Territorial Cohesion - Baltic Sea Region examples
Baltic contribution to the revised Territorial Agenda of the European Union
Introduction

Dear Reader,

EcoRegion is an important project that supports the realisation of sustainable development approaches in the whole Baltic Sea Region and contributes to making it a sustainable and prosperous place.

In recent years, progress has been made to advance sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region. These efforts are now supported by the EcoRegion project, which seeks to turn this area into the world's first EcoRegion, where economical growth goes hand in hand with environmental integrity and social justice.

The project is based on the unique multi-stakeholder network of Baltic 21, which was created for the realisation of the Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region. By way of eight sectoral platforms, Baltic 21 members carry out joint actions and cross-sectoral activities to pursue Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region. Furthermore, the project is aligned with the Aalborg Commitments, through which regional governments voluntarily commit to defining clear targets and implementing concrete actions for Sustainable Development.

Through the EcoRegion project, ten model regions prepare strategic sustainability plans and implement a selected set of concrete measures designed to reach these Sustainable Development targets. This process is supported by a capacity building programme on Integrated Sustainability Management Systems. Numerous workshops foster the inter-regional, cross-sectoral and sectoral-regional dialogue and understanding on Sustainable Development within the Baltic Sea Region. In addition, public materials, including a good practices database, provide information on how to foster Sustainable Development on a regional level.

One of the publications produced by the project is the series EcoRegion Perspectives. It presents policies, projects and practices for the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea Region from various perspectives such as tourism, spatial planning and climate change.

We hope this periodical will give readers an insight into the diversity and potential of sustainable development, and trust that you will find it both interesting and informative.

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EcoRegion Project Lead Partner

Territorial Cohesion - Baltic Sea Region examples
Dear Reader,

The growing importance of the concept of territorial cohesion stems from the acknowledgement of the fact that territory matters for development. It is not a mere coincidence that almost at the same time territorial cohesion became an official objective of the European Union and that the Nobel prize was awarded to Paul Krugman who brought space back into the contemporary debate of mainstream economics. A reason for that is, among others, the fact that in a globalized world more and more attention has to be paid to functional networks and to immobile endowments, which are decisive for regional competitiveness and the ability to cope with external shocks.

The concept of territorial cohesion is complex. It covers market driven development, institutional spheres and policy-making, in addition to value judgments of a normative nature. However, its core feature, the role of territorial organisation for well being at different geographical scales, has been recognized for a long time. In the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) the catalyst role has been played in this matter by VASAB since 1992. Also many local and regional governments have followed by starting to cooperate on territory relevant matters. Territorial issues have been placed high on the agenda of the HELCOM, the Union of the Baltic Cities or the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation and others. One of the flagship projects of the Council of the Baltic Sea States is the project on urban-rural relationships.

Although the concept of territorial cohesion seems to be a fresh one, the experience related to its practical use, at least in the BSR, is rather vast, and worth further promoting. BSR municipalities, regions and states have managed to accumulate relevant know-how on the formation of functional regions and networks, the creation of a critical mass for development through networking, and the integration of territorial assets into broader development policies. Experience in territorialisation of sectoral policies has also been encouraging.

The aim of this issue is to contribute to operationalization of the notion of territorial cohesion by examining different existing practices of its implementation so far in the BSR. But the ambition is also to encourage sectoral and territorial decision makers to think in spatial terms. The momentum is given by the ongoing work on updating the Territorial Agenda of the EU and on evaluation of the EU Strategy for the BSR. Both can hardly be accomplished without proper evidence from local, regional and national level.

Jacek Zaucha
Editor

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Territorial cohesion and its impact on sustainable development

Territorial dimension of sustainable development

With the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009, territorial cohesion has become an official objective of the European Union (EU) that complements the longstanding objectives of economic and social cohesion and sustainable development. The objective of sustainable development has been an official EU objective since 1997 and the first EU Sustainable Development Strategy (the ‘Gothenburg agenda’) was adopted in 2001 (European Council 2001). Together with the ‘Lisbon agenda’, which set the objective for the EU ‘to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’ (European Council 2000; para 1.5), the Gothenburg agenda framed EU policy during the 2000s.

Territorial cohesion (TC) is sometimes described as the territorial dimension of sustainable development (Peyrony 2007), but the relationship between the two EU objectives will greatly depend on how territorial cohesion is defined in future EU policy. At present, several main discourses can be identified in relation to the meaning of TC (Waterhout 2007; Dühr et al. 2010). These discourses are promoted by different interests and have different possible implications for the future EU policy framework.

Principal discussions on territorial cohesion

Currently one of the main issues discussed in relation to TC is the need to reduce regional disparities in the EU, especially through the Structural Funds. The focus is thus on cohesion and based on the underlying argument, as expressed in the ‘European Spatial Development Perspective’ (ESDP, CSD 1999), that a more balanced (i.e. ‘polycentric’) development can help to counteract the damaging effects of concentrations of economic activity at European scale. Moreover, providing access to services of general interest, such as energy and postal services, in weaker and marginal regions of the EU would allow those citizens to stay in their territory and thus achieve ‘spatial justice’.

A second discourse, rather than being aimed at redistribution, focuses on the global competitiveness of Europe. This discussion is based on the EU’s Jobs and Growth Agenda (European Council 2000; 2010) and places emphasis on the accessibility of cities and regions to be able to compete in the global economy, and on the development potential of individual regions. The focus is on all regions, not just those areas that are lagging behind, and the expectation is that all cities and regions would find individual ways to exploit their unique ‘territorial capital’ to contribute to increasing the EU’s competitiveness. Another discourse on TC places emphasis on achieving horizontal policy coordination by integrating the spatial impacts of EU sector policies. This is a discussion that has been promoted in the ‘Territorial Agenda of the EU’ (2007), generally considered as the successor document of the ESDP, which places the spotlight on ‘territorial governance’. Policy coordination is seen as a key concern for the entire EU, and the expectation is that it may be best achieved through spatial development frameworks at higher levels of scale, such as through the macro-regional strategies that are currently being piloted in the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube area.

Fourth, TC is also being interpreted in relation to sustainable development, which places the spotlight on sound environmental management but adds a strong territorial dimension to the longstanding objective of sustainable development. This debate is based on the EU’s sustainable development strategy and driven by environmental interest groups, the European Environment Agency and ‘green’ member states (such as the Nordic countries) who are concerned that the current debate on TC focuses too strongly on economic and social aspects at the expense of environmental issues (EEA 2010). Coordination of EU policies for territorial impacts is also promoted in this debate, albeit from a sustainability perspective which would build on existing instruments such as sustainability appraisals.

Integrated approach as a way out

Whichever of these discourses receives most support in the discussions over the future orientation of the EU policy framework will have implications for the relationship between TC and sustainable development. In the current economic and political climate the competitiveness discourse seems to further gain in prominence (European Council 2010), and this may well come at the expense of the EU’s objective of sustainable development. However, if it can be shown that better policy coordination can indeed be achieved and that this will have positive effects on economic performance, social cohesion and environmental protection, spatial territorial governance may well be an effective way forward.