

# Message in a Bottle: Communication across MRS: How to communicate macro-regional strategies?

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## Report

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### Presentations

The morning part tried to take stock of existing communication initiatives in the context of MRS, and to foster an exchange of experience among the four MRS. The Commission (Dg Regio) highlighted that after ten years of implementation of macro-regional strategies, a moment of truth has come where their results need to be explained to the citizens. This moment of truth will be reflected in the bi-annual report of the Commission on the implementation of MRS to be published by the end of the year. Communication experts emphasized that it is time to discuss how we can make our daily work better, which could be done e.g. with a short and crispy document on MRS communication.

### The Strategies

In the framework of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) a specific budget for communication is foreseen via the transnational Alpine Space programme. There are particularly the elements of environmental issues and the entrepreneurial field that were so far emphasized. Within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), there is a specific project “Let’s communicate” funded by the Baltic Sea region programme that enhances both the internal and external communication of the Strategy. Representatives of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) demonstrated the efforts related to communication conducted by the EUSAIR Facility Point. It was pointed out that the very principle of MRS was missing for an enhanced communication. Within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), horizontal communication efforts ceased to exist once the Danube Strategy Point disappeared. However, there are interesting local initiatives, such as a website implemented by the German land of Baden-Württemberg. The upcoming Danube Strategy Point will be staffed inter alia with a communication officer. Slovenia, which is in its entirety part of three MRS and has co-organised this workshop, has established an interesting project with the TV station RTV.



## Discussion

### Format: The participants formed two small groups for the facilitated discussions

Facilitators: Katalin Czippán with Jörg Mirtl, Tina Trampuš and Charlélie Jourdan

The following guiding questions were set up according to the presentations and issues raised during Q and A sessions of the day:

1. What kind of capacity building needs for communication are identified?
2. How to improve the communication and exchange among the MRS-s?
3. Concrete next steps, actions: offers and requests



### Summary and recommendations of the discussion

Recognising and agreeing that there is a need to enhance the strategic communication of MRS; the communication has to be targeted to the audience focusing to the results and benefits rather than the main statistics of a program/project; to identify and tell stories that make people understand that those results would not happen if there would be no MRS is an attractive and beneficial way of communicating – the participants discussed and identified the following demands and recommendations.

#### 1. Highlighted needs for support and capacity building:

For those who work with communication in MRS the following specific **training needs** had been identified by the participants:

For better public outreach it would be useful to receive a training and share experiences of communication experts on “**How to work with, how to reach out media?** How to collaborate with television companies” To understand what is important and interesting for media journalists’ contribution and participation in such a training would be an asset.

The importance of learning more about **storytelling**, identifying and developing good stories had been highlighted several times. The representative of Danube TP shared that they invited

a storytelling expert and organised a well-received training. Other participants asked for contact of the trainer and receive more info about the training to be able to repeat it for their on colleagues.

All of the MRS implementers **work with stakeholders**. One of the statement was “*there are several stakeholder maps, lists prepared, but most of the times they haven't been used... We should learn why.*” More knowledge and good practice sharing are needed on when and how to identify and map stakeholders, how to tailor messages, channels and stories to them.

**Further** potential important **topics** for trainings, webinars and workshops had been also listed:

- How to work with social media professionally? What is micro-targeting and advertising and how to use it?
- How to organise a communication campaign?
- How to organise a photo contest?
- How to improve the quality of videos?
- How to do terms of reference / how much does it cost? For implementers, leaders and communicators as well:
- How to identify key performance indicators (KPI)?
- How to communicate with decision makers/politicians?
- How to be clear regarding goals, messages?

Beside the above identified training needs for people who deal with communication there were demands expressed to support **positioning communication better in MRS**.

For example, enhancing capacity of the implementers – not only for communicators – of MRS on how to **formulate agreed strategic policy messages** for an MRS and how to spread the same message, how to create synergy between the different communication activities. The participants would like to learn from the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region about the preparation and approval process of the ESBSR's strategic goals, messages.

For improved communication of MRS-s' **governing bodies need to understand and accept that communication play key role** in achieving the goals of the strategy therefore allocating enough resources for communication, sharing the communication between different actors during the planning phase and recognising the importance of expertise for effective communication are important.

Some **analysis** or comparison would be also valuable input for MRS communicators like interviewing the project leaders on how they see the relevant strategy and its communication, scanning the different existing **MRS related websites** or analysing the **stakeholder management** of different MRS' working/action groups and sharing the results to learn from mistakes and good practices as well.

Based on the participants experiences there are several recommended **possibilities to attend or organise trainings** for the above-mentioned learning and capacity building purposes especially on storytelling, how to work with media and how to map and communicate with stakeholders:

- DG Regio/DG Communication are asked to share information, provide access for MRS communication officers and those who are involved in communications to available trainings developed and organised by them;

- Interact is asked to organise more face-to-face workshops and to consider developing new trainings according to the needs above – specifically for all MRS communicators separately or in connection to another MRS events – as well as support sharing practices among MRS-s in easy format like short webinars or E-courses;
- MRS communicators are encouraged
  - o to share their good practices in short webinars, for example: EUSBSR can share how did they do that work on getting one single message; others the know-how of successful events, campaigns etc.
  - o to develop training according to their needs and resources and share it with other MRS-s

Relevant institutions such as programme bodies or the Commission are asked to consider

- o revising relevant policy documents and application criteria in terms of communication requirements that encourage applicants to plan sufficient measures and resources for communication in the proposals and allow them to use the most relevant, update tools;
- o providing guidelines that highlight the important role of strategic communication in implementing MRS and efficiently help in planning and implementing communication;
- o opening special calls for MRS related communication to work with public media – especially with local television companies that would dramatically increase the direct reach.

There is a need to consider how to support the preparation of analysis relevant to communication like the above-mentioned website comparison, stakeholder management practices etc.

Implementers of MRS, governing bodies and leading organisations are called upon to hire external communication experts (third party) to translate the vision into different comprehensive messages.

## **2. Recommendations for improving exchange and communication among the MRS-s**

There is an unquestionable demand for learning from each other in terms of enhancing communication activities across all MRS-s. A quote from a participant “*the workshops and trainings are motivating and best platforms for establishing a good network.*” has been echoed by others throughout the day. Therefore **organising more face to face meetings for people who deal with communication**, learn from each other via presenting cases, sharing practical information by facilitated discussions on how the communication is organised and performed in different MRS are welcomed and desired.

There is a need for enhanced networking among the communication specialists in MRS. Therefore besides organising the previously mentioned face to face meetings, training events **Interact is called for** coordinating to establish a network by

- finding a way to **share the contact** data of MRS' communicators among themselves – the access to that database might lead to quick, short interactions;
- considering if the **Interreg Communication platform** provided by Interact, for sharing some basic and existing information like
  - Checklists for processes, useful documents
  - Terms of references in relation to communication positions, tasks
  - Pool/database for good experts, speakers, production and service providers
  - Trainings, events.
- initiating – if relevant – an exclusive **social media group** (via Interreg platform, Whatsapp, Facebook, or other that suits) for those who works on MRS' communication to know what is done by other MRS communication teams, where they can share an event, a new #, campaign, training, publications, can ask questions, suggestions for experts etc.

**MRS communicators are encouraged** to make use of the Interreg Communication platform and provide feedback to Interact – if needed - on how to improve the exchange from one strategy to another.

## Conclusions

Communication managers in MRS conclude that

- There is a need for **more clarity** in communication. This is need might materialise in a tailor-made training for the key implementers of MRS.
- There is a need for a **better stakeholder mapping** in MRS. The platform keep.eu as well as the EuroAccess tool help in identifying both stakeholders and funding sources.
- Events where MRS can be communicated to an interested audience (annual forums, participation days, stakeholder platforms, etc) bear the capacity to identify motivated multipliers for the macro-regional endeavour.
- The **revision of the Action Plans** of the EUSBSR and the EUSDR are also exercises to improve both the internal and external communication of these MRS.
- **Success stories** are of utmost importance when it comes to communicating MRS, both for **involving journalists and politicians/policy makers**. Starting from this, specific training in **story telling** emerge for internal and external communication.
- There can be **mutual gains between Interreg and MRS**. For MRS, Interreg is a – albeit not the only – funding source also for communication purposes. Moreover, strategic Interreg projects reach out to a world of citizens and policy makers and thereby also to other funding sources. They thereby have a specific communication potential for MRS. However, a certain degree of harmonisation between Interreg communication and MRS communication is needed.
- Participants welcomed the initiative to **discuss communication activities among the four MRS**. A follow-up organised by Interact or other stakeholders would be highly appreciated.



