

Cooperation actions: Shared knowledge towards greater impact

5-6 June 2025

EMBEDDING cooperation in the mainstream programmes

with macro-regional strategies as frameworks

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Let's start from the beginning

BACKGROUND

Macro-regional strategies are supposed to use all relevant existing funding, European Union ones and other funding for its implementation. The Interreg-programmes are just one source of funding and never meant to be the only one.

INITIATIVE 1

The Swedish ESF Council (Managing Authority) took the initiative **in 2011 to the first so called MA-network**. The main reason was to facilitate coordinated (synchronized) calls between the Managing Authorities for the European Social Fund (ESF) in the Baltic Sea Region. A first pilot became the flagship School to Work where such calls were tested.

INITIATIVE 2

In the framework of Policy Area Innovation, the **BSR Stars Innovation Express was introduced in 2013**. A programme offering synchronized calls, match-making and capacity building within the European Regional development Fund (ERDF) in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond. The programme was closed in the end of 2017 due to organisational changes in the Nordic Council of Ministers, the host of the programme.

Cohesion Policy programmes 2014 - 2020

and the embedding of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in the programmes

- In preparation of the new programmes the ESF MA-network **agreed on common themes** for collaboration. This resulted in 7 themes where two were in common for all 8 member states
- Following the example from ESF **three more MA-networks were established: ERDF in 2016 followed by the European Agriculture Fund for Regional development (EAFRD) in 2017 and the European Maritime and Fishery Fund (EMFF) in 2018.** The two latter was results of the Swedish Institute funded Baltic Leadership Programme.
- The national and regional projects funded by the mainstream programmes need a “home”, a platform for collaboration and **the FLAGSHIP was born.** Mission orientated collaborative platforms.
- The European Commission (DG EMPL) operated a **transnational cooperation platform offering support with coordinated calls, partner search and peer-learning to ESF-programmes.** As a result, School to Work was supported with four projects (EE, FIN, LT and SE) in 2017-2020 and the flagship Baltic Sea Labour Forum got support by three projects (FIN, LT and PL)
- The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (ERDF MA) introduced the “**transnational component**”, a simplified funding with a lump sum to be added to an existing projects with EUR 40 000. This was used by some Swedish ERDF-projects.
- A learning from these first years with MA-networks was the **need of a structure with guidelines**, preferably adopted by the ministries responsible for the programmes.

SCHOOL TO WORK

A flagship in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

A collaborative platform embedding cooperation



Innovation Express

Innovation Express is an instrument to foster internationalisation of SMEs through clusters or business networks.

The **BSR Stars Innovation Express** concept included a cluster-to-cluster matchmaking event, a coordinated transnational call for proposals where approved projects were funded through regional or national sources, and several capacity building and policy learning activities.

The programme was launched in 2013 and finalized in 2017. In the five years of existence, they received 315 project proposals and granted 213 projects. The total project budget was 8 million EUR. 6 to 7 countries/programmes participated each year. The match-making and capacity building events gathered yearly some 300 participants.

Innovation Express 2021 was designed as a quick response to the economic recovery after Covid-19 offering SMEs the possibility to widen their markets and develop new products and services with partners in Europe.

The call covered two topics, “Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Applications” and “Digital solutions in sustainable industry”. Four programmes participated in the synchronized call, Salzburg (Austria), Baden Württemberg (Germany), Canton Fribourg (Switzerland) and Brandenburg (Germany).



Cohesion Policy programmes 2021-2027

and the embedding of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in the programmes

- When preparing for the present MFF it was **decided to embed the macro-regional strategies in the Cohesion Policy programmes**. This process started with a European wide conference in Brussels in spring 2019 with some 180 participants. This conference functioned as kick-off for the parallel embedding processes in the four macroregional strategies.
- Already prior to the conference it had been agreed in the Baltic Sea Region to organise a **capacity building programme** for two of the MA-networks (ERDF and ESF). The programme with five modules over 18 months (2019/20) was financed by the Swedish Institute and organized by them and the Norden Association Sweden. The programme resulted in **draft mission statements**, guidelines for the coordination between the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the ERDF and ESF programmes. Common themes were mapped resulting in **an overview of common thematic priorities between EUSBSR and the member states. Provisions were inserted in Operational Programmes** where programmes and Strategy share thematic priorities.
- In parallel, on the European level the **Common Provision Regulation** (CPR) was negotiated, guidelines for the Cohesion Policy Programmes. To offer cooperation possibilities was included in the CPR, where projects could **include cooperation both within the European Union** but also beyond provided it benefits the region/country where the project is funded from. Programmes in countries where a macro-regional strategy exists need also to provide support to the implementation of this Strategy.
- In 2024 **the mission statements were adopted by the two MA-networks (ERDF and ESF).**

Cohesion Policy programmes 2021-2027

and the challenges with embedding cooperation

The MA-networks need to be operational

- lack of commitment by the hierarchies of the Managing Authorities
- staff changes with limited awareness of the history behind the networks (some members believe the networks exists just for exchange of experiences)
- lack of capacity and competence to organize synchronized calls – capacity building is needed
- lack of support by EU COM (DG REGIO/DG EMPL)

Key stakeholders implementing the macro-regional strategies need to know how to use mainstream programmes for transnational cooperation and how to work with MA-networks

- Lack of understanding of the importance to learn how to use this funding – to expand outside the Interreg-funding
- Lack of capacity (knowledge/time) to build flagships (platforms for collaboration)

Important to **promote the added value of transnational cooperation among project promoters** – offer capacity building activities for stakeholders (local, regional, national). This just exists in Sweden, so far.

When both MA-networks are operational and EUSBSR key stakeholders are ready to start using these funds co-financing rates is still the challenge. The project partners need to be able to co-finance with up to 50%. Hence, the macro-regional added value need to be well-defined and clear to all parties involved. The differences in co-financing rate is vary between member states creating in equality.



Thank you for your attention!