

# EU Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies: Framework to explore and benefit from

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | March 2024

## Overview

The current ETC (Interreg) Regulation, ESF+, Just Transition, ERDF, and CPR, as well as IPA and NDICI regulations, recognise EU Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS) and the Sea Basin Strategies (SBS) as important territorial frameworks providing guidance for investments. The regulations require programmes to plan and show contribution to the implementation of these frameworks. MRS and SBS stakeholders are recognised as important partners for Interreg programmes.

Having post-2027 perspective in mind, the session was aiming to share current experiences, discuss, how can stronger cooperation between Interreg programmes and the MRS/SBS lead to a bigger impact and changes in the territory. Programmes, through planning concrete actions, express their commitment to contribute to the MRS/SBS. However, this session invited programmes to reflect on what works well, and what needs to be improved for the Post 27 period. The discussions focussed on the thematic contribution of the programmes to MRS/SBS and potentials for even more efficient contribution, not focusing on the governance support as it is well established.

## Methodology

The session was organised as a group discussion. It was opened by three programmes inputs (Interreg Italy-Croatia, Interreg Baltic Sea Region, and Interreg Atlantic Area) highlighting current experience in working with the strategies, lessons learnt and recommendations for the future.

The topics discussed in the room were:

1. Collaboration with the MRS/SBS – existing approaches and practices.
2. Value for Interreg, including programme experience in building cooperation with the strategies.
3. How to improve visibility and recognition of Interreg programme efforts and what is really missing?
4. How to use the full potential of strategies as frameworks where collective impact and synergies are created?
5. Way forward and Post 27 perspective – is there a need for change in regulatory framework or implementation requirements.

The participants represented a mix of transnational and cross border programmes, including Monitoring Committee members and the MRS National Coordinators (Latvia and Croatia), as well the representatives from DG Regio, EC, ESPON and TESIM.

## Key discussion points

What is working?

- Interreg is a significant contributor to MRS/SBS implementation, incl. governance and thematic support.
- MRS/SBS help programmes to reach out to wider stakeholder groups reaching beyond the programme stakeholders, including regional and other funds. Besides, MRS/SBS help to upstream and downstream project developed solutions and link project results to policy level, thus sustaining project results.
- MRS/SBS as territorial frameworks ease programme work during programming (by highlighting topics, showing orientation for cooperation), programme implementation and when evaluating change made.
- Closer cooperation between MRS/SBS and programmes is beneficial, while maintaining a unique place for each.
- Work with MRS/SBS has to be seen from the need to maintain balance between efforts, required resources and benefits for the programmes.
- Interreg programmes are open to contribute to the MRS goals (not only through mandatory percentage of programme topics that have to correspond to the MRS topics).

What requires repairing / improvement?

- Strategic leadership by MRS/SBS in advancing the policy dimension of their work, an approach to coordinating across Interreg projects (but not only) and utilising their outcomes and results for policy development. This could evolve around the questions of how MRS/SBS work with projects, what are the benefits for projects to engage with MRS/SBS, what is the role of MRS/SBS coordinators in bringing project results to policy level discussions, how MRS/SBS and programmes jointly could support capitalisation initiatives and ensure sustainability of individual project results, leading to a real change. If strategies remain project based the added value within the context of Interreg programme implementation will be limited
- Recognition and acknowledgement of Interreg contribution to MRS/SBS collaboration. Interreg contribution can be seen as facilitator and cooperation engine, as well as new idea and concept developer, while at the same time, MRS/SBS shall continuously work to engage with and utilise other funding sources for further implementation of envisaged long-term changes or linking project results to policy change.
- MRS/SBS role as frameworks for structured dialogues and cooperation could be further strengthened.
- Improving dialogue between the MRS/SBS and Interreg programmes, especially cross-border cooperation programmes (CBC) and transnational programmes that are partly covered by MRS/SBS, showing importance of programmes' contribution to territorial frameworks. The question of mechanism to achieve this was brought up.

The solution could be built in the MRS governance papers. It was also mentioned that MRS/SBS support structures could take more active role in this regard.

- Improve official communication channels between programmes and MRS/SBS, to ensure clear and continues information flows.
- Enhance existing MRS monitoring tools to show Interreg programme contribution in a systematic way. Currently, the monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plans involves Interreg programmes in a fragmented way. Groups also exchanged on possibilities to harmonise the approach in evaluation of programmes and strategies, which could be supported by ESPON.
- Activate and closer engage DG Near and DG Mare in dialogues between programmes and MRS/SBS.
- Tighter connection of MRS/SBS with transnational programmes that do not cover completely same territory.

What would be your vision for the future?

- Policy dimension of MRS/SBS work must be strengthened allowing beneficiaries to have a clearer understanding how MRS/SBS add value to their work and assure durability of project results.
- Reinforce embedding and Interreg programme cooperation with mainstream programmes through MRS/SBS.
- MRS/SBS become platforms for structured dialogues between the MRS/SBS stakeholders and Interreg programmes.
- Stronger links between the Interreg programmes and SBS.
- Cross-programme evaluations showing change made thanks to the programmes' contribution to MRS/SBS. There is a potential for more harmonisation of approaches.
- Contribution of Interreg and collaboration with other territorial frameworks could be clarified, including through more harmonisation of evaluation approaches.
- Improve visibility of Interreg contribution to MRS/SBS.
- More funds for Interreg to support MRS/SBS.

### **Regulations and articles of particular significance**

It was highlighted that current level of provisions stipulating programme contribution to MRS/SBS, including for IPA and NDICI funds (or equivalent successor funds) should remain. Each programme strand provides relevant contribution to the strategic frameworks, while coordination across strands could be improved by the MRS/SBS thematic coordinators.

However, it was also suggested to improve the possibilities for a clear follow up on programme contributions to MRS/SBS, e.g., by including relevant requirements in the programme evaluations.

### **Conclusions, plans for followed up**

The meeting highlighted benefits of working with MRS/SBS as well as several challenges that require follow up, especially regarding the added value MRS/SBS bring to projects and how to improve the communication between Interreg community (especially cross-border cooperation programmes) and MRS/SBS stakeholders.



All discussion elements will feed into further work and discussions with the Interreg programmes and MRS/SBS stakeholders.

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