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

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Abstract

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

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

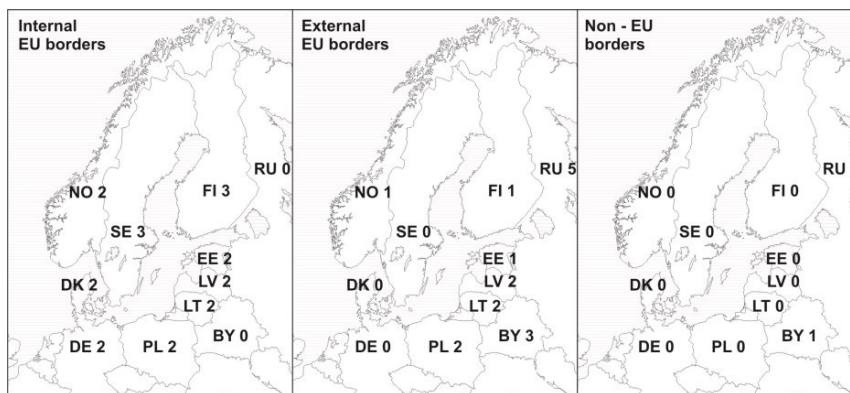


Fig. 1. Internal, external and non-EU borders of the Baltic Sea Region.

3. Macroregional cooperation

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

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