives; global projections (or 'export') of European norms, procedures or modes of operation beyond existing EU borders. While the European macro-regional strategies were originally set up without recourse to new organisations, funds or instruments, it is conceivable that the Europeanization processes that they have promoted may ultimately lead to new organisations, funds or instruments in the long-term.

Coinciding with the notion of 'exported' governance (discussed by Clark & Jones, 2008), it is interesting to note that the first two European macro-regional strategies (for the Baltic Sea and the Danube Basin) contain both new and old member states and both strategies extend beyond existing EU boundaries. This may be coincidence but could equally represent a deliberate approach for including non-EU member states in the development and implementation of EU-led regional strategies. It is certainly the case that developments immediately outside the EU are highly important for the Baltic Sea Region. The Kaliningrad region for example is high on the agenda of both the Russian Federation and the EU because of its position between EU member states and St. Petersburg (also included in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region) is easily the largest metropolitan conurbation in the Baltic Sea macro-region (it has a larger population than the countries of Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania). Extending the involvement of stakeholders beyond the European Union is also implied in new proposals for additional macro-regional strategies in the North Sea and Adriatic-Ionian region. This therefore has implications for the rescaling of environmental governance not just within member states but also extending out beyond the current territory of the European Union.

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