

MACRO-REGIONS AS CONCEPT FOR EUROPEAN SPATIAL INTEGRATION? – DISCUSSING CO-OPERATION STRATEGIES IN THE BALTIC SEA REGIONS

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[Abstract, 150 words]

The Baltic Sea Region has a long tradition of integrated regional development. For decades economic, social, cultural and ecological concerns have been tackled in a way that serves well as basis for a sustainable future. Nevertheless, global economic competition has become a challenge for the area. Strengthening a region's global competitiveness requires stronger links as well as synchronised and coordinated action between neighbouring regions and countries (transnational arena). This links 'globalisation' with the concept of 'macro-regions' which recently has been introduced by the European Commission adopting the Baltic Sea Region as the first model. The macro-region approach is intended to allow both European Union and its Member States to identify common needs and to allocate available resources to strengthen economic and social development and to enable sustainable development. The paper discusses potentials and restrictions of the Baltic Sea Region as a European macro-region.

Introduction

During the Swedish presidency of the EU the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was endorsed by the European Council in October 2009. In the presidency's conclusions it is said: "This Strategy constitutes an integrated framework to address common challenges, i.a. the urgent environmental challenges related to the Baltic Sea, and to contribute to the economic success of the region and to its social and territorial cohesion, as well as to the competitiveness of the EU. The European Council calls upon all relevant actors to act speedily and ensure full implementation of the Strategy, which could constitute an example of a macro regional strategy. It invites the Commission to present a progress report to the Council by June 2011" (CEC 2009).

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Against this background this article explores the co-operation landscape of the Baltic Sea Region and discusses the perspectives of macro-region in the context of parallel forms of co-operation. Can macro-regions become a concept contributing to future European spatial integration? In this context it also specifies requirements to be fulfilled if aiming at an integrated and sustainable regional development of the area. The article starts with defining relevant framework conditions, then describes co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region, as well on the macro-regional as on other levels, takes a closer look into a reference region in Northern America and, finally, draws conclusions with reference to the research question.

1. Globalisation and Regional Development in the Baltic Sea Region

Globalisation is expected to cause significant structural changes concerning spatial structures and spatial development (Castells 1996, Sassen 1991). For regions competing as locations on the global scale offering the most productive environment and being ‘attractive’ for investments and enterprises as well as for high-skilled work forces have become touchstones of ‘success’ (Sassen 2007). Consequently, the ‘competitive region’ has gained some sort of sovereign interpretative power as new orientation of regional development going along with a restricted understanding of urban and regional development that subordinates activities and expenditures to economic success factors.

Simultaneously, with regard to the question of a location’s appropriate scale in the newly arranged global area a shift towards spatial extension respectively upscaling can be observed (Ásgrímsson 2008).

Metropolitan regions, supra-regional partnerships, meta- or mega-regions as well as macro-regions represent the idea that larger areas have better chances of getting recognition and being competitive in a globalised world. For the U.S.A. Lang, Nelson & Dawkins (2010) describe this as a process of continuity starting from the modern integrated metropolis (1930-1970), via the post-modern, quasi-integrated metropolis (1970-2010) and reaching towards the megapolitan form of networking metropolises including wider territories of the participating metropolises, the area in-between and associated micropolitan areas. In many regions similar ambitions can be identified bringing together neighbouring regions or states to form new cross-border areas of co-operation. As they are driven mainly by economic motivation these co-operations concentrate on topics of international accessibility, joint economic clustering or place-making respectively marketing. Besides, some of these re-scaling activities also include objectives of territorial cohesion.

Both aspects – approaching the challenges of globalisation for ‘competitive regions’ as well as the spatial upscaling – have far reaching consequences for urban and regional development as well as further on, as some examples indicate:

- Selective approach: Cities and regions are characterised by a high complexity of development factors, including economic as well as social, cultural and ecological aspects. Some regions, like

many of the Scandinavian regions, have become prominent for their high standards regarding quality of life and for their far reaching concepts of integrated spatial development addressing a wide range of this complexity. In contrary, the ‘competitive region’ stands for an reduced view on urban and regional development threatening those fragile relationships.

- Actor exclusion: Furthermore, reducing the complexity by highlighting an hegemonic economic orientation results in an exclusion of actors. Whereas earlier concepts of cooperative regional development integrated stakeholders representing a broad field of societal interests the ‘competitive region’ favours stakeholder from the business sector and related research, at best including labour representatives or sciences. Thus, the power of definition in informal but agenda setting processes is allocated very selective and discriminates relevant social interests.
- Negation of decentral approaches: Another topic is the extension of scale. Against the background of sustainability concerns and climate change local and regional economy has recently gained increasing attention for minimizing energy demand and transportation. Thus, the extension of scale appears as a competing concept negating those new forms of decentralised economy. The “bigger is better”-device, favouring place-making on upper spatial levels, contributes to an overall and exclusive transformation towards a globalised economy and society.

In summary, against the background of globalisation a sort of brainwashing-process seems to have been taking place aiming at implementing a hegemonic concept of economically oriented globalisation and ignoring achievements of integrated and sustainable spatial development by pushing forward an economic dominance in society and politics.

However, the described concerns concerning scale do not mean that inter-regional co-operation is the problem, but the way it is treated respectively its often one-sided orientation. Co-operation has proven as a suitable concept for achieving better solutions in various fields, for an exchange of knowledge or for joint lobbying against superior political institutions, and has the potential to be used for achieving a sustainable regional development.

How do this considerations concern co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region? – When closer looking into the Baltic Sea Region a number of related processes can be identified there, as the following examples show:

- as example for up-scaling approaches stands the BSR Macro-Region that has been adopted bei the EU recently,
- vision documents for transregional co-operation have been elaborated in the context of the INTERREG programme,

- in some of the member states metropolitan regions have been introduced as new tool of spatial policies aiming at international positioning and competing with former integrated development strategies,
- there are discussions of developing meta-regions in-between the macro regional and the metropolitan level, and
- Germany has been experimenting with supra-regional partnerships bringing together metropolitan regions and their further hinterland for developing stronger ties for regional development and contributing to territorial cohesion.

This article discusses potentials as well as restrictions of such spatial innovations in the Baltic Sea Region and includes a critical reflection of the implications of macro-regions against the background of the described parallel approaches.

2. Baltic Sea Macro-Region

The Baltic Sea Region includes eleven countries, eight of them being EU member states. It encompasses whole territories of Poland, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark; parts of Russia and of Germany. The total land area of the BSR is approx. 2.4 million km², which is more than half of the total area of the EU 27 (ca. 4.2 million km²). The total population living in the Baltic Sea Region is approx. 105 million (EU 27: ca. 500 million). Saint Petersburg and Berlin are the largest metropolises with 4-5 million inhabitants each.

In recent years The Baltic Sea Region has become a prominent area of co-operation. This is based on a long tradition of various constellations and forms of co-operations, e.g. the Hanseatic League or the Scandinavian co-operation. Since the 1990s co-operation has strongly been supported by the EU INTERREG-initiative fostering transnational co-operation in different parts of Europe (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: Baltic Sea Region



INTERREG Baltic Sea Region

In contrary to international co-operation which focuses on states and their governments as formal actor transnational co-operation also includes private stakeholders and non-governmental organizations. The EU started INTERREG in 1991 to motivate cross-border co-operation between neighbor countries inside Europe, in 1994 with INTERREG IIC the transnational orientation was added creating larger areas of co-operation and also integrating non-EU countries. Besides the Baltic Sea Region other areas were the Western Mediterranean and Latin Alps, South-Western Europe, the Atlantic Area, the North Western Metropolitan Area and Centre, Adriatic, Danube and Southeast Europe (CADSES) (see fig. 2). In 2000 the transnational co-operation was shifted into INTERREG IIIC and some of the program areas were newly arranged, for the

program period 2007 to 2013 INTERREG IVC has followed, again with changes in the program areas (see table 1).

Figure 2: INTERREG co-operation areas

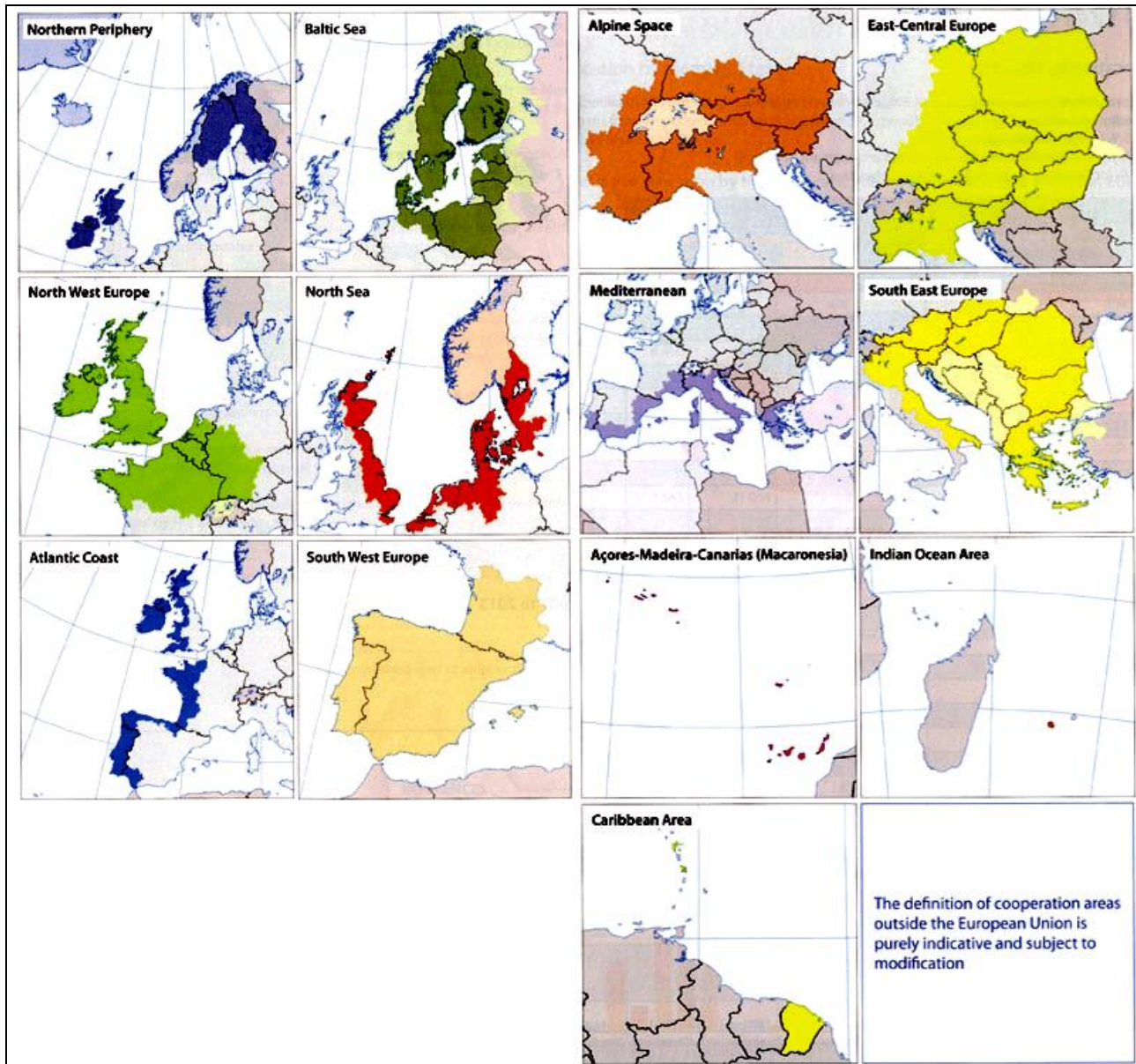


Table 1: Program areas of transnational co-operation in the INTERREG phases II, III and IV

INTERREG IIB	INTERREG IIIC	INTERREG IVC
Baltic Sea Region	Baltic Sea Region	Baltic Sea Region
	Northern Periphery	Northern Periphery
North Sea Region	North Sea Region	North Sea Region
Atlantic Area	Atlantic Area	Atlantic Coast
North Western Metropolitan Area	North West Europe	North West Europe
South-Western Europe	South West Europe	South West Europe
Western Mediterranean and Latin Alps	Western Mediterranean	Mediterranean
	Alpine Space	Alpine Space
Centre, Adriatic, Danube and Southeast Europe (CADSES)	CADSES	Central Europe
	Archimed	South East Europe

Till 2006 INTERREG was organized as an Community Initiative Program, since 2007 it has become a proper objective – objective 3: European Territorial Cooperation – of EU’s regional policy and thus has been strengthened within the scope of the European Structural Funds.

Whereas there have been some changes in other parts of Europe, the table shows that for the Baltic Sea Region, as well as for the NSR, continuity can be stated. Nearly twenty years of INTERREG co-operation have contributed to an advanced culture of co-operation. When in 1992 only a few organizations existed on the pan-Baltic level (e.g. CBSS – Council of the Baltic Sea States, HELCOM – Helsinki Commission, UBC - Union of the Baltic Cities), many more have been initiated since then (e.g. BSSSC – Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, Baltic Agenda 21, Baltic Development Forum) (Fischer / Zaucha 2009: 622).

The INTERREG program periods are structured by Operational Programs and a specific governance structure bringing together the multiple actors from different levels. Looking closer into the different INTERREG phases in the Baltic Sea Region, INTERREG II aimed foremost at supporting the development of a future-oriented spatial structure and at contributing to better living conditions for the people and the enterprises in the region. Core objectives of the Operational Program were:

- “strengthening the development potential of the Baltic Sea Region,
- increasing economic and social cohesion,

- ensuring a sustainable development for the region as a whole, and
- promoting a territorial balance by supporting weak points and building on strong points”.

The priorities and sub-programs show that there was great emphasis on spatial matters (promotion of sustainable spatial development measures, promotion of a spatial development approach in the Baltic Sea Region, further development of spatial planning strategies and exchange of experience in the field of spatial planning, management of spatial planning relations in particular to natural and cultural heritage and tourism development etc.) going back to the overall aim of early INTERREG.

In comparison to INTERREG IIC, the Community Initiative Programme for INTERREG III B grounded on continuity, but introduced some organisational changes, e.g.:

- a stronger focus of actions concerning themes and measures, priority areas, character of projects, including better integration of spatial development and regional policies,
- an extended co-operation area concerning the Barents Region and land parts in all countries except for Finland and the Baltic States which took part with the whole territory already under INTERREG IIC,
- a more active involvement of representatives of Non-EU countries even in immediate programme working groups,
- supporting stronger involvement of private actors and public-private partnerships in project funding.

In the next phase (2007-2013) INTERREG IVB has changed this spatial approach towards a stronger regional economic orientation including international positioning of the Baltic Sea Region in Europe and worldwide. In addition, the implementation of concepts was given a higher priority combined with fostering investments which explicitly had not been possible in INTERREG before. INTERREG IVB also underlined the objective of minimizing the considerable differences in the level of socio-economic development between the western and eastern parts of the region. These new orientations show a grown responsibility for the development of the Baltic Sea Region as a whole. The Baltic Sea Region as well accepts the differences between its member states as a political challenge as it takes on the role as representative of the region on the international scale. Whereas the cohesion task has always been an integrated part of the spatial development objectives the joint “foreign policy” underlines a new dimension of regional co-operation, but also posing numerous questions concerning competencies, legitimacy and organizational matters.

In the field of spatial planning INTERREG has resulted in the VASAB documents. VASAB stands for Long-Term Perspective for the territorial development of the Baltic Sea. It focuses on trends and challenges for territorial development in the Baltic Sea Region, on perspectives concerning territorial cohesion and on

policy guidelines and specific actions to achieve these goals (e.g. promoting urban networking and urban-rural cooperation, improving internal and external accessibility or enhancing maritime spatial planning and management) (Dutkowski/ Görmar/ Palmowski 2009; Fischer/ Zaucha 2009).

Baltic Sea Macro-Region

Against the background of long-ranging co-operation the concept for a macro-region has been introduced with great expectations of the member states of the BSR “as a model test for a new level of governance” (Schymik 2009: 1; see Schymik/ Krumrey 2009). During the Swedish presidency of the EU the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was endorsed by the European Council in 2009. In the context of the EUSBSR a macro-region has been defined as “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges” (Säumecki 2009: 1). Against the EU background the number of EU member states of a macro-region “should be significantly fewer than in the Union as a whole” (Verschelde 2009). In other contexts the term marco-region has been used differently, as well for describing internationally oriented groups of nations (EU, NAFTA etc.) as for a number of regions within a country. Considering further characteristics, macro-regions can be described as “place-based, inclusive and, in principle, prepared and implemented on t multi-level basis” (Säumecki 2009: 2).

These characteristics raise various questions concerning political, institutional and further organizational implications of macro-regions, some of them are:

- What is the added value of macro-regions with regard to regional development? What are suitable instruments and structures that produce the expected impact? How can objectives be linked to strategies, programs and action?
- What is the suitable spatial context of a macro-region? Are administrative or functional boundaries more applicable or is “variable geometry” a better solution?
- If macro-regions intend to develop some sort of para-diplomacy how can private stakeholders be included?
- If macro-regions aim at a new level of governance in the EU-context what are their expectations concerning funding and legislation from the EU level?

Before further discussing these questions it seems to be worth looking at parallel developments in spatial development in the BSR that might have a relation to macro-regions.

3. Metropolitan Regions – Supra-regional Partnerships – Meta-Regions as spatial innovations

When considering the Baltic Sea Macro-Region further spatial co-operations become of interest that can be found in the same Baltic Sea Area but act on different territorial scales and follow different objectives respectively orientations:

- metropolitan regions have become a new instrument of spatial politics of city-regions and national policies,
- supra-regional partnerships have been explored as a new approach towards territorial cohesion bringing together metropolitan regions and their further hinterland, and
- meta-regions are situated in between the macro regional and the metropolitan level and can be seen as in-between approach of strategic regional development.

These different co-operation forms can be seen critically because they multiply the already existing levels of co-operation, creating a maybe confusing multi-level landscape, binding additional resources or resulting in a thicket of responsibilities. Besides, they might interfere with the new level of a macro-region. To be able to evaluate the relationship of the different structures with each other and to explore their specific additional value they are described more thoroughly in the following. Table 2 gives an overview of the mentioned institutional arrangements aiming at regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region but situated on different spatial levels, table 3 evaluates some implications concerning main characteristics of these co-operations forms.

Table 2: Overview of selected institutional arrangements of regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region

Spatial entity	Spatial scale	Main goals	Example(s)
Metropolitan Region	Agglomeration(s) and functionally linked hinterland	Urban-hinterland co-operation Regional marketing	Metropolitan Region of Hamburg Öresund Region
Supra-regional Partnership	Metropolitan Region plus further reaching hinterland	Territorial cohesion of metropolitan region and further hinterland International positioning by up-scaling	Supra-regional Partnership Metropolitan Region of Hamburg/ Northern Germany Supra-regional Partnership Northeastern Germany
Meta-Region	Several metropolitan regions creating a joint territorial alliance	Co-operation in selected cluster-topics International positioning	Meta-Region Hamburg-Öresund-Oslo-Stockholm

		by up-scaling	
Macro-Region	Area including territory from a number of different countries or regions	International political lobbying Joint development of the macro-region	BSR

The overview shows that the spatial co-operations range from city-hinterland-co-operation in major metropolitan agglomerations to international co-operation of governments in the Baltic Sea Region (see table 2). Differences become visible when analyzing the objectives of co-operation. Whereas metropolitan regions and supra-regional partnerships put strong concern on intra-regional aspects meta- and macro-regions aim more explicitly on international lobbying and positioning including representation on the European political floor. Besides, the latter also explore potentials of intra-regional co-operation. In recent years metropolitan regions have started activities on the international level as well, some establishing so called para-diplomacy with lobbying activities in Brussels or in partner-regions worldwide (e.g. Hunds 2010). One reason has been a shift of strategic orientation of larger agglomerations, that have put more emphasis on location competition and, thus, on an external orientation whereas before they had mainly been concerned with co-operation of the core city and its hinterland. – Concerning territorial cohesion a complementary can be found between supra-regional partnerships and macro-regions. The ones aim at cohesion on the supra-regional scale, the others regarding the macro-region.

Looking into chances, risks and further implications of the different forms of co-operation the picture gets more differentiated (see table 3). The chances mostly result from the co-operations objectives that are intended to contribute to some sort of positive output on each level of co-operation, ranging from city-hinterland- to macro-regional co-operation. Risks respectively problems are a result of the construction of many of these co-operations. This includes in particular the question of a restricted understanding of regional development focusing on economic and private sector-aspects as well as an exclusion of a broader set of civil society stakeholders. One reason for this narrowed stakeholder spectrum might be seen in the history of regional co-operation that has been a co-operation of public administrative bodies and their political counterparts. The challenge of including private partners was forced by EU-standards (economic and social partners) and pragmatic aspects like financing problems. Whereas economic partners were welcome to contribute social partners were hardly motivated for doing so. Furthermore, they mostly have worse conditions with regard to organizational capacity, manpower or resources.

The macro-region is confronted with the additional problem that the efforts in joint diplomacy long mainly for public organization more or less excluding private stakeholder. Thus, there is on the one hand the necessity of organizing a legitimized democratic decision making process and on the other hand the aim of including private stakeholders in the implementation phase.

Besides these questions of legitimacy and organizational aspects a main concern stays regarding the overall orientation of all these co-operations – economically focused or following a broader integrated approach?

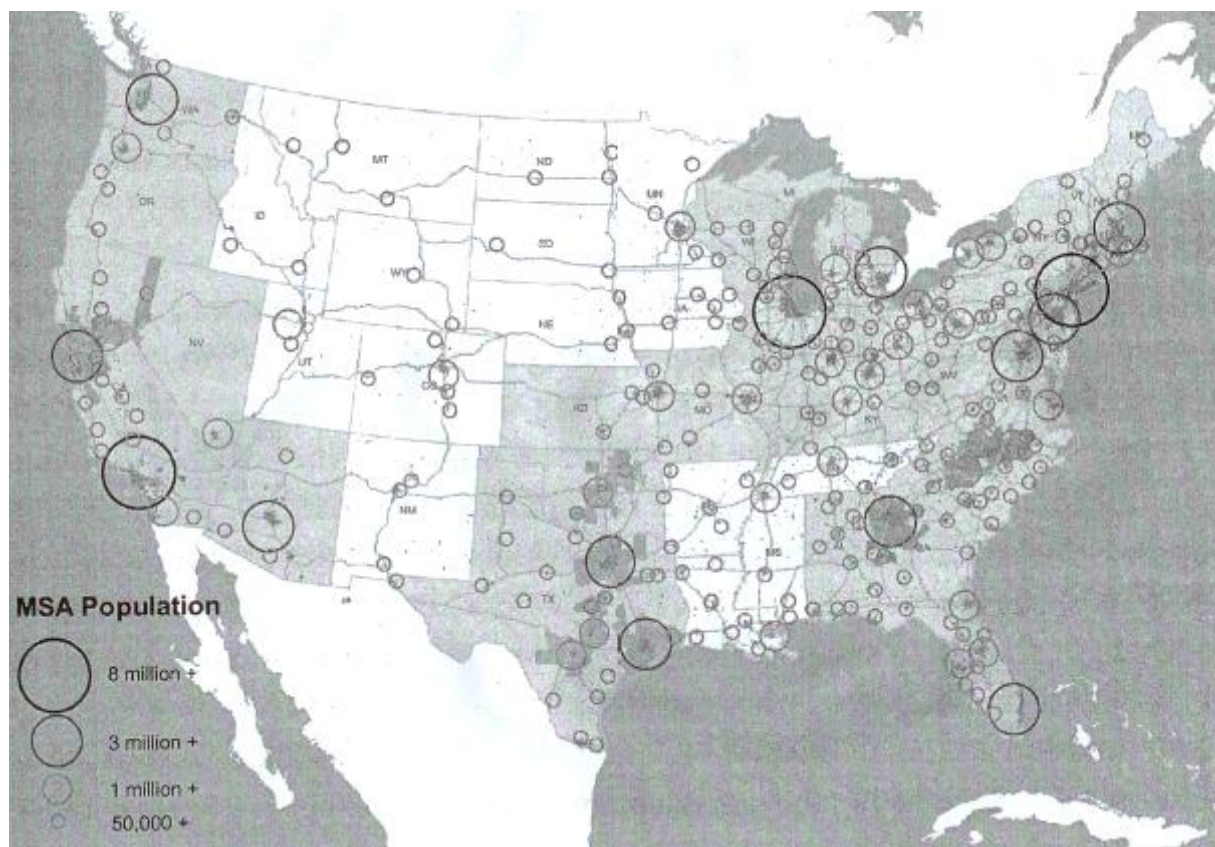
Table 3: Chances and risks of regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region

Spatial entity	Chances	Risks / problems	Challenges
Metropolitan Region	City-hinterland co-operation International positioning (para-diplomacy)	Restricted economic orientation Restriction on private stakeholders from the economic sector	Integration of economic and quality of life-approach (integrated development strategy) Integration of civil society-stakeholders
Supra-regional Partnership	Innovative solutions for territorial cohesion on the supra-regional level New forms of spatial partnership and solidarity Integration of private stakeholders as partners and drivers	Restricted economic orientation Restriction on private stakeholders from the economic sector	Development of strategies, instruments and tools for decentral territorial cohesion Integration of economic and quality of life-approach (integrated development strategy) Integration of civil society-stakeholders
Meta-Region	Co-operation and joint projects in specific fields promising added value for all participants International positioning (up-scaling the metropolitan-regional level)	Complicated cross-border and multi-level structures Competition with other levels of competency Restricted economic orientation Restriction on private stakeholders from the economic sector	Identification of promising fields for co-operation Integrated development strategy Integration of civil society stakeholders Creation of trust as main resource for co-operation Use of EVTZ as organizational instrument
Macro-Region	Co-operation and joint projects in specific fields promising added value for all participants International positioning (up-scaling the state level)	Complicated cross-border and multi-level structures Implications for other EU member states competing for attention on the European level Restricted economic orientation Restriction of decision making in “foreign policy” on public actors	Acceptance for a new in between-level of European co-operation Integrated development strategy Integration of private stakeholders

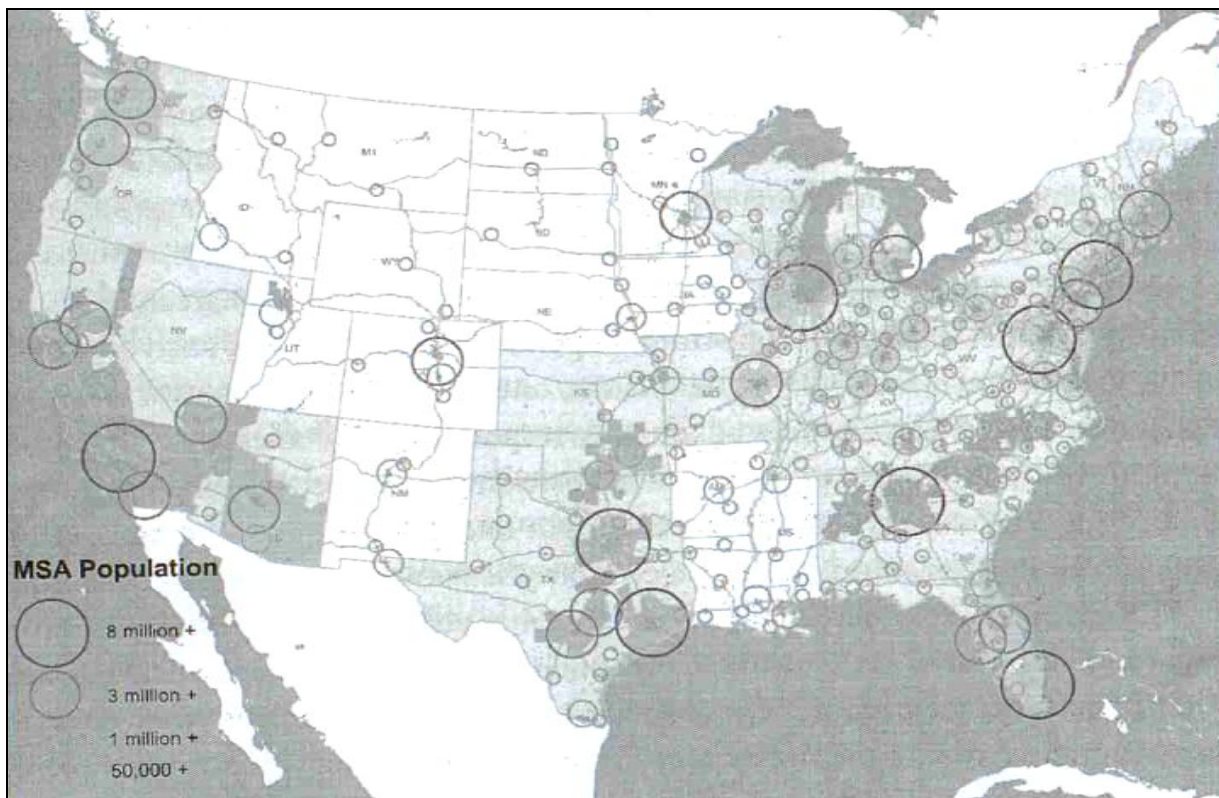
4. Reference case Cascadia Corridor: between megapolitans and mega-regions³

Against the background of the European discussion in regional respectively spatial development macro-regions might appear as a new and singular issue. But are there comparable approaches in other parts of the world that could contribute to a deeper understanding of those processes of spatial re- or up-scaling? – In the U.S.A. in recent years there has been a broad discussion about neighbouring metropolitan regions cooperating in so called mega-regions or in a megapolitan form. Mega-regions are described as city-networks on a higher spatial scale with examples like Southern California, the Texas Triangle, the Great Lakes or Megalopolis at the Eastcoast (Lang/ Nelson/ Dawkins 2010). An important framework condition for these considerations is the projection that the U.S.A. are in a process of an substantial population growth. According to the U.S. census in comparison to the year 2000 with about 275 mio. inhabitants the numbers increase in 2030 to 351, in 2050 to 404 and in 2090 to 534. Thus, many of the city-regions will further expand explicitly (see fig. 3).

Figure 3: U.S. Megaregions according to population in the years 2000 and 2050 (Ross 2009: 3).



³ The reference case is based on desk research as well as interviews with representatives of local and regional institutions that were conducted during a research period in the region in September 2008.



One example is the Cascadia mega-region including the U.S. states of Washington and Oregon as well as the Canadian regions of Vancouver and Victoria B.C. The Cascadian mega-region is located in the north-west of the U.S.A. and the south-west of Canada. It comprises a corridor of about 300 miles and is home of nine million people, with 88% living in Vancouver B.C., Seattle and Portland metropolitan areas (see table 4). The mega-region crosses the U.S.- Canadian border, state borders and various county and city borders.

On the U.S.-side there has been a long tradition of metropolitan regions which were installed in the 1950s. The metropolitan regions have developed differently, ranging from ambitious spatial planning, like in Portland, Seattle or the Twin Cities Minneapolis-Saint Paul, to more or less mere providing the region with data or offering an informal communication platform. In the U.S. the metropolitan level has hardly been used for stronger spatial development efforts due to the de-central political culture and organisational structure.

In the Cascadian mega-region two aspects came together that contributed to more ambitious regional efforts. On the one hand the U.S.-Canadian-border restricted economic and social development, concerning traffic infrastructure and many other fields that are known as affected by a border situation. On the other hand Vancouver as well as Seattle and Portland have developed a comparably open culture regarding engagement for public goods and quality of life. As example the ambitious planning legislation might be seen distinguishing the northwestern states from most of the U.S.A.

Table 4: Population figures of the Cascadia mega-region (Seltzer 2008)

Region	Population
Metropolitan Portland	2,265,223
Metropolitan Seattle	3,554,760
Metropolitan Vancouver B.C.	2,116,581
Other counties	1,040,700
Total	8,977,264

Figure 4: Cascadia Megaregion



The Cascadia co-operation is organized as project consisting of two main bodies (see table 5):

- Cascadia Task Force as a cross-border strategic alliance of regional planning, working together on cross-border mobility, enhancing the region's competitive position in the global marketplace, and increasing international environmental cooperation along the corridor, and
- Cascadia Economic Council encouraging greater cross-border cooperation.

Table 5: Objectives of the Cascadia co-operation (Cascadia Project n.y.)

Cascadia Task Force	Cascadia Economic Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocating regional cooperation and participation in Task Force work. - Promoting Cascadia as an international destination for trade, tourism and investment. - Advocating joint trade missions in software, biotechnology/environmental technology. - Eliminating government barriers to cross-border capital flow and technology. - Organizing and annual Cascadia Retreat of economic and political leaders. - Exploring a possible regional development bank for border infrastructure investment and a potential Cascadia stock exchange - Encouraging cooperative strategies for sustainable development. - Advocating increased cultural, arts, sports, and educational cooperation in the Cascadia region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Securing broad-based support for renewed Amtrak service from Vancouver, B.C., to Eugene, OR. - Advocating increased investment in the development of high-speed rail and regional transit connections. - Improving cross-border passage of people, goods, and capital through enhanced technology, intermodal connections, and publicprivate partnerships. - Encouraging cross-border cooperation in the tourism, trade, and international marketing of the region. - Providing a forum for cross –border education and strategic planning in urbanization, sustainable development, and environmental regulation.

Main activities have been in the fields of bi-national infrastructures, in particular a high-speed train connection, trade corridor (with working groups on border crossing questions, ports), bi-national tourism and a roundtable on sustainable communities. The co-operation brings main actors together and serves as a platform for strategic planning and exchange.

Compared to the Baltic Sea Region the Cascadian co-operation is quite young. This explains the very informal status of co-operation. Nevertheless, the objectives and action fields show that there is comparable motivation for joint activities. On the one hand there is a common identity created by the specific natural situation, in the Cascadia Region the coastline and the in huge parts still very natural environment. On the other hand the region suffers from its periphery and border location which can only be influenced by co-operation and joint action reaching from lobbying on the state level to joint projects. Furthermore, the Cascadia region serves as an example how to combine economic and sustainable development. Both orientations are strongly integrated in the organization and its objectives.

Looking at the scale of co-operation the Cascadia mega-region, as these co-operations are called in the U.S.A., lies in between the European metropolitan and macro-region. Its size is more like that of a meta-region (like Hamburg-Copenhagen-Oslo-Stockholm or Helsinki-St. Petersburg - Tallin). This leads to the question of the right size for mega-, meta- and macro-regions. What is the added value of a bigger sized macro-region compared to the smaller but more homogenous mega- and meta-regions?

5. Conclusions

When reviewing the concept of macro-regions against the background of the Baltic Sea Macro-Region and the reference case of the Cascadian Region and thinking through challenges of globalisation and location competition on the one hand as well as of integrated spatial development on the other hand the following aspects become worth to consider:

- Economically driven up-scaling: With regard to the “bigger is better”-device macro-regions offer regions or states the opportunity of having a stronger perception on the international respectively global scale. The increase of the number of included inhabitants, cities, regions or states results in a “bigger player” easier to be found on the global map. Against this background macro-regions can be interpreted as a consequent reaction to external challenges.

Considering also the European perspective macro-regions include further strategic aspects:

- Political up-scaling: With the enlargement of the European Union each single member state has to be aware of relatively losing power respectively importance because of its decreasing share of the EU-total, e.g. in terms of population, economic output or vote. Thus, partnering of neighbouring states can be seen as a strategy of keeping a strong position in the European arena. From organisational sciences and praxis it is known that an enlargement of an institution at certain points needs internal organisational innovations to assure all necessary functions. Against the background of the EU enlargement macro-regions can be understood as such an re-organisation approach of creating a new meso-level of co-operation. But those structural changes can lead to implications – positive as well as negative – for existing structures or actors.
- Social innovations: As co-operation always does, macro-regions offer the advantage of social innovations including an exchange of innovative approaches in various fields, transfer of good practices from one partner to the other or joint projects. Although these options are always available the institutionalisation of a macro-regional facilitates and enhances their implementation by offering new forms and opportunities of co-operation.

- Bridging borders: Everywhere in the world borders and cultural differences are obstacles for co-operation and peaceful living together. The European Union has been a huge peace effort by overcoming many of the European borders and bringing its members closer to each other. In the same direction macro-regions as parts of the EU can deepen neighbouring relationships. Against this background it becomes obvious that macro-regions are obliged to include a broad range of co-operation topics reaching into everyday lives of the participating regions or countries.

Summarizing, the concept of macro-regions is ambivalent. On the one hand it offers chances for building new political alliances, innovation and bridging political and cultural barriers. On the other hand it can be used in an restricted way concentrating on economic aspects and thus excluding further social concerns and stakeholders.

Furthermore, the discussion about macro-regions refers to a context reaching beyond a mere instrumental point of view. Macro-regions can be interpreted as symbol for the “bigger is better”-device that has recently gained support in the context of globalisation and global competition. It seems worth to reflect the origins and substantiation of this argumentation more thoroughly as there remain some open questions: What is the right scale for certain tasks of regional development like quality of life, social standards or environmental aspects – the city, the metropolitan region, the meta region or the macro region? What does an up-scaling mean for existing governance structures – do lower levels lose access or power, do parliaments lose influence? etc. Spatial development should be aware of the risks resulting from trends being “en vogue” in the “planning scene”. Currently those trends are “up-scaling regions” and “the economic metropolis”. There have been good reasons for including sustainability as well as social and ecological concerns into spatial planning legislation. As a main question it should be considered how macro regions could contribute to those fundamental objectives of spatial development.

But the polarisation of economic or sustainable orientation is not a question of scale. Sustainability has always been as well a topic on international level as on the local scale. Thus, macro-regions offer good chances to contribute to an integrated development perspective and many of the aims in the Baltic Sea Region or in the Cascadian Region underline this opportunity. The more important question is who wins the definition power for agenda setting. This is on the one hand a question of modes and mainstreams but on the other hand it is a question of organisation and structures, in particular of included stakeholders and decision making processes. – With regard to the regional vision stimulating the orientation of the macro-region maybe a debate about perspectives of the “European Region” – in analogy to the “European City” – could point into an adequate direction, delivering the necessary substantial basis for future regional perspectives that could as well serve as content for European macro-regions?

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