

# Evaluating EU macro-regional strategies: The perspective of experimentalist governance

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From evidence to action: territorial trends and challenges identified in the ESPON projects  
Fostering policy coherence in the Danube Region  
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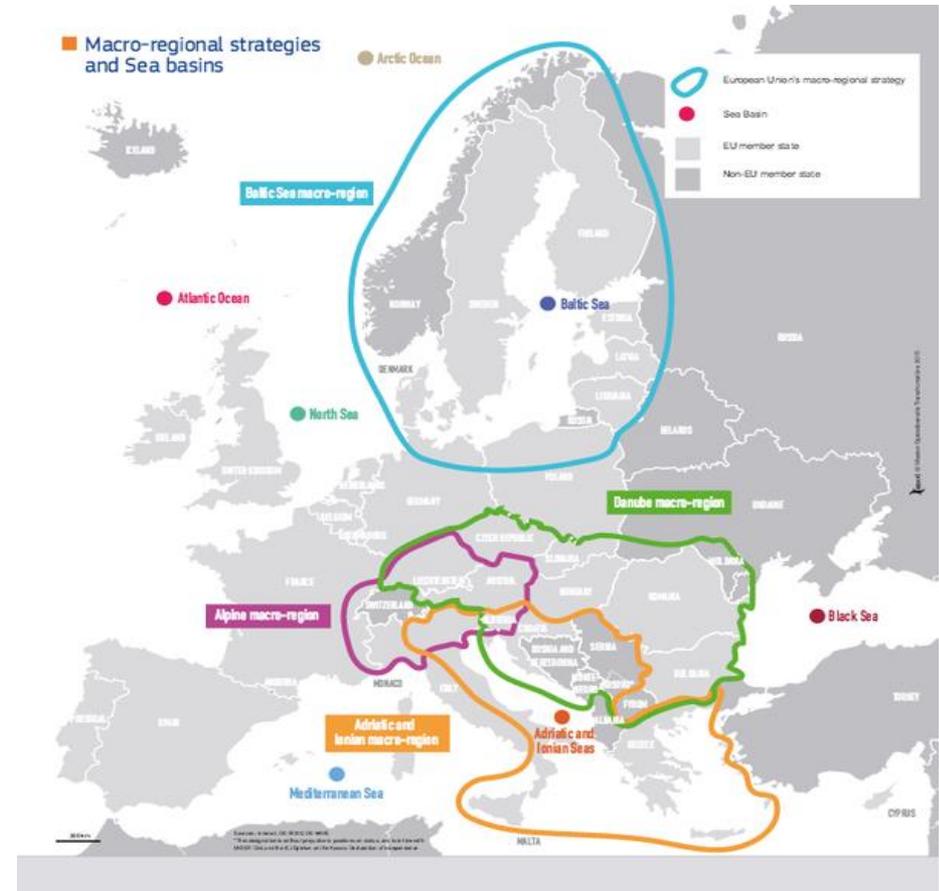
# Making sense of EU macro-regional strategies

## A better regulatory area

"[For] most environmental problems the EU is not an optimal regulatory area, being either too large or too small. In a number of cases [...] the scope of the problem is regional rather than EU-wide, and is best tackled through regional arrangements tailored to the scope of the relevant environmental externality." (Giandomenico Majone, 2014)

## Democracy and federalism

"A Europe of the Regions has so far been envisaged and arranged on far too small a scale [...]. Regional associations may revive the good old principle of European federalism – they rise above the nations that often operate today as blockading powers, but they are also still near enough to the cultural characteristics and networks of the people of Europe." (Claus Leggewie, 2012)



## What are EU macro-regional *strategies*?

- A macro-regional strategy is
  - '(1) an integrated framework relating to member states and third countries in the same geographical area; (2) addresses common challenges; (3) benefits from strengthened cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion' (European Commission 2013)
- Coordination and integration of policies into a comprehensive and evolving new governance architecture across different levels of a multi-level governance system
  - Seeks to provide a strategic platform or reference framework for actors
  - Builds on 'Three No's'
  - Aims to mobilize existing actors and funding schemes
- **Discursive action**

# Evolution of EU macro-regional strategies

## Regional cooperation

### 'Outside' EU

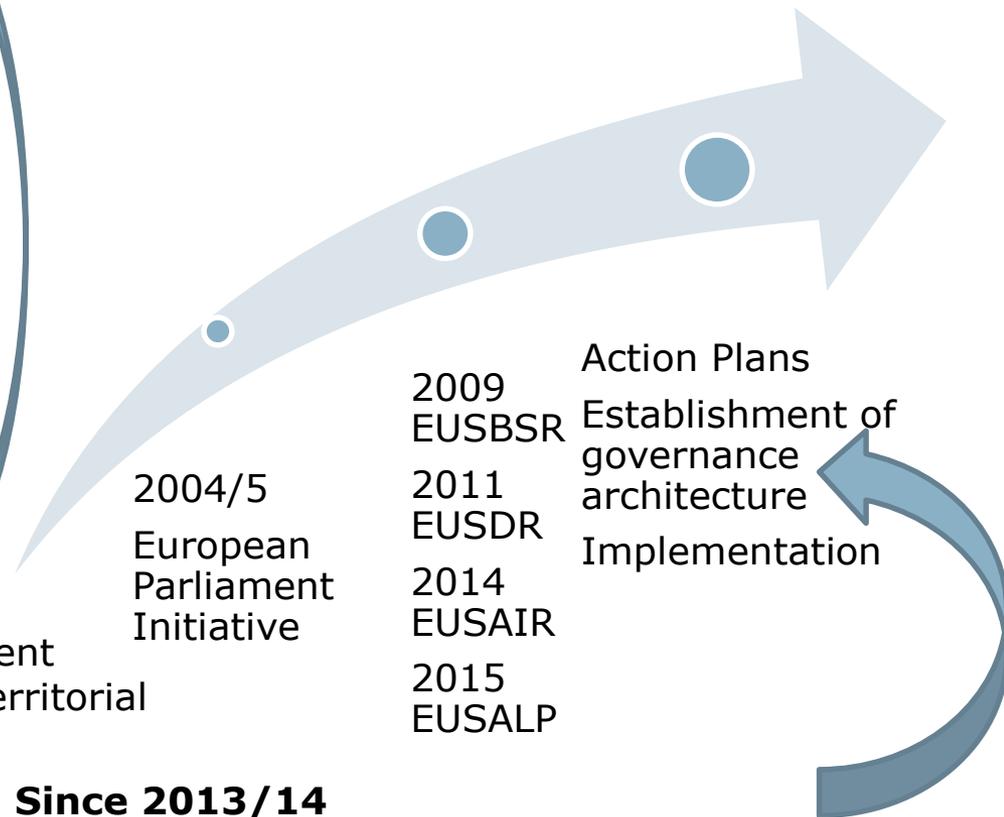
- e.g. Nordic cooperation
- Baltic Sea cooperation
  - 1974 – Helcom
  - 1992 – CBSS

### 'Inside' EU

- Union Approaches to the Baltic Sea Region (1994)
- Barcelona Process (1995)
- Union for the Mediterranean (2008)
- Northern Dimension (1997/2006)

## Territorial cooperation

- ESDP (European Spatial Development Perspective) and other European territorial cooperation activities
- INTERREG
- Barca Report (2009)
- EGTC (2006/09)
- Urban Agenda (2015)



2004/5  
European  
Parliament  
Initiative

2009  
EUSBSR

2011  
EUSDR

2014  
EUSAIR

2015  
EUSALP

Action Plans  
Establishment of  
governance  
architecture  
Implementation

### Since 2013/14

**Extra-regional initiatives**, e.g. BRI,  
16+1 framework, Russia, United States etc.

## What is experimentalist governance?

- Experimentalist governance describes “a recursive process of provisional goal-setting and revision based on learning from the comparison of alternative approaches to advancing them in different local contexts.”
- “Based on framework rulemaking and constant revision based on implementation experience.”
- “Project to policy loop” (Seibel and Zeitlin 2010).

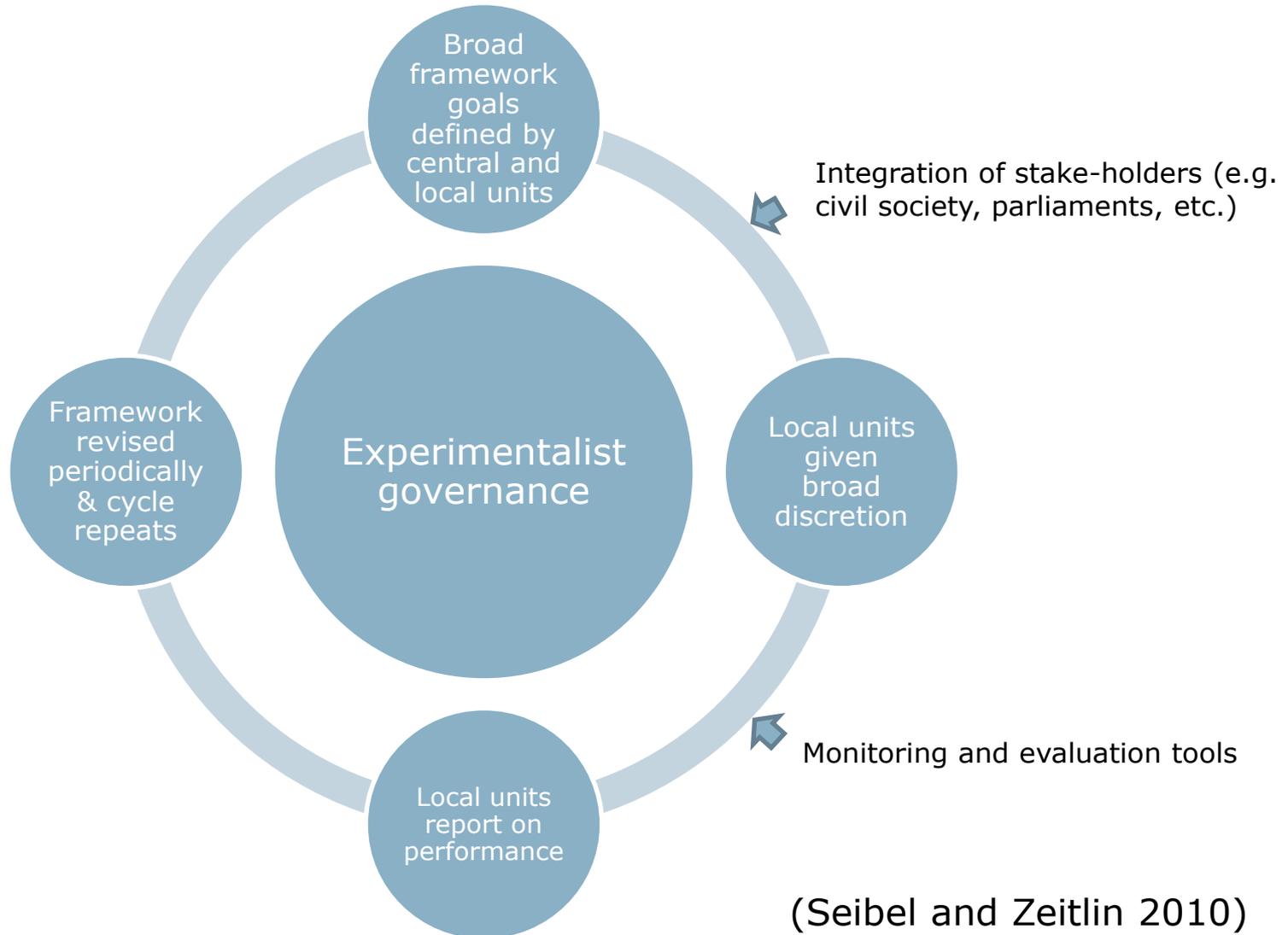
... inside a system of multilevel governance

- “...a system of continuous negotiations among nested governments at several territorial tiers” that gives rise to arrangements in which “supranational, national, regional and local governments are enmeshed in territorially overarching policy networks” (Marks 1993).

## Examples of experimentalist governance

- **Regulation** (e.g.) of competition, energy, telecommunications, finance; food, drug, chemicals, and maritime safety; environmental protection; employment promotion and social inclusion; justice, security, and crisis management
- **Encompass a variety of organisational forms**, including European agencies, networks of national regulators, open methods of coordination (OMCs)
- **Progressive formalization** of European regulatory networks as in the case of the Third Energy Package (2009)
  - **Avoid supranational centralization** (Sabel and Zeitlin 2008, 2010; Zeitlin 2016)
  - **Differentiation in European integration** seems to trigger patterns of experimentalist governance

# What is experimentalist governance?



Macro-regional Strategies and Experimentalist Governance (EG)						
<b>EG element</b>	<b>VERTICAL RECURSIVE PROCESS</b> →	EUSBSR (2009) EU MS; Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden	EUSDR (2011) EU MS: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania Slovenia, Slovakia, Non-EU MS: Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine	EUSAIR (2014) EU MS: Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia Non-EU MS: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia	EUSALP (2015) EU MS: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia Non-EU MS: Liechtenstein, Switzerland	<b>VERTICAL RECURSIVE PROCESS</b> ↑
<b>Framework goals</b>		Strategy In the Action Plan SEC(2009) 712, defining examples of action	Defined in addition to the Action Plan which indicates examples of projects and actions SEC(2010)1489 Targets agreed between PAC and European Commission	Action Plan indicates actions related to actors and potential projects, SWD(2014) 190 final	Action Plan foresees result and policy indicators, gives examples for indicators/units SWD(2015) 147 final	
<b>Delegating to local units</b>		Nomination of PAC, HAC, NC and Steering Group members	Nomination of PAC, NC, and Steering Group members	Nomination of NC, Pillar Co-ordinators, 'Governing Board'; involvement of EP and EESC	Thematic Action Groups and their Leaders, NC; Executive Board (administrative) and General Assembly (political)	
<b>Local units regularly reporting on performance with agreed indicators/framework goals</b>		Report to Commission	Report to Danube Strategy Point/monitoring	Report to Governing Board	Report to Executive Board	
<b>Revision of framework goals</b>		Action Plan updated in 2013 2015, and 2019 defining targets and indicators SEC(2009) 712/2 SWD(2015) 177 SWD(2017) 118	Action Plan under revision (2019)	N/A	N/A	
<b>← HORIZONTAL RECURSIVE PROCESS →</b> (e.g. Commission Communications, Council Conclusions, ESPON macro-regional monitoring tool)						

## Impact of EU macro-regional strategies

- **Demand-driven 'institutionalization'** – e.g. Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum transformed into a permanent fisheries forum
- **Mainstreaming in other EU programmes**, i.e. ESIF, EN(P)I
- **Integration of external partner** into MRS governance architecture
- **Impact assessment difficult** – many effects of macro-regional strategies are the subject of conjecture
  - The European Court of Auditors' 2016 Special Report on combating eutrophication in the Baltic Sea noted that 'EUSBSR's impact on [...] actions to reduce nutrient [...] difficult to assess'.

# Why evaluation of EU macro-regional strategies is key

## **Challenges**

- Lack of political commitment to assess indicators and targets
- Uneven performance and practices of reporting
- (Too much) focus on financial implementation instead of the effectiveness in attaining strategic goals

## **Needs**

- Evidence-based not only with regards to projects and policies, but also governance
- Mutual reflection on the basis of more regular monitoring and debate desirable
- More rigorous methodologies for analysing best practice cases and peer review

# Conclusion: EU macro-regional strategies

1) Best understood as **instances of experimentalist governance: laboratory for a new Europe** as a key added value

- Sense-making ('script' across levels)
- Silo-breaking
- Coordination 'challenge' across

2) **Evaluation and monitoring important** from experimentalist governance perspective as MRS can be jeopardized *if not informed by evidence-based monitoring and evaluation*

3) Draw **regional and territorial cooperation closer** together

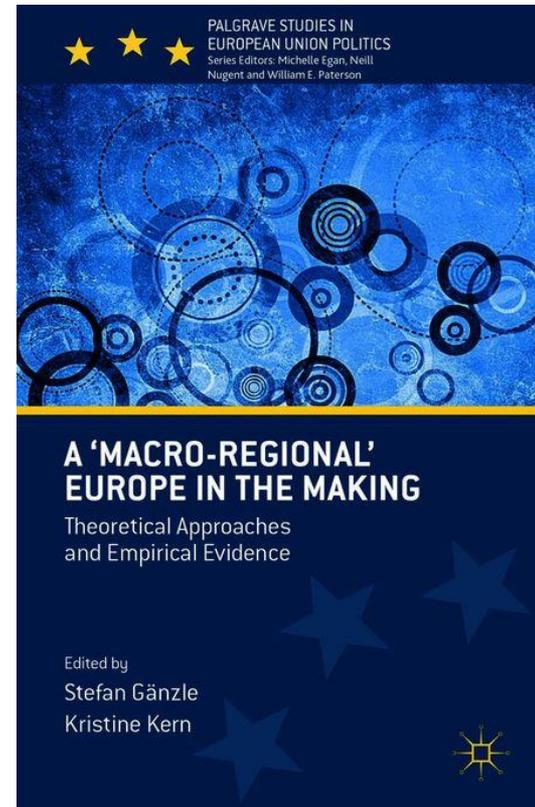
- Regionalization of EU-wide policies: Connect 'Investment, Jobs and Growth' with cooperation

4) Make regional cooperation '**comparable' across macro-regions** to allow for mutual learning and exchange of best practice

- MRS not different, but macro-regions at different stages ("phases of development" (COWI et al 2017, p. 13)
- Potential to modify the territorial face of Europe

## Literature

- Stefan Gänzle and Jörg Mirtl (2019)  
“Experimentalist governance beyond European Territorial Cooperation and cohesion policy: macro-regional strategies of the European Union (EU) as emerging ‘regional institutions’? *Journal of European Integration*  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1580277>
- Stefan Gänzle and Kristine Kern (eds) (2016), *A ‘Macro-regional Europe’ in the Making. Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Evidence*, (EU studies series edited by Neill Nugent, Michelle Egan and William Paterson), London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.



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