

IS CULTURE A KEY FACTOR IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES?

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1. Macro-regional strategies: the specific case of EUSAIR

The European Commission defines «macro-region» as «an area including a territory from a number of different Member States or regions associated with one or more common features and challenges»¹. This definition gives rise to the idea that macro-regions should be thought of using a functional rationale, which further suggests that there are mutual cross-border challenges or opportunities on which Member States or regions are better of working in partnership than on their own². In this respect, the prevailing dimension of the macro-regional strategies appears to be functional, depending on the stakeholders being able to agree on an action plan, and to coordinate their respective actions. Thus, while it is self-evident that geographical proximity and similarities can fundamentally shape a macro-region, they do not necessarily define the macro-region's scope or strategy³.

The European Council endorsed the first macro-regional strategy, i.e. the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)⁴ in 2009. It came about as a result of the Baltic countries' willingness to improve existing transnational projects in order to provide a better coordinated response to address specific issues in the territory, e.g. pollution in the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, the functional problems or opportunities arising in a specific geographic area are dealt with within a multi-level governance structure, which has different layers of policy and players. Therefore, these macro-regional strategies are the new prototypes for interpreting territorial cooperation, inside and outside the European Union (EU), which seeks to more efficiently utilise existing resources and institutions. The purely functional role that macro-regional strategies are expected to play is stressed by the so-called 'three

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